



Do personality differences between students from different schools generalize across countries?

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Letters to the Editor

Do personality differences between students from different schools generalize across countries?

Dear Sir

We read with particular interest the paper “Variation in personality traits of medical students between schools of medicine” (Wilson et al. 2013). That study compared personality traits (NEOFFI) of undergraduate vs. graduate entry medical students in seven schools in Australia and found that higher Agreeableness and Conscientiousness were associated with attending an undergraduate school (OR = 1.07 and 1.03, respectively).

We have replicated the regression analysis (backward logistic regression, with undergraduate versus graduate being predicted by NEOFFI personality traits controlling for gender and age) in a sample of 529 medical students (75% of undergraduate students, $n = 397$) from three different medical schools in Portugal.

As expected, we have found similar results for age: older students were more likely to be graduate entry students (OR = 3.14, 95% CI 2.47–4.00, $p < 0.001$). However, age presented significantly higher impact in our study.

The only personality trait that was statistically significant between the two school types was Conscientiousness (OR = 1.10, 95% CI 1.00–1.21, $p = 0.049$), with graduate students being the most conscientious ones. This result is the opposite of what Wilson et al. obtained. Also, contrarily to authors’ results, Agreeableness was not a significant predictor of attending a particular school type. When performing a binary logistic regression with “Enter” method, Agreeableness presented similar effect size, although higher scores were associated with graduate entry (OR = 1.04, 95% CI 0.90–1.21, $p = 0.120$) and not with undergraduate entry. This non-significance could be explained by the difference in size of the two samples.

The highlight from our study is that relations between personality and attendance of graduate entry versus high school entry schools probably do not generalize across countries. More in depth studies are necessary to clarify whether the differences are caused by educational

policies – for example; admissions policies, cultural factors, religion, level of development, etc. – or others.

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Reference

- Wilson I, Griffin B, Lampe L, Eley D, Corrigan G, Kelly B, Stagg P. 2013. Variation in personality traits of medical students between schools of medicine. *Med Teach* 35:944–948.

Do medical students really need lecture handouts?

Dear Sir

In their recent paper entitled ‘What happens when teachers do not give students handouts?’, the authors (Wongkietkachorn et al. 2014) present interesting findings that could influence the decision-making of medical teachers on lecture preparation, which could in turn lead to changes in the learning performance of medical students. I agree with the authors that pre-clinical students are more handout-dependent than clinical students. However, there are critical points that should be addressed before deciding to give handouts in lectures.

What competencies do teachers want their students to develop for fostering self-directed learning? Reading is one of the important skills for medical students. In that paper, only