

The Personal Traits and the Academic Accomplishments of the Students at the Faculties of Pedagogy

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Abstract

This is an academic-research paper consisting of two parts: a theoretical and an empirical one. The theoretical part defines the conceptual basis, i.e. the frames of the research project. This means that it primarily deals with some relevant assumptions, such as the personal traits in the context of the academic accomplishments of the students that attend courses for teachers and educators. We conducted an empirical research to determine the role of these components. We opted for the technique of a non-probabilistic research of the sample. It consists of 115 students attending the first cycle of studies at the faculties of pedagogy. We used Eysenck's Personality Questionnaire (EPQ) as an instrument to measure the following traits: neuroticism – stability, extroversion – introversion, and psychoticism. A simple one-way ANOVA and Kruskal-Wallis tests were used to process the data. The result analysis led to the following conclusions: 1. The students differ in the academic accomplishments based on the variable of neuroticism; and 2. The students differ in the accomplishments based on the variable extraversion. We also suggest that other researches in this scientific area are conducted for a detailed analysis of the relation between the personality traits and the academic accomplishments.

Keywords: personal traits, neuroticism , extroversion , psychoticism ,academic accomplishments

Introduction

This paper is an academic research consisting of a theoretical and an empirical part. The theoretical part defines the conceptual basis, i.e. the frame of the academic research project. It highlights some relevant (internal) personal assumptions dealing with: a) the personal traits and b) the academic achievements of the students enrolled at teaching faculties. We are going to try and determine the role of these components by carrying out an empirical research.

Personal Characteristics – Personality Traits

Modern literature advocates that in order to better describe and anticipate the behavior of people, we need to take into account the personal traits, such as the fundamental dimensions of the personality (Myers, 1999). These personality traits influence not only the specific behavior of people, in our case – the students, but also their preparedness to face the challenges of the process of study. Nonetheless, the concept of personality cannot be defined that easily. This is one modern definition of personality (Caver and Scheier, 2000): "Personality is a dynamic organization of psychophysical systems that produce characteristic models of behavior of the person, together with thinking and feelings inside the person" (p.5). Today, many theoreticians agree that the traits are the basic structural units of the personality. The theory of traits is mostly used in empirical researches because it offers a basis for developing valid and reliable measurements of the individual differences. They are mostly determined as a broad system of similar tendencies in the behavior of specific individuals (McCrae and Costa, 1985). According to Allport (1962), the traits are related to the character, the temperament, and the abilities. Their influence is mostly reflected on the health, thinking and working performances (Hogan, 1986; McKenzie, 1989). Cattell (1963) discussed that the behavior of the individuals, i.e. their reactions are the result of the personality and the situation they find themselves in. Regarding this theory, not much is done until the eighth decade of the previous century when many psychologists confirmed that these factors are very important for a successful description of the personality (Costa, 1992). Currently, there is a great interest in the five-factor-model of the personality. Norman (1963) stresses that these five factors can accurately describe the personality.

This paper is also going to discuss the theoretical analysis of the nature of the personality by Eysenck (1947, 1952, 1967) based on three previous categorizations of the people: a. Hippocrates' theory; b. Kretschmer's theory and c) Jung's personality theory. By combining these three theories he discovered two dimensions that can describe the change in the personality of people: introversion-extraversion and neuroticism-stability (Eysenck, 1977). We need to mention that he was not satisfied only with these two dimensions of the personality which led him to study this matter further. By analyzing results from a personality test of psychiatric patients, Eysenck came to the conclusion that there is another factor of the personality that he called psychoticism – R factor. This dimension is characterized by symptoms of maniac-depressive psychoses and schizophrenia. The people with such symptoms tend to be socially withdrawn or isolated. They are also prone to depression, etc. They are people *"whose results in addition are just as bad as the results in drawing in a mirror, they have minor oscillations in the test of reverse perspective, they are also slow in following a given line, indecisive in the social opinions, have weak concentration and memory, and also tend to make big movements and badly assess distance and results. These people read more slowly, tap more slowly on the tapping test, and their level of aspiration is badly synchronized with reality"* (p.217). He claimed that all three dimensions are independent from one another. By presenting the personality through these three dimensions, the author tried to identify and find the reasons for the behavior. According to him the extrovert people have higher tolerance of irritability than the introvert. For example, extraversion is associated with a decreasing performance with time, whereas neuroticism is associated with a great decrease after stress. Understandably, in order to explain these effects on the achievements (performances), we need to do more explaining at different levels. We start from such premises with the goal to identify different positions of ranking a motivation test depending on the achievements of the respondents in terms of the dimensions of extraversion and neuroticism. Also, he stressed that men are more extraverted than women, and that women are more neurotic than men, whereas as far as psychoticism is concerned, men (even male children) have higher scores than women (and female children). This realization confirms some of our assumptions dealing with the interpretation of the differences in the traits in female and male subjects related to their achievements.

Academic Achievements

It is assumed that the academic achievements of the students are related to their cultural background. Explicitly or implicitly, they bear the symbolism of the democratization of a society, the culture, current trends and the engagement of the teachers and other people that are responsible for the education. At the same time, they also reflect the attitudes of the parents, and the culture in general towards education (Elliot et al, 2000). These achievements are an essential indicator of the intellectual education and competence as the most important condition for the individual and educational prosperity of a person. This characteristic comprises the academic achievements of the students in one vital question that needs to be addressed by political structures and by the academic workers. The assessment of the achievements of the students in the study program usually targets the academic achievements, however, many institutions also assess the behavior and attitude of the students (Banks, 1993).

The academic achievements, as an essential indicator of the intellectual education and competence, are the most important condition for the individual and educational prosperity of the person. This characteristic combines them into one vital matter that needs to be addressed by the political structures and by the academic workers (Slavin, 2006). They bear symbolism of the democratization of a society, the culture, current trends and the engagement of the teachers and other people responsible for the education (Ames, C., Archer, J., 1988). For these reasons they are going to be studied in relation with the personality traits.

The authors Dempster, Stiggins and Vajnsins state that there is a broad vision for assessment that includes adequate activities that allow the students to have a complete overview of the subject they study, to reflect, to get trained to critically and creatively solve problems and implement this in real life (according to Brophi, 2003). Starting from the established weak points of the classic way of forming test questions and also in function of a more comprehensive testing and assessment of the knowledge of the students, different models whose goal is to further improve the activities for assessment of the progress of the students in their courses were prepared (Bloom, 1980). It is a solid concept for a comprehensive assessment of the academic achievements of the students which promotes the sense of assessment of knowledge and the learning progress in general. Also in the educational practice, a need occurred for further improvement of the new paradigm of assessment (Feldman, R.S. 1989). In this aspect, another author, Anderson (2000) claims that the taxonomy is in fact a different way of thinking. As a result, he transformed the names of the six main categories (from nouns) into verbal forms in the very beginning.

Subject of Research

The subject of this research are the personal traits as assumed important predictors of the academic achievements of the students at the faculties of pedagogy.

Research Matter

According to the subject, the matter of research is defined in the following way: Do the personality traits influence the academic achievements of the students at the faculties of pedagogy?

3.2 . Research Variables

According to the matter, the main variables of the research are the following:

The personality traits such as the dimensions: extraversion, introversion, neuroticism, stability and psychoticism, and the academic achievements of the students in the final years at the faculties of pedagogy.

Hypotheses of the Research

The students differ in their academic achievements in terms of the dominant dimensions of the personality.

Sub-hypotheses:

- A.1. The students differ in the academic achievements depending on the dimension neuroticism.
- A.2. The students have different academic achievements depending on the dimension extraversion.
- A.3. The students differ in the academic achievements depending on the dimension psychoticism.

3.4. Method of Research

The research is going to determine the degree of connection between the academic achievements of the students with the personality traits but not in the sense of their causal connection. Accordingly, a non-experimental method is going to be used.

Sample of the Research

The sample covers students from the groups for preschool education and elementary education at the faculties of pedagogy in Skopje and Tetovo (Table No.1). The preliminary number of respondents is 130. The final number of subjects was reduced to 115.

Table No.1. Structure of the preliminary and the final sample

Faculties	Faculty of Pedagogy "St. Kliment Ohridski" - Skopje	Faculty of Pedagogy of DUT
Year of study	IV(final)	IV (final)
Number of subjects	60	70
Definite number of subjects	50	65
Total respondents	115	

Research Data Processing

In the processing and the analysis of the empirical data we used one-way ANOVA, i.e. the F-test of significance of differences between arithmetic means for big samples and the Kruskal-Wallis test. All statistical analyses are processed by a computer with the software pack: SPSS. The indicators of the academic achievements are extracted from the students' indexes in the form of the grades given by the professors for the regular exams.

Research Results

Psychologists claim that it is normal to notice the characteristics of the people in whom specific personality traits prevail. The reflections of these differences in the personalities can also be noticed during the studies, i.e. the academic performances of the students (Morin, 2016). Accordingly to the set hypotheses, we expect to confirm the connection between the academic achievements, i.e. the achievements of the students in the courses with specific character traits.

What do the ANOVAs imply in terms of these relations? The answer to this question can be found in Table No.2, Table No.3, Table No.4 and Table No. 5.

Table No.2 ANOVA for the personality trait neuroticism – academic achievement

Dimension: neuroticism	Sum of squares	Df	Ms	F	Sig.
Between the groups	30.215	15	2.014	2.007	.022
In the groups	99.351	99	1.004		
Total	129.565	114			

The most probable explanation for this relation is that the students who are characterized by neuroticism make greater efforts in the study, i.e. in the processing of the instructional content, which on the other hand leads them to a better position compared to other students in terms of the study results. Bearing in mind that the trait anxiety is associated to the dimension neuroticism, we are going to mention that in several important researches, a negative relationship between the anxiety test and the self-efficacy of the students has been established (Pintrich & deGrot, 1990, Zohar, 1998). Knowing the positive role of self-efficacy, we can directly make assumptions about the influence of anxiety on the educational achievements. Usually, the people with emphasized neuroticism are characterized by a great energy of anxiety. According to this, they should not be confident in themselves (self-efficacy), and hence, their performance during the tests is questionable. However, this research proved the contrary. A possible explanation for this tendency is that the students with neuroticism are more careful and more disciplined when studying which leads to greater preparedness for the tests mostly in order to avoid failures when taking exams.

Table No.3 ANOVA for the personality trait psychoticism – academic achievement

Dimension: psychoticism	Sum of squares	df	ms	F	Sig.
Between the groups	20.067	18	1.115	.977	.492
In the groups	109.498	96	1.141		
Total	129.565	114			

Regarding the dimension psychoticism, we did not find any statistical relations in terms of the achievement of the students (Table No.3). This implies the insignificant role of psychoticism in the acquisition of the instructional content in the courses. This does not confirm the sub-hypothesis for the connection between this dimension and the academic achievements.

Table No.4 ANOVA for the personality trait extraversion – academic achievement

Dimension: extraversion	Sum of squares	df	Ms	F	Sig.
Between the groups	18.691	8	2.336	2.234	.030
In the groups	110.874	106	1.046		
Total	129.565	114			

Extraversion, on the other hand, is supposed to help the students be more active in the instruction, in the social interaction, the communication with professors and colleagues, and make them bolder in the efforts to solve the instructional problems. It increases the tendency for better academic achievements. By analyzing the indexes from the previous table, we can clearly notice the connection between the disposition of extraversion and the academic achievements. To some extent, it is logical to expect a positive connection of the variable extraversion with the achievements of the students. Those who are extrovert demonstrate better communication with the peers and their superiors. In the instructional activities, they are characterized by courage to engage in team work, and they are also open to different academic challenges. Their open lifestyle creates a positive image in the teachers who, on the other hand, dedicate more time to them, and are sometimes biased in the assessment.

According to the general conclusion from the previously presented tables, and also on the basis of the calculations of the data from the ANOVAs, we can notice statistically significant connections among the variables. More specifically, the dimensions neuroticism and extraversion are greatly reflected in the academic achievements of the students in this sample.

Another research that was carried out in an American college yielded results which confirmed the influence of the personality traits on the academic achievements. This research provided conclusions that stated that the personality factors, such as consciousness and extraversion are closely related to the academic performances of the students (Furnham et al., 2009). Similarly, in a research that was carried out at an Iranian University, it was established that the traits such as neuroticism and extraversion are also important predictors of the academic achievements, but in a negative sense (Hakimi et al., 2011). Contrary to this, the findings in this paper confirm that both dimensions have a property of a positive indicator of success in the studies. Nonetheless, we cannot give an accurate answer why these differences exist. Maybe it is because of the design of the researches, or maybe the cultural differences have their own say!

Final Conclusions

Generally, the conclusions from the research confirm a partial existence of statistically significant differences between the research variables.

Regarding the expectations that specific personality dimensions (neuroticism, psychoticism and extraversion) lead to unequal achievements by the students, it was confirmed that was the case in terms of neuroticism and extraversion. Other researchers have acquired similar results, although there are opposite cases.

According to the results of the statistical analysis, we can confirm that the students with predominant dimension of neuroticism tend to have greater academic achievements. It is unclear whether this is due to the fact that this group of subjects is careful during lectures, respects the teachers and the students' code because of the oversensitivity to a possible failure (failing an exam). In order to avoid this failure, they make great efforts in the learning process and during the regular attendance of the lectures. On the other hand, maybe there are other hidden variables which we cannot discover with this design of the research.

A tendency for higher scores was noticed in the extraverted students, which was somewhat expected. More elaborately, they are open to the outside world and have social skills for establishing successful contacts with the colleagues and professors. For them it is usual to be active during the lectures and other instructional engagements. These traits make it easier for them to adjust to the academic roles of the students, and therefore they stand out by having greater achievements.

Limiting Factors and Suggestions for Future Researches

This research covered some of assumingly the most important variables which undoubtedly influence the achievements of the students. However, it is a fact that there are some limiting factors which relativize the conclusions of the research, and this imposes the need for designing a new one with developed analytical procedures for this particular areas. In this regard, we make the following notes:

Regarding the research sample (it covers a small number of subjects – students at the faculties of pedagogy), we can say that it is not sufficiently representative for a valid generalization of the conclusions;

Regarding the research instruments, we came to the conclusion that it is necessary for other ones from the psychological-pedagogical inventory for research of personality traits and motivation to be used as well;

In terms of the academic achievements, there are different ways and indicators for assessing them. According to this, we believe that in future researches it would be beneficial to use data analysis from other evaluating procedures such as the knowledge tests and other indicators of the academic performances of the students.

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