

## PERCEPTION OF THE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF STUDENTS' PERSONALITY TRAITS

Cornel Victor IGNA, Ph.D.,  
DPPD, University "1 December 1918" Alba Iulia, Romania  
Email address: cornel.igna @ uab.ro

**Abstract:** *The present study sought to investigate the relationship between students' personality traits and how they perceive the various aspects associated with academic activities. Previous research indicated the importance of the perception as a mediator of personality in the relationship that students form with the requirements of the academic environment. In view of this common aspect and seeking further clarification of these relationships, the present study will investigate with a different questionnaire the personality traits in an attempt to obtain information with potential application. For this reason, the hypothesis of this research is: Students' perceptions of academic activities and interaction with teachers are associated with the presence of personality traits. This study envisages a cross-sectional design aimed at conducting a correlational type of research. The sample in question was a voluntary group of first-year students from several specializations. The results obtained did not indicate worrying values of the means for the analyzed personality traits but the analysis of the correlations between perceptions and personality traits led to the confirmation of the hypothesis highlighting a diverse picture of statistically significant correlation indices. After analyzing and interpreting the results, beyond the limitations of the study, the conclusion is that students' personality traits are associated with their perceptions and that different personalities focus on largely different aspects.*

**Keywords:** *perception; academic; personality; student*

### Background

The academic environment has benefited from many studies but especially from studies that had as subjects students. This evolution is a result of both the research concerns manifested by academic staff or the availability

of the sample but especially of the growing importance of identifying any factors that have a significant impact on the development of the educational act and the effectiveness of learning. Despite this rich literature focused on student samples, recent studies often confirm older results but also bring new information that contributes to a better understanding of existing interactions, interactions that often evolve and may be influenced by a variety of factors.

The present study sought to investigate the relationship between students' personality traits and how they perceive the various aspects associated with academic activities.

Concerns about students' perceptions have been analysed for a long time, students' perceptions being seen as a link between their personality and their academic performance (Odom & Pourjalali, 1997). In a more recent article, the authors emphasise the importance of students' perceptions (Van Petegem et al., 2007). Another study indicates a very close relationship between the perception of the help received and the satisfaction with the course (Lee et al., 2011). Also, studies have already been conducted that investigate the relationship between students' personality and how they appreciate the professionalism of the teacher (Göncz, et al., 2014) or between students' personalities and their own sense of efficiency regarding academic activities (Güngör et al., 2014). Freedom and responsibility perceived by students from the teacher also influence the way students perceive their behaviour (Fisher et al., 1998). Regarding the influences of negative personality enhancements on the way the student perceives online courses, a recent study (Bhagat et al., 2019) indicates the impact of the feature of neuroticism. Such results have already been reported previously, both in connection with the feature of neuroticism and psychoticism, which are considered predictors of academic performance (Ciorbea & Pasarica, 2013). In a partially different approach, current research has attempted to identify the link between personality traits and elements of psychopathology in students (Akinci et al., 2018).

All this previous research leads to the importance of the perception as a mediator of the personality in the relationship that students form with the requirements of the academic environment. Considering this common aspect and seeking further clarification of these relationships, the present study will investigate with a different questionnaire the personality traits in an attempt to obtain information with potential application.

### **Hypothesis**

Students' perceptions of academic activities and interaction with teachers are associated with the presence of personality traits.

### **Research design**

This study follows a cross-sectional design aimed at conducting a correlational type of research.

### Sample

This study was conducted in the first semester of the academic year 2020-2021 on a voluntary group of students who studied the Psychology of education in the first year of the psycho-pedagogical module. The questionnaire was distributed in the last week of the first semester, and 107 students were invited to participate. Of these, 28 completed the questionnaire received. The mean age of the sample was  $M = 27.50$  ( $S.D. = 10.871$ ). Given the high value of the standard deviation, the value of the median (19.50) and the mode (19) were also calculated. These values indicate a group with significant age differences between its members, the minimum value being 18 years and the maximum 50 years. The distribution of frequencies by sex indicated 19 females and 9 males. The mean age for students was  $M = 26.63$  ( $S.D. = 11,558$ ) and for students  $M = 29.33$  ( $S.D. = 9,631$ ). The calculation of the significance of the difference between the two means (T-test Independent Sample) indicated that although there is a difference of almost 3 years between the means, there was no statistically significant age difference between the two subgroups (students):  $t(26) = -0.607$ ,  $p = .549$ .

A Crosstab analysis using age and sex variables indicated the following frequencies (Table 1):

**Table 1. Crosstab analysis for variables Sex \* Age**

		Age											Total	
		18	19	20	28	31	32	35	37	42	43	48		50
Sex	Feminin	2	9	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	2	19
	Masculin	0	3	0	1	2	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	9
Total		2	12	1	2	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	28

And, a Crosstab analysis that used the variables specialization and sex indicated the following frequencies (Table 2):

**Table 2. Crosstab analysis for variables Specialisation \* Sex**

		Sex		Total
		Feminin	Masculin	
Specialisation	Public Administration	2	0	2
	Social assistance	3	0	3
	Law	1	1	2
	Physical education and sports	2	6	8
	Kinetotherapy and special motricity	3	1	4
	Sociology	1	1	2
	Occupational Therapy	7	0	7
Total	19	9	28	

### Instruments

The tools used were:

a) a survey that asked about several aspects related to the perceptions, expectations and academic behaviour of students (attached in Appendix).

b) the Leonhard-Shmishhek questionnaire. This questionnaire was designed to identify one or more accentuated personality traits that a person may present at a given time. Shmishhek developed the instrument taking into account the contributions already made by K. Leonhard, who indicated two categories of accentuations, some of character and others of temperament. Being a test for adults for a variety of purposes, including in the education process, it was considered a useful tool to apply to this sample of students. The number of questions is not equal for each assessed trait but are 4, 8 or 12 questions. Some questions are rated for the affirmative, others the opposite, for the negative. A trait is considered accentuated if the person provides answers to which more than half of them are considered relevant to that trait.

Both tools were introduced in Google Forms as a multi-section questionnaire. In Google Forms, the questionnaire was anonymous in order to stimulate answers as close as possible to what students feel and believe, even if this anonymity may have partially contributed to the decrease in the sample of participants.

### Results

In order to be able to perform the analyses leading to the necessary results in order to test the hypothesis, it was necessary that the answers from the survey be converted into numerical variables (1 = "strongly disagree", 2 = "disagree", 3 = "somewhat disagree" , 4 = "somewhat in agreement", 5 =

"agreement", 6 = "strong agreement"), and for the Leonhard-Shmishek questionnaire to calculate the inverted scores, then the scores for each scale and finally the percentages for these scores.

The mean percentages obtained in the sample of this study for the questionnaire scales can be seen in the table below which shows that Demonstrativeness and Cyclothymia slightly exceed the value of 50%, while Hypersperseverance, Hypertension, Exaltation and Emotivity exceed 60%, even 70% in the case the last scale (Table 3).

**Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for accentuated personality traits**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Media	Std. Deviation
P_Demonstrativ	28	16,67	83,33	51,1904	17,81737
P_Hyperexact	28	8,33	83,33	45,5358	19,96421
P_Hyperperseverance	28	41,67	83,33	60,4168	13,15156
P_Impulsive	28	,00	100,00	42,8571	25,09901
P_Hypertim	28	25,00	100,00	65,6250	22,97971
P_Dysthym	28	12,50	87,50	41,9643	19,60675
P_Ciclothymic	28	25,00	100,00	52,2321	23,33670
P_Exalted	28	,00	100,00	61,6071	24,98346
P_Anxious	28	,00	75,00	37,0536	23,93136
P_Emotional	28	37,50	100,00	75,0000	17,01035
Valid N (listwise)	28				

Subsequently, an analysis of the correlations between the survey items and the percentages obtained at the 10 scales of the Leonhard-Shmishek questionnaire was performed. Statistically significant correlation indices will be presented below.

Demonstrative personality has two correlations, both negatively and marginally significant indicating a dissatisfaction with the examples presented in the course (25. The teacher provides relevant examples)  $r(26) = -, 375, p =, 050$ . as well as the possibility of attend classes at the University (41. I would have preferred to have attended classes in the classroom at the University)  $r(26) = -, 374, p =, 050$ .

Hyperexact personality shows five significant correlation indices, these are presented in the following table (Table 4)

**Table 4. Statistical significant correlations of variable P\_Hyperexact**

	P_Hiperexact	PE_18	PE_21	PE_24	PE_28	PE_30
	act	nr	nr	nr	nr	nr

P_Hyperex act	Pearson Correlation	1	,444*	,402*	,384*	-,415*	-,389*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,018	,034	,044	,028	,041
	N		28	28	28	28	28

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

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

Note:

18. In the course discussions, the teacher has preferences depending on the ethnicity of the students

21. The teacher makes misplaced remarks or jokes

24. I participated in all classes

28. The teacher provides useful answers to the questions asked by the students

30. Students can intervene with questions, clarifications, during the course

Hyperperseverant personality shows only one significant correlation index, with the question regarding the weekly participation in seminars (9. I participated in weekly seminars)  $r(26) = -,417, p = ,027$

Impulsive personality presents two significant correlation indices, of the same value, the first direct, regarding the behaviour of the teacher (32. The teacher jokes without any connection with the topic of the course)  $r(26) = ,408, p = ,031$  and the second conversely, regarding participation in physical courses (41. I would have preferred to have attended classes in the classroom, at the University)  $r(26) = -,408, p = ,031$ .

Hyperthymic personality have obtained a single significant correlation index, with the question of managing information from the course by students (19. The volume of information presented in the course can be managed by students)  $r(26) = ,434, p = ,021$

The dysthymic personality presents a picture of only negative but much richer associations. These are shown in the following table (Table 5):

**Table 5. Statistical significant correlations of variable P Dysthymic**

	P_Dy sthy mic	PE_5 nr	PE_8 nr	PE_20nr	PE_22nr	PE_26nr	PE_28nr	PE_29nr	PE_30nr	PE_41nr	PE_42nr	
P_Dysth ymic	Pearson Correlat ion	1	-,513 **	-,493 **	-,405 *	-,592 **	-,426 *	-,438 *	-,477 *	-,398 *	-,401 *	-,562 **

Sig. (2-tailed)		,005	,008	,033	,001	,024	,020	,010	,036	,034	,002
N	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28

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

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

Note:

- 5.The terms used in the presentation of the course are understood by most students.
8. The content of the courses is presented coherently
20. The course makes the connection between the theoretical aspects of the discipline and the daily reality.
22. The teacher shows flexibility in teaching the content
- 26.Students can ask questions about some concrete aspects experienced, related to the content of the course.
28. The teacher provides useful answers to the questions asked by the students.
29. The teacher interacts with the students during the presentation of the course.
- 30.Students can intervene with questions, clarifications, during the course
41. I would have preferred to have attended classes in the classroom at the University.
42. I can communicate with the teacher through the means provided by the university (UAB email, Teams).

The Cyclothymic personality presents only one significant correlation index, with the question regarding the participation in courses in physical format (41.I would have preferred to have attended courses in the classroom, at the University)  $r(26) = -,398, p = ,036$

The Exalted Personality presents a statistically rich and varied picture of significant associations. These are listed in the following table (Table 6):

**Table 6. Statistical significant correlations of variable P Exalted**

	P_Exal tat	PE_4 nr	PE_5 nr	PE_6 nr	PE_9 nr	PE_1 6nr	PE_2 4nr	PE_2 7nr
Pearson Correlation	1	,525**	,466*	,401*	,399*	-,405*	,514**	-,452*
Sig. (2-tailed)		,004	,012	,035	,035	,033	,005	,016
N	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28

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

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

Note:

4. It is required to go through the bibliography related to the course

5. The terms used in the presentation of the course are understood by most students
6. I participate in seminars
9. I attended weekly seminars
16. Seminar assignments are difficult
24. I participated in all classes
27. The teacher repeats some information too much

Anxious personality presents a single significant correlation index, with the question regarding the difficulty of the seminar tasks (16. Seminar tasks are difficult)  $r(26) = -,447, p = ,017$

Emotional personality in this sample does not show statistically significant correlation indices with the survey items.

## Discussion

Although the analysis of the means did not reveal any particular accentuations of the personality traits (especially the negative ones), the second set of statistical analyses on the correlations between perceptions and personality traits confirmed the hypothesis by highlighting a diverse picture of statistically significant correlation. Strictly speaking from a statistical point of view, correlational analysis does not allow the establishment of a causal relationship even if statistically significant correlation indices are obtained between two or more variables. On the other hand, given that all personality theories claim that personality traits develop slowly and have a high degree of stability over long periods of time, in the case of this study, it can be assumed with a reasonable degree of certainty that personality traits of personality precede and are the cause of expressed perceptions. Comparing the results obtained in this small sample with the results already published and mentioned in the first part of this study, especially with the results of research that investigated the relationship between negative personality traits and perception. According to the obtained results, it could be said that regarding the students' perception according to the personality traits, there is a negative pole represented by the Hyperexact and Dysthymic personality and a positive pole represented by the Exalted personality. The results indicate a diverse, heterogeneous population of the sample from the perspective of dominant personality traits. It can only be speculated that this diversity or the share of personality traits found was the same in the whole group to which the questionnaire was sent or on a completely different sample. Beyond these limitations, however, strictly taking into account the results obtained, it can be concluded that the personality traits of students are associated with their perceptions and that different personalities focus on different aspects.



## References

- Akinci, Z., Yurcu, G., & Ekin, Y. (2018). Relationships between Student Personality Traits, Mobbing, and Depression within the Context of Sustainable Tourism Education: The Case of a Faculty of Tourism. *Sustainability*, *10*(10), 3418. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su10103418>
- Bhagat, K. K., Wu, L. Y., & Chang, C.-Y. (2019). The impact of personality on students' perceptions towards online learning. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, *35*(4). <https://doi.org/10.14742/ajet.4162>
- Ciorbea, I., & Pasarica, F. (2013). The Study of the Relationship between Personality and Academic Performance. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *78*, 400–404. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.04.319>
- Fisher, D., Fraser, B., & Kent, H. (1998). Relationships between Teacher-Student Interpersonal Behaviour and Teacher Personality. *School Psychology International*, *19*(2), 99–119. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0143034398192001>
- Göncz, A., Göncz, L., & Pekić, J. (2014). The Influence of Students' Personality Traits on their Perception of a Good Teacher within the Five-Factor Model of Personality. *Acta Polytechnica Hungarica*, *11*(3), 65–86.
- Güngör, F., Kurt, H., & Ekici, G. (2014). The Relationship between Personality Types and Self-efficacy Perceptions of Student Teachers. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *116*, 786–790. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.01.298>
- Lee, S. J., Srinivasan, S., Trail, T., Lewis, D., & Lopez, S. (2011). Examining the relationship among student perception of support, course satisfaction, and learning outcomes in online learning. *The Internet and Higher Education*, *14*(3), 158–163. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2011.04.001>
- Odom, M. D., & Pourjalali, H. (1997). Is Perception The Missing Link Between Personality Traits And Student Performance? *Review of Business Information Systems (RBIS)*, *1*(4), 67–80. <https://doi.org/10.19030/rbis.v1i4.5511>
- Van Petegem, K., Aelterman, A., Rosseel, Y., & Creemers, B. (2007). Student Perception As Moderator For Student Wellbeing. *Social Indicators Research*, *83*(3), 447–463. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-006-9055-5>

## Appendix

### Student Perception Survey

(1 = "strongly disagree", 2 = "disagree", 3 = "somewhat disagree", 4 = "somewhat agree", 5 = "agree", 6 = "strongly agree")

1. If I could, I would give up this course
2. The course is too voluminous
3. Students can enter or exit the course at any time without being evaluated negatively by the teacher
4. It is required to go through the bibliography related to the course

5. The terms used in the presentation of the course are understood by most students
6. I participate in seminars
7. The specialised terms are explained in such a way that they can be understood by the student
8. The content of the courses is presented coherently
9. I attended weekly seminars
10. In the course discussions, the teacher favours men more
11. I went through materials from the course bibliography
12. At the seminar, the theoretical contents presented in the course are discussed and clarified
13. The teacher prefers to talk only with certain students
14. Participation in this course is a waste of time
15. I consider that the knowledge acquired by participating in the course is useful for me as a future teacher
16. Seminar assignments are difficult
17. The connection between the courses is made gradually and coherently
18. In the course discussions, the teacher has preferences depending on the ethnicity of the students
19. The volume of information presented in the course can be managed by students
20. The course makes the connection between the theoretical aspects of the discipline and the daily reality
21. The teacher makes misplaced remarks or jokes
22. The teacher shows flexibility in teaching the content
23. The course content is boring
24. I participated in all classes
25. The teacher provides relevant examples
26. Students can ask questions about some concrete aspects experienced, related to the content of the course
27. The teacher repeats some information too much
28. The teacher provides useful answers to the questions asked by the students
29. The teacher interacts with the students during the presentation of the course
30. Students can intervene with questions, clarifications, during the course
31. The teacher is subjective
32. The teacher jokes without any connection with the topic of the course
33. The evaluation method at the end of the course is difficult
34. I consider that the knowledge acquired by participating in the course is useful for me as a person
35. In the course discussions, the teacher favours women more
36. The presentation of the course is made in an attractive way for the students
37. I would have preferred to have had several partial assessments during the semester
38. The information from the course helped me to understand some things better

39. The teacher in the presentation of the course follows the written content
40. The exam simulation is useful
41. I would have preferred to have attended classes in the classroom at the University
42. I can communicate with the teacher through the means provided by the university (UAB email, Teams)