

The Relationship between Personality and Self-Esteem towards University Students in Malaysia

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Abstract. This research investigated the relationship between personality traits and self-esteem among university students in Malaysia. The main objective of this research is to assess the relationship between personality traits and self-esteem among university students. This research examined the predictive value of Big Five Personality Factors for university students' self-esteem and surveyed the gender difference in Big Five Personality Factors. Participants of this study were 515 university students (258 females and 257 males). The sampling method that was used in this study is purposive sampling. Two highly versatile instruments were used in this research which are Big Five Personality Factor's Scale (Goldberg, 1999) and Coopersmith's Esteem Scale (CSEI). The Big Five Personality Inventory (BFI) is comprised of 44 items, Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). This instrument has five subscales which are extraversion (E), agreeableness (A), conscientiousness (C), openness (O) and neuroticism (N). The CSEI is a 58 item scale developed by Coopersmith (1967) to measure self-esteem. This scale was based on two options which are, "Like me" or "Unlike me". Results show a significant positive correlation of self-esteem and personality. Simultaneous multiple regression of self-esteem on the personality traits sub scales, revealed that the extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness were significant positive predictor and neuroticism versus emotion stability was significant negative predictor of the self-esteem. The results of analysis t-test indicated gender difference in male and females in two personality traits which are conscientiousness and neuroticism while no significant gender difference extraversion, agreeableness and openness traits. In a nutshell, this study indicates that personality traits influences an individual's life in every domain which serves the purpose of this study and it highlights the connections between self-esteem and the Big Five dimensions can be accounted for by individual differences.

Keywords: University students, self-esteem, personality

Introduction

There are many studies being done on personality and self-esteem for decades now. The study of self-esteem and personality are usually done for students and adolescents (Dweck, 2008). In 1985, Demo stated that when it comes to examining human personality, most researchers tend to put self-esteem as the central focus of research despite it being inconclusive. According to Demo (1985) study on self-esteem can be haphazard because there is a diverse range of measurement procedures and in some case there are non-existent or weak correlations among indicators. Meanwhile, Baumeister (1993) identified self-esteem as the most researched topic within social psychology. This observation still remains true till today (Edworthy & Cole, 2012). Self-esteem can be defined as the extent to which we like accept or approve of ourselves, or how much we value ourselves (McLeod, 2008). In a simpler word, self-esteem can be called as self-worth. Self-esteem is the small branch from the big tree called self-concept (Baumeister, 1999). Judgement and feedback of others play important roles in the formation of self-

esteem (Cast & Burke, 2002). Somehow self-esteem can also be categorized as a type of individual's character (Demo, 1985).

Discussing on individual's character, the next key focus of this study is personality. Personality is a very wide topic, but in this research, focus has been given to the Big Five Personality Factors which is also known as "Big 5" or acronymically known as "OCEAN". Allport (1961) stated that personality is the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his characteristics behaviour and thought. Personality can also be defined as the characteristics or blend of characteristics that make a person unique (Weinberg & Gould, 1999). In Social Learning Theory, Bandura (1977) have mentioned that a person's characters are developed through both nature (genetic, by birth) and nurture (environment). He also highlighted that personality may remain the same or change over time (Bandura, 1986).

Since personality is a very wide topic, in this study, the focus was given to the big five personality traits. The theory of the big five personality traits started expanding around 1940s (Allport, 1961). D.W Fiske (1949) was a

pioneer psychologist who started to believe that there are only five core personality factors. This belief slowly became the foundation of the big five personality theory (Dweck, 2008). Later on, this theory was expanded upon by other psychologists like Norman, Smith, Goldberg and McCrae & Costa. The five personality traits in this theory are openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism (emotional instability). Every individual have all five traits within them and what differentiates everyone is the percentage or the range of each trait. Each of the five personality factors represents a range between two extremes (Weinberg & Gould, 1999). For example, extraversion represents a continuum between extreme extraversion and extreme introversion.

Various studies have been done on personality and self-esteem in the past years. However, most of the studies done were focused on working people compared to students. For example, more researches have been done in finding out the connection between personality and self-esteem which contributes in terms of work motivation, job performance and job satisfaction (Edworthy & Cole, 2012). Therefore it is also important to learn about students' personality and self-esteem. This is because one can perform better as a student by being aware about his/her self-esteem which can be affected by their personality (Cast & Burke, 2002).

As mentioned earlier, human's personality comprise of all five personality traits and what differentiates each individual is their dominant trait (based score of the trait) (John & Srivatsa, 2001). It is crucial to find out which personality traits can be the positive predictors for students' self-esteem level. This is because some of the traits tend to be the negative predictor of self-esteem level which can indirectly affect the students' performance in university (Dweck, 2008). Research objectives are (1) To assess the relationship between personality traits and self-esteem among university students. (2) To examine the predictive value of Big Five Personality Factors for university students' self-esteem. (3) To find out the gender difference in Big Five Personality Factors. Research Questions are (1) Is there a relationship between personality traits and self-esteem among university students? (2) Do personality traits have effect on the level of self-esteem of university students? (3) Is there a gender difference in personality traits of university students?

Method

Participants of this study were 515 university students (258 females and 257 males). The sampling method that was used in this study is purposive sampling. This study was aimed to investigate the relationship between personality traits and self-esteem among university students in Malaysia. The samples were obtained from various universities' across Malaysia. Mean age of the students are 22.56 (SD = 2.89). In order to have a better response rate, administered on-site method and online survey method was used for data collection. This method is very efficient in generating large amount of data

especially when the survey is conducted during meeting with the respondents and as the researchers are unable to travel across states to obtain results. Respondents were required to rate their degree of agreement by assigning point on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). They were also reminded that there is no right or wrong answer to the questions and confidentiality of their answers is guaranteed.

The Big Five Personality Inventory (BFI) is comprised of 44 items. This instrument has five subscales which are extraversion (*E*), agreeableness (*A*), conscientiousness (*C*), openness (*O*) and neuroticism (*N*). The researchers adapted these measures because they were short instruments and easy to understand by the respondents. The Alpha coefficient for this overall scale 0.67 in this research. The Cronbach's alphas were .68, .40, .50, .73, and .45 for the Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, and Openness to Experience scales respectively. BFI also shows high convergent validity with other self-report scales and with peer ratings of the Big Five (Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann Jr, 2003). Each of this personality trait scales has a high inter item reliability which are 0.73 (*E*), 0.86 (*A*), 0.70 (*C*), 0.74 (*O*) and 0.77 (*N*) respectively (Amirazodi & Amirazodi, 2011). The test-retest reliability of BFI indicated .80 which is relatively high. The correlation reliability between the 100-item Goldberg inventory and were .71, .69, .66, .71, and .61 for conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, emotional stability, and openness to experience, respectively. Coefficient alphas (e.g., α from .70 to .80) and test-retest reliabilities (e.g., r from .75 to .90) across scale scores have been considered satisfactory in cross-cultural samples using multiple translations of the measure for this instrument. Findings showed, with the exception of the Openness scale, all alpha values were $\geq .80$. Additionally, BFI test-retest reliability of scores ranged from .93 (Openness/Neuroticism) to .96 (Extraversion) (Arterberry, Martens, Cadigan, & Rohrer, 2016).

The CSEI is a 58 item scale developed by Coopersmith (1967) to measure self-esteem. This scale was based on two options which are, "Like me" or "Unlike me". Participants have to choose the response based on the items. This scale has a special subscale which is the Lie scale. There are 8 questions in this subscale. A separate score total number of responses indicative of defensive. If the individual score three "Like Me" in these eight questions, they are excluded from the sample. The overall scoring for this instrument is over 50 excluding the lie scale. Total score of self-esteem was obtained by adding the items based on the individual's own perception and associating this perception to personal competence. The Alpha coefficient for this overall scale 0.76 in this research. CSEI has a high reliability. Test retest reliabilities obtained with the full CSEI range from .88 (over a five week period) to .70 (over a three year period). In addition, a test-retest coefficient of 0.61 was found over a nine month period. According to the results of KR-20,

reliability coefficient of the scale was found to be .76 and internal consistency reliability coefficient was found to be .81 (Ummet, 2015). Global general self-esteem was measured with Coopersmith's Self-Esteem Inventory, e.g., "I'm not as nice and good looking as most people", reversed coding, (alpha = .79), and with Rosenberg's Self-Esteem (RSE) Scale (1965) e.g., "I feel that I have a lot to be proud of", (alpha = .84). This indicated that CSEI has a good construct validity (Johnson, 2016).

Results

The table below shows the frequency of participants according to their respected ages. The youngest age of the participant is 20 years old and the oldest age is 32 years old. The mean age of the sample in this research is 22.54 years old with a standard deviation, SD = 2.89. The diagram illustrates the age of participants of this research.

The table below shows the frequency of participants according to their respected gender. The number of participants are almost equivalent according to gender in this research. The table below illustrates the frequency of participants according to gender.

Table 1. Gender

Gender	Frequency
Female	258
Male	257

The table below shows the frequency of participants according to their respected ethnicity. The majority participants of this research are Indians with 33.59%, Chinese and Malay participants are 25.05% each respectively in this research. The diagram below illustrates the frequency of ethnicity.

Table 2. Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Frequency
Indian	173
Malay	129
Chinese	129
Others	84

The results revealed positive and significant correlations between extraversion ($r = .17, p < .001$), agreeableness ($r = .15, p < .001$), conscientiousness ($r = .11, p < .05$) and openness ($r = .38, p < .001$) to self-esteem, whereas it is negative and significant correlations between neuroticism and self-esteem, $r = -.35, p < .001$ (Table 4).

Table 3. Correlation between Personality Traits and Self-Esteem

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
Extravers ion	1					
Agreeable ness	.52**	1				
Conscient iousness	.29**	.22**	1			
Openness	.64**	.35**	.05	1		
Neuroticis m	.38**	.34**	.21**	.28**	1	
Self-esteem	.17**	.15**	.11*	.38**	-	1

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.001$

Simultaneous multiple regression of self-esteem total score on the personality traits sub scales, revealed that the extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness were significant positive predictor and neuroticism versus emotion stability was significant negative predictor of the self-esteem (Table 5). Multiple regression analysis was used to test if the personality traits significantly predicted participants' self-esteem. The results of the regression indicated the five predictors explained 27% of the variance ($R^2 = .27, F(5,509) = 37.08, p < .01$). It was found that extraversion significantly predicted self-esteem ($\beta = .29, p < .001$), as did agreeableness ($\beta = .18, p < .001$). Conscientiousness significantly predicted self-esteem ($\beta = .09, p < .05$), openness significantly predicted self-esteem ($\beta = .14, p < .001$) and lastly neuroticism also significantly predicted self-esteem ($\beta = -.52, p < .001$).

Table 4. Multiple Regression of Personality Traits on Self-Esteem

Criterion variable	Self-Esteem					
	R	R ²	B	β	t	p <
Prediction Variable						
Extraversion			.79	.2	5.09	0.001
Agreeableness			.46	.1	3.98	0.001
Conscientiousness	.52	.27	.15	.0	2.28	0.05
Openness			.69	.1	2.96	0.001
Neuroticism			-	-	12.43	0.001

The results of analysis t-test showed that the mean score of females (M = 3.38, SD = 7.24) was significantly greater than males in the conscientiousness (M = 32.10, SD = 4.88). The mean score of females (M = 27.25, SD = 3.51) were also significantly higher than the males in neuroticism (M = 26.60, SD = 3.28). Although, there is no significant difference between girls and boys in extraversion, agreeableness and openness traits (Table 5).

Table 5. Independent Sample T-Test of Sample in Personality Traits and Self-Esteem

Variable	Female		Males		t	p<
	M	SD	M	SD		
Extraversion	28.05	3.39	28.10	3.73	1.12	.87
Agreeableness	30.69	3.98	31.04	3.79	1.02	.30
Conscientiousness	33.38	7.24	32.10	4.88	2.34	.02
Openness	37.49	5.23	37.60	5.30	0.75	.81
Neuroticism	27.25	3.51	26.60	3.28	2.19	.03

Discussion

The current study conducted revealed a basic profile of personality traits and self-esteem using a large sample of university students. The results revealed that there are significant positive correlation between extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness with self-esteem. In other words, high level of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness revealed a high level of self-esteem which states that these traits are significant positive predictor of self-esteem. These findings were congruent with previous research studies suggesting that personality traits impacts university student's self-esteem. The researchers Zeigler, Holden, Enjaian, Southard, Besser, Li and Zhang (2015) revealed that self-esteem was associated with high levels of extraversion, emotional stability, agreeableness and conscientiousness. The characteristics associated with extroverts are known to be outgoing, dominant, energetic, and expressive (Amirazodi and Amirazodi (2011). Those who are extrovert tend to have lower levels of shyness and social inhibition. Extrovert individuals are also assertive and bold that results them to be more engaged in a lot of activities and in civil associations and their participation leads them to excel in many different situations that in return will increase their self-esteem level. Extroverts tend to communicate with a lot of people and they speak out their problem with friends and family as they seek out for stimulation from their external environment (Muthu, Balbag & Cemrek, 2010).

On the other hand, individuals having high level of openness to experience tend to possess traits such as creativity, aesthetic sensitivity, the ability to learn quick, clever and insightful. Individuals who are high on openness tend to move out of their comfort zone and constantly acquire wide range of interests in order to have new experiences. According to Kumari and Sharma (2016), extraversion and openness to experience are crucial determinants of mental well-being and those who scored high on these personality traits tend to have high score on mental well-being as well. According to Amirazodi and Amirazodi (2011), students who are agreeable tend to have traits such as straightforward, helpful and more trusting. Those who are under this domain of personality are the ones who are cooperative

and gets involved with altruistic activities and have a positive view of human nature. In addition, conscientiousness was also positively correlated with self-esteem. According to Muthu and colleagues (2010), the traits of conscientiousness are linked with self-disciplined, self-control and persistence. Students who are high on conscientiousness always stand strong for their own point of view and decisions and stick to their decisions until it can be. Besides that, high self-esteem individuals are those who believes in themselves that they are capable and worthy. They also view themselves as someone who is competent and capable of doing things, in other words, an individual with a sense of personal adequacy. Hence, it could be seen that the positive effect of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness on self-esteem is conformed.

On the other hand, this study revealed that there is a significant negative correlation between neuroticism and self-esteem among university students. This finding is significant with previous research study that was conducted by Amirazodi and Amirazodi (2011) on university students. Individuals who are neurotics tend to be overly anxious, more prone to stress, constantly lack of confidence, experience a lot of mood swings, easily get frustrated and often feels insecure in their relationship. According to Kumari and Sharma (2016), neuroticism can influence the individual's level of subjective well-being. Thus, the negative relationship between neuroticism and self-esteem is supportably. Researchers Teng and Liu (2013) revealed that neurotic university students positively predict negative emotions such as depression and anxiety. Neurotics tend to react excessively to certain stimuli and most of the time feel nervous in all type of situations. According to Sushma, Kumar and Batra (2015), individuals who shows traits such as self-pitying, conforming, disorganized, careless and also reserved have lower levels of self-esteem. Researcher Barlett and Anderson (2012) also reported that there is a strong negative correlation between neuroticism and self-esteem.

Furthermore, this research study also revealed that the mean score of females was significantly higher than males in the personality trait of both conscientiousness and neuroticism. This research findings is inclined with previous research study conducted by Weisberg, DeYoung and Hirsh (2011) that revealed higher scores for females in neuroticism. Females scored higher than males in levels of anxiety and low level of self-esteem. In terms of anger, some studies reported that males scored higher levels of hostility, some reported females scored higher in terms of anger and some researchers revealed that there are no gender differences when it comes to anger. Females tend to associated with negative affect, submissiveness, nurturance and more concerned with feelings than ideas compared to males (Paul, Terracciano & McCrae, 2001).

In a study conducted by Djuidiyah, Sulastiana, Harding and Sumantri (2016), female scored higher than males in neuroticism mainly due to physical growth and

androgen hormones as females are constantly showing more hormonal changes. Females also tend to go through a lot of psychological and social difficulties than males such as negative gender expectations and stereotypes. Besides that, girls tend to score higher in neuroticism due to having negative self-perception and body image than males. In comparison with men, woman tend to score higher in conscientiousness trait when it comes to order, self-discipline and dutifulness and females tend to value perfectionism more than males. In addition to that, more egalitarian gender roles, socio-political gender equity and gender socialization were associated with larger gender differences in these two traits, neuroticism and conscientiousness (Schmitt, Long, McPhearson, O'Brien, Remmert & Shah, 2017).

Conclusion

Results of this research study revealed that extraversion, agreeableness, openness and conscientiousness personality traits were a significant positive predictor of the self-esteem whereas neuroticism was a significant negative predictor of the self-esteem. In terms of gender differences, females scored higher on neuroticism and conscientiousness when compared with males. As a result, it could be seen that personality traits influences an individual's life in every domain.

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