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# Contributions to the Development of the Contemporary Paradigm of the Institutional Childhood

An Educational Perspective

LIT

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FUTURE TEACHERS' PERSONALITY, CREATIVE  
LEARNING, AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS – HOW MUCH DOES  
THEIR RELATIONSHIP MATTER IN THE EDUCATIONAL  
CONTEXT?

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*A large number of empirical studies have emphasized the importance of both cognitive and non-cognitive factors in the academic success of future teachers. However, very few of them have focused on exploring the personality and attitudes towards creative learning as determinants of academic success. Given their importance in the educational context, the aim of this study was to examine the relationship between these variables. The study included 306 future preschool (N=145) and primary school teachers (N=161). The correlation analyses indicated significant correlations between personality traits with academic success and attitudes towards creative learning and no significant correlation between attitudes towards creative learning and academic success. Based on the regression analysis it was found that personality traits are significant predictors of academic success.*

*Key words:* future teachers, personality traits, attitudes towards creative learning

## 1 Introduction

Even though the aim of the educational process has remained the same over the years, the contemporary educational context has clearly changed. The discrepancy between the society/ technology/ civilization changes, which have created new educational needs in our children today, and the form of contemporary educational process, has been growing larger each day. In these circumstances, there is a tendency to perceive the educational process nowadays as increasingly

complex than it was the case twenty years ago. Vizek-Vidović et al. (2014) emphasized that this complexity arises from various cognitive and non-cognitive factors that strongly influence the general educational process. Many empirical studies have also emphasized the importance of both cognitive and non-cognitive factors in the academic success of students (Marušić, Jugović & Lončarić, 2016). However, very few of them have focused on exploring personality (Ayers, 1989; Tatalović Vorkapić, 2012, 2015, 2017) and creative learning (Čepić & Tatalović Vorkapić, 2015) – two focused variables of this particular study. Furthermore, there is little research evidence about the relationship between the students' personality and their attitudes toward creative learning, as well as about their effect on the students' academic success. Within the Big-Five model (Goldberg, 1990) teachers showed high levels of extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience with a low level of neuroticism. Slightly lower results in these five dimensions have been determined on the sample of future preschool and primary school teachers (Tatalović Vorkapić, Čepić & Sekulja, 2016). However, high levels of consciousness showed to be the most significant personality dimension regarding the students' academic success (Marušić, Jugović & Lončarić, 2016). Furthermore, research results by Čepić & Tatalović Vorkapić (2015) on the attitudes of future teachers regarding creative learning have shown that students' attitudes towards creative learning are positive; in fact, they are even more positive if the students are evaluating their own opportunities to encourage creative learning in children, rather than their professors'. Study on the myths about creativity among future preschool and primary school teachers, and future art teachers, conducted by Čepić, Tatalović Vorkapić, & Mašić (2016), indicates that they demonstrate high and moderate agreement with nine myths from a total of 19 Kampylis's myths (2010). Therefore, the main implication of these findings is the need for study program modification with the aim of fostering creativity and creative thinking in students so they could be able to do the same with children. Identification, detection, and awareness of the teachers' implicit definitions of creativity and ways of its encouragement may provide valuable insights into misconceptions and can contribute to

improving the quality of educational work (Kampylis, 2010; Bocconi, Kampylis & Punie, 2012; Čepić, Tatalović Vorkapić, & Mašić, 2016; Čepić, Tatalović Vorkapić & Brajdić, 2016). Therefore, research on their attitudes about creativity, same as on their personality is more than essential for achieving the desired outcomes in quality educational practice.

## 2 Research aim, problems, and hypotheses

The main aim of this research was to explore the relationship between the students' personality, attitudes toward creative learning, and their academic success. The first task was to run descriptive analyses about the students' personality traits, attitudes toward creative learning, and their academic success. The second task was to investigate their relationship by means of a correlation analysis. Finally, the third task was to analyze the prediction power of their personality and attitudes towards creative learning by applying hierarchical regression analyses. It was hypothesized that the students would show higher levels of all personality dimensions except for neuroticism and positive attitudes towards creative learning. Furthermore, it was assumed that a significant positive correlation between all personality dimensions and attitudes toward creative learning, except for neuroticism, would be determined. The highest correlation was expected to be found between openness to experience and attitudes toward creative learning. Finally, it was also expected that personality dimensions and attitudes towards creative learning would be determined as significant predictors of academic success.

## 3 Method

### Participants

Overall 306 students (9 male) enrolled in the Faculty of Teacher Education in Rijeka participated voluntarily in this study. Their average age was  $M=22.24$  ( $SD=48.53$ ), ranged from 18 to 56 years. Their averaged academic success (on the grade scale from 1 to 5) was

$M=3.97$  ( $SD=.49$ ) ranged from 2.36 to 4.95. Regarding the study program, 145 (all female) were future preschool teachers (first year = 39, second year = 28, third year = 40, fourth year = 30, fifth year = 24) and 161 of them were future primary school teachers (first year = 39, second year = 23, third year = 21, fourth year = 32, fifth year = 30).

#### Measures and Procedure

Two measures were applied in this research. The first one was the Big Five Inventory (BFI; John & Srivastava, 1999) aimed to measure five personality domains: extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience, i.e. its adapted version in the Croatian language (Kardum, Gracanić & Hudak-Knežević, 2006). It consisted of 44 items on which the respondents evaluate their personality traits on the Likert scale of 7 degrees (1-disagree strongly to 5-strongly agree). Cronbach alpha reliability levels in this study ( $\alpha=.753$  for extraversion,  $\alpha=.816$  for neuroticism,  $\alpha=.847$  for conscientiousness,  $\alpha=.777$  for agreeableness, and  $\alpha=.769$  for openness to experience) are satisfied. The second measure was the Questionnaire for measuring students' attitudes toward creative learning (Čepić & Taralović Vorkapić, 2015), which measured attitudes toward creative learning from two aspects: "How much have the professors encouraged creative learning in students?" and "How much will the students encourage creative learning in their future work with children?". It consisted of 30 items on which the students could evaluate their agreement with items on a Likert scale of five points (1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree) from the two described aspects. Cronbach alpha reliability levels are satisfying:  $\alpha=.95$  (first subscale) and  $\alpha=.94$  (second subscale). Collected data was obtained during classes at the Faculty of Teacher Education in coordination with colleague professors. Filling out the questionnaires took approximately 10 minutes individually throughout the course of one month. Research was confidential and anonymous, and the feedback was assured to students and professors.

#### 4 Results and discussion

As it is observable from Table 1, moderate to high levels of attitudes towards creative learning and four personality dimensions (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience) were determined in the total sample, and in both subsamples of students. A low level of neuroticism was obtained, as it was expected. For a detailed overview of the results about attitudes towards creative learning, see previous paper (Čepić & Tatalović Vorkapić, 2015). Regarding the determined personality traits, they are similar to those determined in previous studies (Tatalović Vorkapić, Čepić & Šekulija, 2016). Correlation analysis on the total sample (Table 2) revealed that all personality traits are significantly positively related to attitudes towards creative learning encouraged by the students, except for neuroticism, which demonstrated a negative relationship with them, which was expected.

**Table 1:** Descriptive parameters (M-mean, SD-standard deviation, Range) of two types of attitudes toward creative learning and five personality dimensions on the total sample, and subsamples

	Total sample (N=306)	Future pre- school teachers (N=145)	Future primary school teachers (N=161)
	M(SD), RANGE	M(SD), RANGE	M(SD), RANGE
<b>Attitudes toward creative learning</b>			
<i>How much have the professors encouraged creative learning in students?</i>	3.37(.64) 1.4-4.9	3.28(.62) 1.4-4.77	3.44(.64) 1.93-4.9
<i>How much will the students encourage creative learning in their future work with children?</i>	4.19(.45) 2.7-5	4.17(.42) 2.9-4.97	4.20(.48) 2.7-5
Extraversion	3.73(.56) 1.5-5	3.75(.53) 2.63-4.88	3.70(.58) 1.5-5
Agreeableness	3.92(.55) 2.56-5	3.97(.54) 2.67-5.00	3.88(.56) 2.56-4.89
Conscientiousness	3.65(.63) 1.44-5	3.69(.66) 1.44-5.00	3.62(.60) 2.11-5
Neuroticism	2.46(.65) 1-4.5	2.48(.65) 1.25-4.13	2.43(.66) 1-4.5
Openness to experience	3.68(.58) 1.8-5	3.71(.56) 1.90-5	3.66(.59) 1.80-5

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$

On the other hand, only agreeableness showed a significantly positive relation with attitudes towards creative learning encouraged by professors and neuroticism showed a negative one. Students who are more emotionally stable and more agreeable evaluate their attitudes towards creative learning that was encouraged by their professors higher or more positively. Furthermore, more extraverted, agreeable, conscientiousness, open, and emotionally stable students have significantly positive attitudes towards creative learning which they would apply in their work with children.

**Table 2:** Correlation matrix between socio-demographic variables (age, study program, academic success), two types of attitudes toward creative learning and five personality dimensions

	Attitudes toward creative learning ( $n = 43$ , $p = .001$ )		Age	Study programme	Academic success
	encouraged by professors	encouraged by students			
Extraversion	.09	.26**	.16**	-.03	.10
Agreeableness	.13*	.16*	.03	-.08	.01
Conscientiousness	.09	.25**	.37**	-.07	.22**
Neuroticism	-.14*	-.23**	-.08	-.02	.14*
Openness	.04	.22**	.22**	-.04	-.10
Age	.09	.24**	1.00	-.12*	.07
Study program	.12*	.06	-.12*	1.00	-.29**
Academic success	-.12	-.15	.07	-.29**	1.00

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$

In addition, academic success is higher in those students who are more conscientious and are not emotionally stable, what was expected (Marušić, Jugović & Lončarić, 2016). Separate correlation analyses (Table 3) between focused variables demonstrated that future primary school teachers' personality traits have a stronger and more significant relationship with both attitudes towards creative learning: encouraged by professors and students. Also, what was very interesting, academic success was significantly related to conscientiousness and neuroticism only in future primary school teachers' sample.

Table 3: Correlation matrix between socio-demographic variables, two types of attitudes and five personality dimensions on two subsamples

	Future primary school teachers (above diagonal)							
	Future pre-school teachers (under diagonal)							
	Attitudes toward CL_professors	Attitudes toward CL_students	Age	Age	Academic success			
Extraversion	.01	.18*	.38**	.18*	.15	.15	.17	.04
Neuroticism	-.16	-.12	-.24**	-.24**	-.03	-.15	-.00	.25**
Conscientiousness	-.03	.22**	.23*	.28**	.39**	.35**	.16	.28**
Agreeableness	.10	.17*	.02	.27**	-.07	.11	.10	-.11
Openness	-.05	.12	.28**	.19*	.55**	.06	-.17	-.14
Attitudes toward CL_professors		1.00	.27**	.54**	-.04	.25**	-.11	-.06
Attitudes toward CL_students			1.00	.36**	.12	-.03	-.13	-.13
Age				1.00				.30**
Academic success								1.00

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$

The overall results of the three hierarchical regression analyses revealed that some personality traits are the only significant predictors of academic success. More specifically, the analysis of the results on the total sample has revealed that extraversion ( $Beta = 229$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), neuroticism ( $Beta = 231$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), conscientiousness ( $Beta = 234$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and openness to experience ( $Beta = 179$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) are significant predictors of academic success, which together contribute in explaining 15 % of the total variance in academic success. Analysis run on the subsample of future preschool teachers demonstrated that only openness to experience ( $Beta = .307$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) significantly predicts academic success. In difference to that, future primary school teachers showed that their extraversion ( $Beta = 271$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), neuroticism ( $Beta = 275$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), and conscientiousness ( $Beta = 364$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) are significant predictors of their academic success, and they

explain 25.3 % of the total variance in criteria variable. Determined results clearly show that personality traits play an important role in the students' academic success, and they are different regarding the study program. On the other hand, both types of attitudes towards creative learning, showed not to be significant predictors of academic success.

## 5 Conclusion

As the results of this research have shown, personality traits of future teachers are an important factor in their academic achievement and attitudes towards creativity. Even though future studies should be conducted on a bigger and more random sample, which could enhance research results, this study has confirmed prior results about the importance of teacher's personality. So, the professionalism of teachers is not only the totality of their competences, but a true teacher, at any level of teaching, as emphasized by Korthagen (2009), is determined above all by his or her personal qualities, which are related to the teacher's deep personal convictions, strong emotional involvement, and intrinsic motivation to perform this profession, which also includes an ethical commitment and the foundations on which the recognition of the mission in his profession is based. This means that it is important to recognize and encourage the teacher's intrinsic qualities if quality is to be achieved. Korthagen (2009) also writes that good teachers are always involved in their job with the entire personality, all their feelings, and their core personal characteristics. The modern educational context requires that teachers effectively play new roles as mentors, orchestrators, and facilitators of learning, and act as role models of creativity and innovation. It is therefore important, especially in initial teacher education, to create conditions which will raise the awareness, foster reflection and analysis of the beliefs and attitudes that relate to a wide range of phenomena with which teachers comes into contact in their daily work, but it is also important to change the concept of the self and to turn the unconscious into conscious, and through activities help future teachers to make implicit effects into explicit. If we want to contribute to cognitive and non-cognitive positive learning outcomes,



it is important to also pay special attention to the quality of relationships in the educational context.

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