

Research Paper

The Impact of Imposter Syndrome and Perfectionism on Aging Professionals and Comparing with the Early Career Professionals

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ABSTRACT

This study looks at how imposter syndrome and perfectionism affect teachers, focusing on differences between those early in their careers (less than 5 years of experience) and more experienced teachers (5 or more years). The goal was to understand how these feelings and traits vary with experience and how they might impact teachers' well-being and performance. A total of 170 teachers participated in the study by completing two surveys: the Clance Imposter Syndrome Scale (CISS) and the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS). The results were analysed using statistical tests to compare the two groups. It was found that early-career teachers experience significantly higher levels of imposter syndrome compared to experienced teachers. However, there was no major difference in perfectionism levels, showing that perfectionism is similar across career stages. These findings suggest that newer teachers may struggle more with self-doubt and feelings of not being good enough, likely due to less confidence and experience. In contrast, perfectionism seems to be a personality trait that does not change much over time.

Keywords: *Imposter Syndrome, Perfectionism, Early career adults, Aging professionals*

Imposter syndrome and perfectionism are significant psychological factors that impact many professionals' mental health, well-being, and job performance over the course of their careers. Imposter syndrome first identified by Clance and Imes (1978), is a psychological phenomenon characterized by persistent self-doubt and a fear of being seen as a fraud, despite clear achievements and demonstrated competence. Individuals experiencing imposter syndrome may feel out of place in their roles or believe that their success is unearned, leading to ongoing emotional distress and anxiety. In contrast, perfectionism involves setting unattainably high standards and focusing excessively on personal flaws or perceived failures, often with harsh self-criticism (Bravata et al., 2020). These two traits frequently intersect, as perfectionistic tendencies can heighten feelings of inadequacy and reinforce imposter syndrome. While both have been extensively studied in younger professionals early in their careers, their effects on aging professionals—who encounter different challenges and pressures—are less understood, highlighting a gap in our understanding of how these traits may develop or change over a career.

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Received: November 19, 2024; Revision Received: March 27, 2026; Accepted: March 31, 2026

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Early career professionals, especially those just beginning in the workforce, face unique challenges that can amplify feelings of imposter syndrome and tendencies toward perfectionism. The shift from academic settings to professional roles can be stressful, as new professionals may feel uncertain about their skills and readiness (Vergauwe et al., 2015). They often face job insecurity, pressure to build a professional identity, and a strong desire to prove their value to themselves and others. This environment can contribute to imposter syndrome, with younger professionals feeling as if they don't belong in their roles and fearing exposure as unqualified. Additionally, the high expectations and competitiveness of many entry-level jobs can promote perfectionistic standards. While perfectionism can sometimes be motivating, it can also lead to overachievement and mental health struggles, including burnout and self-criticism. Younger professionals may frequently compare themselves to their peers or to more experienced colleagues, which can further intensify feelings of inadequacy and pressure to perform at an exceptional level (Shannon et al., 2019).

Aging professionals encounter a unique set of career-related challenges. Many feel increased pressure to uphold high performance standards amid evolving technology, changing industry norms, and the rise of younger talent. Concerns about job relevance may arise, as some worry that their skills and knowledge are becoming outdated or less valued. Age-related stereotypes can also fuel imposter syndrome, leading older professionals to feel pressured to “prove” themselves in environments where youth and adaptability are often prioritized. This fear of seeming obsolete or “past their prime” can intensify self-doubt, even in those with substantial achievements (Neureiter & Traut-Mattausch, 2016). For aging professionals, perfectionism may manifest differently, focusing on maintaining consistent performance or establishing a meaningful legacy. Unlike younger workers, whose perfectionism often stems from a desire to make their mark, older professionals may feel compelled to preserve their standing or leave a positive legacy. This can lead to stress and self-criticism if they perceive any shortfall in their performance.

Comparing early-career and aging professionals offers valuable insight into how imposter syndrome and perfectionism develop and change over time. Younger professionals may experience imposter syndrome more acutely due to the novelty of their roles and a lack of experience to reinforce their confidence. For aging professionals, imposter syndrome may re-emerge or shift, particularly when they face the need to adapt to new technologies or work alongside younger colleagues who might be seen as more adaptable or innovative. Perfectionism also manifests differently, with younger professionals often focused on achieving idealized standards, while older professionals may focus on preserving their accomplishments and credibility. This comparison reveals the evolving nature of imposter syndrome and perfectionism, underscoring the importance of understanding how these factors affect professionals at various career stages (Mak et al., 2019).

Workplace culture and organizational expectations can significantly influence how imposter syndrome and perfectionism affect professionals of various ages. Younger professionals may feel intense pressure to conform to fast-paced, high-stakes environments where high standards and close scrutiny of achievements are common. In contrast, aging professionals might encounter stereotypes linking age with limited adaptability or resistance to change, potentially fostering feelings of inadequacy. Recognizing these generational and organizational influences is crucial for creating supportive work environments that address the unique psychological needs of both age groups.

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Imposter syndrome and perfectionism can have significant impacts on professionals, affecting mental health, job satisfaction, and career growth. These traits are linked to anxiety, depression, and burnout, which not only hinder productivity and job performance but also diminish overall career fulfillment. Among early-career professionals, imposter syndrome and perfectionism may discourage risk-taking, self-advocacy, and pursuing promotions, thereby limiting career advancement. For aging professionals, these traits can create obstacles in adapting to evolving work environments or exploring new career paths, potentially resulting in job dissatisfaction or premature burnout.

The lack of in-depth research on how imposter syndrome and perfectionism affect professionals at different career stages highlights a key gap in the literature. By examining these traits among both early-career and aging professionals, this study seeks to provide insights that can enhance workplace practices, mental health programs, and career counseling approaches. Adapting interventions to meet the specific needs of each group may help alleviate the negative impacts of imposter syndrome and perfectionism. For instance, mentorship programs could support younger professionals in building confidence, while workshops focused on adaptability and skill development could benefit older professionals. Future research could further investigate how organizational support, mentorship, and peer networks reduce these psychological challenges, fostering better mental health and career satisfaction across all career stages.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Klans, H., & Ames, R. (1978). The relationship between Imposter Syndrome, perfectionism, and early maladaptive schemas in female students. Findings indicate that Imposter Syndrome is significantly associated with unhealthy perfectionism and maladaptive schemas. Despite achieving external success, students often struggle to internalize their accomplishments. Perfectionistic traits—such as excessive concern over mistakes, self-doubt, and pressure from parental expectations—tend to intensify Imposter Syndrome. Furthermore, maladaptive schemas, such as feelings of inadequacy, social isolation, and emotional deprivation, frequently appear among these students. These combined factors reinforce a sense of self-doubt, leading students to feel as though their success is unearned or merely an act.

Holden, C. L., Wright, L. E., Herring, A. M., & Sims, P. L. (2021). Relationships between imposter syndrome, perfectionism, and stress in first- and continuing-generation college students. This study examines imposter syndrome, perfectionism, and stress among 388 college students, including 184 (47.4%) first-generation students. Results indicate similar levels of imposter syndrome and stress between both groups, though imposter syndrome is more strongly associated with stress in first-generation students. Socially prescribed perfectionism significantly correlates with both imposter syndrome and stress for each group. Findings underscore the impact of these factors on mental health and the importance of retention-focused interventions for students.

Pakozdy, C., Askew, J., Dyer, J., Gately, P., Martin, L., Mavor, K. I., & Brown, G. R. (2024). Imposter phenomenon, self-efficacy, perfectionism, and happiness in university students. This study examined the relationship between imposter phenomenon (IP), self-efficacy, maladaptive perfectionism, and happiness in 261 university students, considering gender differences. Results showed that IP negatively correlated with self-efficacy and happiness, and positively with maladaptive perfectionism. Females scored higher on both IP

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and perfectionism compared to males. The negative impact of perfectionism on happiness was fully mediated by IP. The findings suggest that addressing IP in interventions could enhance student well-being and reduce maladaptive perfectionism.

Iwenofu, C., Dupont, R., & Kaczurkin, A. (2024). Hope and trait anxiety as mediators of the relationship between imposter syndrome and perfectionism. This study investigated how hope influences imposter syndrome and perfectionism in 271 undergraduate students and whether trait anxiety mediates these relationships. Results revealed that higher levels of hope were associated with lower levels of imposter syndrome and perfectionism. Additionally, trait anxiety was found to mediate these relationships, with increased hope leading to lower anxiety, which in turn reduced imposter syndrome and perfectionism. These findings suggest that increasing hope may reduce anxiety and alleviate these maladaptive traits, promoting better mental health.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Sampling has been selected through convenience sampling method from various parts of India. 101 adults met the eligibility criteria for participation. Adults from the age group above 20 who are working in teaching profession were only taken in the study, both males and females were included in the study.

Inclusive and Exclusive Criteria

Inclusive Criteria:

In this study we include,

- Targeted population: between the age group above 20 years.
- Gender: both male and female subjects were selected.
- Designation: all the subjects are working and retired adults.
- Ethnicity: urban and rural population.
- Adults in various parts of India.
- Adults who were willing to take part in the study.

Exclusive Criteria:

- Children below 20 years, and adults who are not in teaching profession.
- Subjects who were not willing to participate.

Research design

- The current study uses quantitative approach.
- It is a comparative study.
- It is a quantitative research frame work.
- The statistical tool like t test is been used.

Quantitative Study:

It focuses on the numerical form of data that is in the form of statistics and percentages.

Sample:

Our target population of adult's ranges from the age group of above 20 years. A total of 101 samples with participants providing informed consent. I used Clance Imposter Scale and

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Multidimensional Perfectionism Questionnaire. The samples were collected from in and around India. Convenience sampling method was adopted in this study.

Instruments

1. Clance Imposter Phenomenon Scale: Clance Imposter Phenomenon Scale (CIPS) is a 20-item questioner with each consisting of 5 parameters showing severity from none to very severe levels (1-5). The twenty component scores are then added to yield a global CIPS score in the range of 20 to 100; the higher the score is, the worse the imposter syndrome. All symptoms of imposter syndrome were evaluated on basis of these parameters. The data collected was entered and analysed on SPSS v.20.
2. Multidimensional Perfectionism Questionnaire (Frost, 1990): The FMPS (Frost et al., 1990) is a 35-item questionnaire that assesses multiple aspects of perfectionism. The MPS contains six subscales: concern over mistakes, doubts about actions, personal standards, parental expectations, parental criticism and organisation. The internal consistency of the subscales range from 0.77 to 0.93 and is 0.90 for the total perfectionism score (Frost et al., 1990).

Data collection and presentation

The questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms to the academic professional informants. The informants were informed of the study's objectives. Participants provided informed consent before proceeding with the survey, ensuring that they were aware of their voluntary involvement and the confidentiality of their responses. The survey was available for one week, during which time informants completed the questionnaire at their convenience. Responses were recorded anonymously to protect informants' identities and to encourage honest, unbiased answers. This anonymity allowed for a more open and reflective contribution from participants regarding their job satisfaction. After the data collection period, the responses were collated and prepared for further analysis to understand the impact of imposter syndrome in teaching professionals and their job satisfaction in India.

RESULTS

The primary objective of this study was to examine the relationship between imposter syndrome and perfectionism across different levels of teaching experience. To achieve this, the Clance Imposter Syndrome Scale (CISS) and the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS) were administered to a sample of 170 teaching professionals. The data was analyzed using both normality tests and independent t-tests to assess the differences between early-career (less than 5 years) and experienced teachers (5 or more years).

Normality Tests

Prior to performing the statistical analysis, normality tests were conducted on both the imposter syndrome and perfectionism scores to ensure that the data met the assumptions for conducting parametric tests. The Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests were used for normality assessment.

The normality tests revealed that the imposter syndrome scores significantly deviated from normality, as indicated by a significant result in both the Shapiro-Wilk test ($W = 0.965$, $p < 0.001$) and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test ($D = 0.110$, $p < 0.001$).

Similarly, perfectionism scores also showed significant deviations from normality with the Shapiro-Wilk test ($W = 0.972$, $p = 0.002$) and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test ($D = 0.101$, $p <$

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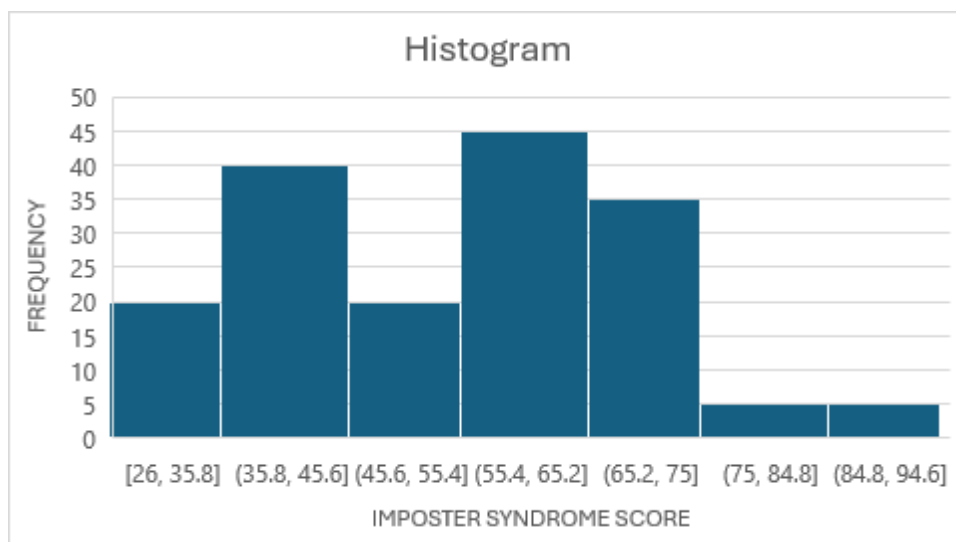
0.001). These results indicate that the data was not perfectly normal, though it could still be used for parametric testing, given that the violation was not extreme (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

Histograms for both imposter syndrome and perfectionism were generated, which further confirmed the deviations from normality.

Histograms for Normality Check:

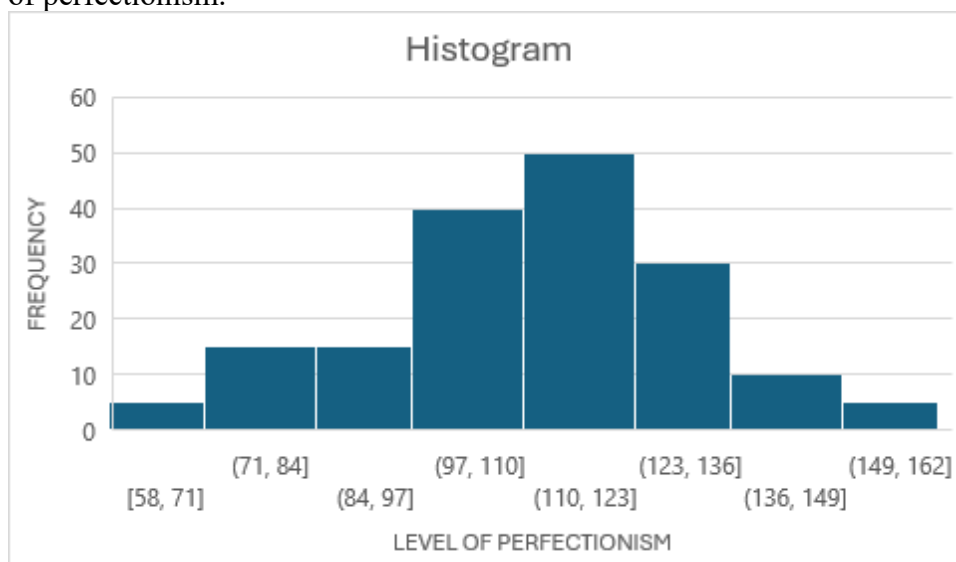
1. Imposter Syndrome Scores Histogram

It shows the distribution of imposter syndrome scores. The histogram reveals a slight skew to the right, indicating that most respondents scored at the higher end of the imposter syndrome scale.



2. Perfectionism Scores Histogram-

It depicts the distribution of perfectionism scores. As with imposter syndrome, the distribution is skewed right, suggesting that most participants have moderate to high levels of perfectionism.



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Group Statistics

The group statistics for imposter syndrome scores are displayed in **Table 1**. Early-career teachers ($M = 57.37$, $SD = 15.46$) reported significantly higher imposter syndrome scores compared to experienced teachers ($M = 51.87$, $SD = 15.21$). An independent samples t-test was performed to compare the imposter syndrome scores between these two groups. The **Levene's Test for Equality of Variances** showed that the assumption of homogeneity of variance was met ($F = 1.232$, $p = 0.269$). The results of the t-test indicated a statistically significant difference in imposter syndrome scores between the two groups, $t(168) = -2.321$, $p = 0.022$, with early-career teachers reporting higher levels of imposter syndrome.

For perfectionism scores, as presented in **Table 1**, early-career teachers ($M = 109.21$, $SD = 23.90$) and experienced teachers ($M = 114.80$, $SD = 15.69$) did not show a significant difference in their perfectionism scores. The Levene's Test for Equality of Variances indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variance was violated ($F = 14.451$, $p < 0.001$). However, the t-test conducted with unequal variances revealed that the difference in perfectionism scores was not statistically significant, $t(162.957) = 1.834$, $p = 0.069$.

Table 1 Group Statistics for Imposter Syndrome and Perfectionism Scores

	Years of Exp	N	Mean	SD
Level of Imposter syndrome	Above 5 years	75	51.87	15.205
	Below 5 years	95	57.37	15.462
Perfectionism score	Above 5 years	75	114.80	15.688
	Below 5 years	95	109.21	23.896

Independent Samples t-test

An independent samples t-test was performed to compare the imposter syndrome and perfectionism scores between the two groups. The Levene's Test for Equality of Variances indicated that for Imposter Syndrome scores, the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met ($F = 1.232$, $p = 0.269$), whereas for Perfectionism scores, the assumption was violated ($F = 14.451$, $p < 0.001$).

For Imposter Syndrome scores, the t-test indicated a statistically significant difference, $t(168) = -2.321$, $p = 0.022$, with early-career teachers reporting higher levels of imposter syndrome. For Perfectionism scores, the t-test showed no statistically significant difference, $t(162.957) = 1.834$, $p = 0.069$, suggesting that early-career and experienced teachers reported similar levels of perfectionism despite the variance in their scores.

Table 2 Independent Samples t-test Levene's Test for Equality of Variances

		F	Sig	t	df	Sig(2-tailed)
Level of Imposter Syndrome	Equal Variance Assumed	1.232	.269	-2.321	168	.022
	Equal Variance not Assumed			-2.325	160.127	.021
Perfectionism Score	Equal Variance Assumed	14.451	.000	1.749	168	.082
				1.834	162.957	.069

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T-test for Equality of Means

Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
-5.502	2.371
-5.502	2.366
5.589	3.195
5.589	3.048

DISCUSSION

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the impact of imposter syndrome and perfectionism on experienced and early-career teachers, utilizing the Clance Imposter Syndrome Scale (CISS) and the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS). The results suggest notable differences in imposter syndrome scores between early-career and experienced teachers, while no significant differences were found in perfectionism scores. This section discusses these findings in relation to existing research and provides insight into their implications for the teaching profession.

Imposter Syndrome and Years of Experience

The study found that early-career teachers reported significantly higher levels of imposter syndrome compared to experienced teachers. This finding is consistent with previous research that has shown early-career professionals, particularly in high-stakes environments such as education, often feel less competent or deserving of their roles despite evidence of success (Hutchins & Rainbolt, 2017; Parkman, 2016). This phenomenon can be attributed to the transitional nature of early career stages, where teachers may face uncertainty, limited resources, and the challenges of establishing themselves in their roles. Research by Clance and Imes (1978) suggests that imposter syndrome is often associated with individuals who are in environments where they feel they do not meet the high expectations placed upon them, which aligns with the challenges faced by early-career teachers.

The significant difference observed between the groups indicates that while experience may provide confidence and mastery over teaching tasks, early-career teachers may still be grappling with feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt. It is noteworthy that the difference in imposter syndrome was modest (mean difference = 5.50), but still statistically significant, highlighting the importance of addressing imposter syndrome early on in a teacher's career. Interventions such as mentorship programs and peer support networks could be vital in reducing these feelings and promoting psychological well-being among early-career educators (Hutchins, Penney, & Sublett, 2018).

Perfectionism Across Career Stages

Contrary to expectations, the study did not find a significant difference in perfectionism scores between early-career and experienced teachers. This result is somewhat surprising, given that perfectionism is often thought to decrease with experience as individuals become more comfortable and confident in their roles (Stoeber & Otto, 2006). However, the findings are consistent with some previous studies suggesting that perfectionism may be a trait that persists across different stages of a career, particularly in professions where high standards are the norm, such as teaching (Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990).

The lack of significant difference could also be attributed to the multifaceted nature of perfectionism. The FMPS includes several dimensions of perfectionism, including concern over mistakes and the need for organization, both of which may remain influential regardless

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of experience. Additionally, teaching, as a profession that continuously demands improvement and adaptation, may create a persistent culture of striving for perfection, which could explain the stability in perfectionism scores across career stages (Frost et al., 1990).

Despite the lack of significant differences in perfectionism, the high levels of perfectionism reported by both groups may have implications for teacher well-being. Teachers with high perfectionism may be more susceptible to burnout, anxiety, and stress (Hutchins & Rainbolt, 2017), suggesting a need for interventions that address unrealistic expectations and foster a healthy work-life balance.

CONCLUSION

This study contributes to our understanding of how years of teaching experience influence imposter syndrome and perfectionism. The significant difference found in imposter syndrome scores suggests that early-career teachers are particularly vulnerable to feelings of self-doubt, highlighting the need for targeted support programs during the early stages of their careers. While perfectionism scores remained consistent across experience levels, both early-career and experienced teachers may benefit from interventions that promote adaptive perfectionism and reduce the risk of burnout. By providing appropriate psychological support, institutions can foster healthier, more resilient teachers who are better equipped to navigate the challenges of the teaching profession.

Implications

The findings of this study have several important implications for the teaching profession. First, the higher levels of imposter syndrome reported by early-career teachers underscore the need for targeted support mechanisms. Teachers in their early years may benefit from structured mentorship programs, peer networks, and professional development opportunities designed to enhance their sense of competence and reduce feelings of fraudulence. Such interventions could help foster a more supportive environment where new teachers feel valued and capable, which could in turn improve job satisfaction and retention rates (Hutchins, Penney, & Sublett, 2018).

Furthermore, although perfectionism did not vary significantly between groups, the persistence of high perfectionism across career stages suggests that addressing perfectionistic tendencies in teachers is crucial for overall mental health. Training programs focused on managing perfectionism, setting realistic goals, and coping with failure could help alleviate some of the stress and anxiety often associated with the profession (Stoeber & Otto, 2006).

Future research could further explore the intersection of imposter syndrome and perfectionism in teaching by examining how these factors interact with other variables, such as teaching efficacy, job satisfaction, and burnout. Longitudinal studies could provide insights into how imposter syndrome and perfectionism evolve over time, particularly as teachers gain more experience and encounter different professional challenges. Additionally, investigating potential cultural or institutional factors that may influence these psychological traits could lead to more tailored interventions for teachers in diverse contexts.

Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the experiences of early-career and experienced teachers, there are several limitations to consider. First, the study relied on self-

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reported data, which may be subject to social desirability bias or inaccuracies in self-assessment. Future studies could incorporate observational methods or triangulate self-reported data with other forms of assessment (e.g., supervisor evaluations, student feedback). Additionally, the sample size of 170 participants, while adequate for this analysis, may not fully capture the diversity of the teaching population, particularly across different countries or educational settings. Future studies could explore how these psychological factors manifest in different cultural contexts or within specific subject areas.

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Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Deetchita, D. & Bhuyan, B. (2026). The Impact of Imposter Syndrome and Perfectionism on Aging Professionals and Comparing with the Early Career Professionals. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 14(1), 3485-3495. DIP:18.01.348.20261401, DOI:10.25215/1401.348