

The Effectiveness of Personality Traits on Learning English as a Foreign Language

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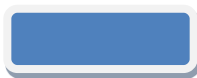
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Abstract

The research investigates the impact of personality traits on learning English as a foreign language .It can be seen that some learners acquire a foreign language more quickly and easily than others. The researchers believe that it is important to identify the effectiveness of individual differences on language learning. The research falls into three sections. In the first section, the researcher introduces a brief information about the research topic then they state the purpose and hypothesis of the research as well as its methodology. The third section explains the research method, findings and conclusion. The conclusion of research illustrates the effectiveness of those traits on learning from students' points of view.

Keywords: Personality traits, Individual differences, foreign

language learning, method, personality variables.

1. Introduction

Being lecturers of English as a foreign language for about ten years, the researcher notices that in second language learning, learners' differences will always appear .It is stated by Mitchell& Myles (2013: 288) that although people learning similar language, they differ in comprehension and understanding .Thus , some of them are more successful than others and several criteria of language are acquired easier than others for second language learners.

Personality traits can be defined as “those characteristics of a person that account for consistent patterns of feeling, thinking and behaving”. Personality is a major category of individual differences because of the

idea that any individual is often judged relying on his/her personality. Carle (1995: 414).

The researchers aim at determining whether personality traits affect learning a foreign language or not? And what are those effective traits in order to concentrate on them to promote students' learning capacity?

The researchers hypothesize that personality traits are not important in learning and teachers do not care of them in their teaching classes. The researchers make an effort to demonstrate that those traits play an obvious role in the learning process and they affect learners' comprehensive and performance ability.

2. Literature Review

Dewaele & Furnham (1999:p12), in their research entitled " Personality and Speech Production: A Pilot Study of Second Language Learners", studied the relationship between personality traits and speech production of second language learners. The researchers argued that some cognitive and physiological features associated with extraversion, as superior short-term memory and better resistance to stress, can show interindividual difference in speech production. Dewaele and Furnham also pointed out that a majority of studies concerning language and

extraversion done by linguists concentrated on the impact of extraversion on language learning.

Seyed Hossein Fazeli (2011:p8),in his thesis entitled" The Impact Of Personality Traits On The Affective Category Of English Language Learning Strategies " , discussed the impact of personality traits in the use of the Affective English Language Learning Strategies (AELLSs) for learners of English as a foreign language. The results showed that although there is a significant relationship between the traits of personality and use of the AELLSs, personality cannot be a strong predictor with high percentage of contribution to predict use of the AELLSs.

Wells and Matthews (1994:p11), in their book entitled " Attention And Emotion : A Clinical Perspective " , concluded that anxious individuals tend irrationally to lack confidence in their abilities, and would therefore adopt coping strategies, such as worry (emotion focused coping), that are likely to impair performance.

3. Methodology of the study

3.1 Participants

Sixty Iraqi students in the first and second grades, Department of English, College of Education For Women, University of Kufa during the academic year (2018-2019) are chosen to run the test. The test includes three questions and each question comprises five possible choices.

3.2 Procedure

In order to achieve the aim of the study, the following steps will be done:

1. Presenting some information on personality traits, variables of personality as well as a background on individual differences.
2. Carrying out the test and checking the testees' answers precisely.
3. Performing a statistical study of the testees answers to find out the actual weaknesses through their answers.
4. Analyzing the data and finding the percentage ratios of students' answers by using Microsoft excel 2010.

3.3 Data Collection

The data of the study were collected between September and November 2018 in Iraq, at the University of Kufa, College of Education for Women in Najaf. Some modern

learning instruments were administrated during class time and based on the availability of the participants of first and second grades (years) at three stages. The researchers, themselves, administrated all the instruments. All the subjects participated in the main study, were explained the goals of the current study by the researchers.

4. Individual Differences

One of the principal objectives in second language learning is to investigate whether the learners' personal differences have any influence on the learning process, and how some are more successful in learning a second language than others (Dörnyei, 2005: 5- 6) ; (Gass & Selinker, 2008: 395). According to Dörnyei (2005: 2), individual differences in adults are “the most consistent predictors of second language learning success ; no other phenomena investigated within second language acquisition have come even close to this level of impact”. Therefore, in a broad sense, individual differences have been first described as any personal traits that signal “a person as a distinct and unique human being” (Dörnyei, 2009: 181). It is widely held that second language acquisition involves personal and general factors with cognitive variables that include various forms of mental information processing (e.g. language aptitude,

strategy use, cognitive ability) and affective significance that involve, for example, motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence, and that learners may differ in a number of scales pertaining to their personality (e.g. extroversion, introversion, locus of control), learning styles and strategies, demographic factors (e.g. gender, age) and many other variables that may be of a great influence on second language learning achievement (Ellis, 2008:643-648 ; Breen , 2001:12-13; Lightbown & Spada , 2006 : 54 ; Dörnyei, 2009: 182; Gardner et al., 1997).

The assignment will only refer to personality factor in second language acquisition, describing the literature behind it and exploring its main traits. the personality factor will only be dealt in terms of its traits and characteristics as most literature indicated above place great importance to those traits. Some authors such as (Dörnyei, 2005:13) talks about what is called the 'Big Five' models related to personality such as openness, conscientiousness, agreeableness, etc. It is preferable to focus on the personality traits that could affect second language learning as they received more attention by the literature (Lightbown & Spada, 2006:54).

4.1 Personality

Richards and Schmidt (2002: 275) define personality as “those aspects of an individual’s behavior, attitude, beliefs, thoughts, actions and feelings which are seen as typical and distinctive of that person and recognized as such by that person and others.”This definition explains that each human being has his / her specific personality . Other definitions of personality state that personality is a stable group of tendencies and properties which determine the psychological attitude of people Berens (1999 : 70) .

Evidence has shown that second language learning success is due to two main factors: cognitive factors such as language aptitude, and affective factors such as personality, motivational, and demographic factors (Ehraman & Oxford,1995, :67). Therefore, personality attributes have a significant influence on the degree of success in second language learning since some characteristics of the student’s personality can inhibit or increase in second language learning. Personality traits can be defined as “those characteristics of a person that account for consistent patterns of feeling, thinking and behaving” (Pervin and John, 2001: 4, as cited in Dörnyei, 2005:11). They indicate constant and enduring aspects of the learners that make them distinct

from other people and form the background for their future behavior.

The term ‘Personality’ has been used interchangeably by some scholars. For instance, Dörnyei (2005: 11) indicated that some researchers used the terms ‘temperament and mood’ by which he argued that temperament and personality are two overlapping domains, where mood refers to changeable states and highly volatile feelings while personality has stable and constant traits. Furthermore, Gass and Selinker (2008:432) showed that personality research has a long tradition in psychology.

For learners, personality factor is theorized as a significant aspect of individual differences since they are usually judged depending on their personality. Many scholars (such as: Skehan, 1989: 4; Lightbown & Spada, 2006: 60; Ellis, 2008, : 672) included personality factor in their publications. Learners are distinguished by a distinct pattern of features, and more successful language acquirers select specific methods suited to their personalities (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989: 291). Moreover, Oxford (1994) argues that there are broad justifications for evaluating personality as a predictor of second language learning. However, Lightbown and

Spada (2006: 60) mentioned that some personality traits are not easy to define in empirical studies. For instance, it is said that an extroverted person is well-suited to second language learning; but some studies have also found that numerous successful language individuals do not achieve high results on measures of extroversion.

Learners with varying personality characteristics may interpret, perceive and respond to occasions in different ways, creating a difference in how they learn. Therefore, we need to consider a set of specific personality traits that characterize a language learner and how they relate to second language acquisition . These characteristics are the intrinsic aspect of affectivity within a learner that can contribute to the success of second language learning . Brown (2000: 142-154) outlined the following personality variables:

- Self-esteem
- Extroversion and introversion
- Inhibition and risk-taking
- Anxiety
- Empathy

A description and critical analysis for each one will be provided .

4.1.1 Self- esteem

Learners require certain grade of self-confidence and self-esteem to be

successful in their activities. Self-esteem is the sense of self-worth and the negative or positive evaluation of self-knowledge in our self-concept (MacIntyre et al., 1999: 216). Therefore, an individual develops his/her perception of self-esteem in response to the information (s)he derives from other people. Three types of self-esteem have been identified in the literature: global, situational, and task self-esteem (Brown, 2000:145). Brown argued that global might refer in general to second language learning, situational might denote self-appraisal in specific situations such as work, education, etc. and task self-esteem could relate to writing, speaking, and specific lessons or exercises in a second language. In the context of second language learning, students may be affected by the process of teaching, for instance, i-e, negative feedback from the teacher or their peers. People with low self-esteem may avoid situations which make them feel insecure, feeling they have nothing to contribute meaningfully and not to express their own ideas, and making them unwilling to communicate using a second language, even dropping out of the class. Conversely, high self-esteem learners are not affected by environmental cues. They feel confident that they can contribute

effectively; and that others will respect them. Consequently, this will be reflected in their desire to communicate and express their views. Ultimately, this will influence and improve their second language acquisition. (Brown 2000, 145)

4.1.2 Extroversion and Introversion

Extroversion is the extent to which a person has a deep-seated to receive ego enhancement, self - esteem, and a sense of wholeness *from other people* as opposed to receiving that affirmation within oneself (Douglas Brown , 2000: 155).

In a piece of research, Zhang (2008:58) discussed the importance of extrovert or introvert characteristics to students' success or fail in second language learning . He defined an extrovert as “a person more interested in what is happening around him than in his own thoughts and emotions. That is to say, the extrovert experiences the world more through contact with others and shared experience than through self-examination or study”, while an introvert is “a person who is more interested in his thoughts and feelings than in things outside himself, and is often shy and unwilling to speak or join in activities with others”. Through our experience in classroom teaching, extroverts are very sociable, work

well with others, and are lively participants in discussions. They often speak only to fill the silence, spending more time with others than reading books, trying to do new things and are happier with the outer world; consequently, their exposure to second language targets should be greater, facilitating second language learning. Conversely, introverts prefer time alone, have few friends, not less talkative, and prefer solitary activities. They also prefer to think and process ideas alone and feel unproductive when asked to comment and share information, limiting their exposure to second language opportunities. However, Gass and Selinker (2008: 433) claimed that the implications of both extroversion and introversion might be somewhat contradictory, as we might see an introvert does better in school. It is therefore both extroversion and introversion that can lead to success in second language learning in different ways (Thompson , Edmund R ,2008 : 542).

4.1.3 Inhibition and Risk-taking

Inhibition can negatively influence second language learning because it discourages risk-taking . It is regarded as an important aspect in language learning development (Brown, 2000: 147-149). It is found that learners with narrow boundaries

learn second language more easily, prefer openness and are tolerant of ambiguity. It is necessary for learners to make mistakes to acquire the target language. Students test out their language skills by making errors. If students stay silent until they are sure that their speech is correct, they will not learn communicative skills. It is seen that children adopt a new accent or language more quickly than adults, who are more self-conscious (Lightbown & Spada, 2006: 61). Learners should also accept that they depend on others and weaknesses may be revealed . According to Brown (2001: 166) interaction requires that learners take the risk of: failing to produce the right meaning or failing to interpret the intended speech, being laughed at or rejected. Risk-taking is a crucial interactive manner in acquiring second language in EFL classroom. Hence, students can learn a foreign language without any difficulty if they interact with their teacher or peers. Moreover, Brown (2000: 150) advocated that high risk taking will be helpful to second language learning. Our experience suggests that the teacher can play an essential role in overcoming learners' inhibition and learning blocks in that they should focus on learners' strengths rather than weaknesses.

4.1.4 Anxiety

Another element of personality that impacts second language learning is 'anxiety'. Lightbown and Spada (2006: 61) described anxiety as mind's state related to apprehension's feelings, self-doubt, stress, or nervousness. There are two types of learners' anxiety: 'trait anxiety', a general tendency of being worried and 'state anxiety' which is experienced in a specific situation (Brown, 2000: 151). Brown also recognized that test anxiety, communication apprehension and fear of negative social evaluation can impede second language acquisition process. However, It must be distinguished between facilitative and debilitating anxiety. Although anxiety can have a harmful influence (debilitative) on success of second language learning, it could also be a positive factor (facilitative), i-e, a little nervous tension may help a successful process in second language learning (Lightbown & Spada, 2006: 61- 62).

4.1.5 Empathy

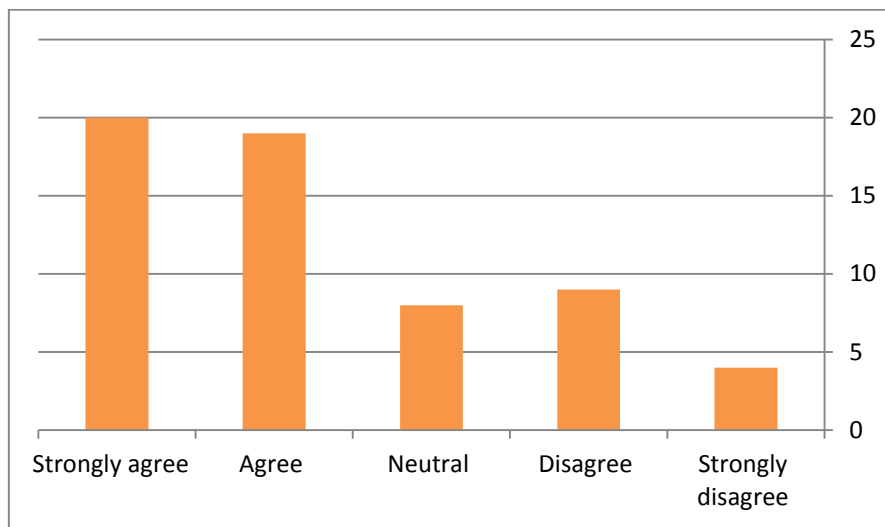
Empathy is an important variable in terms of its impact on conversational skills in second language learning.

Brown (2000: 152-154) described 'empathy' as the willingness and capacity to identify with others. He stated that the empathetic learner may be able to recognize more easily with other speakers of a second language. Thus, the learner will accept others' input as an intake for acquisition of language. Furthermore, research by Guiora (1972, as cited in Ellis, 2008: 672-673) confirmed that in terms of pronunciation, learners with high empathy would be better listeners. However, the empathy factor has been investigated only in the acquisition of conversational skills; there is no evidence in literacy or academic skills acquisition (Lightbown & Spada, 2006: 62). Moreover, there is no an adequate measure of the quality of empathy and "the ability to put oneself in someone else's shoes" (Raymond, 1982: 47).

5. Results and Discussion

After processing the data of the questionnaire statistically by using Microsoft Excel 2010 , the following notes have been observed :

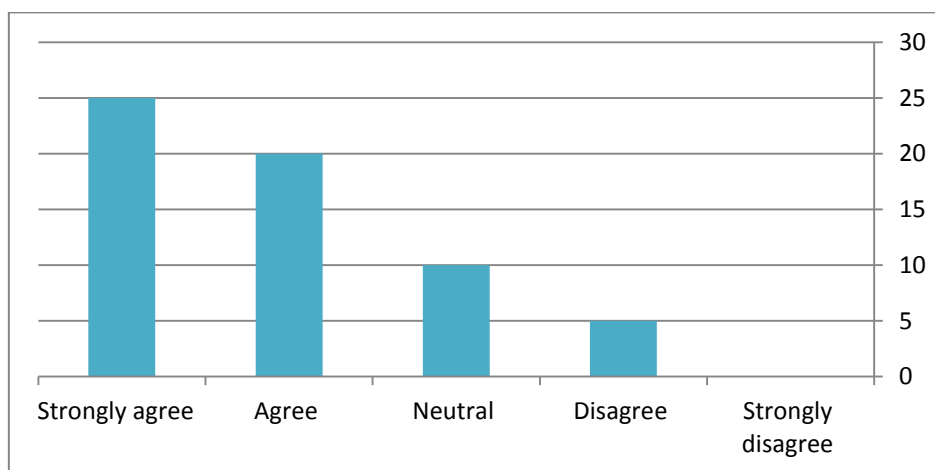
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First Figure

Twenty students strongly agreed that most teachers, of different scientific titles in the college, take into consideration the individual differences among their students in the studying classes while nineteen students only agree . Moreover ,

there were eight neutral answers as well as nine students believed that personality traits were not taken care by teachers in the studying halls . The last four ones answered by strongly disagree .



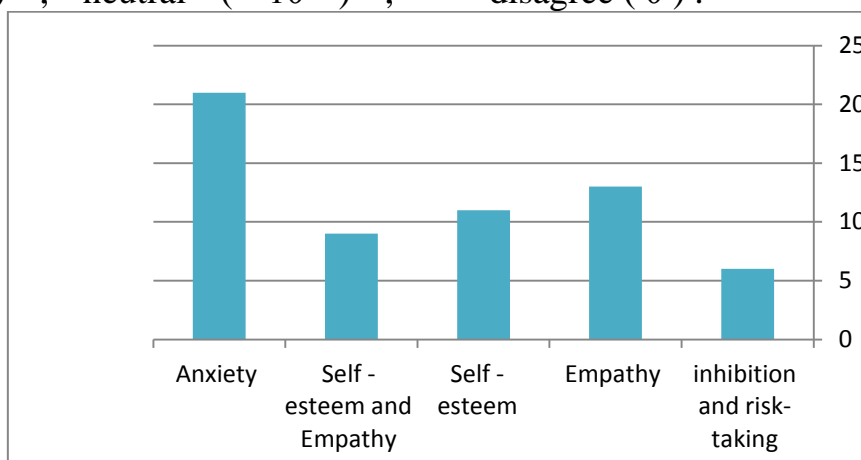
Second Figure

The figure above states that a wide number of students (almost 25) strongly agreed that personality traits

widely affecting the process of learning a foreign language . Then the rest answers were less than that ,

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respectively , between agreeing (20 students) , neutral (10) , disagreeing (5) and strongly disagree (0) .



Third Figure

The diagram above shows that twenty-one examinees believe that anxiety seriously affects their active participation in studying halls. Being shy and hesitated sometimes make you ineffective member in the class even if you are smart .Other students ,almost nine assures that self-esteem and empathy reduces their interest to interact with the teacher and even other colleagues in the classroom .This is in one hand . On the other hand , eleven examinees affirm that self-esteem alone can elevate them in the classroom and enforce their desire to communicate in the classroom.

Conclusion

In conclusion , The researchers have demonstrated that learners may vary in a number of scales pertaining to their personality characteristics and

other variables. By considering these variations, including the influence of personality, it can be understood what makes students similar to one another in second language acquisition and what makes them different too.

It is showed that second language acquisition involves personal and general factors with cognitive variables that include various forms of mental information processing (e.g. language aptitude, strategy use, cognitive ability) and affective significance that involve, for example, motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence, and that learners may differ in a number of scales pertaining to their personality (e.g. extroversion, introversion, locus of control), learning styles and strategies, demographic factors (e.g. gender, age) and many other variables that may be of a great

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influence on second language learning achievement .

Learners with varying personality characteristics may interpret, perceive and respond to occasions in different ways, creating a difference in how they learn. Thus, it is clearly seen that personality traits plays an outstanding role in individual learning differences.

Recommendations

Thus, teachers should be aware of their students' anxiety, self-esteem and should know that self-esteem may affect their feelings and emotional states besides their academic performance. Teachers can create an appropriate atmosphere inside the classroom, which underpins students' confidence.

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Appendix

My name is **Iman Hameed Faraj** and I am conducting this research " **The Effectiveness of Personality Traits on Learning English As A Foreign Language**" as an assistant lecturer of English Language, College of Education for women, University of Kufa, Najaf, Iraq.

Background Information

- 1- Name:
- 2- Stage:
- 3- City :

Questionnaire

Direction: Indicate your response in the appropriate square next to the suitable answer.

1- Teachers take those traits into consideration in the studying classes ?

- Strongly Agree.
- Agree.
- neutral.
- Strongly disagree.
- disagree.

2- Personality traits affect the process of learning a second language ?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- neutral.
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree

3- What is the most effective trait on the student's learning ability ?

You can choose more than one .

- Self – esteem .
- Extroversion and introversion
- Inhibition and risk - taking .
- Anxiety .
- Empathy .

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