

# A Study of the Relation between Personality Type & Academic Success

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## ABSTRACT

*Objective: The paper makes a humble attempt to draw a relation between personality type and academic success of students. The study proves that personality type is correlated with academic success thus emphasizing that students with a certain personality type (Conscientiousness) are geared towards academic success as compared to any other personality type. The personality types were studied on the BIG FIVE model and accordingly five hypotheses were established for the purpose.*

*Methodology: A survey questionnaire was used to gather data on personality type under the BIG FIVE model, academic performances (Average of percentages scored in important years-10<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, Graduation & PGPM, Post Graduate Program In Management Semester 1) and demographic details. The total completed responses were 162 out of 260 sent and 198 received.*

*Findings: Conscientiousness is statistically and positively correlated to academic success.*

*Conclusion: Conscientiousness is a good predictor of academic success or performance. This is one personality trait that speaks volumes about people's integrity and it is heartening to statistically prove that such students will be good academic performers too.*

*Internal correlation between the Big 5 factors depicts that Conscientiousness has a significant positive correlation with agreeableness and significant negative correlation with neuroticism, indirectly indicating that an agreeable personality can be a good academic achiever too & lack of emotional stability will be a hindrance to performance thus the increasing value of EQ (Emotional Quotient). Age seems to play no role.*

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## INTRODUCTION

In India academics has been a passport to success. Success means a good quality of life and to be able to afford the basic and the esteem needs of the Maslow's Hierarchy. There is a lot of pressure on Indian students to do well in studies as the alternative options are few in number and the struggle is immense.

Success in academics is also highly valued in society. Society treats such individual on the pedestal and they get all the respect and adulation from family, friends and peers. Though things are changing and on account of globalization some other careers such as music, sports etc are also emerging but academics continues to be a big hit amongst the Indian students and parents.

The amount of pressure a student has to absorb to succeed in school and college is immense in India. The elite institutes such as the IIMs (Indian Institute of Management) and IITs (Indian Institute of Technology) enroll less than ten percent of the total applicants. It takes a lot of hard work and rigor to succeed in these exams. The students who clear these exams are branded for life! They are now a part of individuals who have the passport to succeed in life. The other students who are not able to succeed either try again or enroll in other colleges.

India has also been the epicenter of creating academic geniuses such as Arya Bhatt, Ramanujan, Shakuntala Devi etc. According to Edison genius is predicted by "perspiration" or using the terms coined by psychologists such as perseverance, effort, practice, and determination (Baumeister, et al., 2006; Duckworth, et al., 2007; Trautwein, 2007).

Are the personality characteristics of such academically successful students very much different than the others? What are the personality traits that differentiate such successful students from others? What drives these students to strive and work harder than their peers?

The research study tries to look at personality traits which give such students a head start in their academic endeavors in comparison to their peers. The study tries to correlate the overall academic achievement of students to the Big 5 Model of personality which identifies extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness to experience and neuroticism

(opposite of emotional stability).

Confidence, communication etc. have been umpteen numbers of times seen as traits leading to high success of the individuals possessing the same and on the contrary those who had visible absence of these traits were more likely to face failure. The researchers tried to see if academic success can be attributed to some personality traits or type. This prompted this empirical study to statistically test the relation between personality types and academic success.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Some of the Characteristics of Successful Students<sup>1</sup> have been listed as: they are punctual and regular; they do their assignments timely and neatly; they seek extra help if need be; they are attentive, participative, courteous and polite; they learn to identify what needs to be studied in greatest detail; they set short-term and long-term goals; they learn to schedule enough for homework; they enjoy being successful students; if they have to miss classes, they quickly cover the same as they know they are responsible for their own success.

Personality has been classified into five basic traits by researchers. The five personality traits (Big Five) researched by Costa and McCrae (1995) are conscientiousness, openness to experience, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism. According to the five-factor theory propagated by McCrae et al. (2000), the five personality factors are the base on which the foundation of an individual's behavior such as self-concept, personal strivings, habits or attitudes is based. Individual behaviours are also based on "external influences" like cultural norms or life events and experiences (Muller et al., 2006).

The Big Five personality framework has been widely adopted and accepted as a description of the structure of personality (Digman, 1990; Funder, 2000; Goldberg, 1993; John, 1990). Factor analyses in numerous studies have consistently identified the five factors of neuroticism, extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience as the Big Five personality dimensions. The Big Five factors have been associated with a number of studies, and the empirical data of the studies provide support for their stability and predictive validity (McCrae & Costa, 1999).

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. James L. Warner. Characteristics of Successful Students. Available at [http://ares.bainbridge.edu/student/vp\\_stud/cha\\_suc.htm](http://ares.bainbridge.edu/student/vp_stud/cha_suc.htm) accessed on 17/10/2013

Buchanan (2001) has also described individuals based on the five basic Dimensions of personalities such as conscientiousness, openness to experience, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism. Extraversion is the trait of individuals who are gregarious, energetic and enjoy the company of others. Extraversion is also an individual choice of his/her liking of social situations. Such people are comfortable and enjoy the limelight and are always the conversation initiators. Agreeableness is an attitude of people to interact with others. Individuals who are high on this dimension are considered friendly, trustworthy and co-operative. They are also excellent team workers. The conscientiousness dimension is associated with individuals who are methodical, organized, and persistent and focused towards their goals. However he considers openness to experience as a trait which signifies creativity, open to embrace change and open to embrace cross cultural experiences and educational experiences.

According to Tomas et al. (2007), the development of the big 5 personality factors has provided researchers with a tool to assess the importance of personality traits in various domains including educational settings.

There are numerous studies which show how personality type and learning approaches influence students' academic performance (Heinstrom, 2000; Duff et al., 2004; O'Connor and Paunonen, 2007). But the research into individual personality traits and their effect on academic performance of post graduate students in India is limited. The current research is conducted with purpose of contributing to fill this gap and to contribute to the available scholastic literature on this topic.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Before we set the objectives we can define our constructs

### Extraversion

Social skills have been demonstrated to be critical prerequisites to academic and interpersonal success (Elliot & Gresham, October 1987)

### Open to Experience

People with a high openness have broader interests, are liberal and like novelty. This factor relates to intellect, openness to new ideas, cultural interests, educational aptitude and creativity (Howard & Howard, 1998).

These individuals are cultured, aesthetic, intellectual and open. (Boeree, no date). The openness to experience can be connected to activities like writing, science and art (Wallach & Wing, 1969). Flexibility is an attitude that accepts ambiguity and uncertainty. It's the ability to move forward without seeing the complete picture. It involves a willingness to learn new skills and change your way of thinking.

### **Emotional Stability**

Practice appropriate patience (Marques, 2007).

### **Conscientiousness**

The conscientious, focused person is concentrating on only a couple of goals and strives hard to perceive them. He is career oriented, while the flexible person is more impulsive and easier to persuade from one task to another. Conscientiousness has been linked to educational achievement and particularly to the will to achieve. (Howard & Howard, 1998). The more conscientious a person is the more competent, dutiful, orderly, responsible and thorough he is.

### **Agreeableness**

The agreeableness scale is linked to altruism, nurturance, caring and emotional support versus hostility, indifference, self-centeredness and jealousy. Agreeable people are altruistic, gentle, kind, sympathetic and warm (Boeree, no date).

Based on the Review of Literature the following objectives can be drawn:

- To assess the personality types of the students based on the Big Five Model
- To see the effect of the Big Five personality factors on the overall academic performance of post graduate students.
- To find out those Big Five personality factors which have correlation with academic achievement.

### **Hypotheses**

The existing literature review on personality type (the Big Five Model) supports that the personality type has a great influence on PGPM (Post Graduate Program In Management) students' performance. Therefore the

present study seeks to establish the relationship between PGPM students' personality traits that include Openness to Experience; Conscientiousness; Extraversion; Agreeableness & Neuroticism (OCEAN) and their academic success herein represented by their Average percentage (10<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, Graduation & PGPM 1<sup>st</sup> semester).

To study the above objective the following hypotheses were framed as part of the research study based on the Review of Literature:

### Hypothesis Formulation

- H<sub>1</sub>** There will be significant links between personality traits and performance indicators of PGPM students, such that:
  - H<sub>1a</sub>** Openness will be correlated significantly and positively with performance indicators of PGPM students
  - H<sub>1b</sub>** Conscientiousness will be correlated significantly and positively with performance indicators of PGPM students
  - H<sub>1c</sub>** Extraversion will be correlated significantly and positively with performance indicators of PGPM students
  - H<sub>1d</sub>** Agreeableness will be correlated significantly and negatively with performance indicators of PGPM students
  - H<sub>1e</sub>** Neuroticism will be correlated significantly and negatively with performance indicators of PGPM students

Control variables that are predicted to influence significantly PGPM students' performance will be measured.

### Age Influence on PGPM Students' Performance

Cognitive development and maturity is essential for the good performance of students. Age as increases also has its effect on all areas of human performance (Ukueze, 2007).

- H<sub>2</sub>** Age will predict PGPM students' performance

### Gender and PGPM Students' Performance

Gender relates to the difference in sex (that is an individual being a male or female) and how this quality affects their outlook and observation towards life and academic activities (Okoh 2010). The difference in gender and how it affects students' and academic performance is inconclusive in a study conducted by Buadi (Buadi 2000).

### **H<sub>3</sub>** Gender will predict PGPM students' performance

Number of years one has stayed out of home and his/her Personality

Many factors impact personality broadly categorised into genetics and environment. The number of years a person stays away from his home is a part of the environment and brings about a difference or some change in a person's personality.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

For the present research there were post graduate management students who were a part of the study. The total sample size was 162 respondents. The respondents who were a part of this study comprised of both males and females from the age groups of 20 years to 28 years.

A cross sectional design was adopted for the research study. Survey method was adopted for the research. After taking consent from the respondents (Convenience sampling was adopted) they were asked to complete a survey which took 10-15 minutes. It was ensured that all the data collected for the study was confidential and was used only for the research study.

### **Measures and Data Collection Instruments**

An online survey questionnaire (see Annexure) was created and the link to the same was sent to all. The first section was demographic details (age, gender etc.) followed by the second section on academics (percentages or grades in various exams like 10<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, graduation & PGPM Semester one) and the final third section of the questionnaire was a pretested truncated version (20 questions used in the study by Taher et al, 2011) of the IPIP (The International Personality Item Pool) five factor personality inventory (Buchanan, 2001) used in the study. They are, namely, Conscientiousness (C), Openness (O), Extraversion (E), Agreeableness (A) and Neuroticism (N) whose internal consistencies or interitem collinear reliability or cronbach alpha, were reported as above 0.6 that makes the items reliable for study (O: 0.88; C: 0.76; E: 0.83; A: 0.84; N: 0.74 as reported in the original scale). Taher et al (2011) mention that if the items were positively phrased (rating of 1 was weak association and a rating of 5 was strong association) and negatively phrased (rating of 1 meant strong associations and a rating of 5 meant weak association) thus accordingly the points were either taken as such or reversed for final calculation.

In total 260 students were sent the link of the survey questionnaire out of which 198 replied back and 162 were complete. The survey was administered separately to 5 different groups (5 sections of 52 students each) during their class timings in one session of 30 minutes. All these students were students of first year PGPM and participated voluntarily to this study. The Study was conducted during October 2013 to January 2014. The data was analysed using SPSS version 17.

## DATA ANALYSIS

Academic success has been defined in terms of average percentage scored hitherto in important exams cleared by the individuals that makes a difference to them in terms of their career decisions. In India 10<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> & graduation are very important stages and performances in the same can make or break or change the course of one's career. PGPM is one of the areas chosen for a career after one decides that one wants to pursue career in the field of management.

This average percentage was further divided into two categories of high and low scores the cut off being a decent 60% because in most of the admission processes for higher studies (PG, Research etc.) or even jobs this is the desirable percentage. The researchers did not differentiate between 60% and 75% or further as a decent 60% is able to place the students in the minimum criteria that is set by most of the companies and colleges for further jobs or admissions respectively. Table 1 shows that around 83% are high scorers and around 17% are low academic achievers.

**Table 1: Average Percent**

		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Valid	high	135	83.3
	low	27	16.7
	Total	162	100.0

### Descriptive Statistics of the Data

Descriptive study has been used to present the frequency distribution of the data

- Among the respondents 68.5% were male (coded as 1) & 31.5% female (coded as 2)
- Age range: 20-28 years with mode being 23 years and average age being 22.7 years. Only one student was 20 years and another one 28 so these were outliers.
- Table 2 gives the frequency distribution of the time duration that students have spent out of their homes for reasons related to education or jobs. Almost 26% have stayed away from home for above 5 years (this was mainly because of education). 25% have been out only for a short duration of 6 months to a year with 5% never having lived outside their homes. As already mentioned this also has an impact on the personality of the individual.

Results of statistical operations encompassing the Means & Standard Deviation for all variables of the study are shown in Table 3. Table 4 depicts the correlation between the variables we have earmarked to study.

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Average percent	68.1805	8.73989	162
Agreeableness	13.2160	1.87073	162
Extraversion	13.5556	2.56106	162
Neuroticism	10.6667	2.64458	162
Conscientiousness	13.7654	2.48609	162
Opentoexperience	12.9938	2.16837	162
Gendercode	1.3148	.46588	162
Age	22.7037	1.34159	162

## DISCUSSIONS & CONCLUSIONS

To establish that personality is one of the key predictors, factors or indicators for academic success this study tried to reflect on the interaction between the two. The correlation's analysis (Table 4) indicates a significant interaction between Conscientiousness, Open to Experience, Neuroticism & Agreeableness. Additionally the control variables (age & gender) reflect significant correlation with some of the construct variables.

With regard to the present study's earlier expectations Pearson Correlation Coefficients (Table 4) demonstrate a significant and positive correlation between Conscientiousness, Average percentage and gender

Table 4: Correlation Analysis

		Correlations							
		Avprcnt	Agreeableness	Extraversion	Neuroticism	Conscientiousness	Opentoexperience	Gendercode	Age
Avprcnt	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.013	0.035	-0.112	.246 <sup>**</sup>	-0.011	.283 <sup>**</sup>	-0.107
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.868	0.66	0.155	0.002	0.885	0	0.173
	N	162	162	162	162	162	162	162	162
Agreeableness	Pearson Correlation	-0.013	1	-0.041	-.246 <sup>**</sup>	.205 <sup>**</sup>	.190 <sup>*</sup>	0.071	-0.068
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.868		0.607	0.002	0.009	0.015	0.368	0.387
	N	162	162	162	162	162	162	162	162
Extraversion	Pearson Correlation	0.035	-0.041	1	-0.148	0.09	-0.053	-.158 <sup>*</sup>	-0.095
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.66	0.607		0.061	0.255	0.502	0.045	0.231
	N	162	162	162	162	162	162	162	162
Neuroticism	Pearson Correlation	-0.112	-.246 <sup>**</sup>	-0.148	1	-.191 <sup>*</sup>	0.012	.247 <sup>**</sup>	0.016
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.155	0.002	0.061		0.015	0.884	0.002	0.842
	N	162	162	162	162	162	162	162	162
Conscientiousness	Pearson Correlation	.246 <sup>**</sup>	.205 <sup>**</sup>	0.09	-.191 <sup>*</sup>	1	0.103	.161 <sup>*</sup>	0.029
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.002	0.009	0.255	0.015		0.19	0.041	0.711
	N	162	162	162	162	162	162	162	162
Opentoexperience	Pearson Correlation	-0.011	.190 <sup>*</sup>	-0.053	0.012	0.103	1	0.076	-0.058
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.885	0.015	0.502	0.884	0.19		0.338	0.461
	N	162	162	162	162	162	162	162	162
Gendercode	Pearson Correlation	.283 <sup>**</sup>	0.071	-.158 <sup>*</sup>	.247 <sup>**</sup>	.161 <sup>*</sup>	0.076	1	-.168 <sup>*</sup>
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0.368	0.045	0.002	0.041	0.338		0.033
	N	162	162	162	162	162	162	162	162
Age	Pearson Correlation	-0.107	-0.068	-0.095	0.016	0.029	-0.058	-.168 <sup>*</sup>	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.173	0.387	0.231	0.842	0.711	0.461	0.033	
	N	162	162	162	162	162	162	162	162

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Avprcnt-Average Percentage

and significant correlation between Extraversion, Neuroticism & Conscientiousness.

Conscientiousness has a significant relation with Average Percent ( $r=0.246$ ); Agreeableness ( $r=0.205$ ); with Neuroticism ( $r=-0.191$ )

Further Agreeableness has significant relation with neuroticism ( $r=-0.246$ ); and with Open to Experience ( $r=0.190$ ).

Costa & McCrae (1992), highlight the role of conscientiousness as a domain-general trait that predicts conscientious behaviour across a broad class of achievement-related situations.

Conscientiousness is a good predictor of academic success or performance. This is one personality trait that speaks volumes about people's integrity and it is heartening to statistically prove that such

students will be good academic performers. This factor has a significant negative correlation with neuroticism indicating that lack of emotional stability will be a hindrance to performance thus the increasing value of Emotional Quotient (EQ).

The relationship of personality with academic achievement is, probably, not the same at all age levels. It may be concluded that personality factors do contribute to academic achievement at the high school level (Bhatnagar, 1969). But in this study age seems to play no role.

Conscientiousness is positively and significantly correlated with agreeableness indirectly indicating that an agreeable personality can be a good academic achiever too. Internal correlation between the Big 5 model agreeableness is significantly and negatively correlated with neuroticism but significantly and positively correlated to conscientiousness & openness to experience.

This study provides and extends support to those few empirical studies that have considered conscientiousness and academic competence beliefs together. Fewer still have attempted to predict academic achievement by a combination of conscientiousness, competence beliefs, and academic effort. Instead, most researchers have concentrated either on conscientiousness (e.g., in personality research) or on competence beliefs (e.g. in educational research) for a variety of reasons (theoretical and methodological rationales; research traditions) (Trautwein et al., 2009).

## LIMITATIONS

Though the study was conducted with utmost care but a mention of the following limitations will help forward the results beyond the scope of this paper:

The study comprised of only first year PGPM students.

The average percentages can be further segregated. The various academic percentages in 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> were from different boards which can be normalised to standardise the analysis. This was not done as this information was not available with the researchers.

Number of years they stayed away from home for whatever reason can be one of the intermittent variable/exogenous factors. Most of the students leave homes after 12<sup>th</sup> and hence their personalities are further developed. Thus the percentages of 10<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> might not be that much dependent on personality.

## Future Scope of the Study

The study limits itself to the performance of the students in their vocational course i.e. PGPM here which will ultimately fetch them jobs. Moving from here, Career paths can be mapped to study their achievements and future success to draw an extrapolated relation between the variables. A longitudinal study can be conducted for the same.

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## Annexures

### QUESTIONNAIRE Part I : Demographic Details

Name

Email Id :

Mobile No :

Age:

Please tick the relevant option :

#### Q1) Gender

1. Male
2. Female

#### Q2) How many years have you stayed outside your home:

1. 0-6 months
2. 6months-1 year
3. 1-2 years
4. 2-3 years
5. 3-5 years
6. Above 5 years
7. Never

#### Q3) Kindly indicate the purpose of staying away from home:

1. Education
2. Job
3. Any other Reason (Kindly Indicate)

#### Q4) During your outstation stay away from home , you stayed in a:

1. College hostel with roommates
2. Independent flat with roommates

3. Alone
4. Relative's Home
5. Any Other (Kindly Indicate)

## Part II : ACADEMIC DETAILS

Please give your %/CGPA/GPA during various education levels:

	Board	Place	Main Subjects	%/CGPA/GPA
10 <sup>th</sup>				
12 <sup>th</sup>				
Graduation				
PGPM (1 <sup>st</sup> Sem )				

## PART III: PERSONALITY DETAILS

Please tick (✓) one of the scale phrases mentioned below for expressing to what extent you agree with each one of the statements describing how do you view matters. Please consider each item and decide if the content correctly describes you.

	Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I. agree- ableness	1. My remarks, sometimes, deeply, offend other students					
	2. I think that, when doing things, people can be trusted as having goodwill					
	3. I accept people as they are					
	4. It is easy to me to get back at people					

II. extra- version	5. I don't like drawing people's attention to myself					
	6. I make friends easily					
	7. I can easily attract my counterparts and hold their attention					
	8. I prefer keeping a low profile in my campus					
III. neu- roticism	9. I have frequent mood swings					
	10. Generally, I don't bother about people's views and attitudes towards me					
	11. I often panic, easily, about things around me					
	12. Generally, I am very pleased with my self					
IV. conscientiousness	13. I carry out my plans to reach my goals					
	14. I often find myself unwilling to do my study work					

	15. I often pay attention to details					
	16. I often waste my time by doing unnecessary things					
V. openness to	17. I am not interested in abstract ideas					
	18. I prefer voting for conformist leaders of students					
	19. I tend to support liberal students' leaders					
	20. I avoid philosophical discussions in class					