Do Personality Traits Predict Academic Writing Ability?

An EFL Case Study

Ali Mansouri Nejad

School of languages, literacies, and translation

Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800, Penang, Malaysia

E-mail: mansoria313@yahoo.com

Maryam Bijami

School of languages, literacies, and translation

Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800, Penang, Malaysia

E-mail: m_fateme2013@yahoo.com

Mohammad Reza Ahmadi

School of Educational Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia

11800, Penang, Malaysia

E-mail: mr.ahmadi2720@gmail.com

Abstract

Although the role of personality traits in predicting the academic performance has been extensively studied, the relationship between affective factors, extraversion and introversion, and academic writing has been a neglected area of research. In this study, it was tried to examine to what extent these affective factors could foretell academic writing ability. To do so, 30 EFL students participated in the study studying literature in junior level at Ilam University, Iran. The pupils would take the free writing exam and their papers were scored based on Barron's rating criteria (2004). After that, they were divided into two groups of extraverts and introverts through Eysenck Personality Inventory (EPI). The results revealed that there was no significant relation between personality and writing ability. The findings refuted the cliché that the extraverts outperform the introverts in skills like writing.

Keywords: Introversion, Extroversion, EFL learners, Writing skill, Affective domain

1. Introduction

Mental processing is a fundamental paradigm in understanding, learning, and producing. Information of the mental performance is supposed to be influential in design, implementation, and assessment of language teaching. Information regarding mental process and its role in language learning could be searched in the domain of psycholinguistics. Simply learning how to walk and intricately acquiring a language both require psychological process on the human beings' behalf. The importance of psychology in learning as an entire entity and personality is so much that no study or research can overlook.

Learning and psychology are so interwoven that it becomes complicated to differentiate one from the other. This intricateness is derived from the fact that learning seems a kind of field for theoretical psychology because both are seeking for change and stability in human beings and how they can accommodate to their environment (Stern, 1991). The notion of learning has a variety of definitions. Brown (2007: 7) refers to learning as "acquiring or getting of knowledge of a subject or skill by study, experience, or instruction." To define it more concisely, Slavin (2003: 138) maintains that learning is a change in an individual caused by experience." In retrospect, there have come several theories intending to find out psychological answers for learning questions.

1.1 Personality and affective domain in learning

Haslam (2007) delineates personality as distinction from "an inanimate thing." He considers it as our shared humanity. In the scope of psychology, personality is supposed to be "individuality or individual differences." In fact, personality is the real foundation of interactions of affective variables which in its behalf contribute into learning.

The degree of intensity of these variables such as anxiety, risk taking, self-confidence, and extroversion/introversion establishes so many personalities that even two brothers differ from each other in terms of personality. It is supportable enough to claim that personality partially roots in affective variables. Therefore, in order to scrutinize a personality we can picturesquely portray it with the color of affective variables.

As learning is the matter of change and the source of this change can be attributed to affective domain, it seems important that affective domain be investigated to dig out reasons for learning like language learning. As Brown (2000) puts it, "affective domain is the emotional side of human behavior." Thus, it is a kind of fault to discard emotion from language learning. In language learning the role of affection is so crucial that it can make a learner withdraw from learning or in opposite pole engrossed in learning (Chastain, 1988). Stern (1991) also confirms that the whole "learning experience" involves emotional reactions and personality of persons.

1.2 Extroversion and introversion

As it was indicated, regarding Oxford and Anderson (1995, cited in Doughty and Long, 2005), affective domain concerns "values, beliefs, and attitudes that influence what an individual pays attention to in a learning situation." Extroversion and introversion are two dominant variables in affective domain. In Stern's (1991) view, "introversion refers to tendency to withdraw from social interactions" while extravert persons are fond of involving in social communication and environment. It is generally assumed that extroversion accelerates language learning and introversion hampers learning. However, it is not so, they both may contribute to different aspects of language learning differently. Drawing on results of different studies, we can certainly announce to what parts of language these variables are more contributive. Widdowson (1979) displays the characteristics of extraverts and introverts as follow:

Insert Table 1 here

1.3 Literature review

As mentioned above, there are several studies devoted to the relation and effect of extroversion and introversion in EFL and ESL. These studies consist of effect of extroversion/introversion on language learning strategies (Imanpour, 2005), relation between affective variables and speaking skill (Ashtari, 2002; Do¨rnyei & Kormos, 2000; Kormos & Trebits, 2012), the impact of extroversion/introversion on vocabulary learning (Saemian, 2001), the effect of extroversion/introversion on evaluation of writing (Carrell, 1995), relation between personality and academic performance (Chamorro-Premuzic and Furnham, 2003; Rindermann & Neubauer, 2001; Sanchez-Marin et al., 2001; Pulford and Sohal, 2006), and influence of personality factors on reading skill (Li and Chingell, 2010). In the following lines some of the relevant studies would be discussed in details.

Bergeland (1974), in an attempt, found that extroversion and structured interaction did not indicate any association while introversion positively correlated with group social modeling. He executed the study among 80 eleventh grade students from three high schools in Illinois.

Busch (1982, cited in Brown, 2000) tried to determine whether there would be any relationship between extroversion/introversion and English proficiency among the EFL students in Japan. The study came out to reject the hypothesis that the extraverts are more proficient than the introverts. The study clarified that extroversion had negative correlation with proficiency and the introverts had better reading comprehension and grammar proficiency than the extraverts.

Among 81 students from a multi-section basic communication course at southwestern states, Cook and Hurt (1983) found that there existed an approximately high relationship between communication classroom learning outcomes (final grades in the course) and psychological (extroversion) and social structures as organizational communication variables.

Inquiring into the giving and receiving of interpersonal feedback within the human relations groups, Gordon (1983) conducted a study among 33 members of two different university human relations groups. It came out that extroversion did not correlate positively with the giving of useful feedback.

Landrum and Meliska (1985) investigated to identify any relationship between extroversion/introversion and caffeine use and its consequence in performing tasks such as tapping rate, serial learning, reaction time, writing rate, and

reading comprehension. In the execution section of the study, they assigned twenty female and twenty male into two groups of low and high caffeine users. The study elucidated that there was a significant relationship between extroversion and consumption of caffeine (r=.411; p<.01), but no significant effect on the implementation of the tasks was observed.

Pazhuhesh (1994) explored the relation between extroversion/introversion and reading comprehension among EFL Iranian students. According to the study the introvert students were more successful than their extravert counterparts.

Badran (2002) attempted to determine if there existed any relationship between both extroversion/introversion and the pronunciation accuracy in English as a foreign language with respect to the gender variable. He conducted the study among 71 third year students in English department at Mansoura University, Egypt. Regarding his hypothesis, he found three results in his research: first, there was a positive relationship between extroversion/introversion and English pronunciation accuracy, then the male were better in pronunciation accuracy than the female and the last was that the extravert outperformed the introvert in English pronunciation.

Mann (2003) made an attempt to explore the relation of the five-factor model of personality (extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and intellect) with college student adjustment. He carried out the study among 200 introductory psychology students at a large public university in Canada. The outcome of his research was that there was a positive correlation between emotional stability and institutional attachment and extroversion and agreeableness had a positive relation with academic and social adjustment; however the study clarified a low (negative) relation between conscientiousness and college student adjustment.

Van Daele et al. (2006) explored the effect of extroversion on L2 oral proficiency among 25 Dutch-speaking students learning English and French as foreign languages. The findings of study indicated that the extroversion had little effect on the oral speech production of L2 learners of English and French. In addition, there was not a clear influence of extroversion on the lexical complexity in French. The results illustrated that the influence of the extroversion was negative in the lexical complexity in English.

Razmjoo and Shaban (2008) intended to certify the relationship between extroversion/introversion and grammaticality among the Iranian EFL students. They conducted the study at Guilan University, Rasht by employing 124 EFL students through Farhady's TOEFL Test. The study led to several results: first, there was no meaningful difference between the extravert and introvert students in the English proficiency. Second, there was no significant difference between the extravert and introvert in grammaticality judgment. Third, there appeared a positive relation between language proficiency and grammaticality judgment. The last was that language proficiency predicted the grammaticality rather than the extroversion/introversion.

Gan (2011) examined the relation of one dimension of personality trait, extroversion and introversion with the L2 oral performance with respect to fluency, accuracy, and complexity in task performance. The findings of the study revealed that there was no significant relation between degree of extroversion/introversion and "assessment scores" and "discourse-based measure."

1.4 The purpose and significance of the study

This idea that extraversion may facilitate or frustrate the process of learning, as Stern (1983: 79) puts, "may be only half-truth, but they provide the stimulus for systematic investigations." Motivated by individual difference in the language learning in EFL classes on the one hand and the ideological conflict between psychologists and applied linguists on the other hand, the present study aims at investigating any relation between extroversion/introversion and writing ability by employing Iranian EFL participants. The study has a non-directional decision or two-tailed hypothesis. The main question for which the study is supposed to find an answer is whether there is any relationship between extroversion/introversion and English writing. The study also undergoes a null hypothesis: There is no significant relation between extroversion/introversion and writing among EFL Iranian students.

What necessitates such a study and contributes to its significance is that there has not been any pertinent study to magnify the importance of extroversion and introversion in writing. This study can theoretically enrich the findings in the applied linguistic as well as psycholinguistics. Furthermore, it can clarify the relation between psychology and language learning and teaching. This study hopes to have some implications for parental training. Parents can focus on developing some personal attributes in their children which in future call for a particular language skill. The findings of the present study can also provide teachers and language centers with enough evidence to change or modify their outlook toward extravert or introvert students and the role of personality factors in language learning.

2. Method

In this section, we provide some information about the subjects' age and field of study. In the next part, the instruments including Eysenck Personality Inventory (EPI) and free writing test are introduced. In the last part, the data collection and analysis would be discussed.

2.1 Subjects

There were about 30 EFL students studying English literature in junior level at Ilam University, Iran. Students filled Eysenck Personality Inventory questionnaire which would be discussed in details below. A group of students who got L scores of above 4 or 5 from EPI were excluded from the study and the rest was divided into two groups of extroversion and introversion. Both male and female students took part in this study with range of 20 to24 years of age.

2.2 Instrumentation

The materials which were used in this research are as follow:

Eysenck Personality Inventory (EPI) has been employed to identify to what extent the pupils are introvert or extravert. The participants are instructed to mark their answers in the boxes under "yes" or "no" columns provided in answer sheets. This questionnaire entails 75 questions and three scales based on which the degree of extroversion and introversion becomes clarified. The L scale includes 9 items and those who choose 5 items or so are excluded from the study because these people try to pretend to be extravert or introvert. The E scale comprises 24 items and shows the degree of extroversion and introversion. Those students who have answered above 53 percent of the items (equal to raw score of 13) would be regarded as extravert and the score below 53 percent would indicate the introversion. The N scale with 24 items explicates the degree of stability and instability which this study does not cover. Concerning the validation of EPI (the 75-item one), Azarkhosh (2000) asserts that the frequency of score from the three criteria was reported to be normal.

Free writing Test has been used to evaluate the English writing proficiency of both groups of the extravert and introvert students. Barron's rating criteria (2004) was used by researcher to give an objective assessment of writing. The range of score in this scale is from 6 to 0. The essay which received 6 should have the following attributes:

a. actively addresses the writing task,

b. is well organized and well developed

c. uses clearly appropriate details to support a thesis or illustrate ideas.

d. displays consistent facility in the use of language

e. demonstrates syntactic variety and appropriate word choice.

An essay will be scored 0 if it:

a. contains no response

b. merely copies the topic

c. is off-topic, is written in a foreign language, or consists only of keystroke characters

2.3 Procedure of data collection and analysis

In order to collect data, writing exam was administered to the students in the regular English classes. Students were asked to write an essay about a particular topic and a time about 30 minutes was allotted to the exam. The administration was followed by a clear instruction concerning the time and the scoring. Most of students were able to finish their writing within the time or earlier. The answer sheets were collected and scored objectively by researcher based on Barron's rating criteria (2004). Subsequently, after a brief interval, the students were requested to fill Eysenck Personality Inventory (EPI) questionnaire. The instruction was clear enough and they were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement to each question with utmost attention to the description of the questionnaire. The whole time was 15 minutes; they were informed not to focus on one question for a long time. The obtained answers are scaled based on two criteria (L and E); accordingly some got discarded from study. It should be indicated that the essays of those students who were excluded from the study based on the EPI questionnaire were also removed from the following analysis. Based on the results of Eysenck Personality Inventory (EPI) questionnaire, students were divided into two groups of introverts and extravert. Then, the students' scores obtained from Eysenck Personality Inventory (EPI) questionnaire and writing exams were compared through Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient (r) to find any potential correlation.

The collected data was analyzed by means of descriptive statistics. That is, the correlation between extroversion/introversion and writing is calculated by Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient (r). The level of significance for the analysis of data was placed at 0.05.

3. Results and discussion

Students' scores of writing exam were divided into two groups based on the Eysenck Personality Inventory (EPI). One group involved the extravert's writing marks and the other group included introvert's scores. The writing performance of both groups was analyzed based on their answers to the Eysenck Personality Inventory (EPI) to evaluate any correspondence between affective factors and writing ability. As displayed in the tables 2 and 3(see appendix), the measurements of Pearson Product Moment correlation (r) regarding the relationship between extroversion/introversion and writing ability were 0.55 and -0.55 respectively. These results showed that there was no significant relationship between extroversion/ introversion and writing competency because results were not significant at .05 (the critical level of significance). As tables 1 and 2 show, significances obtained from the Pearson Product Moment correlation (.06 and .121 in terms of extroversion and introversion respectively) were more than the significance level (.05). In fact, the results revealed that extraverts did not outperform introverts in writing essays.

These results could be discussed in other ways. That is, as Brown (2007) suggests, it is misleading to take for granted that extravert students are more capable in language learning. Such false reasoning unfortunately has influenced teachers' perception of students. There are enough clues indicating that teachers favor the outgoing and talkative students who are considered extravert students and that they consider introvert students inactive and sometimes inert students. Such a biased tendency among instructors is more manifest in the skills like writing and speaking. The results of present study, however, illustrated that such a philosophy might not be accurate since being extravert or introvert could not forecast the exact level of writing proficiency. Chastain (1988) contend that extraverts are able to participate in class activity with less fear of risk-taking in contrast to their introverts. On the other hand, introverts are more conscious and attentive to their tasks than extraverts do. The findings of the study seem to be compatible with the above-mentioned statements. In addition, the results of present study echo the statistical findings in the previous empirical studies (Ehrman and Oxford, 1995; Carrell, Prince and Astika, 1996; Gan, 2011) that found negative relation between extraversion/introversion and language performance.

Further the results of the study can settle the contradictory ideologies taken by psychologists and applied linguists. According to Stern (1983), the former group hypothesizes that extraversion attributes could not be advantageous for learning under the premise that extraverts have "less cortical arousal" and "limited long term memory." Reversely, applied linguists contend that extraverts stand a better chance to fully acquire the second or foreign language on the ground that extraverts draw out "more input" and produce "more output." The results of present study concerning no specific relationship between extraversion/introversion and writing proficiency could resolve this disagreement.

In Iran language teachers, like their colleagues in other countries, admire garrulous and extravert students and treat reticent, self-restrained students as problems. This assumption is more stressed in the communicative classes where speaking and writing skills are emphasized over other skills. In Chastain's (1988) term, some students are even shy and uncertain in expressing themselves in their first language; then, attempting to communicate in the second language seems to be tremendously bulky for them. Based on the outcomes of the present study it could be claimed that reclusiveness does not hint a disability in handling language learning. It is suggested, as Razmjoo and Shaban (2008: 147) report, that teachers can include the personality facets in their decision regarding "materials selection, groupings, and task instructions." Dividing students into two groups of extraversion and introversion could facilitate the process of learning and class activity performance.

4. Conclusion

This article sets out to examine a relation of personality variables, mainly extraversion and introversion, with writing ability in EFL context. Drawing on the data collected from Eysenck Personality Inventory and the writing exam, we were able to display that the personality characteristics of extraversion and introversion did not correlate significantly with the writing proficiency. Although in the area of second language acquisition (SLA) there is a general assumption that extraverts are more competent than introverts in interpersonal communicative abilities (Lightbown and Spada, 1993; Ellis, 1994), the findings of the study disapprove this traditional claim, at least in the case of writing. Therefore, the present investigation suggests that any conclusion concerning the relation of personality characteristics and language performance should be taken with caution. Having access to a limited number of participants, the present study suggests that further study could be conducted taking into account the factors of gender and age and their roles in relationship between personality traits and academic writing ability. Further, the

present study opens a new avenue for more research on the presumed relation between personality factors and other skills or sub-skills.

References

Ashtari, F. (2002). *A study of the relationship between, extroversion/introversion and speaking in a foreign language*. Unpublished MA Thesis, Isfahan University, Iran.

Azarkhosh, M. (2000). *The application of psychological tests and clinical recognition*. Tehran: Ravan Publications Press.

Badran. A. H. (2001). *Extroversion/Introversion and gender in relation to the English pronunciation accuracy of Arabic speaking college students*. Egypt: Report-Research Press.

Barron's How to Prepare for the TOEFL Essay. (2004). [Online] Available: http://www.barronseduc.com (March 20, 2009).

Bergeland, B. (1974). Promoting adolescent career information-seeking and information- processing behaviors with group social models and structured group counseling. Northwestern University, Evanston: Final Report.

Brown, H. D. (2000*). Principles of language learning and teaching.* (4th ed). USA: Prentice-hall.

Brown, H. D. (2007). *Principls of language learning and teaching*. (3rd ed).   USA: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Carrell, P. L. (1995). The effect of writers' personalities and raters' personalities on the holistic evaluation of writing. *Assessing Writing*, 2 (21), 153-l90. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/1075-2935(95)90011-X

Carrell, P., Prince, M., & Astika, G. (1996). Personality type and language learning in an EFL context. *Language Learning*, 46, 75–99. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1996.tb00641.x

Chamorro-Premuzic, T., & Furnham, A. (2003). Personality predicts academic performance: Evidence from two longitudinal university samples. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 37, 319–338. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0092-6566(02)00578-0.

Chastain, Kenneth. (1988). *Developing second-language skills: Theory and practice.* (3rd ed). Florida: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Cook J., A., & Hurt, H. T. (1983, May). The relationships among organizational communication structures and basic communication course learning outcomes. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of International Communicate Association, Dallas.

Do¨rnyei, Z., & Kormos, J. (2000). The role of individual and social variables in oral task performance. *Language Teaching Research*, 4, 275–300.

Doughty, C. J., & Long, M. H. (Eds). (2005). *The handbook of second language acquisition*. Oxford: Blackwell publishing. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/b.9781405132817.2005.x

Ehrman, M., & Oxford, R. (1995). Cognition plus: Correlates of language learning success. *The Modern Language Journal*, 79 (1), 67–89. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1995.tb05417.x

Ellis, R. (1994). *The study of second language acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Eysenck, H. J., & Eysenck, S. B. (1968). *Manual for the Eysenck personality inventory*. Sandiego, California: Educational and Industrial Testing Service.

Gan, Z. (2011).   An investigation of personality and L2 oral performance. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 2 (6), 1259-1267. http://dx.doi.org/10.4304/jltr.2.6.1259-1267

Gordon, R. (1983, August). An investigation of the giving and receiving of interpersonal feedback within the human relations groups. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Communication Association of the Pacific America, Honolulu.

Haslam, Nick. (2007). *Introduction to personality and intelligence.* London: Sage.

Imanpour, A. (2005). *The effect of introversion/extroversion on the use of language learning strategies*. Unpublished MA Thesis, Islamic Azad University, Shiraz Branch, Iran.

Landrum, R. E., & Meliska, C. J. (1985, May). Caffeine use and extroversion. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of Midwestern Psychological Association, Chicago.

Lightbown, P., & Spada, N. (1993). *How languages are learned*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Li, J., & Chingell, M. (2010). Birds of a feather: How personality influences blog writing and reading. *Int. J. Human-Computer Studies*, 68, 589–602. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhcs.2010.04.001

Kormos, J., & Trebits, A. (2012). The role of task complexity, modality and aptitude in narrative task performance. *Language Learning*, 62 (2), 439–472. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2012.09.003

Mann, M. P. (2003, August). The relationship between higher order personality factors and students adjustment. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Psychological Association, Toronto, Canada.

Pazhuhesh, P. (1994). *The role of extroversion/introversion in EFL reading*. Unpublished MA Thesis, Tehran University, Iran.

Pulford, B. D., & Sohal, H. (2006). The influence of personality on the students' confidence in their academic abilities. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 41, 1409–1419. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2006.05.010

Razmjoo, S. A., & Shaban, M. (2008). On the relationship between introversion/extroversion and grammaticality judgment among the Iranian EFL learners. *The Iranian EFL Journal*, 2, 124-150.

Rindermann, H., & Neubauer, A. (2001). The influence of personality on three aspects of cognitive performance: Processing speed, intelligence and school performance. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 30, 829–842. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0191-8869(00)00076-3

Saemian, M. (2001). *Personality factors (introversion/extroversion) and vocabulary learning*. Unpublished MA Thesis, Islamic Azad University, Tehran Branch, Iran.

Sanchez-Marin, M., Rejano-Infante, E., & Rodriguez-Troyano, Y. (2001). Personality and academic productivity in the university student. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 29, 299–305. http://dx.doi.org/10.2224/sbp.2001.29.3.299

Slavin, R. (2003). *Educational psychology: Theory and practice*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Stern, H. H. (1983). *Fundamental concepts in language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stern, H. H. (1991). *Fundamental concepts of language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Van Daele, S., Housen, A., Pierrard, M., & Debruyn, L. (2006). The effect of extroversion on oral L2 proficiency. *EUROSLA Yearbook*, 6, 213–236. [Online] Available: http://www.UCM.es/info/circulo/no 24/ Vandadaele.htm (November 24, 2005). http://dx.doi.org/10.1075/eurosla.6.13dae

Widdowson, H. G. (1979). *Reading and thinking in English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Appendix

Table 1. Introvert versus extravert characteristics

Criteria	Extroversion	Introversion
General	Sociable	Quiet
Attitude to people	Has many friends	Doesn't make friends easily, prefers books to friends.
Attitude to study	Dislikes studying by himself	Likes studying by himself
Decision making	Makes quick decisions and takes chances	Plans things carefully in advance

Table 2. Correlation between extroversion and writing ability

Variables	Extroversion
Writing	.556
Sig.(2tailed)	.06

*significant at .05

Table 3. Correlation between introversion and writing ability

Variables	Introversion
Writing	-.555
Sig.(2tailed)	.121

*significant at .05