

# A Study of Evaluative Apprehension Perfectionism and Performance Anxiety in Music Performance: The Case of Music College Students in Southwest China

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study was to examine the basic situation of evaluative apprehension perfectionism and performance anxiety among music college students, and then a survey was conducted to analyze 183 music college students from three universities in the southwest. The results of this study showed that both evaluative apprehension perfectionism and performance anxiety were at high levels among the study participants, and the mean value of evaluative apprehension perfectionism was higher than that of performance anxiety. In terms of the lower variables of evaluative apprehension, the mean scores were ranked from highest to lowest as apprehension of failure, doubt about performance, and socially compulsive perfection, respectively.

**Keywords:** Music performance, Music education, Perfectionism, Performance anxiety

## 1. Research Background and Purpose

### 1.1. Perfectionism

Perfectionism refers to the pursuit of a flawless state, with a tendency to demand high standards from themselves or others that are difficult to accomplish, with a high degree of perfectionist tendencies, such people often make themselves seek tasks beyond their abilities, and try their best to challenge them, pursuing unrealistic achievements. As a result, they often exhibit characteristics such as unreasonable challenging beliefs and doubts and duties to self[1]. Being in this situation for a long time leads to being plagued by negative emotions, resulting in behaviors such as low performance and procrastination[2].

In the initial research on perfectionism, divided perfectionism into normal perfectionism and neurotic perfectionism. Studies were conducted with a focus on negative characteristics such as depression, obsessive-compulsive, and anti-functional beliefs, but the dimensions were too homogeneous and non-adaptive. With the continuous exploration of perfectionism, Frost, Martin, Lahart, and Rosenblate (1990) argued that perfectionism is a highly demanding nature of tasks or things that are difficult to achieve, accompanied by criticism and blame of oneself, which would trigger multiple psychological difficulties. They established the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS; Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale) by classifying perfectionist tendencies into six sub-dimensions in terms of cognitive, behavioral, and developmental aspects, namely, "concerns about mistakes," "personal expectations", "Parental expectations and blame", "Self-doubt" and "Organizationalization". The concept of "concern about mistakes" is defined as a conflation of mistakes and failures[3-4]. "Personal expectation" is a habitual behavior of setting a high standard for one's task performance, and "parental expectation and blame" refers to complete trust in the standard of task given by one's parents. If this standard is not met, there is a fear of being blamed. "Self-doubt" refers to doubts about one's own abilities and abilities. Organization refers to a preference for order and organization. Dunkley and Blankstein (2000) factor and integrate previous scales of perfectionism into two domains: "evaluative concern perfectionism" and "personal standard perfectionism. "Evaluative perfectionism" represents socially empowered perfectionism, concerns about things, and doubts about task performance. "Personal standard perfectionism" represents self-directed perfectionism, i.e., organizational, personal standards, and other factors[5-6].

Perfectionism, which has the nature of evaluation concern, refers to individuals who are overly

concerned about the expectations, evaluations of others regardless of the success or failure of the implementation results, they are often dissatisfied with their own behavior and constantly criticize, and reflect on their own behavior [7], they are overly pessimistic about the expectations and evaluations of others, and evaluations of others are instead overly pessimistic. In other words, they assign tasks to themselves that are difficult to achieve, and if they fail to achieve them, they are blamed by themselves or others and thus feel a lot of emotions. For example, they feel uneasy, anxious, depressed, etc., even remain highly sensitive at all times, thus experiencing negative feelings in their hearts[8]. Evaluative apprehension perfectionism can reflect the state of resilience, emotion, sensitivity, and stress in the hearts of music majors. During musical performance activities, performers tend to enter into the experience of evaluative perfectionism, and despite constant practice behind the stage, there is no avoiding the possibility that performers will enter into this mental experience. Moreover, the more time they spend on stage and the more they participate in stage performances, the higher the chance of experiencing perfectionism with evaluation concerns. It is associated with difficulties in the hearts of college students and has been linked to problems of mental health, academic completion, and interpersonal relationships. Therefore, this study used the concept of "appraisal apprehension perfectionism" as proposed by Dunkley and Blankstein (2000), and then analyzed the appraisal apprehension perfectionism that influences stage performance anxiety in music education[9].

### ***1.2. Performance Anxiety***

Anxiety is a negative psychological state experienced by every person. Among the psychological perspectives, there are many theories and approaches that consider anxiety as a universal human symptom, which is an indispensable and necessary factor in human growth [10]. Usually individuals experience states of rapid heartbeat, sweating, inability to concentrate, behavioral inhibition and withdrawal in response to an impending threat [11]. It may be a temporary subjective feeling in a person or a stable personality trait [12]. Appropriate levels of anxiety can have a positive effect by increasing an individual's alertness, and quicker perception of potential threats in the environment to deal with. However, if an individual is in a high level of anxiety for a long time, it can seriously affect physical and mental health or even evolve into an anxiety disorder[13]. Performance anxiety is the persistent uneasiness and agitation that occurs during performance [14]. Appropriate levels of performance anxiety are very common for every performer, and because they are often seen performing in public, they often experience anxiety as well. However, if performers demand that their performances must be perfect and always feel a great sense of burden about the outcome of the performance due to some flaw or a small misstep, which can lead to a vicious cycle. Since they will consistently fail to meet their expectations, they will remain in a state of frustration and self-doubt for long periods of time, which can be a factor in low self-efficacy, stress overload, and barriers to achievement and employment, showing social avoidance, inability to express their opinions openly, or difficulty in thinking logically and getting his favorable comments instead increases shame and nervousness.

Salmon (1990) defined anxiety in musical performance as "persistent uneasiness and substantial impairment in public situations, and performance at inappropriate levels during training and preparation". In a prior study by Ruscio, Brown, Chiu, Sareen, Stein, and Kessler (2008), it was noted that performance anxiety causes stress and academic discomfort, which affects students' academic achievement and social life. Because individuals with high performance anxiety are chronically low in self-confidence, they self-evaluate negatively even when they complete tasks perfectly, shrink their self-achievement actions, and they are actually more likely to be perceived as incompetent in social situations. This also explains why they often feel lost in life. Spielberger (1979) argued that performance anxiety is divided into internal and external factors. Internal factors may be perfectionism, competitive tendencies, and doubts about self-competence. External factors are mentioned as parental transition expectations, audience evaluations, and competitive situations[15-16].

### ***1.3. The Relationship Between Perfectionism and Performance Anxiety***

In the path of music learning, students usually grow up experiencing many competitions, and exams with competitive and evaluative situations. They believe that their abilities and values will be evaluated in equal amounts based on the results of their performances, and the results of their performances will have a greater impact on music majors' self-worth, self-confidence, and self-identity, and the more they desire to perform successfully, the more their anxiety will become severe. Therefore, there is a high degree of static correlation between performance anxiety and perfectionism of music majors. In a study by Frost, Martin, Lahart, and Rosenblate (1990), college students with high perfectionism fear the

evaluation of others, and especially when in public often experience discomfort that. Researchers such as Mor, Day, Flett, and Hewitt (1995), who suggest that there is an emotional association between perfectionism and performers, and that perfectionist tendencies with appraisal concerns increase social anxiety due to appraisal worries, which can have a serious impact on performance anxiety. Performance anxiety was studied by Leblanc, Jin, Obert, and Siilvola (1997), who arranged experiments in which performers performed alone and in company, and showed that performers' anxiety increased as the audience increased. Physiologically, they are characterized by rapid heartbeat, cold sweat, and trembling limbs. From the above study we can see that evaluation concerns of perfectionism and performance anxiety, which are negative physiological and psychological reactions experienced by individuals before and after a performance situation. There are high correlated characteristics of these two factors.

#### 1.4. Research Objectives

Based on the above, the preliminary study verified the basic relationship between appraisal apprehension perfectionism and performance anxiety in music majors, and that perfectionism has a direct effect on performance anxiety. Since this is a frequent and unavoidable problem for music majors and deserves more attention, it is necessary to observe the basic situation of appraisal apprehension perfectionism and performance anxiety in practice, and then make further improvement strategies to provide a theoretical reference base for subsequent studies. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine what trends exist in perfectionism, and performance anxiety among college students majoring in music in southwest China at present.

## 2. Research methods and results

### 2.1. Tools and Objects

The subjects of this study were music college students from three universities in southwest China, the questionnaires were distributed and collected by the relevant teachers in the schools, and a total of 183 questionnaires could be applied for analysis. This study used Lee's (2018) evaluation apprehension perfectionism questionnaire, which consisted of 28 questions with 3 factors, and each question used a 5-degree Likert scale with an overall reliability of 0.886. The performance anxiety questionnaire by Hewitt and Flett (1991) was used, consisting of 20 questions, each of which also used a 5-degree Likert scale, with an overall reliability of 0.793[17-18].

### 2.2. Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: The index of the investigated subject population between the variables

Ingredients	Average	Standard deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Perfectionism of evaluation concerns	3.56	0.44	.573	.435
Concerns about mistakes	3.73	0.43	-.049	.625
Doubt about execution	3.58	0.65	.172	.089
Social compulsion to be perfect	3.46	0.62	.217	-.078
Performance anxiety	3.45	0.28	-.207	-.350

To understand the levels of the main variables in this study, descriptive statistical analysis was performed, as shown in Table 1 and Figure 1. The mean calculations were: evaluation concern perfectionism mean of 3.56 with a standard deviation of 0.44, concern about failure mean of 3.73 with a standard deviation of 0.43, and doubt about execution mean of 3.58 with a standard deviation of 0.65. The mean of social compulsion perfection was 3.46 with a standard deviation of 0.62, and the mean of performance anxiety was 3.45 with a standard deviation of 0.28. All means showed less than 3 when identified by skewness and kurtosis, confirming that the data were approximately normally distributed[19].

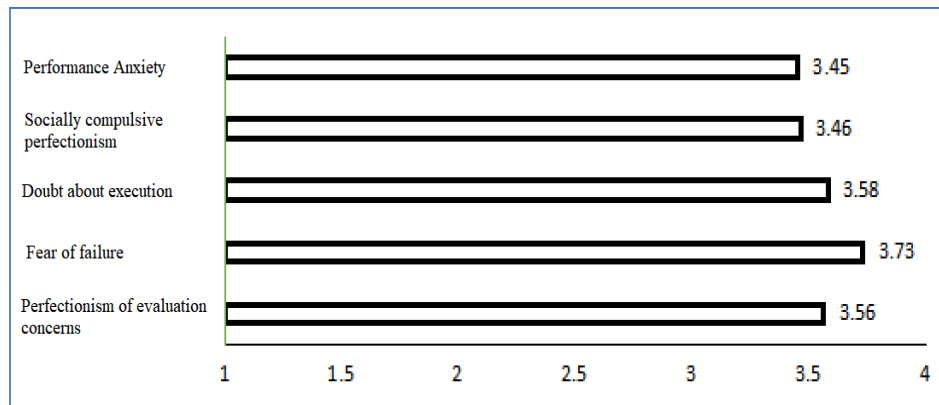


Figure 1: The index of the investigated subject population between the variables Interpretation of the investigated object population in the form of exponential figures between the variables

### 3. Conclusions

This study conducted a descriptive statistical analysis in understanding the status of evaluation concerns perfectionism and performance anxiety among music majors. The results of the study showed that: both perfectionism of evaluation concerns and performance anxiety were higher among music majors, and the mean value of perfectionism of evaluation concerns was more than that of performance anxiety. In terms of the sub variables of evaluative concerns, the highest mean scores were first for concerns about mistakes, followed by doubts about performance, finally socially forced perfection, and the results of this part of the analysis were consistent with the prior research section. This suggests that current music college students still possess high levels of evaluative concerns perfectionist tendencies and performance anxiety[20]. They often worry or fear a lot of negative evaluations before performing and create a lot of discomfort, worry most about being wrong in life or on stage, doubt their own ability, and care more about the eyes and evaluation of bystanders. Therefore, they will experience excessive anxiety in a variety of performances. Therefore, schools and teachers need to encourage students more, form stage experiences, and encourage them not to be afraid of performing mistakes on stage. Students themselves also need to mentally prepare for lowering their self-expectations in performance, develop the habit of adjusting their mindset in a timely manner, then it be able to make an objective and neutral mindset about what to expect after a stage performance. This study concluded that music majors improve perfectionism and performance anxiety, which both require the assistance of external and internal factors. Therefore, subsequent studies can address the internal and external factors of psychological resilience and social support, then conduct research about the improvement of perfectionism or performance anxiety, which can suggest more meaningful references for music performance[21].

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