

## *Extraversion and Introversion in Young Adult ESL Learners*

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### **Abstract**

Despite the best efforts of student advising, retention of first year university students remains a challenge in the world of academia. Student's personality types, specifically their tendencies towards extraversion and introversion, and the correlation to academic success have been studied before, but never with a population of young-adult Emirati students on a foundation year program. In this study, the researchers identify their students' extraversion-introversion preferences and then track said students' performance through to the end of their foundation experience. A majority of introverted students were successful within a two-year span while a majority of extraverted students failed to meet the expectations of the program. If universities wish to retain more students, teachers need to recognize their students' extravert-introvert preference, and lesson plan accordingly.

Keywords: MBTI, Extravert, Introvert, Carl Jung, Psychometric

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## Introduction

In 1922, Swiss psychologist Dr. Carl Jung published a book called *Psychological Types* which introduced the world to the terms extravert and introvert. The former is characterized by a focus on the outer-world of events and the cultivation of wide social relationships while the latter is characterized by a focus on the inner-world of thoughts and reflections, and a tendency to seek more quiet surroundings. However, it must be pointed out that “everyone possesses both mechanisms, extraversion as well as introversion, and only the relative predominance of one or the other determines the type” (Jung, 1976, p.4).

It was Katharine Briggs, a young graduate from Michigan whose interest in Jung’s theory eventually led to the production, in 1943, of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator- a psychometric tool designed to identify a person’s preferences for energizing, learning, decision-making and organization. Briggs identified facets, or sub-personalities, for the extravert-introvert dichotomy as seen in Figure 1.

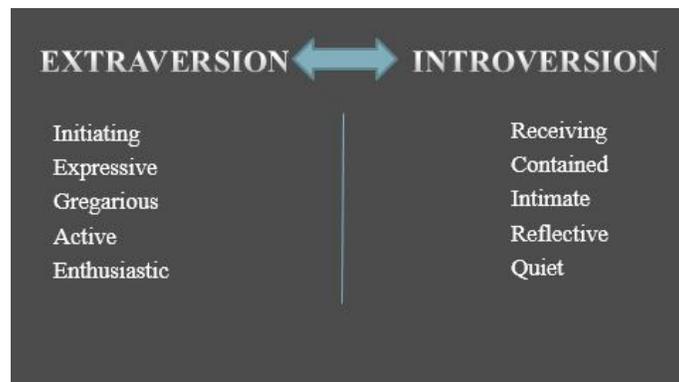


Figure 1: Facets of Extraversion and Introversion  
(Briggs-Myers, Mccauley, Quenk & Hammer, 2009)

Adding to the above definition of extraverts, we can say that they have a preference for initiating conversation and enjoy a stimulating environment which can subsequently feed their urge to collaborate and their desire to influence events. As a result, extraverts also tend to attach importance to the persona they project. Meanwhile, introverts are quite comfortable in their own company or with intimate others, and their reflective nature tends to contain their emotions and responses (Jung, 1976). Moreover, introverts may tend to view phatic communion, or the pleasantries of small talk as mundane and unnecessary.

While psychological tests such as the MBTI have often been dismissed as pseudo-scientific, it is thanks to the rise of brain imaging in the 1990’s and the subsequent growth of neuroscience that research now strongly suggests that the existence of extraversion and introversion is correlated to the blood flow within the brain. Blood flow to the temporal lobe is responsible for interpreting surrounding sensory data

(extraversion), and blood flow to the frontal lobe is involved in memory, planning and problem solving (introversion) (Johnson et. al, 1999). Further studies also suggest that the “activation magnitudes in the brain’s reward system” are more evident in extraverts than for introverts (Cohen et. al., 2005) and support the widespread idea that an extravert’s dopamine network is more active than that of introverts.

Jung’s theory has led us today to a body of research showing that in academic environments where introspection, self-reflection and hours of study without immediate reward are arguably the norm, extraverts tend to suffer and are more likely to struggle if they fail to adjust to the expectations of academia. This raised the question in our own minds as to whether or not a correlation between extraversion and poor academic performance was indeed the case with our own students. Consequently, we undertook a longitudinal study at the Petroleum Institute in Abu Dhabi with a view to the possibility of addressing student retention and enhancing student advising.

## **Literature Review**

There are a variety of different tools inspired by the MBTI, such as NEO-PI, the Five Factor Model (FFM) and Eysenck’s Personality Inventory (EPI), so researchers in the following studies may have used different tools to assess extraversion and introversion in their participants. Regardless of the tool used, a body of research over the past 50 years consistently suggests that extraverts are less likely to achieve academic success than introverts, and it is speculated that this is largely because extraverts prefer to invest more time socializing as opposed to studying (Chamorro-Premuzic, Furnham & Ackerman, 2006), (Eysenck, 1992) preferring instead to “make use of interpersonal relationships and personal information of individuals rather than technical analysis” (Ibrahimoglu, Unaldi, Samancioglu and Baglibel, 2013).

In 1966, research on Ghanaian students by Paul Kline was one of the earliest such studies to identify a correlation between poor academic performance and extroversion, and this finding revealed itself again in a subsequent study by Martey and Aborakwa-Larbi (2016) on another cohort of Ghanaian students. Since Kline’s study, the same findings have appeared widespread across different cultures. For instance, a study in Turkey by Ibrahimoglu, Unaldi, Samancioglu and Baglibel (2013) found that extraverts, according to Kolb’s Learning Styles Inventory, tend to favour a diverging and accomodating learning style which favours a more tactile approach to learning- suggesting extraverts prefer a more technical or vocational educational environment. In a Croatian study of 826 high school students, Banai and Perin (2016) not only revealed that extraversion was “negatively related” to academic performance, but was also linked to the type of school (gymnasium or vocational) that the respondents attended. Meanwhile, in the UK, a study by Chamorro-Premuzic, Furnham and Ackerman (2006) involved completion of a 60-item general knowledge test among 201 British university students whose results found that introverts outperformed their counterparts. As far as we have ascertained, there remains little or no research that focuses specifically on extroversion and academic performance in Emirati male students, so this study is one of the earliest- if not the earliest- to explore this subject.

## Method

In the Fall semester of 2015, thirty-three Emirati male students in the Petroleum Institute's Academic Bridge Program (ABP) in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates, were selected to complete an MBTI Form M in order to identify their personality type on the extraversion-introversion dichotomy. Twenty-three students (70%) typed as extraverts while ten (30%) typed as introverts. This ratio was consistent with previous assessments on the extroversion-introversion scale within the ABP. The data on the students' progression was then gathered in the Spring semester of 2017 by which time students had either passed through the program successfully with a coursework grade of C or higher coupled with and an IELTS overall band of 6, or they had been terminated from the program for excessive absence or not meeting the C grade and IELTS 6 requirements to continue into their degree program. This data was then analyzed in the context of the extraversion-introversion dichotomy.

## Results

At the end of the Spring 2017 semester, all thirty-three students who had begun their studies in the Fall semester of 2015 had exited the ABP through termination, withdrawal or had met the requirements to undertake freshman studies at the Petroleum Institute. Figure 2 shows that 35% of the extravert cohort continued their studies in freshman year while Figure 3 shows 60% of introverts were successful in reaching the same stage.

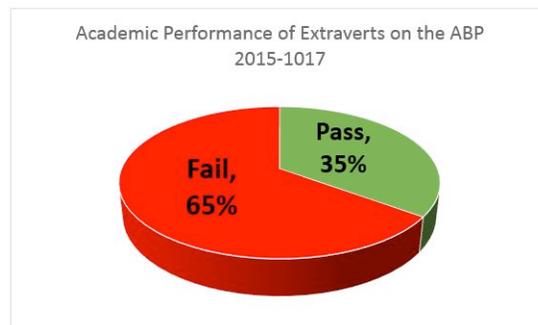


Figure 2: Academic Performance of Extraverts on the ABP 2015-1017

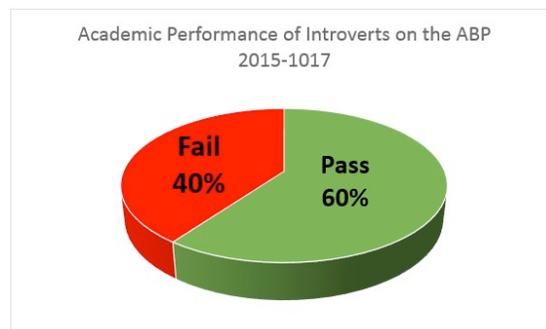


Figure 3: Academic Performance of Introverts on the ABP 2015-1017

## **Discussion**

This small-scale, longitudinal research project supports the findings of previous research highlighting the disparity in academic performance on the extroversion-introversion dichotomy. University, like high school, requires spending hours alone reading, taking notes, preparing for lessons, reviewing material etc., which is largely the realm of the introvert. Moreover, unlike the high school environment where socializing and self-image are predominant and influential among teenagers, the university environment is one that encourages scholars to take responsibility for their learning as well as prioritizing and contributing to the successful completion of their learning outcomes. Understandably, in a context such as this extravert students may interpret this environment as one lacking in social engagement and may also interpret periods of silence from their peers as a rejection. Consequently, they would view this kind of environment as one challenging their academic goals and lacking in the energizing activities they need in order to function at their best. Given what we know about extraverts' preference for oral interaction, social engagement and breadth (as opposed to depth) of interest in topics, it would be beneficial to deliver lessons involving discussion and group work, hands-on tasks, team projects and presentations as a way to mitigate student attrition during the first years of university when drop-out rates are at their highest. The implications of failure on an extravert student are also more likely to resonate with a teacher and/or his/her peers as extraverts are more likely to blame others for their shortcomings (Briggs-Myers, McCaulley, Quenk & Hammer, 2009). Extraverts need to discuss concepts and if they are not offered a platform, such as office hours and study groups to do this, it will only amplify the isolation they feel in an academic context. For example, extraverts are less likely to prefer written feedback on a paper, but more likely to want to discuss a grade face-to-face with an instructor. Conversely, because introverts tend to be more reflective of their inner-world, they prefer to think more deeply before they act and tend to be more intra-punitive.

In light of this discussion, the limitations of this study need to be considered. Firstly, the sample size of introverts (n=10) was disproportionate to the number of extraverts (n=23), but as mentioned in the introduction, this is anecdotally a representative ratio of individual sections on the ABP. Secondly, a further MBTI questionnaire either in the middle or the end of the study would have consolidated the students' types on the extravert-introvert dichotomy. This is because psychometric tests are not always conclusive in the first instance and may require several attempts before participants can be classified as extraverts or introverts.

## **Conclusion**

As a result of their academic and professional experience, teachers are able to switch more easily between extravert and introvert facets. However, it must be remembered that young adult students are likely to experience more difficulty adapting to this sudden change and the expectation that they must function well both as extraverts and introverts in order to succeed academically. While the extravert who is unaware of the need to cultivate facets of introversion (i.e. the ability to reflect and feel at ease with solitude)

which are conducive to academic success, may indeed struggle, it must be remembered that there are other factors that serve as effective predictors of academic success, namely IQ, type of school attended and deep learning strategies.

Probably the best approach educators can offer their students is to regularly raise their awareness of the extroversion-introversion theory so they understand that in order to achieve academic success, the weaknesses posed by their opposing facets will need addressing as they progress through university and into professional life. Awareness of the theory also helps students to gain a better understanding of each other and put perceived weaknesses and differences down to human nature rather than a lack of intelligence or a weak, ineffective personality. In terms of lesson planning for teachers, telling the class beforehand what the session involves within a time scale, whether a lecture, tutorial or workshop, will also help address their learning preferences so they can prepare to make the necessary cognitive adjustments. For example, if the lesson heavily involves the receptive skills of listening and reading, teachers could tell the class that a discussion will follow after twenty minutes. This will not only benefit the introvert, who we know likes time to reflect before answering, but also the extravert who is energized by oral interaction.

An extraversion-introversion assessment is available at the following link and QR code:

<https://quiz.tryinteract.com/#/59226b3a5684a100112f886a>



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