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Preprint / Preprint

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Yahaya, M. F., Mohamed, A. R., & Mohamed Ismail, S. A. M. (2012). The Relationship between Personality Traits and Reading Proficiency. *International Proceedings of Economic Development and Research*, 53(8), 36-40. <https://doi.org/10.7763/IPEDR.2012.V53.8>

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Please cite the article as Yahaya, M.F., Mohamed, Abdul Rashid, & Mohamed Ismail, S.A.M. (2012). The relationship between personality traits and reading proficiency. *International Proceedings of Economics Development and Research*.53, 36-40.

## The relationship between personality traits and reading proficiency

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**Abstract.** Generally, different individuals have the tendency to perform differently while reading. Despite such variation, studies have shown that readers have the tendency to be consistent in their performance. Studies have also found such consistency can be traced to the personality traits of the subjects. Hence, the purpose of the study is to investigate the relationship between personality traits and reading proficiency score. The respondents of this study are mainly third semester diploma students of various courses from one of the leading institution of higher learning in Malaysia involving 313 students. The respondents are required to sit for a reading proficiency test and a personality trait test. An analysis of variance is used to see whether certain personality traits can be associated to reading proficiency. Using a one way analysis of variance, it is found that none of the personality traits show significant relationship to reading proficiency as  $p > 0.05$ . However, despite the insignificant relationship between reading proficiency and personality traits, it is found that there are some negative correlations between reading proficiency score and personality traits.

**Keywords:** personality traits, Five Factor Model of personality, reading proficiency

### 1. Introduction

According to the five factor model of personality, personality may vary in terms of the five personality traits namely, extraversion, openness to experience, emotional stability, agreeableness and conscientiousness (Lee-Baggeley, Preece & Delongis, 2005). Generally, the quality of extraversion, conscientiousness, openness, emotional stability and agreeableness can be found in all of us but the only difference is in terms of the degree of the five traits.

Similarly, the proficiency of the readers would also be different depending on the ability of the person. Different readers have the tendency to perform differently while reading. A person may be grouped into certain similar group namely, high, intermediate or low proficiency level. Nevertheless, by focusing on the individual aspects within the group, it may be noticed that despite being within the same group, each one of them may have different proficiency level. One reader may be able to comprehend a reading text better despite being in the same proficiency group with other readers.

Studies have shown that readers have the tendency to be consistent in their performance (McCrae & Costa, 1987). Studies have also found such consistency can be traced to the personality traits of the subjects (Connor-Smith & Flachsbar, 2007; Hambrick & McCord, 2010). In other words, the personality traits of the subjects are causing such differences. Nevertheless, what and how personality traits are influencing the reading proficiency is not known.

For that reason the study will investigate the relationship between personality traits and the performance in a reading proficiency test. The study is developed based on an alternative hypothesis that personality traits are related to reading proficiency.

Studies have found that personality traits can be a predictor of a person's performance (Chunping, Dengfeng & Fan, 2009; Matzler, Renzl, Mooradian et al., 2011). Certain types of personality traits can dictate the performance of a person. However, whether these different personality traits become the predictor of the students' reading proficiency is the concern of this study.

#### 1.1 Factors influencing reading

Unlike other behaviour, reading involves some cognitive processing of information that. Readers are expected to cognitively self-regulate the reading processes by self-assessing, self-strategizing and self-

adjusting the reading (Griffith & Ruan, 2005). On that reason, the ability to manipulate the cognitive abilities is essential.

Aside from the cognitive abilities, the prior knowledge of the subject matter may also influence a person's success in reading. If a reader is able to make connection of the new text to the existing knowledge, reading will become more successful (Grabe, 2009).

Furthermore, the working memory of the readers may also become a factor. A person's ability to process certain amount of information depends on the capacity of the working memory (Carroll, 2008). The bigger the working memory, the more information can be processed

The significant roles of the cognitive abilities, prior knowledge as well as the working memory, to a certain extent, undermine the role of the personality traits in reading processes. Nevertheless, studies have discovered that there is some relationships between reading behaviour and personality traits (Brow, 2008; O'Donnell, 2006). In fact, Pulford and Sohal (2006) discovered that a prediction of the reading performance can be made by looking into the degrees of the personality traits.

## 2. Method

The study is based solely on quantitative approach. Such approach is hope to able to deduce how significant personality traits are to the reading proficiency of the readers

### 2.1 The respondents of the study

The subjects of the study involved third semester diploma students of Universiti Teknologi Mara Perlis, Malaysia. The whole population of the third semester English course students is 468 students. From this number, only 313 students consisting of 121 male and 192 female completed all the required assessment while the rest of the students did not complete the test or did not turn up for the test.

### 2.2 Measures and Procedures

The respondents of the study were required to respond to two different instruments namely the personality trait test and the reading proficiency test.

The personality trait test, Cronbach Alpha of 7.1, is a 50-item public domain International Personality Item Pool (IPIP) with five-point likert scale. The test is translated into Malay language from its original English version. The test is used to classify the readers' personality traits levels on the basis of the five factor model of personality traits which include emotional stability, extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness. The subjects are profiled according to the five factor model of personality traits.

The reading proficiency test, Cronbach alpha of 8.5, consists of six reading texts with 45 multiple-choice questions. The time allocated for the test is ninety minutes.

## 3. Findings

The personality traits of the subjects in this study are categorized as extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability and openness. Prior to the testing of the analysis of variance (Anova), Levene test of homogeneity of variance are conducted on all the five personality traits. Table 3.0 shows the findings of the test of homogeneity of variance for the personality traits. The Levene's test results indicated the homogeneity of variances were not significant in all the five personality traits ( $p > .05$ ). This means that the population variance for each group was approximately equal. For that reason, the use of the analysis of variance to find out the relationship between reading proficiency score and the personality traits of the subjects is appropriate.

Table 3.0 Test of Homogeneity of Variance for the Personality Traits

	Levene			
	Statistics	df1	df2	Sig.
Extraversion	.267	2	310	.766
Agreeableness	1.197	2	310	.303
Conscientiousness	.039	2	310	.962
Emotional stability	2.785	2	310	.063
Openness	1.322	2	310	.268

A one way analysis of variance was administered to evaluate the relationship between the personality traits of the subjects and the reading proficiency score. The independent variable of the test is the personality traits of the subjects which actually measure the degrees of five factor personality traits. Nevertheless, after computing the degree of the personality traits level from the fifty item questionnaires only three levels of personality traits can be traced in all the subjects across the personality traits. Level 2 of the personality traits is considered as low; level 3 is considered as intermediate and level 4 is considered as high. The dependent variable of the subjects is the reading proficiency score of the subjects. Table 4.0 shows the relationship between personality traits and reading proficiency score.

In terms of extraversion personality traits, the highest mean can be traced in the low level of extraversion ( $x = 2.5000$ ,  $sd=.70711$ ) followed by intermediate level ( $x = 1.9929$ ,  $sd =.55858$ ). The analysis, however, showed that there is no significant difference among the three mean scores,  $F= (2, 310) = .782$ ,  $p=.419$ .

In terms of agreeableness, equal mean can be found in the low level ( $x= 2.0000$ ,  $sd=.81650$ ) as well as the intermediate level of agreeableness ( $x=2.0000$ ,  $sd=.54433$ ). Nevertheless, there is no significant difference among the three mean scores,  $F= (2, 310)=1.49$ ,  $p> 0.05$ .

The highest mean for conscientiousness can be found in low level of conscientiousness ( $x=2.1667$ ,  $sd=.40825$ ) followed by the intermediate level ( $x=1.9964$ ,  $sd=.55941$ ). Again, there is no significant difference among the three mean scores,  $F=(2, 310)=.486$ ,  $p>0.05$ .

No significant difference can also be traced among the three means in both emotional stability where  $F(2, 310)=.020$ ,  $p= .980$  and openness where  $F(2, 310)= 1.374$ ,  $p=.255$ ). The highest mean score for emotional stability is at low level ( $x= 2.000$ ,  $sd=.73855$ ) while for openness is at intermediate level ( $x=2.0068$ ,  $sd =.55418$ ).

The partial eta square of less 0.01 shows a very weak relationship between the independent variables namely the personality traits and the reading proficiency score.

Table 4.0 Analysis of variance on the subjects' personality trait and the reading proficiency score.

Dependent Variable: reading							
Source	N	Mean	Sd	df	F	Sig.	Partial $\eta^2$
Extraversion	2.00	2	2.500	.70711			
	3.00	283	1.9929	.55858			
	4.00	28	1.9643	.50787			
	Total	313	1.9936	.55466	2	.872	.419
Agreeableness	2.00	4	2.0000	.81650			
	3.00	271	2.0000	.54433			
	4.00	38	1.9474	.61281			
	Total	313	1.9936	.55466	2	1.49	.861
Conscientiousness	2.00	6	2.1667	.40825			
	3.00	279	1.9964	.55941			
	4.00	28	1.9286	.53945			
	Total	313	1.9936	.55466	2	.486	.615
Emotional stability	2.00	12	2.0000	.73855			
	3.00	254	1.9961	.52973			
	4.00	47	1.9787	.64232			
	Total	313	1.9936	.55466	2	.020	.980
Openness	2.00	5	1.8000	.83666			
	3.00	294	2.0068	.55418			
	4.00	14	1.7857	.42582			
	Total	313	1.9936	.55466	2	1.374	.255

However, none of the personality traits are significantly correlated to the reading score. The study shows that there are some negative correlations on reading against extraversion ( $r= -.021$ ), agreeableness ( $r= -.109$ ) and conscientiousness ( $r= -.020$ ) while some positive correlations are found on emotional stability ( $r= .032$ ) and openness ( $r=.098$ ). Despite the insignificant correlation found in relation to reading, the study found that person who would probably do well in reading is an introvert rather than extrovert, antagonist rather than

agreeable, undirected rather than conscientious, emotionally stable rather than neurotic as well as opened to values and experience.

Table 5.0 Correlation between personality traits and reading proficiency

		extravert	agree	conscience	emotion	open	reading
extravert	Pearson Correlation	1	.250(**)	.150(**)	.188(**)	.207(**)	-.021
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.008	.001	.000	.715
	N	313	313	313	313	313	313
agree	Pearson Correlation	.250(**)	1	.217(**)	.024	.222(**)	-.109
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.672	.000	.054
	N	313	313	313	313	313	313
conscience	Pearson Correlation	.150(**)	.217(**)	1	.150(**)	.114(*)	-.020
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.008	.000		.008	.043	.724
	N	313	313	313	313	313	313
emotion1	Pearson Correlation	.188(**)	.024	.150(**)	1	.085	.032
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.672	.008		.133	.568
	N	313	313	313	313	313	313
open	Pearson Correlation	.207(**)	.222(**)	.114(*)	.085	1	.098
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.043	.133		.083
	N	313	313	313	313	313	313
reading	Pearson Correlation	-.021	-.109	-.020	.032	.098	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.715	.054	.724	.568	.083	
	N	313	313	313	313	313	313

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

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

## 4. Discussion

Based on the findings derived from the analysis of variance and pearson correlation, it is found that personality traits have little relationship to the reading proficiency of the readers. This shows that the relevancy of the personality traits to reading proficiency score is very minimal.

Despite the contradicting findings from Brow (2008), O'Donnell (2006) and Pulford and Sohal (2006), the study concurs with Griffith and Ruan (2005), Grabe (2009) and Carroll (2008) that there are other factors that influence the success of the reading comprehension. In fact, the study shows that the latter factors may in fact play a bigger role compared to the personality traits of the readers in the success of reading comprehension.

Another possible explanation for this finding is that reading involves cognitive processes while personality traits are part of affective factors. Since the two elements are different from one another, it is only logical that two may have little or no relationship. Whatever relationship between the two elements may be considered as coincidental rather than expected.

## 5. Conclusion

The study does not find any significant relationship between reading proficiency score and the personality traits. Nevertheless, there are some negative relationships between some of the personality traits against reading proficiency score. However, they are not significant. The study also discovered that certain personality traits correlate with other types of personality traits. This proves that people generally would have more than one personality traits. The differences, however, is in terms of the degree of the traits.

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