
Exploring Foundation Students' Perspectives on Personality and Social Engagement in University

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Abstract

The transition to university introduces significant social and academic adjustments for students. This preliminary study investigated how 50 Foundation students from a private university in Selangor perceive the role of personality traits, specifically introversion and extroversion, in their social experiences. Employing a quantitative survey, the research found a strong perception that personality significantly shapes social engagement and academic success, influencing friendship choices and social group formation. Students demonstrated detailed awareness of introversion and extroversion, associating introverts with smaller social settings and extroverts with active participation in campus events. However, data also indicated that adaptation to university life is influenced by factors beyond personality, highlighting the complexity of student adjustment. This research highlights the importance of universities creating inclusive environments that accommodate diverse personality types, suggesting tailored interventions for student support services and extracurricular programming to promote social integration and academic success for all students navigating the transition to higher education.

Keywords : Personality traits; Introversion/Extroversion; Student Social Engagement; University Adjustment; Foundation Students; Social Interactions

I. INTRODUCTION

Foundation programs serve as a crucial bridge between secondary education and the rigors of university life, preparing students not only academically but also for the essential social landscape of higher learning. Socialization during this formative period plays an important role in students' holistic development. It empowers them to form valuable networks, refine their communication skills, and adjust to new environments and expectations. Through interaction with peers, lecturers, and the broader university community, students develop a sense of belonging and support systems that can significantly impact their academic journey and overall well-being. Furthermore, successful socialization during the foundation year lays the groundwork for future success by fostering essential life skills, including collaboration, problem-solving, and adaptability. A strong social foundation contributes to a positive university experience, enhancing student engagement, and personal growth.

However, students may struggle to build relationships beyond their immediate foundation year peers, which can limit their access to diverse social networks and hinder their potential for upward social mobility [1]. The ease and effectiveness of socialization are often significantly influenced by individual personality traits. Research has consistently demonstrated the relationship between personality and socialization skills, revealing that some students, particularly those with introverted tendencies, social anxiety, or other personality-related challenges, may struggle to form meaningful connections and immerse themselves into the university community. These challenges can have profound consequences, affecting not only their social life but also their academic performance, mental health, and overall sense of belonging. Students encounter a range of changes and potential problems when they begin their university studies, which, among others, includes social challenges such as making new friends, feeling isolated, feeling stressed and unhappy [2]. Understanding the complex relationship between personality and socialization within the specific context of diverse higher learning institutions is therefore important. By exploring these situations, higher learning institutions can develop targeted support strategies that cater to the unique needs of students with

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varying personality profiles, fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment that empowers all students to thrive and achieve their full potential. This, in turn, contributes to a richer and more vibrant campus community, ultimately enhancing the higher education experience and preparing students for future success.

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this study is to explore the foundation students' perception of the influence of personality on their social engagement at university. Additionally, the study also seeks to investigate how the foundation students perceive the relationship between specific personality traits and various aspects of their social life in university.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. The Transition to Higher Education

The transition from high school to higher education could be a tough period for young adults, particularly those aged between 18 to 20 years old; as this may include a change in their personality. Critical relationship was established between learner identity and student achievement in higher education, emphasizing the importance of integrated transition systems to facilitate its development [3]. This foundation of learner identity is crucial for understanding the challenges faced by students transitioning to university. The experiences of foundation year students were explored as they navigate this transition [4]. Their research reveals the value students place on the foundation year as a "stepping stone" to further studies, providing a "second chance" and enhanced preparedness. However, they also identify key challenges, including the struggle to develop a strong university student identity and a perceived stigma associated with the foundation program.

While foundation students form strong support networks within their cohort, they often face difficulties integrating with the wider student population. This struggle for belonging is further highlighted in a study that found that a sense of belonging is essential for students to feel that the foundation year meets their expectations [5]. They recommend intentionally fostering belonging through relationships with peers and lecturers, directly connecting to the integrated transition systems [4]. Collectively, these studies highlight the need for foundation programs to address not only academic preparation but also the social and emotional aspects of student transition, focusing on identity formation, fostering a sense of belonging, and facilitating integration into the larger university community.

B. Benefits of Social Engagement

Research has demonstrated the positive impact of student engagement on academic outcomes, particularly grades and persistence. Studies have found that student engagement had beneficial effects on grades and persistence between the first and second year of college for students across various racial and ethnic backgrounds [6][7]. Importantly, their research also highlighted the compensatory effects of engagement, showing that historically underserved students benefited even more from engagement in terms of achieving higher grades and persisting to their second year. This suggests that fostering engagement can be a powerful tool for promoting equity and student success. It was further emphasized that the diverse nature of student engagement, identifying several key dimensions including online engagement, self-managed learning, peer interaction, and student-staff engagement [8]. Their work highlights the need for higher education institutions to adopt a broader approach to measuring and monitoring student engagement, recognizing its various forms and influences.

Beyond academic outcomes, student engagement also contributes to a range of valuable personal and developmental benefits. The impact of extracurricular activities was explored, finding that participation can improve students' linguistic competence, critical thinking skills, and time management abilities [9]. Moreover, involvement in extracurricular activities boosts self-confidence and self-esteem, while also making the transition easier, enabling students to make adjustments to the university environment. This research highlights the importance of providing students with opportunities to engage in activities outside the classroom, not only for skill development but also for personal growth and a stronger sense of belonging. The authors note the university's recent efforts to increase faculty involvement in extracurricular initiatives, suggesting an institutional recognition of the significant role these activities play in student development.

C. The Role of Personality in Academic and Social Setting

Personality traits, particularly extroversion and agreeableness, significantly influence the social dynamics of foundation students, with more extroverted individuals participating in a wider range of social activities [10]. Traits like openness and extroversion might positively affect students' lives in socialising and form a network with each other, while conscientiousness might make students limit their social interaction with one another. Next, in their study, the authors explore the role of personality traits in shaping social capital among

students, particularly at the foundational level. They find that certain personality factors, such as openness and extroversion, significantly influence students' ability to socialise and form networks within the academic settings [11]. These findings suggest that personality plays a critical role in facilitating social interactions, which are important for building social capital and fostering a collaborative learning environment. This implies that students with higher openness will engage in a lot more group activities, and seek their peers for support. Meanwhile, students with introversion may require additional support in building social opportunities. Notably, extroverted individuals, known for their sociability and warmth, tend to actively seek out social interactions and are more likely to exhibit higher levels of social engagement [12][13][14]

Additionally, the influence of personality traits on students' social interactions and academic engagement were examined during study abroad programs, which highlights that traits such as openness, emotional stability, and conscientiousness are crucial in determining how well foundation students socialise in diverse cultural environments [15]. The findings show that personality not only impacts academic success but also enhances students' ability to engage in social activities to encourage intercultural communication and a supportive social network during their studies abroad. It demonstrates that conscientiousness allows students to tailor emotional stability that struggles with adapting to the new environment, it also helps with learning and expanding opportunities while being abroad. Research conducted in a Malaysian university also reinforces the relationship between personality traits and students performance, which highlights the importance of developing strategies for personal growth and self-improvement that can increase students' confidence, resilience and adaptability needed to navigate the higher learning environment [16]. Understanding and addressing these personality issues is also crucial for supporting their academic and personal success. Moreover, social engagement in an academic context extends beyond mere social interactions; it involves the quality and nature a student's connections with peers, teachers and the broader community in the school [12]. Furthermore, agreeableness, characterized by traits such as trust, altruism, and kindness, is associated with positive social interactions, a greater willingness to cooperate and the formation of trusting relationship [12][13][14]

Next, the impact of personality traits and social environment on the entrepreneurial tendencies of students at a foundation university were examined [17]. Their findings suggest that traits such as openness and extroversion are strongly related with

students' ability to socialize effectively and influence their social networks for entrepreneurial activities. The study highlights that personality not only influences academic engagement but also plays a significant role in shaping students' social interactions, which are important not only for their professional development but also entrepreneurial pursuit, which could play a part in foundation students' social engagement.

The process of socialization in educational settings is significantly influenced by the student's personality traits, as suggested by [18] and [19]. They suggest that personality factors, such as openness and conscientiousness, play an important role in students' ability to adapt and engage in social relationships within academic communities. Their findings can be applied to foundation students, indicating that a supportive educational environment promotes positive social behaviours and enhances interpersonal connections. They explained that these traits, such as openness to experience or conscientiousness, play a significant role in shaping how students engage with their peers and participate in social activities, thus affecting their overall integration within the educational environment. These findings show the significant role that personality plays in shaping students' social experiences and interactions. Both of these qualities are related to agreeableness requires empathy and kindness, while being an extrovert requires assertiveness. Both of these characteristics contribute to a healthier social interaction. It fosters a more positive environment in the classroom and makes the class more connected.

Social engagement has various dimensions, including behavioural engagement, emotional engagement, cognitive engagement and social engagement. Each of these dimensions plays a crucial role in shaping a student's academic journey. Positive relationships with both teachers and peers are vitals for fostering enthusiasm for learning, promoting self-confidence, and ensuring long-term academic success. Supportive relationships contribute significantly to a student's sense of belonging and connectedness within the academic environments, which has been consistently identified as strong predictor of academic performance. When students feel accepted, respected and supported by those around them, they are more likely to be motivated to learn, actively participate in class activities and seek assistance when facing academic challenges. This positive social environment creates a foundation to thrive in academic setting. [20]

Social engagement can also act as an important link in the relationship between personality traits and academic performance. For example, an extroverted student's tendency to engage socially might lead them to actively participate in study groups, seek help from peers and instructors, and build supportive relationships. These increased opportunities for interaction and support can then contribute to improved understanding of course material and ultimately lead to better academic outcomes. Thus, personality can indirectly influence academic performance by shaping a student's social interactions and the level of social support they receive within the academic community. In contrast, high levels of neuroticism, often associated with anxiety and mood swings, can hinder social engagement [12][13][14]. However, it is important to note that introversion does not necessarily equate to low social engagement [21][22]. While introverted students may not engage socially in the same way as their extroverted peers, their style of engagement can still be meaningful and beneficial for their learning.

To conclude, education plays a central role in the socialization process, acting as a platform where personality traits influence how students form relationships [23]. Personality traits such as extroversion and agreeableness significantly influence the formation of peer relationships and social networks within these settings. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for educators to create supportive environments that cater to diverse personality types, and thereby enhancing students' overall academic and social integration.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative method to explore the foundation students' perception on the influence of personality on various aspects of their social life in the university. A survey was carried out via Google Form and 50 respondents were chosen through random sampling from the Foundation programs in a private university in Selangor. This preliminary study utilizes a smaller sample size to establish initial findings and inform future, more comprehensive research.

The survey was divided into three sections: Demographics, Perception of Personality Traits, and Perception of Introversion vs Extroversion Tendencies. The study used a 5-point Likert Scale for the questionnaire, ranging from 1 - Strongly Disagree to 5 - Strongly Agree to assess the students' perception of personality on their social engagement at university.

Even though factors such as emotional stability, agreeableness, and conscientiousness play a role in social engagement, the study specifically focuses on extroversion vs introversion due to its direct link to social engagement. It is the most fundamental traits that influence how individuals interact socially. In university social environment also, it has clear, observable impact where there are emphasis of group discussions, networking and collaborative learning. Students' participation level in these settings are often strongly influenced by their extroversion-introversion tendencies, making it an ideal point for the study.

Descriptive statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS version 27 to summarize the demographic data and responses to the survey items. The following measurement is used to indicate students' agreement towards the statements used in the survey.

Table 1: Interpretation of Mean Score

Mean Score	Interpretation
3.67 – 5.00	High
2.34 – 3.66	Moderate
1.00 – 2.33	Low

Further analysis, such as correlations, may be conducted to investigate potential relationships between perceptions of different personality traits and social engagement among Foundation students.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Respondents' Profiles

This preliminary study's respondents consisted of 50 Foundation students from a private university in Selangor, encompassing a variety of academic programs. The demographic analysis revealed a predominantly female sample, indicating 80% female and 20% male respondents. This is proportionate to the overall enrolment of students in the foundation programs in the private university in Selangor where the male students to female students ratio is 1:10. Given this institutional context, the sample provides a representative view of the majority of student population in foundation programs in this particular university rather than an unintended limitation.

The majority of respondents were within the 18-20 age bracket, representing 77.6% of the sample, while smaller proportions were aged 21-24 and 25-30. In terms of academic programs, the Foundation for B.Ed TESL program was the most dominant, with 58% of respondents, followed by other programs such as Foundation in IT, Foundation in Management, Foundation in Islamic Studies,

Foundation in Science, and Foundation in Arts. These demographics provide context for the interpretation of the study's findings regarding student perceptions of personality traits and social engagement within the university's Foundation program.

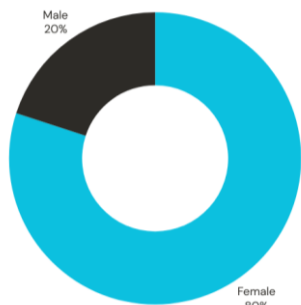


Figure 1: Respondents' gender

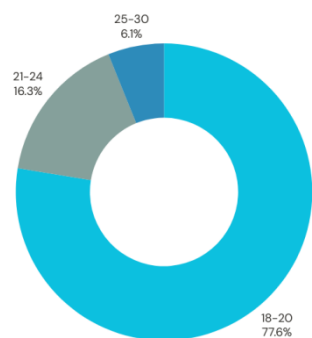


Figure 2: Respondents' age group

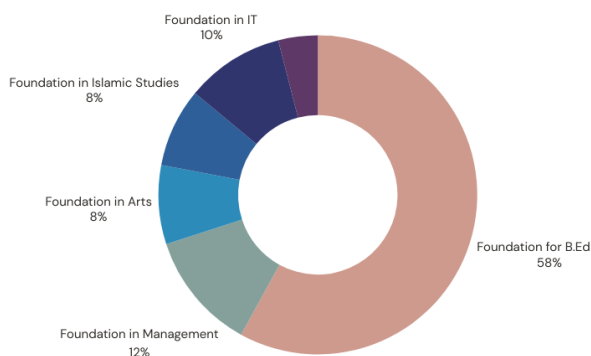


Figure 3: Respondents' Programme of Studies

B. Foundation Students' Perception on Personality Traits

The following data in Table 2 shows the Mean score on the Foundation students' perception on general personality traits on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest and shows the strongest agreement.

Table 2: Mean Score on Foundation students' perception on personality traits

Item	Statement	Mean Score
1	Personality traits significantly impacts the types of social activities students participate	4.56
2	Personality traits influence students' choice of friends	4.14
3	Personality traits play a crucial role in determining a student's social success at university	4.54
4	Personality traits can predict the ease with which students adjust to university life	3.00
5	Personality differences lead to social conflicts among Foundation students	4.44
6	Similar personality types tend to form social groups together	4.12

The first item 'personality traits significantly impacts the types of social activities students participate' scored the highest with 4.56 mean score along with item number 3, which is 'personality traits play a crucial role in determining a students' social success at university' (4.54). The high Mean scores show that personality factors significantly impact social activities among Foundation level students, as students' social engagement is shaped by personality traits. This also suggests that extroverted students may actively seek out numerous social events, while introverted students might prefer fewer, more selective gatherings. The findings also align with the introverts' tendency to seek out close-knit groups while extroverts tend to build wider networks.

Additionally, Table 2 shows that respondents agree with the statements 'personality traits influence students' choice of friends' (4.14) and 'similar personality types tend to form social groups together' (4.12). This suggests that students tend to gravitate towards peers with similar traits, which means introverts may prefer smaller, more familiar groups whereas extroverts may expand their social circles more easily.

Lastly, the statement 'personality traits can predict the ease with which students adjust to university life' scores a moderate Mean score of 3.00, which suggests that regardless of their personality, some Foundation students may adjust to their life as a tertiary level students while others may struggle. Some challenges that they could have faced regardless of their personality could relate to

academic pressure, homesickness or new social dynamics that they have to navigate.

Overall, the data indicates that Foundation students strongly believe that personality traits significantly influence their social experiences at university, particularly in shaping their choice of activities and friends.

C. Foundation Students' Perception on Introversion and Extroversion Tendencies

The following data in Table 3 shows the Mean score on the Foundation students' perception on Introversion tendencies. It provides insights into the students' opinion on how introverted students interact socially in educational campus settings.

Table 3: Mean Score on Foundation students' perception on Introversion Tendencies

Item	Statement	Mean Score
1	Introverted students prefer smaller, more intimate social circles	3.92
2	Introverted students struggle more with group work in social settings	3.44
3	Introverted students are more likely to seek out one-on-one interactions	3.74
4	Introverted students may rely more on online social networks than in-person interactions	3.12
5	Socializing helps introverted students come out of their shells over time	3.78

On a scale where 5 represents strong agreement, the highest Mean score is 3.92, for the statement 'introverted students prefer smaller, more intimate social circles' which indicates strong agreement that introverts do prefer smaller social circles, followed by statements 'socializing helps introverted students come out of their shells over time' and 'introverted students are more likely to seek out one-on-one interactions' with Means scores of 3.78 and 3.74 respectively. Even though the scores are on the high level, it leans slightly on the moderate level which indicates that though introverts do favour one-on-one conversations over group interactions, socializing also helps introverts become more comfortable over time.

The lowest Mean score in the dataset in Table 3 is for the statement 'introverted students may rely more on online social networks than in-person interaction' with only 3.12 Mean score, showing a

moderate agreement that introverts rely more on online networks than face-to-face interactions. This suggests that even though introverts might prefer online interactions, they do not shy away from face-to-face interactions, if the situation needs them to be more assertive such as for classroom presentations.

Overall, the data suggests that Foundation students generally perceive introverted students as favouring smaller social circles and one-on-one interactions, while not necessarily relying heavily on online networks.

Meanwhile, the following data in Table 4 illustrates Foundation students' perception on extroversion tendencies. It provides insights into how they perceive extroverted students engage in social activities at university. The dataset were scored on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest and shows strong agreement.

Table 4: Mean Score on Foundation students' perception on Extroversion Tendencies

Item	Statement	Mean Score
1	Extroverted students socialize more easily than introverted students	3.82
2	Extroverted students find it easier to initiate conversations with new peers	3.78
3	Extroverted students are more likely to attend social events on campus	3.76
4	Extroverted students are more likely to join clubs and societies	3.54
5	Extroverted students are more likely to take on leadership roles in group settings	3.42

Based on the data, the statement 'extroverted students socialize more easily than introverted students' scored the highest with Mean scores of 3.82. Additionally, the statement 'extroverted students find it easier to initiate conversations with new peers' and 'extroverted students are more likely to attend social events on campus' show the Mean score of 3.78 and 3.76 respectively. This suggests strong agreements on their perceptions that extroverts have an easier time socializing and initiating conversations, even with strangers. The findings also suggest that compared to introverted students, extroverted students are more likely to engage more in campus events.

The other two statements, 'extroverted students are more likely to join clubs and societies' (3.54) and 'extroverted students are more likely to take on leadership roles in group settings' (3.42) has lower Mean scores which suggests that even though extroverted students are likely to thrive more in social settings, there is only moderate agreement in their involvement in clubs and societies. This could be because extroverts are more likely to join the activities, other factors such as specific interests or time commitments might also play a role. Additionally, taking on the role of leadership also has the weakest agreement which suggests that leadership does not solely depend on extroversion and other factors such as confidence and experience could also play a role.

Overall, the data suggests that Foundation students perceive extroverted students as having an easier time with general socialization and event participation. However, they also recognize that involvement in clubs and leadership roles are influenced by a broader range of factors beyond just extroversion.

Upon comparing the Foundation students' perception of Introversion and Extroversion across both datasets, the findings show their perception of how extroverts tend to socialize more easily and participate more in social activities compared to introverts who prefer smaller circles, one-on-one interactions and may find group work challenging. Both groups of students with this personality show some adaptability over time, with introverts may becoming more social and extroverts taking on leadership roles.

Introverts and extroverts differ in social ease but given time and proper support, they can adapt to various environments. Introverts may struggle with group work but they may become more comfortable through gradual exposure. And while not all extroverts are born-leaders, not all introverts also rely on only online socializing and this challenges the common stereotypes, especially in academic settings.

VI CONCLUSION

The insights from this study offer significant practical implications for student support services and extracurricular programming within university settings. The data, specifically from Foundation students in a private university in Selangor, reveals a strong perception that personality traits have a significant influence on social experiences. As evidenced by the high mean scores for items related

to personality's impact on social activities (4.56) and social success (4.54), students recognize the critical role personality plays in shaping their university life. This highlights the need for higher learning institutions to move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach to student engagement.

Furthermore, the data suggests a clear understanding of the social dynamics associated with introversion and extroversion. The perceived tendency for introverted students to prefer smaller, more intimate social circles, coupled with the recognition of extroverts' ease in initiating conversations and engaging in campus events, provides a roadmap for targeted interventions. For instance, universities can facilitate smaller, interest-based groups or peer mentoring programs to cater to introverted students, fostering a sense of belonging without overwhelming them. Conversely, larger, more dynamic events, such as themed social gatherings or collaborative projects, can be organized to engage extroverted students, providing them with ample opportunities for interaction and networking.

Moreover, the moderate score regarding the ease of adjustment to university life (3.00) highlights the need for comprehensive support systems that address the challenges faced by all students, regardless of personality. This includes strong academic advising, mental health services, and orientation programs that proactively address issues like academic pressure, homesickness, and navigating new social dynamics. By acknowledging that personality differences can influence a student's adjustment, universities can tailor their support to meet individual needs.





Ultimately, fostering awareness among faculty members, staff, and student leaders about the impact of personality traits on student engagement is also important. This can be achieved through workshops, training sessions, and the integration of personality awareness into existing student development programs. By promoting a deeper understanding of personality differences, universities can cultivate a more inclusive and supportive learning environment, empowering all students to thrive both academically and socially. This preliminary study serves as a foundation for future research that explores the longitudinal impact of these perceptions and the effectiveness of targeted interventions in enhancing student well-being and academic success. Besides that, by first establishing the role of extroversion-introversion in social engagement, future studies could also be expanded to include other personality traits for a more comprehensive analysis.

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