THE ROLE OF LECTURER PERSONALITY ON STUDENT PERFORMANCE: A SELF–STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of lecturer personality on student performance. Lecturer personality is considered to be an important factor in determining the quality of the teaching and learning experience for both students and lecturers. It is suggested that a lecturer's personality can have a major impact on the way students learn, as well as their overall learning experience. The focus of this article will be on a selected lecturer from a selected South African higher education institution (HEI). This study explores the effects of this lecturer's personality on their student's performance. It examines the factors that contribute to the student's success to becoming a junior lecturer, led by the lecturer's modelling of professionalism, enthusiasm, passion, accessibility and approachability, amongst other factors. To accelerate the conceptual debates of this article, qualitative research methodology is employed alongside the Social Cognitive Theory. Scholars note that there is a reciprocal effect between personal, environmental and behaviour factors that affect learning outcomes. This is the reason why this theory is employed in this research about the personality of this lecturer. Consequently, findings are that positive personality traits of a lecturer model good behaviour and encourage good performance towards students.

Keywords: Lecturer personality, professionalism, classroom environment, learning and teaching, student performance, student success, higher education.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in understanding the impact of lecturer personality on student performance. Though research has identified instructional quality, teaching methodologies, and student engagement as key factors affecting student performance, the role of lecturer personality has also been suggested as to play a significant role. According

to the Five–Factor Model of Personality, five primary traits define an individual's personality strategies, course design, and other environmental factors as important predictors of student performance. The role of the lecturer's personality and behaviour has often been overlooked in this regard (Noreen, Ali and Munawar 2019). Personality is defined as the distinctive patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours that characterize an individual and remain relatively stable over time (Feist and Feist 2017). Lecturer personality may impact students' academic performance through their teaching style, ability to create a positive learning environment, communication skills, and ability to motivate and engage students Eryilmaz (2014).

INTRODUCTION

The role of the lecturer's personality on student performance has recently become a topic of significant interest among researchers. A recent study by Lukman et al. (2021) examined the relationship between what they call the Big Five personality traits of lecturers and student performance. These personality traits are agreeableness, extroversion, neuroticism, openness and conscientiousness. Luckman et al (ibid) found that lecturers who scored higher in openness, conscientiousness, and extraversion had better student evaluation scores and higher pass rates in their courses. Furthermore, Feist and Feist (2017) also mention these as important personality traits for lecturers. These traits may impact a lecturer's ability to connect with and motivate students, facilitate learning, and foster a positive classroom environment. Luckman et al (2021) further claim that the personality traits of lecturers may significantly influence student performance. Understanding how a lecturer's personality impacts student learning can help lecturers tailor their teaching style and behaviour to create a more engaging and effective learning experience for students (Shaista, Aktar and Uzma 2019).

The above discussion lays a ground for this study, which is based on the experiences of the author-student (one of the authors of this article, who is also the self–reflecting student) to examine how lecturer personality can influence student performance. Hence self–study research approach was chosen as the research methodology for the article.

Self–study is a self–reflexive approach, where the individual critically analyses their own practice, supporting their argument with relevant literature. It is a reflective approach that is based on one's experiences (Hauge 2021). Through self–study, a key motivation for conducting such research is often a desire to explore the researcher's own experiences and perspectives in relation to a particular area of interest (Bullough and Pinnegar 2001). Madolo (2019) further state that it is a reflexive account of one's performance, where objectivity is ensured. In this case, the authors chose to study the role of a lecturer's personality on student performance because one of them, the author–student, had a personal experience that has led

her to be interested in this topic.

The context of this discussion is of a lecturer teaching in a South African public higher education institution based in the rural areas of South Africa. The lecturer is a middle–aged female, teaching in language methodology in one of the African languages. The lecturer was chosen because her personality and professionalism seemed to increase the self–esteem of the students who were generally undermined by their peers from other faculties and disciplines. Once the lecturer joined the faculty, students felt like they had someone to talk to. This was evident through the engagements between the author–student and the lecturer. It was also through the author–student's observations of the lecturer's interaction with other students in and outside the classroom. The author–student also noted the lecturer's engagement with students during consultation, as she was more like the lecturer's assistant, spending most of the time in the office (although the student would leave the office when personal issues were discussed). The lecturer was found to be approachable by all kinds of students.

This study was conducted based on the Social Cognitive Theory. Social Cognitive theory is a psychological theory that was developed by Albert Bandura. It is also known as social learning theory or observational learning theory (Bandura 1986). The theory proposes that individuals learn through observation and imitation of others and through their own direct experiences (Schunk and Usher 2012). It suggests that human behaviour is shaped by the interaction of personal, behavioural, and environmental factors (Mwamwenda 1994). The social cognitive theory posits that human behaviour is shaped by the reciprocal interaction of personal (e.g., personality traits), environmental, and behavioural factors. According to this theory, behaviour is influenced by three core factors: personal factors (e.g., personality traits), environmental factors (e.g., social, cultural, and physical), and behavioural factors (e.g., personal actions and interactions). In the context of the role of lecturer personality on student performance, the social cognitive theory provides a useful framework for understanding the interplay of personal, environmental, and behavioural factors that shape the learning outcomes of students. The theory suggests that personality traits of a lecturer can impact the achievement of learning outcomes by students through the interaction of personal, environmental, and behavioural factors (Poropat 2009). For instance, a lecturer with an agreeable personality may be more effective in creating a positive learning environment by fostering collaboration, empathy, and mutual respect among students. Similarly, a lecturer with a conscientious personality may be more effective in promoting accountability, effectiveness, and organization among students. The social cognitive theory provides a useful framework for understanding the interplay of personal, environmental, and behavioural factors that shape students' learning.

Therefore, the research on the role of lecturer personality on student performance can be supported by Social Cognitive Theory through identification of the important factors that influence the effectiveness of lecturers. This can guide the development of effective strategies for improving student performance.

PERSONALITY TRAITS MODELLED

Lecturers who model professionalism, enthusiasm, passion, accessibility, and profitability to their students create a positive learning environment that facilitates academic success (Acaray and Yildirim 2017). These facilitating factors were modelled by the lecturer under discussion in various ways, including professionalism, accessibility and approachability, enthusiasm and passion, profitability.

Professionalism

Professionalism is defined by Smith (2015) as including qualities such as punctuality, preparedness, and maintaining a professional demeanour in the classroom. Like in Smith's observation the lecturer modelled professionalism that set high standards for her students and factors were modelled in various ways, including through their actions, words, and attitudes (Dı́ez-Palomar et al 2020). Professionalism was modelled to students by the lecturer through their adherence to ethical standards, punctuality, and preparedness for lectures. This is in line with what Ayeni (2018) discovered, that professionalism of lecturers in terms of preparation for lectures, communication and presentation skills, played a crucial role in students' academic success. The lecturer under discussion displayed these skills. She always came to class prepared, was always punctual and adhered to ethical standards. Although she was approachable, she was found to be strict when it comes to marking and other academic activities. If a student came with a lame excuse for not submitting an assessment task, she would not entertain it. Whereas, if a student gave a valid reason why they would not submit their assessment task, then she would make arrangements for later submission.

Observing professionalism trait on their lecturer encourages students to want to emulate the trait both in their professional and social lives. A lecturer with such trait motivates students, even during consultation hours. One might come to the lecturer with a problem, be it personal or professional. Once the matter is handled professionally, the student feels better, even when they have not been offered help. Professionalism goes a long way in the teaching profession. Another point is that some students have their own frustrations from home. This is even worse post–Covid–19, where students have been affected by deaths or illnesses in the family. A

professional individual helps circumvent the students' stresses. (Li et al. 2020). This assists students to focus on their studies with a positive mind.

Professionalism is important in the academic setting as it establishes a sense of trust and credibility between teachers and students. According to a study by Darling–Hammond (2006) professionalism has been identified as a key factor in promoting student success through demonstrating effective communication, being in tune with current research and trends in education and having a strong understanding of curriculum and instructional practices. The lecturer displayed this through open communication channels with students. She had WhatsApp groups for her students so that they may directly communicate with her, without going via class representatives. In terms of research and trends in education, her teaching was always in par with the school curriculum and the latest academic research. This gave students confidence in the lecturer and in themselves. As such, the students used to excel in the lecturer's subject during their teaching practice. According to Jaasma and Koper (1999) trust in the teacher–student relationship has been associated with student motivation, engagement, and academic achievement. Teachers who display professionalism in their behaviour and communication can create a positive learning environment, which in turn can enhance student achievement. Prasetyo, Ilham and Asvio (2022) conclude that lecturer's professionalism has a significant positive impact on student performance. They found that students were more likely to attend classes, engage in discussions and thus, professionalism had a significant positive impact on student performance. The study noted that a professional lecturer exhibits appropriate behaviour in both academic and non–academic settings, maintains a positive attitude, and demonstrates expertise in their field of study. Students perceive such lecturers as credible and reliable, which in turn improves their motivation to learn and perform well in class. The author–student noticed that students were more comfortable in discussing their academic and personal matters with the lecturers (although the author–student was not part of the personal matter discussions as she was recused whenever a personal matter was to be discussed.). This was evident in their informal discussions with the author–student, as they could see that she was close to the lecturer.

An effective lecturer should be able to demonstrate personality traits in order to engage and motivate learners. According to (Williams and Williams 2011) professional educators must demonstrate their enthusiasm, expertise, and interest in the material being taught and use their personalities to influence learner motivation, interest, and attitude. There are various ways a lecturer can effectively show their personality traits, the researchers will reveal on how this lecturer demonstrated them. Preparedness: This showed professionalism by always be well–

prepared before entering a classroom. This means having all necessary materials ready, offering insightful, interactive approaches to teaching and providing clear expectations for Assignments and assessments. According to Mohamed, Valcke and Wever (2017), preparedness is one of the most important aspects of professional teaching. This shows students that the lecturer values their time and takes their education seriously. Hereunder are the professionalism traits noticed from the case study lecturer.

Respectful communication: The lecturer showed professionalism by communicating respectfully with students. This include using appropriate language and tone, being mindful of nonverbal cues, and actively listening to students' questions and concerns. As noted by Solis and Turner (2017), communicating with students in a respectful manner can help build a positive learning environment. The students were also encouraged to emulate the lecturer's respect amongst themselves. This was stressed by encouraging students to treat others as they would like to be treated – with respect.

Punctuality in class and feedback: The lecturer showed professionalism by being punctual to classes and provide timely feedback on formative assessments. As stated by Tay and Lam, (2022), being timely in grading and returning student work is a sign of professionalism and shows that the lecturer values students' efforts.

Fairness: The lecturer was found to be fair to all students and created an inclusive learning environment. This includes establishing clear expectations, through sharing the learning outcomes and assessment criteria, providing students with grading criteria whenever an assessment was given, providing opportunities for student participation, and being open to feedback from students. As noted by Scott et al. (2014), fairness and equity are crucial components of a professional teaching practice.

Continuous self–improvement: She consistently strived to improve her teaching skills and content knowledge by attending professional development workshops or conferences, seeking feedback from peers and students, and staying up–to–date with current trends or research in her field. The author–student got to know about these when she engaged with the lecturer. And the lecturer always informed the students when she (the lecturer) had attended a professional development course and would alert the students of the changes to be implemented in class. As stated by Lin et al (2022), having a growth mind set and being willing to learn and adapt is a hallmark of professional teaching.

Overall, this lecturer demonstrated professionalism by being prepared, communicating respectfully, being timely, being fair, and continuously striving to improve their teaching skills and knowledge. These proved to be important aspects that motivated students to perform better

in her courses. For example, students consistently reported higher attendance rates and engagement in class discussions and assignments, indicating that the lecturer's professionalism played a pivotal role in motivating them to excel in her courses.

Accessibility and Approachability

Accessible and approachable lecturers positively impact student performance. According to Faulkner et al. (2021), a lecturer who is accessible and approachable creates a comfortable and safe environment where students feel comfortable asking questions and seeking assistance. Such an environment fosters a positive teacher–student relationship, which contributes to students' academic success. Accessibility and approachability are also important factors that can impact student achievement. When teachers are easy to approach and willing to help students outside the classroom, it can foster a supportive learning environment. According to a study by Baik and Brooker (2019), approachable teachers who are willing to listen, empathize, and help students can increase their sense of social connection and academic motivation. Approachability then becomes an important trait in higher education.

In the case under study, accessibility served as a critical factor that contributed to the success of students, as students who had access to their lecturers and received individual attention tended to perform better. This was evident when I approached the lecturer for assistance with a challenging aspect of Linguistics, and she made herself available after class. This support significantly contributed to my success in that particular area. This indicates that accessibility and individual attention positively influenced student success in this case. As highlighted Zepke (2010), lecturers who are approachable and willing to engage with students can create a supportive environment that allows students to be more confident in their learning and improve academic performance. There is a tendency for some lecturers to be unapproachable and distant to students. This hinders students from engaging with them, in or outside the classroom. Once the students find an approachable lecturer, who is willing to lend an ear to their views, that lecturer becomes famous to the students, whether they attend that lecturer's classes or not (Su and Wood 2012). Su and Wood said lecturer was found to be the point of interest for students even from other faculties because of their (the lecturer's) welcoming attitude. Hereunder are the traits that showed the lecturer's accessibility and approachability:

Being available and responsive: This lecturer made herself available to students by holding office hours, responding to emails promptly, and being present before and after class for consultations. I obtained this information through direct observation and feedback from students who mentioned their positive experiences with the lecturer's accessibility in our group

discussions for the group assignments. This showed the students that the lecturer is approachable and willing to help them outside of class hours (Su and Wood 2012).

Using inclusive language: She used inclusive language in the classroom by using gender–neutral pronouns, avoiding using offensive language, and acknowledging diversity in her class, this was evident through class interaction. For instance, in linguistics classes, the lecturer would inform the students that isiXhosa is spoken in various areas. Therefore, it is not correct to judge people's understanding of concepts like "imbeleko" (traditional welcoming of a child ceremony). Even the terminology used by student from isiMpondo–speaking area would be different from the one from isiRharhabe–speaking area. Whenever students picked these as mistakes, the lecturer would remind them that the term is correct in that particular student's community. Therefore, instead of judging the student, one needs to learn more about the new term. According to Peters (2020) the use of inclusive language would clearly show the students that this is an important issue and that they are welcome to express themselves freely and honestly in a non–sexist way. Their performance showed that students performed better when they see that they are recognised and respected irrespective of their background, social class or sexual orientation.

Encouraging participation: The lecturer encouraged participation during class by asking open–ended questions, giving students the chance to speak, and actively listening to their responses. She encouraged participation by posing open–ended questions, providing opportunities for students to share their thoughts, and attentively listening to their responses, fostering an engaging and inclusive classroom environment. This showed the students that the lecturer values their opinions and encourages engagement (Su and Wood 2012).

Being approachable in demeanor: A lecturer can show approachability in their demeanor by being friendly, smiling, and making eye contact with their students (Bunglowala, 2015). The lecturer made sure that she reaches to all students in class. For students who are not comfortable expressing their views, the lecturer would give peer discussion and small group discussion tasks so that the students would get a chance to express themselves amongst peers. This creates a positive and inviting atmosphere in the classroom (Nilufar 2023). Even those students who would feel like disrupting the class would participate once they see that the lecturer was noticing and acknowledging their presence and engagements.

Enthusiasm and passion

Enthusiasm and passion were modelled to students through the lecturers' genuine interest in their subjects and their enthusiasm for sharing their knowledge with their students. Bella (2023)

notes that when lecturers are enthusiastic about the subjects they teach, they can help to generate excitement and interest among their students, which can lead to improved academic performance. An enthusiastic lecture makes learning exciting to students. They use relevant pedagogical theories to enhance student involvement in engaging with topics. That way students get to create or co–create knowledge themselves. For instance, social constructivism theory was used by the lecturer. This advocates for students to be given learning tasks that will help them engage and construct their own understanding of knowledge. Students work in pairs and groups to create knowledge (Biggs and Tang 2007). Giving students a chance to engage with knowledge transferred the lecturer enthusiasm to students.

According to a study by Su and Wood (2012), students are more likely to perform better when their lecturer demonstrates enthusiasm towards the subject matter. A lecturer who is passionate about their field of study can create a positive and engaging classroom environment that improves the students' motivation to learn. The study noted that enthusiastic lecturers encourage students to participate in class discussions and ask questions, which ultimately leads to improved academic performance. Enthusiasm and passion can significantly influence student achievement. According to Dewaele and Li (2021), when teachers exhibit enthusiasm for their subject matter and demonstrate a genuine passion for teaching, it often leads to increased motivation and engagement from students. A study by Fidan (2023) found that a teacher's passion for teaching can create engaging and challenging learning experiences that increase students' enjoyment and achievement in the classroom.

Research conducted by Su and Wood (2012) found that the passion exhibited by a lecturer has a significant impact on students' academic performance. Passionate lecturers are enthusiastic about their teaching, which translates to the students' increased engagement and motivation to learn. As such, students tend to remember the material taught by a passionate lecturer for longer periods of time, which positively affects their academic performance. Hereunder is the discussion of how the lecturer modelled enthusiasm:

Use body language: A lecturer's body language showed enthusiasm and excitement about the subject matter. The lecturer used hand gestures, facial expressions, and movement around the room to engage with the students for example, she would use expressive facial expressions to convey excitement or concern about the topics discussed, and she occasionally moved around the room to interact more closely with students, fostering a dynamic and engaging learning environment. As noted by Wang (2022), the use of animated body language can significantly increase a lecturer's perceived level of enthusiasm and engagement.

Demonstrating real–world relevance: She showed enthusiasm by linking the course

material to real–life situations by providing examples of how the subject matter is applicable in the real world, sand haring her experiences. According to Su and Wood (2012), relevance to the world outside the classroom is an important factor in keeping students engaged and motivated. By demonstrating how the material is applicable in a real–world context, the lecturer can convey enthusiasm for the subject matter.

Using humour: By injecting humour and jokes she conveyed enthusiasm and created a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom. This not only lightens the mood but also helps in building rapport between the lecturer and the students. As noted by Tran and Le (2022), the use of humour can significantly increase students' enjoyment of the class and the level of engagement with the subject matter.

Promoting interactive learning: The lecturer showed enthusiasm by making the lecture interactive and engaging. She encouraged discussion and debate, asking for student feedback, and used technology to promote interactive learning this was noticed through direct observation of the lecturer's teaching methods and interactions with students during class sessions. According to Prasetyo, Ilham and Asvio (2022), interactive learning promotes active engagement with the subject material, facilitating a deeper understanding and retention of the material. Lecturers who show enthusiasm for interactive learning can help to create a stimulating and engaging classroom environment. On the other hand, passion was displayed through:

Engaging and enthusiastic delivery: The lecturer delivered her lectures in an engaging and enthusiastic manner. This involve using tone, body language, and pacing to keep the students interested and involved in the subject matter. For example, she used humour or storytelling to make a dry topic more interesting. In a study conducted by Beswick et al. (2023), it was found that an engaging and enthusiastic teaching style was a key factor in creating a positive learning environment and can significantly improve student outcomes.

Bringing personal experiences and stories: She also used personal experiences and stories to help demonstrate the relevance and importance of the subject matter and the author–student experienced the lecturer's teaching methods firsthand as a student in her class. Personal and other stories can help students to see the practical application of what they are learning and can make the material more relatable. In a study by Aladsani (2022), it was found that personal stories and experiences were highly valued by students and helped to enhance their engagement and understanding of the course material.

Providing individual attention: The lecturer also showed her passion for teaching by providing individual attention to each student. This involved taking the time to answer questions, provide feedback, or offer extra support to struggling students. In a study by Su and

Wood (2012), it was found that students who received individual attention from their lecturers had higher levels of satisfaction and engagement in their courses.

Overall, this passionate lecturer showed her passion through the use of engaging and enthusiastic delivery, personal stories and experiences, and by providing individual attention to each student. Her passion was inspirational to her students to become more interested and engaged in the subject matter. Her passion's impact was observed through increased student engagement, active participation in class discussions, and a heightened interest in the subject matter, as reflected in higher attendance rates.

CONCLUSION

According to the literature, the modelling of professionalism, enthusiasm, passion, accessibility, profitability, and any other positive traits by lecturers play a significant role in the success of students. By providing a positive learning environment that facilitated academic success, this lecturer is found to have helped to build the foundation for their students to become better professionals and citizens. The lecturer under discussion used these traits to make students feel welcome and important in the classroom. This was evident in the way students were found to be free in her classes. Student participation was also noticed in her classes, as the students felt not judged, but their views welcomed. The author–student got to experience and observe these in the classes by the lecturer. The lecturer's traits seemed to enhance students' self–esteem and made them feel more confident to engage with the knowledge under discussion. As a student in her class, the author–student personally observed how the lecturer's teaching style and traits made students feel welcome and important. This was evident in increased classroom participation, improved self–esteem, and greater student confidence in engaging with the subject matter. The personality traits displayed by the lecturer may also help students in their future endeavours.

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