

What Makes Great Teachers Great: Effect of Teachers' Personality on Students' Engagement

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Abstract:

Students get the influence from teachers' personality and it is one of the important factors determining the interests and academic achievement of students in the course of that specific teacher to whom they like. The main purpose of this research is to find out those aspects of teachers' personality which are appreciated or disliked by the students at university level. This study is an effort to make university teachers realize that the different aspects of their personality are noticed by students that's why they should be conscious enough about exposing their different personality traits. This study is quantitative in its design and a survey questionnaire has been used to collect data from the university students regarding their judgment about their teachers' personality. 521 students both male and female of three universities of Lahore participated in this study. Data was analyzed using SPSS 21. Results indicated that students prefer mature, experienced, friendly and supportive teachers over young, serious and highly commanding ones.

Key Words: Teachers' personality, Teachers' influence, University students, Student Academic Behavior, Student Engagement

Introduction

Teachers play a strong role in the personality development of students and usually, the students want to imitate the personality of their teachers (Szűcs, 2009;2010). Students who are the most important key stakeholders of an education system are gaining more rights and dominance (at every stage, from Montessori to university) all over the world. Teachers are the persons who have direct contact with students and influence them through their personality. This study investigates the effect of the university teachers' personality on student engagement at higher education. Teachers vary in their personality characteristics and although it is hard to determine which personality characteristics are the most impressive, still we can identify some characteristics and behaviors that distinguish between influencing and not so influencing behaviors of the university teachers.



Literature Review

The role of teachers is very important in the life of students therefore, it is necessary for teachers to understand students' psychology and their own role as teachers (Bisschoff & Grobler, 2006; Zhang, & Zhang, 2013). Teaching, in addition to pedagogy, is more of the case of attitudes and behaviors of the teacher towards his/her students' subjects and work rather than only a show of knowledge and skills (McCroskey, Teven, Minielli & McCroskey, 2014). It is very easy to become a teacher but to become a great teacher needs to tend to rise above the crowd and leave indelible impressions on students (Orlando, 2013).

A teacher through his/her instructional methods and skills provide students such an educational environment that ensures the active participation and learning of students (Bisschoff & Grobler, 2006). Having an abundance of enthusiasm, wittiness, knowledge, encouragement, and support, coupled with his/her being friendly and humorous are those crucial factors of teacher's personality that not only enhance the teaching-learning process rather they are also helpful in decreasing the stress level of students and make them awake all the time providing a relaxed environment (Hockley & Harkin, 2006).

Role of Teachers in Students' life

Many researchers talked about the changing role of a teacher in this fast-changing world of 21stcentury (Gu, 2001; Hu & Grove, 1999; Hammond, 2006; Zhang & Zhang, 2013). Their focus was that though a teacher is no longer a lecturer yet he/she has adopted the role of a facilitator and still even after this changing role, the teacher has great influence on students in every respect. To support their argument the above-mentioned researchers, use the reference of United States where student-centered teaching is emphasized (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997; Biggs, Watskin, 2011; Ho, 2011). Support, love, and attention of teachers really help students a lot that they keep improving their academic profile (Harkin, 1998; Fredrickson, 1998, 2001; Hockley & Harkin, 2006; Zhang & Zhang, 2013). The absence of such personality traits in teachers result in the possibility that even the best possible curriculum can fail to result in an effective learning of students and raising their achievement (Klem & Connell, 2004; Frisby & Myers, 2008; Frisby & Martin, 2010; Frisby & Strawser et al., 2014).

Some researchers argue that whatever change takes place in the educational institutions, it flows from teacher to students, because a teacher is the person, with whom students have a direct contact (Holley & Steiner, 2005; Frisby & Strawser et al; 2014). Jennings & Greenberg, (2009) & Kruger (2003) argue that a teacher's role or duty is of such importance that he/she alone can be considered responsible for:

- Dropout rate of students,
- Passive learners,
- Demotivated students, and
- Poor academic results,

They further stress that as an instructional leader it is the foremost responsibility of a teacher to initiate the restoration of a learning culture by directing, supporting, and encouraging the activities of students towards the attainment of best learning possible (Jennings & Greenberg 2009; Kruger, 2003). Like the above-mentioned researchers, Maistsa (1995) also notes that teachers and students are the most important stakeholders of the institute; they can help each



other in many ways to make a dull learning environment a harmonious and well-functioning one (Zhang, & Zhang, 2013; Jennings & Greenberg 2009; Kruger, 2003).

The following researchers describe the teacher's role in this way;

- A teacher models' high expectations and respect for students (Cotton, 2003; Harris & Lowery, 2002)
- To manage conflict and crisis situations in an institution, a teacher develops and implements a plan in an effective and timely manner (Cornell & Sheras, 1998).
- To maintain positive student morale a teacher utilizes shared decision-making (Fink & Resnick, 2001; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

Teacher-Student Relationships

A classroom is a place where students and teachers together lead a life. Their sharing of ideas and experiences can enhance their lives and the sense of efficacy in the world around them (Blaich & Wise, 2008). By examining the complexities of their relationship, students and teachers can make their relation better (Quinlan, & Mazer, 2010). Nielsen (1992) holds the positive relationship between a teacher and students essential for the learning culture of the institute. It also helps students in their challenges that they face in their daily educational life. Previous research about positive relationship between teacher and students suggest that both of these stakeholders have more in common for the welfare of the organization than anyone else and specifically teacher' personality thrive in the success of the students (McCroskey & Richmond, 1996; Andersen, 1979; Richmond, McCroskey & Hickson, 2008; Sanders, 2010).

Positive relation between students and teachers (also describes as teacher's immediacy) gives students a sense of ownership and develops self-confidence in them, and eventually increases their learning and liking towards each other (Christophel, 1990; Plax, Kearney, McCroskey, & Richmond, 1986; Richmond, Gorham, & McCroskey, 1987; Thomas, Richmond, & McCroskey, 1994; Thweatt & McCroskey, 1998; McCroskey, Teven, Minielli & McCroskey, 2014). The information obtained by the QTI (Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction indicated that the helpful, friendlier, supporting and understanding behaviors of teachers are the thriving force for students' learning (Taylor, Fraser & White, 1994; Fisher Fraser, Cresswell1995; Harkin ,1998; Hockley & Harkin, 2006).

Learning is a very active process and it does not occur by just passively sitting on a chair, listening whatever teacher is saying, poring over books unendingly and writing your assignment. It increases through sharing (Harkin & Turner, 2006). A host of researchers are supporters of students' and teacher's positive relation. They argue that only students are those primary stakeholders who are most affected by the reflection, discussion, dialogue and action of their teachers (Fielding & McGregor, 2005, Bradley, Deighton, & Selby, 2004, and Johnson, 1991). Nagle (2001) describes teacher-student relation in a unique way that this collaboration is like the active presence, involvement, and power of individuals to influence decision-making process with their relation to that particular organization, people working there, to the institution and its practices.

A student's participation is a behavior that is desired by every instructor or teacher (Rocca 2001). Similarly, students' participation is very essential for a successful teaching-learning process. Students participate orally or passively in the class. They may contribute through their comments or remarks for academic affairs or they may show excellent academic record. For



many students, a teacher's attitude determines whether they should participate in classroom activities or not (McCroskey, Teven, Minielli & McCroskey, 2014). If they find a teacher's attitude positive, they are more inclined to be a part of classroom affair and on the contrary in teeth of the teacher's negative attitude many students detach themselves from class affairs (Schrodt, Turman, & Witt, 2007; Grossberg, 2009). Through their rights to participate a teacher can bring to the fore some fundamental tensions, contradictions, and ambiguities which are not good for students as well as for the teacher him/herself (Rudduck and McIntyre, 2007).

Cotton (2003) contends that to create and sustain a positive and safe learning environment in a class a teacher must involve students in the academic activities where necessary. Classroom environment and culture are the combinations of behavior, values, and beliefs between students and teachers. It means that a teacher has a huge influence on classroom culture and coordination between students and a teacher is a crucial part of it (Stewart 2003). The frequencies of teacher–student interaction determine students' emotion and it is positively linked to students' desire to participate in class and their academic motivation (Mazer et al. 2014).

Role of Teacher's Personality in Teacher-Student Relationships

In teacher-student relationship, it is the towering personality of the teacher that bears a lasting impression on the students. The marks of this impression can be traced in the behavior of the student both at perceptible and imperceptible levels (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom, 2004). The students imbibe the personality traits of the teacher, the very environment created within the four walls of the classroom. This effect on students is so pervasive and, at times, so overpowering that parents complain that they have no say before their sons or daughters. They request the teacher to exert his or her influence to convince their child over an issue (Deresiewicz, 2014).

There are two major aspects of personality, one is external, and the other is internal. The first impression that students get of their teachers is of their external personality. External aspects may cover the appearance, mannerism, and dressing of teachers (Cruickshank, Jenkins, and Metcalf 2003) On the other hand, teacher's enthusiasm, liveliness, and passion complement internal aspect which helps create such an environment in the class that teacher becomes a role model for students and they follow him/her in the learning process (Kauchak and Eggen 2000). Orlando (2013) opined that a teacher must possess the following nine characteristics in his/her personality;

- 1. Respect for students,
- 2. A sense of community and belongingness,
- 3. Warm, accessible, caring, and enthusiastic,
- 4. Setting high expectations,
- 5. Love for learning,
- 6. Maintaining professionalism in all area,
- 7. Ability to shift gears,
- 8. A skilled leader, and
 - 9. Continuous collaboration with colleagues

As teaching is not possible without interaction and teachers and students have to have question-answer sessions frequently so with only a trustworthy and supportive teacher, students



can dare to ask questions repeatedly and can share their views and problems (Cruickshank, Jenkins, and Metcalf 2003).

The rapid development in the field of social cognition is a very powerful stimulus that has urged many researchers to show interest in the study of teacher- student relation. Social cognition is defined as relating to how people think, understand, and learn (Bisschoff & Grobler, 2006). It involves a person's thoughts about himself/herself, people around, different institutes and organizations of society and to some extent, the complete social world in which he/she is living (Flavell, 1977; Bisschoff & Grobler, 2006). This is an interesting fact that as student spends half or more than a half of time of their whole day in their institutions, so the institute is the complete social world for them. And it is not something strange that students talk about their university as their routine, class periods, and specifically about teacher 's behavior. So, it becomes obvious that there is an impact of teachers' personality on students. That is why since last two decades some of the researchers and theorists seem to be very serious to explore student-teacher relation and impact of this relation on students' behavior (Andersen. 1979; Bruner, Goodnow & Austin, 1979; Keller & Sherman. 1974; Wittich & Schu,1973; Mottet et al., 2006).

The literature, which we have on social cognition, is enough to prove that students are and true mirrors of whatever is happening in the classroom and teacher being the protagonist of the whole activity within the classroom. Many researchers have explored students' thoughts and their social behavior and specifically teachers' influence on them (Glick, 1978, Bem, 1972, Damon 1979, Gordon, 1981, and Swarthout, 1980). Gregersen & Travers (1968) conducted a survey to gauge students' opinion about their teachers. The results of this survey proved that there were obvious changes in teachers' behavior when they came to know students' opinion about themselves. Therefore, this observation of Gregresen & Travers makes it clear that students have deep insight about their teachers and they take notice of teachers' behaviors, their gestures and even their mannerism and way of dressing (1968).

Rowling (2003) is a famous children and young adult writer who has raised many questions that deal with students' life in the educational organization by offering compelling and proactive images of curriculum, teaching, and specifically relations between students and teachers in her works. She firmly believes that the whole set-up of an institute is for students and they are a crucial and integral component of the educational organization; that is why, it is necessary for teachers to be very sensitive to their behaviors and communication styles towards them. As in the fifth book of Harry Potter, Harry and his friends think of changing their art teacher with whom they are not satisfied. Collectively they decide that teachers' personality and behavior should be of such kind that prepares them for the world outside (Sollitto , Johnson & Myers, 2013). DeJong, (1954) describes the importance of a teacher's personality and way of communication in the scenario of the institute in this way that it is the teacher who develops the sense of inquiry and curiosity among students. Because he/she is the person who creates such kind of climate in which every student gets the equal opportunity to enhance their ability, and without the intent of the teacher, it is not possible. Chbosky (1999) has the image of the teacher as of the transformational leader who through his unique behavior and communication style makes special efforts to help students in every possible way.

Anderson (1999) discusses that teacher knows the issues of students more than any other personnel of the institute and in many cases he/she takes a very bold step of challenging the



institution authorities (board of governors) for the interest of students. In fact, anything that happens in classroom leaves its trail behind let it be their lives within or even outside of institute. History and literature show that students merely do not read books or curriculum rather they are very active agents of change in the educational organization and can act to open the revolutionary domains of possibilities when they get support from teachers (McLaren, 2003). It is the strong personality of the teacher that helps students to maintain their self-discipline, and students' academic achievement and their grades depend heavily on this ability to maintain their discipline (Duckworth and Seligmen, 2006).

Self-discipline as well as self-composure is considered a royal road leading to marvelous academic achievement. This self-discipline comes when students get the feelings that they are active participants in the class and not merely the passive recipients of fixed rules and decisions of the teacher (Duckworth and Seligmen, 2005). There are many expectations related to the personality of a teacher and by the passage of time, these expectations keep increasing (Lawrence et al., 2008). Students take notice of the teacher's competence, expertise; his/her character and his/her care that how much he/she is in favor of students' welfare (Teven & McCroskey, 1997 and Ricmond, 2006). McCroskey and McCain (1974) and Edwards (2001) observe that students perceive a teacher through three dimensions:

- 1. the tasks he/she assigns
- 2. his/her social skills
- 3. his/her physical appearance

Through the dimension tasks, a student wants to work with the teacher; he/she wants that the teacher should be creative and knowledgeable and has the leading qualities as well as clarity of thought. He/she should be disciplined and well organized in his/her duties and responsibilities. Here the student takes notice of the intellectual stature of the teacher and expects him/her to have enough grip on the subject taught that he/she could give clear and satisfactory answers to their questions; and steer them out of the troubled waters (Berscheid & Walster, 1969). In social dimension, a student expresses the desire to socialize with the teacher; he wants the teacher to be friendly, witty, flexible, and supportive in nature. Here the student expects that a teacher should adopt such an accommodating behavior and communication style that students could easily express their confusion before him/her (McCroskey et al., 2006).

In the third dimension, that is, physique, a student takes notice of the physical appearance of the teacher. In this dimension, a student expects that the teacher should be smart and well-dressed. In many cases, students seem to be so much impressed by the galvanizing, nicely trimmed personality of the teacher that they want to copy him/her. They are drawn towards him/her so much so that they want to be just like the teacher (McCroskey and McCain, 1974; McCroskey et al., 2006; McCroskey et al., 2014).

Effect of Teachers' Personality on Students

A teacher must be a fatherly/motherly figure for all the students. Students' attitude towards a teacher is a matter which can not only help educationist to resolve many issues regarding dropping out, dissatisfaction, changing courses and restlessness among students rather it can also bring a tremendous change in teacher's role (Fredrik, Alm and Thornberg, 2014). Different surveys' responses demand more attention from educators about what students actually want. Usually, students want a sense of belonging in class because much time of the day they spend in



institutions (Vleuten, & Schmidt, 2011; Frisby et al., 2014). It is an interesting fact that usually teachers are trained in such a manner to make all the students feel that they are important and valued. Generally, students get the impression of being important when teachers:

- call them, using their names,
- talk about life outside of the institution, and
- Involve them in classroom decisions, solving classroom problems and issues.

Walker, Topping and Rodrigues (2008) state that research on students' experiences, their expectations and their perception has been the interest of many researchers. Hofer and Pintrich 1997 identified relation between a teacher and students' approaches to learning as an area demanding further investigation. Interpersonal relationship between teachers and students and their interaction not only motivate students to participate in class it is also the most dominant factor in students' cognitive and effective learning (Frisby & Myers, 2008; Frisby & Martin, 2010; Ryan et al., 2011; Frisby et al., 2014).

Leadership characteristics of a teacher as help, appreciation, support, empathy, understanding of other, and encouragement are among those factors of a teacher that leave an indelible impression on the mind and personality of students (She and Fisher 2002; Frisby & Martin, 2010; Wilson, & Pugh, 2011; Frisby et al., 2014). Research on the effect of teacher's personality on students brings out a very interesting fact that a teacher interacts with a hundred to one fifty students or even more than this number in a single day. Usually, it is hard for many teachers though not for all teachers to recall or remember what students said, asked and how they responded? On the other hand, students easily remember each gesture of their teachers, and this situation is much stronger in the case of young children, (She and Fisher, 2002). This research indicate that students have deeper understanding and record of teachers' typical behaviors and idiosyncrasies (Rosenshine, 1971; Walberg & Haertel, 1980; Stodolsky, 1984; Fraser, 1998; She and Fisher, 2002).

Weber, Martin, and Myers (2011) introduced instructional Beliefs Model (IBM), the core purpose of this model was to explore the strength of relationship of teachers, students, and classrooms with the learning process. This theory of IBM emphasizes on the impact of instructors' personality and his/her communication style on students in many ways. This impact reflects students' cognitive learning outcomes or behavioral outcomes or both (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001; Chesebro, 2003; Weber et al., 2011).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore multiple perspectives of students that indicate teachers' influence for paving the ways to involve students in the learning process. While using the quantitative research method, it was expected that evidence-based answers to the research questions will be produced. The critical factors regarding the effect of teachers' personality on student engagement would be identified to determine those specific attitudes of teachers that help to enhance teacher-student relation and motivate students to achieve best academic results in higher education.

Methodology

In this study, the researcher has adopted the approach of positivist paradigm. Quantitative research proceeds with a normative approach in positivist paradigm; it is the systematic and scientific investigation use to collect and analyze quantitative data (Gray, 2004; Wiersma & Jurs,



2008). The respondents who participated in the study were total 663 in number. The survey questionnaire respondents were both male and female students. All students who participated in this study were undergraduate or graduate.

A semi-structured survey questionnaire was devised to use as the research tool in this study. The constructs used in survey of this research have been well identified in the literature review phase of this study. Another reason for deciding the survey questionnaire as the research tool for this study was to get the perception of students. A survey is considered the best tool for getting perceptions/conceptions by many researchers (Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle, 2010). The survey questionnaire used in this study was divided into 4 independent segments. The questionnaire first part gathered information about students' demographics. The second part of the questionnaire consisted of six sections. Each section consists of two statements with the use of or between them. The respondents had to choose one statement between these two statements, which he/she liked most. In the third part of the questionnaire, nine characteristics of an effective university teacher have been mentioned. From these nine qualities of an effective teacher, the respondent had to choose the three qualities which he/she liked most. Then the fourth part of the questionnaire consisted of five items to assess students' engagement. (see Appendix A).

The scale on students' engagement was constructed on five points Likert Scale with the option of 1 for "never," and 5 for "always.". The reliability coefficient was checked by using SPSS 21 and found to be Cronbach's Alpha 0.91.

Appreciated personality attributes of teachers as perceived by the students Most of the time Students were more influenced by the Teacher who:

Students prefer mature and experienced teachers (69.5%; n = 521) over young and enthusiastic teachers (30.5%; n = 521).

Table 1. Students preference in section 1

No	Statement	f	%	
1	Who is young and enthusiastic	159	30.5	
2	Who is mature and experienced	362	69.5	

Students prefer teacher who is friendly and has humorous nature (70.1%; n = 521) over serious and sober teachers (29.9%; n = 521).

Table 2. Students Preference in Section 2

No	Statement	f	%
1	Who is friendly and has humorous nature	365	70.1
2	Who is serious and sober	156	29.9

Students prefer flexible and supportive teachers (69.3% n=521) over highly commanding teachers (30.7% n=521).



Table 3. Students Preference in Section 3

No	Statement	f	%
1	Who is flexible and supportive	361	69.3
2	Who is highly commanding	160	30.7

Students prefer teacher who sends students in the world to explore it by themselves (56.8%; n= 521) over teacher who brings world in the classroom using the technology (43.2%; n= 521).

Table 4. Students Preference in Section 4

No	Statement	f	%
1	Who brings the world in the classroom using the technology	225	43.2
2	Who sends students in the world to explore it by themselves	296	56.8

Students prefer teacher who uses English and Urdu in his/her language (74.9%; n= 521) over teachers who is well-versed in English (25.1%; n= 521).

Table 5. Students Preference in Section 5

No	Statement	f	%
1	Who is well-versed in English	131	25.1
2	Who uses English and Urdu in his/her language	390	74.9

Students prefer teacher who exercises complete hold on instructions and students always look up to him/her for guidance (51.4%; n= 521) over teacher Who encourages healthy discussion in the classroom, infusing autonomy and self-reliance in the students (48.6%; n= 521).

Table 6. Students Preference in Section 6

No	Statement	f	%
1	Who encourages healthy discussion in the classroom, infusing autonomy and self-reliance in the students	253	48.6
2	Who exercises complete hold on instructions and students always look up to him/her for guidance	268	51.4



Students Preferences for Teachers' Personality Characteristics The characteristics which Students appreciate the most in their University Teacher

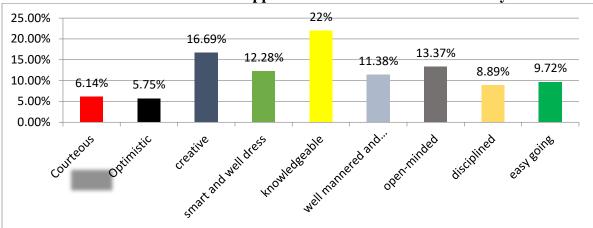


Figure 1. showing students preference for the characteristics, which they like most in their teachers

The students were asked to encircle three qualities out of nine which the appreciate most.

Showing students preference for the characteristics which they like most in their teachers,

Qualities	Percentage
Knowledgeable	22%
Creative	16.69%
Open-minded	13.37%
Smart and well dressed	12.28%
Well mannered and composed	11.38%
Easy going	9.72%
Disciplined	8.89%
Courteous	6.14%
Optimistic	5.75%

The most appreciated quality, which the students preferred in their university teachers, is knowledgeable which 22% students out of 663 selected. The second quality is creative which 16.69% students selected and the third most appreciated quality is open-minded which 13.37% students selected.

Summary

In the present study, the researcher has tried to examine the potential role of the university teachers' personality on students' engagement in higher education. According to Cayanus & Martin (2004) and Hill, Ah Yun, & Lindsay (2008) teachers' behavior is that vital component which determines student's response towards teachers. Through university teachers' specific behavior, students get encouraged or discouraged to talk to them and discuss their issues with them (Cayanus & Martin, 2008; Miller, Katt, Brown & Sivo, 2015).

The present study has been conducted to identify those specific factors of the university teachers' personality which play a dominant role to ensure maximum student engagement in local area context. The study has been successful in the identification of those specific factors,



and it has yielded a conceptual model to gain student engagement which can be used anywhere in the world.

The study has confirmed that the present environment for teaching and learning in both public and private universities of the local area is very satisfactory. The research is contributive towards generating data for the teacher-student relationship and its' effect on students. The findings identify the difference among those factors of the university teachers' personality, which have positive or negative effects on students' academic behaviors. The results also outline that in both public and private universities, teachers are well aware of their influence on students' academic behavior and they do not behave in such a way that could develop the feeling of disappointment among students.

It may be safely concluded that students in higher education of Lahore, have a good impression of their university teachers' personality. Moreover, the university teachers also influence them positively in every respect. Results indicate that the university teachers have a positive effect on students' academic behaviors.

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Who encourages healthy discussion in the

classroom, infusing autonomy and self-

Who exercises complete hold on instructions and students always look up to him/her for

reliance in the students.

guidance



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Appendix A

3

Effect of Teachers' Personality on Students' Engagement

Name (optional)	Gender ram Year: Ist - 2 nd - 3 rd - 4 th
Please encircle one of the two statement Most of the time I am more influenced b	· ·
Who is young and enthusiastic. OR	• Who brings world in the classroom using the technology
• Who is mature and experienced.	OR
•	 Who sends students in the world to explore it by themselves.
Who is friendly and has humorous nature	Who is well-versed in English? OR
OR	Who uses English and urdu in his/her
Who is serious and sober.	language

6

Pick 3 qualities that you appreciate the most in a teacher;

Who is flexible and supportive

OR

Who is highly commanding

• Courteous	Smart and well dressed	Open-minded
 Optimistic 	 Knowledgeable 	 Disciplined
Creative	Well-mannered and composed	Easy going