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The Relationship Between Personality Traits and Academic Success

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Abstract:

This article examines the influence of personality traits and individual differences on academic success at a Colombian university. Academic success is defined as the opportunity to complete undergraduate courses within the stipulated period; individual differences are the unique characteristics distinguishing each person; and personality traits are habitual patterns of behaviour, thought, and emotion. Data were collected via an online survey administered to 502 engineering undergraduates. The findings highlight the significant role of abstractedness and perfectionism in academic performance, with the relationship notably pronounced among male students. Those with higher abstractedness and organizational traits tend to achieve better grades, suggesting that these personality dimensions, potentially modulated by sex, are associated with academic success (Mateus et al., 2021).

Keywords: Personality, Traits, Individual differences, behaviour, etc

1. Introduction

Researchers have long sought to comprehend the factors influencing academic achievement by studying the relationship between personality traits and academic success (Jude Akomolafe, 2013). Accordingly, the present work explores the linkage between various personality traits and measures of academic success.

The direct association between personality and academic performance has attracted investigative efforts across different educational settings. A growing body of literature

attempts to understand how the fundamental personality traits affect academic accomplishment. Yet, the research is characterized by contradictory findings, often due to sampling limitations and measurement procedures. By identifying mechanisms through which personality exerts influence on academic outcomes, it becomes plausible to propose that certain character traits can determine success, while others prove less advantageous. Such analysis also offers a framework to direct efforts towards more effective learning strategies during a student's course of study (Mateus et al., 2021). Reflecting on these issues underscores the pragmatic importance of studying personality traits in relation to academic success.

Considering that academic outcomes rely on numerous individual factors, it is prudent not to overstate the predictive potency of personality alone. The discussion thus examines the manner in which personality relates to academic success and the consequent implications, while acknowledging the complex interplay of factors shaping academic trajectories.

2. Theoretical Framework

The link between personality traits and academic performance is a longstanding concern for psychologists and educators. Numerous theories have attempted to explain the processes behind the relationship, drawing on both psychological and educational perspectives. Understanding the role of personality is particularly significant in light of modern educational challenges, such as high failure rates, dropout levels, and student demotivation. Consequently, an examination of personality traits in relation to academic success provides a valuable framework from which to address these issues (Mateus et al., 2021) (Jude Akomolafe, 2013) (Ali Raza & Shah, 2017).

3. Defining Personality Traits

Personality traits are constructs that refer to characteristic patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that reveal an individual's consistent response to a variety of situations. They not only describe general tendencies but also distinguish individuals across different dimensions. Several frameworks have been proposed to identify and quantify personality traits through empirical inquiry, of which the Big Five model has become the dominant structure in psychology (Ali Raza & Shah, 2017). The Big Five traits—Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness to Experience—exhibit broad societal and cross-cultural support and offer a comprehensive classification characteristic of human personality.

4. Measuring Academic Success

The significance of academic success is evident in its use for determining readiness before advancing to a new course level (Ali Raza & Shah, 2017). Influential factors range from intelligence to holiday-time exercise or part-time student employment (Jude Akomolafe, 2013). Nevertheless, the question of the relationship between personality traits and

students' academic success is frequently asked in classrooms and across educational institutions. Therefore, academic success must be quantified to provide researchers with suitable data backing or opposing a hypothesis. It can be measured using the extent to which academic skills and competences present in individuals predict the possibility that they are more likely to complete an academic program successfully (Kay Bevars, 1986). Researchers have used various indicators to classify academic success, most notably Grade Point Average (GPA), that measures the average of a student's performance in all subjects tried during schooling on the basis of a scale of values, educational attainment on the basis of the year of progress a student has accomplished, retention/continuation that expresses the repeat or dropout decision of a student, and honours/awards granted to students for good academic performance. The most accepted indicator is GPA since it helps reduce the variability that exists in the educational cycle among students.

5. Personality Traits and Academic Performance

The examination of personality traits as influencing factors on academic success has gained increased attention (Mateus et al., 2021). Various studies have demonstrated that personality traits provide significant insight into academic outcomes. Psychometric scores of students have been correlated with personality characteristics, vocational interests, and academic achievement. Certain associations underscore a relationship between personality, academic performance, stress levels, and sleep patterns; notably, neuroticism appears to adversely affect stress, sleep quality, and overall academic performance. Conversely, some investigations have reported no significant correlations between personality scores and academic results, nor between sex or age and academic success. Among the widely examined frameworks, the Big Five personality traits—Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism—serve as a primary model. Research consistently identifies Conscientiousness as the most robust predictor of academic achievement, attributed to attributes such as discipline, organization, and achievement orientation (Asghar Hayat et al., 2020). However, other dimensions of the model exhibit varied and generally weaker relationships with academic performance. Although sex differences in personality traits and academic outcomes are observed, they do not translate into systematic variations in academic achievement, suggesting that personality and motivational factors partially mediate the association between gender and academic success.

5.1. Conscientiousness

Conscientiousness demonstrates a consistent and strong positive correlation with college performance (Corazzini et al., 2021). Building upon intensive research on the subject, individuals high in conscientiousness tend to be disciplined and organized, which enhances the ability to study effectively through practices such as self-discipline, pursuit of

excellence, and ability to motivate oneself (L. Duckworth et al., 2012). Measured indicators of conscientiousness align closely with these conceptualizations, encompassing self-perceptions of intellectual competence and diligence, regulatory knowledge, endorsement of conventional norms, and perceived control over one's environment (Roemer et al., 2022). Conscientiousness is characterized by dependability, orderliness, cautiousness, and diligence, dimensions collectively associated with high academic achievement. Traits linked to conscientiousness—such as prioritization, punctuality, planning, persistent effort, forethought, and self-control—contribute to its positive association with college retention and academic performance. Effortful persistence, a qualified manifestation of conscientiousness, also emerges as a predictor of better grades. Notably, the influence of conscientiousness on academic grades appears largely independent of cognitive competencies, suggesting additional underlying mechanisms beyond intellectual aptitude.

5.2. Openness to Experience

The Big Five personality trait of openness to experience includes imagination, curiosity, creativity, and a preference for variety, all facilitating academic performance through various mechanisms. Individuals high in openness demonstrate divergent thinking and generate novel ideas, engaging in academic activities with enthusiasm and intrinsic motivation. This drive for enjoyment and curiosity propels them toward challenging tasks, fostering skill acquisition. Conversely, those low in openness favor consistency and familiarity, which may hinder academic success as they often shy away from difficult tasks and deep learning strategies. Empirical studies show that openness correlates positively with academic achievement and predicts performance improvements over time, particularly in conjunction with conscientiousness, enhancing a deep learning approach that benefits academic outcomes. (Roemer et al., 2022)

5.3. Extraversion

Extraversion is a key personality dimension in the Big Five framework, notably affecting university students' social integration and academic outcomes. It is linked to larger social networks and increased social engagement, yet its impact on academic performance remains unclear. Studies of Italian freshmen indicate a weak and occasionally negative correlation with grades, hinting that extroverts may focus more on social activities than academics. Additionally, some research suggests that extraverts are more responsive to external motivators like rewards, which does not necessarily enhance intrinsic motivation for learning. Despite these complexities, extraversion plays a crucial role in shaping social capital and performance in education. High levels of extraversion are associated with increased sociability, reflecting variations in social skills, friendship networks, and susceptibility to social influence across different developmental and cultural contexts. Thus,

extraversion is an important factor in university success, requiring a nuanced interpretation within the academic landscape. (Jusri & Lechner, 2023)(Corazzini et al., 2021)

5.4. Agreeableness

Agreeableness comprises traits of altruism, cooperation, and pro-social behaviours. Individuals with high levels of agreeableness tend to be empathetic and eager to assist others. There is limited evidence for a direct effect of high agreeableness on academic success—but consider the typical behaviours exhibited by a student possessing this attribute. Such students are cooperative in group projects, pleasant to schoolmates, and respectful towards teachers. These dispositions can improve classroom interaction and, by extension, learning outcomes. One Australian study found that students with high agreeableness also reported greater satisfaction with their academic experience, which in turn predicted success (Roemer et al., 2022). Systematic investigations of the broader impact of agreeableness on academic success have not yet been conducted, but it is plausible that the disposition exerts an indirect effect.

5.5. Neuroticism

Many modern theories of motivation include stress among the negative emotional effects that can adversely affect voluntary behaviors (Ali Raza & Shah, 2017). Individuals with high neuroticism tend to exhibit psychological distress and unrealistic thoughts without necessarily presenting a clinical disorder or risk of psychiatric diagnosis. Conversely, those with low neuroticism are emotionally stable, calm, and better equipped to manage stress (Rehman Ghazi et al., 2013). University students with elevated levels of neuroticism are frequently at heightened risk of academic failure and are prone to experiencing considerable stress (de la Fuente et al., 2021).

6. Influence of Personality on Learning Styles

Academic success is a complex concept that depends on a variety of factors; personality traits tend to be an important one (Luqman Siddiquei & Khalid, 2018). Recent research alludes to learning style and personality having a symbiotic relationship, as style preferences are often partially guided by an individual's personality traits (Pornsakulvanich et al., 2014). Research has also confirmed that personality traits influence a learner's ability to perform within certain environments, which in turn can influence how well various learning style strategies are adopted. An earlier summary of workplace literature asserts that it is too risky to generalize learning styles at a group level. This is because learning style is strongly related to personality traits, which often cause individual variability.

7. Impact of Personality Traits on Study Habits

Study habits are vital for academic success in higher education, encompassing individual study style, consistency, timing, study groups, duration, study environment, and attention during study time. Different methods lead to varying success levels for students. Stress and

anxiety may hinder performance, while academic training and good study habits enhance success. Personality traits impact study approaches, consistency, and focus. This research examines how personality traits affect study habits and their contribution to academic achievement, providing a framework that links previous studies. Empirical research shows significant ties between personality traits and study habits. According to pathways and Big Five models, study habits relate to personality traits, influencing academic achievement. Procrastination shows a negative link with conscientiousness and a positive link with extraversion. The relationship between academic performance and study habits varies based on how academic success is measured. (Ali Raza & Shah, 2017)(Mateus et al., 2021)

8. Personality Traits and Motivation

Motivation consists of the processes that direct energy toward achieving goals. Students exhibit various motivation patterns that influence learning and academic success. The main types are intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation drives behaviors for personal enjoyment; students with this motivation show enthusiasm for learning and respond positively to feedback. In contrast, extrinsic motivation is fueled by the pursuit of external rewards like grades. Research highlights the link between motivation and personality traits, with conscientiousness being the strongest predictor of academic motivation, related to productivity and discipline. Extraversion also predicts extrinsic motivation, as extraverts seek approval from others, while neuroticism negatively impacts motivation due to low self-confidence and self-esteem. (Ali Raza & Shah, 2017)

9. Social Interactions and Academic Success

Personality traits play a crucial role in students' social interactions during transitions to new institutions, impacting academic motivation and retention through the quality of their social networks. The Big Five personality traits, especially extraversion, are key to social integration. Students from lower social classes tend to form fewer friendships than their more privileged counterparts but enjoy more diverse networks with faculty and peers. These social interactions can indirectly affect academic success, as social networks create opportunities for collaborative learning, emotional support, and academic identification. Close friendships at university lead to higher motivational scores, academic resilience, and future aspirations. Personality traits influence social integration: extraversion boosts social competence, openness aids transitions, and agreeableness fosters new friendships. High levels of openness and agreeableness positively correlate with support from staff and course engagement, while neuroticism impedes social integration. Research on 333 Nigerian secondary-school students highlights that character and personality traits significantly predict academic performance. Certain trait combinations lead to varying levels of achievement. Influenced by social norms and environmental factors during transitional years, personality traits are valuable but imperfect indicators of educational success. Both

character and intelligence contribute to changes in student performance, suggesting that a combination of these elements provides a fuller understanding of future academic achievement. (Jusri & Lechner, 2023)(Jude Akomolafe, 2013)

10. Cultural Influences on Personality and Academics

Culture influences individuals' temperament and academic behavior. In some East Asian cultures, following social norms can restrict personality expression. Shee-Tou (2017) proposed that personality development is culturally constructed, meaning personality is, at least to some extent, culturally relative. The influence of culture on personality traits extends to academic expectations, as different societies place varying emphasis on educational success. Cultural context thereby shapes not only personality but also the academic environment in which individuals operate (Mateus et al., 2021).

11. Gender Differences in Personality and Academic Outcomes

The link between academic performance and personality traits is well documented, providing valuable insights, especially when considering gender. Personality predicts educational attainment, evident in the association between traits and grades from primary school to university. This connection is influenced by personality's impact on motivation, goals, and learning strategies. Gender differences are noted in the Big Five traits: females score higher in neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, while males score higher in openness to experience. Neuroticism negatively impacts achievement for both genders, and extraversion's effect is mixed. Females' higher achievement is linked to their greater conscientiousness and exam strategies. The relationship between openness and academic success remains debated, with measurement key to understanding it. Conscientiousness is consistently associated with academic success, while agreeableness presents mixed results. (Mateus et al., 2021)(Jude Akomolafe, 2013)

12. Future Research Directions

The literature clearly shows personality traits impact academic performance through the Big Five model, yet questions about the mechanisms, boundary conditions, and context-specific influences linger. Future research can fill these gaps by focusing on four main objectives:

- (a) Elucidate mechanisms. More evidence on mediators is needed, particularly in motivational, cognitive, behavioral, and social processes. Refining the understanding of academic motivation could yield valuable insights.
- (b) Uncover contingencies. Little empirical attention has been given to factors that influence the relationship between traits and performance. Age-related moderators are crucial, as personality effects are minimal in preschool but increase during adolescence. The rise of online education also requires examination due to new instructional and assessment methods.

(c) Clarify heterogeneity. Existing summaries show considerable variability in personality-performance relationships, especially regarding openness and agreeableness, indicating a need for further moderator analyses. Notably, differences across educational levels have been overlooked and require more scrutiny.

(d) Enhance operationalisation. The reliance on the Big Five and GPA neglects other valid measures, suggesting a need for research across varied student populations. Exploring emerging personality constructs could yield intriguing insights, as modern theories promote a more complex understanding of human nature that goes beyond five dimensions.

Addressing these objectives will deepen understanding of how personality affects academic performance, identifying conditions where individual traits enhance assessment, selection, and counseling. In conclusion, personality traits significantly influence academic success by shaping behavior. However, the lack of universal personality traits illustrates the substantial impact of contextual factors alongside individual differences. Academic outcomes are thus a complex interplay of various dispositional and situational influences rather than merely results of stable individual attributes. (Ali Raza & Shah, 2017)(Mateus et al., 2021)(Jude Akomolafe, 2013)

13. Practical Implications for Educators

Understanding the links between personality traits and academic success aids in designing educational strategies that cater to individual differences, enhancing student engagement and achievement. Research indicates that personality dimensions influence motivation, engagement, goal-setting, and self-regulation, impacting academic outcomes. The Big Five framework can provide insights into trait-specific effects, guiding supportive instructional approaches. Integrating personality assessments into education aligns with theories that stress individual and situational factors in learning. These assessments help educators customize instruction to fit students' traits. Conscientiousness, marked by impulse control and dependability, is consistently linked to better academic performance, forming a basis for effective educational strategies. Other traits may have varying influences, underscoring the need for adaptable approaches. Overall, basing interventions on personality research enables institutions to enhance student achievement and address maladjustment, promoting academic and social success. Utilizing personality-informed strategies allows for tailored professional practices to meet diverse student needs rather than oversimplifying categories. Adopting the Big Five framework in education supports the use of established models, highlighting the relevance of personality dimensions in academic settings. (Moreira et al., 2020)(J. Jackson, 2011)

14. Conclusion

Exploration of the relationship between personality traits and academic success reveals intricate interplay shaping educational outcomes. The Big Five personality traits—

conscientiousness, openness to experience, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism—are key in analyzing these linkages. Conscientiousness is the primary predictor of academic achievement, linked to organization and responsibility. Openness enhances creativity and intellectual engagement, enriching learning processes. Extraversion has mixed effects; while social inclination aids collaborative learning, excessive sociability may distract from studies. Agreeableness influences cooperation in group projects and classroom dynamics, fostering a harmonious environment. In contrast, neuroticism can impede performance due to stress and anxiety affecting study effectiveness. Personality shapes learning styles and motivation; conscientious individuals prefer structured approaches, while open individuals seek exploratory learning. Extroverts leverage peer networks for academic opportunities. Cultural settings and gender differences make these relationships dynamic, mediating the traits' academic influence. Ongoing research is needed to address methodological limitations and incorporate diverse perspectives to clarify personality's role. Practitioners recognizing these dynamics can develop strategies that accommodate individual dispositions, promoting scholastic progress across personalities. (Mateus et al., 2021)(Corazzini et al., 2021)

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