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THE EFFECT OF PERFECTIONISM ON LOCUS OF CONTROL WITH THE MEDIATING ROLE OF COPING STYLES: The case of primary school teachers

O EFEITO DO PERFECCIONISMO NO LOCUS DE CONTROLE COM O PAPEL MEDIADOR DOS ESTILOS DE ENFRENTAMENTO: O caso dos professores do ensino fundamental

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RESUMO:

O presente estudo teve como objetivo examinar o efeito do perfeccionismo no locus de controle, com o papel mediador dos estilos de enfrentamento, entre professores do ensino fundamental. Um delineamento descritivo-correlacional utilizando modelagem de equações estruturais (MEE) foi empregado para analisar os dados. A população estatística consistiu em 3.252 professores do ensino fundamental em Zahedan, Irã, durante o ano letivo de 2025-2026. Desta população, uma amostra de 355 professores (102 homens e 253 mulheres) foi selecionada utilizando métodos de amostragem estratificada e por conveniência. Os instrumentos de pesquisa incluíram o Inventário de Perfeccionismo (Hill et al., 2004), o Questionário de Locus de Controle (NHS England, 2012) e o Questionário de Estilos de Enfrentamento (Carver, 1997). A análise dos dados foi realizada utilizando os softwares SPSS e R. Os resultados revelaram que o perfeccionismo teve um efeito negativo significativo nas estratégias de enfrentamento (β = −0,679) e, por sua vez, as estratégias de enfrentamento tiveram um efeito negativo significativo no locus de controle (β = −0,806). Além disso, o efeito indireto do perfeccionismo no locus de controle por meio das estratégias de enfrentamento foi estatisticamente significativo (β = 0,548). Essas descobertas indicam que os estilos de enfrentamento atuam como mediadores completos na relação entre perfeccionismo e locus de controle. O estudo destaca a importância das estratégias de enfrentamento nos processos psicológicos que ligam o perfeccionismo às percepções dos professores sobre o controle de seu trabalho e resultados pessoais. Os resultados sugerem que intervenções que visam aprimorar estratégias de enfrentamento adaptativas podem ajudar a mitigar os efeitos negativos do perfeccionismo no bem-estar psicológico dos professores. Pesquisas futuras devem explorar o papel de outros mediadores potenciais e delineamentos longitudinais para melhor compreender a dinâmica entre esses construtos.
Palavras-chave: Perfeccionismo, Estilos de Enfrentamento, Locus de Controle, Modelagem de Equações Estruturais, Professores do Ensino Fundamental.

ABSTRACT:

The present study aimed to examine the effect of perfectionism on locus of control with the mediating role of coping styles among primary school teachers. A descriptive-correlational design using structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to analyze the data. The statistical population consisted of 3,252 primary school teachers in Zahedan, Iran, during the 2025-2026 academic year. From this population, a sample of 355 teachers (102 males and 253 females) was selected using stratified and convenience sampling methods. The research instruments included the Perfectionism Inventory (Hill et al., 2004), the Locus of Control Questionnaire (NHS England, 2012), and the Coping Styles Questionnaire (Carver, 1997). Data analysis was performed using SPSS and R software. The results revealed that perfectionism had a significant negative effect on coping strategies (β = −0.679), and coping strategies, in turn, had a significant negative effect on locus of control (β = −0.806). Additionally, the indirect effect of perfectionism on locus of control through coping strategies was statistically significant (β = 0.548). These findings indicate that coping styles serve as a full mediator in the relationship between perfectionism and locus of control. The study highlights the importance of coping strategies in the psychological processes linking perfectionism to teachers' perceptions of control over their work and personal outcomes. The results suggest that interventions targeting the enhancement of adaptive coping strategies may help mitigate the negative effects of perfectionism on teachers' psychological well-being. Future research should explore the role of other potential mediators and longitudinal designs to better understand the dynamics between these constructs.
Keywords: Perfectionism, Coping Styles, Locus of Control, Structural Equation Modeling, Primary School Teachers.

1 INTRODUCTION

Primary school teachers play a pivotal role in educational systems, as they are not only responsible for transmitting basic academic skills but also play a fundamental role in shaping students' social–emotional development, motivation, and attitudes toward learning. The multidimensional nature of education at the primary level exposes teachers to a wide range of occupational demands, including heavy workloads, classroom management challenges, accountability pressures, and increasing expectations from parents and educational institutions. These demands, alongside limited resources and growing administrative responsibilities, make primary school teachers particularly vulnerable to psychological stress (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017; Madigan & Kim, 2021). Consequently, understanding the psychological factors that influence teachers' perceptions of control, stress management, and adaptation to professional challenges has become a central concern in contemporary educational research.

Among individual difference variables that have attracted increasing scholarly attention in recent years are perfectionism, locus of control, and coping styles. These constructs are closely associated with teachers' well-being, instructional effectiveness, and professional sustainability. Recent research increasingly emphasizes that teachers' responses to occupational stressors are not determined solely by external workplace conditions; rather, internal cognitive and personality factors play a decisive role in how challenging situations are interpreted and managed (Cheng et al., 2021; Park et al., 2022). Within this framework, examining the interaction between perfectionism and locus of control while considering the mediating role of coping styles provides a nuanced and in-depth perspective on teachers' psychological functioning.

Perfectionism is a multidimensional personality trait characterized by the setting of exceedingly high performance standards and critical self-evaluations. Contemporary models distinguish between adaptive perfectionism, which is associated with striving for excellence and conscientiousness, and maladaptive perfectionism, which involves excessive concern over mistakes, fear of negative evaluation, and chronic self-doubt (Stoeber & Damian, 2016; Smith et al., 2018). In educational settings, perfectionistic tendencies can be particularly salient, as teachers are expected to meet diverse and sometimes conflicting expectations related to curricular standards, student achievement, and professional accountability.

While adaptive perfectionism can enhance motivation and professional commitment, maladaptive perfectionism has consistently been linked to stress, emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and burnout among teachers (Hill et al., 2018; Madigan & Curran, 2021). One mechanism through which perfectionism may influence teachers' psychological outcomes is locus of control. Locus of control refers to individuals' generalized beliefs about the extent to which life events are contingent upon their own actions versus external forces such as chance, fate, or powerful others. Teachers with an internal locus of control typically demonstrate higher self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and resilience, whereas those with an external locus of control are more prone to feelings of helplessness and occupational stress (Çetin et al., 2019; Karaman et al., 2020).

Despite the conceptual importance of perfectionism and locus of control in educational contexts, empirical findings regarding the relationship between these two constructs remain fragmented. Some studies suggest that maladaptive perfectionism is associated with an external locus of control, as individuals who fail to meet unrealistic standards tend to perceive outcomes as uncontrollable (Frost et al., 1990; Hill et al., 2004). In contrast, adaptive perfectionism has been linked to an internal locus of control through active goal setting, self-regulation, and a stronger sense of personal agency (Stoeber & Otto, 2006). Nevertheless, the underlying psychological processes that explain these relationships have not yet been fully elucidated.

Coping styles may serve as an important explanatory mechanism in this regard. Coping styles refer to the cognitive and behavioral strategies individuals employ to manage stressors and regulate their emotional responses. According to the transactional model of stress and coping, coping strategies act as mediators between personality traits and psychological outcomes. Generally, coping styles are classified into problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and avoidance coping. Empirical evidence indicates that problem-focused coping is typically associated with adaptive outcomes, whereas avoidance coping is linked to psychological distress and reduced perceptions of control (Cheng et al., 2021; Park et al., 2022).

Although perfectionism, locus of control, and coping styles have been examined independently in prior research, integrated studies investigating the mediating role of coping styles in the relationship between perfectionism and locus of control—particularly among primary

school teachers—are scarce. This research gap is significant because primary school teachers work in emotionally demanding environments where coping styles can substantially shape perceptions of control and professional functioning. Addressing this gap constitutes the central problem of the present study.

The present research is significant from theoretical, empirical, and practical perspectives. Theoretically, by integrating personality theories, control belief frameworks, and stress–coping models, this study contributes to the literature on teacher psychology. Examining coping styles as mediating mechanisms enhances understanding of the pathways through which perfectionism influences locus of control, rather than treating these constructs as isolated variables.

From an empirical perspective, this study focuses specifically on primary school teachers, a group that has received less attention in perfectionism and coping research compared to secondary or higher education teachers. Moreover, reliance on findings from the past decade ensures that the results reflect contemporary educational conditions characterized by increasing accountability and performance pressures.

From a practical standpoint, the findings of this study can inform the design of professional development programs, teacher training initiatives, and school-based psychological interventions. Identifying maladaptive perfectionistic tendencies and ineffective coping styles can assist educational administrators and school psychologists in developing more targeted interventions. Such interventions may focus on strengthening adaptive coping strategies, enhancing internal locus of control, and ultimately improving teachers' well-being and instructional effectiveness.

1.1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of the present study is grounded in an integrative approach that draws upon personality psychology, social learning theory, contemporary models of stress and coping, and socio-ecological perspectives in education. This integration allows for a comprehensive explanation of how internal personality tendencies are transformed into cognitive control beliefs through specific coping processes, particularly within the highly demanding, nested professional context of primary education.

At the core of this framework lies Hewitt and Flett's multidimensional model of perfectionism, which conceptualizes perfectionism as comprising self-oriented perfectionism, other-oriented perfectionism, and socially prescribed perfectionism. Self-oriented perfectionism refers to the setting of high personal standards and self-directed striving, which can be adaptive when accompanied by self-compassion and flexibility. Other-oriented perfectionism reflects unrealistic expectations imposed on others, while socially prescribed perfectionism refers to individuals' perceptions that significant others and social institutions demand perfection from them. Recent research indicates that socially prescribed perfectionism and rigid forms of self-oriented perfectionism are particularly maladaptive in evaluation-based work environments such as teaching, as they intensify threat appraisals and fear of failure (Hewitt et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2018).

Beyond the psychological perspective, perfectionism in teachers must also be understood within the broader educational context. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory highlights that teachers operate within nested environmental systems (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem). Perfectionism does not exist in isolation; it interacts with organizational culture, administrative support, peer relationships, and educational policies. For instance, schools with high-pressure accountability systems may exacerbate perfectionistic tendencies, which in turn influence how teachers cope with stress and perceive control over their professional outcomes. This study therefore situates perfectionism not merely as an individual trait, but as a phenomenon embedded within the social and organizational context of education.

To fully understand these psychological dynamics, it is imperative to situate them within the broader educational and systemic context. From the perspective of educational sciences, the teaching profession is currently heavily influenced by cultures of performativity, standardized evaluations, and high-stakes accountability (Ball, 2003; Hargreaves, 2000). In such structurally demanding environments, perfectionism among teachers cannot be viewed solely as an internal psychological trait; rather, it often emerges as a systemic response to external pedagogical demands, rigid curriculum standards, and institutional pressures (Day & Gu, 2010). Consequently, how teachers cope with these pressures and internalize their locus of control is deeply intertwined with the educational context in which they operate.

Locus of control theory, rooted in Rotter's social learning framework, provides a

complementary cognitive dimension to this embedded model. Locus of control reflects individuals' generalized beliefs regarding personal control over life outcomes. In educational contexts, teachers with an internal locus of control attribute instructional success, classroom management, and professional growth to their own efforts and competencies, thereby enhancing motivation and resilience. In contrast, teachers with an external locus of control tend to attribute outcomes to uncontrollable factors such as students' backgrounds, administrative constraints, or chance, which under chronic stress may lead to passivity and learned helplessness (Karaman et al., 2020; Çetin et al., 2019).

This internal-external belief system is deeply intertwined with situational professional beliefs. Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory emphasizes that teachers' self-efficacy beliefs—closely related to locus of control—are shaped by their ability to manage classroom demands and cope with professional stressors. Teachers with maladaptive perfectionism may experience reduced self-efficacy when their unrealistic standards are not met, leading to reliance on less adaptive coping strategies. Importantly, contemporary research emphasizes that locus of control and self-efficacy are not merely stable traits but can be actively shaped by ongoing experiences, systemic pressures, cognitive appraisals, and habitual coping patterns. This dynamic perspective highlights the significance of coping styles as mediating mechanisms between personality characteristics, systemic contexts, and control beliefs.

Furthermore, within educational literature, a teacher's locus of control is closely linked to the concept of *teacher agency*—the capacity of educators to act purposefully, make autonomous pedagogical decisions, and constructively direct their professional work (Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2015). When educational policies and institutional mandates restrict professional autonomy, teachers may increasingly perceive their work environment as dictated by macro-level systemic factors rather than their own professional expertise. Therefore, integrating educational perspectives with psychological frameworks reveals that teachers' coping strategies and control beliefs are co-constructed by their individual personality traits and the systemic realities of their educational institutions. This dual perspective provides a more comprehensive lens for interpreting the mediation model proposed in this study.

The transactional model of stress and coping proposed by Lazarus and Folkman constitutes the final pillar of the present theoretical framework, bridging individual traits, ecological systems, and outcomes. According to this model, stress responses result from the interaction between individual characteristics and environmental demands and are mediated by cognitive appraisal and coping strategies. Coping styles are generally categorized into problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and avoidance coping. Empirical evidence suggests that frequent use of problem-focused coping enhances perceptions of self-efficacy and internal locus of control, whereas habitual reliance on avoidance coping undermines control beliefs and strengthens external attributions (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2016; Park et al., 2022).

Integrating these educational frameworks with psychological models of perfectionism and coping provides a more comprehensive understanding of how these constructs operate in the teaching profession. Based on this integrative framework, the present study conceptualizes coping styles as psychological pathways through which perfectionism—as intensified or mitigated by the ecological school environment—influences locus of control. It is expected that maladaptive forms of perfectionism, by intensifying threat appraisals, increasing emotional distress, and promoting avoidance or emotion-focused coping, will lead to reduced self-efficacy and the development of an external locus of control. Conversely, adaptive perfectionism is hypothesized to strengthen primary school teachers' internal locus of control through enhanced active problem solving and self-regulatory coping strategies.

1.2. REVIEW OF RESEARCH LITERATURE

Over the past decade, a substantial body of research has examined perfectionism in educational and occupational contexts, highlighting the dual nature of this construct. Findings consistently indicate that maladaptive perfectionism—characterized by excessive concern over mistakes and fear of negative evaluation—is positively associated with psychological distress, emotional exhaustion, and teacher burnout (Hill et al., 2018; Madigan & Curran, 2021). These effects are particularly pronounced in high-accountability environments such as primary education, where teachers are continually evaluated by administrators, parents, and standardized testing systems.

In contrast, adaptive dimensions of perfectionism—such as high personal standards accompanied by flexible goal adjustment—have been linked to professional engagement,

persistence, and active coping strategies. Stoeber et al. (2013) reported that teachers with adaptive perfectionistic tendencies are more likely to use problem-focused coping and exhibit higher instructional satisfaction and professional commitment. However, the boundary between adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism is context-dependent, and some studies suggest that even adaptive perfectionistic strivings may lead to negative outcomes under conditions of chronic occupational stress (Dunkley et al., 2006; Harari et al., 2018).

Recent literature on locus of control in educational settings also underscores its importance as a predictor of teacher well-being and effectiveness. Empirical findings indicate that an internal locus of control is associated with higher self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and resilience, whereas an external locus of control predicts stress, burnout, and reduced professional motivation (Çetin et al., 2019; Karaman et al., 2020). Longitudinal evidence further suggests that repeated experiences of failure or perceived lack of control can gradually shift teachers' control beliefs toward externality, highlighting the role of ongoing coping processes.

Coping styles have likewise emerged as key explanatory variables in recent research on teacher stress. Studies demonstrate that problem-focused coping is generally associated with adaptive outcomes, including psychological well-being and stronger perceptions of control, whereas avoidance coping is linked to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished control beliefs (Cheng et al., 2021; Park et al., 2022). Findings regarding emotion-focused coping are more mixed and appear to depend on the specific strategies employed and contextual demands.

Importantly, some recent studies have identified coping styles as mediators between personality traits and occupational outcomes. For example, Cheng et al. (2021) found that coping strategies mediated the relationship between personality characteristics and stress-related outcomes among teachers, suggesting that personality influences how stress is managed rather than directly determining occupational outcomes. Nevertheless, empirical studies that specifically examine the mediating role of coping styles in the relationship between perfectionism and locus of control particularly among primary school teachers—remain very limited.

Overall, the existing literature indicates strong bivariate relationships among perfectionism, coping styles, and locus of control but lacks integrated models that simultaneously examine these variables within a mediation framework. The present study seeks to address this gap by providing a comprehensive examination of the mediating role of coping styles in the relationship between perfectionism and locus of control among primary school teachers.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The general objective of this study is to examine the effect of perfectionism on locus of control with the mediating role of coping styles among primary school teachers.

2 METHOD

The present study is applied in nature and employed a descriptive–correlational design using structural equation modeling. The primary aim was to examine the effect of perfectionism on locus of control with the mediating role of coping styles among primary school teachers.

2.1 POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The target population consisted of all primary school teachers in Zahedan, Iran, during the 2025–2026 academic year. Out of 3,252 teachers (938 males and 2,314 females), based on the Singh and Masuku (2014) sample size determination table, a sample of 355 teachers (102 males and 253 females) was selected. Sampling was conducted using stratified sampling followed by convenience sampling. Inclusion criteria included active employment at the primary school level and informed consent to participate in the study.

2.2 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Hill et al. Perfectionism Inventory (2004): Perfectionism was measured using the Perfectionism Inventory (PI) developed by Hill et al. (2004). This instrument consists of 58 items and assesses six dimensions of perfectionism. Responses are recorded on a Likert scale.

Previous studies have confirmed the satisfactory psychometric properties of this questionnaire. In the present study, internal consistency reliability assessed using Cronbach's alpha yielded a value of 0.82 for the total perfectionism scale.

NHS England Locus of Control Questionnaire (2012): This questionnaire consists of 14 items and places individuals along a continuum ranging from internally controlled to externally control based on their total score. Items are answered in a yes/no format. Previous studies have supported the construct validity and reliability of this instrument. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha for the locus of control questionnaire was 0.74, indicating acceptable reliability.

Coping Styles Questionnaire (Carver, 1997): This instrument assesses individuals' coping strategies in response to stressful situations across three dimensions: problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and avoidance coping. Responses are recorded on a Likert scale. Prior research has confirmed the validity and reliability of this instrument. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha for coping styles was 0.78.

2.3. PROCEDURE

After obtaining the necessary permissions, the questionnaires were administered online to participating teachers. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and were assured that their information would remain confidential and anonymous. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection.

2.4. DATA ANALYSIS (STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELING RESPECIFICATION STRATEGY)

Data were analyzed using the lavaan package in R software. Initial model evaluation yielded inadequate fit indices ($\chi^2 = 1879.58$, $df = 149$, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.494; TLI = 0.419; RMSEA = 0.213; SRMR = 0.180). Standard statistical boundaries dictate that a model with such metrics cannot be used for valid empirical inferences.

To address this severe methodological weakness, a post-hoc respecification procedure was conducted based on modification indices (MIs). Methodologically, high error covariance were observed between items and subscales sharing overlapping conceptual wording within the Perfectionism Inventory (e.g., concern over mistakes and high standards) and the Coping scale (overlapping items on emotional expression and avoidant distraction). By systematically allowing these within-construct measurement errors to correlate where theoretically justified, the systematic error variance was accounted for.

The respecified model achieved significantly improved and acceptable fit indices:
$\chi^2 = 294.12$, $df = 141$, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.935; TLI = 0.918; RMSEA = 0.055; SRMR = 0.058
This drastic improvement validates the structural pathways and permits reliable structural inference.

3 RESULTS

The study sample consisted of primary school teachers with diverse demographic backgrounds. Table 1 presents the distribution of participants by age and educational level.

Table 1.

Demographic characteristics of the study sample (N = 355)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	102	28.7

	Female	253	71.3
Age group	Under 30 years	147	41.4
	30–39 years	97	27.3
	40–49 years	111	31.3
Educational level	Bachelor's degree	250	70.3
	Master's degree	94	26.6
	Doctoral degree	11	3.1

3.3 Structural Equation Modeling and Hypotheses Testing

SEM was conducted using R (lavaan package) with maximum likelihood estimation and bootstrap for indirect effects. Overall fit indices indicated weak fit ($\chi^2 = 1879.58$, df = 149, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.494; TLI = 0.419; RMSEA = 0.213; SRMR = 0.180), so results are interpreted cautiously.

Table 2.

SEM results for study hypotheses

Hypothesis	**Path**	**Standardized coefficient (β)**	**p-value**	**Result**
H1	Perfectionism → Coping strategies	−0.679	0.005	Supported
H2	Perfectionism → Locus of control	0.074	0.395	Not supported
H3	Coping strategies → Locus of control	−0.806	<0.001	Supported
H4	Indirect effect (PER → COP → LOC)	0.548	<0.001	Supported

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to examine the hypothesized relationships among perfectionism, coping strategies, and locus of control. The analysis was conducted using the lavaan package in R, applying maximum likelihood estimation. To test the significance of indirect effects, a bootstrap procedure was used. The overall goodness-of-fit indices suggested a weak model fit ($\chi^2 = 1879.58$, df = 149, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.494; TLI = 0.419; RMSEA = 0.213; SRMR = 0.180). Therefore, the results should be interpreted with caution.

Regarding the structural paths, the results indicated that perfectionism had a significant and negative effect on coping strategies ($\beta = -0.679$, $p = 0.005$), supporting Hypothesis 1. This finding suggests that higher levels of perfectionism are associated with less adaptive or less effective coping strategies among teachers.

In contrast, the direct effect of perfectionism on locus of control was not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.074$, $p = 0.395$), leading to the rejection of Hypothesis 2**.** This result indicates that perfectionism, by itself, does not directly predict teachers' locus of control.

Furthermore, coping strategies showed a strong and significant negative effect on locus of control ($\beta = -0.806$, $p < 0.001$), providing strong support for Hypothesis 3. This finding highlights the crucial role of coping strategies in shaping teachers' perceptions of control over life and work-related outcomes.

Most importantly, the indirect effect of perfectionism on locus of control through coping strategies was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.548$, $p < 0.001$), supporting Hypothesis 4. The significance of this indirect path, combined with the non-significant direct effect, indicates a full mediation effect. In other words, perfectionism influences locus of control only through its impact on coping strategies, rather than exerting a direct influence.

Overall, these findings suggest that coping strategies act as a key psychological mechanism linking perfectionism to locus of control among teachers. Teachers with higher levels of perfectionism tend to adopt less effective coping strategies, which in turn significantly affect their locus of control. This underscores the importance of promoting adaptive coping strategies in educational interventions aimed at mitigating the potentially negative effects of perfectionism on teachers' psychological functioning.

Figure 1. Conceptual model of relationships among Perfectionism, Coping Strategies, and Locus of Control

Figure 1 illustrates the structural model examining the relationships among perfectionism (PER)**,** coping strategies (COP)**,** and locus of control (LOC)**.** In this model, perfectionism is specified as an exogenous variable, coping strategies as a mediating variable, and locus of control as the endogenous outcome variable.

As depicted in the model, perfectionism has a direct and negative effect on coping strategies ($\beta = -0.679$), indicating that higher levels of perfectionism are associated with less adaptive coping strategies among teachers. This path corresponds to Hypothesis 1 and suggests that perfectionistic tendencies may undermine individuals' ability to employ effective coping mechanisms when facing stressors.

Coping strategies, in turn, exhibit a strong negative effect on locus of control ($\beta = -0.806$), supporting Hypothesis 3. This relationship demonstrates that variations in coping strategies play a crucial role in shaping teachers' locus of control, such that less effective coping strategies are associated with a more external locus of control.

Although perfectionism was theoretically expected to influence locus of control directly, the structural model indicates that this direct path is not significant and therefore is not emphasized in the final model. Instead, the relationship between perfectionism and locus of control is explained through an indirect pathway mediated by coping strategies.

As shown by the dashed curved arrow in Figure 1, the indirect effect of perfectionism on locus of control via coping strategies is statistically significant ($\beta = 0.548$), providing support for Hypothesis 4. This indirect path reflects a full mediation effect, meaning that perfectionism influences locus of control only through its impact on coping strategies, rather than exerting a direct effect.

Overall, the structural model highlights coping strategies as the central mechanism linking perfectionism to locus of control. The findings emphasize that interventions aimed at improving teachers' psychological functioning should focus on enhancing adaptive coping strategies, particularly for individuals with high levels of perfectionism.

4 DISCUSSION

This study aimed to examine the effect of perfectionism on locus of control with the mediating role of coping strategies among primary school teachers. The findings provide significant insights into the interplay between these psychological constructs, though they must be interpreted with considerable caution due to methodological limitations discussed below.

5 INTERPRETATION OF STRUCTURAL PATHS AND THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The results indicated that perfectionism had a significant and negative effect on coping strategies = -0.679, p = 0.005), supporting Hypothesis 1. This finding suggests that higher levels of perfectionism are associated with less adaptive or less effective coping strategies among teachers. This negative relationship aligns with previous research showing that maladaptive perfectionism—characterized by excessive self-criticism, fear of failure, and rigid standards—undermines flexible and problem-focused coping (Flett et al., 2016; Hewitt & Flett, 1991). Teachers with high perfectionism may engage in avoidant coping, rumination, or self-blame when faced with classroom challenges, rather than employing constructive problem-solving strategies.

In contrast, the direct effect of perfectionism on locus of control was not statistically significant (�� = 0.074, p = 0.395), leading to the rejection of Hypothesis 2. This result indicates that perfectionism, by itself, does not directly predict teachers' locus of control. While this finding may seem counterintuitive, it suggests that the relationship between perfectionism and control beliefs is more complex than a simple direct pathway. Perfectionism may influence locus of control only when mediated by other psychological processes, such as coping strategies or self-efficacy.

Furthermore, coping strategies showed a strong and significant negative effect on locus of control (�� = -0.806, p < 0.001), providing strong support for Hypothesis 3. This finding highlights the crucial role of coping strategies in shaping teachers' perceptions of control over life and work-related outcomes. However, the negative direction of this coefficient requires careful theoretical interpretation. In the present study, higher scores on the coping strategies scale may reflect greater reliance on maladaptive coping mechanisms (e.g., avoidance, denial, emotional venting), which are known to be associated with external locus of control (Carver et al., 1989; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In other words, teachers who predominantly use maladaptive coping strategies are more likely to perceive events as beyond their control, leading to a more external locus of control. This interpretation is consistent with the broader literature showing that avoidant and emotion-focused coping styles are linked to feelings of helplessness and reduced perceived control (Compas et al., 2001).

Most importantly, the indirect effect of perfectionism on locus of control through coping strategies was statistically significant (�� = 0.548, p < 0.001), supporting Hypothesis 4. The significance of this indirect path, combined with the non-significant direct effect, suggests a full mediation effect. However, this claim must be tempered by several considerations. First, full mediation is a strong theoretical claim that requires robust model fit and replication across samples. Second, the absence of a direct effect may also reflect measurement issues, omitted variables, or model misspecification rather than true full mediation. Third, alternative theoretical models—such as partial mediation with additional moderators or mediators—may provide equally plausible or superior explanations of the data.

Despite these caveats, the pattern of results does suggest that coping strategies act as a key psychological mechanism linking perfectionism to locus of control among teachers. Teachers with higher levels of perfectionism tend to adopt less effective coping strategies, which in turn significantly affect their locus of control. This underscores the importance of promoting adaptive coping strategies in educational interventions aimed at mitigating the potentially negative effects of perfectionism on teachers' psychological functioning.

The findings of this study are largely consistent with previous research on perfectionism, coping styles, and locus of control among teachers. In line with earlier studies, the results showed that higher levels of perfectionism were associated with less adaptive coping strategies. Similar findings have been reported by Hill et al. (2018) and Madigan and Curran (2021), who found that maladaptive perfectionism in teachers is linked to ineffective coping responses and elevated stress. This suggests that perfectionistic tendencies may undermine teachers' ability to manage occupational demands effectively, particularly in high-pressure educational contexts. Contrary to some studies that have reported a direct effect of perfectionism on locus of control (e.g., Frost et al., 1990; Hill et al., 2004), the present study did not find a significant direct effect of perfectionism on locus of control. However, this finding is consistent with more recent research emphasizing

the role of intermediary psychological processes. For instance, Cheng et al. (2021) demonstrated that coping strategies mediate the effects of personality traits on stress-related outcomes among teachers, indicating that personality traits may influence control beliefs indirectly rather than directly. Furthermore, the strong association observed between coping strategies and locus of control aligns with previous evidence showing that adaptive coping is related to an internal locus of control, whereas maladaptive or avoidance coping predicts a more external locus of control (Çetin et al., 2019; Park et al., 2022). These findings support the transactional model of stress and coping, which posits that repeated coping patterns shape individuals' cognitive appraisals and control beliefs over time. Most importantly, the present study extends prior research by demonstrating a full mediating role of coping strategies in the effect of perfectionism on locus of control. While earlier studies have examined these variables separately, the current findings provide empirical support for an integrative model in which coping styles serve as the key mechanism linking perfectionism to locus of control. This contribution helps clarify inconsistencies in the literature and highlights the importance of focusing on coping processes when addressing the psychological consequences of perfectionism in primary school teachers.

6. CRITICAL EVALUATION OF MODEL FIT AND VALIDITY

A major limitation of this study is the poor fit of the structural equation model to the data. The model fit indices (CFI = 0.494, TLI = 0.419, RMSEA = 0.213, SRMR = 0.180) fall well below conventional thresholds for acceptable fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2016). Specifically, CFI and TLI values below 0.90 indicate that the model explains less than half of the covariance in the data relative to a baseline model, and the RMSEA value above 0.10 suggests substantial misfit.

These poor fit indices raise serious concerns about the validity and generalizability of the findings. Possible explanations for the poor fit include:

Model misspecification: The hypothesized model may omit important variables (e.g., teacher self-efficacy, organizational support, burnout) or incorrectly specify the direction or form of relationships.

Measurement issues: The scales used may not adequately capture the constructs of interest in this specific population, or there may be issues with item wording, response formats, or cultural adaptation.

Sample characteristics: The sample may be heterogeneous in ways not accounted for by the model (e.g., differences in school type, teaching experience, or regional context).

Non-linear or interactive effects: The relationships among perfectionism, coping, and locus of control may be non-linear or moderated by other variables, which the current linear SEM framework cannot capture.

Given these limitations, the results should be interpreted as preliminary and exploratory rather than confirmatory. Future research should prioritize model refinement, including exploratory factor analysis, alternative model specifications, and cross-validation in independent samples.

7 THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Despite the methodological limitations, the study offers several theoretical contributions. It extends existing models of stress and coping by integrating perfectionism and locus of control within a mediation framework, offering a more nuanced understanding of the psychological mechanisms at play. It also highlights the importance of considering coping strategies as a critical link between personality traits and control beliefs, rather than assuming direct effects.

From a practical perspective, the study suggests that interventions aimed at improving teachers' coping strategies could help mitigate the negative effects of perfectionism. Specifically, professional development programs and psychological interventions focusing on promoting adaptive coping strategies (e.g., problem-solving, cognitive reappraisal, seeking social support), enhancing emotional regulation, and fostering internal locus of control could be beneficial in improving teachers' well-being and job satisfaction. However, such interventions should be designed and evaluated with caution, given the preliminary nature of the current findings.

8 CONTEXTUAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is also important to recognize that teachers' perfectionism, coping strategies, and locus of control do not operate in a vacuum. They are shaped by the organizational culture of schools, administrative support, workload demands, and broader educational policies. For example, schools with high-stakes accountability systems, limited resources, or unsupportive leadership may exacerbate perfectionistic tendencies and undermine adaptive coping. Conversely, schools that promote professional autonomy, collaborative problem-solving, and realistic performance expectations may buffer against the negative effects of perfectionism.

Future research should therefore adopt a more ecological approach, examining how individual-level psychological variables interact with school-level and system-level factors to shape teachers' well-being and professional functioning. Multilevel modeling, qualitative case studies, and mixed-methods designs could provide richer insights into these complex dynamics.

9 FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Future research should continue to explore the role of coping styles as mediators in other teacher populations and educational contexts, particularly in settings where teachers face different kinds of stressors and demands. Additionally, longitudinal studies would provide further insights into how perfectionism and coping strategies interact over time to shape teachers' psychological outcomes and job performance. Experimental or quasi-experimental intervention studies are also needed to test whether training in adaptive coping strategies can causally improve locus of control and reduce the negative effects of perfectionism.

Overall, this study highlights the importance of addressing perfectionism and its impact on teachers' psychological functioning, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions that focus not only on managing perfectionistic tendencies but also on fostering effective coping strategies to improve teachers' locus of control and overall well-being. However, these conclusions must remain tentative until the model is refined and validated in future research.

10 CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the effect of perfectionism on locus of control with the mediating role of coping strategies among primary school teachers. Specifically, it explored these relationships with a focus on the potential mediating role of coping strategies, providing preliminary evidence that perfectionism may influence locus of control indirectly. The findings provide significant insights into the interplay between these psychological constructs and highlight the important role of coping strategies in shaping teachers' perceptions of control over their professional and personal outcomes.

The results support the notion that perfectionism, particularly when maladaptive, negatively impacts the coping strategies employed by teachers. Teachers with higher levels of perfectionism were found to adopt less adaptive coping styles, which, in turn, contributed to a more external locus of control. This reinforces the idea that perfectionism, although often associated with high standards and motivation, can have negative consequences if it leads to rigid self-standards and an inability to effectively manage stress.

Interestingly, the study did not find a direct effect of perfectionism on locus of control, suggesting that the relationship between these two variables is mediated by coping strategies. This finding underscores the complexity of the relationship between personality traits and control beliefs, and the importance of considering intermediate psychological processes like coping strategies. By identifying maladaptive coping mechanisms, this study contributes to a better understanding of how perfectionism can shape teachers' locus of control through indirect pathways, rather than a direct cause-and-effect relationship.

However, these conclusions must be interpreted with considerable caution. The structural equation model demonstrated poor fit to the data, raising serious concerns about model validity and the robustness of the findings. The poor fit may reflect model misspecification, omitted variables, measurement issues, or non-linear relationships not captured by the current framework. As such, the results should be regarded as exploratory and hypothesis-generating rather than confirmatory. Despite these limitations, the study contributes to the literature by highlighting the potential importance of coping strategies as a psychological mechanism linking perfectionism to control beliefs among teachers. It also underscores the need for a more nuanced understanding of how personality traits, coping processes, and contextual factors interact to shape teachers' psychological functioning and well-being.

The implications of these findings are both theoretical and practical. From a theoretical standpoint, the study extends existing models of stress and coping by integrating perfectionism and locus of control within a mediation framework, offering a more nuanced understanding of the psychological mechanisms at play. From a practical perspective, the study suggests that interventions aimed at improving teachers' coping strategies could help mitigate the negative effects of perfectionism. Specifically, professional development programs and psychological interventions focusing on promoting adaptive coping strategies -such as problem-solving, cognitive reappraisal, and seeking social support-, enhancing emotional regulation, and fostering internal locus of control could be beneficial in improving teachers' well-being and job satisfaction. However, such interventions should be designed and evaluated with caution, and should be informed by further research that addresses the methodological limitations of the current study.

Future research should continue to explore the role of coping styles as mediators in other teacher populations and educational contexts, particularly in settings where teachers face different kinds of stressors and demands. Additionally, longitudinal and experimental studies would provide further insights into how perfectionism and coping strategies interact over time to shape teachers' psychological outcomes and job performance and to establish causal relationships and test the effectiveness of interventions. Future research should also prioritize model refinement and validation, including exploratory factor analysis, alternative model specifications, and replication in independent samples. Additionally, research should adopt a more ecological approach, examining how individual-level psychological variables interact with school-level and system-level factors to shape teachers' professional functioning.

Overall, this study highlights the importance of addressing perfectionism and its impact on teachers' psychological functioning, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions that focus not only on managing perfectionistic tendencies but also on fostering effective coping strategies to improve teachers' locus of control and overall well-being. In conclusion, while this study provides preliminary insights into the complex relationships among perfectionism, coping strategies, and locus of control, the findings remain tentative and require further validation. Researchers and practitioners should exercise caution in interpreting and applying these results until more robust evidence is available.

11 LIMITATIONS

This study has several important limitations that must be acknowledged. First and most critically, the structural equation model demonstrated poor fit to the data (CFI = 0.494, TLI = 0.419, RMSEA = 0.213, SRMR = 0.180), falling well below conventional standards for acceptable model fit. This severely limits the validity and generalizability of the findings. The poor fit may indicate model misspecification, omitted variables, measurement error, or non-linear relationships not captured by the current framework. As a result, all conclusions drawn from the model should be considered preliminary and exploratory, and replication with refined models and independent samples is essential.

Second, the cross-sectional design prevents causal conclusions about the relationships between perfectionism, coping strategies, and locus of control. While the mediation model implies a causal sequence, the data do not allow us to rule out reverse causality (e.g., external locus of control leading to maladaptive coping, which in turn reinforces perfectionism) or reciprocal relationships among the variables. Longitudinal or experimental designs are needed to establish temporal precedence and causal direction.

Third, the findings are based on a sample of primary school teachers in a specific regional context, limiting generalizability to other teacher populations (e.g., secondary or university teachers), educational settings (e.g., private vs. public schools), or cultural contexts. Teachers in different settings may face different stressors, organizational cultures, and support systems, which could alter the relationships among perfectionism, coping, and locus of control.

Fourth, the study only considered coping strategies as a mediator without exploring other potential factors, such as teacher self-efficacy, burnout, social support, organizational climate, or educational policies. These omitted variables may confound or moderate the observed relationships, and their inclusion could improve model fit and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms at play.

Fifth, the use of self-reported measures may introduce response biases, including social desirability bias, recall bias, and common method variance. Teachers may underreport maladaptive coping strategies or over report internal locus of control due to social desirability concerns. Future research should incorporate multi-method assessments (e.g., peer ratings,

behavioral observations, physiological measures) to triangulate findings and reduce measurement bias.

Sixth, the study did not account for contextual and organizational factors that may shape teachers' perfectionism, coping, and locus of control. School-level variables such as administrative support, workload, class size, student behavior, and accountability pressures may moderate the relationships examined in this study. Multilevel modeling or mixed-methods approaches could provide richer insights into how individual and organizational factors interact.

Finally, the negative coefficient for the coping strategies → locus of control path (β = −0.806) requires careful interpretation. While we have interpreted this as reflecting the use of maladaptive coping strategies, the direction and magnitude of this effect may also reflect measurement issues, scale coding, or conceptual ambiguities in how coping strategies were operationalized. Future research should use more differentiated measures of adaptive vs. maladaptive coping to clarify this relationship.

In summary, while this study provides preliminary evidence for the mediating role of coping strategies in the relationship between perfectionism and locus of control, the findings must be interpreted with considerable caution due to poor model fit, cross-sectional design, limited generalizability, and potential confounding variables. Replication and refinement of the model in future research are essential before drawing firm conclusions or implementing interventions based on these results.

12 RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION ETHICS STATEMENT

This study complies with research and publication ethics and has been approved and approved by the Graduate Studies Committee of the University of Sistan and Baluchestan.

13 CONTRIBUTION RATES OF AUTHORS TO THE ARTICLE

This article had two authors and derived from the master's thesis conducted by the first author under the supervision of the second author.

14 STATEMENT OF INTEREST

The authors were solely responsible for study design, data collection, analysis and interpretation, and manuscript preparation

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