

The Influence of Self-Efficacy on Anxiety and Perfectionism among Dancers

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Abstract

The world of dance, though celebrated for its creativity and artistic freedom, often carries considerable psychological demands on performers. Beyond the physical rigor, dancers navigate pressures of performance standards, audience expectations, and internalized goals of perfection. This study examined how self-efficacy—an individual's belief in their own capability—shapes the experiences of anxiety and perfectionism among dancers, with a particular focus on gender differences. A balanced sample of 120 dancers (60 males and 60 females) was assessed using standardized psychological scales, and the data were analyzed through t-tests, Pearson correlations, and regression analyses to evaluate both relational and predictive dynamics. Results revealed no significant gender differences in the overall levels of self-efficacy, anxiety, or perfectionism. However, the patterns of relationships among these variables differed by gender. For male dancers, self-efficacy demonstrated a protective quality: it was positively correlated with both excellencism (adaptive perfectionism) and maladaptive perfectionism, while simultaneously showing a negative relationship with anxiety. Regression analyses further confirmed these links, as self-efficacy significantly predicted anxiety ($R^2 = 0.116$), excellencism ($R^2 = 0.219$), and maladaptive perfectionism ($R^2 = 0.176$) among males. In contrast, for female dancers, self-efficacy was positively associated only with excellencism, and regression results confirmed that it predicted this adaptive trait ($R^2 = 0.158$), but not anxiety or maladaptive perfectionism. These findings highlight gender-specific nuances in the psychological dynamics of dance. While self-efficacy functions as a buffer against anxiety and maladaptive tendencies in male dancers, its role for females appears more focused on fostering adaptive striving for excellence. Overall, enhancing self-efficacy may be a critical intervention strategy in dance training programs, promoting not only sustained performance and artistic growth but also mental well-being across genders.

Keywords: Self-Efficacy, Anxiety, Perfectionism, Excellencism, Dance

INTRODUCTION

Self-Efficacy in Dance

According to Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory [1-9](1977, 1997), self-efficacy refers to belief in one's ability to succeed. In dance, it is cultivated through mastery experiences, observing others,

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verbal encouragement, and interpreting emotional/physiological states. Environments like Alvin Ailey and The Royal Ballet School actively promote self-efficacy through supportive training and psychological skill-building. Research shows that even in recreational settings, dance enhances confidence and self-perception, proving self-efficacy is not confined to elite performers (Table 1).

Anxiety in Dance

Anxiety—whether situational (state) or chronic (trait)—is prevalent in the high-pressure world of dance. Dancers face performance demands, aesthetic

Table 1. Mean, standard deviation, and t-values for self-efficacy, anxiety and perfectionism among dancers (male and female).

	Mean		SD		t-value	sig
	Males	Females	Males	Females		
Self-Efficacy	30.50	29.83	5.037	3.724	0.824	0.411
Anxiety	45.39	45.78	12.758	13.074	-0.165	0.869
Excellencism	5.05	5.33	1.265	0.957	-1.331	0.186
Perfectionism	4.48	4.29	1.253	1.30	0.832	0.407

Table 2. Correlation between self-efficacy and anxiety among male and female dancers.

Correlation between Self-Efficacy and Anxiety				
	Males		Females	
	Self-Efficacy	Anxiety	Self-Efficacy	Anxiety
1. Self-Efficacy	1	-0.341**	1	-0.063
2. Anxiety	-0.341**	1	-0.063	1
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)			Correlation is not significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)	

Table 3. Correlation between self-efficacy and perfectionism (excellencism and maladaptive perfectionism) among male and female dancers

Correlation between self-efficacy and excellencism				
	Males		Females	
	Self-efficacy	Excellencism	Self-efficacy	Excellencism
1. Self-efficacy	1	0.468**	1	0.397**
2. Excellencism	0.468**	1	0.397**	1
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)			**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)	
Correlation between self-efficacy and perfectionism (Maladaptive)				
	Males		Females	
	Self-efficacy	Perfectionism	Self-efficacy	Perfectionism
1. Self-efficacy	1	0.419**	1	0.222
2. Perfectionism	0.419**	1	0.222	1
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)			Correlation is not significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)	

ideals, injury fear, and constant evaluation. Anxiety manifests cognitively (self-doubt), physiologically (muscle tension), and behaviorally (avoidance). Without emotional support or coping tools, anxiety may lead to burnout and impaired performance. Supportive teaching methods and mental health openness (as advocated by dancers like Misty Copeland) help mitigate these effects (Table 2).

Perfectionism in Dance

Perfectionism is often normalized in dance but can be harmful. While adaptive perfectionism (excellencism) encourages growth, maladaptive perfectionism fuels self-criticism, fear of mistakes, and dependence on external validation. It often erodes self-efficacy and increases anxiety. Institutions that encourage vulnerability and normalize mistakes help shift dancers toward healthier striving (Table 3).

Rationale of the Study

Despite growing attention to mental health in dance, research lacks an integrated examination of how self-efficacy, anxiety, and perfectionism interact. This study aims to fill that gap, offering insights for evidence-based interventions that promote psychological resilience. Findings will benefit educators, psychologists, and choreographers seeking to balance performance excellence with mental well-being—redefining strength in dance as resilience, not the absence of vulnerability.

Table 4. Regression between self-efficacy and anxiety among dancers

Regression between self-efficacy and anxiety among male dancers			
<i>MODEL</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R square</i>	<i>Adjusted R square</i>
1	0.341	0.116	0.101
<i>a. Predictors: (Constant), self efficacy</i>			
Regression between self-efficacy and anxiety among female dancers			
<i>MODEL</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R square</i>	<i>Adjusted R square</i>
1	.063	.004	-.013
<i>a. Predictors: (Constant), self-efficacy</i>			

Table 5. Regression between self-efficacy and perfectionism among dancers

Regression between self-efficacy and excellencism among dancers			
<i>MODEL</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R square</i>	<i>Adjusted R square</i>
1(Males)	.468	.219	.206
2(Females)	.397	.158	.143
<i>a. Predictors: (Constant), self-efficacy</i>			
Regression between self-efficacy and perfectionism (maladaptive) among dancers			
<i>MODEL</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R square</i>	<i>Adjusted R square</i>
1(Males)	.419	.176	.162
2(Females)	.222	.049	.033
<i>a. Predictors: (Constant), self-efficacy</i>			

Theoretical Foundations

This study draws on Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory, which highlights self-efficacy—belief in one’s ability to succeed—as a key factor in shaping behavior, motivation, and emotions. In dance, high self-efficacy supports performance, emotional control, and resilience, while low self-efficacy may lead to anxiety and self-doubt (Table 4). The Multidimensional Perfectionism Theory further distinguishes between adaptive perfectionism (excellencism), which encourages growth, and maladaptive perfectionism, marked by fear of failure and self-criticism. These theories suggest that self-efficacy can act as a buffer against anxiety and influence how perfectionism is expressed. The study also considers gender-based differences, acknowledging that social expectations may shape these psychological traits. Together, these frameworks guide the investigation of how self-efficacy, anxiety, and perfectionism interact within the high-pressure context of dance (Table 5).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Arbinaga, F. [2] (2025) investigated how psychological factors relate to resilience in dance students. The study, using a cross-sectional design, included 147 dancers with over three years of training. Resilience was measured alongside self-efficacy and perfectionism using standardized tools. Results showed that students with higher resilience had significantly greater self-efficacy ($t = 3.397, p = .001$), though no significant differences were found in perfectionism levels. The study emphasizes the importance of fostering resilience and self-efficacy in dance education, highlighting their role in enhancing performance and adaptability without necessarily increasing perfectionistic tendencies.

Arbinaga, F. [1](2023) studied 145 music students (57.9% female, Mage = 27.77) to examine links between perfectionism, resilience, and self-efficacy. Using standardized scales, results showed that females scored higher on both adaptive ($d = 0.41$) and maladaptive perfectionism ($d = 0.70$), though no gender differences appeared in self-efficacy or resilience. Students with high resilience reported significantly greater self-efficacy ($d = 1.30$), while those with low resilience showed higher adverse responses to imperfection ($d = 0.49$). Regression analysis indicated that self-efficacy strongly predicted resilience ($\beta = 0.525, p < 0.001$), whereas dysfunctional perfectionism showed a weak negative trend ($\beta = -0.156, p = 0.063$). Findings highlight the role of self-efficacy in fostering resilience and suggest implications for music education interventions.

Won, H. I.[10] (2023) studied 308 ballet students from three universities and examined how COVID-19 barriers affected learning, performance, and anxiety. Using standardized scales and regression analysis ($p < .05$), results showed that weight management and appearance-focused body image heightened perfectionism goals, achievement anxiety, and negative emotions such as fear and despair. Health concerns were linked to performance anxiety, while personal and parental expectations further increased anxiety and communication difficulties.

Li, Z., Zhou, M., et al. [5](2022) explored the impact of shifting dance education to Zoom during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on its effect on students' 4C skills and self-efficacy. While creativity and collaboration improved, communication and critical thinking remained unchanged. However, students reported a notable drop in self-efficacy, likely due to reduced physical interaction, limited real-time feedback, and difficulty adapting to online learning in a performance-based discipline. The study highlights the importance of supporting mental well-being alongside skill-building in virtual dance education.

Dennis, A.[3] (2021) investigated how social physique anxiety, perfectionism, and burnout interrelate in collegiate dancers. Among 166 participants, body image concerns were strongly tied to maladaptive perfectionism, which contributed to emotional exhaustion. Although adaptive perfectionism supported motivation, it also heightened anxiety when linked to appearance. The study highlights the fine line between healthy ambition and self-critical tendencies in dance and emphasizes the need for wellness programs that address body image and perfectionism to support dancers' long-term well-being.

Min, Y. M., & Yu, Y. J.[6] (2021) explored how perfectionism affects competition anxiety and dance immersion in middle and high school dance students. Using data from 279 participants and various statistical methods, the study found a significant link between perfectionist traits, increased anxiety, and levels of dance immersion. The results suggest that perfectionism not only heightens anxiety but also directly influences how deeply students engage in dance. Understanding these psychological dynamics is crucial for promoting focused and healthy participation in dance among adolescents.

Temel, A.[9] (2021) investigated how athletic self-efficacy and perfectionism influence performance among Gazi University student athletes. Using a correlational design and data from 186 randomly selected athletes, the study found that self-efficacy and perfectionism significantly predicted athletic performance, accounting for 54% and 46% of the variance, respectively ($p < 0.05$). These results underscore the importance of integrating psychological traits like confidence and achievement orientation with physical training in athlete development and evaluation.

Pentith, R., et al.[7] (2021) studied perfectionism and injury coping strategies in 68 young competitive Irish dancers (mean age: 14). Among the 189 reported lower-body injuries, 79% of dancers showed perfectionistic traits—40% mixed, 29% self-oriented, and 10% socially prescribed. Frequent coping strategies included planful problem-solving, self-control, and seeking social support. Notably, mixed perfectionists were significantly more likely ($p = 0.03$) to use planful problem-solving and confrontive coping. The findings highlight the need for medical professionals to consider perfectionist tendencies when treating injured dancers to better manage their psychological responses.

Diaz, F. M. [4](2018) studied meditation habits in 255 college musicians and their connection to music performance anxiety (MPA), considering trait mindfulness and perfectionism. Findings revealed that weekly meditation was associated with lower MPA, even when mindfulness and perfectionism levels were controlled. Higher mindfulness correlated with reduced anxiety, while greater self-oriented and socially prescribed perfectionism were linked to elevated MPA. However, the type of meditation practiced had no significant impact on anxiety levels.

Sarıkaya, M., & Kurtaslan, Z. [8](2018) conducted a correlational study involving 541 undergraduate music student teachers in Turkey to explore the links between performance anxiety, perfectionism, and self-efficacy. Their findings showed that perfectionism had a dual role—certain forms heightened anxiety, while others reduced it. Notably, high self-efficacy consistently emerged as a protective factor, helping to lower performance anxiety.

METHODOLOGY

Aim

The aim of the study is to investigate the influence of self-efficacy on anxiety and perfectionism among dancers, examining whether higher self-efficacy reduces performance-related anxiety and moderates the effects of perfectionism.

Objectives

1. To examine gender differences in the levels of how self-efficacy influences anxiety and perfectionism among dancers.
2. To study the relationship between self-efficacy and anxiety among dancers.
3. To study the relationship between self-efficacy and perfectionism among dancers.
4. Self-efficacy will predict anxiety among dancers.
5. Self-efficacy will predict perfectionism among dancers.

Hypotheses

- H_1 : There will be no significant gender difference in the levels of how self-efficacy influences anxiety and perfectionism among dancers.
- H_2 : There will be no significant relationship between self-efficacy and anxiety among dancers.
- H_3 : There will be no significant relationship between self-efficacy and perfectionism among dancers.
- H_4 : Self-efficacy will not predict anxiety among dancers.
- H_5 : Self-efficacy will not predict perfectionism among dancers.

Research Design

A research design is a structured plan that guides the research process while controlling variables to ensure validity (Polit & Hungler, 1999). This study began with an exploratory design to identify research gaps and formulate hypotheses. Once finalized, descriptive and correlational designs were used to analyze relationships among variables.

Variables

- *Independent variable*- Self-Efficacy
- *Dependent variables*- Anxiety and Perfectionism

Sample

8 research papers and literature reviews which studied self-efficacy, anxiety and perfectionism over the last decade were studied. General Self-Efficacy Scale(GSE) by Ralf Schwarzer and Matthias Jerusalem[11] (1995), State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) by Charles D. Spielberger and colleagues[12-13] (1970) and Scale of Perfectionism and Excellence(SCOPE) by Gaudreau, A., & Thompson, A.[12](2010) was generated into a google form and had been filled by 120 dancers aged 18 to 30 who have undergone at least two years of formal dance training in western dance

Inclusion Criteria

Participants are supposed to be dancers aged 18 to 30 with a minimum of two years of formal dance training in western dance. They must be actively engaged in dance performances, competitions, or professional dance settings to ensure relevant experience.

Exclusion Criteria

Participants below 18 or above 30 years, with under two years of dance training, or diagnosed with severe psychological or medical conditions will be excluded. Dancers trained in classical or folk forms and those with chronic injuries will also not be considered.

Tools

The General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES), developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem[11] (1995), is a 10-item instrument that assesses an individual's belief in their ability to cope with a variety of challenging situations. Each item is rated on a 4-point Likert scale, measuring confidence, resilience, and problem-solving skills. The State-Trait Anxiety Inventory – Short Version (STAI) is a 6-item scale used to differentiate between temporary (state) and long-standing (trait) anxiety, especially in performance settings. Rated on a 4-point Likert scale, it offers a concise and reliable method for assessing anxiety in high-pressure contexts. Lastly, the Scale of Perfectionism and Excellencism (SCOPE) distinguishes between *excellencism*—a flexible, adaptive form of high achievement—and *personal standards perfectionism*, which is characterized by rigid self-imposed standards often associated with anxiety.

Procedure

The study will recruit 120 dancers aged 18–30 with at least two years of formal training, sourced through academies and independent networks. After informed consent, participants will complete self-report measures including the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES), State-Trait Anxiety Inventory – Short Version (STAI), and the Scale of Perfectionism and Excellencism (SPE), administered online or in person. Data will be analyzed using correlation and regression to explore the relationship between self-efficacy, anxiety, and perfectionism. The findings aim to inform psychological interventions that promote resilience and healthier performance mindsets in dancers.

RESULTS

The results of the study indicated no significant gender differences in mean scores for self-efficacy, anxiety, excellencism, or maladaptive perfectionism. However, self-efficacy showed stronger associations in males—negatively with anxiety ($r = -0.341$, $p = 0.008$) and positively with both excellencism ($r = 0.468$, $p < 0.01$) and maladaptive perfectionism ($r = 0.419$, $p < 0.01$). In females, self-efficacy was linked only to excellencism ($r = 0.397$, $p < 0.01$). Regression results also confirmed greater predictive power of self-efficacy in males, highlighting its stronger psychological role in this group.

DISCUSSION

The study investigated the relationship between self-efficacy, anxiety, and perfectionism (excellencism and maladaptive) among male and female dancers. The t-test results indicated no significant gender differences in mean scores for self-efficacy, anxiety, excellencism, or maladaptive perfectionism (Table 1). Correlation analyses revealed distinct relational patterns. Among male dancers, self-efficacy was negatively correlated with anxiety ($r = -0.341$, $p < 0.01$) and positively associated with both excellencism ($r = 0.468$, $p < 0.01$) and maladaptive perfectionism ($r = 0.419$, $p < 0.01$). In contrast, female dancers showed a significant positive correlation only between self-efficacy and excellencism ($r = 0.397$, $p < 0.01$), with no significant relationship between self-efficacy and either anxiety or maladaptive perfectionism. Regression analyses further confirmed these gender-specific trends. For males, self-efficacy significantly predicted anxiety ($R^2 = 0.116$), excellencism ($R^2 = 0.219$), and maladaptive perfectionism ($R^2 = 0.176$). For females, self-efficacy significantly predicted only excellencism ($R^2 = 0.158$), with minimal predictive power for other outcomes. These findings highlight self-efficacy as a key psychological resource, particularly for male dancers, and support the integration of mental training and gender-sensitive support in dance education.

CONCLUSION

The study found that self-efficacy significantly influences dancers' psychological well-being, especially among males. Higher self-efficacy was linked to lower anxiety ($r = -0.341$, $p < 0.01$) and higher levels of both adaptive ($r = 0.468$, $p < 0.01$) and maladaptive perfectionism ($r = 0.419$, $p < 0.01$) in male dancers. Regression analysis showed self-efficacy predicted 11.6% of anxiety and 21.9% of excellencism variance in males. Among females, self-efficacy was associated with excellencism ($r = 0.397$, $p < 0.01$) but had minimal impact on anxiety or maladaptive perfectionism. These results underscore the importance of fostering self-efficacy and healthy perfectionism in dance training.

Limitations

- The research was conducted on a limited sample of 120 dancers, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of dancers.
- The study did not differentiate between dance styles or levels of professional experience, both of which could potentially influence psychological outcomes.
- Factors such as cultural background, socio-economic status, and educational levels were not accounted for, which may have introduced uncontrolled variability in self-efficacy and perfectionism scores.
- Due to the cross-sectional nature of the study, causal relationships between the variables could not be established.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. Future research could extend to include dancers from varied dance styles (e.g., classical, etc.) and diverse backgrounds.
2. A longitudinal study would provide more robust evidence of how self-efficacy evolves and affects perfectionism and anxiety over time.
3. Further studies can explore the role of coaching style, peer dynamics, and performance feedback in developing self-efficacy.
4. Inclusion of additional psychological constructs such as resilience, motivation, and self-esteem could provide a more comprehensive picture.

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