

Personality Traits and Their Influences on Communication Skills: The Case of Khmer Students in Vietnam

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This paper explores the Big-Five personality traits and their effects on communication skills amongst ethnic Khmer students in multicultural higher education in Vietnam. A total of 426 first-to-third year Khmer students were randomly sampled via a cross-sectional study. Instruments used in the study consist of Big Five Personality Factors and a communication skill questionnaire employing a Likert scale. The results reveal that when rating their personality, Khmer students rated Agreeableness as the highest trait and Extraversion as the lowest. Female students tended to be more oriented towards Agreeableness than their male fellows, while male students were recorded to be more focused on Emotional stability than females. Furthermore, significant positive correlations were found between personality traits and communication skills. Multiple regression analysis indicated personality characteristics accounted for 11.2 percent of variance in communication skills in which Extraversion, Conscientiousness and Openness to Experience directly affected the communication skills of ethnic Khmer students while Emotional Stability and Agreeableness did not. These results are interpreted within the context of educators in Vietnam developing a better understanding of ethnic Khmer students' personality traits in predicting their communication skills within a learning setting to encourage and nurture student motivation and achievement.

Key words: *Communication skills, personality traits, Khmer students.*



Introduction

Vietnam is a multi-ethnic country with 54 official ethnic minority groups, each with its own language, lifestyle and cultural heritage. Khmer people are an ethnic minority group in Vietnam with a population of about 1,260,640, which is roughly 1.4 % of the Vietnamese population (Vietnamese Population & Housing Census, 2009). Most ethnic Khmers live in the Mekong River Delta of Southern Vietnam where there are three main groups: Kinh (Vietnamese), Khmer and Chinese. The majority of the Khmer subscribe to a religion based essentially on Buddhism which has deep roots in Khmer culture. Buddhism has shaped the Khmer way of life, guiding the standards of traditional values (Pham, Luong, Vu & Huynh, 2011). In addition, Khmer people are bilingual in their ethnic language and Vietnamese. As the language of Kinh (Viet) majority, which is Vietnamese, is the official and national language, Khmer students are required to use Vietnamese as a medium of instruction in Universities and Colleges. Therefore, when entering Universities, Khmer students are different from majority groups in a range of aspects not only in terms of family backgrounds, language, lifestyle, culture but also personality characteristics including distinctive personality characteristics making them behave differently in various social and educational settings. Personality traits are conceptualised as various stable individual characteristics explaining a person's disposition towards particular patterns of behaviour, cognition, feelings and motives (Hogan, Hogan & Roberts, 1996) that a person exhibits across situations. Researching the personality characteristics of students can help educators recognise their individual differences and improve procedures for schooling and educational methods. During the past decade, many researchers have been interested in using personality measures to determine the relationship between personality characteristics and academic performance (Komarraju, Karau & Schmeck, 2009; Hakimi, Hejazi & Lavasani, 2011). Good communication skills in the classroom are seen as an important aspect of academic performance (Rubin, Graham & Mignerey, 1990; Martín-Pastor, et. al. 2013); however, studies about the relationship between personality traits and communication skills are scarce. Until now there has not been any systematic or in- depth academic study on Khmer students. Therefore, this paper aims to explore Khmer students' personality traits and examine how these traits impact their classroom communication skills.

Literature Review

In the current study, the personality concept uses the big five personality traits introduced by McCrae and Costa (1987) which include the dimensions of Extraversion, Agreeableness, Emotional Stability, Conscientiousness and Openness to Experience. The Big Five dimensions cover all facets of personalities and vary in degree from low to high, amongst different individuals as following:

Extraversion is characterised by sociability, excitement-seeking, assertiveness and verbal and emotional expression. People with a high level of extraversion are usually described as sociable, friendly and talkative (McCrae & Costa, 1987) while a low level indicates a person who likes to stay in the background, is less talkative more reserved in speech and less action-oriented (Migliore, 2011).

Agreeableness is described by traits such as sympathy, altruism, honesty, sense of co-operation and hospitality (McCrae & John, 1992). Individuals with a high level of agreeableness have a tendency to be good-natured, obedient, modest, gentle, and cooperative (Roccas, et. al. 2002). Individuals with a low level of agreeableness are critical, doubtful, try to push limits, express hostility directly and show condescending behaviour towards others (Graziano & Tobin, 2015).

Conscientiousness reflects the tendency to be responsible to others, self-controlled, hardworking, tidy and rule-abiding (Jackson & Roberts, 2015). Individuals who have a high level of conscientiousness tend to be careful, organised, thorough, responsible and trustworthy. Those with a low level of conscientiousness tend to be irresponsible, disorganised and unscrupulous (Roccas, et. al., 2002).

Emotional stability is characterised by the capacity to maintain one's emotional balance under stressful circumstances. It also refers to the tendency to be relaxed, secure and calm (Digman, 1990). Individuals with a high level of emotional stability appear well-adjusted, calm, secure, and self-confident (Driskell, et. al. 2006), whereas a low level of emotional stability indicates a person's emotional-reactive behaviour related to negative feelings such as anxiety, anger or depression (Migliore, 2011).

Openness to experience is best characterised by originality, imagination, broad interests, and daring (McCrae & Costa, 1987). High scores indicate broad intellectual curiosity with individualistic and non-conforming ways of thinking and behaving, while low scores indicate a preference for familiarity, narrow, and conservative thinking and behaviour (Migliore, 2011).

Gender differences have been presented by several research studies (Costa, Terracciano & McCrae, 2001; Weisberg, DeYoung & Hirsh, 2011). Costa, et. al. (2001) found that women had higher levels of neuroticism, agreeableness, warmth and openness to feelings whereas men were more assertive and open to experience than women. Weisberg, et. al. (2011) also found that women reported higher scores in agreeableness and neuroticism than men; however, men reported higher scores in extraversion than women and no significant gender difference was found in conscientiousness and openness to experience. . In another study, Hakimi, Hejazi and Lavasani (2011) found no significant difference in personality traits between male and female students. It is obvious from those studies that personality difference between males and

females can originate from beliefs in diversified cultures (Costa et. al., 2001). This continues to be investigated in this study.

A number of studies have been conducted to examine in terms of the relationship between the Big Five personality traits and communication skills. Daly (2002) concludes that personality plays an important role in interpersonal communication as individual differences affect how people communicate in various interpersonal settings. Furthermore, Neuman and Wright (1999) have shown that people with a high level of agreeableness tend to cooperate with others and possess the necessary social skills for effective teamwork. Individuals with a high level of Conscientiousness tend to be concerned with a group's goal accomplishment, group, meanwhile extraversion indicated no significant relations with team skills (Neuman & Wright, 1999). In another study related to social skills, Morgeson, Reider and Campion (2005) found that extraversion and agreeableness had significant relationships with social skills; however, conscientiousness and emotional stability did not correlate with these skills. Similarly, Sims (2017) revealed that extraversion had the greatest influence on assertiveness in communication but did not uniquely explain the variance in active-empathic listening. According to a study by Ames, Maissen and Brockner (2012), extraversion does not account for good listening skills. Extraversion has been described as a combination of assertiveness and sociability (Lucas, et. al. 2000), therefore, a person's listening skills are independent and not affected by his or her level of extraversion. In another study on openness to experience and its social consequences, McCrae and Sutin (2009) provided evidence linking openness to social outcomes, comprising of taking the lead and being influential in work teams. Persons with high openness also proved to be verbally fluent, expressive and funny (Sneed, McCrae & Funder, 1998).

In a study which explores the effects of personality on employee communication skills on job performance in Vietnam, Mai, et. al. (2016) showed that Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Emotional Stability had a direct effect on communication skills. Amongst four independent variables, the trait of extraversion made the greatest contribution to communication skills, suggesting that a person who possesses high traits of extraversion can easily communicate with others in relationships.

Molinuevo and Torrubia (2013) conducted a study on 524 first-year and 507 second-year medical students in the University setting and showed the influence of personality traits on their communication skills. Accordingly, students' higher scores in extraversion are related to their higher self-rating on communication skills. However, in a recent study, Kuntze, Molen and Born (2016) investigated 143 psychology students and found that none of the factors in Big Five personality traits could significantly predict the degree of mastery of communication skills, meaning that students could be good at communication regardless of their scores on these personality factors. To sum up, big Five personality factors are apparently related to communication, however, the model of relationships amongst these personality factors with

communication skills are inconsistent in some of the studies. In the present study, researchers will continue to examine these relationships on ethnic Khmer students in the University setting in Vietnam.

The Big-Five personality representing human personality is shown to account for variations between people across many languages and cultures (McCrae & Costa, 1997; Migliore, 2011). In this study, Khmer students also have their own language and cultural heritage. In the University contexts, they are bilingual in Khmer and Vietnamese. In terms of their bilingual language and distinct culture, the present study explores Khmer students' personality traits and examines the effects of these traits on their communication skills within classroom contexts. These research aims are categorised into three main research questions.

1. What are Khmer students' personality traits?
2. Is there a significant difference in personality traits between males and females?
3. How do Khmer students' personality traits influence their communication skills in the classroom?

Method

Participants

A total of 426 Khmer students including 256 (60,1%) female and 170 (39,9%) male students were recruited during their first three years in their third-year of University study at Tra Vinh University, Can Tho University and Kien Giang University in the Mekong River Delta.

Research Instruments

Personality traits were measured by a questionnaire using The Ten Item Personality Inventory (Gosling, Rentfrow & Swann, 2003) which was translated into Vietnamese by two translators who initially worked separately and were subsequently asked to work together on the items until a complete agreement was reached. This inventory comprised of 10 items with each personality trait (Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability and Openness to experience) consisting of a pair of descriptors that were ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). More specifically, each dimension was represented by two items, one stated in a positive and the other stated in a negative way.

Communication skills were developed based on the available literature on communication skills and discussions among researchers. The constructs of communication skill questionnaire in the classroom consisted of 43 behavioural items at relatively microscopic levels consisting of three clusters of communication skills (listening, speaking, and co-operation). Participants

responded to a five-point Likert scale questionnaire ranging from 1 (completely untrue) to 5 (completely true). The completed questionnaire was then sent to experts in the field of communication for validation.

Data Analysis Procedure

Mean and standard deviation were used to determine the personality traits and communication skills of Khmer students. The correlation was used to determine the significance of the relationship between personality traits and communication skills. Multiple regression analysis was used in order to determine the exact contribution of each personality trait to the criterion of overall communication skills. Finally, t-test was used to determine significant differences between male and female Khmer students regarding personality traits.

Findings

Personality Traits of Khmer Students

Table 1 presents the mean and standard deviation of scores of personality traits of Khmer students in terms of their gender as assessed with the Personality Inventory. In comparison with the overall sample on personality in the original study of Gosling et. al. (2003), the result of one sample t-test shows that the mean scores of the Khmer were lower in Extraversion ($M = 4.09$ vs. $M = 4.44$, $t = -5.86$, $p < 0.001$); in Conscientiousness ($M = 5.16$ vs. $M = 5.40$, $t = -4.19$, $p < 0.001$); and in Emotional stability ($M = 4.36$ vs. $M = 4.83$, $t = -8.46$, $p < 0.001$); however Khmer students scored higher in Agreeableness ($M = 5.69$ vs. $M = 5.23$, $t = 5.14$, $p < 0.001$). There was no significant difference in Openness to experience between the mean scores of Khmer students and the overall sample in the original study.

Considering Khmer students' personality traits, as seen in Table 1, Agreeableness exhibited the highest mean ($M = 5.69$, $SD = 0.99$), followed by Conscientiousness ($M = 5.16$, $SD = 1.18$), while Extraversion had the lowest mean ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 1.20$). A significant statistical difference between males and females was found in Emotional Stability ($t = 3.33$, $p < 0.05$) and Agreeableness ($t = -2.94$, $p < 0.05$) in which males had higher mean scores ($M = 4.58$, $SD = 1.08$) than females ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 1.16$) in Emotional stability while females scored higher ($M = 5.80$, $SD = 0.88$) than male ($M = 5.52$, $SD = 1.11$) in Agreeableness. No significant gender difference was found in Extraversion, Conscientiousness and Openness to Experience.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for Personality traits of Khmer students

| Variable | Whole sample | | Gender | | | | t | p |
|------------------------|--------------|------|--------|------|--------|------|-------|-------|
| | | | Male | | Female | | | |
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | | |
| Extraversion | 4.09 | 1.20 | 4.14 | 1.27 | 4.07 | 1.15 | 0.56 | 0.574 |
| Conscientiousness | 5.16 | 1.18 | 5.12 | 1.29 | 5.12 | 5.19 | -0.60 | 0.551 |
| Openness to Experience | 5.41 | 1.02 | 5.45 | 1.09 | 5.38 | 0.96 | 0.70 | 0.484 |
| Emotional stability | 4.36 | 1.15 | 4.58 | 1.08 | 4.21 | 1.16 | 3.33 | 0.001 |
| Agreeableness | 5.69 | 0.99 | 5.52 | 1.11 | 5.80 | 0.88 | -2.94 | 0.003 |

Effect of Personality Traits on Communication Skills

The general average communication skills of Khmer students participating in the research was at a medium level ($M = 3.51/5.0$; $SD = 0.53$), including listening skill with a mean of $3.59/5.0$ and standard deviation of 0.55 ; speaking skill with mean of $3.39/5.0$, and standard deviation of 0.61 ; cooperative skills with a mean of $3.56/5.0$, and standard deviation of 0.62 . The relationship between Khmer students' personality traits and their communication skills in the classroom is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Relationship between personality traits and communication skill

| Variables | Listening skills | Speaking skills | Cooperative skills | Overall communication skills |
|------------------------|------------------|-----------------|--------------------|------------------------------|
| Extraversion | 0.13** | 0.19** | 0.23** | 0.21** |
| Conscientiousness | 0.23** | 0.17** | 0.19** | 0.22** |
| Openness to Experience | 0.27** | 0.18** | 0.19** | 0.24** |
| Emotional stability | 0.14** | 0.12* | 0.12* | 0.15** |
| Agreeableness | 0.15** | 0.08 | 0.15** | 0.14** |

** Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The results in Table 2 represent the positive personality traits of students which were significantly related to their communication skills, so that an increase in these personality traits would lead to better communication skills. This positive correlation tends to be higher in listening and cooperative skills (the correlation coefficients of two skills in most traits were higher than in speaking skills). Students with higher Conscientiousness, Openness to Experience and Emotional Stability had higher coefficients with their listening skill while those with higher Extraversion and Agreeableness tended to have better cooperative skills. As seen in Table 1, Agreeableness exhibited the highest mean; however, it had the lowest correlation

with communication skill which was still significant (see Table 2). Agreeableness in particular did not correlate significantly with speaking skills ($r = 0.08, p > 0.05$).

In order to explore these relationship trends between male and female students, data selected by males and females was analysed separately, then correlations of personality traits and communication skills were examined. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Relationship between personality traits and overall communication skill selected by gender

| Gender | Extraversion | Conscientiousness | Openness to Experience | Emotional stability | Agreeableness |
|--------|--------------|-------------------|------------------------|---------------------|---------------|
| Male | 0.23** | 0.21** | 0.23** | 0.14 | 0.14 |
| Female | 0.19** | 0.23** | 0.25** | 0.16* | 0.15* |

** Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Female Khmer students traits were all significantly related to communication skills. Their coefficients were also higher than those of male students except for Extraversion. The result in Table 1 shows that males had a higher mean than females in Emotional stability, but lower than females in Agreeableness. However, results in Table 3 show that these two traits did not significantly correlate with communication skills amongst male students, but significantly correlated amongst the female group.

Multiple regression analysis was used in order to determine the exact contribution of each personality trait to the criterion of overall communication skill. The researchers checked the assumptions of normal error distributions and constant error variances as the primary step. Multi-collinearity was also checked to assess the independence of predictors included in the model. The tolerance values in the regression model ranged from 0.830 to 0.924, indicating that the predictors used in the analyses carried unique information to explain communication skills. Table 4 shows the results of regression analysis for communication skills by personality traits.

Table 4: Coefficients of regression analysis for communication skills by personality traits

| Model | B | Std. Error | β | t | p |
|--|-------|------------|---------|--------|-------|
| Constant | 2.253 | 0.195 | | 11.560 | 0.000 |
| Extraversion | 0.075 | 0.022 | 0.169 | 3.441 | 0.001 |
| Conscientiousness | 0.069 | 0.023 | 0.154 | 3.054 | 0.002 |
| Openness to Experience | 0.071 | 0.028 | 0.137 | 2.555 | 0.011 |
| Emotional stability | 0.020 | 0.023 | 0.044 | 0.878 | 0.380 |
| Agreeableness | 0.020 | 0.028 | 0.037 | 0.721 | 0.471 |
| $R^2 = 0.112$; $F_{(5,399)} = 10.034$, $p = 0.000$ | | | | | |

The results of the regression indicate that these traits significantly predicted communication skills. Approximately 11.2% of the variance in communication skills could be explained by these traits, $R^2 = 0.112$; $F = 10.034$, $p < 0.001$. Amongst these predictors, Extraversion, Conscientiousness, Openness to Experience statistically and significantly predicted communication skills in which Extraversion had the greatest positive influence on communication skills with the standardised Beta (β) value at 0.169 and significant level at 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). Emotional stability and Agreeableness failed to achieve statistical significance in order to have an impact on communication skills with $p > 0.05$.

Result in Table 5 show that around 10.0% of variance of listening and cooperating skills could be explained by listening, speaking and cooperating skills within communication. The level of variance in speaking skills was lower, accounting for 7.5%. In the listening skill model, Openness to Experience had the greatest positive influence ($\beta = 0.18$), while, in the speaking and cooperating skill model, Extraversion had the greatest positive influence ($\beta = 0.17$ and $\beta = 0.20$, respectively). Emotional stability and Agreeableness did not affect the clusters of skills, which was consistent with the above overall communication skill model.

Table 5: Coefficients of regression analysis for clusters of listening, speaking and cooperating skills by personality traits

| | Listening skills | | | Speaking skills | | | Cooperating skills | | |
|------------------------|--|---------|------|--|---------|------|--|---------|------|
| | B | β | p | B | β | p | B | β | p |
| Constant | 2.35 | | 0.00 | 2.30 | | 0.00 | 2.15 | | 0.00 |
| Extraversion | 0.04 | 0.08 | 0.09 | 0.09 | 0.17 | 0.00 | 0.11 | 0.20 | 0.00 |
| Conscientiousness | 0.07 | 0.15 | 0.00 | 0.06 | 0.12 | 0.02 | 0.07 | 0.13 | 0.01 |
| Openness to Experience | 0.10 | 0.18 | 0.00 | 0.07 | 0.11 | 0.04 | 0.05 | 0.08 | 0.14 |
| Emotional stability | 0.02 | 0.04 | 0.38 | 0.02 | 0.03 | 0.52 | 0.01 | 0.02 | 0.65 |
| Agreeableness | 0.02 | 0.03 | 0.59 | -0.01 | -0.01 | 0.82 | 0.05 | 0.08 | 0.13 |
| | $R^2 = 0.103$; $F_{(5,406)} = 9.364$; $p < 0.001$ | | | $R^2 = 0.075$; $F_{(5,405)} = 6.566$; $p < 0.001$ | | | $R^2 = 0.100$; $F_{(5,405)} = 9.046$, $p < 0.001$ | | |

Discussion

Personality of Khmer Students

In this study, amongst the Big Five personalities, Agreeableness is a typical characteristic of Khmer students. Graziano and Tobin (2015) show that those with a high level of Agreeableness are predisposed to learn agreeableness about others, to be flexible and accommodating in dealing with others, and to be biased towards learning prosocial thoughts, feelings and behaviour. This finding suggests that Khmer students tend to be good-natured, obedient, modest, gentle and more trusting of others. These characteristics are also consistent with Huynh's research (2011) which found that Khmers greatly value honesty, benevolence and gentleness. A sound explanation for this finding could relate to the Khmer's cultural belief in Buddhism. In Vietnam, approximately 95% of Khmers are Buddhists which shaped the Khmer way of life, guiding standards of values such as honesty, helpfulness and forgiveness when still at a very young age.

Extroversion with the lowest score was considered a typical characteristic of Khmer students. Individuals with a low level of Extroversion tend to be more lethargic, inhibited, reflective, and quiet (Wilt & Revelle, 2015). Therefore, a low score in Extraversion suggests that Khmer students tend to be quiet, less talkative, reserved in speech and less action-oriented. This characteristic can be explained by the fact that most Khmer people in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam often live in closed villages and communicate almost exclusively with their own community (Pham, et. al., 2011), so Khmer students tend to be less talkative. Also, the findings on Khmer students are consistent with those proposed by Huynh (2011), who found that Khmer

people are quite gentle, self-contained and less sociable. These characteristics may result in some difficulties in expressing their thoughts and ideas (Bui, 2016) in academic activities and a lack of engagement in the classroom (Pham, 2017) of Khmer students in the Vietnamese university context. In addition, emotional stability was also found to be quite low amongst Khmer students. Therefore, the likelihood of Khmer students maintaining their emotional balance in stressful situations is low.

Gender Differences in Khmer Students' Personality Traits

Analysis of gender differences in personality traits revealed that there were significant differences amongst male and female students regarding Emotional stability and Agreeableness. In the Khmer family in the Mekong delta of Vietnam, the man's role is to make money for the household, while the woman takes care of the children which may have an impact on gender differences in personality traits. Khmer female students exhibited a higher level of Agreeableness than male students, and tended to be more good-natured, obedient, modest, gentle, and cooperative than Khmer males. This finding was consistent with previous research showing that women had a higher mean score of Agreeableness than men, suggesting that females are more trusting and compliant than males (Costa, et. al., 2001; Weisberg, et. al., 2011). Meanwhile, males had a higher mean score of Emotional stability than females, showing that Khmer males are more capable of maintaining their emotional balance and more relaxed and calmer in different situations. This is contradicted by Grossman and Wood (1993), who found that women have a higher rating for personally experiencing emotions and more intense expression with greater intensity than men, and tend to seek out emotional experiences. **In addition**, the current study showed that there was no significant difference between males and females in Extraversion, Conscientiousness and Openness to Experience. In their research, Weisberg, et. al., (2011) also found no significant gender difference in Conscientiousness and Openness to Experience trait; however, they found a small but significant gender difference in overall Extraversion in that women score higher than men. As a matter of fact, this finding reflects gender-related beliefs amongst Khmer people in that women tend to be better-natured, more obedient, less relaxed and more worried than men.

Influences of Khmer Students' Personality Traits on Their Communication Skill

Results from regression analysis reveal personality traits accounted for 11.2 percent of the variance in overall communication skills. According to the results presented in Table 3, Extroversion, Conscientiousness and Openness to experience had direct effects on communication skills while Emotional stability and Agreeableness did not. Amongst the three independent variables that had a direct impact on communication skills, Extraversion made the greatest contribution. This result is consistent with reality and can be clearly explained by the fact that people with this trait tend to be sociable, friendly and talkative (McCrae & Costa,

1987), so they will find it easy to communicate with others. This finding confirmed the hypothesis and was consistent with many other studies which consider Extraversion to be the most reliable predictor of communication skills (Mai, et. al., 2016). In addition, looking at the clusters of each skill separately, Extraversion was found to make the greatest contribution to speaking and cooperating, and made the smallest contribution to listening skills.

Conscientiousness had the second greatest positive influence on overall communication skills. When people with Conscientiousness tend to act in a thoughtful and goal-driven way, they communicate with other people. Furthermore, conscientious people are defined as highly responsible, achievement-oriented and industrious learners. Such characteristics make them determined to gain advanced communication skills. Thus, it is not surprising that Conscientiousness makes a significant contribution to the prediction of communication skills. In the current study, Khmer students exhibited a high level of Conscientiousness ($M = 5.16$) and the correlation coefficient showed that they tend to be good at listening and cooperating in the classroom.

The last factor that had a positive effect on communication skills was Openness to Experience, which was also found in previous studies. McCrae and Sutin (2009) found that this trait is associated with social outcomes, including taking the lead and being influential in work teams. In addition, Khmer students with a high level of Openness to Experience tend to be good at listening skills in the classroom ($\beta=0.18$ as presented in a listening model). This is consistent with findings by Berry and Hansen (2000) regarding associating Openness with paying visual attention to speakers during interactions.

It is surprising that a high level of Agreeableness is a typical characteristic of Khmer students and former researchers proved that people with high scores on Agreeableness tend to cooperate and work well in a team (Costa & McCrae, 1997; Neuman & Wright, 1999). However, in the current study, this trait did not affect the communication skills of Khmer students. One possible explanation for this finding is that although Khmers students are honest, helpful, obedient, modest and gentle, they are less outgoing and so like to stay in the background. Therefore, high or low Agreeableness seems to have no impact on communication skills.

Conclusion

This aim of this study was to identify the personality traits of minority Khmer students and examine the relationship between these traits with their communications skills in Vietnamese universities. The findings reveal that high levels of Agreeableness and low levels of Extraversion are typical characteristics of Khmer students. There were positive direct relationships between Khmer students' personality traits and their communication skills in the



classroom. However, considering the level of contributions of each trait, the results show that Khmers' Extraversion traits had the greatest positive influence on communication skills while Khmers' Agreeableness did not significantly affect their overall communication skills.

These findings provide University lecturers in Mekong delta Vietnam with a better understanding of Khmer students' personality traits related to their culture. More importantly, by understanding personality traits, lecturers can predict students' communication skill in the learning setting, and so design individualised interventions in their lesson plan to motivate Khmer students' academic communication as well as learning engagement in the classroom.

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