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Conscientiousness as a key to success for academic achievement among French university students enrolled in management studies

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify the role of the five-factor model in the prediction of academic motivation, procrastination, and academic achievement among French university students enrolled in management studies. Overall, 404 first- and second-year management students answered a questionnaire composed of the following scales: Big Five-fr, academic motivation, and procrastination. The study identified that management students with higher annual results are the most conscientious and intrinsically motivated, and they procrastinate less and are less amotivated. Thus, among management students, the trait of conscientiousness is the best predictor of academic achievement. On the whole, the contribution of this study is twofold: first, it brings to light the central role of conscientiousness, in particular as a moderator between amotivation and academic results; and second, it proposes the combined analysis of personality, motivation, and procrastination as explanatory variables for academic results. Finally, this study delivers useful insights on how to move towards greater engagement of first- and second-year students regarding French education policies. This is one of the first studies to provide evidence of the relationship between personality and academic success within the French context.

1. Introduction

Though achieving satisfactory academic results is the goal of all the students enrolled at the University, many of them tend to postpone several tasks overnight, which directly affects their motivation and later their exam results. Moreover, personality could also be a possible explanation for students' motivation and academic success. In the United States, an initial study has confirmed these relationships for a population of students from different fields of education (Komarraju, Karau, & Schmeck, 2009). Moreover, some studies have also established the link between personality traits and procrastination (Steel, 2007), personality traits and motivation for studies (Komarraju et al., 2009; Payne, Youngcourt, & Beaubien, 2007), and personality traits and GPA (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007; Komarraju, Karau, Schmeck, & Avdic, 2011; Komarraju et al., 2009). In a nutshell, it is proposed to investigate the central role of conscientiousness for predicting academic success and evolve the link between personality traits with academic motivation and procrastination. To the best of our knowledge, no French study has investigated these relationships until now, particularly as regards to first- and second-year students enrolled in management studies.

2. Personality traits and academic achievement

University, the workplace, and social relationships are all vital, and the majority of us would like to succeed in every step of our lives. It is now evident that some facets of personality directly affect various life outcomes, such as academic and workplace success

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(Roberts, Kuncel, Shiner, Caspi, & Goldberg, 2007). Originally developed by McCrae and Costa (1987), the five-factor model (FFM) of personality has been widely explored in many fields, and personality is considered as a non-cognitive competency (Moore & Shute, 2017). Also, the FFM characterises five ranges of personalities, known in France as the OCEAN model and frequently expanded as follows: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. Essentially, scholars favour the use of FFM to assess personality (Costa & McCrae, 1995; Furnham, 1996; John, Naumann, & Soto, 2008, pp. 114–158) and the FFM should be represented at various levels in every human personality (Plaisant, Courtois, Réveillère, Mendelsohn, & John, 2010). To a large extent, personality, which is considered as the stable dimension of an individual, seems to predict academic success (Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2003a, 2003b, 2002). Contemporary researchers have found a relationship between Big Five personality and academic achievement. For the purpose of this study, a special focus on the trait of conscientiousness will be presented.

The trait of openness mirrors the extent of intellectual curiosity, creativity, or eclecticism. Blended results have been found concerning openness to predict academic performance. Sometimes positive (Komarraju et al., 2011; Phillips, Abraham, & Bond, 2003) and sometimes negative (Bauer & Liang, 2003; Conard, 2006; Nofle & Robins, 2007).

In the same vein, a high score on extraversion (i.e., sociable, active, talkative, open to others) is not synonymous with academic performance (Heaven, Mak, Barry, & Ciarrochi, 2002; Komarraju et al., 2011). Also, a negative relationship can be highlighted with academic performance (Hair & Hampson, 2006) as well as a positive one (Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2015; Goff & Ackerman, 1992; Rothstein, Paunonen, Rush, & King, 1994).

Similarly, agreeableness which refers to the propensity to be confident, compassionate, helpful and indulgent in social situation shows equivocal results among scholars. For example, Komarraju et al. (2011), Conard (2006), Lounsbury, Sundstrom, Loveland, and Gibson (2003) or Farsides and Woodfield (2003) have found a positive relationship between agreeableness and academic success. They suggest that students with higher level of agreeableness have a higher propensity to attend the institution and thus to reap more knowledge positively affecting academic results. Nevertheless, we should mention that Paunonen (1998) or Rothstein et al. (1994) have found counteract results.

Concerning the trait of neuroticism which refers to be in negative emotional state, results converged and demonstrated a negative and significant relationship with academic performance (Ackerman & Heggestad, 1997; Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2003a; De Raad & Schouwenburg, 1996; Wagerman & Funder, 2007) or no causal relationship (Komarraju et al., 2009, 2011).

However, to the best of our knowledge, we did not find any ambivalence concerning conscientiousness as a predictor of academic achievement. Those with a high level of conscientiousness undoubtedly have a higher chance of obtaining academic success (Busato, Prins, Elshout, & Hamaker, 2000; Komarraju et al., 2011; O'Connor & Paunonen, 2007; Poropat, 2009; Trapmann, Hell, Hirn, & Schuler, 2007). Hence, in their meta-analysis, neither Trapmann et al. (2007) nor Poropat (2009) mention any French study. Moreover, McCrae and John (1992) associate a high level of conscientiousness with adjectives like organised, reliable, hard worker, self-disciplined, meticulous, punctual, perseverant, and ambitious. Therefore, conscientiousness is linked from an early age to persistence in the effort (Nofle & Robins, 2007; Perry, Hunter, Witt, & Harris, 2010) and desire to learn (Colquitt & Simmering, 1998). Moreover, in recent studies, conscientiousness has been linked to grade point average (GPA), predicting that students with a high level of conscientiousness would have a higher chance of obtaining a higher GPA (Duckworth et al., 2007; Komarraju et al., 2009, 2011). However, the latter studies did not focus on a specific field of education; as data were collected from various majors, and the focus was consequently not on any one major in particular. Moreover, these studies did not explore the relationship between personality and procrastination.

3. Personality traits and procrastination in education

Procrastination is a widespread phenomenon characterised by the desire to postpone activities to a later date while bearing in mind the potential negative consequences of doing this (Klingsieck, 2013; Steel, 2007). This attitude is particularly present among students (Solomon & Rothblum, 1984). In fact, about 50% of them display regular procrastinating behaviour (Day, Mensink, and O'Sullivan, 2000), which negatively impacts their academic performance in comparison to the students who do not engage in this behaviour (Steel, 2007). Thus, procrastination has a significant and negative influence on students' academic achievement (Steel, 2007). This result is also effective in a different cultural context such as in Italy (De Paola & Scoppa, 2015).

Furthermore, the activities of procrastination are highly diverse, but sleeping and watching television are the most prominent (Pychyl, Lee, Thibodeau, & Blunt, 2000). In addition, procrastination affects mental health (Fee & Tangney 2000; Strongman & Burt, 2000) and physical well-being (Sirois, Melia-Gordon, & Pychyl, 2003, Stead, Shanahan, and Neufeld, 2010). The recent literature confirms that conscientiousness, unsurprisingly, is always negatively correlated with academic procrastination (Gustavson & Miyake, 2017). However, it is not surprising that academic procrastination, in fact, is negatively correlated with academic motivation (Gustavson & Miyake, 2017). Nevertheless, a recent meta-analysis stressed inconsistent testimony between academic performance and procrastination (Kim & Seo, 2015), sometimes authors found a positive relationship (e.g. Balkis, 2013), a negative relationship (e.g. Schraw, Wadkins, & Olafson, 2007) or did not find any connection between procrastination and academic performance (Seo, 2011). Thus, the said relationship remains an interesting research subject in a new cultural context.

4. Personality traits and academic motivation

According to Deci and Ryan (1985) and Ryan and Deci (2000), self-determination theory attempts to explain the dynamic motivation behind the engagement (or lack thereof) in a task. There are various reasons why individuals engage in a task, which is shaped by the feeling of freedom to choose and internal coherence (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Precisely, motivation is divided into three dimensions, all of which are composed of various levels of self-determination. At the extremes are intrinsic motivation and

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