

## FEAR OF FAILURE AND PERFECTIONISM: A PRELIMINARY STUDY OF BUSINESS STUDENTS AT A MALAYSIAN POLYTECHNIC

Madiha binti Hasbulah  
Asmahani binti Mohd Hanapi  
Masidah binti Masri

### ABSTRACT

*The aim of this quantitative study was to investigate the level of Fear of Failure (FoF) and perfectionism among a sample of business students at a Malaysian polytechnic. The American Psychological Association (2007) has defined FoF as 'persistent and irrational anxiety about failing to measure up to the standards and goals set by oneself or others'. Perfectionism, on the other hand, has been defined as 'setting of excessively high standards of performance in combination with an overall tendency towards critical self-evaluation' (Frost et al., 1990). A total of 94 students enrolled in Diploma in Marketing program completed the short form versions of the Revised Almost Perfect Scale (Rice et al., 2014) and the Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory (Conroy et al., 2002). The majority of the students were females (n = 72; 76.6 %) from 2 different levels of study (i.e. 2nd and 5th semester). Descriptive (e.g. mean and frequency) and inferential (e.g. t-tests) statistical analyses were conducted to provide information with reference to the research questions. The results of this study have revealed that the levels of FoF and perfectionism were moderate. There was a significant difference in FoF scores between male and female students but not between levels of study. On the contrary, there was a significant difference in perfectionism scores between levels of study but not between genders. The findings of this study will help fill the gap in the literature regarding the extent of perceived FoF and perfectionism of Malaysian polytechnic students. These findings will also be beneficial to the polytechnic educators and administrators in managing students to overcome the negative consequences of FoF and perfectionism. This study, however, is subject to several limitations. The first is the small sample size used and secondly only students from one academic program were surveyed. Thus the results of this study must be interpreted with caution.*

Keywords: Fear of Failure (FoF), Perfectionism, Adaptive Perfectionism, Maladaptive Perfectionism

### INTRODUCTION

There are a multitude of external and internal factors that impact student achievement in higher education. Some of the external factors often mentioned in literature are learning attitudes, quality of teaching and family background (Li & Qui, 2018). As for internal factors, often highlighted are personal self-confidence (self-efficacy), optimism, fear of failure (FoF) and perfectionism (Chemers et al., 2001; Flett et al. 1995; Stoeber & Rambow, 2007). Lambert (1969) defined academic failure as a performance below expectation. According to Stuewig et al. (2010), FoF in students can elicit shame and lead to undesirable behaviors such as cheating to achieve. Covington and Omelich (1991) opined that these type of individuals typically doubt their ability to succeed and capability to avoid failure. To measure students' perceived FoF, this study used the 5-item short form of the Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory (Conroy et al., 2002). Frost et al. (1990) defined perfectionism as a high standard of performance accompanied by an inclination to critical self-evaluation. Some authors suggested that perfectionism is a multidimensional characteristic involving both positive and negative aspects (Hewitt, Flett, 1991; Stoeber, Otto, 2006). In this study, perfectionism is categorized into adaptive (i.e. positive perfectionism) and maladaptive (i.e. negative perfectionism). Some of the positive outcomes of adaptive perfectionism found in literature are academic achievement, self-esteem and life satisfaction while examples of maladaptive perfectionism outcomes are anxiety, stress and depression (e.g. Chang & Rand, 2000; Rice & Slaney, 2002). To measure students' perceived perfectionism, this study utilized the 8-item Short Form of the Revised Almost Perfect Scale (Rice et al., 2014) which measured both adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism dimensions. This study aimed to investigate the extent of FoF and perfectionism among a sample of business students at a Malaysian polytechnic. The two personality traits were chosen because of an absence of literature regarding their impact on polytechnic students' well-being and academic performance. Findings from this study will provide practical insights for polytechnic educators and administrators to manage students that exhibit negative outcomes arising from these two personality traits. This study will also contribute to the body of knowledge regarding FoF and perfectionism which prior studies have shown to impact students' academic achievements.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### FEAR OF FAILURE

Elliot and Thrash (2004) defined fear of failure (FoF) as a tendency of trying to avoid failure because of the anticipated experience of shame or embarrassment when failing in an achievement task. FoF can be both beneficial and detrimental to achieving success. On a positive note, it can be a factor that can motivate individuals to reach a high level of performance. Conversely, it can hinder these individuals from actualizing their potential (Entwistle, 1988). Golden (1998) stated that FoF can be categorized into interpersonal failure and educational or academic failure. Some researchers opined that the pressure to perform well coupled with a general lack of confidence in the ability to succeed could result in FoF (e.g. Covington & Omelich, 1991; Kumaraswamy, 2013; Shaver, 1976). Studies have shown a number of aversive consequences with regards to feelings of FoF. The latter has been found to be associated with i) negative feelings of incompetence (McGregor, 2003), ii) negative self-evaluation (Pantziara & Philippou,

2015), iii) shame and humiliation (Conroy et al., 2007), iv) threat to self-esteem (Entwistle, 1988), v) anxiety and stress (Entwistle & Ramsden, 1983) and vi) procrastination (Zhang et al., 2018).

There are numerous studies that examined FoF in academic settings. Examples of FoF constructs studied in relation to FoF include procrastination (Anoita et al., 2020), anxiety and locus of control (Onyekuru & Ibegbunam, 2014), motivation (Nakhla, 2019) and gender (Nelson et al., 2013). Moores Stuart (2013) in a study of 237 college students discovered that students who experienced higher levels of FoF received lower academic results compared to their counterparts who were less anxious about failing. However the inverse relationship between FoF and academic success correlation was weak which indicated the existence of other moderating factors. A similar study of high-school students found FoF to be a significant predictor of grade point average and an inverse relationship between FoF and school engagement (Caraway et al., 2003).

The levels of FoF in 220 male and female university engineering students were investigated by Nelson and colleagues (2013). Using the Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory (PFAI), results revealed that female students had significantly higher FoF than their male counterparts. Female students also exhibited higher scores on the subscales of Fear of Experiencing Shame and Embarrassment (FSE), Fear of Devaluing One's Self-Estimate (FDSE) and Fear of Having an Uncertain Future (FUF). The authors opined that self-efficacy (i.e. beliefs about own internal abilities) and self-esteem (i.e. beliefs about own worth and value) could be amongst the factors influencing this finding. In another study of FoF of student athletes by Sagar et al. (2011), similar findings were obtained where females reported higher levels of FDSE than males. Males however reported higher levels of Fear of Important Others Losing Interest (FIOLI). These findings are supported by Ellison and Partridge (2012) and Alabduljabbar et al. (2022) who reported that females had higher FDSE compared to males. These results seem to suggest that males had higher fear of negative relational consequences compared to females. However, not all studies on FoF showed significant differences between males and females. Fitrianda and Amna (2019) compared FoF of 70 engineering undergraduates and found no significant differences between genders. On the factor of academic levels, a study by Alabduljabbar et al. (2022) found significant relations between study levels of medical students and 3 dimensions of the PFAI. Specifically, third-year students had significantly higher FSE, FDSE and Fear of Upsetting Important Others (FUIO) scores when compared with fourth and fifth-year students.

## PERFECTIONISM

Perfectionism according to Flett and Hewitt (2016) is a popular topic in educational research because it is generally related to students' academic achievement. Slaney et al. (2001) described perfectionism as one's inclination to set high standards and strives for flawlessness. Perfectionists are also individuals who are overly self-critical and are often highly concerned with how others perceive and evaluate them (Frost et al., 1990). Scholars have distinguished two types of perfectionism, i) adaptive (i.e. positive perfectionism) and ii) maladaptive (i.e. negative perfectionism). Adaptive perfectionism is usually associated with achievement and success where the focus is on setting and having high objectives and personal standards (Silverman, 2007). On the other end of the spectrum, maladaptive perfectionism focuses on the discrepancy between an individual's actual personal performance and high goals (Comerchero & Fortugno, 2013). These individuals strive for excessive and unrealistically high standard, and are overly critical and evaluative of their own behaviour (Chan, 2010).

Many studies have reported the positive outcomes of adaptive perfectionism such as resilience, optimism and academic success (Enns et al., 2001; Hicks & Meng Yao Wu, 2015). In contrast, maladaptive aspects of perfectionism have been associated with amongst others, anxiety and depression (Rice et al., 2012), mental health outcomes (Tan, 2022) and emotional dysregulation (Dobos et al., 2021). Verner-Filion & Gaudreau (2010) stated that maladaptive perfectionism leads to low academic performance. This is supported by a study of 793 students where Roohafza et al. (2010) discovered that maladaptive perfectionism had a negative impact on academic achievement. The FoF factor which is prominent in maladaptive perfectionist standards could be one of the reasons for the problems in academic achievement (Conroy, 2003; Martin, 2006). Hill and Curran (2016) meanwhile mentioned that perfectionistic concerns (e.g. doubts about action and concern over mistakes) could also contribute to an array of maladaptive outcomes, such as performance anxiety and achievement challenges.

Perfectionistic tendencies of students are often studied in relation to gender, age-groups and academic levels. In an academic setting, studies on adaptive and maladaptive perfectionisms and academic achievement have produced mixed results. According to Stoeber et al. (2009), adaptive perfectionism dimensions have been correlated with, amongst others, academic confidence, academic achievement and higher levels of hope for success. Studies that showed adaptive perfectionism contributing to high academic achievement included those by Ashby & Bruner (2005), Grzegorek et al., (2004) and Enns et al. (2001). A study of 350 university students revealed that positive perfectionism has a significant positive effect on academic achievement and perceived self-efficacy (Akar, et al., 2018). Frost et al. (1990) opined that this could be linked to the increase in study time and time spent in consultation with instructors/lecturers. Bieling et al. (2003) while agreeing that adaptive perfectionism had an effect on academic performance, mentioned that the relationship was not very significant. Scholars however have cautioned that some students might have academic-related difficulties as a result of perfectionism. These difficulties included test anxiety (Burns, 2004), anxiety (Flett et al., 1989) and FoF (Adderholt-Elliott, 1989).

Studies investigating differences in perception of perfectionism between males and females are inconclusive. Ghosh and Roy (2017) investigated 90 female and 60 male university students and found the level of perfectionism differed between gender. Macsinga and Dobrița (2010) analysed differences in perceived perfectionism in a sample of 29 men and 33 women. Their findings revealed significant differences regarding perceived perfectionism where men showed more concerned over making mistakes than women. Similar findings were obtained by McCreary et al. (2004) who found significant differences of perfectionism levels between male and female students. On the contrary, studies that showed the absence of differences in perfectionist tendencies

between males and females include those of Sand et al. (2021) and Curran and Hill (2017). Sand et al. (2021) investigated perfectionism among 10,217 Norwegian adolescents using gender and parental education level as independent variables and found no significant differences between male and female respondents. Similarly, Curran and Hill (2017) found no evidence of differences in levels of perfectionism between male and female college students. The authors conducted a meta-analysis of birth cohort differences from 1989 to 2016.

On the relationship between FoF and perfectionism, Sagar and Stoeber (2009) believed that there exists an association between these two student-related factors. According to Conroy et al. (2007), FoF is mainly associated with socially prescribed perfectionism. The latter refers to the tendency for an individual to believe that others expect perfection from him or her (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). A number of studies found in literature indicated a positive relationship between perfectionism and FoF. Leland et al. (2017), for example, in a study of 338 university students found a positive association between clinical perfectionism and fear of failure. Another study by Sunkarapalli and Agarwal (2017) using a sample of 200 students yielded similar results where there was a positive correlation between Perfectionism and all dimensions of FoF, namely FSE, FUF, FSE, FDSE and FUIO.

## STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

There are a host of student-related factors that have been investigated to determine their impact on students' academic achievement. Some of these factors were study habits, study skills, self-learning efforts, self-efficacy, motivation, interest and prior knowledge. However, most of these studies were conducted in western countries and the findings may not be appropriate or applicable elsewhere due to socio-cultural differences. A review of literature has also revealed that studies investigating perceived perfectionism and FoF with regard to level of study and gender have produced mixed results. There is also limited knowledge on the level of FoF and perfectionism among Malaysian polytechnic students due to an absence of studies conducted locally. Thus there exists a need to conduct research studies in polytechnic educational settings that contribute to the body of knowledge regarding FoF and perfectionism which prior studies have shown to impact students' academic achievements.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main objective of this study was to investigate students' perception of FoF and perfectionism when undertaking a business course at a Malaysian polytechnic. Specifically, this study was conducted to identify the differences in FoF and perfectionism with respect to gender and academic level. To achieve these objectives, two groups of students from different semesters (2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>) but enrolled in the same academic program (Diploma in Marketing) were surveyed.

The following research questions (RQ) were specifically designed to achieve the study objectives:

- RQ1. What is the extent of FoF among the students based on level of study?
- RQ2. What is the extent of FoF among the students based on gender?
- RQ3. What is the extent of perceived perfectionism among the students based on level of study?
- RQ4. What is the extent of perceived perfectionism among the students based on gender?
- RQ5. Is the difference in mean perceived FoF scores between levels of study statistically significant?
- RQ6. Is the difference in mean perceived FoF scores between male and female students statistically significant?
- RQ7. Is the difference in mean perceived perfectionism scores between levels of study statistically significant?
- RQ8. Is the difference in mean perceived perfectionism scores between male and female students statistically significant?

## SIGNIFICANT OF THE STUDY

This research study adds to the present body of knowledge regarding FoF and perfectionism of Malaysian students. However, prior studies found in literature had only focused on university students. According to the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE, 2020), the total number of graduates produced by the polytechnic education system in 2020 was 28,924. This study aims to fill the gap in the literature given the large number of polytechnic graduates entering the job market annually and the important role played by the polytechnics in producing technically skilled graduates that meet industry needs. Studies on the extent of perceived FoF and perfectionism of Malaysian polytechnic students will be of benefit to polytechnic educators and administrators who are directly or indirectly involved in producing competent and well-rounded graduates.

## METHODOLOGY

### PARTICIPANTS

Convenient sampling was used for this study because it was a convenient and inexpensive way to gather data. Furthermore, all three researchers were involved in the polytechnic education system and had easy access to the students. The total number of participants in this study was 94. Two groups of students enrolled in Diploma in Marketing program were surveyed and these groups represented participants in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> semester of their studies. The majority of the students were females (n = 72; 76.6 %).

## INSTRUMENTS

### THE SHORT FORM OF THE REVISED ALMOST PERFECT SCALE

The Short Form of the Revised Almost Perfect Scale (SAPS; Rice et al., 2014) consists of two subscales; i) Standards (4 items) and ii) Discrepancy (4 items). The Standards subscale measures the adaptive dimension of perfectionism (i.e. high performance expectations). A sample item is "I have a strong need to strive for excellence". The Discrepancy subscale, on the other hand, measures the maladaptive aspect of perfectionism (i.e. self-critical evaluation of performance). A sample item is "I am hardly ever satisfied with my performance". Each item on both subscales uses a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). According to Rice et al. (2014), the Cronbach alphas ( $\alpha$ ) ranged from .85 to .87 for Standards and .84 to .87 for Discrepancy. This study had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.70 to 0.74 for Standards and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.72 to 0.77 for discrepancy.

This short form of the Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory was developed by Conroy et al. (2002) to measure general FoF. This self-report 5-item measure assessed aversive consequences of failure, namely i) experiencing shame and embarrassment (FSE), ii) devaluing one's self-estimate (FDSE), iii) having an uncertain future (FUF), iv) important others losing interest (FIOLI) and v) upsetting important others (FUOI). A sample item included "When I am failing, I worry about what others think about me". A five-point Likert scale ranging from -2 (Do not believe all the time) to +2 (Believe 100% all the time) was used to solicit responses from the participants. Conroy et al. (2002) reported its internal consistency ( $\alpha$ ) of 0.72. The present study had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.70.

## STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The analyses were performed using IBM SPSS (version 25.0) software. This study utilized both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were used to answer RQ1, RQ2, RQ3 and RQ4. T-tests were used to answer RQ5, RQ6, RQ7 and RQ8.

## RESULTS

### DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY PARTICIPANTS

**Table 1. Demographics of the Study Participants**

		2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester		
No. of Participants		CGPA*		
Male	Female	< 2.0	2.1 to 2.9	> 3.00
12	38	8 (16.0 %)	26 (52.0 %)	16 (32.0 %)
		5 <sup>th</sup> Semester		
No. of Participants		CGPA*		
Male	Female	< 2.0	2.1 to 2.9	> 3.00
10	34	6 (13.6 %)	26 (59.1 %)	12 (27.3 %)

\* denotes both male and female students

From Table 1, fifty 2<sup>nd</sup> semester students were surveyed as compared to forty four 5<sup>th</sup> semester students. The number of female participants in both semesters were 72 (76.6 %) compared to only 22 (23.4 %) male participants. Students' academic achievement was determined from their end of the semester cumulative GPA (CGPA). As displayed in Table 1, the majority of students of both semesters achieved CGPAs between 2.1 and 2.9.

### Research Question 1.

RQ1. What is the extent of FoF among the students based on level of study?

Mean and standard deviation for the dimensions of FoF were calculated. Results are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for the Dimensions of FoF based on Level of Study**

Dimensions of FoF	Semester 2		Semester 5	
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D
Fear of experiencing shame and embarrassment (FSE)	.40	1.245	.30	1.069
Fear of devaluing one's self-estimate (FDSE)	.32	.741	.27	.727
Fear of having an uncertain future (FUF)	.66	.626	.61	.754
Fear of important others losing interest (FIOLI)	.10	.909	.34	.888
Fear of upsetting important others (FUOI)	.20	.670	.39	.754
Overall Mean	0.34	.191	0.38	.166

Table 2 shows that 2<sup>nd</sup> semester students had higher means for fear of experiencing shame and embarrassment (M = 0.40), fear of devaluing one's self-estimate (M = 0.32) and fear of having an uncertain future (M = 0.66) as compared to 5<sup>th</sup> semester students. The latter had higher means for fear of important others losing interest (M = 0.34) and fear of upsetting important others (0.39). Overall, 5<sup>th</sup> semester students experienced higher FoF (M = 0.38) compared to 2<sup>nd</sup> semester students (M = 0.34).

### Research Question 2

RQ2. What is the extent of FoF among the students based on gender?

Mean and standard deviation for the dimensions of FoF were calculated. Results are presented in Table 3

**Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for the Dimensions of FoF based on Gender**

Dimensions of FoF	Male		Female	
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D
Fear of experiencing shame and embarrassment (FSE)	.18	1.259	.40	1.134
Fear of devaluing one's self-estimate (FDSE)	-.09	.610	.31	.959
Fear of having an uncertain future (FUF)	.41	.590	.26	.769
Fear of important others losing interest (FIOLI)	.32	.716	.28	.716
Fear of upsetting important others (FUOI)	.68	.716	.63	.680
Overall Mean	.30	.134	.38	.189

From Table 3, male students had higher means in 3 dimensions of FoF i.e. fear of having an uncertain future (M = 0.41), fear of important others losing interest (M = 0.32) and fear of upsetting important others (M = 0.68). Female students had higher means for the dimensions of fear of experiencing shame and embarrassment (M = 0.40) and fear of devaluing one's self-estimate (M = 0.31). Overall, female students experienced higher FoF (M = 0.376) compared to male students (M = 0.30).

### Research Question 3

RQ3. What is the extent of perceived perfectionism among the students based on level of study?

Mean and standard deviation for perceived perfectionism were calculated. Results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Perceived Perfectionism based on Level of Study

Level of Study	Mean	S.D
2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester	3.73	.375
5 <sup>th</sup> Semester	3.35	.366

Table 4 shows that 2<sup>nd</sup> semester students had higher mean scores (M = 3.73) than 5<sup>th</sup> semester students (M = 3.35) for perceived perfectionism.

### Research Question 4.

RQ4. What is the extent of perceived perfectionism among the students based on gender?

Mean and standard deviation for perceived perfectionism were calculated. Results are presented in Table 5

**Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for Perceived Perfectionism based on Gender**

Gender	Mean	S.D
Male	3.58	.427
Female	3.55	.411

Table 5 shows that male students had higher mean scores (M = 3.58) than female students (M = 3.55) for perceived perfectionism.

### Research Question 5

RQ5. Is the difference in mean perceived FoF scores between levels of study statistically significant?

The independent variable of FoF was calculated for mean and standard deviation. T-test was then calculated to determine the significant differences between the two groups of students. Results are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6. Descriptive and Inferential Statistics for FoF based on Level of Study**

Student Population	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester	50	.336	.191	-1.231	.221
5 <sup>th</sup> Semester	44	.381	.166		

Table 6 shows that the mean score for FoF in 2<sup>nd</sup> semester students (M =.336) was lower than the mean score for 5<sup>th</sup> semester students (M= .381).

A two sample t-test performed to compare perceived FoF levels between 2<sup>nd</sup> semester students and 5<sup>th</sup> semester students indicated that 2<sup>nd</sup> semester student' scores (M = .336, SD = .191) did not differ significantly from 5<sup>th</sup> semester students' scores (M = .382, SD = .166);  $t(92) = -1.231, p = .221$

#### Research Question 6

RQ6. Is the difference in mean perceived FoF scores between male and female students statistically significant?

The independent variable of FoF was calculated for mean and standard deviation. T-test was then calculated to determine the significant differences between the two group of students. Results are displayed in Table 7.

**Table 7. Descriptive and Inferential Statistics on Variable of Fear of Failure based on Gender**

Student Population	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
Male	50	.300	.134	-2.062	.044
Female	44	.375	.189		

A two sample t-test was performed to compare perceived FoF between male and female students. Table 7 shows that there was a significant difference in perceived FoF between male students (M = .300, SD = .134) and female students (M = .375, SD = .189);  $t(92) = -2.062, p = .044$

#### Research Question 7

RQ7. Is the difference in mean perceived perfectionism scores between levels of study statistically significant?

The independent variable of perceived perfectionism was calculated for mean and standard deviation. T-test was then calculated to determine the significant differences between the two group of students. Results are displayed in Table 8.

**Table 8. Descriptive and Inferential Statistics on Variable of Perfectionism based on Level of Study**

Student Population	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester	50	3.730	.375	4.853	.000
5 <sup>th</sup> Semester	44	3.358	.366		

Table 8 shows that the mean score for perfectionism in 2<sup>nd</sup> semester students (M =3.73) was higher than the mean score for 5<sup>th</sup> semester students (M= 3.358).

A two sample t-test analysis comparing 2<sup>nd</sup> semester students' perceived perfectionism levels to 5<sup>th</sup> semester students' perceived perfectionism levels indicated that the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester students' scores (M = 3.730, SD = .375) did differ significantly from the 5<sup>th</sup> semester students' scores (M = 3.358, SD = .366);  $t(92) = 4.853, p = .000$

#### Research Question 8

RQ8. Is the difference in mean perceived perfectionism scores between male and female students statistically significant?

The independent variable of perfectionism was calculated for mean and standard deviation. T-test was then calculated to determine the significant differences between the two group of students. Results are displayed in Table 9.

**Table 9. Descriptive and Inferential Statistics on Variable of Perfectionism based on Gender**

Student Population	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
Male	50	3.579	.427	.306	.761
Female	44	3.548	.411		

A two sample t-test was performed to compare perceived FoF between male and female students. The results displayed in Table 9 shows that there was not a significant difference in perceived FoF scores between male students ( $M = 3.579$ ,  $SD = .427$ ) and female students ( $M = 3.548$ ,  $SD = .411$ );  $t(92) = -.306$ ,  $p = .761$

## DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study investigated Malaysian polytechnic business students' perception of FoF and perfectionism. Specifically, this study sought to determine if the variables FoF and perfectionism were significantly different between genders and levels of study. The results of this study indicated that the level of FoF of business students was moderate. Further inspection with reference to different levels of study indicated that 2<sup>nd</sup> semester students experienced higher FoF in the following subscales: FSE, FDSE and FUF. However, 5<sup>th</sup> semester students exhibited higher FoF for the other two dimensions: FIOLI and FUIO. These results mirrored those of a study by Alabduljabbar et al. (2022) where 3<sup>rd</sup> year medical students showed higher FSE and FDSE scores in comparison with 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> year students. This result is also in line with a study by Conroy et al. (2007) who found that age influenced FoF scores. Overall, 5<sup>th</sup> semester students exhibited higher FoF in comparison to 2<sup>nd</sup> semester students and one possible explanation on this higher mean FoF scores is that the latter has to cope with more challenging courses when compared with 2<sup>nd</sup> semester students. However, the mean scores of FoF between the two groups of students was not significantly different (Table 6).

When comparing FoF between genders, there was a significant difference in scores between male and female students (Table 7). Overall, female students experienced higher FoF compared to male students. Specifically, female students had higher means in 2 dimensions of FoF i.e. FSE and FDSE. This result supported previous findings by Reddy et al. (2018) and Nelson (2013) who found female university students scoring higher FoF in comparison to their male counterparts. The authors also discovered female students demonstrated higher scores on the subscales of FDSE and FSE. According to Ellison and Partridge (2012) and Thompson et al. (2008), females exhibited higher FDSE and FSE scores when appraising feelings of threat, guilt and self-criticism.

Some authors (e.g. Sherry et al., 2013) mentioned that previous studies did not show significant associations between levels of perfection and age and school level. In this study, the results show that 2<sup>nd</sup> semester students demonstrated higher scores compared to their seniors and the difference is significant (Table 8). This indicated that younger students' inclination towards being perfect is greater than that of older students. However, Lozano-Fernández et al. (2012) cautioned that this tendency to be perfect will diminish over time. Further investigation comparing perfectionism between genders reveals that male students exhibited higher perfectionism than their female counterparts. However the difference is not significant (Table 9). This supports previous findings of Stoeber & Stoeber (2009) who found no significant correlations between gender (and age) with the overall perfectionism scores across a sample of 107 students. This however contradicts the results of a study of 100 university students by Gawlik (2012) who discovered that females had higher scores in FoF and the difference was statistically significant.

In summary, the results of this study show that the levels of FoF and perfectionism among a sample of polytechnic business students were moderate. There was a significant difference in FoF scores between male and female students but not between levels of study. On perfectionism, there was a significant difference in scores between levels of study but not between genders. The present preliminary study has some limitations that could be improved in future studies. Firstly, the sample was small ( $N = 94$ ) and unbalanced in terms of gender composition ( $f = 72$ ,  $m = 22$ ). This was unintended because the majority of business students in polytechnics are females. To address this imbalance, future studies should include students from other academic programs such as engineering and hospitality. Bigger samples of study participants should also be considered so that the results are more representative of the student population. The impact of FoF and perfectionism on students' academic performance and well-being should also be investigated in future studies. The findings will be beneficial to the polytechnic educators and administrators in managing students who experience these two personality traits and putting in place intervention programs that help improve their academic performance.

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Madiha binti Hasbulah  
*Department of Commerce*  
*Politeknik Kota Bharu, 16450 Ketereh, Kelantan, Malaysia*  
*email: madiha@pkb.edu.my*

Asmahani binti Mohd Hanapi  
*Department of Commerce*  
*Politeknik Kota Bharu, 16450 Ketereh, Kelantan, Malaysia*  
*email: asmahani@pkb.edu.my*

Masidah binti Masri  
*Department of Commerce*  
*Politeknik Kota Bharu, 16450 Ketereh, Kelantan, Malaysia*  
*email: masidah@pkb.edu.my*