

Personality Traits, Emotional Intelligence and Academic Achievements of University Students

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To cite this article:

Yoke Theing Chen, Chooi Seong Lai. Personality Traits, Emotional Intelligence and Academic Achievements of University Students.

American Journal of Applied Psychology. Special Issue: Psychology of University Students.

Vol. 4, No. 3-1, 2015, pp. 39-44. doi: 10.11648/j.ajap.s.2015040301.17

Abstract: This research investigated the relationships between personality traits, emotional intelligence and academic achievements among 160 university students in Malaysia. Big Five Inventory (BFI) was used to measure the five dimensions of personality traits - extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, openness; Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale (SEIS) was used to measure emotional intelligence and students' academic achievement was measured by Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA). Bivariate analysis using Pearson Correlation method indicated that extraversion ($r=.311, p<.05$), agreeableness ($r=.378, p<.05$), conscientiousness ($r=.315, p<.05$) and openness ($r=.497, p<.05$) were positively and significantly correlated with emotional intelligence. Neuroticism ($r=-.303, p<.05$) was found negatively and significantly associated with emotional intelligence. However, emotional intelligence ($r=.002, p>.05$) was insignificantly associated with academic achievement. Future researches are recommended to employ Structural Equation Modeling analysis to determine how both personality traits and emotional intelligence have an impact on academic achievements.

Keywords: Personality Traits, Emotional Intelligence, Academic Achievements

1. Introduction

Everyone believes that higher education is the key to economic advancement. All parents want their children to pursue tertiary education because they believed that a university degree can provide better jobs and hence higher standard of living for their future generation. Governments of most countries are willing to allocate large proportion of their annual budget for education because they are convinced that having more graduates will create higher economic growth and social justice by improving the quality of living of the lower and middle income groups. Literature also indicated that people with higher education have higher level of health and happiness; and these countries also have lower crime rates.

However, low graduation rate is a waste of time and money for both parents and government. Factors such as poor study habits, lack of motivation, lack of self and effort regulation, and lack of financial supports may lead to poor academic performance and hence more drop outs [1]. Study by Ebrahimi [2] reported a significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and academic achievement.

Van, Thijs and Schakel [3] reported that personality differences can shape emotional intelligence, and there was a significant association between emotional intelligence and personality traits.

Previous researchers who had conducted studies on the relationship between personality traits and emotional intelligence found strong relationship existed between personality traits and emotional intelligence [4 - 11]. These studies consistently showed a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness. Emotional intelligence was found to be correlated negatively with neuroticism [4, 5, 6, 8, 12, 13]. Conscientiousness was found to have the highest significant correlation with emotional intelligence as compared to the other dimensions of personality traits [7, 13]. A research done in Croatia and Slovene universities by Avsec, Takšić, and Mohorić [14], showed that the Big Five personality traits were able to explain for 32% of the variance in emotional intelligence.

Meanwhile, many past studies had also proven significant

and positive relationship between emotional intelligence and academic achievement [15 – 28]. However, some more recent studies found positive but insignificant relationship between emotional intelligence and academic achievements of both college and high school students [2, 29 – 35].

Serdar and Suleyman [36] who did a study on physical education teachers to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence, personality traits and academic achievement found that personality traits have no relationship with emotional intelligence and emotional intelligence was not correlated with academic achievement. In contrast, a study done by Van et al. [3] found that personality traits are strongly correlated with emotional intelligence. The researchers also found a weak and negative association between emotional intelligence and academic achievement.

Literature review showed very few investigations were conducted on university students using all these three variables: personality traits, emotional intelligence and academic achievement. Most previous researches were conducted on secondary schools and educators such as teachers rather than on university students. It is therefore crucial to study the personality traits of university students and how it may be associated with emotional intelligence and affect their academic achievement. It is also important to determine whether drop-out rate of university students are caused by low academic achievement or other factors such as financial problems. Thus, it is necessary for researchers to investigate the relationship between personality traits, emotional intelligence and academic achievement because these three variables are related to one another and may predict students' academic achievement.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between personality traits, emotional intelligence and academic performance of university students in order to provide an insight and create awareness among parents, educators, and students so that they can play an active role in improving poor academic achievement. Personality traits are divided into five dimensions: 1) Extraversion, 2) Agreeableness, 3) Conscientiousness, 4) Neuroticism and 5) Openness.

The following research hypotheses were formulated to guide this research objective:

H1: There is a positive and significant relationship between personality traits of extraversion and emotional intelligence.

H2: There is a positive and significant relationship between personality traits of agreeableness and emotional intelligence.

H3: There is a positive and significant relationship between personality traits of conscientiousness and emotional intelligence.

H4: There is a negative and significant relationship between personality traits of neuroticism and emotional intelligence.

H5: There is a positive and significant relationship between personality traits of openness and emotional intelligence.

H6: There is a positive and significant relationship between emotional intelligence and academic achievement (CGPA).

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Research Method and Respondents

Correlational research was employed to investigate the relationship between personality traits, emotional intelligence and academic achievement, using a survey research method in which questionnaires were distributed to collect information on these variables. 160 university students from various specializations participated and each participant was given the same questionnaire consisted of Section A: demographic information, Section B: Big Five Inventory (BFI) [37] and Section C: Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale (SEIS) [38]. An informed consent form was attached at the front page of the questionnaire.

2.2. Instruments

2.2.1. Big Five Inventory (BFI)

According to John and Srivastava [37], Big Five Inventory (BFI) is designed to measure extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness. This instrument consists of 44 items to measure the five subscales of personality traits which are extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness. Each item of the BFI is scaled in a 5-point Likert-type ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly). The scoring for each personality traits is the sum of the items. Items 1, 6, 11, 16, 21, 26, 31 and 36 are the scoring for Extraversion trait. Extraversion is described as sociable, outgoing, extrovert and active people. The range for this trait is 8 - 40, with higher score reflecting a more extraverted people. Items 2, 7, 12, 17, 22, 27, 32, 37 and 42 are the scoring for Agreeableness trait. Agreeableness is described as cooperative, tender and conflict avoidant. The range for this trait is 9 - 45, with higher score reflecting a more agreeableness people. Additionally, items 3, 8, 13, 18, 23, 28, 33, 38 and 43 are the scoring for Conscientiousness trait. Conscientiousness is described as conscientious, goal-oriented, and well-organized. The range for this trait is 9 - 45, with higher score reflecting a more conscientiousness person. Items 4, 9, 14, 19, 24, 29, 34 and 39 are the scoring for Neuroticism trait. Neuroticism is described as emotionally relaxed, calm and stable. The range for this trait is 8 - 40, with higher score reflecting a greater neuroticism person. And finally, items 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 41 and 44 are the scoring for Openness trait. Openness is described as individuals who are creative, open to experience and imaginative. The range for this trait is 10-50, with higher score reflecting a more openness person.

The subscale of BFI was reported to have Cronbach's alpha coefficient level of .83 indicating a high reliability [37]. The reliability correlation coefficients for the five subscales were .88 for extraversion, .79 for agreeableness, .82 for conscientiousness, .84 for neuroticism and .81 for openness [37].

2.2.2. Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale (SEIS)

Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale (SEIS) consists of 33 items. Each item is scaled in a 5-point Likert-type ranging

from 1(disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly). A higher score reflects a higher emotional intelligent individual and vice-versa. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this instrument ranged from .70 to .85, indicating a high reliability [39].

3. Results

Table 1. Relationship between Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, Openness and Emotional Intelligence.

		Emotional Intelligence
Extraversion	Pearson Correlation	.311**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000
	N	160
Agreeableness	Pearson Correlation	.378**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000
	N	160
Conscientiousness	Pearson Correlation	.315**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000
	N	160
Neuroticism	Pearson Correlation	-.303**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000
	N	160
Openness	Pearson Correlation	.497**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000
	N	160

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

Table 1 showed the statistical results of Pearson-Product-Moment correlation coefficient between the five personality traits and emotional intelligence.

Firstly, the results indicated a mild but positive and significant relationship between personality traits of extraversion and emotional intelligence ($r=.311$, $p < .05$, $N=160$). Thus, Hypothesis 1 is accepted.

Secondly, a positive and significant relationship was found between personality traits of agreeableness and emotional intelligence ($r=.378$, $p < .05$, $N=160$). Thus, Hypothesis 2 is accepted.

Thirdly, analysis of the association between conscientiousness and emotional intelligence indicated a mild, positive and significant relationship ($r=.315$, $p < .05$, $N=160$). Thus, Hypothesis 3 is accepted.

Meanwhile, the correlation results reported a negative and significant relationship between personality traits of neuroticism and emotional intelligence ($r= -.303$, $p < .05$, $N=160$). Thus, Hypothesis 4 is accepted.

Lastly, analysis of the relationship between openness and emotional intelligence showed a mild, positive and significant relationship between personality traits of openness and emotional intelligence ($r=.497$, $p < .05$, $N=160$). Therefore, Hypothesis 5 is also accepted.

The statistical analysis indicated that there was a weak, positive but insignificant relationship between emotional intelligence and CGPA as $r = .002$, $p > .05$, $N=160$. Therefore, Hypothesis 6 that posited a positive and significant relationship between emotional relationship and academic

achievement was rejected.

Table 2. Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and CGPA.

		Emotional Intelligence
Emotional Intelligence	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	
	N	160
CGPA	Pearson Correlation	.002
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.491
	N	160

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The relationship between personality traits and emotional intelligence has been widely investigated, and the findings of the current study confirmed the association between the five dimensions of personality traits and emotional intelligence and is consistent with most of the past studies. The extent of the relationship between the said variables is different across different studies as it depends on the instruments employed to measure emotional intelligence [7, 8]. The association between personality traits and emotional intelligence was significantly correlated as emotional intelligence is related to awareness, understanding and regulating emotions which are essential for personality constructions [8].

The present study endorses extraversion as positively related with emotional intelligence. The finding is expected as individuals who are extroverts are talkative, assertive, energetic, outgoing, excitement seekers and enthusiastic [40, 41]. These people are more optimistic and have tendencies to experience more positive emotions. Therefore, these people can be considered emotionally intelligent because they are active, outgoing and sociable, have interpersonal skills to interact with others, and they are assumed to be able to use, understand and regulate one's and others' emotions [6, 14, 41]. In other words, extroverted person tends to express their feeling and emotion freely as compared to introverts.

Meanwhile for individuals who are agreeable, they are kind, altruistic, forgiving, warm and compassionate [41]. People with these agreeable characteristics have high emotional intelligence [7, 11, 41]. This present study has proven and supported the findings of past studies with its conclusion that the more agreeable a person is, the higher the emotional intelligence skills the person possesses. This is because individuals with high level of agreeableness are assumed to be optimistic, can engage in effective interpersonal relationship, are able to perceive, express and regulate emotions effectively.

Additionally, people who are conscientious are productive, reliable, responsible, thorough and so forth [41]. The more conscientious an individual is, the higher the emotional intelligence one has [13,14]. Therefore, conscientiousness is positively associated with emotional intelligence as proven by the present study.

Individuals who are high on neuroticism are anxious, hostile, vulnerable, tense, unstable and self defeating [41]. As an emotionally intelligent person, one should be aware of one's emotions, understand and interpret it thoroughly,

manage and regulate one's emotions and convert the negative ones to a more positive emotions such as change one's perceptions of the situations [6]. Therefore, individuals who are high on neuroticism are predicted to be low on emotional intelligence as they have tendency to experience negative moods and do not know how to interpret and regulate their emotions. In contrast, people with low level of neuroticism are able to manage and regulate their emotion effectively [14]. This present study has proven and supported this assumption.

Lastly, a person who is high in openness is artistic, insightful, original, fantasy and so forth [41]. This type of people are perceived to be open-minded, could see things from various perspectives, are able to use emotions to guide in decision making process. Thus, they are assumed to be emotionally intelligent persons as supported by literature review and the results of this study [8]. In the present study, openness trait is reported to have the highest correlation among all the other relationships between personality traits and emotional intelligence; and it is also the most prominent personality trait possessed by this research participants, hence they are also assumed to have high emotional intelligence. In short, the results of this study reported that all five dimensions of personality traits are significantly correlated with emotional intelligence.

Currently, IQ is no longer a single factor that could predict academic achievements. Factors such as emotional intelligence, financial, family, time management, test anxiety, attention deficiency and so forth could play a role in predicting academic success. Emotionally intelligent person is able to perform better academically [42, 43]. For instance, students with higher emotional intelligence could manage and regulate their emotions to avoid experiencing high level of stress and prevent burnout [43]. They are also better in handling test anxiety, hence, they are able to perform better in examinations [42]. Besides, students who have higher emotional intelligence have the tendency to experience more positive emotions that could lead them to concentrate more on studies and not easily get distracted by other factors [42]. Thus, emotional intelligent is extremely essential for students to deal with stress and anxiety in meeting high academic demands.

Society is now starting to accept emotional intelligence as an important factor in predicting success and leading people to a more meaningful and productive life. Future researchers who would like to conduct studies on relationship between personality traits, emotional intelligence and academic achievements are recommended to include a larger and more diverse population from different private and public tertiary institutions; and use probability sampling such as random or stratified sampling method to increase the generalization of the results to their community. The findings obtained in this study may not be applicable or appropriate to other countries due to cultural difference, hence future researchers could replicate the study in other Asian countries to identify whether there are differences in the findings amongst different cultures. In order to ensure the directions of causal relationship between the variables, future researchers may want to conduct meta-analysis and more advanced structural equation analysis

for the study. By conducting meta-analysis, researchers will be able to evaluate and summarize findings of many past studies to provide more comprehensive secondary source of primary research reports to the study of personality traits, emotional intelligence and academic achievements of university students. On the other hand, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) would enable future researchers to determine how both personality traits and emotional intelligence have an impact on academic achievements. Researchers would be able to determine the variation of academic achievements (dependent variable) explained by each personality traits (independent variable) and emotional intelligence (independent variable) and the combined effects of both personality traits and emotional intelligence.

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