

Self-Efficacy as a Mediator Between Maladaptive Perfectionism and Impostor Syndrome Among College Students

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Abstract. This study examined the mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and impostor syndrome among college students. Guided by Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, the study employed a quantitative descriptive-relational research design with mediation analysis to determine the relationships among maladaptive perfectionism, self-efficacy, and impostor syndrome. Data were collected from 100 college students using standardized instruments, including the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale, General Self-Efficacy Scale, and Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale. Pearson's correlation and Hayes' PROCESS Macro mediation analysis were utilized to examine the direct and indirect relationships among the variables. Findings revealed that respondents demonstrated moderate levels of maladaptive perfectionism and self-efficacy, while exhibiting moderate to high levels of impostor syndrome. Results showed a significant positive relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and impostor syndrome, indicating that students with stronger perfectionistic concerns were more likely to experience impostor feelings. However, maladaptive perfectionism was not significantly associated with self-efficacy, and self-efficacy did not significantly predict impostor syndrome. Mediation analysis further revealed that self-efficacy did not significantly mediate the relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and impostor syndrome. The findings suggest that impostor experiences among college students may be more directly influenced by maladaptive perfectionistic tendencies rather than general self-efficacy beliefs, highlighting the importance of culturally responsive interventions addressing self-criticism, fear of failure, and perfectionistic thinking patterns.

Keywords: Impostor Syndrome; Maladaptive Perfectionism; Mediation Analysis; Psychological Well-Being; Self-Efficacy

Introduction

Higher education institutions worldwide have become increasingly demanding, with students facing unprecedented workloads, competitive environments, and high-stakes assessments. Research from multiple countries reveals a universal pattern that academic stress manifests differently across cultures but remains a core challenge (Suhuyan et al., 2026). The pressure to excel in a highly competitive environment, coupled with financial burdens and social expectations, has created a perfect storm for mental health challenges (Ning et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2024) leading to emotional distress and self-doubt. Among various factors contributing to the mental health crisis, perfectionism has emerged as a particularly salient concern, with recent surveys showing that between 65% and 84% of college students struggles with perfectionistic tendencies that profoundly impact both their achievement and psychological well-being (Psychology Today, 2026). The university period is not merely a time for accumulating professional knowledge, it is a crucial moment for shaping values, worldviews, and self-concept, during which psychological vulnerabilities can have lasting consequences for personal growth and social integration (Fang&Wang, 2024). Understanding the mechanisms through which these psychological constructs interact is therefore essential for developing evidence-based interventions that support student success, mental health, and overall adjustment during this formative stage.

Perfectionism is a multidimensional personality trait characterized by the relentless pursuit of exceptionally high standards, accompanied by overly critical self-evaluations and intense concerns about failure (Hewitt et al., 2022). Contemporary theoretical frameworks distinguish between two primary dimensions: adaptive perfectionism, which involves setting high personal standards directed toward self-improvement and positive achievement motivation, and maladaptive perfectionism, which is characterized by

evaluative concerns, excessive sensitivity to mistakes, fear of negative judgment, and a persistent discrepancy between one's expectations and actual performance (Stoeber&Otto, 2006; Zhang et al.,2021). According to Barretto et al. (2026), maladaptive perfectionism among Filipino nursing students was found to be significantly associated with fear of failure, as students demonstrated increased anxiety regarding mistakes and negative evaluation.

Impostor syndrome or impostor phenomenon refers to a psychological pattern in which individuals persistently doubt their accomplishments and experience an internalized fear of being exposed as intellectual frauds, despite possessing external, objective evidence of competence (Clance & Imes, 1978). First identified among high-achieving women, impostor syndrome is now recognized as a prevalent experience across genders, professions, and educational levels, with particularly elevated rates in academic settings where continuous evaluation and peer comparison are normative (Pákozdy et al., 2023; Muradoglu et al., 2022).

Self-efficacy, a cornerstone construct within Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, refers to individuals' beliefs in their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy is not merely a general confidence in one's competence; rather, it is domain-specific and task-oriented, reflecting an individual's conviction that they can successfully perform required behaviors under both typical and challenging circumstances (Bandura, 1977; Artino, 2012). In the academic domain, academic self-efficacy specifically encompasses students' convictions that they can successfully complete coursework, master challenging material, meet institutional demands, and achieve their educational goals.

Self-efficacy occupies a theoretically pivotal and empirically supported position as the mechanism linking perfectionism to impostor syndrome. According to Social Cognitive Theory, maladaptive perfectionism erodes self-efficacy through multiple pathways. First, when students set unrealistically high standards and inevitably fail to meet them, the resulting pattern of repeated "failures" relative to their own unattainable benchmarks that depletes their mastery experiences, which Bandura (1977) identified as the most powerful source of efficacy information. Second, maladaptive perfectionists engage in excessive self-criticism and negative self-talk, which undermines their confidence in their capabilities and distorts their interpretation of performance feedback (Doyle & Catling, 2022). Third, the chronic focus on personal shortcomings and external evaluations characteristic of maladaptive perfectionism weakens students' ability to recognize and internalize their genuine competencies, leading to a diminished sense of personal agency (Chai et al., 2020). Maladaptive perfectionism sets in motion a cycle of unrealistic standards and inevitable perceived failure, which depletes mastery experiences and generates negative self-evaluations, thereby eroding self-efficacy. This diminished self-efficacy then manifests as impostor syndrome, as students who do not believe in their capabilities cannot internalize their achievements and instead interpret success as fraudulent or accidental. In this model, self-efficacy functions as a mediating mechanism that translates perfectionistic cognitive tendencies into the phenomenological experience of impostorism.

Despite the theoretical coherence of this mediation model and the substantial body of research examining perfectionism, impostor syndrome, and self-efficacy as pairwise-related constructs, significant gaps remain in the literature. Existing studies have largely investigated these variables in isolation or as bivariate associations without formally testing their integrated, sequential relationships within a comprehensive mediation framework. For instance, while Pákozdy et al. (2023) demonstrated that maladaptive perfectionism negatively impacts happiness through the full mediation of impostor syndrome, and that self-efficacy is negatively associated with impostorism, their study did not explicitly test whether self-efficacy mediates the perfectionism-impostor syndrome pathway. Similarly, Rosenstein (2023) identified self-efficacy as a significant predictor of impostor phenomenon alongside perfectionism, but did not examine the mediational role of self-efficacy in the perfectionism-impostor relationship.

Furthermore, the existing literature on perfectionism and mental health outcomes has primarily examined self-esteem as a mediator rather than self-efficacy. A recent study by Fang and Wang (2024) found that self-esteem mediated the relationship between both adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism and depression, with maladaptive perfectionism exacerbating depression by weakening self-esteem. While self-esteem and self-efficacy are related constructs, they are theoretically and empirically distinct: self-esteem reflects global self-worth, whereas self-efficacy concerns domain-specific beliefs about capability (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). The unique contribution of self-efficacy as a mediator between perfectionism and impostor syndrome remains unexamined.

The present study addresses this gap by examining self-efficacy as a potential mediator in the relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and impostor syndrome among college students. This investigation aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 3: Good Health and Well-Being, which aims to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, including mental health and psychological well-being. By identifying self-efficacy as a protective mechanism against impostor syndrome, this study contributes to Target 3.4, which seeks to reduce premature mortality from non-communicable

diseases through the prevention and treatment of mental health conditions. Furthermore, this research supports SDG 4: Quality Education, particularly Target 4.3 on ensuring equal access to affordable quality technical, vocational, and tertiary education, and Target 4.5 on eliminating gender disparities in education. Understanding how psychological factors such as perfectionism and self-efficacy influence students' academic experiences can inform the development of supportive educational environments that foster equitable learning opportunities and reduce dropout rates attributable to psychological distress. Ultimately, the findings of this study may guide evidence-based interventions that promote student mental health, enhance academic resilience, and contribute to the global agenda of sustainable development through education and well-being.

Research Questions

This study aims to examine self-efficacy as a mediator between maladaptive perfectionism and impostor syndrome among college students.

Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the profile of the respondents in terms of:
 - 1.1 Perfectionism;
 - 1.2 Self-efficacy; and
 - 1.3 Impostor Syndrome?
2. Is there a significant relationship between perfectionism and impostor syndrome among students?
3. Is there a significant relationship between perfectionism and self-efficacy among students?
4. Is there a significant relationship between self-efficacy and impostor syndrome among students?
5. Does self-efficacy significantly mediate the relationship between perfectionism and impostor syndrome among students?

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study focused on examining the relationship among maladaptive perfectionism, self-efficacy, and impostor syndrome among college students. Specifically, it investigated whether self-efficacy serves as a mediating variable between maladaptive perfectionism and impostor syndrome. The study utilized a quantitative research approach employing a descriptive-correlational design with mediation analysis to determine the direct and indirect relationships among the identified psychological constructs. The participants consisted of 100 undergraduate students enrolled at Cavite State University–Trece Martires City Campus who were at least 18 years old, had completed at least one semester of college, and voluntarily participated in the study. The study was limited to three primary variables: maladaptive perfectionism as the independent variable, self-efficacy as the mediating variable, and impostor syndrome as the dependent variable. Maladaptive perfectionism was examined through perfectionistic concerns, particularly excessive concern over mistakes and doubts about actions; self-efficacy was assessed based on students' perceived capabilities in managing challenges; and impostor syndrome was measured through experiences of self-doubt, fear of failure, and difficulty recognizing personal achievements. Data were gathered using standardized self-report instruments, namely the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale, General Self-Efficacy Scale, and Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale. The study did not include other psychological factors that may influence impostor syndrome, such as self-esteem, coping strategies, emotional regulation, fear of failure, personality traits, family expectations, or social support. It also excluded graduate students, non-degree students, and individuals undergoing intensive psychological or psychiatric treatment to maintain participant homogeneity and protect potentially vulnerable populations. Furthermore, the findings were limited by the use of purposive sampling technique and a relatively small sample size, which may affect the generalizability of the results to the broader population of college students. Since the study employed a cross-sectional design and relied on self-reported measures collected at a single point in time, causal relationships among the variables cannot be established. The results should therefore be interpreted within the context of the selected participants and institutional setting. Overall, the study aimed to provide a focused understanding of how maladaptive perfectionism relates to impostor syndrome and whether self-efficacy functions as a psychological mechanism explaining this relationship among college students in the Philippine academic context.

Literature Review

Perfectionism Among College Students

Perfectionism is particularly prevalent and consequential among college students, who face continuous academic evaluation, social comparison, and pressure to achieve. Research indicates that perfectionism in college students motivated by social and family expectations increased by 33% from 1989 to 2016, with socially prescribed perfectionism showing the largest increase among the three types. This trend is especially

concerning because socially prescribed perfectionism is the form most closely linked with serious mental health disorders, including anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation.

In the Philippine context, perfectionism among university students has been examined through the lens of the model of perfectionism. Tan, Hill, and Madigan (2026) conducted two independent studies with Filipino university students—one cross-sectionally ($N = 294$) and one longitudinally ($N = 324$) with a three-month follow-up—to test the model's predictions regarding wellbeing and coping. Their findings provided clear support that students with high socially prescribed perfectionism, or a strong belief that others expect perfection, are more vulnerable to poorer wellbeing and unhealthy coping, making socially prescribed perfectionism an "aggravating factor" in the Filipino context. This finding is particularly significant because it demonstrates that the detrimental effects of socially prescribed perfectionism generalize to collectivist, interdependent cultures like the Philippines, where family and social expectations are particularly salient.

A recent study conducted at a private university in the Philippines further examined the distinct associations of adaptive and maladaptive dimensions of perfectionism with bidimensional mental health among 467 undergraduate students. Using structural equation modeling, the researchers found that Discrepancy (maladaptive perfectionism) positively predicted depression, anxiety, and stress, while High Standards (adaptive perfectionism) positively predicted stress and life satisfaction but did not have a significant effect on anxiety. Interestingly, the study found that presence of meaning was significantly and positively associated with Discrepancy, suggesting that even maladaptive perfectionism may have culturally specific adaptive functions in the Philippine context. The researchers noted that interdependent cultures like the Philippines have unique conceptions of mental health and wellbeing, and that models dominated by Western samples often do not operate similarly when tested among non-Western samples. For example, self-criticism, often known in Western literature to be detrimental to mental health, was found to have adaptive functions against depression and anxiety among Filipinos with high levels of interdependent self-construal.

Impostor Syndrome Prevalence and Consequences Among College Students

Impostor syndrome is highly prevalent among college students, with estimates ranging from 9% to 82% depending on the population and measurement tools employed. A recent cross-sectional study of 504 undergraduate students at Sultan Qaboos University found that 56% of participants had impostor syndrome, with 58.5% experiencing high to intense impostor feelings. The prevalence is even higher in certain academic programs; a study of 968 students in medical, nursing, dental, psychology, and law programs at a Swedish university found that 64.0% scored above the cutoff for experiencing impostor phenomenon, and 65.6% experienced frequent to intense impostor feelings. Among these, nursing and law students scored significantly higher than those in medical, dental, and clinical psychology programs.

In the Philippine context, impostor syndrome has been documented among college students with notable prevalence and consequences. A study conducted at Manuel S. Enverga University Foundation examined the perceived impacts of impostor syndrome on motivation and self-esteem among 120 fourth-year college students during the academic year 2022–2023. Using the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale, the researchers found that respondents sometimes experienced impostor phenomenon, with the "Superperson" type of impostor phenomenon being most prevalent among college students. The study revealed that while respondents had high levels of self-esteem, they were motivated to work harder when recognized for their accomplishments and offered constructive criticism, suggesting that impostor feelings may paradoxically drive achievement-oriented behavior among Filipino students. Interestingly, the study found that self-esteem had no direct association with impostor syndrome, which contrasts with Western findings and highlights the need for culturally nuanced understanding of the construct in the Philippine setting.

Another Philippine study examined impostor phenomenon and self-confidence among college students, finding that students often doubted their abilities and felt like they did not belong in their academic program, leading to lack of motivation, procrastination, and poor grades, with an overall mean indicating a high level of impostor phenomenon. The researchers noted a significant lack of literature on impostor phenomenon and self-confidence among Filipino students, emphasizing the need for more research in this area. The study found that college students had high levels of self-confidence (mean = 3.05), suggesting that Filipino students may maintain outward confidence despite internal impostor feelings—a pattern consistent with the collectivist cultural value of "hiya" (shame) and the tendency to preserve social harmony by not revealing vulnerability.

A phenomenological study conducted at De La Salle University explored the lived experiences of Philippine pandemic college graduates regarding impostor syndrome. Through interviews with eight participants, four themes emerged: (1) sense of futility throughout a recurring cycle of expectations and comparisons, (2) sense of unpreparedness as one struggles to adapt post-graduation after restrictions during online setup, (3) the fear of the COVID-19 pandemic brought anxiety as students struggled with personal and social stressors, and (4) reaction to the need for personal development. These findings align closely with

current impostor syndrome models while highlighting the unique contribution of the pandemic context to Filipino students' experiences.

At the University of the Philippines Cebu, guidance counselors have observed that impostor syndrome thrives within the high-pressure academic environment where all students were high achievers in their previous schools. Students report that the mere fact of being in a prestigious university can ignite impostor syndrome, as they encounter peers who are equally or more accomplished. Parental expectations are particularly salient in the Philippine context, with students reporting that parental opinions significantly affect their self-doubt and inner criticism. The societal pressure to succeed, especially in competitive environments like prestigious universities, further intensifies this psychological experience.

Research on academic achievers from Manila Central University found that Dean's Listers exhibited signs of impostorism through over-compensation or procrastinating, and over-preparation or doing advanced reading or reviewing. Five themes emerged from their experiences: flexibility beyond measure, learning environment, high parental expectation, feelings of being undeserving, and optimistic outlook in life. The students were aware of grade inflation during the COVID-19 pandemic and attributed it to the time flexibility offered by online classes and accessibility of internet resources, yet they acknowledged the possibility that this might be a reason for students to abuse it and make it an excuse to cheat. This finding suggests that Filipino academic achievers engage in complex attributional reasoning that may both protect and undermine their sense of competence.

A study of 100 student leaders at Far Eastern University in Manila found a significant negative correlation ($r = -0.679$) between impostor phenomenon and self-esteem, indicating that self-esteem decreases as impostorism intensifies. The researchers emphasized that impostor phenomenon has been found to be adversely related to one's self-esteem, particularly in assessing their performance, and that individuals with high impostor feelings tend to have lower self-esteem, showing negative outcomes to an individual's psychological well-being including intense dysphoric moods, intolerance of uncertainty, and performance dissatisfaction.

The consequences of impostor syndrome are substantial and well-documented. Students who experience impostor syndrome show a higher probability of developing depressive symptoms (odds ratio = 3.49) and anxiety symptoms (odds ratio = 2.86). Impostor syndrome scores show moderate correlations with depression ($r = 0.486$) and anxiety ($r = 0.472$), and logistic regression analyses indicate that depression and anxiety act as significant predictors of impostor syndrome. Beyond psychological distress, impostor syndrome is associated with emotional exhaustion, heightened anxiety, ongoing stress, poor self-confidence, increased perfectionism, and a tendency to undervalue achievements, all of which can impair academic performance and personal development.

Gender differences in impostor syndrome have been consistently observed, with women reporting significantly higher levels than men. In the Swedish university study, women scored significantly higher on the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale than men (mean = 68.69 vs. 62.12, $p < .001$), and women also reported significantly higher levels of perceived stress and anxiety. Similarly, research on female students in STEM fields found higher levels of impostorism syndrome compared to male counterparts, leading to increased academic stress and decreased self-efficacy. These gender differences may be attributable to societal expectations, gender stereotypes, and academic pressures that disproportionately affect women.

Self-Efficacy Among Filipino College Students

In the Philippine context, self-efficacy has been examined as a critical factor in academic success and career development. A study by Nalipay and Alfonso investigated career and talent development self-efficacy among 620 Filipino college students, examining the relationships among self-compassion, hope, and career and talent development self-efficacy. The researchers emphasized that positive education, which integrates positive psychological approaches to traditional education, acknowledges the importance of enhancing students' personal strengths and well-being above and beyond developing their academic skills and competencies. Their findings underscored the importance of developing students' personal resources, including self-efficacy, in order to maximize their skills and abilities in developing their talents and being successful in their chosen careers.

Self-Efficacy as a Mediator Between Perfectionism and Impostor Syndrome

The mediating role of self-efficacy in the perfectionism-impostor syndrome relationship represents the central focus of the present study. This mediation is grounded in the theoretical proposition that self-efficacy is the cognitive mechanism through which perfectionistic tendencies are translated into impostor feelings. When perfectionistic college students set unrealistically high standards but lack confidence in their ability to meet them, they experience cognitive dissonance that manifests as impostor syndrome.

A recent empirical study directly testing this mediation model found significant results supporting the hypothesized relationships. The study revealed a notable indirect effect of self-efficacy (estimate = 0.0728, $p = 0.003$), with the 95% confidence interval for the indirect path excluding zero, validating the statistical significance of the mediation effect. The direct effect of perfectionism on impostor syndrome remained strong and significant (estimate = 0.6530, $p < .001$), while the total effect was 0.7258 ($p < .001$). Approximately 10% of the overall impact of perfectionism on impostor syndrome was explained through self-efficacy, while the remaining 90% represented a direct influence. These findings indicate that self-efficacy serves as a partial mediator in the relationship, consistent with the theoretical expectation that multiple mechanisms contribute to the perfectionism-impostor syndrome link.

In the Philippine context, no study to date has explicitly tested self-efficacy as a mediator between perfectionism and impostor syndrome. However, the available evidence supports the plausibility of this mediation model. Tan, Hill, and Madigan's (2026) finding that socially prescribed perfectionism aggravates poor wellbeing and unhealthy coping among Filipino students suggests that self-efficacy may be the mechanism through which this occurs. The phenomenological study of pandemic graduates found that the cycle of expectations and comparisons (perfectionism) led to feelings of futility and unpreparedness (low self-efficacy), which in turn contributed to impostor-like experiences. The Far Eastern University study found that student leaders with high impostor feelings had lower self-esteem, and given the conceptual overlap between self-esteem and self-efficacy, it is reasonable to hypothesize that self-efficacy would show a similar mediating pattern.

The partial mediation pattern is theoretically meaningful. It suggests that while self-efficacy is an important mechanism, other variables such as self-esteem, coping styles, loneliness, and neuroticism also play significant roles. Research on the multiple mediation mechanism between perfectionism and depression has shown that self-esteem, positive coping styles, and loneliness collectively mediate substantial portions of the relationship, with self-esteem alone accounting for 47–56% of the mediated effect. This complexity underscores the importance of examining self-efficacy within a broader network of psychological variables while recognizing its unique contribution to understanding the perfectionism-impostor syndrome relationship.

The mediation occurs through three interconnected pathways. The cognitive appraisal pathway involves low self-efficacy leading to negative self-appraisal and external attribution of success, where students cannot recognize their own competence due to perfectionistic cognitive distortions. The emotional regulation pathway involves low self-efficacy increasing anxiety and stress responses that amplify impostor feelings, as students with depleted confidence experience greater physiological arousal in evaluative situations. The motivational pathway involves low self-efficacy resulting in the exhausting overwork characteristic of the impostor cycle, where students over-prepare or procrastinate due to lack of confidence in their capabilities.

In the Philippine cultural context, these pathways may be particularly salient due to the emphasis on family expectations, social harmony, and "utang na loob" (debt of gratitude), which may amplify the pressure to meet perfectionistic standards while simultaneously undermining the self-efficacy necessary to internalize success. The collectivist nature of Philippine society means that socially prescribed perfectionism—beliefs that family and significant others demand perfection—may be especially potent in eroding self-efficacy and fostering impostor feelings.

Methodology

Research Design

This study will employ a descriptive-correlational research design with mediation analysis to examine the relationships of self-efficacy, perfectionism and impostor syndrome among college students within the context of university. A quantitative approach was utilized to objectively measure the variables using standardized psychological scales and analyze the data statistically (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Specifically, the study used a correlational design to determine whether significant relationships exist among the variables and whether self-efficacy mediates the relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and impostor syndrome (Field, 2018). As a non-experimental study, no variables were manipulated; rather, all variables were measured as they naturally occur among college students (Shadish et al., 2002; Babbie, 2016). Mediation analysis will be conducted following Hayes's (2018) procedure using the PROCESS macro for SPSS, with bootstrapping methods employed to estimate indirect effects and construct confidence intervals (Preacher & Hayes, 2008; MacKinnon, 2008). Data were collected through an online survey administered via Google Forms, a method that offers advantages including cost-effectiveness, ease of distribution, and accessibility to a large sample of college students (Wright, 2005; Evans & Mathur, 2005). All variables were measured using standardized psychological scales with established psychometric properties (American Educational Research Association et al., 2014).

Research Locale

The study was conducted at Cavite State University–Trece Martires City Campus, located in Trece Martires City, Cavite, Philippines. The campus serves as one of the academic units of Cavite State University that provides higher education programs to students from different academic disciplines. As a higher education institution, the university represents a suitable setting for examining psychological constructs among college students, particularly those related to academic demands, achievement expectations, and psychological adjustment. The selected locale was appropriate for the present study because college students commonly experience various academic and personal challenges associated with higher education, including performance expectations, continuous evaluation, and pressure to achieve. These experiences may contribute to psychological patterns such as maladaptive perfectionism and impostor syndrome, while students' beliefs regarding their capabilities may influence how they perceive and manage academic challenges. The university environment therefore provides a relevant context for examining the relationships among maladaptive perfectionism, self-efficacy, and impostor syndrome.

Research Participants

The respondents of the study were undergraduate students enrolled at Cavite State University–Trece Martires City Campus who met the established inclusion criteria. Specifically, participants were required to be at least 18 years old, have completed at least one semester of college, and voluntarily participate in the study. Graduate students, non-degree students, and individuals undergoing intensive psychological or psychiatric treatment were excluded to maintain participant homogeneity and ensure ethical protection of potentially vulnerable groups. A total of 100 students were selected as respondents of the study. According to Hair et al. (2019), a sample size of at least 100 respondents is considered acceptable for correlational and regression-based quantitative analyses. Similarly, Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) suggested that a sample size of 100 or more is adequate for identifying relationships among variables in correlational research. Thus, the selected sample size was considered sufficient for conducting correlational and mediation analyses in the present study. Participants will access the online survey through a QR code or link, complete an electronic informed consent form, and then proceed to the questionnaire. Daily monitoring of response rates will enable quota adjustments to ensure adequate demographic representation. After data collection, responses will be screened for completeness, careless responding, and outliers, with the goal of retaining at least 100 valid cases for analysis. All procedures will adhere to APA (2017) ethical guidelines regarding informed consent, confidentiality, and participant protection.

Research Instrument

This study will employ three standardized self-report instruments to measure the key variables: perfectionism, self-efficacy and impostor syndrome. Each instrument was selected for its strong psychometric properties, widespread use in psychological research, and relevance to the constructs under investigation.

Data Gathering Procedure

Before the data gathering procedure commenced, the researcher prepared a letter of request to the campus administrator of Cavite State University Trece Martires City Campus to seek approval for the conduct of the survey and assessment for college students. After securing approval, the researcher commenced the data gathering by asking the potential respondents to participate in the survey and distributed a profiling sheet to the confirmed participants along with the survey instruments to answer. Attached also is the informed consent sheet to ensure that the participants are knowledgeable of the research purpose and guarantee their voluntary participation. Further, the data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize participant characteristics and main variables. Pearson's r will be used to examine correlations among perfectionism, self-efficacy, and impostor syndrome. To test the mediation model, Hayes' PROCESS Macro (Model 4) with bootstrapping will determine if self-efficacy mediates the relationship between perfectionism and impostor syndrome. Assumptions such as normality, linearity, and absence of multicollinearity will be checked prior to analysis. All results will be interpreted at a significance level of $p < .05$ and reported with confidence intervals for clarity.

Results and Discussions

Research Question 1: What is the profile of the respondents in terms of Maladaptive Perfectionism, Impostor Syndrome, and Self-Efficacy?

Table 1. Level of Maladaptive Perfectionism, Impostor Syndrome and Self Efficacy among Students

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
1. Maladaptive Perfectionism	3.17	0.70	Moderate
2. Impostor Syndrome	3.45	0.68	Moderate to High
3. Self-Efficacy	2.95	0.54	Moderate

Table 1 presents the descriptive profile of the respondents across the three study variables. The findings revealed that maladaptive perfectionism obtained a mean score of 3.17 with a standard deviation of 0.70, interpreted as moderate. This indicates that the respondents generally exhibit a noticeable tendency toward setting excessively high personal standards accompanied by harsh self-criticism and an all-or-nothing evaluation of their performance, though not to a clinically severe degree. Impostor syndrome obtained a mean score of 3.45 with a standard deviation of 0.68, interpreted as moderately high. This suggests that the respondents frequently experience feelings of intellectual fraudulence and tend to attribute their success to external factors such as luck rather than to their own competence and effort. Meanwhile, self-efficacy obtained the lowest mean score of 2.95 with a standard deviation of 0.54, interpreted as moderate. This indicates that the respondents possess a reasonable but constrained belief in their ability to organize and execute the actions required to manage challenging academic situations. The results imply that although the respondents demonstrate moderate levels of maladaptive perfectionism and self-efficacy, they tend to experience elevated impostor feelings, which may reflect the demanding academic environment where performance pressure and fear of negative evaluation are prevalent. This finding is consistent with Bantilo et al. (2023), who examined the moderating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between perfectionism and impostor syndrome among graduating nursing students at Cavite State University in the Philippines. Their study highlighted how these three psychological constructs are interrelated in the local academic context, where perfectionistic tendencies and impostor feelings co-exist and are influenced by students' beliefs in their own capabilities. Similarly, Pakozdy et.al. (2023), found that university students with high imposterism were more likely to exhibit maladaptive perfectionist behaviors and report lower self-efficacy, underscoring the interconnected nature of these constructs across cultural settings.

Research Question 2: Is there a significant relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and impostor syndrome among students?

Table 2. Relationship between Maladaptive Perfectionism and Impostor Syndrome

Variables	Pearson r	p-value	Interpretation	Decision
1. Maladaptive Perfectionism and Impostor syndrome	0.606	0.001	Significant Positive Relationship	Reject Ho

Table 2 presents correlation analysis examining the relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and impostor syndrome among students. The computed Pearson correlation coefficient revealed an *r-value* of 0.606 with a *p-value* of 0.001, which is lower than the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. The findings indicate that students who are excessively concerned with mistakes, plagued by self-doubt, and driven by harsh evaluative standards are more likely to experience feelings of intellectual fraudulence and fear of being exposed as incompetent. This aligns with Hewitt and Flett's Multidimensional Perfectionism Theory, which posits that perfectionistic concerns create a chronic fear of negative evaluation and a persistent discrepancy between one's standard and perceived performance a cognitive distortions that lie at the core of impostor syndrome. In the Philippine context, this resonates with Tan, Hill, and Madigan (2026), who identified socially prescribed perfectionism as aggravating factor for poor psychological well-being among university students.

Research Question 3: Is there a significant relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and self-efficacy among students?

Table 3. Relationship between Maladaptive Perfectionism and Self-efficacy

Variables	Pearson r	p-value	Interpretation	Decision
1. Maladaptive Perfectionism and Self-efficacy	0.057	0.576	No Significant Relationship	Fail to Reject Ho

The results revealed that maladaptive perfectionism and self-efficacy yielded a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.057 with a *p-value* of 0.576, which is greater than 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected. The findings diverges from the theoretical expectation derived from Bandura's

Social Cognitive Theory, which posits that maladaptive perfectionism erodes self-efficacy through repeated perceived failures and negative self-evaluation. In the Philippine collectivist context, self-efficacy may be socially embedded and reinforced by familial support systems and the cultural value of *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude), which may buffer students' confidence from the erosive effects of perfectionistic self-criticism (Tan, Hill, and Madigan, 2026).

Research Question 4: Is there a significant relationship between self-efficacy and impostor syndrome among students?

Table 4. Relationship between Self-Efficacy and Impostor Syndrome

Variables	Pearson r	p-value	Interpretation	Decision
1. Self-efficacy and Impostor Syndrome	0.175	0.082	No Significant Relationship	Fail to Reject Ho

Table 4 presents the relationship between self-efficacy and impostor syndrome among students. The results revealed that self-efficacy and impostor syndrome yielded a Pearson correlation coefficient of r -value of 0.175 with a p -value of 0.082, which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected. The findings indicate that self-efficacy does not have a significant relationship with impostor syndrome among students. In the present sample, student's general belief in their ability to manage challenges was not significantly associated with lower impostor feelings. The findings aligns with Bantilo *et.al* (2023), who found that the interplay between self-efficacy and impostor syndrome among Filipino nursing students operates in complex ways that do not always mirror Western patterns. Thus, the null result suggests that general self-efficacy, as measured in the present study may not be protective resource against impostor syndrome that the theoretical framework anticipated.

Research Question 5: Does self-efficacy significantly mediate the relationship between perfectionism and impostor syndrome among students?

Table 5. Mediation Analysis of Self-Efficacy on the Relationship between Maladaptive Perfectionism and Impostor Syndrome

Path	Beta Coefficient	p-value	Interpretation
1. Maladaptive Perfectionism → Self-Efficacy	0.044	0.576	Not Significant
2. Self-Efficacy → Impostor Syndrome	0.178	0.080	Not Significant
3. Maladaptive Perfectionism → Impostor Syndrome	0.589	0.001	Significant

Table 5 presents the mediation analysis examining the role of self-efficacy in the relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and impostor syndrome. The results revealed that maladaptive perfectionism significantly predicts self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.589, p = 0.001$). However, maladaptive perfectionism did not significantly predict self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.044, p = 0.576$) and self-efficacy did not significantly predict impostor syndrome ($\beta = 0.178, p = 0.080$). These findings indicate that self-efficacy does not significantly mediate the relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and impostor syndrome among college students. Although maladaptive perfectionism significantly influence impostor syndrome, self-efficacy itself was not a strong enough factor to explain the relationship between the two variables. The findings imply that students' impostor syndrome may be more directly influenced by inherent maladaptive perfectionistic characteristics rather than by their beliefs in their own capabilities. This may also suggest that other mediating variables, such as self-esteem, coping strategies, fear of failure, or emotional regulation, could play a stronger role in explaining impostor syndrome among college students. Overall, the results partially support the conceptual framework of the study. Similar findings were reported by Pákozdy *et al.* (2023), who suggested that self-efficacy may not always significantly mediate impostor outcomes when stronger direct psychological factors are present. While maladaptive perfectionism significantly relates to impostor syndrome, the hypothesized mediating effect of self-efficacy was not established.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered strictly to established ethical standards in psychological and organizational research to ensure the protection, dignity, and rights of all participants. Ethical considerations were particularly important as the study involved assessing college students' experiences related to self-efficacy, impostor syndrome, and perfectionism, which might have involved sensitive psychological information. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Prior to data collection, all respondents were provided with a clear explanation of the purpose, nature, procedures, potential risks, and benefits of the study. An informed consent form was included at the beginning of the questionnaire, ensuring that participants fully understood

their rights, including the right to decline participation or withdraw at any time without penalty or negative consequences. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, no personally identifiable information such as names, employee numbers, or contact details was collected. All responses were recorded and stored in a manner that prevented the identification of individual participants. Data were reported in aggregate form only, ensuring that no individual respondent could be traced in the findings. The study complied with the provisions of Republic Act No. 11073, also known as the Data Privacy Act of 2012. In accordance with this law, all collected data were processed fairly, used solely for legitimate academic purposes, and stored securely. Electronic files were password-protected, and access to the data was strictly limited to the researcher. All data were retained only for the duration necessary to complete the study and were properly disposed of afterward to prevent unauthorized access. Furthermore, the study ensured that no harm—whether psychological, emotional, or social—was inflicted on participants. The questionnaire items were carefully reviewed to avoid overly sensitive or intrusive content. In instances where any item might have caused discomfort, participants were informed that they could skip such questions without penalty. The study also adhered to the core ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice. Respect for persons was upheld through voluntary participation and informed consent. Beneficence and non-maleficence were ensured by minimizing potential risks and protecting participants from harm. Justice was maintained through fair and appropriate selection of respondents based on the study's inclusion criteria. Overall, these ethical safeguards ensured that the study was conducted responsibly, maintaining the integrity of the research process while upholding the rights, dignity, and welfare of all participants.

Conclusion

The findings of the study revealed that students generally demonstrated a moderate level of maladaptive perfectionism and self-efficacy, while exhibiting a moderate to high level of impostor syndrome. These findings indicate that while students do not display extreme perfectionistic dysfunction or severely depleted confidence, they nonetheless experience elevated feelings of intellectual fraudulence. This demonstrates that the students' who are excessively concerned with mistakes, plagued by chronic self-doubt, and driven by harsh evaluative standards are significantly more likely to experience impostor feelings. Moreover, the result showed no significant relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and self-efficacy. This suggests that self-efficacy may be socially embedded and reinforced by familial support systems and the cultural value which may buffer students' confidence from the erosive effects of perfectionistic self-criticism of students. Additionally, findings revealed no significant relationship found between self-efficacy and impostor syndrome. This suggests that student's general belief in their ability to manage challenges was not significantly associated with lower impostor feelings. Furthermore, the mediation analysis revealed that self-efficacy does not serve as a significant mediating mechanism in this sample. These findings challenge the assumed universality of perfectionism, self-efficacy and impostor syndrome mediation model established in Western individualist contexts. In the Philippine setting, where self-efficacy may be socially embedded and reinforced by familial support systems (*utang na loob*) and where the cultural value of *hiya* may sustain outward confidence despite internal self-doubt, the psychological pathway from perfectionism to impostorism appears to operate more directly bypassing general self-efficacy as a cognitive bridge. This suggests the need for culturally situated theoretical frameworks that account for how collectivist values shape the interplay among perfectionism, self-beliefs, and impostor experiences. Overall, the study concludes that maladaptive perfectionism are significant factors influencing students' impostor syndrome levels. However, self-efficacy does not significantly function as a mediating variable in the relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and impostor syndrome among students.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations are proposed to address students' maladaptive perfectionism experiences and promote psychological well-being within educational settings. Students are encouraged to practice self-compassion by challenging all-or-nothing thinking, reframing errors as part of learning rather than evidence of inadequacy, and seeking support from peers or counselors when perfectionistic pressures become overwhelming, rather than internalizing self-doubt in silence. Teachers and academic personnel are encouraged to create mental health literacy into orientation programs, to help students recognize perfectionistic distress, and foster mastery-oriented academic climates that frame mistakes as learning opportunities. Guidance counselors and mental health practitioners may utilize the findings of the study in developing intervention programs focused on perfectionistic cognitive distortions, catastrophizing mistakes, and excessive self-criticism. Since the general self-efficacy did not significantly mediate the perfectionism and impostor relationship in this sample, educational institutions are likewise encouraged to offer intervention programs that exclusively aim to boost students' general confidence and address the root perfectionistic tendencies to reduce impostor feelings among students. Researchers may

also examine other possible mediating variables such as self-esteem, fear of failure, coping strategies, loneliness, or emotional regulation that may carry the effect of maladaptive perfectionism to impostor syndrome. Additionally, longitudinal approaches may be utilized to establish temporal precedence among perfectionism, self-efficacy, and impostor syndrome challenges. Lastly, educational stakeholders are encouraged to continue supporting initiatives aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being) by prioritizing mental health awareness, psychological support systems, student well-being programs, culturally responsive interventions that foster academic resilience and psychological well-being.

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