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ARAŞTIRMA

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## Investigation of the Relationship between Personality Traits and Positive and Negative Affect

Üniversite Öğrencilerinin Kişilik Özellikleri ve Olumlu Olumsuz Duygu Düzeyleri Arasındaki İlişkinin İncelenmesi

Ayşe Dilek Öğretir Özçelik, Zeliha Özkanat

### ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the relationship between personality traits and positive and negative affect of university students. The study was conducted on a sample of 500 university students (246 male and 256 female) attending Gazi University in Turkey who voluntarily participated in the research. The participants were selected through snowball and convenience sampling methods. Giessen Test Self-Form, the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS), and demographic information forms were used to conduct the research. Independent t-test, ANOVA, Pearson correlation coefficient, and regression analyses were employed to examine the relationships between variables. The results revealed a weak statistically significant relationship between personality traits and positive and negative affect of university students. The findings are discussed in the light of personality traits and positive and negative affect literature.

### ÖZ

Bu çalışmanın amacı, üniversite öğrencilerinin kişilik özellikleri ve olumlu olumsuz duygu düzeyleri arasındaki ilişkinin incelenmesidir. Çalışmaya Gazi Üniversitesinde öğrenim görmekte olan toplam 500 (246 erkek ve 256 kız) gönüllü öğrenci katılım göstermiştir. Katılımcılara kartopu ve uygun örneklem yöntemiyle ulaşılmıştır. Giessen Testi Ben Formu, Pozitif ve Negatif Duygu Ölçeği ve genel bilgi formu veri toplama araçlarıyla veriler toplanmıştır. Bağımsız t Testi, ANOVA ve Pearson korelasyon katsayısı ve regresyon analizleri yapılarak değişkenler arasındaki ilişki incelenmiştir. Sonuçlar üniversite öğrencilerinin kişilik özellikleri ve olumlu olumsuz duygu düzeyleri arasında istatistiksel olarak zayıf bir ilişki olduğunu göstermiştir. Elde edilen veriler, kişilik özellikleri ve olumlu olumsuz duygu alanında yapılan çalışmalardan faydalanılarak tartışılmıştır.

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### Makale Bilgileri

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## Introduction

The term of emotion is generally defined as physiological reactions and mental changes toward an important situation for the individual. In addition, this process includes behavioral reactions, physical expressions, cognitive processes, feelings, and physiological stimulus (Gerring, 2012; Wade & Tavis, 2017). In terms of their adaptive functions, emotions have a crucial role in human life. To illustrate, fear can be a sign of submission to the attacker and asking for help from close friends, in contrast, joy makes it easier to have and sustain positive relationships with others (Gray & Bjorklund, 2014). There are individual differences in the experience of emotions composed of two independent hierarchical structures: positive and negative affect. These individual differences are seen in the production and regulation of emotions, the emotions' effect on behavior, thought, and expression. For example, in the face of danger, people differ in how to react to that situation and to what extent they control their reactions (Reisenzein et al., 2020). Besides individual differences, the structure of positive and negative affect is interrelated. Those who become easily happy experience more joy, amusement, and proud, while those who are inclined to be unhappy are more inclined to negative emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt. (Corr & Matthews, 2020).

Studies have found that frequent positive emotions can predict life span (Levy, Slade, Kunkel & Kasl, 2002), resilience to adversity (Fredrickson et al., 2003), decrease in physical pain (Gil et al., 2004), increase in happiness (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002), and psychological growth (Fredrickson et al., 2003). The effect of positive emotions on human life is explained by the broaden-and-build theory. The theory can briefly be explained as while negative emotions have adaptive value in life-threatening situations, positive emotions broaden peoples' thoughts and actions. While positive emotions widen one's attention, increase creative and flexible thinking, negative emotions narrow one's attention to a particular detail. Positive emotions increase the capacity to handle problems, improve performance and have better relationships with others (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). When considering the value of emotions in human life, the analysis of positive and negative emotions of university students may contribute in terms of interventions, programs, and politics to be developed for them.

Personality traits and emotions are closely intertwined but are distinct aspects of human behavior and psychology. Burger (2006) defines personality as consistent patterns of behavior and internal processes that originate from the individual. The meaning of consistent behavioral patterns is that people who are extroverted today will be extroverted tomorrow and show the same behavioral patterns everywhere. Intrapersonal processes include all the emotional, motivational, and cognitive processes that develop within us and affect how we behave and feel. Personality traits mean to the stable factors in habitual behaviors and personal attitudes (Buecker, et al., 2020). Personality traits are found to be correlated with positive and negative emotions (Curun et al., 2020; Korkmaz, & Çetinkaya, 2021; Larsen et al., 2020; Özpolat et al., 2013). To conclude, existing studies have shown some evidence of relationship between personality traits and emotions (Donovan et al., 2020; Harley et al., 2015; O'Malley, & Gillette, 1984).

Personality traits are generally tested by five-factor personality trait inventory (Baranczuk, 2019). To contribute to the literature, this study examines how university students perceive their personality traits and its relationship with positive and negative affect. For this reason, Giessen Test Self-Form (Öğretir Özçelik, 2004, 2017; Özdoğan, 1990) and Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (Gençöz, 2000) were used. Moreover, since there are contradictory findings in the literature (Erus et al., 2019; Kuyumcu & Kabasakaloğlu, 2018; Kuyumcu et al., 2019; Öztekin & Tezer, 2009; Sapancı &

Bahtiyar, 2018; Simon, & Nath, 2004; Yüceant et al., 2019), demographic variables (gender, age and department) were also examined in this study.

### The purpose of the Study

This study aims to discover the relationship between personality traits and positive and negative affect of university students. For this purpose, these questions are asked:

1. What is the level of university students' positive and negative affect?
2. Do personality traits and positive and negative affect of university students differ according to their gender, age and department?
3. Is there any significant relationship between personality traits and positive and negative affect of university students?
4. To what extent positive and negative affect, as measured by the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule is predicted by personality traits?

### Method

This study uses the correlational research method to investigate the relationship between personality traits and positive and negative affect of university students. In correlational research method, the relationship between two or more variables or data groups is defined and evaluated (Creswell, 2011, s.338).

### Participants

The study was conducted on a sample of 500 university students (246 male and 256 female) attending Gazi University in Turkey who voluntarily participated in the research. The participants were selected through convenience sampling methods. The participants acknowledged that their answers were confidential, and the assent form was signed. The study was approved by the institutional review board.

The distribution of students by branch was social (92), health (47), science (46), and education (315). The age of the students ranged from 18 to 26 (229 below the age of 20 and 271 above the age of 20). Additionally, there is no missing value in terms of participants' answers.

**Table 1.** Demographics of the Study Participants

	<b>Group</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Age</b>	20 and below	229	45.8
	20 and above	271	54.2
<b>Gender</b>	Female	254	50.8
	Male	246	49.2
<b>Department</b>	Social	92	18.4
	Health	47	9.4
	Science	46	9.2
	Education	315	63.0

### **Ethical Statement**

This study was conducted by the approval of the Ethics Committee on 10.05.2022, with reference number 09.

### **Data Collection Tools**

In this study, demographic information form, Giessen Test (GT) Self-Form adapted into Turkish by Özdoğan and Öğretir Özçelik (2004) and Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) adapted into Turkish by Gençöz (2000) were used as data collection tools.

#### **Demographic information form**

The questionnaire prepared by researchers aimed to gather information about the participants' age, gender, and department.

#### **Giessen Test (GT) Self-Form**

The Giessen Test is developed to measure how one perceives herself/himself. The test can be applied to those above 18 years of age and with an average IQ level. The adaptation of the Giessen Test into Turkish is conducted by Özdoğan (1990). It's composed of 40 items and six subscales, but Özdoğan and Öğretir Özçelik (2004) decreased the number of items to 25 and four subscales: controlled-uncontrolled (seven items), social-non-social (eight items), dependent-independent (six items), and hypomanic-depressive (four items) trait (Öğretir Özçelik, 2004).

In controlled-uncontrolled subscale, the conflict between the id and super-ego within himself is revealed and how the person affects the environment is evaluated. In social-non-social subscale, how the one perceives his/her relationships with others. In dependent-independent subscale, one's tendencies towards aggression, neuroticism or passiveness are evaluated. In hypomanic-depressive subscale, it is focused on whether the one directs her/his aggression towards others or towards herself/himself.

For reliability and validity studies, 4168 participants completed the test in which test-retest (three week later) and Cronbach alpha were found as .82 and .72 respectively. Cronbach alpha of subscales was found as .61 (controlled-uncontrolled subscale), .64 (social-non-social subscale), .49 (dependent-independent subscale) and .40 (hypomanic-depressive subscale). In this study, Cronbach alpha was found as .63 (controlled-uncontrolled subscale), .70 (social-non-social subscale), .47 (dependent-independent subscale), and .42 (hypomanic-depressive subscale). It is a 7-Likert type and a self-report about how one sees herself/himself and feels. If one thinks that compared to other people's feelings, his/her feelings do not differ, one marks "0". If the feeling is too strong, mark the right 3, and contrary if the feeling is too weak, mark the left 3. The maximum score for this scale was 168 and the minimum score was 24 (Öğretir Özçelik, 2004).

#### **Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS)**

The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) is developed by Watson, Clark, and Tellegen (1998) and is composed of two subscales. Each subscale has ten mood-related adjectives. The positive affect subscale measures being active, alert, attentive, determined, enthusiastic, excited, inspired, interested, proud, and strong. The negative affect subscale measures being afraid, ashamed, distressed, guilty, hostile, irritable, jittery, nervous, scared, and upset. PANAS is a Likert scale of 5 points in which the participants were asked to report their feelings in the last two weeks. In each

subscale, high score represents the experience of affect, while the low scores correspond to the lack of that feeling. For each subscale, the maximum score is 50, whereas the minimum is 10.

The adaptation of the PANAS into Turkish is conducted by Gençöz (2000) who found factor loadings for PA and NA changing between .46-.76 and .48 and .74 respectively. Also, the internal consistency for PA and NA was .86 and .83; test-retest reliability (three week later) was .54 and .40 respectively. In this study, the internal consistency for PA and NA was found as .81 and .83 respectively.

### Data Procedure and Analysis

After the study was approved by the institutional review board, the researchers got in contact with the departments at Gazi University. The researchers visited the departments and asked University professors for leaving 30 min at the beginning or end of their lectures to collect the data. The purpose of the study was explained to the students, and they were told that participation is voluntary and anonymous, and confidentiality was guaranteed.

For data analysis, IBM® SPSS Version 24 software is utilized. To run the parametric tests, the normal distribution of the data was investigated. Skewness and kurtosis values of scales ranged from -1 to +1. Along with these values, descriptive analysis was performed to examine the demographic information of university students. The means, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis values are presented in Table 2. Then, for the main purpose of the research, independent t-test, ANOVA, Pearson correlation coefficient, and regression analysis are employed to investigate relationships between variables.

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variable	Variable rank	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Positive Affect	10-50	31.77	7.45	-.084	-.325
Negative Affect	10-50	23.11	8.06	.465	-.509
Controlled	7-49	31.22	5.46	.539	.092
Uncontrolled	7-49	31.22	5.46	.539	.092
Social Nonsocial	8-56	24.63	8.30	.429	.218
Dependent	6-42	21.56	5.84	.134	.218
Independent	6-42	21.56	5.84	.134	.218
Hypomanic-Depressive	4-28	17.18	4.58	-.089	-.297

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As can be seen from Table 2, the mean scores of PA, NA, CU, SN, DI, and HD were 31.7, 23.1, 31.2, 24.6, 21.5, and 17.1. To explain these findings shortly, it can be stated that for PA and NA, min 10 and max 50 could be obtained for each scale. Thus, the sample seems to have an above average PA level and below average NA level as in other studies (Erus et al., 2019; Öztekin & Tezer, 2009; Yüceant et al., 2019). On the other hand, for Social-nonsocial trait is close to the average level, and Controlled-uncontrolled, Dependent-independent, and Hypomanic-depressive trait mean values are above the average level.

## Results

The second problem of the research was to study the personality traits and positive and negative affect of university students regarding their gender, age and department. According to this, independent t test analysis is performed to examine participants' gender and age effect on their personality traits and positive and negative affect. The results are presented in the table 3 and 4 below.

**Table 3.** Independent T Test outcome of Giessen Test Self-Form and PANAS Depending on Gender

Variables	Gender	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	p
<b>Positive Affect</b>	Female	254	3.136	.748	.029	.865
	Male	246	3.220	.740		
<b>Negative Affect</b>	Female	254	2.257	7.618	2.724	.099
	Male	246	2.365	8.485		
<b>Controlled</b>	Female	254	2.863	1.025	.125	.724
	Male	246	3.030	.998		
<b>Social</b>	Female	254	2.840	.997	.015	.904
	Male	246	3.326	1.021		
<b>Dependent</b>	Female	254	3.577	1.033	3.738	.054
	Male	246	3.609	.9115		
<b>Hypomanic-Depressive</b>	Female	254	4.379	1.150	.001	.973
	Male	246	4.210	1.138		

As it can be inferred from the Table 3, the results of the independent t-test analysis showed that there is no statistically significant difference between males and females regarding their personality traits and positive and negative affect. In other words, males' personality traits and positive and negative affect did not differ from females' personality traits and positive and negative affect.

**Table 4.** Independent T Test outcome of Giessen Test Self Form and PANAS Depending on Age

Variables	Age	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	p
<b>Positive Affect</b>	Below 20	229	3.331	.742	.858	.355
	Above 20	271	3.047	.723		
<b>Negative Affect</b>	Below 20	229	2.079	.708	8.403	<b>.004</b>
	Above 20	271	2.506	.833		
<b>Controlled</b>	Below 20	229	2.908	.966	2.190	.140
	Above 20	271	2.976	1.054		
<b>Social</b>	Below 20	229	3.100	1.068	2.458	.118
	Above 20	271	3.061	1.012		
<b>Dependent</b>	Below 20	229	3.549	.922	3.148	.077
	Above 20	271	3.630	1.016		
<b>Hypomanic-Depressive</b>	Below 20	229	4.229	1.153	.038	.845
	Above 20	271	4.353	1.139		

As the table 4 indicates, the results of the independent t-test analysis indicated that there is a statistically significant difference between the participants who are below 20 years old and the



participants who are above 20 years old depending on their negative affect ( $t(498) = -6,098, p = 0.004$ ). In other words, participants who are above 20 years old tend to be more negative concerning participants who are below 20 years old. Nonetheless, age-related differences did not be found in other variables.

Another test which is one-way ANOVA test was conducted to compare the effect of participants' departments on their personality traits and positive and negative affect. The results are displayed in the following table.

**Table 5.** Descriptive Statistics and One way ANOVA Outcomes Regarding Participants' Department

Variables	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Minimum	Maximum	F	p
NA	Social	92	2.279	8.292	.086	1.00	4.90	11.203	.000
	Science	46	2.941	8.918	.131	1.30	4.40		
	Health	47	2.157	7.485	.109	1.00	4.00		
	Education	315	2.251	7.570	.042	1.00	4.60		
	Total	500	2.311	8.066	.036	1.00	4.90		
DI	Social	92	3.757	.951	.099	1.00	5.67	4.676	.003
	Science	46	3.800	.641	.094	2.17	5.33		
	Health	47	3.883	.858	.125	1.50	5.17		
	Education	315	3.472	1.018	.057	1.17	6.83		
	Total	500	3.593	.974	.043	1.00	6.83		

An analysis of variance showed that the effect of the department was significant on negative affect  $F(3,496) = 11,203, p = 0.000$  and on the dependent independent trait  $F(3,496) = 4,676, p = 0.003$ . In addition, there was no statistically significant difference between departments and other variables that are positive affect, controlled uncontrolled, social nonsocial, and hypomanic-depressive traits. As seen in the table 5, participants studied at science-related departments are more prone to negativity than those from the other departments. Also, participants studied at health-related departments are more inclined to show dependent traits than those from the other departments.

**Table 6.** Pearson Correlation Coefficient between Measures of Giessen Test Self-Form and PANAS

Variable	PA	NA	CU	SN	DI
<b>Positive Affect</b>					
<b>Negative Affect</b>	-.240**				
<b>Controlled</b>					
<b>Uncontrolled</b>	-.310**	.211**			
<b>Social</b>					
<b>Nonsocial</b>	-.197**	.112*	.382**		
<b>Dependent</b>					
<b>Independent</b>	-.129**	.064	.032	.054	
<b>Hypomanic-Depressive</b>	-.095*	.169**	.110*	.199**	.100*

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Note. PA: Positive Affect; NA: Negative Affect; CU: Controlled Uncontrolled; SN: Social Nonsocial; DI: Dependent Independent; HD: Hypomanic-Depressive.

The correlation coefficient is a measure of the relationship between variables, which values change from 1 to -1. If the value is between .10 to .39, it indicates a weak correlation (Dancey and Reidy

2007). In this study, correlation coefficients among the variables varied between -.31 and .38 in the total sample. The highest negative correlation was observed between positive affect and controlled/uncontrolled traits (-.31). The highest positive correlation was observed between controlled/uncontrolled and social/unsocial traits (.38). In other words, the results indicate that there was a weak relationship between personality traits and positive and negative affect.

**Table 7.** Regression Analysis between Measures of Giessen Test Self-Form and PANAS

Predictors	Dependent variable	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R Square	t	F	df	p	p
CU	PA	.344 <sup>b</sup>	.118	.111	-5.958	16.602	4	.000 <sup>b</sup>	.000
SN					-1.702				.089
DI					-2.649				.008
HD					-.894				.372
CU	NA	.261 <sup>b</sup>	.068	.060	4.063	9.020	4	.000 <sup>b</sup>	.000
SN					.169				.866
DI					.992				.322
HD					3.192				.002

b. Predictors: (Constant), CU, SN, DI, HD

A regression analysis was performed to determine whether personality traits could predict the university students' positive and negative affect. The results revealed that personality traits explained 11% of the variance in positive affect ( $R^2=0.11$ ,  $p<0.000$ ) and 0.6% in negative affect ( $R^2=0.06$ ,  $p<0.000$ ).

## Discussion

The results showed that the sample seems to have an above average PA level and below average NA level as in other studies (Erus et al., 2019; Kapikiran, 2012; Öztekin & Tezer, 2009; Yüceant et al., 2019). The level of positive and negative affect may differ concerning nationality. For example, it is found out that the Swedish sample of university students seemed more positive rather than be negative on the other hand; the Iranian sample of university students seemed more negative rather than be positive (Kormi-Nouri et al., 2013). In other nationality-based studies, Western and Asian cultures differed considering positive affect and resembled in terms of negative affect (Miyamoto et al., 2010; Uchida & Kitayama, 2009).

Other than nationality, gender is a study topic for positive and negative affect. The results showed that males' positive and negative affect did not differ from females' positive and negative affect as in the literature (Kuyumcu & Kabasakaloğlu, 2018; Öztekin & Tezer, 2009; Sapancı & Bahtiyar, 2018; Yüceant et al., 2019). Contrary to this study, in some studies males found to have a higher level of positive affect (Erus et al., 2019; Kuyumcu et al., 2019; Simon, & Nath, 2004). It was assumed that household income decreases the gender differences (Simon, & Nath, 2004). In addition, the results showed that participants studied at science-related departments are more prone to negativity than those from the other departments. The other studies examining department-related positive and negative affect levels found different results. For example, participants studied at the department of architecture had more negative affect regarding other departments (Erus et al., 2019). It was explained that heavy workloads of curriculum and so its effect on social life may increase negative effect. Curriculum differences may have an important role in students' life.



Furthermore, age is an important variable for positive and negative affect. It was found that participants who are above 20 years old tend to be more negative concerning participants who are below 20 years old. Nonetheless, age-related differences did not be found in other variables. In literature, big age differences are examined. The older and higher educated people were found to have more positive affect. Contrary, the younger and low educated people were found to have more negative affect (Simon, & Nath, 2004). In this study, university students above 20 years old may have concerns for the future so that their negative affect is higher than younger ones. After graduation from the university, there are some cultural expectations from these emerging adults. These expectations can be a decision of existing relationships whether they will marry or not and finding a job so that they can live independently (Roisman et al., 2004).

When it comes to the relationship between positive and negative affect and personality, the results indicated that there was a weak relationship. Moreover, regression analysis revealed that personality traits explained 11% of the variance in positive affect and 0.6% in negative affect. In other words, positive and negative affect were not differed by personality traits. Studies have found that big five personality traits can explain %48 of the variance in positive affect. Consistent with this research, big five personality traits could not explain the variance in negative affect. Also, personality traits have a significant effect on positive and negative affect. (Korkmaz, & Çetinkaya, 2021). In relation to personality traits, life positions were found to be determinant for positive and negative affect. The university students who have I am Ok, You are Ok life positions have more positive affect. Nonetheless, the university students who have I am not Ok, You are not Ok life positions, have more negative affect. In other words, the people who tend to be depression have more negative affect (Özpolat et al., 2013). Inconsistency with early studies can be a result of social desirability.

The distribution of university students among personality traits were varied. The students showed social traits that are having fun about being with others, showing compassion and being creative. Moreover, the participants were found to be controlled traits which is having self-control, being cautious about spending money, and being neat. Also, students showed dependent traits that is being patient, adaptable, affiliating with others, and not liking to command. Students showed depressive traits which means criticizing himself/herself, choosing to be dependent to others, having fears, and keeping angry feelings inside. When examining the variables effect on personality traits, it was found that males' personality traits did not differ from females' personality traits. On the other hand, Kuru and Baştuğ (2008) found significant gender differences between 40 males' and 80 females' personality traits. Male footballers perceived themselves as uncontrolled and nonsocial, whereas females perceived themselves as controlled and social. In this study, the sample size may have minimized gender differences.

The only significant effect was found on the variable of studying at health-related departments. Participants studied in health-related departments are more inclined to show dependent traits than those from the other departments. The results were consistent with senior students but not with the freshmen students. Freshmen students were found to be uncontrolled, social, and independent. The differences were explained by university entrance exam and social factors (Turan et al., 2021). Moreover, Altunay and Öz (2006) found that students from nursing departments were social, controlled and depressive which is consistent with the results. However, about dependent-independent trait, students studied at health-related departments were found dependent contrary to Altunay and Öz's study (2006). Nursing students showed independent trait that having a hard time to establish relationships,

frequently arguing with others and being good at role playing. The contrary results may be derived from department-based differences.

### Recommendations

This study is limited to a sample of university students. For this reason, the results cannot be generalized for different age groups. Future research should examine whether different age groups have different features in terms of personality traits, positive and negative emotions, and their relationship with each other. Moreover, the levels of anxiety, depression, and other kinds of psychological problems can be examined as a controlled variable.

Interventions that can be aimed at increasing university students' personal resources and self-awareness so that their well-being can be supported. Furthermore, from the perspective of positive psychology, considering the importance of positive emotions and character strengths for human wellbeing, the relationship between character strengths and positive and negative affect can be examined.

While this research sheds light on university students' self-reports of personality traits and their positive and negative affect today, there is still much to be learned about personality and emotion.

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### **Author Contribution Statement**

In this study, the authors' contributions to the research process are equal.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

There is no conflict of interest

### **Ethical Statement**

This study was carried out in accordance with the approval of Gazi University Institute of Educational Sciences Ethics Commission dated 10.05.2022 and numbered 09.