AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS OF HIGH ACHIEVERS AND LOW ACHIEVERS

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Abstract

Personality is the totality of one's behavior towards one self and others as well. It includes everything about the person, his physical, emotional, social, mental and spiritual make-up. This study is being conducted for the educators as an attempt to categorize pupils as "High Achievers" and "Low Achievers" on the basis of different personality characteristics. On the basis of these categorizations the educators may design, develop and, implement their education plans in a way to give the country responsible, energetic, enthusiastic and mentally stable citizen.

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Meaning of personality

Etymologically, the word personality is derived from the "Latin" word "persona", which means a mask worn by the actors in ancient Greece. This is to say that it has its original reference to "false appearance".

Personality is now considered as a complex structure, which the individual develops during the course of his life as a result of his experience. It is a continuously changing structure depending upon the influence of cluster of experiences about his physical and psychical entity. It is unique as it is composed of different basic capacities that have been developed due to exposure to different environments from the beginning of one's birth. It is multi-dimensional.

Psychologically speaking personality is all that a person is. It is the totality of one's behavior towards one self and others as well. It includes everything about the person, his physical, emotional, social, mental and spiritual make-up. It is all that a person has about him.

In this way, definitely, the term personality signifies something deeper than mere appearance (or) outward behavior. How should it be given a proper meaning (or) definition is a difficult problem. Actually its subjective nature does not allow reaching a clear-cut, well agreed definition. That is why; it has been defined by some many psychologists in so many ways according to their own points of view. Some of these well known attempts at defining personality are presented.

Definitions of personality:

Some of the important and prevalent definitions of personality are mentioned below:

According to F. H. Allport, personality is 'the individuals' characteristics reactions to social stimuli and his adaptation to the social features of environment". (or) "Personality is a dynamic organization within the individual of those psycho-physical systems that determine his unique adjustment to his environment".

As per R. B. Cattell, "Personality is that which enables us to predict a person's behavior in a given situation".

Woodworth defines "personality as the total quality of an individual's behavior as is revealed in his characteristics, habits of thought, expression, attitudes and interest, his manner of acting and his own philosophy of life".

Mc. Dougail says that "personality is the integration of disposition, character and intellect of a person".

Watson defines, "personality is the sum of activities that can be discovered by actual observations over a long enough period of time to give reliable information".

Warren defines that "personality is such a well organized composition of a person's cognitive, sentimental, affective and physical characteristics by which he presents himself before other persons".

History of Personality Testing:

As early as the 19th century, personality differences were observed among astronomers who conducted various studies regarding the timing and passage of stars. Of great note is that many of them yielded different results, an outcome that was not necessarily due to procedural differences but rather to individual differences in response to "Personality" of perception (APA Monitor, 1999). Such "Personality" differences ultimately led to the study of human reaction times, (or) "character" as it was commonly termed in the initial stages of experimental psychology. During this period in time, phrenologists such as Franz Josef Gall attempted to assess personality based on the shape of the skull and described "faculties" of mind, clearly indicating the early drive to understand personality (APA Monitor).

By the late 19th century, personality was regarded by some as a significant aspect of human life. Ribot (as cited in APA Monitor, 1999) developed a physiological theory of personality in the tradition of somatic psychiatry in 1885 while Janet postulated Conscious and unconscious personalities (or) selves in 1889 (as cited in APA Monitor). William (as cited in APA Monitor) followed suit in 1890 with "Principles of Psychology" in which he recognized that the self was composed of constituent persons including the material, social, spiritual, and the superego. In addition, freud's (1904) dynamic personality concept of mental life (as cited in APA Monitor) and Carl Jung's (1928), theories of introversion and extroversion (as cited in APA Monitor) opened new dimensions for describing normal personality types and furthered research in this area. However, it was not until Morton

Prince's 1906 text, "Dissociation of a personality, that the term "personality" became commonplace. In the same year, attempts to measure personality traits were initiated by Heymans and Wiersma (as cited in APA Monitor) as they employed rating scales to investigate interests, aptitudes, and temperaments. In the United States, Robert S. Woodworth's (as cited in APA Monitor) early attempt to measure personality variables through his Psychoneurotic Inventory became the model for such tests by 1917.

Gordon Allport (as cited in APA Monitor) ultimately brought personality theory into the psychological mainstream of the United States in 1937 with his work, "Personality: A Psychological Interpretation", in which he defined personality as "the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine unique adjustments to his environment", In 1940, the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), one of the most utilized self-report personality inventories, was introduced by Hathaway and McKinley and put into practice. In 1960, the Myers-Briggs Test, which translated Carl Jung's personality theory, was introduced, and subsequently joined the MMPI as one of the most widely used models. In 1963, Norman replicated Cattell's 16 PF Personality Questionnaire (as cited in APA Monitor) and suggested that five factors would be sufficient to describe personality. These factors include Openness to experience, Conscientiousness, Extroversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism (APA Momnitor). This conception ultimately became known as the Five-Factor model of Personality and has been perhaps the most popular and extensively applied theory of personality within the past twenty years. Modern Personality Testing Considerations according to Hsu (2004), some feel that personality has not fully coalesced as a subject matter in psychology because there has never been an overarching theory (or) even a thoroughly accepted definition of personality. This has not, however, prevented personality from being the subject of psychological research and the development of theories. Though some psychologists regularly use tests to predict and understand behavior, others believe that personality is a moving target determined by past experience and the current environment and, therefore, cannot be predicted (Hsu, 2004). It is the reconciliation between these two schools of thought that ultimately proves to be the greatest obstacle.

Unfortunately, the recent trend in this area has been to overlook the fundamental aspects of sound personality tests to deliver a useable product. Due to this lack of empirical and theoretical consideration, various subjective and baseless personality tests exist in current practice. There are, however, select inventories that, though largely untested, provide an effective and parsimonious approach to understanding personality. Of great note is a more recently developed assessment called the True Colors Research Word Sort (True Colors Inc., 2005). Not only does this assessment

possess the aforementioned qualities, it has also yielded positive results for management training, new employee training, and team building as a result of its increased national use over the last twenty years. In addition to its organizational success, there are also broad implications for its use within educational settings.

Research Design:

The study was conducted on 3 different types of schools. One government managed school, one privately managed and, one granted school were taken for the study. One researcher representative was appointed in each school for observation of sample and data collection purposes. Four high achievers and four low achievers were identified by the researcher representatives and a questionnaire specifically designed for the study was filled by each researcher representative for each sample unit. The data was analyzed and the conclusions are drawn in the form of "Salient Features of high achievers" and "Salient Features of low achievers".

Salient features of High Achievers:

Back ground:

Most of the high achievers seem to come from urban homes, where generally the father is educated. In some cases, though not very commonly, they also have educated mothers. Generally, a happy and pleasant childhood is recalled by most of the subjects. A few specific incidents like accidents, punishment, and rebellious behavior are also recollected. In a few instances initial aversion to studies is stated. But general satisfaction in school, good relationships and high academic records are the common features of this group. Illness and diseases do not figure with any degree of prominence in their health record.

Family Figures:

An attitude of respect and warm admiration frequently characterizes their perception of their father. In a few cases he is conceptualized as stern and dominating. But more frequently he is seen as helpful, considerate and understanding. The father generally entertains a positive attitude towards education and encourages (or) helps directly in it. Frequently little (or) no compulsion for studying on the part of the parent is asserted by the subject.

The mother is most often perceived as loving, devoted and kind. She is also seen as helpful in a general kind of way. Moreover, both parents seem to repose considerable confidence and trust in these subjects. They usually entertain high aspiration and hopes of them, while expressing general satisfaction over their achievement and activities.

With respect to sibling, a conflicting pattern of relationship is frequently asserted. Along with regard and admiration for the older sibling there is some indication of self-assertiveness. An urge to rival and excel the achievement of siblings is often noticeable. It is uncommon that this group asserts that their older siblings are indifferent (or) critical towards them.

An ambivalent attitude towards the siblings is far more common with younger siblings they frequently appear to demand respect and recognition for their qualities and achievements.

Personality Features:

Thinking variables:

In general intelligence, most high achievers grade as "superior". In their thinking, they seem to place greater reliance on themselves rather than imitate (or) depend on others. Greater self-reliance is expressed in solving their problems and devising plans and solutions. They manifest a marked degree of interest in theoretical and the abstract.

Interests in abstract ideas and principles are frequently asserted. However, this interest appears or indicates more a fantasy orientation rather than a genuine intellectual ambition. Fantasy activity occupies a significant place in their thinking. Further indication of fantasy orientation is gained by a perusal of their career aspiration and choice of models, which are often drawn from fiction.

Emotional Variables:

With respect to their anxiety, the high achievers in general tend to display a normal range of manifest anxiety. The major area of worry is related to studies such as anxiety and tensions related to the present task of keeping up a high achievement level in the examination which is the concern of most of the subjects. However, this anxiety seems to act as an instigator to better performance rather than an overwhelming influence disrupting effective functioning.

Specific anxieties relating to other areas, however, are not so common with them. Whenever there is awareness of specific anxieties relating to areas like interpersonal relationship and home adjustment, such anxieties are generally compartmentalized (or) systematically cut off from their experience, leaving the subjects free to devote themselves to the present activity of studies.

Motivational variables:

The high achievers are generally highly motivated. They have a higher persistence and frequently express high aspirations and need for achievement. High motivation is also frequently reflected in high ambitions, and aspirations for a career. Administrative services, engineering and higher research frequently appear to be their goal. Desire for status and recognition from others is fairly common with this group. Desire to contribute creatively in research (or) other profession is indicative of the drive for status and recognition. Urge to gain acceptance by others through adult accomplishment and outstanding academic achievement frequently directs and channelises the strivings of this group.

Self-Image:

In general, the high achievers describe themselves as persons of above average intelligence, honest and sincere. They express general satisfaction over their self-image, accepting both the good and the bad with equanimity.

They generally think that the favorably disposed (friendly) persons over estimate them, while the unfavorably disposed underestimate them. Over estimation of self by friends would again suggest the significance of the positive expectations of others in their functioning.

They stress the diversity of interests which an ideal student should have. Keen interest in studies along with interest in extra-curricular activities and games are generally regarded as the mark of an ideal student. However, they usually have leisure activities like reading, but athletic interests are not so common with this group. An emphasis on the dual aspect of students life, viz., academic and extra-mural, suggests an awareness of a similar lack of balanced development in themselves.

Study habits:

Regularity of regarding hours and routine characterize most of the high achievers. But it cannot be regarded as the general feature. In preparing for examination, greater reliance is placed on text books and self prepared notes. Cramming, except for a few key phrases, is not recommended and subjects seem to depend more on their own powers of expression, organization and presentation According to Lucito: The high achievers are those children whose potential, intellectual powers and abilities are at such a high ideational level in both productive and evaluative thinking that it can be reasonably assumed that they could be future problem solvers, innovators and evaluators of the culture if adequate educational experiences are provided to them:

Salient features of Low Achievers:

Back ground:

Quite frequently the low achievers hail from rural homes, where the father often has little education (matriculation (or) less). Mother's education is not so common either.

A happy and uneventful childhood is recollected by them. Many of them assert an affectionate and loving atmosphere at home during child hood. During early schooling mischievous behavior, and quarrels with classmates are frequently reported. Pressure either by teacher (or) from parents is mentioned for early schooling, Periods of illness during childhood are also mentioned by some of them.

Family Figures:

A distant and ambivalent pattern of relationship with the father is more frequently observed. The father is conceptualized by many as overbearing, dominating and fearful. Closeness with the father is not commonly experienced.

The mother is seen as very loving, protective and nurturant. During childhood she appears to bear considerable closeness. Protective behavior is also assigned to her if the father became too angry (or) primitive.

The parents (particularly father) hold a positive attitude towards education. Often they stated that their presents

were on the whole satisfied with their performance. In some cases, pressure by father for obtaining education is mentioned.

With siblings, a very Co-operative and harmonious adjustment is asserted. Minimal conflicts and quarrels, along with a helpful and affectionate attitude towards each other seem to be the general intersibling relationship pattern.

Personality Features:

Thinking Variable:

In general, on intelligence, most of the subjects grade as "average". With respect to their thinking, they do not seem to depart from the usual, exhibiting unlike the high achievers, a lack of conscious striving for originality (or) novelty in expression and presentation of ideas. In their thinking, they mostly tend to imitate (or) depend upon others, embracing ideas, principles and ideas which are widely prevalent. Many of them have keen interests in their subjects of study besides general interest like literature and other reading hobbies. They frequently place premium value on novelty in expression and presentation of ideas. Originality in ideas is valued considerably.

Motivational variables:

By and large, the low achievers display a low level of general motivation. A passive and dependent approach appears to be more characteristic of their motivational structure. Likewise, they lack of high degree of persistence which sets off in sharp contrast to the high achievers.

In addition, they show a general lack of desire for recognition from others and do not seem to manifest a strong desire for achievement in their present field of activity. More often, acceptance by others is sought not through adult accomplishment but rather by adopting passive behavior patterns like helpfulness and sincerity towards others and being rewarded for good behavior.

In their career aspirations also, they generally entertain ill-defined goals like studying to get a job. Such vague ends fail to provide a strong urge for studies and at best arouse a weak and segmental motivation.

Even when high career aspirations (or) ambitions are expressed, they appear more like fantasy wishes, essentially hollow and unrealistic bearing little relation to their potentiality and abilities. Operational plans for fulfilling ambitions are rarely outlined. An indication of fantasy orientation may also be gained from their choice of 'models' as such. Specific 'persons' in some cases from fantasy sources are frequently chosen as 'models'. However, they are considered more as standard of excellence (or) achievement to be admired, but rarely understood and emulated.

Finally, they do not exhibit a realistic and strong orientation to future. The present activities are generally not placed cognitively against a broad time perspective, while fantasy desires and dreams of future seem to substitute for realistic future orientation. Even when a high drive level is displayed, it is generally a misguided drive for status,

lacking a future perspective and unrelated to the present activity of studies.

A sense of responsibility and duty frequently appears as a significant motivational component in directing the activities of these individuals. This may be diffused as duty towards work (or) present occupation. A well developed conscience (or) super ego is also suggested.

Another source of motivation for better performance is reflected in their perception of themselves and what they conceive to be the expectation of others in relation to them. For instance, high expectations of parents, their trust and confidence, and the perception of significant others granting them a higher positive self frequently increases the drive level for measuring up to these expectations. However, they, on their part, do not generally select specific models but rather hold a group of composite qualities gathered from different sources as the ideal for emulation or incorporation. Finally, the group as a whole displays a strong future orientation, its present activities being evaluated against a broad time perspective. Their career ambitions are precise and their activities display this singleness of intent and purpose.

Emotional variables:

Most of the subjects display a satisfactory general adjustment. They have better home adjustment emotional adjustment and health adjustment than the low achievers. However, in their

social relationships they are often somewhat withdrawn. They also prefer a few close friends to having a lot of friends. In addition sensitivity to others is seen to be fairly common with this group. Difficulties arising in social relationships are frequently due to such sensitivity to the feelings and reactions of others. In their general adjustment, they manifest a diffused urge for the satisfaction of the primary needs of acceptance and belongingness.

Most of the low achievers in their general adjustment are graded as "Satisfactory". However, it is not infrequent that difficulties in home adjustment emotional adjustment and health adjustment are encountered. In addition, specific problems relating to self-functioning and adjustment in other specific areas are a source of considerable anxiety and tension in this group. Family troubles, tension due to pressure responsibilities and worries are frequent and persistent.

The Sources of specific anxieties and tension are varied. Future insecurity relating to career (or) Job, and anxiety associated with the present task of studies occur with considerable frequency. Anxieties relating to self – functioning personal inadequacy, uncertainty and general lack of confidence are fairly common.

Anxiety relating to a feeling of inadequacy and inability to cope with problems are disturbing. Combined with the present pressure to succeed in examinations, and the consequent worry to settle on a job, anxieties tend to overwhelm the subjects, frequently

forcing them either to escape in fantasy or to repress such tensions and withdraw to other fields of activity.

A markedly dependent behavior is reflected in their attempt to face the present problems realistically. Assistance is frequently sought from others (friends, parents, and teachers) to solve their problems and self reliance is not displayed. Dependence on friends plays an important role for this group. It may be useful in this context to mention that perhaps the most striking features of low achievers is their accentuated dependency needs.

They tend to manifest a strong desire for acceptance and belongingness and a child like desire for regard, for good behavior. This dependency, when extended to their social environment, is frequently expressed in motives and desires to help others, to be of use to others, to be good, sincere and similar passive traits.

Finally, the group appears to be more conscious of its problems and anxieties and is frequently unable to resolve such tensions. These anxieties tend to have an adverse effect on the functioning of these subjects and prevent a full and free access to their potentiality and abilities.

Self–Image:

In describing themselves, the slow achievers consider themselves as possessing a good character. They feel that others consider them as good. Moreover, they regard themselves as persons of moderate ability and at times show awareness of some of their weaknesses.

They frequently feel that both the favorably disposed and unfavorably disposed persons underestimate them. In other words, they think that others over scribe to them negative traits and underestimate their positive qualities (a difference from the high achievers may be noted here, who felt that those who were friendly over estimated their positive qualities in relation to their own self image). In addition, the image of an ideal student is not so clearly defined in his mind as it is frequently found among the high achievers. The qualities of keeping away from family troubles, and policies are in the main mentioned as the necessary pre-requisites for an ideal student.

Most of the subjects in this group report that they spend their leisure with friends either gossiping or roaming or seeing films. Games constitute frequently a popular leisure activity for them. Light reading also occupies their leisure time.

Study habits:

Very regular habits of study are not adopted by these subjects. Class notes and textbooks serve as chief aids in preparing for examinations.

Educational Implications:

Study of personality is very useful for education. The works conducted in this direction makes it know that if the following things are paid attention to then the use of education can become still more purposeful and effective.

1. The schools should consider the personality of a student and try to understand it. This study would help in intellectual, social and physical development.

2. Specific help can be given to the socialization process of a student with the study of his personality.

3. The teacher should provide self-confidence to the students for independent behavior so that they learn to less depend on others.

4. Limited anxiety, which neither less nor more, can prove helpful in social and intellectual development of the students.

5. Controlled behavior of the students can be developed for the control and development of moral decisions, behavior and emotions.

6. A student's personality develops in desired direction in the school atmosphere of affection, free behavior and freedom of work, so it would be desirous to create such as atmosphere.

The chief basis of the above discussion is the close relation between education and personality. On it depends how educational objectives and aims can be achieved with the help of educational psychology.

Since it is found that high academic achievers are submissive, obedient, mild, easily led, docile and accommodating; teachers have to inculcate these positive aspects in their students by way of Value–oriented education; training and counseling. The academic performance of low academic achievers can be improved to some extent. Teachers have to design certain programs in consultation with psychologists and counselors to promote these positive qualities in their students, particularly the low academic achievers. Then will improve the academic achievement of the students. Programs for the improvement of good personality characteristics among students may be developed by the regular teachers, researchers and psychologists.

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