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Article

Teacher Personality Predicts Emotional Well-Being and Academic Achievement in Students with Specific Learning Disorders

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Abstract: Background/Objectives: Students with specific learning disorders (SLDs) are at increased risk for emotional and academic difficulties. While teacher characteristics can influence student outcomes, few studies have examined the role of teacher personality in supporting students with SLDs. This study investigated whether teacher personality traits predicted student emotional well-being and academic achievement in a school-based intervention context. **Methods**: Participants were 64 students with SLDs (Mage = 13.28) nested within 21 teachers. Students completed measures of emotional well-being at baseline and post-intervention, and Grade Point Average (GPA) was obtained from school records at the end of the school year. Teachers completed the Big Five Inventory mid-intervention. Two-level multilevel models were conducted in Mplus using the Maximum Likelihood estimation with Robust standard errors (MLR) estimator. Models controlled for student and teacher demographics, baseline emotional well-being, and intervention group. Missing data were addressed using full-information maximum likelihood (FIML). **Results**: Teacher female sex, higher neuroticism, and lower teaching experience were associated with higher student emotional well-being post intervention. Follow-up analyses confirmed that teacher sex, neuroticism, and conscientiousness each explained substantial between-teacher variance. In the GPA model, student sex and teacher openness were significant predictors, with female students and students taught by more open teachers earning higher GPAs. **Conclusions**: Teacher personality traits, specifically neuroticism, conscientiousness, and openness, were associated with emotional and academic outcomes among students with SLDs. Findings highlight the importance of considering teacher characteristics in designing school-based interventions to support the development of learners with SLDs or other neurodevelopmental disorders.

Keywords: teacher personality; big five traits; emotional well-being; academic achievement; specific learning disorders; multilevel modeling

Introduction

With students spending a significant amount of time at school, teachers are key figures in supporting their emotional well-being and academic achievement (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Zheng, 2022). Because of the pivotal role teachers play in children's lives, understanding teacher-related factors, such as personality, may provide information that helps education systems tailor support to increase positive student outcomes. Understanding the relationship between teacher personality traits and student outcomes is especially critical for supporting students who are at an increased likelihood of greater school-related difficulties, such as students with specific learning disorders (SLDs) (Bonuomo et al., 2023; Matteucci et al., 2019). This study examined the relationship between teacher personality traits, emotional well-being, and academic achievement of students with SLDs.

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SLDs are a group of neurodevelopmental disorders characterized by difficulties in academic domains such as reading, comprehension, spelling, written expression, and/or mathematics (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). SLDs are one of the most frequent disorders among school-aged children with prevalence rates ranging from 5% to 15% (Grigorenko et al., 2020; Piko & Dudok, 2023). SLDs have the potential to not only negatively impact students' academic achievement, but also their development across social and emotional domains (Bonuomo et al., 2023; Musetti et al., Mugnaini et al., 2009; Visser et al., 2020). Additionally, SLDs have been identified as a risk factor for internalizing problems, including anxiety and depression, as well as broader psychological distress, which can contribute to poorer emotional well-being (Carroll et al., 2005; Francis et al., 2019; Hendren et al., 2018; Matteucci et al., 2019; Visser et al., 2020). As children with SLDs transition into adulthood, these difficulties often persist and contribute to lower rates of degree completion, underemployment, and disproportionate involvement in the criminal justice system (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014). However, many students with SLDs achieve success and attribute their success, in part, to positive relationships with teachers, friends, and mentors (Catts & Petscher, 2021; Grigorenko et al., 2020; Orr & Goodman, 2010; Stein et al., 2024). Given the involvement of teachers in the lives of children and the potential protective role they play for students with SLDs, it is essential to better understand how teacher characteristics, such as personality traits, may influence outcomes for these students.

Teacher Personality and Student Emotional Well-Being

In addition to academic challenges, many individuals with SLDs have high levels of anxiety, depression, poor mental health, and lower self-esteem (Hendren et al., 2018). Elevated internalizing problems can further impair academic success (Brännlund et al., 2017; McLeod & Kaiser, 2004), creating a negative cycle that may exacerbate difficulties already faced by students with SLDs. However not all students with SLDs report poorer emotional well-being, many individuals show positive adjustment despite potential risk factors associated with their SLD (Haft et al., 2016; Stein et al., 2024). Specifically, teacher support has been shown to act as a protective factor for students with SLDs (Al-Yagon, 2016; Kiuru et al., 2012). Among students without academic difficulties, positive student-teacher relationships are associated with greater student emotional well-being (Baker et al., 2008). When considering caregivers, peers, and educators, support from educators demonstrated the strongest association on students' wellbeing (Danielsen et al., 2009). Therefore, understanding factors related to teachers is critical for supporting students' emotional well-being.

Research suggests that positive student-teacher relationships are marked by high levels of closeness and warmth as well as low levels of conflict (Furrer et al., 2014; Hamre & Pianta, 2005); therefore, teachers who have the ability to promote closeness and warmth while reducing conflict may be better able to support students with SLDs. Additionally, students who perceive greater teacher support report higher levels of emotional well-being (Kashy-Rosenbaum, 2018). Therefore, teacher personality traits, such as agreeableness, extraversion, conscientiousness and openness, that promote positive, supportive relationships may be particularly important for fostering positive emotional well-being in students with SLDs.

Teacher Personality and Student Academic Achievement

Among students without academic difficulties, positive student-teacher relationships are associated with greater student academic achievement (McCormick et al., 2013). Students with SLDs generally experience lower academic achievement compared to their typically developing peers, as these disorders often impact their ability to process information and perform well in certain subjects (Mattison et al., 2022). However, some studies suggest that with appropriate accommodation and teaching strategies, students with SLDs can achieve academic outcomes comparable to their peers (Nowicki, 2003; Sideridis, 2007). As such, considering factors that impact students with SLDs' academic achievement is critical to ensure proper support is in place. One potential factor could be teachers' personality traits.

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Research has found mixed results regarding the impact of teachers' personality traits on student outcomes. Some studies indicate that teachers' extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience are associated with greater students' academic achievement for students with and without SLDs (Eilam & Vidergor, 2011; Eryilmaz 2014; Goldstein & Benassi, 2006; Kell, 2019; Nkomo et al., 2022). In contrast, other research has shown that teacher personality predicts the subjective measures of teaching effectiveness, but not students' objective academic achievement (Kim et al., 2018, 2019). These findings suggest that while students may feel more supported, it may not translate to improved academic performance. Because many students with SLDs benefit from individualized support from teachers, it is important to understand how teacher personality traits may influence students' academic achievement.

Current Study

The present study aimed to examine the associations between teacher personality traits and student outcomes—specifically, emotional well-being and academic achievement—among adolescents with SLDs. Demographic variables, including the age and sex of both students and teachers, as well as teachers' years of teaching experience, were included as covariates given their previously documented associations with student outcomes (Hwang & Fitzpatrick, 2021; Kini & Podolsky, 2016). Based on prior literature (Eilam & Vidergor, 2011; Eryilmaz 2014; Goldstein & Benassi, 2006; Kell, 2019; Nkomo et al., 2022), it was hypothesized that teacher traits of openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness would positively predict student academic achievement and emotional well-being over time, controlling for baseline characteristics. In contrast, teacher neuroticism was expected to negatively predict both student outcomes.

Methods

Procedure

Data for the current study were collected as part of a larger longitudinal project evaluating the biopsychosocial outcomes of mindfulness-based instruction on adolescents with SLDs. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two social and emotional learning (SEL) curricula: a mindfulness-based SEL curriculum (MindUP; Maloney et al., 2016) or "Normal Isn't Real" (NIR), which aimed to promote neurodiversity awareness (Banerjee & Lalor, 2021). Both programs were administered by the teachers for 17 weeks. This study was publicly preregistered on ClinicalTrials.gov, https://clinicaltrials.gov/study/NCT05787483, including the research design and planned analyses, prior to data collection and analysis. For this study, surveys completed at specific time points were used: students completed surveys at baseline and at post-intervention (week 18), while teachers completed surveys at the intervention midpoint (week 9).

Participants

The initial sample included 68 students nested within 22 teachers. One teacher was excluded due to missing data on all Big Five personality traits, resulting in the removal of their three corresponding students. Additionally, one student was excluded prior to analysis after being identified as a statistical outlier, with a standardized residual of –2.70 and a disproportionate influence on residual normality. The final analytic sample consisted of 64 students nested within 21 teachers.

Participants included in this study were 64 students enrolled in Grades 5 through 12 at a private school in Alabama serving children and adolescents with learning disorders. Students ranged in age from 10 to 19 years (M = 13.28, SD = 2.24), with equal distribution by sex (50% female, 50% male) and a near-even split between intervention groups (46.9% MindUP, 53.1% NIR). Students in the MindUP group did not differ significantly from those in the NIR group in terms of age, $t(62) = 0.38$, $p = .703$; sex, $t(62) = 0.49$, $p = .623$; or baseline emotional well-being, $t(61) = 0.47$, $p = .643$.

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A total of 21 teachers were included in this study, each responsible for an average of 4.39 students (SD = 0.89). Teachers ranged in age from 26 to 62 years (M = 39.05, SD = 11.86), with one participant missing age data. Most teachers were female (66.7%), and all identified as White and non-Hispanic. All teachers held at least a bachelor's degree, and 42.9% reported more than 10 years of teaching experience. Teachers in the MindUP and NIR groups did not differ significantly on sex, $t(19) = 1.56$, $p = .135$; years of teaching experience, $t(19) = -0.73$, $p = .473$; or any of the Big Five personality traits (all $ps > .05$).

Measures

Big Five Inventory-10 (BFI-10)

Teachers' personality traits were assessed using the BFI-10 (Rammstedt & John, 2007), a brief 10-item self-report inventory designed to measure the Big Five personality domains: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. Each domain is assessed with two items. Teachers rated items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 5 (*agree strongly*), and trait scores were computed by averaging the two items corresponding to each domain. The BFI-10 has demonstrated strong part–whole correlations with the BFI-44 scales (rs = .74–.89), acceptable test–retest reliability over 6–8 weeks (rs = .65–.87), and good convergent and external validity (Rammstedt & John, 2007). However, internal consistency estimates were not reported in the original validation study, this is consistent with psychometric literature cautioning against the use of Cronbach's alpha for 2-item scales (Eisinga et al., 2013). In the present sample (n = 21), only the extraversion subscale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency (α = .62). The remaining subscales showed poor internal consistency: openness (α = .52), neuroticism (α = .43), agreeableness (α = .36), and conscientiousness (α = .11), likely reflecting both the scale's brevity and the small sample size.

Brief Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (BMSLSS-PTPB)

Students' emotional well-being was assessed using the Brief Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale–Peabody Treatment Progress Battery version (BMSLSS–PTPB; Bickman et al., 2010). This 6-item self-report measure was administered at baseline and post-intervention. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*very dissatisfied*) to 5 (*very satisfied*). One item assesses overall life satisfaction, while the remaining five items assess satisfaction across specific life domains: family life, friendships, school experience, self-perception, and living environment. Scores were averaged to create a total emotional well-being score, with higher scores indicating greater life satisfaction. Internal consistency in the current sample was good at both timepoints, with Cronbach's alpha increasing from baseline (α = .80) to post-intervention (α = .88). This aligns with, and slightly exceeds, previously reported reliability in clinical samples (α = .77; Athay et al., 2012) and falls within the range observed in normative school-based samples (α = .76–.85; Huebner et al., 2006).

Grade Point Average (GPA)

GPA was utilized to measure students' academic achievement. Students' GPA was reported by the school on a scale ranging from 0.0 to 4.0; grades of A (3.1-4.0) were reported as 4.0, grades of B (2.1-3.0) as 3.0, grades of C (1.1-2.0) as 2.0, grades of D (0.1-1.0) as 1.0, and grades of F as 0.0. Students' end of year GPA was calculated as an arithmetic mean of first semester letter grades and second semester letter grades. The courses considered in the calculation were math, English, history, science, and health. School-reported students' GPA was obtained at the end of the school year, which corresponds to a few months post-intervention.

Demographics Survey

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Student demographic information was collected through parent-reported data. Teacher demographic information was collected through self-reported surveys, including race, sex, years of teaching experience, and highest level of education. Teachers selected the label that best described their highest level of education from the following list: high school diploma or General Equivalency Diploma (GED), associate's degree, bachelor's degree, some graduate coursework (but no degree), master's degree, education specialist or professional diploma (post-master's), or doctorate.

Statistical Analyses

Missing Data

Among the 64 students included in the analytic sample, 10.9% (n = 7) had missing data on emotional well-being variables used in the multilevel models. Specifically, six students were missing post-intervention emotional well-being scores, and one was missing baseline emotional well-being. Missingness was significantly associated with end of school-year GPA, $t(62) = 2.23$, $p = .029$, but not with post-intervention emotional well-being, $t(56) = 0.32$, $p = .751$. Additionally, missingness was unrelated to any student-level covariates, including age, sex, intervention group, or baseline emotional well-being (all $ps > .05$), supporting the assumption that data were missing at random (MAR). All models were estimated in Mplus Version 8.1 using full-information maximum likelihood (FIML) with the robust maximum likelihood (MLR) estimator to appropriately handle missing data.

Assumption Testing

Assumptions for multilevel modeling (MLM) were evaluated in SPSS (Version 30) prior to model estimation in Mplus. Restricted maximum likelihood (REML) was used during assumptions testing, as it provides unbiased estimates of variance components. Intraclass correlation coefficients (ICCs) were calculated using random intercept models to assess the proportion of variance attributable to the teacher level. For emotional well-being, the ICC was .181, and for GPA, the ICC was .054, indicating that 18.1% and 5.4% of the variance, respectively, were due to differences between teachers. Both values fall within the range of .05 to .25 commonly observed in educational research, supporting the use of MLM to account for the nested structure of students within teachers (Hedges & Hedberg, 2007).

Residual plots suggested homoscedasticity for emotional well-being but revealed heteroscedasticity for GPA. This violation was confirmed by a significant Breusch–Pagan test, $F(1, 62) = 29.80$, $p < .001$. Attempts to correct the heteroscedasticity through data transformations were unsuccessful. As a result, both models were estimated using the robust maximum likelihood (MLR) estimator in Mplus to account for potential heteroscedasticity. The normality of residuals was supported for emotional well-being, as indicated by nonsignificant Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests. For GPA, residual normality was less clear, with inconsistent test results suggesting minor deviations from normality, which were addressed through robust estimation. Visual inspection confirmed linear relationships between continuous predictors and outcomes. Multicollinearity diagnostics indicated no concerns, with all variance inflation factor (VIF) values below 2.40 and tolerance values above .40.

Model Specification

Two two-level multilevel models were estimated using Mplus version 8.1 with the MLR estimator. In both models, students (Level 1) were nested within teachers (Level 2), and random intercepts were specified to account for clustering. The first model predicted students' post-intervention emotional well-being. Student-level (within) predictors included age, sex at birth, intervention group, and baseline emotional well-being. Teacher-level (between) predictors included sex, years of teaching experience, and Big Five personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness). The second model predicted students' end of school-

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year GPA. Student-level predictors were age, sex at birth, and intervention group, while teacher-level predictors were identical to those in the emotional well-being model. All continuous predictors were centered prior to analysis: student-level variables were group-mean centered, and teacher-level variables were grand-mean centered. Categorical predictors were dummy coded. Missing data were handled using FIML with the MLR estimator, which provides robust estimates under the assumption of data missing at random.

Results

Preliminary Analyses: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

A total of 64 students completed the survey. Students reported moderately high levels of post-intervention emotional well-being ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 0.77$), on a scale ranging from 0 to 5. Their academic performance, assessed via school-reported GPA, averaged 3.70 ($SD = 0.35$). Teachers had an average of 7.81 years of teaching experience ($SD = 2.89$). On average, teachers scored slightly above the midpoint on the Big Five personality traits of agreeableness ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 0.87$), conscientiousness ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 0.75$), neuroticism ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 0.91$), and openness ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 0.93$), but slightly below the midpoint on extraversion ($M = 2.52$, $SD = 1.03$), based on a scale ranging from 1 to 5. Full descriptive statistics for all study variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables.

Variable	*n*	*M*	*SD*	Range	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Student																	
1. Age	64	13.28	2.24	10-19	-												
2. Sex	64	0.50	0.50	0-1	-.03	-											
3. Intervention group	64	0.47	0.50	0-1	-.05	-.06	-										
4. Baseline EWB	63	4.11	0.72	2-5	-.37**	-.06	-.06	-									
5. Post EWB	58	4.08	0.77	2.17-5	-.38**	-.12	-.08	.78**	-								
6. Student GPA	64	3.70	0.35	2.8-4.0	-.21	.16	-.06	-.07	-.15	-							
Teacher																	
7. Sex	21	0.67	0.48	0-1	-.49**	.07	-.38**	.26*	.40**	.08	-						
8. Teaching experience	21	7.81	2.89	1-10	-.19	.09	.15	.04	.09	.02	.35	-					
9. Extraversion	21	2.52	1.03	1-5	.14	-.13	.03	-.12	-.16	.03	-.13	-.47*	-				
10. Agreeableness	21	3.24	0.87	1.5-4.5	-.44**	-.23	-.09	.16	.20	-.05	.26	.16	.29	-			
11. Conscientiousness	21	3.93	0.75	2.5-5	-.04	-.16	-.05	.05	.19	-.14	.00	.16	-.14	.31	-		
12. Neuroticism	21	3.38	0.91	2-5	-.24	.04	-.07	.24	.24	.04	-.02	.25	.02	-.20	-.01	-	
13. Openness	21	3.83	0.93	2-5	.02	-.10	.32*	-.11	-.25	.22	-.47*	-.24	.28	-.41	-.45*	.14	-

Note. EWB = emotional well-being; GPA= grade point average; post=post-intervention. Sex coded as 0 = male, 1 = female. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Pearson bivariate correlations were conducted among all primary study variables (see Table 1), with three distinct sets of associations evaluated: (1) student-level variables, (2) teacher-level variables, and (3) cross-level correlations between student and teacher characteristics. At the student level, older students reported significantly lower emotional well-being at both timepoints, $r = –.37$, $p = .003$ (baseline), and $r = –.38$, $p = .003$ (post-intervention). Baseline emotional well-being was strongly and positively associated with post-intervention emotional well-being, $r = .78$, $p < .001$.

Correlations among teacher-level variables were computed using a dataset aggregated at the teacher level to preserve independence. More years of teaching experience were significantly associated with lower extraversion, $r = –.47$, $p = .032$. Female teachers reported significantly lower levels of openness, $r = –.47$, $p = .033$. Openness was also negatively associated with conscientiousness, $r = –.45$, $p = .040$.

Several significant correlations emerged between student-level and teacher-level variables. Older students were more likely to have male teachers, $r = –.49$, $p < .001$, and teachers who scored

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lower on agreeableness, $r = –.44$, $p < .001$. Students in the MindUP group were more likely to have male teachers, $r = –.38$, $p = .002$, and teachers who scored higher on openness, $r = .32$, $p = .011$. Additionally, students with female teachers reported higher levels of emotional well-being at both timepoints, $r = .26$, $p = .037$ (baseline), and $r = .40$, $p = .002$ (post-intervention).

Main Analyses: Multilevel Modeling

All 64 students had complete data for the GPA full model, while only 57 students had complete data for the emotional well-being full model. Both models were estimated in Mplus using the MLR estimator with FIML to handle missing data. The emotional well-being model has an average cluster size of 2.71 and an ICC of .380, while the academic achievement model has an average cluster size of 3.05 and an ICC of .114.

Emotional Well-Being Model

A two-level multilevel model was estimated to examine predictors of students' post-intervention emotional well-being, accounting for the nesting of students (Level 1) within teachers (Level 2). Complete model results, including unstandardized estimates, standard errors, and significance levels, are presented in Table 2, along with standardized coefficients to facilitate interpretation of effect sizes. At the student level, higher baseline emotional well-being significantly predicted greater post-intervention emotional well-being ($b = 0.70$, $SE = 0.10$, $p < .001$). Students assigned to the MindUP group also reported significantly higher post-intervention emotional well-being compared to those in the NIR group ($b = 0.33$, $SE = 0.16$, $p = .034$). Student age and sex were not significant predictors ($b = 0.03$, $SE = 0.08$, $p = .708$; $b = –0.02$, $SE = 0.12$, $p = .860$, respectively).

Table 2. Multilevel Model Predicting Post-Intervention Emotional Well-Being.

Predictor	*b*	*SE*	*β*	*p*
Level 1 (Student-Level)				
Age	0.03	0.08	0.04	.708
Sex	–0.02	0.12	–0.02	.860
Intervention Group	0.33	0.16	0.26	.034
Baseline EWB	0.70	0.10	0.65	<.001
Level 2 (Teacher-Level)				
Sex	0.89	0.19	0.83	<.001
Teaching Experience	–0.09	0.03	–0.52	.001
Extraversion	–0.15	0.09	–0.29	.114
Agreeableness	0.03	0.05	0.06	.478
Conscientiousness	0.28	0.14	0.40	.055
Neuroticism	0.25	0.08	0.44	.003
Openness	–0.04	0.10	–0.07	.701

Note. EWB = emotional well-being. *b* = unstandardized regression coefficient; *SE* = standard error; *β* = standardized coefficient; *p* = significance value. Student-level predictors were group-mean centered; teacher-level predictors were grand-mean centered. Sex coded as 0 = male, 1 = female. Intervention group coded as 0 = NIR, 1 = MindUP. $N = 57$ students with complete data.

At the teacher level, students taught by female teachers reported significantly higher emotional well-being ($b = 0.89$, $SE = 0.19$, $p < .001$). Higher teacher neuroticism was positively associated with student emotional well-being ($b = 0.25$, $SE = 0.08$, $p = .003$), whereas more years of teaching experience was negatively associated with student emotional well-being ($b = –0.09$, $SE = 0.03$, $p = .001$). Teacher conscientiousness was not a significant predictor ($b = 0.28$, $SE = 0.14$, $p = .055$). Teacher extraversion, agreeableness, and openness were all not significant ($ps > .10$). After accounting for covariates and predictors, the residual variance at the student level was 0.22 ($SE = 0.06$, $p < .001$), and the residual

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between-teacher variance was negligible and non-significant (0.002, *SE* = 0.06, *p* = .978). The model explained 47.4% of the variance in emotional well-being at the student level (*p* < .001) and 99.3% at the teacher level (*p* < .001).

Given the unusually high R-square at the between level, several follow-up models were tested to examine the plausibility of this value. First, individual teacher-level predictors were entered separately into four additional models. When teacher sex, neuroticism, and conscientiousness were tested as individual predictors while controlling for covariates, each emerged as significant. Teacher sex alone significantly predicted emotional well-being (*b* = 0.75, *SE* = 0.28, *p* = .006) and explained 53.8% of the between-level variance (*p* = .005). Teacher neuroticism was a significant positive predictor (*b* = 0.19, *SE* = 0.08, *p* = .012), accounting for 70.4% of the between-level variance (*p* = .001). Teacher conscientiousness also significantly predicted EWB (*b* = 0.32, *SE* = 0.15, *p* = .029), explaining 79.8% of the between-level variance (*p* < .001). In contrast, teaching experience was not a significant predictor (*b* = 0.03, *SE* = 0.03, *p* = .376) and explained only 2.7% of the between-level variance (*p* = .666). These findings suggest that teacher sex, neuroticism, and conscientiousness may be driving a large portion of the between-level variance, and that the high R-square observed in the full model likely reflects a combination of overlapping contributions from multiple teacher-level characteristics.

Academic Achievement Model

A second two-level multilevel model was estimated to examine predictors of students' academic achievement (end of school-year GPA). Complete model results, including unstandardized estimates, standard errors, and significance levels, are presented in Table 3, along with standardized coefficients to facilitate interpretation of effect sizes. At the student level, student sex was a significant predictor, with girls reporting higher GPA than boys (*b* = 0.14, *SE* = 0.07, *p* = .038). Student age and intervention group were not significantly associated with GPA (*b* = –0.02, *SE* = 0.05, *p* = .772; *b* = –0.10, *SE* = 0.09, *p* = .256, respectively). At the teacher level, greater teacher openness significantly predicted higher GPA (*b* = 0.17, *SE* = 0.07, *p* = .022). No other teacher-level predictors reached significance, including teacher sex (*b* = 0.09, *SE* = 0.11, *p* = .393), teaching experience (*b* = 0.01, *SE* = 0.02, *p* = .560), and the remaining personality traits (all *p*s > .10).

Table 3. Multilevel Model Predicting End of School-Year GPA.

Predictor	*b*	*SE*	*β*	*p*
Level 1 (Student-Level)				
Age	–0.02	0.05	–0.04	.772
Sex	0.14	0.07	0.21	.038
Intervention Group	–0.10	0.09	–0.14	.256
Level 2 (Teacher-Level)				
Sex	0.09	0.11	0.37	.393
Teaching Experience	0.01	0.02	0.24	.560
Extraversion	–0.01	0.06	–0.05	.923
Agreeableness	0.05	0.08	0.37	.498
Conscientiousness	0.02	0.07	0.14	.731
Neuroticism	–0.02	0.04	–0.11	.736
Openness	0.17	0.07	1.29	.022

Note. GPA = grade point average. *b* = unstandardized regression coefficient; *SE* = standard error; *β* = standardized coefficient; *p* = significance value. Student-level predictors were group-mean centered; teacher-level predictors were grand-mean centered. Sex coded as 0 = male, 1 = female. Intervention group coded as 0 = Normal Isn't Real, 1 = MindUP. *N* = 64 students with complete data.

After accounting for covariates and predictors, the residual variance in GPA remained significant at the student level (*b* = 0.10, *SE* = 0.02, *p* < .001), while the between-teacher residual

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variance was negligible and non-significant (b = 0.00, SE = 0.01, p = .967). The model explained 7.3% of the variance in GPA at the student level (p = .196) and 96.9% at the teacher level (p = .190); however, neither R-square value reached statistical significance. To examine the robustness of the significant effect for openness, a follow-up model tested openness as the only teacher-level personality predictor while controlling for teacher sex and teaching experience. In this model, teacher openness remained a significant predictor of student GPA (b = 0.13, SE = 0.06, p = .033), suggesting this effect is not dependent on other personality traits in the model. However, the between-level R-square was not significant (0.961, p = .353), indicating substantial unexplained variance remained.

Discussion

Summary of Findings

The present study investigated how teacher personality traits influence emotional well-being and academic achievement among students with SLDs—a population often underrepresented in research on teacher-student dynamics (Catts & Petscher, 2021; Haft et al., 2016; Stein et al., 2024). While previous studies have examined the relationship between teacher personality and student outcomes in general populations (Kim et al., 2018; Zee & Koomen, 2016), this study extends the literature by focusing on students with SLDs and using a multilevel framework to capture teacher-level effects.

Findings partially supported the initial hypotheses and offered nuanced insights into the influence of teacher personality traits on student outcomes. Contrary to expectations, higher teacher neuroticism significantly predicted greater student emotional well-being following the intervention. Although this finding diverges from prior literature linking teacher depressive symptoms to poorer student achievement (McLean & Connor, 2015), it may reflect the benefits of emotional sensitivity. Neuroticism reflects a tendency toward emotional sensitivity, anxiety, and self-consciousness (John & Srivastava, 1999). While often associated with negative outcomes, certain facets of neuroticism—such as heightened emotional awareness—may enhance a teacher's ability to recognize and respond to students' emotional needs. Teachers higher in neuroticism may be more emotionally attuned and better able to create classroom environments that are validating and responsive to students' affective experiences. This interpretation aligns with research suggesting that emotionally sensitive or expressive teachers can foster psychologically safe classroom environments (Roeser et al., 2013). Notably, of the 21 teachers, 9 scored at or below the midpoint and 12 scored above it, indicating that neuroticism levels in this sample were generally moderate rather than extreme. It is possible that moderate levels of neuroticism are adaptive, whereas higher levels may produce different effects. Future research should explore potential nonlinear (e.g., U-shaped) associations between teacher neuroticism and student well-being.

Teacher conscientiousness did not significantly predict student emotional well-being in the full model but did emerge as a significant predictor when examined in isolation. This finding supports prior research suggesting that conscientious teachers, who tend to be organized, responsible, and attentive, may better adapt to and support the diverse needs of students with SLDs (Caprara et al., 2003; Kim et al., 2018). Teacher conscientiousness may foster the type of structured yet flexible learning environment beneficial for students requiring additional support.

As hypothesized, greater teacher openness significantly predicted higher student GPA post-intervention. This aligns with prior work indicating that open teachers, who are often imaginative, flexible, and intellectually curious, are more likely to implement adaptive and inclusive instructional strategies (Decker & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008; Eryilmaz, 2014; Kell, 2019). Such characteristics may be especially beneficial for students with SLDs, who often thrive under creative and differentiated teaching approaches (Sideridis et al., 2007). In contrast, teacher agreeableness and extraversion were not significantly associated with student outcomes in this study. This aligns with prior research indicating that while these personality traits may enhance students' perceptions of teacher support and foster greater self-efficacy, they do not directly predict objective measures such as academic

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achievement (Kim et al., 2018). These findings suggest that although interpersonal warmth and sociability are important for relational aspects of teaching, they may not be sufficient to influence academic or emotional outcomes in students with specific learning disorders.

Beyond personality traits, several student and teacher characteristics also contributed to post-intervention outcomes. Students with higher baseline emotional well-being showed higher post-intervention emotional well-being, as expected. Participation in the MindUP intervention was also associated with increased emotional well-being, highlighting the program's potential benefits for students with SLDs (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2017). Female teachers were associated with higher student emotional well-being, consistent with literature suggesting that female teachers often display higher levels of emotional support (Graziano et al., 2024; Kashy-Rosenbaum, 2018; Sánchez-García et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2021). Notably, fewer years of teaching experience predicted greater student emotional well-being, potentially due to reduced burnout or increased enthusiasm among early-career teachers. Teacher burnout, which tends to increase with years of service, has been linked to decreased emotional support and may negatively impact both teacher and student well-being (Chang, 2009; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Finally, female students demonstrated higher end of school-year GPA than male students, consistent with national trends showing higher academic performance among girls (Duckworth & Seligman, 2006; Hwang & Fitzpatrick, 2021). These findings underscore the importance of accounting for both teacher and student characteristics in evaluating how teacher personality shapes developmental outcomes for students with SLDs.

Implications

The findings of this study offer meaningful implications for educational practice, particularly for supporting the success of students with SLDs. First, the observed associations between teacher personality traits and student outcomes underscore the importance of considering personality dimensions in teacher recruitment, training, and ongoing professional development. Teacher openness reflects qualities such as adaptability, creativity, and openness to experience, all of which are traits that may enhance a teacher's ability to differentiate instruction and respond to diverse learner needs. Integrating strategies that cultivate these qualities in professional learning settings may improve student academic outcomes, especially in inclusive classrooms.

The unexpected positive association between teacher neuroticism and student emotional well-being suggests that emotionally sensitive teachers might create more validating and emotionally attuned environments, particularly beneficial for students with SLDs who may be at greater risk for emotional challenges. Teacher preparation programs may benefit from helping educators' channel emotional sensitivity into supportive classroom practices, while also ensuring appropriate emotional regulation strategies are in place to protect teacher well-being.

Additionally, the association between teacher conscientiousness and greater student emotional well-being in exploratory analyses suggests that structured, responsible, and dependable teacher behaviors may foster emotional safety and predictability in the classroom, all of which are key components of well-being for students requiring additional support (Iznardo et al., 2023; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). This highlights the potential value of embedding classroom management, organization, and relationship-building skills within teacher development programs.

Organizations have long used personality assessments to guide personnel decisions (Salgado & De Fruyt, 2017). However, findings from the present study suggest that teacher personality traits may not consistently predict student outcomes, particularly for students with SLDs. While certain traits such as openness and conscientiousness showed positive associations with student outcomes, others like agreeableness and extraversion did not. The unexpected positive link between teacher neuroticism and student emotional well-being further underscores the complexity of teacher-student interactions.

 doi:10.20944/preprints202505.0302.v1

Rather than relying solely on personality profiles, teacher selection and training processes might benefit more from emphasizing adaptive interpersonal and instructional behaviors. For example, traits commonly associated with female teachers, such as empathy and emotional responsiveness (Graziano et al., 2024), were indirectly supported by findings showing that students of female teachers reported higher emotional well-being. These qualities could be more effectively cultivated through targeted professional development than predicted through trait-based assessments alone.

Beyond personality, the findings that female teachers and less experienced teachers were associated with higher student emotional well-being raise important considerations for mentoring and workplace support. It may be that newer teachers, despite having less classroom experience, exhibit higher enthusiasm or lower levels of burnout, which benefits student mental health (Harding et al., 2019; Madigan & Kim, 2021; Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016). Schools might consider supporting mid- and late-career teachers with emotional wellness initiatives or job re-engagement strategies to mitigate burnout and sustain effective emotional support over time.

Finally, the positive effect of participation in the MindUP program reinforces the value of implementing structured mindfulness-based SEL interventions in middle and high school settings (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2017). Given the unique academic and emotional needs of students with SLDs, embedding SEL into standard curricula, especially when delivered by emotionally attuned and adaptable teachers, may optimize both academic and psychosocial outcomes. Together, the results point to the need for a more comprehensive approach to teacher development with one that integrates relational competencies, classroom adaptability, and evidence-based intervention delivery to better serve neurodiverse learners.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. First, the relatively small sample size, particularly at the teacher level, may have limited statistical power to detect smaller effects and increased the potential for over- or underestimating associations. Although multilevel modeling was used to account for nesting, the number of clusters (teachers) was modest, which may constrain the generalizability of results. Having a larger sample size may help improve clustering and the stability of estimates. Future studies should replicate these findings using larger and more diverse samples across multiple schools or districts.

One key limitation in the present study was the absence of baseline GPA data. As a result, the multilevel model predicting end of school-year academic achievement could not control for students' prior academic performance. This prevents making any causal inferences about the impact of teacher characteristics on student academic achievement. Future studies should incorporate pre-intervention academic data to better assess change over time.

Additionally, the teachers included in this study taught very different academic subjects at the school, such as math and reading. Considering that SLDs can be specific to a single academic domain, it is possible that the influence of teacher personality may differ depending on subject area and the particular domain of student difficulty. Future research may consider how content-area instruction (e.g., reading vs. math) interacts with teacher traits to shape academic or emotional outcomes in students with SLDs.

Another limitation involves the teacher-student assignment structure. Although all teachers in the study delivered the same social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum they were assigned with (MindUP or NIR), they did not necessarily teach the academic subjects contributing to students' GPA. Students rotated among different teachers for core subjects such as math, English, and science, and some SEL instructors—such as those teaching art—were not involved in academic instruction that factored into GPA calculations. This introduces ambiguity when interpreting the finding that teacher personality predicted student academic achievement, as the teacher completing the personality inventory may not have directly influenced the student's academic grades. Future research should

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consider linking teacher characteristics more precisely to the specific subjects or instructional contexts influencing each outcome.

This study also relied on a brief self-report personality inventory (BFI-10), which showed limited internal consistency for several scales due to having only two items per trait. BFI-10 was selected because it is a widely used measure of personality traits in psychological, health, and cross-cultural research (Chapman & Elliot, 2019; Costa Mastrascusa et al., 2023; Courtois et al., 2020). Nonetheless, the internal consistency of most subscales was low in this sample. This may be due in part to the short scale length and small teacher sample size. While the BFI-10 has demonstrated acceptable psychometric properties in larger studies (Courtois et al., 2020; Stone et al., 2022), limited reliability in this context may have introduced measurement error and affected the precision of estimates. Future research would benefit from using longer and more psychometrically robust personality assessments to ensure greater measurement reliability.

Lastly, the lack of direct assessment of teaching practices and teacher-student relationship quality limits understanding of the mechanisms linking teacher personality to student outcomes. Including such variables in future studies would help clarify these pathways. Despite the above limitations, this study offers valuable insights into how teacher characteristics relate to academic achievement and emotional well-being among students with SLDs. Continued investigation in this area can inform teacher preparation programs, classroom interventions, and inclusive education practices aimed at promoting well-being and success among neurodiverse learners.

Conclusions

This study contributes to the growing body of research on teacher influences in inclusive education by examining how teacher personality traits relate to academic and emotional outcomes among students with SLDs. Using a multilevel framework, the findings revealed that teacher neuroticism and conscientiousness were associated with greater student emotional well-being, while teacher openness was associated with higher student GPA. These findings highlight the nuanced ways in which teacher characteristics may impact students beyond traditional instructional practices. In addition to teacher traits, student and teacher demographic variables such as sex, teaching experience, and participation in a mindfulness-based SEL intervention also emerged as important contributors to student outcomes. These results underscore the multifaceted nature of classroom dynamics and the need to consider both interpersonal and contextual factors in supporting the success of students with SLDs. Although limitations related to measurement reliability and sample size warrant caution, the findings offer meaningful implications for teacher training, intervention implementation, and inclusive education policy. These findings contribute to the broader literature on children's well-being and mental health in educational contexts, emphasizing the importance of teacher characteristics in designing school-based strategies that support the holistic development of neurodiverse students.

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