Understanding the Ocean Model of Personality: A Conceptual Analysis of the Big Five Traits

Fatanah Jislan[1], Syahrina Hayati Md Jani[2], Wan Nor Syazana Wan Hashim[3]*, Khalijah Mohd Nor[4]

[1,3,4] Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA

[2] Faculty of Business and Management / Islamic Philanthropy and Social Finance (IPSF), Universiti Teknologi MARA

***Corresponding Author**

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ABSTRACT

The OCEAN Model, also known as the Big Five Model, is an influential framework in the field of personality psychology. This model describes human personality through five primary domains: Openness (to Experience), Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. This conceptual paper analyzes the OCEAN Model from the perspectives of both domains and sub-traits (facets), focusing on its applications in education, business, and clinical psychology. Recent studies from 2020 to 2025 indicate that the model has the potential to explain academic achievement, job performance, and aspects of mental health. A sub-trait-based approach also provides a more detailed picture of individual behavioral patterns. However, the OCEAN Model is not an exhaustive personality theory and possesses certain limitations, including cultural bias, limited measurement accuracy, and a failure to fully account for the influence of situational factors on behavior. The model's predictive capability may also vary across cultures and contexts. Therefore, the application of the OCEAN Model requires consideration of cultural and situational factors. Future research should examine the interaction between personality and situations, as well as refining sub-trait measurements to enhance the model's accuracy and applicability.

Keywords: Big Five Personality Traits, Conceptual Analysis, OCEAN model, Personality Psychology

INTRODUCTION

The OCEAN model, or Big Five, is a significant model in modern personality research that describes human personality through five key dimensions: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism (John & Srivastava, 1999). This model is based on the lexical hypothesis used to describe human behavior reflect consistently on personality traits. Costa and McCrae further developed the model through instruments such as the NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI) to produce more consistent and reliable personality assessments (McCrae & Costa, 1997; Costa & McCrae, 2008). Different from the theories that classify personality into specific categories, the OCEAN model describes personality traits as a spectrum with varying levels. This approach allows for a more detailed explanation of the differences and uniqueness of everyone's personality (Larsen & Buss, 2017).

In addition to the five main OCEAN dimensions, each personality trait comprises six sub-traits that provide a more detailed picture of an individual's personality. Conscientiousness encompasses traits such as competence, orderliness, achievement striving, a sense of responsibility, self-discipline, and prudence in judgment. Extraversion characterizes individuals who are sociable, outgoing, self-confident, and active. Neuroticism relates to a tendency to experience anxiety, stress, and negative emotions. Meanwhile, Openness to Experience refers to individuals who possess imagination and creativity and are willing to embrace new ideas, experiences, and concepts. Agreeableness is associated with helpfulness, trust in others, cooperativeness, and compassion (Costa

& McCrae, 1992; John et al., 2008). An approach based on these traits allows the OCEAN Model to provide a detailed picture of an individual's personality and behavior.

Various studies demonstrate the significance of the OCEAN Model across diverse fields. In the context of education, Conscientiousness has been identified as the personality trait most strongly linked to academic success, while Openness to Experience and Agreeableness also make significant contributions to student achievement (Bhattacharjee & Ramkumar, 2025). In clinical and medical education, traits such as Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness have the potential to boost students' self-confidence. Conversely, Neuroticism tends to show a less positive relationship with this aspect (Peters et al., 2024). Meanwhile, in the business environment, a CEO's personality traits are linked to an organization's ability to adapt its strategies and to its overall performance (Aabo et al., 2024).

However, the OCEAN model has limitations regarding the overlap of personality traits, cultural differences, and moderate predictive capability. It also tends to overlook situational factors and changes in personality over time. Therefore, its application requires consideration of cultural context, situational factors, and personality development.

Theoretical Foundations of Personality Model

The development of personality research has been influenced by various theories proposed to understand human thought processes, emotions, and behavior. In the early stages, theories such as those of Carl Jung and Hippocrates' four temperaments classified individuals into specific groups. Although useful, these theories lacked sufficient empirical evidence and were limited in their ability to explain the complexity and diversity of human personality.

Trait theory views personality as a set of relatively stable characteristics that influence behavior across various situations. Gordon Allport (1937) categorized personality characteristics into primary, secondary, and cardinal traits. Subsequently, Raymond Cattell employed factor analysis to develop the 16 Personality Factors (16PF) model, which identifies 16 key personality traits

Hans Eysenck developed a simpler model with three main dimensions, namely Psychoticism, Neuroticism–Stability and Extraversion–Introversion. This model emphasizes that personality is influenced by biological factors, arousal levels and genetics. The development of statistical methods such as factor analysis later reinforced the idea that human personality has a relatively stable structure.

Research by Lewis Goldberg, Robert McCrae, and Paul Costa identified five consistent personality dimensions: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism (OCEAN). This model demonstrates stability across cultures and time and can predict various life outcomes. Thus, OCEAN model is viewed in decades as of personality research findings into a systematic framework.

The OCEAN or Big Five model is significant because it was developed based on data and statistical analysis across diverse languages and cultures. These five personality dimensions are recognizable across various cultures, making the model universal framework for explaining personality differences in individual. However, these five traits may not include every aspect of human personality. Therefore, other models known as HEXACO, were introduced by adding a new dimension called Honesty-Humility. Considering added elements such as biological, cultural and situational factors on personality studies can influence an individual's behavior. Overall, the evolution of personality theory reflects a shift from categorical classification to a trait-based approach, thereby reinforcing the usefulness of the OCEAN model in understanding human personality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent studies indicate that Big Five traits can predict academic achievement, particularly through specific traits and sub-traits. Conscientiousness is the most consistent predictor of academic performance, even when cognitive ability is considered. A combination of cognitive ability and personality traits also predicts performance better than cognitive ability alone (Mammadov, 2022; Anglim et al., 2025). At the sub-trait level, self-discipline,

achievement striving, and orderliness components of Conscientiousness show strong associations with academic achievement and study habits. Meanwhile, sub-traits of Openness, such as curiosity and an interest in new ideas, are better predictors of performance in fields requiring creativity and conceptual thinking Stephan et al., 2025). Therefore, analysis at the sub-trait level offers a more accurate understanding and prediction of academic achievement.

In the context of organizations and leadership, personality influences performance, strategy, and innovation. Openness and Conscientiousness support creativity and task execution, while Extraversion and Agreeableness help enhance collaboration and interpersonal relationships (Aabo et al., 2024; innovation meta-analysis, 2025). For CEOs, the combination of Big Five traits also influences strategic flexibility, work quality, and risk-taking propensity. High Conscientiousness and low Neuroticism are associated with more organized work performance, while high Openness drives entrepreneurial change and new product development (Aabo et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2025). Therefore, assessment at the facet level is crucial for facilitating the selection and development of more suitable leaders

In the field of health education, personality facets such as reliability, responsibility, cooperation, and emotional stability can predict a supervisor's confidence in a student's ability to perform professional tasks more accurately than simply assessing the five OCEAN dimensions in general (Peters et al., 2024). This study demonstrates that measuring personality facets can help provide a more accurate understanding of workplace behavior and decision-making processes. This approach ensures that personality assessments better reflect actual work situations and proves useful for critical or high-stakes professional training.

Currently, a growing number of critical studies have stated that the Big Five Model has limitations in terms of measurement, cultural and theoretical. Psychometric studies that involve several countries found that the Big Five Model instruments often fail and unmet the expectation of reproduce the five-factor structure while using it as sample from society in non-WEIRD populations. Besides, response format, translation and the survey delivery of those studies also influence the results of this structure (Laajaj et al., 2019; Smederevac et al., 2024). Cultural variations indicate that personality models need to be adapted to the specific culture. Therefore, models such as the "Big Two" or culture-based approaches might be required, or the "Big Five" model needs to be modified and validated for suitability before being used in different cultures (Thalmayer et al., 2024).

Although the OCEAN model is important for understanding personality, it has certain limitations, such as trait overlap, moderate effects for some traits, and a lack of consideration for situational influences and personality changes over time (von Bergen & Diestel, 2024; He, 2025). Therefore, the OCEAN model remains suitable as a foundation for understanding personality; however, it needs to be complemented by analyses of sub-traits, cross-cultural studies, situational factors, and individual development to gain a more comprehensive understanding of personality.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Recent literature indicates that the Big Five (OCEAN) model remains relevant for predicting educational achievement, organizational leadership, and professional training outcomes, particularly when analysis is conducted at the level of personality sub-traits (Mammadov, 2022; Peters et al., 2024; Aabo et al., 2024). However, the model has certain limitations, including issues regarding cross-cultural applicability, overlap between personality traits, and a lack of consideration for situational influences (Smederevac et al., 2024; He, 2025). Therefore, an analysis combining main traits and sub-traits is employed to gain a more detailed understanding of personality, while also evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the OCEAN model across various cultures and contexts.

The conceptual framework of this study is based on the OCEAN model, which encompasses five primary personality dimensions: Openness (to experience), Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. Assessing sub-traits can provide a more detailed and accurate picture of behavior compared to evaluating only the five main dimensions. Although the OCEAN model is widely used in education, business, and healthcare, its application still faces limitations related to cultural differences, situational influences, and

changes in personality over time. Thus, combining analysis at both the domain and sub-trait levels can yield a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of personality (He, 2025; von Bergen & Diestel, 2024).

This conceptual framework integrates two primary approaches. First, the five dimensions of the Big Five (OCEAN) model are analyzed alongside their sub-traits to understand individual personality and behavior. Second, the model's limitations regarding measurement and scope of application are critically evaluated. While the OCEAN model serves as a useful framework for understanding personality, factors such as culture, situational context, and personality changes over time require attention. Evaluating the model's strengths and limitations can yield a more balanced understanding and pave the way for future improvements to the OCEAN Model (Thalmayer et al., 2024; He, 2025).

Following the establishment of a conceptual framework integrating domain analysis and sub-traits, this study proceeds to examine the five personality traits in greater depth. This approach enables an understanding of each trait's function within educational, organizational, and cultural contexts, while also identifying the OCEAN Model's strengths and limitations regarding measurement, cultural suitability, and theoretical scope. The discussion begins with Openness to Experience encompassing curiosity, creativity, and adaptability—and explores its relationship with learning processes and innovation.

Openness to Experience

Openness to Experience characterizes individuals who are open to new experiences, ideas, and perspectives, and who possess a curious and creative nature. This trait can foster innovation, problem-solving, and engagement in learning. However, its influence on achievement and behavior can vary across cultures and situations. Compared to Conscientiousness, the predictive power of Openness regarding measurable performance is relatively modest (Mann et al., 2021).

High levels of Openness can foster innovative behavior, creative problem-solving, and active engagement in learning. However, its relationship with educational achievement may vary according to cultural factors, while its measurement is also influenced by Western cultural biases (Thalmayer et al., 2024; Smederevac et al., 2024).

After discussing Openness, the discussion shifts to Conscientiousness, the personality trait most consistently linked to achievement and reliability. Aspects of Conscientiousness, such as goal-oriented behavior, self-discipline, and perseverance, influence academic and professional performance, although they may reduce flexibility and innovation.

Conscientiousness

Conscientiousness refers to individual differences in goal-oriented behavior, self-control, and adherence to norms (McCrae & Costa, 2008). The key facets of Conscientiousness include competence, orderliness, a sense of responsibility, achievement striving, self-discipline, and deliberation (Mann et al., 2021). Research findings consistently show that conscientiousness is the strongest predictor of academic and job performance, even after accounting for cognitive ability (Anglim et al., 2025; Mammadov, 2022). Distinctions at the facet level provide deeper insight. The drive for success and self-discipline foster perseverance and the achievement of academic goals, whereas orderliness and a sense of responsibility are crucial in jobs requiring reliability and adherence to procedures. (Stephan et al., 2025). In medical education, conscientiousness—manifested as discipline, responsibility, and diligence helps foster supervisor trust in students regarding the performance of clinical tasks (Peters et al., 2024). Although Conscientiousness is the OCEAN trait that consistently predicts performance, excessively high levels can reduce flexibility and creativity particularly in leadership roles that require risk-taking and adaptability. Furthermore, behaviors such as punctuality and adherence to rules may be interpreted differently across cultures (Smederevac et al., 2024); therefore, their impact must be viewed within the specific situational and cultural context.

Extraversion refers to a personality trait associated with social and energetic aspects, such as self-confidence, sociability, and positive emotions. Analyzing these aspects helps us understand how extroverted individuals contribute to leadership, teamwork, and personal well-being. However, the impact depends on the situation and context for the next discussion.

Extraversion

Extraversion refers to the extent to which a person is sociable, energetic, and assertive when interacting with others (McCrae & Costa, 2008). Key facets of Extraversion include friendliness, sociability, confidence, activity, a tendency to seek new experiences, and the experience of positive emotions (Mann et al., 2021). Individuals high in extraversion typically excel in active engagement, leadership, and teamwork, while their confidence and positive emotionality help enhance collaboration and leadership within an organization (von Bergen & Diestel, 2024), traits such as a sociable nature and a fondness for seeking new experiences help students mingle more easily and gain acceptance among their peers (Stephan et al., 2025). In the workplace, extraversion can enhance job satisfaction and personal well-being through positive and supportive social relationships (He, 2025).

The application of extraversion is evident in the fields of leadership and communication, where extroverted leaders tend to enhance employee engagement and team collaboration (Aabo et al., 2024). In education, students with high levels of extraversion are typically more active in discussions and group learning, while self-confidence helps improve presentation performance (Mammadov, 2022). Students with high levels of extraversion are not necessarily beneficial, as the tendency for them to seek excitement can lead to risky behavior and interfere with tasks that required them to focus (He, 2025). Furthermore, extraversion is influenced by cultural differences. Thus, its benefits depend on the situation, the type of task, and cultural norms.

Next, agreeableness encompasses traits such as trustworthiness, helpfulness, cooperativeness, and empathy. While this trait enhances collaboration in educational and organizational settings, excessive agreeableness such as being overly compliant or avoiding conflict can have negative consequences.

Agreeableness

Agreeableness refers to an individual's tendency to be trusting, helpful, cooperative, modest, and empathetic. At the facet level, trust and helpfulness encourage cooperation, while compliance and modesty help manage conflict and establish group harmony (Mann et al., 2021). In educational and organizational contexts, Agreeableness is significant as it enhances cooperation, conflict resolution, ethical decision-making, and interpersonal relationships (Von Bergen & Diestel, 2024).

In short, Agreeableness is significant in leadership through empathy, trust, and follower development (Aabo et al., 2024). In a clinical context, this trait helps enhance therapeutic relationships and patient satisfaction (He, 2025). However, excessively high levels of Agreeableness can make it difficult for individuals to challenge authority or manage necessary conflicts. Its importance also depends on culture and context, as the trait is more highly valued in collectivistic societies than in more competitive environments (Thalmayer et al., 2024).

Finally, the discussion shift to Neuroticism refers to emotional instability, anxiety, and a tendency to experience stress easily. Facet analysis helps in understanding its impact on mental health, work performance, and learning. However, there have been discussions about using the term Emotional Stability to facilitate cross-cultural understanding.

Neuroticism

Neuroticism refers to emotional instability, negative emotions, and a tendency to experience stress easily (McCrae & Costa, 2008). Its facets include anxiety, anger, depression, self-consciousness, impulsivity, and vulnerability (Mann et al., 2021). Individuals high in neuroticism are more prone to stress and struggle to regulate their emotions (Mammadov, 2022; Stephan et al., 2025). This trait is also associated with poor academic adjustment, low personal well-being, burnout, and low job satisfaction (Von Bergen & Diestel, 2024).

Neuroticism is significant in clinical psychology because high levels are associated with a risk of depression and anxiety. However, moderate levels when combined with high Conscientiousness can help individuals become more attuned to risks (Peters et al., 2024 and better prepared to handle stress. The term Emotional Stability has been proposed to reduce stigma and enhance cross-cultural understanding (Smederevac et al., 2024). Cultural differences in how negative emotions are expressed and interpreted also present a challenge for the OCEAN

model (Thalmayer et al., 2024).

Overall, the OCEAN model describes personality through five key traits: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. Each trait helps explain aspects such as creativity, conscientiousness, leadership, cooperation, and emotional control. However, analysis at the facet level offers greater accuracy in predicting behavior. Application of the model must also account for cultural differences, the overlap of personality traits, and situational influences (He, 2025; Smederevac et al., 2024). Therefore, facet-level analysis can enhance accuracy, robustness, and cultural relevance in understanding personality.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a conceptual research design focused on the analysis of theories and existing studies, without the collection of new data, using literature-based approach, integrating academic research, meta-analyses, and theories published between 2000 and 2025. This approach enables an assessment of the foundations, evolution, and applicability of the OCEAN Model within the current context (Jaakkola, 2020).

The OCEAN Model serves as the primary framework for understanding personality through a two-tiered structure: domains comprising five major traits, and sub-traits (facets) that provide a more detailed analysis. This approach enhances the accuracy of understanding and predicting behavior (Mann et al., 2021; Stephan et al., 2025). Although the OCEAN model is easy to apply, supported by robust research evidence, and widely used across various fields, it still holds certain limitations. These include cultural differences, moderate predictive capability, and the influence of situational factors.

Overall, this conceptual study spans the fields of education, business, and clinical psychology to demonstrate the applicability and flexibility of the OCEAN Model across various contexts. However, as a conceptual analysis, the study does not present new empirical data, and its conclusions are therefore limited by the quality, scope, and cultural reach of existing literature. The insights generated here are intended to guide future empirical investigations and theoretical refinements rather than to offer definitive empirical generalizations. By clarifying the conceptual landscape of the OCEAN model and critically evaluating its utility, this methodology establishes a foundation for the subsequent discussion of its broader implications.

DISCUSSION

The OCEAN model remains relevant as a key framework for explaining individual personality variations across diverse contexts. However, an approach that examines personality at the sub-trait (facet) level offers a deeper and more detailed understanding of individual behavioral patterns compared to assessments that consider only the five major personality domains. This approach enables the identification of specific nuances within each domain, thereby providing a more comprehensive picture of personality. Therefore, future research and applications of the OCEAN model should place greater emphasis on the analysis of personality sub-traits.

In the field of education, the OCEAN model can help explain differences in learning styles, academic achievement, and social relationships among students. Conscientiousness is often linked to diligence and academic performance, whereas Openness to Experience is closely associated with creativity as well as an interest in learning and the exploration of new knowledge. (Mammadov, 2022; Stephan et al., 2025). However, the influence of personality traits on behavior can vary across cultures. Consequently, teaching strategies need to be adapted to the cultural context, particularly in diverse learning environments.

In organizational and business settings, the OCEAN model helps identify leadership potential, teamwork effectiveness, and workplace well-being. Extraversion and Agreeableness are linked to leadership and cooperation, while Conscientiousness has a strong relationship with job performance (Von Bergen & Diestel, 2024). Yet excessive levels of a trait can have negative effects—such as over-compliance associated with high Agreeableness or a tendency toward risk-taking linked to Extraversion. Therefore, organizations should assess personality facets in greater detail while taking cultural differences into account.

In clinical psychology, Neuroticism is associated with the risk of anxiety, depression, and emotional disorders (He, 2025). However, moderate levels of Neuroticism, especially when combined with high Conscientiousness

can help individuals become more attuned to risks and adopt health-promoting behaviors (Peters et al., 2024). Thus, personality assessments must consider situational and cultural factors to ensure interventions are accurate and appropriate. Overall, future research needs to strengthen the OCEAN model through the analysis of sub-traits, as well as the consideration of cultural differences and situational influences. The use of this approach enables the OCEAN Model to be applied with greater flexibility and precision in understanding human behavior, particularly within the contexts of psychology, education, and organizations.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this study evaluates the theoretical foundations and applicability of the OCEAN Model within the contexts of education, business, and clinical psychology. An analysis covering key domains and personality sub-traits demonstrates the model's potential to explain individual variations in learning, performance, social interaction, and emotional regulation. However, the explanatory power of the OCEAN Model must be critically assessed considering certain limitations—specifically regarding cultural diversity, the overlap between personality constructs, the need for more detailed examination of sub-traits, and the influence of situational factors on behavior. Consequently, adapting and modifying the model to suit specific contexts is crucial for enhancing its accuracy, suitability, and applicability.

As this study employs an analytical and synthetic approach to existing literature rather than generating new empirical data, the findings are best viewed as a conceptual foundation to guide future research. Future studies should aim to strengthen the cross-cultural validity of the OCEAN Model, improve predictive accuracy by examining sub-traits, and explore in greater depth the dynamic relationship between personality traits and situational factors. A more comprehensive investigation into these aspects could contribute to refining the OCEAN Model into a more relevant, accurate, and effective framework for explaining human behavior across diverse contexts.

Practical Implications

Overall, the OCEAN model holds practical significance in explaining individual personality variations across various fields, including education, business, and clinical psychology. In education, understanding personality differences can support the planning of teaching strategies that are more responsive to students' needs and inclinations. For instance, students exhibiting high levels of Conscientiousness are more likely to respond positively to structured and systematic tasks, whereas individuals with high Openness to Experience can be motivated through activities that emphasize creativity, exploration, and idea development. Integrating personality perspectives into the teaching process has the potential to enhance student interaction and collaboration, thereby contributing to a more effective learning environment.

In the context of business and organizational management, understanding personality constructs has implications for recruitment, leadership development, and team formation. Assessing sub-traits—specifically aspects such as assertiveness and reliability—can deepen the understanding of the fit between individual characteristics and job demands. This approach allows for a more detailed personality assessment compared to relying solely on the primary domains.

In clinical psychology, the OCEAN model serves as a framework for understanding individual variations regarding emotional resilience and vulnerability. Examining personality domains and sub-traits can contribute to developing interventions tailored to individual needs, while also helping to identify risk factors and formulate appropriate coping strategies. Consequently, the effective application of the OCEAN model requires considering not only individual personality traits but also inter-individual variations and the cultural contexts that influence the manifestation or expression of personality.

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