

The Relationship Between Maladaptive Perfectionism and Academic Burnout with Students' Mental Health: The Mediating Role of Spiritual Intelligence

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Article Info

Article type:

Original Research

How to cite this article:

Bamari, M., Rashidizadeh, Z., & Elahi, M. (2026). The Relationship Between Maladaptive Perfectionism and Academic Burnout with Students' Mental Health: The Mediating Role of Spiritual Intelligence. *Journal of Adolescent and Youth Psychological Studies*, 7(7), 1-11.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.61838/kman.jayps.5367>



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ABSTRACT

Objective: The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and academic burnout with students' mental health through the mediating role of spiritual intelligence.

Methods and Materials: This study was conducted using a descriptive-correlational design based on structural equation modeling. The statistical population included all high school students in Tehran during the 2025–2026 academic year. A total of 412 students were selected through multistage cluster random sampling. Data were collected using the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale, Maslach Burnout Inventory–Student Survey, General Health Questionnaire-28, and Spiritual Intelligence Self-Report Inventory. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated using SPSS-27 software, and structural equation modeling was performed using AMOS-24. The significance of indirect effects was examined using the bootstrap method.

Findings: The findings demonstrated that maladaptive perfectionism had a significant positive relationship with academic burnout ($r = 0.51, p < 0.01$) and mental health problems ($r = 0.58, p < 0.01$). Academic burnout was also positively associated with mental health problems ($r = 0.61, p < 0.01$). In contrast, spiritual intelligence showed significant negative relationships with maladaptive perfectionism ($r = -0.46, p < 0.01$), academic burnout ($r = -0.49, p < 0.01$), and mental health problems ($r = -0.55, p < 0.01$). Structural equation modeling indicated that maladaptive perfectionism directly predicted mental health problems ($\beta = 0.37, p < 0.001$), while academic burnout also had a significant direct effect on mental health problems ($\beta = 0.41, p < 0.001$). Spiritual intelligence significantly mediated the relationships between maladaptive perfectionism, academic burnout, and mental health. The proposed model demonstrated acceptable fit indices ($\chi^2/df = 2.31, CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.057$).

Conclusion: The findings suggest that maladaptive perfectionism and academic burnout are important psychological risk factors negatively influencing students' mental health, whereas spiritual intelligence serves as a protective psychological resource that reduces emotional distress and improves psychological well-being.

Keywords: Maladaptive perfectionism, academic burnout, mental health, spiritual intelligence, students

1. Introduction

Mental health among adolescents and students has become one of the most significant concerns in contemporary educational and psychological research. Rapid educational changes, increased academic expectations, social competition, and emotional pressures have collectively contributed to growing psychological difficulties among students across different educational levels. Mental health problems in students are frequently associated with reduced academic functioning, diminished motivation, emotional instability, interpersonal difficulties, and increased vulnerability to anxiety and depression. Educational systems increasingly recognize that academic achievement cannot be separated from students' psychological well-being, because emotional distress and maladaptive coping mechanisms directly influence learning outcomes and personal development. Recent studies have emphasized that psychological well-being among students is influenced not only by environmental and educational conditions but also by personality characteristics, cognitive patterns, and spiritual resources that shape students' responses to academic stressors (Aalto et al., 2024; Klein & McCarthy, 2022; Mahsood et al., 2025). In highly competitive educational environments, students often experience chronic psychological pressure resulting from unrealistic standards of achievement and persistent fear of failure. Such pressures can negatively affect emotional adjustment and contribute to long-term psychological distress. Research has demonstrated that the prevalence of stress-related mental health problems among adolescents and university students has increased considerably in recent years, particularly among students exposed to excessive perfectionistic tendencies and prolonged academic strain (Terry, 2022; Wan et al., 2024; Yalim et al., 2024). Consequently, identifying the psychological variables associated with students' mental health has become an important priority for both educational researchers and mental health professionals.

One of the most influential personality characteristics associated with psychological maladjustment is maladaptive perfectionism. Perfectionism is generally defined as the tendency to set excessively high standards for oneself accompanied by overly critical self-evaluation. Although some dimensions of perfectionism may facilitate motivation and achievement, maladaptive perfectionism is primarily characterized by fear of mistakes, chronic dissatisfaction with performance, self-criticism, and concern over external

evaluation. Students with maladaptive perfectionism frequently perceive ordinary academic challenges as threats to self-worth and become highly vulnerable to emotional exhaustion and psychological distress. The literature increasingly distinguishes between adaptive striving for excellence and maladaptive perfectionistic concerns, emphasizing that maladaptive forms of perfectionism are more strongly associated with anxiety, depression, emotional instability, and reduced psychological well-being (Gaudreau & Benoit, 2024, 2025). Recent findings indicate that perfectionistic students often experience heightened cognitive rigidity, unrealistic expectations, and persistent fear of academic inadequacy, which collectively undermine their mental health and emotional functioning (Larionow, 2024; Lee et al., 2022). Moreover, perfectionism has been identified as an important psychological risk factor in various educational and professional settings, including medical education, graduate training, and high-performance environments (Al-Na'she et al., 2024; Tenhulzen et al., 2023; Kravets et al., 2023). These findings suggest that maladaptive perfectionism is not merely a motivational tendency but a multidimensional psychological construct with significant implications for students' emotional adjustment and overall well-being.

The psychological impact of maladaptive perfectionism becomes particularly problematic when combined with prolonged academic stress and emotional exhaustion. Academic burnout is another critical factor that has received considerable attention in educational psychology. Academic burnout refers to a chronic state of emotional exhaustion, cynicism toward academic tasks, and feelings of inefficacy resulting from prolonged exposure to educational stressors. Students experiencing burnout often report reduced academic engagement, diminished concentration, hopelessness, emotional fatigue, and declining motivation toward educational activities. Academic burnout has increasingly been recognized as a widespread phenomenon among adolescents and university students due to competitive educational systems and excessive performance expectations (Jiang, 2025; Qin et al., 2022). Burnout negatively influences not only academic functioning but also psychological health by increasing susceptibility to emotional distress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms. Recent investigations have shown that burnout frequently emerges when students perceive a persistent imbalance between academic demands and their coping capacities (Mahsood et al., 2025; Warnock, 2021). Students with perfectionistic tendencies appear particularly vulnerable to

burnout because they often impose unrealistic standards on themselves and perceive any deviation from perfection as personal failure. Studies have repeatedly demonstrated that maladaptive perfectionism predicts higher levels of academic burnout and emotional exhaustion in educational contexts (Dobos et al., 2024; Fadhlurrahman et al., 2024). Furthermore, burnout has been linked with reduced life satisfaction, hopelessness, loneliness, and poor emotional regulation, all of which contribute to deteriorating mental health among students (Dobos et al., 2024; Wang & Wu, 2022).

Recent research increasingly highlights the complex interaction between perfectionism and burnout in shaping psychological well-being. Students who constantly strive for unattainable standards frequently experience persistent self-doubt and dissatisfaction even when they perform successfully. Such cognitive patterns may gradually intensify emotional exhaustion and psychological vulnerability. The association between maladaptive perfectionism and academic burnout has been supported across diverse educational populations, including medical students, graduate students, and adolescents (Fadhlurrahman et al., 2024; Gaudreau & Benoît, 2025; Larionow, 2024). Similarly, evidence suggests that perfectionistic concerns are strongly associated with emotional dysregulation, fear of failure, and chronic stress reactions, which significantly contribute to mental health difficulties (Fatima, 2023; Zheng et al., 2025). Students characterized by perfectionistic concerns often engage in excessive self-monitoring and rumination, leading to increased vulnerability to anxiety and emotional exhaustion. Additionally, educational cultures emphasizing achievement and competition may further reinforce perfectionistic tendencies and psychological strain among adolescents. Researchers have therefore emphasized the necessity of identifying protective psychological factors capable of reducing the harmful effects of perfectionism and burnout on mental health (Azim et al., 2025; Bamine & Tanaka, 2025). Understanding the mechanisms through which these variables interact may contribute to the development of effective interventions aimed at improving psychological resilience and emotional well-being in students.

One psychological construct that may function as a protective factor against emotional distress is spiritual intelligence. Spiritual intelligence refers to the capacity to utilize spiritual values, existential understanding, self-awareness, and meaning-making processes in coping with life challenges and psychological difficulties. Individuals

with higher spiritual intelligence are generally more capable of interpreting stressful experiences constructively, regulating emotions effectively, and maintaining psychological balance during adversity. Spiritual intelligence has increasingly been associated with resilience, emotional regulation, optimism, and improved psychological well-being among students and adolescents (Azim et al., 2025; Mehr et al., 2023). In educational contexts, spiritual intelligence may help students develop adaptive coping strategies that reduce the negative effects of perfectionistic concerns and academic stress. Students with higher spiritual intelligence often demonstrate stronger emotional stability, greater self-acceptance, and increased capacity for meaning-focused coping, all of which may buffer the harmful consequences of burnout and psychological distress. Recent evidence suggests that spiritual well-being and spiritual awareness are negatively associated with maladaptive perfectionism and emotional exhaustion (Cascio et al., 2025). Similarly, spiritually oriented coping strategies have been linked with reduced anxiety, improved resilience, and stronger emotional adaptation in stressful academic environments (Prasetya et al., 2022; Wan et al., 2024).

Theoretical perspectives also support the protective role of spiritual intelligence in mental health. Spiritual intelligence contributes to psychological adaptation by helping individuals transcend immediate stressors and interpret experiences within a broader existential framework. Students with greater spiritual intelligence may become less dependent on external validation and less vulnerable to perfectionistic self-criticism. As a result, they may experience lower emotional exhaustion and greater psychological resilience. Research findings indicate that spiritual and existential resources can significantly improve emotional adjustment and decrease vulnerability to psychological distress among adolescents and young adults (Imad et al., 2023; Terry, 2022). Moreover, spiritual intelligence has been linked with enhanced creativity, emotional awareness, and psychological flourishing, suggesting that it may facilitate adaptive coping and self-regulation processes among students (Mehr et al., 2023). Recent investigations have also demonstrated that mindfulness, emotional awareness, and spiritual practices reduce maladaptive perfectionism and emotional strain by promoting acceptance, self-compassion, and cognitive flexibility (Prasetya et al., 2022; Zheng et al., 2025). Therefore, spiritual intelligence may serve as an important mediating mechanism through which maladaptive

perfectionism and academic burnout influence students' mental health outcomes.

Despite growing research on perfectionism, burnout, and mental health, several important gaps remain in the literature. First, many studies have independently examined the effects of perfectionism or burnout on psychological well-being without simultaneously investigating their combined influence within an integrated conceptual model. Second, although the role of spiritual and psychological resources has increasingly attracted attention, fewer studies have specifically examined the mediating role of spiritual intelligence in the relationship between maladaptive perfectionism, academic burnout, and mental health among adolescent students. Existing evidence suggests that psychological resilience and meaning-centered coping strategies may weaken the harmful effects of perfectionism and stress, yet the underlying mediational processes remain insufficiently understood (Azim et al., 2025; Cascio et al., 2025). Third, much of the current literature has focused primarily on university or medical students, whereas fewer investigations have addressed adolescent populations within secondary educational contexts. Adolescence represents a critical developmental period characterized by identity formation, emotional sensitivity, and heightened academic pressures, making this population particularly vulnerable to perfectionistic concerns and emotional exhaustion (Aalto et al., 2024; Flett & Hewitt, 2022). Additionally, cultural and educational factors may influence the manifestation of perfectionism and burnout, highlighting the importance of conducting context-specific research within different educational systems and societies.

Another important issue concerns the increasing prevalence of psychological distress among students in highly demanding educational systems. Academic competition, parental expectations, fear of failure, and uncertainty about future success may intensify perfectionistic tendencies and burnout symptoms among adolescents. Studies have shown that students exposed to chronic educational pressure frequently experience emotional instability, reduced self-esteem, and impaired psychological functioning (Mahsood et al., 2025; Wan et al., 2024). Perfectionistic students may become trapped in cycles of self-criticism and emotional exhaustion that gradually undermine their mental health and academic engagement. Consequently, identifying psychological mechanisms capable of reducing these harmful effects is essential for developing preventive educational and counseling interventions. Researchers increasingly argue

that promoting resilience, emotional regulation, mindfulness, and spiritual awareness may contribute significantly to students' mental well-being and educational adjustment (Bamine & Tanaka, 2025; Yalim et al., 2024). In this regard, spiritual intelligence appears particularly promising because it integrates emotional, cognitive, and existential capacities that facilitate adaptive coping during stressful experiences.

Given the increasing psychological challenges experienced by students and the growing importance of understanding protective psychological mechanisms, the present study aimed to investigate the relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and academic burnout with students' mental health through the mediating role of spiritual intelligence.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study was conducted using a descriptive-correlational design based on structural equation modeling. The statistical population consisted of all high school students in Tehran during the 2025–2026 academic year. Using multistage cluster random sampling, 412 students were selected from different educational districts of Tehran. Initially, several districts were randomly selected, followed by the random selection of schools and classrooms within those districts. Inclusion criteria included enrollment in secondary school, willingness to participate in the study, and completion of informed consent forms by students and their parents. Students with severe psychiatric disorders diagnosed by school counselors or incomplete questionnaire responses were excluded from the study. The sample size was considered appropriate for structural equation modeling based on the recommended ratio of participants to estimated parameters and previous methodological recommendations in behavioral sciences research. Data collection was conducted collectively in classroom settings after obtaining the necessary permissions from educational authorities and school administrators. Participants were assured that all information would remain confidential and would only be used for research purposes.

2.2. Measures

The Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS) developed by Frost, Marten, Lahart, and Rosenblate in 1990 was used to assess maladaptive perfectionism. This

questionnaire consists of 35 items designed to measure different dimensions of perfectionism, including concern over mistakes, doubts about actions, parental expectations, parental criticism, personal standards, and organization. In the present study, maladaptive perfectionism was mainly evaluated through the dimensions of concern over mistakes, doubts about actions, parental criticism, and parental expectations. Responses are scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), with higher scores indicating higher levels of maladaptive perfectionism. Previous studies have reported satisfactory psychometric properties for this instrument, including high internal consistency and acceptable construct validity across adolescent and student populations. Reliability coefficients reported in previous studies for the total scale and subscales have generally exceeded 0.70, confirming the reliability and validity of the instrument in educational and psychological research contexts.

Academic burnout was measured using the Maslach Burnout Inventory–Student Survey (MBI-SS) developed by Schaufeli, Martínez, Pinto, Salanova, and Bakker in 2002. This instrument contains 15 items assessing three dimensions of academic burnout, including emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and academic inefficacy. Participants respond to the items using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from never (0) to always (6). Higher scores on emotional exhaustion and cynicism, together with lower academic efficacy, indicate greater academic burnout. The MBI-SS has been extensively used among adolescent and university student populations and has demonstrated strong psychometric properties in previous national and international studies. Previous research has confirmed the scale’s convergent validity, factorial validity, and acceptable reliability coefficients for all subscales, with Cronbach’s alpha values generally ranging from 0.74 to 0.89.

To assess mental health, the General Health Questionnaire-28 (GHQ-28) developed by Goldberg and Hillier in 1979 was employed. The GHQ-28 is a widely used screening instrument designed to evaluate general mental health and psychological distress. The questionnaire consists of 28 items organized into four subscales, including somatic symptoms, anxiety and insomnia, social dysfunction, and severe depression. Items are scored on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 0 to 3, with higher scores reflecting poorer mental health and higher psychological distress. The GHQ-28 has been extensively validated in adolescent and student populations and has shown strong reliability and validity indices in numerous studies. Previous investigations have

reported Cronbach’s alpha coefficients above 0.80 for the total scale and confirmed its criterion and construct validity in different cultural settings.

Spiritual intelligence was measured using the Spiritual Intelligence Self-Report Inventory (SISRI-24) developed by King in 2008. This questionnaire consists of 24 items and evaluates four dimensions of spiritual intelligence, including critical existential thinking, personal meaning production, transcendental awareness, and conscious state expansion. Responses are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from completely false (0) to completely true (4). Higher scores indicate greater spiritual intelligence. The SISRI-24 has demonstrated favorable psychometric characteristics in previous studies involving adolescents and university students. Earlier research has confirmed its construct validity through confirmatory factor analysis and reported acceptable reliability coefficients for both the overall scale and its dimensions, with Cronbach’s alpha coefficients generally above 0.75.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using SPSS-27 and AMOS-24 software. Initially, descriptive statistics including mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis were calculated for all variables. Pearson correlation coefficients were used to examine the relationships among maladaptive perfectionism, academic burnout, spiritual intelligence, and mental health. Before conducting structural equation modeling, assumptions including normality, multicollinearity, and absence of outliers were evaluated. Structural equation modeling was then employed to test the hypothesized mediating role of spiritual intelligence in the relationship between maladaptive perfectionism, academic burnout, and mental health. Model fit was assessed using several fit indices, including the Chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio (χ^2/df), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). The significance of indirect effects was examined using the bootstrap method with 5000 resamples and a confidence interval of 95%.

3. Findings and Results

The findings of the study were analyzed based on data obtained from 412 high school students in Tehran. Among the participants, 221 students (53.64%) were female and 191 students (46.36%) were male. The mean age of the

participants was 16.42 years ($SD = 1.11$), with an age range between 15 and 18 years. Regarding educational level, 138 students (33.50%) were studying in the tenth grade, 141 students (34.22%) in the eleventh grade, and 133 students (32.28%) in the twelfth grade. In terms of field of study, 167 students (40.53%) were enrolled in experimental sciences, 129 students (31.31%) in mathematics and physics, and 116 students (28.16%) in humanities. Preliminary screening of

the data indicated no missing values exceeding the acceptable threshold. Examination of skewness and kurtosis indices demonstrated that all variables were within the acceptable range of ± 2 , indicating normal distribution of the data. In addition, Mahalanobis distance values showed no significant multivariate outliers. Therefore, the assumptions for parametric analyses and structural equation modeling were considered satisfied.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Study Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Maladaptive Perfectionism	92.47	14.28	1			
2. Academic Burnout	48.63	11.54	0.51**	1		
3. Spiritual Intelligence	71.35	12.76	-0.46**	-0.49**	1	
4. Mental Health Problems	39.82	10.31	0.58**	0.61**	-0.55**	1

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation coefficients among maladaptive perfectionism, academic burnout, spiritual intelligence, and mental health problems. The results demonstrated that maladaptive perfectionism had a significant positive relationship with academic burnout ($r = 0.51, p < 0.01$) and mental health problems ($r = 0.58, p < 0.01$), indicating that students with higher levels of maladaptive perfectionism experienced greater academic exhaustion and poorer mental health. Furthermore, maladaptive perfectionism showed a significant negative correlation with spiritual intelligence ($r = -0.46, p < 0.01$), suggesting that students with higher perfectionistic concerns reported lower levels of spiritual

intelligence. Academic burnout was also significantly and positively associated with mental health problems ($r = 0.61, p < 0.01$), while it demonstrated a significant negative relationship with spiritual intelligence ($r = -0.49, p < 0.01$). In addition, spiritual intelligence showed a strong negative correlation with mental health problems ($r = -0.55, p < 0.01$), indicating that higher levels of spiritual intelligence were associated with lower psychological distress and better mental health among students. Overall, the correlation matrix supported the hypothesized relationships among the study variables and provided preliminary evidence for testing the mediating role of spiritual intelligence.

Table 2

Direct and Indirect Effects of Maladaptive Perfectionism and Academic Burnout on Mental Health Through Spiritual Intelligence

Path	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect	t-value	p
Maladaptive Perfectionism → Mental Health Problems	0.37	0.16	0.53	6.84	0.001
Academic Burnout → Mental Health Problems	0.41	0.14	0.55	7.29	0.001
Maladaptive Perfectionism → Spiritual Intelligence	-0.46	—	-0.46	-5.98	0.001
Academic Burnout → Spiritual Intelligence	-0.39	—	-0.39	-5.44	0.001
Spiritual Intelligence → Mental Health Problems	-0.35	—	-0.35	-4.92	0.001

The results presented in Table 2 indicate that maladaptive perfectionism and academic burnout both had significant direct effects on students' mental health problems. Maladaptive perfectionism directly predicted mental health problems with a standardized coefficient of 0.37 ($t = 6.84, p = 0.001$), while academic burnout demonstrated a direct effect of 0.41 ($t = 7.29, p = 0.001$). Moreover, both maladaptive perfectionism and academic burnout significantly predicted spiritual intelligence negatively,

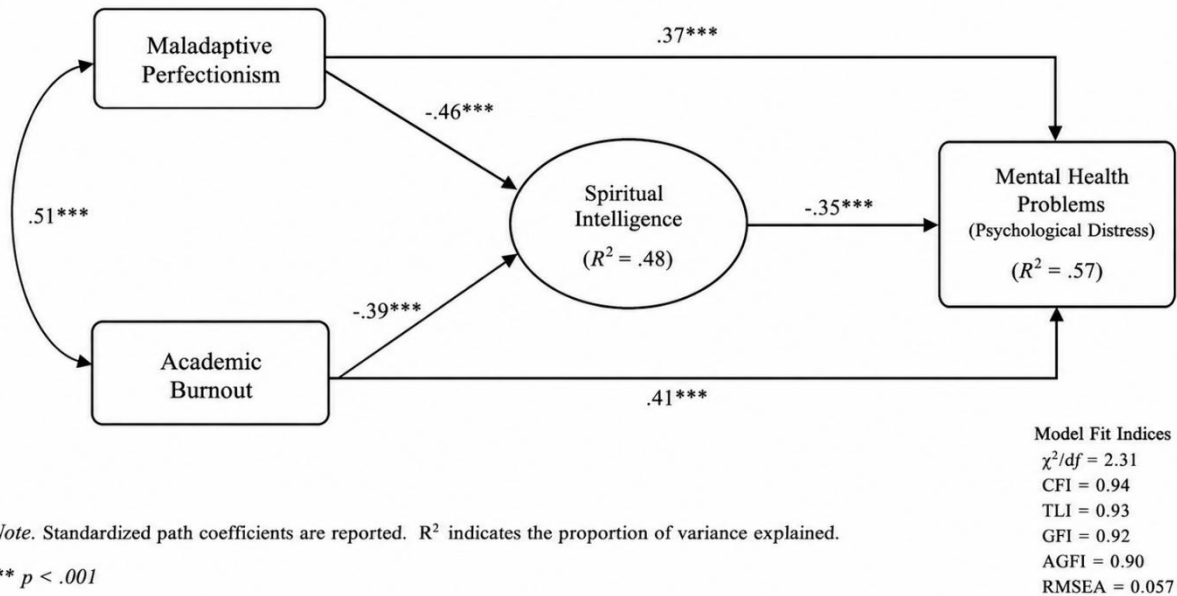
suggesting that increased levels of perfectionistic concerns and burnout were associated with lower spiritual intelligence among students. The path coefficient between maladaptive perfectionism and spiritual intelligence was -0.46 ($t = -5.98, p = 0.001$), whereas the coefficient between academic burnout and spiritual intelligence was -0.39 ($t = -5.44, p = 0.001$). Spiritual intelligence, in turn, significantly predicted mental health problems negatively ($\beta = -0.35, t = -4.92, p = 0.001$), indicating that higher spiritual intelligence reduced

psychological distress and improved mental health status. The bootstrap analysis further revealed significant indirect effects of maladaptive perfectionism ($\beta = 0.16$) and academic burnout ($\beta = 0.14$) on mental health through

spiritual intelligence. These findings confirmed the mediating role of spiritual intelligence in explaining how maladaptive perfectionism and academic burnout influence students' mental health outcomes.

Figure 1

Structural Model of the Relationships Among Maladaptive Perfectionism, Academic Burnout, Spiritual Intelligence, and Mental Health



The structural model demonstrated satisfactory fit indices, confirming the adequacy of the proposed conceptual framework. The ratio of Chi-square to degrees of freedom (χ^2/df) was 2.31, indicating an acceptable model fit. Additionally, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI = 0.94), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI = 0.93), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI = 0.92), and Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI = 0.90) all exceeded the recommended threshold values of 0.90. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was 0.057, further supporting the appropriateness of the structural model. The model explained 48% of the variance in spiritual intelligence and 57% of the variance in mental health problems among students. Examination of the standardized path coefficients indicated that academic burnout had the strongest direct effect on mental health problems, followed closely by maladaptive perfectionism. Furthermore, spiritual intelligence partially mediated the relationships between both predictor variables and mental health, suggesting that students with stronger spiritual capacities were more resilient against the negative psychological consequences of perfectionistic tendencies and academic exhaustion. These findings provide substantial support for the theoretical model proposed in the present

study and emphasize the protective role of spiritual intelligence in adolescent psychological functioning.

4. Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and academic burnout with students' mental health through the mediating role of spiritual intelligence. The findings demonstrated that maladaptive perfectionism had a significant positive relationship with mental health problems among students. In addition, academic burnout was positively associated with psychological distress and poorer mental health outcomes. The results further revealed that spiritual intelligence was negatively associated with maladaptive perfectionism, academic burnout, and mental health problems. Structural equation modeling indicated that spiritual intelligence partially mediated the relationship between maladaptive perfectionism, academic burnout, and students' mental health. These findings suggest that students with higher levels of maladaptive perfectionism and academic burnout experience greater psychological distress, whereas higher spiritual intelligence may reduce the harmful emotional consequences of these psychological difficulties.

One of the important findings of the present study was the significant positive relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and mental health problems. This result indicates that students characterized by excessive self-criticism, fear of mistakes, unrealistic expectations, and chronic concern over evaluation are more vulnerable to emotional distress and psychological maladjustment. Students with maladaptive perfectionistic tendencies often perceive academic challenges as threats to self-worth and become excessively sensitive to failure and criticism. Such cognitive and emotional patterns may gradually contribute to anxiety, emotional exhaustion, depressive symptoms, and diminished psychological well-being. The findings of the present study are consistent with previous investigations emphasizing the harmful psychological consequences of maladaptive perfectionism in educational settings (Gaudreau & Benoit, 2024, 2025; Larionow, 2024). Similar findings were also reported by Wang and Wu, who demonstrated that maladaptive perfectionism contributes significantly to reduced life satisfaction and psychological adjustment among students (Wang & Wu, 2022). Furthermore, research has shown that perfectionistic concerns are associated with chronic emotional tension, heightened self-monitoring, and persistent dissatisfaction with personal achievements, all of which negatively affect mental health (Fatima, 2023; Lee et al., 2022). The current findings also align with the theoretical perspectives proposed by Flett and Hewitt, who argued that maladaptive perfectionism in children and adolescents often creates vulnerability to psychological distress due to excessive fear of failure and conditional self-worth (Flett & Hewitt, 2022).

Another significant finding of this study was the positive relationship between academic burnout and mental health problems. Students experiencing emotional exhaustion, academic cynicism, and feelings of inefficacy reported poorer psychological well-being and higher levels of emotional distress. Academic burnout reflects a prolonged state of psychological fatigue resulting from continuous educational pressures and imbalance between academic demands and coping resources. Students affected by burnout frequently lose motivation toward learning activities and experience emotional depletion, frustration, hopelessness, and reduced engagement with academic responsibilities. These psychological experiences may gradually intensify symptoms of anxiety, depression, and social dysfunction. The findings are consistent with previous studies reporting strong associations between academic burnout and poor mental health among students and educational trainees

(Jiang, 2025; Qin et al., 2022; Warnock, 2021). Similar results were reported by Dobos and colleagues, who found that burnout was significantly associated with hopelessness, loneliness, and emotional difficulties among university students (Dobos et al., 2024). Furthermore, studies have shown that chronic educational stress weakens emotional regulation capacities and increases students' vulnerability to psychological disorders (Klein & McCarthy, 2022; Mahsood et al., 2025). The findings of the present study therefore reinforce the growing body of evidence emphasizing academic burnout as an important psychological risk factor influencing students' emotional adjustment and mental health.

The results also demonstrated a significant positive relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and academic burnout. Students with higher perfectionistic concerns experienced greater emotional exhaustion and feelings of inefficacy in educational contexts. This finding may be explained by the unrealistic standards and chronic self-pressure imposed by perfectionistic students upon themselves. Such students frequently strive to achieve flawless performance and perceive ordinary academic difficulties as evidence of inadequacy. Consequently, they become more vulnerable to emotional fatigue and chronic stress reactions. The present findings support previous research indicating that maladaptive perfectionism functions as a strong predictor of burnout in academic environments (Fadhilurrahman et al., 2024; Gaudreau & Benoit, 2025). Similar findings were observed among graduate students and medical students exposed to highly demanding educational conditions (Al-Na'she et al., 2024; Kravets et al., 2023). Research by Zheng and colleagues further demonstrated that perfectionistic tendencies intensify emotional strain and psychological vulnerability through maladaptive cognitive processing and excessive self-evaluation (Zheng et al., 2025). The findings can also be interpreted within the framework of self-regulation theory, which suggests that students who continuously perceive discrepancies between actual and ideal performance become trapped in cycles of stress, dissatisfaction, and emotional depletion. Therefore, maladaptive perfectionism may gradually undermine psychological resilience and contribute directly to burnout symptoms.

An important contribution of the present study lies in demonstrating the protective role of spiritual intelligence in students' mental health. The findings revealed that spiritual intelligence was negatively associated with maladaptive perfectionism, academic burnout, and mental health

problems. Students with higher levels of spiritual intelligence reported lower emotional exhaustion, reduced perfectionistic concerns, and better psychological well-being. Spiritual intelligence may facilitate emotional adaptation by enabling individuals to interpret stressful experiences within broader existential and meaning-oriented frameworks. Students with greater spiritual awareness often possess stronger emotional regulation capacities, increased self-acceptance, and greater resilience when confronting educational challenges. These characteristics may reduce vulnerability to excessive self-criticism and emotional exhaustion. The findings are consistent with previous studies indicating that spiritual well-being contributes significantly to psychological adjustment and emotional resilience among students (Cascio et al., 2025; Mehr et al., 2023). Similar evidence has shown that mindfulness, self-awareness, and spiritually oriented coping strategies reduce stress and improve psychological functioning in educational environments (Prasetya et al., 2022; Wan et al., 2024). Furthermore, studies have demonstrated that students with stronger spiritual resources often exhibit higher optimism, emotional stability, and meaning-focused coping abilities, all of which improve mental health outcomes (Azim et al., 2025; Imad et al., 2023).

The mediating role of spiritual intelligence in the relationship between maladaptive perfectionism, academic burnout, and mental health was another important finding of this study. The structural model indicated that spiritual intelligence partially reduced the harmful effects of perfectionism and burnout on students' psychological well-being. This finding suggests that spiritual intelligence may function as a psychological buffer protecting students against emotional distress associated with academic pressures and perfectionistic concerns. Students with higher spiritual intelligence may be less dependent on external evaluation and less likely to define their self-worth exclusively through academic achievement. Consequently, they may experience lower levels of anxiety and emotional exhaustion even in demanding educational contexts. These findings are consistent with the broader psychological literature emphasizing the importance of existential meaning, emotional awareness, and spiritual coping in promoting resilience and mental health (Azim et al., 2025; Terry, 2022). Moreover, recent studies have argued that spirituality-based coping strategies improve emotional flexibility and decrease vulnerability to chronic stress by fostering self-compassion and adaptive meaning-making processes (Cascio et al., 2025; Zheng et al., 2025). The

mediational findings of the present study therefore suggest that spiritual intelligence may serve as an important internal psychological resource reducing the negative consequences of perfectionistic tendencies and academic burnout.

The findings of the present study may also be interpreted within broader developmental and educational frameworks. Adolescence represents a highly sensitive developmental period characterized by identity formation, emotional instability, and heightened sensitivity to social evaluation. In highly competitive educational systems, adolescents frequently encounter strong academic expectations imposed by schools, families, and social environments. Such pressures may intensify perfectionistic concerns and increase emotional vulnerability among students. The findings of the present study support the growing perspective that educational success should not be evaluated solely through academic achievement but must also include psychological well-being and emotional adaptation. Previous research has similarly emphasized that excessive educational competition contributes to stress, burnout, and psychological maladjustment among adolescents and young adults (Mahsood et al., 2025; Yalim et al., 2024). Consequently, promoting emotional resilience and spiritual capacities within educational settings may significantly improve students' mental health and academic adjustment.

The findings additionally highlight the importance of integrating psychological and spiritual dimensions into educational counseling and mental health interventions. Traditional educational approaches often focus primarily on academic performance while neglecting emotional and existential dimensions of student development. However, the present results suggest that strengthening spiritual intelligence may improve students' ability to cope adaptively with academic stressors and perfectionistic tendencies. Recent studies have similarly emphasized the value of mindfulness-based interventions, emotional regulation programs, and wellness education in reducing burnout and psychological distress among students (Prasetya et al., 2022; Wan et al., 2024). Moreover, educational interventions aimed at reducing maladaptive perfectionism may help students develop healthier self-evaluative standards and improve emotional adjustment. Psychological counseling services within schools may therefore benefit from incorporating meaning-centered and spiritually informed approaches alongside traditional cognitive-behavioral strategies.

5. Conclusion

Overall, the present study contributes to the existing literature by providing an integrated model explaining how maladaptive perfectionism and academic burnout influence students' mental health through spiritual intelligence. The findings emphasize that psychological well-being among students is shaped by a complex interaction of personality characteristics, emotional experiences, and spiritual capacities. Maladaptive perfectionism and academic burnout appear to function as important psychological risk factors, whereas spiritual intelligence serves as a protective mechanism promoting resilience and emotional adaptation. These findings underscore the necessity of adopting multidimensional educational and psychological approaches to support students' mental health and emotional well-being in contemporary educational environments.

6. Limitations & Suggestions

One of the limitations of the present study was the use of a correlational design, which restricts causal interpretation of the relationships among the variables. In addition, the data were collected using self-report questionnaires, making the findings potentially vulnerable to response bias and social desirability effects. The sample was also limited to high school students in Tehran, which may reduce the generalizability of the findings to students from different cultural, educational, or socioeconomic backgrounds. Another limitation concerns the exclusion of potentially influential variables such as family functioning, socioeconomic status, personality traits, and academic achievement, which may also affect students' mental health and psychological adjustment.

Future research is recommended to employ longitudinal and experimental designs in order to clarify the causal relationships among maladaptive perfectionism, academic burnout, spiritual intelligence, and mental health. Researchers may also investigate the role of additional mediating and moderating variables such as resilience, emotional regulation, self-esteem, mindfulness, social support, and coping strategies. Comparative studies across different educational levels, cultural contexts, and academic disciplines may further improve understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying student mental health. In addition, future studies could evaluate the effectiveness of spiritual intelligence training and mindfulness-based interventions in reducing perfectionism and burnout among adolescents.

From a practical perspective, educational authorities and school counselors should pay greater attention to the psychological consequences of maladaptive perfectionism and academic burnout among students. Schools may benefit from implementing mental health promotion programs focused on emotional resilience, stress management, self-compassion, and adaptive coping skills. Counseling services should help students develop healthier attitudes toward achievement and reduce unrealistic performance expectations. Furthermore, integrating spiritual development and meaning-centered educational activities into school programs may strengthen students' emotional adaptation and psychological well-being. Parents and teachers should also be educated about the harmful effects of excessive academic pressure and perfectionistic expectations in order to create more supportive and psychologically healthy learning environments for adolescents.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all those who cooperated in carrying out this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this article.

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