ATTITUDE TOWARDS SOCIAL RESEARCH: ROLE OF PERSONALITY AND ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at investigating student attitudinal change towards social research during a semester of five months as a result of participation in the social research course. Sample of this study was comprised of 11 students of the MS Career Counselling & Education Program at the National University of Sciences and Technology and data was solicited at four different stages. Information related to student attitude towards social research was collected through a repeated design and information on personality characteristics was collected once. Though the assessment sought from a group of students does not show statistically significant findings, analyses of individual cases shows meaningful findings. Comparison of personality characteristics and academic performance of the students who scored high versus low on Attitude towards Social Research Scale indicate the importance of conscientiousness, extraversion and openness. Factors such as instructional quality, student personality characteristics, expectations and educational background were found as crucial for further in-depth exploration in this area. This study provides initial paradigm for the epistemology of attitudinal change towards social research.

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Contribution/ Originality

This study provides initial paradigm for the epistemology of attitudinal change towards due to the participation in 'introduction to social research' course of study at the post-graduate level. This article highlights the importance of teacher pedagogical techniques to develop student interest, engagement and performance in this course.

1. INTRODUCTION

Student attitude towards learning is a mental inclination which can play a crucial role in steering their academic efforts and involvement. While its importance is well established empirically (Farooq and Shah, 2008; Li, 2012; Rezaei and Zamani-Miandashti, 2013) its quality and vigor can form a sound basis for preference in a learning style and the extent to which a student engages in the academic pursuit. Therefore, it can be said that student attitude may impact performance in social research and investigating these variables in connection is important to determine the trajectory for better learning and performance of university students especially in social research.

Realization of the importance of social research directs investigation into the factors that improve student involvement in it. Research on student attitude towards quantitative research methods that's stirs in negative or positive forms is well demonstrated (Manuel *et al.*, 2013). This explicitly suggests designing the instructional

methods in a manner that emanates critical thinking of students resulting into a change of negative attitudes into positive.

Therefore, it can be rightly articulated that effectiveness of teaching and learning processes is connected to the desirable change in student learning styles and attitude, thereby leads to the improvement in the academic performance. This undoubtedly poses a challenge to both a naïve and experienced teacher in designing the instruction and assessment.

This argument shows a central position of student attitude in learning. It receives multiple influences from the student specific variables and environment related variables. Thus, investigating student attitude in social research along with numerous sources of influence is of crucial importance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a sound and consistent evidence indicating positive role of attitude in students' learning style and academic involvement (Abu *et al.*, 2010; Awang, 2013) and most importantly as a result of quantitative and correlational studies (Morgenshtern *et al.*, 2011; Butt and Shams, 2013; Saeidinia *et al.*, 2013). Realization of the fact that that student attitude may change in potency due to the educational experience, exposure and active participation in learning provides a strong premise for a longitudinal research.

Explaining and analyzing student academic attitude is complex particularly when underpinning variables are explored in connection to those which directly influence it. It can be correctly stated that student academic attitude constitutes a central position entailing the role of influencing other variables such as students' own personality, aspirations and learning environment. To recapitulate, student-specific variables which affect student learning are tightly knit up, resultantly a change in attitude is plausible when a change in the concurrent variables take place or vice versa. Thus, student characteristics and learning variables are tightly knit in a fabric where considering a change in isolation cannot embark on realistically. When student progress and effective learning viewed from this perspective, confluent education eminently stands essential for unleashing student potential. This paradigm guides planning and directing education with an apt consideration of the holistic view of learners and their ability to learn leading to the amalgamated and integrated approach for effectual teaching and learning.

A learner is rightly considered as a constructivist, who is capable of constructing meanings out of the experiences and thus attitude, which forms both the core of learning and outcome of the learning process. Both the doctrines of confluent education and constructivism supported by eminent researchers and scholarly writings (Francke, 1994; Martin, 1998; Hussain, 2012) call for considering intricacies of education well aligned to the student learning modalities and domains directly and indirectly responsible for enhancing student learning. This demands explicating the significant variables which influence student attitude towards academics. In this connection, student' educational background, personality and assessment can yield profound influence on attitude towards social research.

Realization of social and emotional endowment of students play a predominant role in the assimilating confluent education framework (Hurlburt *et al.*, 1991) and immense influence of student personality on attitude engenders inquiry into these variables. The personality of a student is a relatively stable component which may engrain a particular learning style. This may or may not open avenues for new experiences and thus can possibly facilitate a desirable change or make a student entirely resistant to new experiences. Positive changes in academics related attitude of students may be perceptible due to the specific personality characteristics which have a predominant role to take in and absorb new learning experiences. This may evidently promote active learning experiences and forestall students' pessimistic approaches towards learning. Therefore, role of personality characteristics vividly emerges in this framework, which demands the external factors to be robust enough for a shift in the student attitude towards learning. Therefore, student attitudinal change towards social research demands consideration of both the student base-line attitude and personality variables in connection to the learning experiences.

Role of personality characteristics for student academic involvement and achievement is empirically well established especially with reference to the consistent and thorough investigation of big five personality factors. Chamo-Premuzic and Furnham (2009) found openness is the only personality factor that is related to deep learning approaches. Akomolafe (2013) found the significant role of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness for the academic performance of secondary school children, whereby conscientiousness plays the most significant contribution. Koseoglu (2014) found the role of openness and extraversion for involvement in learning for undergraduate students. Bracken and Ludvik (2014) found that conscientiousness, agreeableness and engagement with faculty, peers and campus significantly predicted GPA of college students. In another study by Ibrahim *et al.* (2014) found the strongest role of conscientiousness for GPA on the basis of meta-analysis. While these findings are inconsistent in prominently signaling a single personality characteristic of key importance to student learning, still they firmly establish the prime role of personality characteristics in learning and achievement for the students of all the educational levels. It is important to note that research on the role of personality characteristics in attitude towards social research is scarce and hence needs immense focus while realizing the roots of flourishing societies are deeply embedded and immersed in the progression of social research.

Student personality depicts internal characteristics which may be a predecessor for the attitudinal change. On the other hand, assessment systems and student satisfaction with the assessment may also exert external and internal influences and may likely to be another cause of attitudinal change towards social research. Therefore, this study aims to explicate how the personality and assessment affect student attitudinal change towards research so that teachers can design nomenclature of instruction which catalyzes attitudinal change towards social research. In this connection, objective of this study is through a repeated measure design, student attitudinal change in social research will be investigated as a result of participation in a course on social research. Another objective is to explore comparative importance of student personality and assessment for their performance in social research course.

This study can be considered as a preliminary research based upon which findings can provide enriching results for further large scale and comparative studies on student attitude towards social research and factors concomitant to this variable.

3. METHODOLOGY

This is a longitudinal study with a repeated measure and exploratory design in which a scale to assess attitude towards social research was administered on MS level students. These students were selected from the Center for Counseling and Career Advisory at the National University of Sciences and Technology, Islamabad (Pakistan). They were first semester students of MS. Career Counselling & Education Program. They were considered as the ideal students for this study because they were new entrances and it was assumed that being new students, they could not have significant influences of the institutional environment and hence their own attitude and personality characteristics would yield stronger influences on their own learning. As a result, this repeated measure design could yield meaningful findings.

In this longitudinal study, data was collected three times from the students during a five months semester duration and the forth administration was done during the sixth month exactly after sharing the final results with the students. The purpose of research was shared with the participants in the beginning and again while administering a measure on big five personality traits.

This research methodology was selected because of its suitability and relevance to gauge attitudinal change towards social research. This obviously requires a repeated assessment of attitude towards social research during different phases when students were undertaking course on this subject.

3.1. Sample

The sample of this study was comprised of 11 students. Data could completed from nine students on a scale to measure attitude towards social research during the first two administrations. Whereas, eight students completed and retuned a measure on attitude towards social research when data was collected during third and forth administration. Furthermore, eight out of nine students completed a measure to assess big five personality during the third administration.

3.2. Instruments

A scale to assess attitude towards social research was developed on the basis of 13 categories proposed by Murff and Lane (2013) which were originally utilized to develop Jacksonville Attitude towards Research Survey (JARS). These categories were considered because they were found close to the scale developed by Papanastasiou (2005). Response categories ranged from score 1 to 3, when score 1= No, score 2= cannot say, and score 3= yes. Score ranged between 13-39 and median score was 26.

The Big Five Inventory by John *et al.* (2008) having 44 items with five point response scale was used to assess five aspects of personality namely Extraversion, Agreeableness, Neuroticism, Conscientiousness and Openness. This inventory comprised of 44 items with five point rating from disagree strongly (score=1) to agree strongly (score=5). Score ranges on five dimensions were considered, which were Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism and Openness. Score on Extraversion had range of 8-40 with median=24 (total items =8), score on Agreeableness ranged between 9-45 with median = 27 (total items = 9), score on conscientiousness ranged between 9-45 with median=27 (total items = 9), score on Neuroticism ranged between 8-40 with median = 24 (total items = 8) and score on Openness ranged from 10-50 with median = 35 (total items=10).

3.3. Procedure

During a five months semester, the scale to assess attitude towards social research was administered. First administration was carried out during the first week of the semester, second administration was carried out during the forth week after onset of the semester, third administration was carried out after students submitted final assignments which was in fifth month and last assessment was carried out after sharing of final results with the students which was during the sixth month exactly at the time of completion of this semester. A measure to assess five aspects of personality was administered at the stage of forth administration considering that students had less work load at that time and hence it was possible for them to respond to a 44 item measure without any undue stress. This research strategy was sought purposefully in order to understand the role of big five personality traits and assessment in changing the students' attitude towards social research.

4. RESULTS

Next given are the findings of the study

Table-1. Students' score on Attitude towards Social Research Scale on the basis of four administrations

	Administration 1	Administration 2	Administration 3	Administration 4
Mean	33.7	33.2	33.1	32.5
SD	3.6	3.4	3.7	2.9

Table 1 shows that students' score on Attitude towards Social Research decreased 1.2 points when scores on first and forth administration were compared. Furthermore, it was noted that there was a gradual decline in scores when results at different levels were analyzed and compared.

Table-2. Comparison of high and low grader of students who improved and declined attitude towards social research after participation in the course on social research

	1st administration	2nd Administration	3rd Administration	4th Administration	Academic Performance (%)
	During first Week	During forth week	After submission of final assignment in 5th month	After sharing of final scores	
	Mean Scores				
A student scores indicating improvement of attitude towards social research	2.6	2.6	2.6	2.9	71.6%
A student scores indicating decline of attitude towards social research	2.5	2.5	2.3	2	68.6%

Table 2 shows that a student who performed academically better (71%) on the introduction to social research course also had positive attitudinal change over time while a student who academically performed low on social research course (68%) gradually declined in positive attitude towards social research. For this analysis, information on students' academic performance in terms of total percentages was acquired which were attained after the completion of a course on introduction to social research.

Table-3. Scores on big five personality scale of students who improved/declined after the participation in the introduction to social research course

	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness	Neuroticism	Openness
	Mean Score				
Personality characteristics of a student who improved attitude towards research after the participation in the course on introduction to social research	29	32	40	22	42
Personality characteristics of a student who declined in positive attitude towards research after the participation in the course on introduction to social research	20	35	37	21	35

Table 3 shows that student who scored high on the social research course (see Table 2) also scored high on Extraversion, Conscientiousness and Openness when compared to the student who scored low on social research course. Data that has been analyzed and presented in Tables 2 and 3 is of two selected students, purposefully selected to understand attitudinal change and personality characteristics of high and low achiever.

Table-4. Correlations between personality characteristics and attitude towards social research

Personality characteristics	1st adm	2nd admn	3rd admn	4th admn
Agreeableness	-.08	-.59	.31	.37
Conscientiousness	-.14	.03	-.46	.22
Openness	-.19	-.19	.20	.04
Neuroticism	-.60	-.09	-.40	.08
Extraversion	-.02	.00	.28	-.00

Note: admn (administration)

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Table 4 shows that none of the correlation of personality characteristic was significant with student attitude towards research at any point of administration. However, most noticeable change was found in the domain of conscientiousness because its value changed from inverse to positive relationship with the attitude towards social research when the findings of forth administration were compared to that of first and third. This shows that due to the participation in social research course, inverse relationship of conscientiousness and attitude towards social research changed from inverse to positive. This indirectly indicates that particular personality variables may not be significantly linked to attitude towards social research rather personality disposition can lead to active student participation and that can consequently change inverse relationship of conscientiousness with the attitude towards social research. Findings also indicate that teaching and pedagogical techniques can play an important role to change student positive attitude towards social research by involving students cognitively.

5. DISCUSSION

Analyses of cumulative and individual scores provide a glimpse of a number of factors that might be responsible for the attitudinal change towards research. The gradual decline of the scores on attitude towards social research is indicative of the fact that it changes over time as a consequence of participation in the course on social research. Furthermore, results of the whole group shows that their positive attitude towards social research declined from 33.7 mean score to 32.5 mean score, which might be an indicator of the fact that the social research course did not met the expectations initially set by all the students or their realistic understanding regarding their research skills developed gradually. It is noteworthy that all the participants of this study were not having social sciences background and therefore it can be said that this might be a reason for lack of remarkable upsurge in attitude towards social research. These findings indirectly indicate the significance of teacher pedagogical techniques to tackle individual differences during teaching-learning sessions. Furthermore, findings illustrated that results obtained from a simple correlational method though did not reveal statistically significant results but were meaningful and directional for further research. Maximal change in potency of relationship between conscientiousness and attitude towards social research was visible after the forth administration of measures which suggests that positive attitude towards social research is related to the characteristics which fall under conscientiousness, such as hard work, organization and careful thought and planning linked to this course. Therefore, it is noteworthy that students' scores declined gradually at various levels of administration which rightly indicates that as the students participated in the course, it accentuated changes accentuated over time and decline in their positive attitude towards social research took place. This gradual decline of scores is indicative of the fact that students' perceptions, feelings and learning experiences counted more for their attitudinal change when compared to the assessment. Therefore, assessment seemingly is less detrimental to the attitudinal change. A comparison of high and low scorer on the attitude towards social research and their scores on the personality characteristics and academic performance also supports the premise that conscientiousness has a major role in positive attitude towards social research. The two students had a visible difference on this domain of personality along with scores on academic performance. These findings elucidate and explicate the importance of personality characteristic linked to the positive attitude towards social research. For further exploration, it is anticipated that students' attitude towards social research is dependent upon their personality characteristics and comparing scores of high and low achiever supported this assumption, whereby the high scorer who developed positive attitude towards social research after the participation in the social research course and also scored high on extraversion, conscientiousness and openness when compared to the low scorer who showed a decline of positive attitude towards social research.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Students should be encouraged to incorporate new learning experiences and challenges from the very beginning when they start studying the social research course.

- Students should be encouraged to adopt the qualities and characteristics of conscientiousness during participation in the course on social research.

- Qualitative research method should accompany quantitative research method to explore and investigate student attitude towards social research. This will enable to understand the underlying perceptions affecting student attitudes and to rectify them immediately, so that the process of assessment is linked to removing salient obstructing factors in forming positive attitudes toward social research.

- Teachers should assess students' personality from the very beginning and for students score low on openness and conscientiousness, separate individual advising sessions should be planned.

- Exposure to professional places where social research has contributed significantly can enhance student motivation for studying social research.

- Teachers should involve students in learning and class participation and at the priority those students who stand low on extraversion.

- Teachers should give special attention to the attitudinal issues of low scorers.

- Teachers should set realistic expectations and equally involve all the learners to critically analyze stages, steps and methods of social research.

- In-depth interviews should be taken from high and low scorers in order to dig out their perceptions and prior course entrance experiences affecting their attitude towards social research.

- Advance research methods should be used to test the interaction between student attitude towards research and personality characteristics and openness.

- Data should be collected from a larger group and further decisions in this area should be made on the basis of advance statistical analysis.

6.1. Limitations

Background experiences, analytical skills, interests, aptitude, priorities and the amount of time that students invest in their own learning are few of the crucial factors which are also likely to affect their attitude towards social research and academic performance. These variables were out of the purview of this study and therefore this study provides limited understanding regarding factors of student positive attitude towards social research. Furthermore, reliable and valid scales are should be used to assess student attitude towards social research. Such a scale could not be accessed due to time pressure and hence the study needs to be replicated with a larger sample and by using stronger research methods which assure reliability and validity.

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