

## PERSONALITY TRAITS AND ASPIRATIONS AS PREDICTORS OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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### ABSTRACT

*In order to develop the best talent, improvement in academic achievement of students has grabbed the attention of researchers, academicians, and planners around the world. Several researches have been done which revealed that various factors have indirect or direct impact on academic achievement of students. The present work aims at providing a review of the literature on the most relevant contributions related to personality traits and aspirations of students which determines their academic achievement. The literature on this big issue is very wide and it is not possible to provide a full review of it, however it is believed that the current discussion on these issues can be considered as part of a wider discussion. The present paper focuses on the recent literature on personality traits and aspirations of students in predicting their academic achievement and provides some conclusions and directions for future research.*

**Keywords:** *Personality Traits, Big Five Factors, Aspirations, Academic Achievement.*

### Introduction

Investment on enhancing the quality of education is regarded as an effective way paving the way for a country's comprehensive development including its human resource development. Therefore, educational planning of a country mainly focuses on improving its students' academic achievement. In fact, academic achievement is considered as one of the important criteria of judging the quality of education imparted. However, several variables have been noted which have an effect on students' academic achievement. They are different in terms of personality characteristics, their aspirations, intelligence, ability, attitude, family background, age and gender, etc.

Although, a lot of articles and research papers are available in this regard but it is not possible to compile them in one paper. For the purpose of the present study only few of them have been considered. This paper aims to present a systematic literature review which describes whether personality traits and aspirations of students affect their academic achievement. This paper will then conclude with a summary examination of the literature regarding how personality traits and aspirations of students have an impact on their academic achievement.

### Objectives of the Study

The present study is undertaken to achieve the objectives mentioned hereunder:

- To understand what role personality traits play in predicting academic achievement of students.
- To gain insight on how aspirations of students affect their academic performance.

### Research Methodology

The present study is conceptual in nature as it involves a systemic review of articles and reports related to the topic of the study. Hence, secondary sources have been used including journals, research publications, and internet to fulfil the above mentioned objectives.

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### Concept of Academic Achievement

Academic achievement of students means the knowledge gained and skills developed in school curriculum. Thus, achievement of students in academic subjects in relation to their ability to gain knowledge or level of competence in school tasks usually evaluated by standardized tests and expressed in grades or units based on student's performance. Sinha (1970) defined it as "successful students are those whose academic performance is superior in the form of high percentage of marks while, students who fail in the previous examination and obtained low divisions in their examination are considered failed in their achievements".

Various researchers have identified a number of variables affecting academic achievement of students. As it was concluded in the study done by Gupta (1987) who identified the association between academic achievement and locus of control, anxiety, personality traits, level of aspiration of secondary school students that locus of control, anxiety and level of aspiration had negative correlation with academic achievement; socio economic status was having significant positive correlation with academic achievement; boys were found to have high achievements, more internally controlled and less anxious than girls. In another study conducted by Narula (2007) it was concluded that a significant positive correlation lies between the variables of creativity and academic achievement. Significant difference was also obtained between the creativity of boys and girls at 0.01 level of significance. However, McCrae et al. (2002) concluded that gender differences are not important, Dunsmore (2005) and other researchers were in favour of impact of gender on big personality traits.

To attain the objectives of the present study, the researcher has focused only on personality traits and aspirations as predictors of academic achievement.

### Personality Traits as Predictors of Academic Achievement

Among the significant contributions done by various researchers, Costa & McCrae described personality traits as "the trait theory within personality psychology, where individuals and their unique qualities are distinguished based on descriptions of different universal traits, is a common perspective on human personality". Further, as per Oxford Learner's Dictionaries (2014) a trait is termed as "a particular quality in your personality". In other works it is defined as "the differences between individual's frequency and intensity of thinking, behaving and feeling in certain ways" (Fleeson & Gallagher, 2009; McAdams & Pals, 2006). The literature suggests that personality traits affect the academic motivation and performance (e.g., Costa & McCrae, 1992; Komarraju & Karau, 2005; Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2003, 2008).

The present study takes into account Big Five personality traits model as a determinant of academic achievement. This model consists of five dimensions including extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience (DeYoung, 2010). In the following discussion the researcher has presented the interrelationship between academic achievement and these variables.

- **Openness** covers a wide range of characteristics including being imaginative, perceptive, cultured, curious, artistic, original, broad minded, intelligent, artistically sensitive and being interested in a wide range of issues (Costa & McCrae, 1992; McCrae & Costa, 1985; Barrick & Mount, 2001). McCrae and Costa (1985) identified a positive relationship between intelligence and openness. Heggstad (1997) also supported that openness is highly correlated with intelligence.

Prior research also confirm the role of openness to experience in predicting academic motivation (e.g., Clark & Schroth, 2010) and academic performance (e.g., Paunonen & Ashton, 2001; Laidra et al., 2007; Komarraju, Karau, & Schmeck, 2009). It was also concluded that students who have openness performed significantly in academics (Martey et al., 2016). This is in congruent with Vermetten, et al. (2001) who established the fact that openness motivates critical thinking and disassociated with absenteeism. (Tempelaar, Gijsselaers, van der Loeff, & Nijhuis, 2007) (Bidjerano & Dai, 2007, Lounsbury, Steel, Loveland, & Gibson, 2004). In another study done by John et al. (2008), Openness is positively related with academic achievement occasionally.

- **Conscientiousness** includes self-discipline, diligence, and being reliable, responsible, planful, and mindful of details. It also reflects qualities such as thoughtful, organized, and methodical (Hogan & Ones, 1997). Among all personality traits it is strongly correlated with overall academic performance (Barrick et al., 2001; Hurtz & Donovan, 2000).

Several other studies are in support of conscientiousness influencing academic motivation (Clark & Schroth, 2010) and academic achievement (Costa & McCare, 1992; Crozier, 1997; Kiliç-Bebek, 2000; Laidra et al., 2007; Cheng & Ickes, 2009). Wagerman and Funder (2007) also revealed that conscientiousness is a valid and unique predictor of students' performance. MacCann (2012) also revealed that conscientious individuals are inclined to have high confidence level encouraging greater learning. Bindu Kumari (2014) also indicated that the most related personality trait Conscientiousness is the key factor in predicting the performance of an individual.

Hakimi et al. (2011), Komarraju et al. (2009), Conard, 2009 and Laidra et al. (2007) also concluded that amongst the other personality traits conscientious is the most positively correlated with academic achievement. It was also supported in the research done by Martey et al. (2016) that the students who are highly conscientious performed better. Further, the findings of Barrick Mount & Judge (2001) and Erdheim, Wang & Zickar (2006) also favour that conscientiousness is one of the most consistent personality predictors of academic performance and found to show a positive relationship between conscientiousness and academic performance.

- **Extraversion** covers being dynamic, energetic, active, outgoing and stimulation-oriented. Eysenck (1996) revealed that extraverted individuals may be impulsive and have trouble concentrating on academic material, which could be detrimental. Apparently, this trait does not have the same effect at all ages, since the correlations are mostly positive in young children while, negative for secondary school and university students (Eysenck, 1996).

Although Melissa, Sampo & Panonon (2007) revealed that a negative relationship lies between extraversion and academic achievement, Chomoro & Furnham (2003) found the opposite. Dunsmore (2005) concluded that higher levels of extroversion is positively correlated with higher academic achievement among elementary school students while, indicated lower academic performance at higher educational levels. Similarly, Furnham, Zhang, & Chamoro, (2006) also found an inverse relationship between extroversion and achievement at higher education.

- **Neuroticism** means general tendency of experiencing negative feelings including embarrassment, sadness, anger, guilt, distrust, and fear. Kumari, 2014 defined it as "the degree to which a person is calm and self-confident as opposed to anxious and insecure". Absence from classroom due to illness or any other negative feelings affects performance negatively thus; neuroticism is regarded as a good predictor of academic achievement. Moreover, stress generated symptoms viz., heartbeat, muscular tension and gastric illness coupled with low self-concept result into lower academic achievement (Chomoro & Furnham, 2003b). However, Komarraju et al. (2009) found a positive relationship between neuroticism and academic achievement.

In the study of Furnham et al. (2006), it was concluded that individuals with high neuroticism experience abnormalities and disorders which hamper their performance. Poropat (2009) also found a positive relationship between emotional stability with academic achievement and reported a negative correlation between neuroticism and academic performance in primary level. Thus, most of the studies have reported that neuroticism is negatively related with academic achievement (Laidra et al. 2007).

- **Agreeableness** includes being sympathetic, cooperative, and helpful towards others. It is also referred as the degree to which a person is good natured, warm and co-operative as opposed to irritable, uncooperative, inflexible, unpleasant and disagreeable (Nofle & Robins, 2007). Most of the studies have shown positive relationship between agreeableness and academic achievement. It has been concluded that students having high agreeableness tend to secure higher GPAs thus have higher academic achievement (Furnham et al., 2006; Duckworth & Seligman, 2005; Lounsbury et al. 2003).

Poropat (2014) also reported that high agreeableness leads to better learning and therefore has a positive relationship with academic achievement. Further, Raad and Schouwenberg (1996) also found that agreeableness positively affect academic performance because of effective team work. Finding of Martey et al. (2016) also revealed that students who are agreeable performed significant better than their counterparts who are not. Being generous, friendly and helpful in nature makes it easy for them to received help and favour from fellow students as well.

#### **Aspirations as Predictor of Academic Achievement**

According to Gardner (1940) "level of aspiration is a truly quantitative concept, which has two requirements that the subjects make some public indication of his aims and that, he makes this in quantitative terms." In the words of Hurlock (1967), aspiration is "a longing for what is above one's level with advancement on it. In other words, aspiration means the goal an individual sets for himself in a task, which has intense personal significance for him or in which he is ego-involved."

Chauhan S. (2017) found out a significant and positive relationship between level of aspiration and academic achievement of students. Some other studies (Chauhan, 2014; Chauhan, 2008; Salami, 2008; Caplin, 2006; Albert et al., 2004; Mohapatra, 2004; Singh, 1995) also reported significant and positive relationship between level of aspiration and academic achievement. Further, it was observed that success generally leads to raising the level of aspiration, whereas failure has just the opposite effect. Negel and Pramanik (2019) also supported this view that level of aspiration is a positive indicator of high level of achievement and individuals' attaining goals.

Contrary to this, Cheng Mun Yee, Sandra (2012) indicated that there is no association between perceived academic achievement and career aspirations. Parental support for career building directly and indirectly affects continuing education and career achievement aspirations through academic self-efficacy or career self-efficacy and can predict continuing education and career achievement aspirations.

### Conclusion

Most of the studies indicated that academic achievement is positively associated with aspirations of students and personality traits like openness to experience, agreeableness and extroversion and negatively associated with neuroticism. However, in few studies, no relationship was found between academic achievement and extroversion (Bratko et al. 2006), neuroticism (Hair & Graziano, 2003), openness to experience, agreeableness and extroversion (Wolfe and Johnson, 1995). Duff et al. (2004) also found a positive but weak association between academic achievement and these variables. Hence, although personality traits (Big Five Factors) and aspirations are apparently related to academic achievement, the relationships with these factors are contradictory and may depend on other factors which need to be researched further.

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