



The Relationship Between of Personality Traits and Academic Burnout in Postgraduate Students

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship of personality traits and academic burnout. The sample consisted of 150 MSc students of Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz within the academic year of 2011-2012 who were selected randomly by multi-stage random sampling method. The data was collected by Big five inventory (BFI), and Maslach Burnout Inventor-Student Scale (MBI-SS). Pearson correlation analysis showed that openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion had a significantly negative correlation with academic burnout. Neuroticism had a significantly positive correlation with academic burnout. Results of regression analysis also showed that personality traits played a major role in predicting academic burnout.

Keywords: Personality Traits, Academic Burnout, University Students

INTRODUCTION

While the development of the term burnout is attributed to Freudenberger [1], much of what we know about this construct is based on the conceptualization of Maslach and Jackson [2] who described burnout as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment which is caused by chronic stress due to continuous involvement with clients in human services occupations. The concept of burnout has been extended to education context that is called academic burnout. Zhang, Gan, and Cham [3] described academic burnout as feeling exhausted because of study demands (exhaustion), having a cynical and detached attitude towards one's schoolwork (cynicism), and feeling incompetent as a student (reduced efficacy). Students who suffer from academic burnout, Usually experience symptoms such as in appetite the course content, inability in maintaining attendance in the classroom, no participation in class activities, lack of a meaningful sense in class work and feeling disability in learning academic materials. Many students who seek counseling are likely experiencing burnout or some of its consequences [4].

The literature is replete with studies that examine the relationship of student/academic burnout with various individual and, situational or contextual variables. Individual variables that have been hypothesized as related to burnout among students are coping flexibility [3], Temperament [4], self-esteem [5], and gender [4], [6]. Situational or contextual variables that have been studied in relation to burnout among students include school climate [7], social support [4], [6], academic major [8], academic achievement [9], and coursework [10]. Investigating of the studies conducted on school or academic burnout shows that these studies are focused on situational stressors, So that burnout is more known as a function of the situation, and less as a function of the individual's characteristics.

Generally, investigating the relationship between burnout and personality is based on the assumption that individual characteristics like personality influence on experiencing burnout. This means that a person's personality traits will make him/her more or less susceptible to burnout. Also, it has actually been suggested that personality may help individuals be protected against known risks of developing burnout [11]. Empirically, several studies examined the relationship between personality and burnout in the workplace. For example, Langelaan, Bakker, van Doornen and Schaufeli [12] found that higher level of neuroticism is positively related to higher level of burnout. This is expected that neuroticism is linked to a negative general appraisal tendency and maladaptive and ineffective coping [13]. Mills and Huebner [14] have found that neuroticism and extraversion are both associated with all three components of burnout. Other study findings showed that conscientiousness is associated with emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment; and agreeableness is associated with both

emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. On the other hand, Bakker et al. [11] demonstrated that neuroticism is the sole predictor of emotional exhaustion; neuroticism, extraversion and openness to experience has significant effects on depersonalization; and both neuroticism and extraversion predicted personal accomplishment. Furthermore, Zellars et al. [15] also found that neuroticism predicted emotional exhaustion, depersonalization predicted by extraversion and agreeableness, and openness to experience predicted personal accomplishment. David [16] in a study using path analysis showed that only conscientiousness had a significant relationship with the measure of burnout. Furthermore, in the study Alarcon, Eschleman & Bowling [17] results showed that the five-factor model of personality traits could explain significant variance of burnout and each of its dimensions. The main question of the research was whether there is a relationship between personality traits and burnout. To answer this question, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1: There is a negative relationship between openness to experience and academic burnout in university students.

Hypothesis 2: There is a negative relationship between conscientiousness and academic burnout in university students.

Hypothesis 3: There is a negative relationship between agreeableness and academic burnout in university students.

Hypothesis 4: There is a negative relationship between extraversion and academic burnout in university students.

Hypothesis 5: There is a positive relationship between neuroticism and academic burnout in university students.

Hypothesis 6: There is a multiple relationship between openness to experience, conscientiousness, agreeableness, extraversion, and neuroticism with academic burnout in university students.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research population consisted of all the MSc students of Shahid Chamran University (about 2000 students) in the academic year of 2011-2012. One hundred and fifty students (68 boys and 82 girls) were selected through multi-stage random sampling (ratio). Big five inventory (BFI), Maslach Burnout Inventor-Student Scale (MBI-SS) were used to collect the data .

Big Five Inventory (BFI): The BFI, developed by John, Donahue, and Kentle [18], is a 44-item Likert-type scale measure of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience. Shokri, Daneshvar Pour and Askari [19] reported the reliability coefficients of the BFI scales by Cronbach's Alpha respectively 0.84 (N), 0.72 (E), 0.76 (A), 0.60 (O) and 0.85 (C). In the present study, the instrument's Cronbach's alpha levels are 0/66 (N), 0.68 (E), 0.80 (A), 0.71 (O) and 0.75 (C). Also, in the present research, the validity of the inventory was measured using it correlation with test of NEO-five factor inventory and the following results were obtained: neuroticism (0.60), extraversion (0.59), agreeableness (0.72), conscientiousness (0.61), and openness to experience (0.55). Maslach Burnout Inventor-Student Scale (MBI-SS): The MBI-SS consists of 16 items that constitute the three scales for exhaustion, cynicism, efficacy and total score. All items are scored on a 6-point frequency rating scale ranging from 1 (never) to 6 (always). The authors reported Cronbach's alphas range from .65 to .86 across three nationalities [9]. Cronbach's alphas for the instrument in the present study are 0.80 (total), 0.74 (emotional exhaustion), 0.64 (cynicism) and 0.61 (efficacy). Similarly, the validity of this inventory by means of the internal consistency was calculated 0.68 for (emotional exhaustion), 0.70 for (cynicism) and 0.79 for (efficacy) which was significant at $p < 0.001$ level.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations of the scales. Table 2 shows correlation coefficients of the predictive variables with criterion variable.

Table 1. Mean and standard deviation of the predictive variables and criterion variable

Variable	M	SD	N
Openness to experience	33.37	3.93	150
conscientiousness	22.90	4.88	150
agreeableness	21.70	6.16	150
extraversion	25.16	4.96	150
neuroticism	21.29	4.06	150
Academic burnout	45.26	1.09	150

Table 2. Correlation coefficients of the predictive variables and criterion variable

Criterion Variable	Predictive Variables	Correlation Coefficient (R)	Sig.
Academic burnout	Openness to experience	-0.49	$P \leq 0.01$
	Conscientiousness	-0.41	$P \leq 0.01$
	Agreeableness	0.049	$P = 0.548$
	Extraversion	-0.21	$P \leq 0.01$
	Neuroticism	0.47	$P \leq 0.01$

According to table 2, there is a negative and significant correlation between openness to experience and Academic burnout ($r = -0.49, P \leq 0.01$). Thus, the research's first hypothesis is approved. Similarly, it's obtained a negative and significant correlation between conscientiousness and Academic burnout ($r = -0.41, P \leq 0.01$). Thus, the hypothesis 2 is approved. Instead, There is a positive and non-significant correlation between agreeableness and Academic burnout ($r = 0.049, P = 0.548$). Thus, the hypothesis 3 is rejected. There is a negative and significant correlation between extraversion and Academic burnout ($r = -0.21, P \leq 0.01$). Thus, the hypothesis 4 is approved. Furthermore, there is a positive and significant correlation between neuroticism and Academic burnout ($r = 0.47, P \leq 0.01$). Thus, the hypothesis 5 is approved.

According to Table 3 multiple regression analysis (enter method) showed that the neuroticism, extraversion, openness, conscientiousness and Agreeableness with Academic burnout ($F = 26.80, P < 0.001$). These variables explained 48% of the variance of Academic burnout. Thus, the hypothesis 6 is approved. The results from multiple regression analysis (stepwise model) showed that the openness, neuroticism, extraversion and conscientiousness had a significant multiple correlation with Academic burnout ($F = 32.53, P < 0.001$). These four variables are predictors of Academic burnout. Based on the obtained results, the component of Agreeableness eliminated from regression analysis (Table4).

Table 3. The results of multiple regression analysis with enter model

Dependent Variable	Predictors	MR	RS	F P	Regression coefficients				
					1	2	3	4	5
Academic burnout	Openness	0.49	0.24	F=47.62 P<0.001	$\beta = -0.49$ T= -6.90 P=0.001				
	Neuroticism	0.62	0.39	F=48.06 P<0.001	$\beta = -0.42$ T= -6.46 P=0.001	$\beta = 0.39$ T=6.07 P=0.001			
	Conscientiousness	0.66	0.44	F=38.37 P<0.001	$\beta = -0.35$ T= -5.44 P=0.001	$\beta = 0.35$ T=5.61 P=0.001	$\beta = -0.22$ T= -3.44 P=0.001		
	Extraversion	0.68	0.47	F=32.53 P<0.001	$\beta = -0.37$ T= -5.81 P=0.001	$\beta = 0.36$ T=5.77 P=0.001	$\beta = -0.19$ T= -2.94 P=0.004	$\beta = -0.18$ T= -2.97 P=0.003	
	Agreeableness	0.69	0.48	F=26.80 P<0.001	$\beta = -0.38$ T= -5.93 P=0.001	$\beta = 0.36$ T=5.90 P=0.001	$\beta = -0.19$ T= -2.93 P=0.004	$\beta = -0.17$ T= -2.86 P=0.005	$\beta = 0.096$ T=1.59 P=0.114

Table 4. The results of multiple regression analysis with stepwise model

Dependent Variable	Predictors	MR	RS	F P	Regression coefficients			
					1	2	3	4
Academic burnout	Openness	0.49	0.24	F=47.62 P<0.001	$\beta = -0.49$ T= -6.90 P=0.001			
	Neuroticism	0.62	0.39	F=48.06 P<0.001	$\beta = -0.42$ T= -6.46 P=0.001	$\beta = 0.39$ T=6.07 P=0.001		
	Extraversion	0.66	0.44	F=38.37 P<0.001	$\beta = -0.42$ T= -5.44 P=0.001	$\beta = 0.39$ T=5.61 P=0.001	$\beta = -0.21$ T= -3.44 P=0.001	
	Conscientiousness	0.68	0.47	F=32.53 P<0.001	$\beta = -0.37$ T= -5.81 P=0.001	$\beta = 0.36$ T=5.77 P=0.001	$\beta = -0.18$ T= -2.97 P=0.003	$\beta = -0.19$ T= -2.94 P=0.004

DISCUSSION

The present study has been designed for studying the relationship between personality traits and the academic burnout. In general, the results show that there is a negative and significant relationship between openness, conscientiousness and extraversion with academic burnout. Individuals with high scores on openness actively are seeking further educational opportunities and challenging occupational experiences. Usually,

openness index is positively associated with IQ and academic achievement scores and those with higher education levels are better at this scale. These individuals in confront to challenges and in order to achieve higher goals show more and more efforts [20]. So it can be expected that these students are less susceptible to the negative consequences of academic burnout. Conscientiousness, includes qualities such as a sense of responsibility, need to the achievement and organization. Individuals with high scores on conscientiousness; are purposeful, strong-willed, energetic and decided [21]. extroversion including characteristics such as sociability, being decisive, being active, assertiveness, sensation seeking, and positive emotions which all can be stimulating and progressive [20]. Therefore, students who have extroversion properties are expecting to use more environmental motivating resources in doing their class/home assignment that can reduce academic burnout. Besides, the result of this study shows that the neuroticism is positively related to the academic burnout. In order to explain this finding, Individuals with high scores on Neuroticism tend to irrational thoughts, less ability to control their impulses, feel sadness and continuous and generalized confusion and weaker adjustment with stress and stressful situations [21]. So it can be expected that these students to experience academic stress and greater internal and external pressures.

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