

Personality and Academic Performance of Tourism students

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Abstract

This descriptive correlational study investigated the relationship between personality traits and academic performance. Sixty-six (66) tourism students served as research participants and were given the Guilford Zimmerman Temperament Survey. Results of the test showed that they have average levels of general activity, friendliness, thoughtfulness and masculinity. Grade point averages for the past 3 years showed satisfactory performance. Significant negative correlations were found between academic performance and two GZTS factors namely: sociability and personal relations. The study serves as a reminder to college students not to be too socially-active if they are aiming for high academic achievement.

Keywords: academic performance, personality, tourism

INTRODUCTION

People often use personality when describing individuals. Some people are described as kind, pleasant, nice to be around and easy to get along with or are the types of people who are popular and are most often preferred as friends, roommates or colleagues at work. On the other hand, other people are characterized as having terrible personalities and are described as aggressive, unfriendly or difficult to get along with. These people may be similarly shunned, rejected and isolated. What really is the definition of personality? Is it limited to having good physical appearance, character and social skills? According to Schultz and Schultz (2009), the subject of personality is too complex for such a simplified description since humans are too complex and changeable in different situations and with different people.

Personality originated from the Latin "persona" which means masks. These are the masks that people project and display (Feist & Feist, 2003). This may also include the inner parts of psychological experience which are collectively called self. Personality is a dynamic organization inside the person of psychophysical systems, that create a

person's characteristic patterns of behavior, thoughts and feelings (Allport in Aguirre, Monce, Caguiao, Pa-at, Perez & Santos 2008). It consists of an individual's physical make-up, memories, motives, reactions and experiences. It is a pattern of relatively permanent traits, disposition or characteristics that give some measure of consistency to a person's behavior. The personality of each individual is unique. Wherever part of the world a person would go, there would only be one kind of such person. The characteristics would never have a duplicate, thus making the person a unique human being. The individual would always be unique in terms of his/her likes and dislikes from the inherited character traits and from the way a person reacts to situations presented upon him/her.

Cattell as cited in Feist and Feist (2003) defined personality as that which tells what a person will do when placed in a particular situation. Personality is also defined as a trait or a particular characteristics of a person. It is a generalized and dependable way of thinking, feeling and reacting (Shaughnessy in Al-Qaisy & Khuffash, 2012).

The assessment of personality is a great area of application of psychology to real-world concern (Schultz & Schultz, 2009). Clinical psychologists seek to recognize the symptoms of their clients by assessing their personalities through differentiation between normal and abnormal behaviors and feelings. They measure personality to find the best job for an applicant who may match the requirements of the position based on the individual's interests and needs. Research psychologists assess the personalities of their subjects to describe their behaviors in an experiment or to correlate their personality traits with other measurements such as achievement, aptitude and interest tests for the purpose in predicting future academic success (Peggran, 2007).

In school setting, personality tests are administered to students for counseling purposes but not in the selection of prospective applicants. Most often in the admission of college students, cognitive factors such as results of intelligence tests and previous academic grades of students are considered since research studies show that these are valid predictors of academic performance. Researchers and educators are interested in identifying the best predictors of academic performance to develop the potentials of talented students and at the same time, to plan for interventions for students at risk of academic failure (Caprara, Vecchione, Alessandri, Gerbino & Barbanelli, 2010).

Several studies have investigated the relationship between students' academic success and personality traits. Johnson as cited in Al-Qaisy and Khuffash (2012) reported a study where they examined the relationship between personality traits and academic achievement in gifted students. Results showed that there was a significant correlation between ten personality traits and academic achievement.

Kumar (2013) found that certain personality traits such as sociability, self-confidence and ambitiousness are significantly and positively correlated with academic achievement among high school students, hence signifying that certain personality traits are closely-linked with students' academic achievement. Furthermore, Furnham and Monsen as cited in Kumar (2013) revealed that personality traits, intelligence and sex predict the achievement performance of students.

A comparative study conducted by Gordon as cited by Khalid (2003) revealed that college students scored significantly higher than the high school students on the ascendancy, responsibility and emotional stability scales. For males the relation existed for the sociability scale but for females, the average high school and college sociability scores were significantly different. Another study conducted by Gordon as cited in Khalid (2003) in 27 high schools with reference to Gordon personal profile, it was found that there were significant differences on the three personality traits. Boys scored higher in responsibility and emotional stability and girls in sociability, there was no difference in ascendancy.

Another validation attempt was made by Ahmad and Ismail as cited in Khalid (2003) using the Gordon personal inventory and profile. The results indicated that there was high correlation between academic achievement and vigor (.72), emotional stability (.65) and personal relations (.62). The correlation on sociability and ascendancy was low positive. In Khalid's study (2003), obtained results indicate that there was a strong positive relationship between the personality factors in terms of ascendancy, responsibility, emotional stability, original thinking, personal relations and vigor. However, the high scores on sociability and cautiousness show low academic performance.

Khan and Bhat (2008) conducted a study of the personality factors of high and low achievers of elementary level students. The respondents were 50 high achievers and 50 low achievers, who were randomly selected from one educational zone. Results revealed that high achievers were reserved, detached, aloof, critical, stiff, mature, faced

reality and were emotionally less stable while low achievers were affected by feelings and were emotionally unstable.

Majid and Mattoo (2012) completed a study on personality and academic performance among adolescents. They examined the unique contribution of personality traits (sociability, self-confidence and ambitiousness) toward academic performance. The results revealed a highly-significant relationship among the three dimensions of personality such as sociability, self- confidence and ambitiousness. No significant relationship was found between the personality traits (sociability, self-confidence and ambitious) and academic performance of male respondents in government schools likewise females of private schools. However, ambitiousness was found to have an impact on the academic performance of the respondents.

Research findings of Bayram, Deniz and Erdogan (2008) showed that positive correlations exist among the GPA scores and personality traits such as achievement, counseling readiness and ideal self of eMBA students.

Many studies revealed that the strongest predictor of academic performance is conscientiousness. A meta-analysis conducted by Poropat (2009) confirmed that the personality trait that can strongly predict academic performance is conscientiousness. This trait is defined by the researcher as "sustained effort and goal setting; compliance with and concentration on homework; learning - related time management and effort regulation." It is linked with the will to achieve (Poropat, 2009).

Similar studies confirmed the positive relationship of the personality trait conscientiousness to academic achievement. It is a significant predictor of retention in engineering students (Hall, Kaufmann, Wuensch, Swart, DeUrquidi, Griffin & Duncan, 2015). Conscientiousness and neuroticism can predict the overall performance of secondary school students (Rosander and Backstrom, 2014). Both emotional intelligence and conscientiousness were significantly correlated with internship ratings of psychology students (Grehan, Flanagan & Malgady, 2011). It was also found that a high level of conscientiousness is related to performance in anatomy examinations of undergraduate medical students (Finn, Walker, Carter, Cox & Smith, 2015).

Similarly, a study by Caprara, Vecchione, Alessandri, Gerbino and Barbaranelli (2010) showed that the two personality factors of openness and conscientiousness are associated with the school performance of high school students. Openness is a personality that is related to "having foresight, being intelligent and resourceful" (Poropat 2009).

In selecting college applicants, most schools consider the cognitive factors such as results of intelligence tests and previous academic grades of students, since research studies show that these are valid predictors of academic performance. However, the above-mentioned studies point to the need to also identify personality traits that significantly affect academic performance.

Objectives

This study primarily aims to determine the relationship between personality and the academic performance of third year tourism students enrolled in a private Catholic university during the school year 2012-2013. More specifically, it sought to find answers to the following questions:

1. What are the personality traits of the students?
2. What are the students' academic performance?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the personality and the academic performance of the students?

This study is based on the concept presented by research studies that personality traits may contribute to the prediction of academic performance of students. Based on literatures, individual differences such as processing styles, learning styles and personality traits are very important factors in the learning process. It has been suggested that personality traits tend to be one of the significant factors that influence students' academic success (Bayram et al., 2008).

Figure 1 is the research paradigm used in this research. The personality traits of the students as measured by a standardized instrument, include the following: general activity, ascendance, sociability, emotional stability, objectivity, friendliness, thoughtfulness, personal relations and masculinity. Academic performance is expressed in the grade point averages (GPA) of the students from first year to third

year. This study sought to determine if possible relationship exist between the personality traits and academic performance.

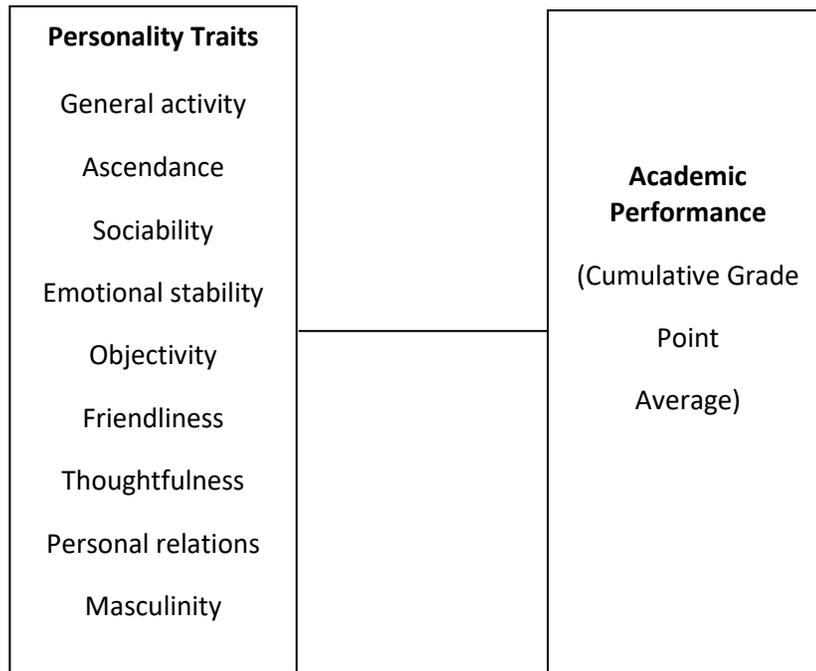


Figure 1. Research paradigm

The results of the study may help the dean and faculty of the College of Tourism in establishing more objective criteria in selecting incoming tourism students, which also includes non-cognitive factors such as personality. Guidance counselors would also benefit from this study since it may guide them in formulating a personality development program which is responsive to the academic, career, personal and social needs of the students. The results of this study may serve as an eye-opener for tourism students in recognizing their strengths and weaknesses and ultimately help them in their career planning. More so, this may be an opportunity for them in developing a pleasant personality since in the future, they will be dealing with different individuals.

METHOD

This study employed descriptive-correlations method. It aimed to describe the personality traits and their academic performance and how they relate to one another. A total of sixty-six (66) third year tourism students participated in the study. They were enrolled for the second semester of the school year 2012-2013 under the Personality Development and Public Relations Course.

The Guilford-Zimmerman Temperament Survey (GZTS), was used to measure the personality traits of the respondents. It is a standardized self-report inventory developed by J. P. Guilford and Wayne S. Zimmerman (1948) designed to measure normal personality and temperament of individuals 16 years and older. It provides a non-clinical description of an individual's personality characteristics and may be used as a tool in career planning, counseling and research. It provides scores on ten personality factors and temperament namely: general activity, restraint, ascendance, sociability, emotional stability, objectivity, friendliness, thoughtfulness, personal relations and masculinity.

The ten personality factors measured by the GZTS are interpreted by Guilford & Zimmerman (1949) as follows:

1. Ascendance (A) - High score indicates leadership habits, self-defense, speaking in public and persuading others while low score may mean submissiveness and lack of assertiveness.
2. Emotional stability (ES) - High score means evenness of mood, composure, optimism, cheerfulness while low score may indicate daydreaming, loneliness, gloominess and pessimism.
3. Friendliness (F) - High score may mean lack of fighting tendencies to the point of pacifism or it may mean a healthy, realistic, handling of frustrations and injuries. It may also mean an urge to please others, a desire to be liked. Low scores mean hostility. At best, it means a fighting attitude.
4. General activity (G) - High score indicates strong drive, energy and activity while low score represents slow action, less productive and inefficient.

5. Masculinity (M) - High score means resistant to fear, not easily disgusted and interest in masculine activities and vocations. A low score means sympathetic, fearful, easily disgusted and has much interest in clothes and styles.
6. Objectivity (O) - High score means less egoism while low score means touchiness or hypersensitivity.
7. Personal relations (P) - High score means tolerance and understanding of other people and their human weaknesses. Low score indicates fault-finding and criticalness of other people and institutions.
8. Restraint (R) - High score indicates over seriousness and less promising while a low score means happy-go-lucky, carefree and impulsive attitude.
9. Sociability (S) - High score may mean being at ease with other people, enjoying their company and ease in establishing of rapport with them while low score means a tendency to be withdrawn, reserved and hard to get to know.
10. Thoughtfulness (T) - High score indicates interest in thinking while a low score may mean interest in overt activity and dislike of reflection and planning.

Psychometric data on the GZTS showed reliability estimates ranging from .75 to .87 using Kuder-Richardson formulas and split-half method. The internal validity of the test was computed using factor-analysis. Criterion-related validity studies yielded correlations ranging from .20 to .50.

The academic performance of the respondents was measured based on their cumulative grade point averages obtained for the past three years.

The Guilford- Zimmerman Temperament Survey was administered by the researchers with the approval of the dean and the faculty in-charge. It was ensured that enough time was given to the respondents in answering the research instrument. Test scores were also individually interpreted to the respondents by the guidance counselor.

Permission from the university registrar was sought by the researcher in securing the grade point averages of the participants. Each participant's grade point average from first to third year was computed. Means and standard deviation were utilized to facilitate the analysis of the aforementioned variables.

RESULTS

Table 1
Personality profile of third year tourism students

Personality Traits	Mean	Standard Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
General activity	28.78	22.79	Average
Restraint	14.92	20.20	Below average
Ascendance	22.57	17.49	Below average
Sociability	17.95	17.31	Below average
Emotional stability	16.77	16.38	Below average
Objectivity	11.81	15.80	Below average
Friendliness	24.53	24.09	Average
Thoughtfulness	40.51	23.88	Average
Personal relations	21.81	15.57	Below average
Masculinity	32.34	25.33	Average

Data presented in Table 1 shows the mean scores and standard deviation values of the participants' personality test as measured by the GZTS. Scores revealed that the participants possess average level of general activity, friendliness, thoughtfulness and masculinity. However, they appear to manifest below average level of restraint, ascendance, sociability, emotional stability, objectivity, and personal relations.

Table 2
Grade point averages of third year tourism students

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
GPA	80.74	11.80	Satisfactory

Table 2 shows the academic performance of the participants for the past three years. The average GPA of the respondents is 80.74

which is interpreted as satisfactory based on the university manual (2013).

Table 3
Correlation of personality traits and academic performance

Bivariates	R	p-value	Interpretation for r / p-value	r ²	Interpretation
General Activity and GPA	-0.156	0.211	Very low negative correlation/not significant	-	-
Restraint and GPA	0.00	.007	No correlations	-	
Ascendance and GPA	-0.152	0.225		-	
Sociability and GPA	-0.281	0.022	Low negative correlation/significant	0.0789	Variations in Sociability account for 7.89% of the variations in GPA
Emotional Stability and GPA	-.064	0.608	Very low or negligible negative correlations /not significant	-	-
Objectivity and GPA	-0.214	0.085	Very low negative correlation/not significant	-	-
Friendliness and GPA	-0.042	0.789	Very low or negligible negative correlations /not significant	-	-
Thoughtfulness and GPA	0.015	0.904	Very low or negligible negative correlations /not significant	-	-
Personal Relations and GPA	-0.225	0.036	Low negative correlations/significant	0.0506	Variations in Personal Relations account for 5.06% of the variations in GPA
Masculinity	-0.225	0.070	Very low or negligible negative correlations /not significant	-	-

Note: * - significant at the 0.05 level

The correlation analyses between the personality traits and grade point average of students in Table 3 showed a low negative correlation / significance for sociability and personal relations. No evidence of relationship was found between the remaining eight (8)

personality traits and academic performance. The coefficient of determination (r^2) of 0.0789 between sociability and GPA indicates that 7.89% of variations in the GPA can be attributed to the variations in the participants' scores in sociability. The coefficient of determination (r^2) of 0.0506 between personal relations and GPA indicates that 5.06% of the variations in GPA which can be attributed to the variations in the Personal Relations' scores of the participants.

DISCUSSION

Personality traits

The findings revealed that the participants have moderate level of general activity indicative of an adequate amount of energy and enthusiasm in the performance of their school activities. As such, they are most likely to complete school projects on time and meet academic requirements.

The average level of thoughtfulness possessed by majority of the respondents mean that they maintain a balance between impulse and reflective thinking, thus their decisions are made after careful deliberation. The presence of this trait show that the respondents are aware that in some situations, they can be happy-go-lucky but there are also times when self-control should be imposed.

Personality test scores also showed that the respondents possess moderate degree of friendliness. This trait is similar to agreeableness, one of the big five traits described by the five factor model of personality by Costa and McCrae (1992). It is seen when people avoid conflict, they are gentle and possess the tendency to agree with other people (Nye, Orel & Kochergina, 2013). The respondents' average test scores on this trait is reflective of their desire to maintain respect for other people despite their domination. However, there are also occasions when they can assert their rights without resorting to hostility. Among tourism students, this is a very important trait since it is predictive of their job competence (Bao, Sun & Xue, 2012).

Results also showed that the level of masculinity of the participants is generally moderate as expected since there are both male and female students involved in the study. A high score on this trait means that the person is unsympathetic and callous, and is better understood and accepted by men. On the other hand, low scorers for this trait are described as sympathetic, emotionally expressive and behave in ways characteristics of women (Guilford & Zimmerman, 1949).

In this study, it is possible that some male respondents scored low on this trait while some female respondents scored high.

The personality test results of the respondents further showed a tendency to manifest fluctuations of moods, interests and energy (low emotional stability), as shown by their below average scores. Students with such scores may find it difficult to cope in times of crises. Being emotionally stable is found to be associated with success in studies as shown by the research of Chamorro-Premuzic and Furnham (2003) as cited by Bayram, Deniz & Erdogan (2008) and Grehan, Flanagan and Malgady (2011). In a similar way, emotional stability is also required for tourism-related jobs and students with low emotional stability may not likely work in the tourism sector (Bao, Sun & Xue (2012).

It is also evident in the test results that the respondents lack leadership skills (low ascendancy), which could also mean lack of assertiveness and self-confidence. In the Guilford-Zimmerman Temperament Survey (GZTS) manual (1949), ascendancy is described in the following traits such as speaking in public, persuading others and being conspicuous. These traits are very important for students' academic achievement. The respondents' low leadership skills may not help them achieve their academic and career aspirations as tourism students.

A happy-go-lucky attitude (low restraint) was also revealed by the personality test results of the respondents. This trait is similar to conscientiousness, which was revealed to be a strong predictor of academic performance based on several studies. Conscientiousness has specific facets namely diligence, dependability, self-discipline, prudence, competence, dutifulness, order and achievement striving, which were all found to be conducive to performance in academic settings, attainment of academic honors and lower disciplinary infractions (MacCann, Duckworth & Roberts, 2009, cited in Caprara, et al., 2010). Apparently, the respondents of the study need to increase their level of conscientiousness if they want to remain in their program.

Another personality trait that was revealed through the findings of the study is the low sociability level of the respondents. Also called social extraversion, this trait is the opposite of social introversion or shyness. The personality trait of extroversion is one of the factors that influences students' intention to remain in the tourism industry. Tourism students who are extroverted tends to be competent in their jobs and are likely to remain longer in the tourism industry (Bao, Sun and Xue, 2012).

The personality test results of the respondents also showed a tendency towards low objectivity which describes them as hypersensitive and self-centered. Students with low objectivity may not be broad-minded enough and have the tendency to be hypercritical of people (low personal relations). Such trait may not contribute to career success and job satisfaction.

Academic performance

The average academic performance of the participants as revealed by their GPA from first to third year is 80.74% which signify only "satisfactory" performance. This finding points to the fact that tourism students are not high achievers as far as academic grades are concerned. Reasons for this seemingly lack of motivation to excel in their studies must be looked into. Tourism is an in-demand course nowadays and graduates who are highly competent as reflected in their academic performance, have bigger chances for employment.

Correlation between personality traits and academic performance

In this study, results of the correlation analysis revealed that among the ten personality traits measured by the GZTS, sociability and personal relations showed negative significant correlations with academic performance. Sociability as defined in the GZTS Manual is evident in the following characteristics: having many friends and acquaintances, liking social activities and seeking social contacts. While social interaction is necessary in the tertiary level, students who spend most of their time engaging in social activities have lesser time to devote in their studies, resulting to a less satisfactory academic performance. Such results imply that the more sociable a student is, the lower the GPA will be. On the other hand, the less sociable a student is, the higher the GPA is.

This finding is contrary to the result of the study conducted by Nye, Orel and Kochergina in 2013. According to the researchers, there are four personality traits that are significant for academic success. One of these traits is intraversion which is negatively-correlated with academic performance. Their study underscores the importance of social interaction in the educational process. Students in the tertiary level need to interact with their classmates, professors and other university personnel in order to accomplish some academic requirements.

Given the above-mentioned conflicting findings, it is believed that the significance of social interaction in academic success depends

on the kind of people to interact with as well as with the type of interaction a student engages in. Students with high academic performance are those who are socially-active in school-related activities.

Similarly, students with a high level of personal relations, tend to obtain low GPAs compared to those with low level of personal relations.

This finding validates results of foreign studies that extraverts underperform in academic settings (Sanchez-Marin, Rejano-Infante, Rodriguez-Troyano, 2001 cited by Chamorro & Furnham, 2003). Introverts tend to have high academic performance because of their greater ability to consolidate learning, and have lower distractibility and better study habits (Entwistle, 1970, cited in Chamorro & Furnham, 2003).

Tourism students who intend to acquire high grades should spend more time with their studies instead of going-out with friends. Putting studies on top of their priorities is very important if they want to finish their degree on time.

The present study has implications to the admission and retention of students enrolled in the tourism program. While it is true that a sociable type of personality is a requirement in the tourism industry because of the nature of their work, tourism students should be taught how to create a balance between their social activities and studies. Guidance counselors and Tourism teachers can help students acquire time management skills in order to achieve good academic performance. On the other hand, tourism students who are introverts, would benefit from student development programs that will provide opportunities to enhance their social skills.

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