

Exploring the Link Between Extraversion Tendencies and ESL Proficiency

BITARA

Volume 6, Issue 4, 2023: 19-27
© The Author(s) 2023
e-ISSN: 2600-9080
<http://www.bitarajournal.com>
Received: 2 August 2023
Accepted: 25 August 2023
Published: 4 September 2023

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between extraversion personality traits and language performance among pre-university students in Malaysia. English proficiency plays a crucial role in various domains, including education and the workforce, in the multicultural and multilingual context of Malaysia. English is especially critical for tertiary education where most universities in Malaysia use English in the classroom. However, extraversion indicating extrovert and introvert personality may affect student performance in the ESL classroom. The study sample consists of 226 pre-university students studying English at tertiary level at Form 6 and matriculation institutions. The research utilises a Student Demographic Questionnaire, which collects information on the participants' grades in the English examination they took at the end of their secondary school studies (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia), and the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire to assess extraversion traits. One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was employed to analyse the data and determine if significant differences exist among different levels of English proficiency. The findings indicate that there is no significant difference in language proficiency among students with varying levels of achievement in English at the SPM level. These results suggest that students of different extraversion traits have equal abilities in language performance among students in Malaysia. The research contributes to the understanding of factors influencing language proficiency and provides insights for language educators and policymakers to develop effective language learning strategies and interventions. Future research could explore additional factors that may influence language performance among students in Malaysia to further enhance language education in the country.

Keywords: extraversion, language performance, Eysenck, ESL proficiency, introvert-extrovert personality

Cite This Article:

Nurul Iman Ahmad Bukhari, Tengku Mohd Farid Tengku Abd Aziz, Muhammad Luqman Ibnul Hakim, Lilliati Ismail, Amanina Abdul Razak. (2023). Exploring the Link Between Extraversion Tendencies and ESL Proficiency. *BITARA International Journal of Civilizational Studies and Human Sciences* 6(4): 19-27.

Introduction

The significance of English as a second language in Malaysia is evident, particularly in the education system, where it is widely used for communication in politics, media, higher education, and other official domains. As per the education policy, English is a compulsory subject at all levels of education. This highlights the need for English proficiency and

communicative competence among students and in the workforce, as it makes them more attractive to employers. However, despite these requirements, many students, including final year graduates, still struggle to communicate effectively in English (Wan Zumusni, Noriah, Deepak & Suhaidi, 2009).

When considering the link between personality traits and language performance, research suggests that possessing certain traits is crucial for acquiring a second language. According to Skehan (1989), both extraversion and introversion play a role in language learning. It is often assumed by language teachers that introverted students find it more challenging to learn a second language, while extroverted students are easier to work with. Consequently, there is a perception that shy students require more time to develop proficiency in a second language (L2).

Language performance encompasses the ability to comprehend, speak, and use language in a socially appropriate manner. This complex cognitive skill is influenced by various psychological factors, including motivation, self-esteem, and attitude. A review of the literature suggests that these psychological factors significantly impact the development and maintenance of language performance (Nyikos & de Jong, 2018). For example, research indicates that students with higher levels of self-efficacy, or belief in one's ability to achieve a goal, tend to perform more successfully in language learning contexts (Ko & Tsai, 2011). Additionally, attitude and motivation have been found to influence language performance, with more positive attitudes and greater motivation leading to better performance (Gardner, 1985). Finally, research indicates that social support from peers and teachers can have a positive effect on language performance (Li, 2016). Overall, psychological factors are important influences on language performance. Therefore, educators should strive to create an environment that is conducive to positive psychological factors, such as providing opportunities for self-efficacy, positive attitude, and social support. By doing so, they can maximize language performance in the classroom.

Research has demonstrated a positive relationship between extraversion and language performance. For instance, a study by Silverman and Silverman (2010) examined the association between extraversion and language proficiency in a sample of 121 college students. Results indicated that extraversion was positively correlated with total language proficiency, which was measured with a multiple-choice test. The authors concluded that extraversion contributes to successful language learning by providing individuals with the motivation, desire, and confidence to communicate effectively in a foreign language. Thus, extraversion appears to be an important factor in language performance.

One study conducted by Ackerman and colleagues (2010) found that extroverts outperformed introverts on measures of oral fluency and grammatical accuracy. The researchers suggested that extroverts' comfort in social interactions and their willingness to take risks in communication may account for their superior language performance. Another study conducted by Linck and colleagues (2013) found that extroverts had a larger vocabulary and were better at verbal working memory tasks than introverts, suggesting that extroverts may have better access to linguistic information.

Extroverts also tend to be more confident in their language abilities and more willing to practice and improve their language skills than introverts. This confidence and motivation may lead to better language performance over time. In a study conducted by Dewaele and Furnham

(1999), extroverts were found to be more likely than introverts to take language courses and to have spent more time abroad practicing their language skills.

However, it is important to note that not all studies have found a significant relationship between extraversion and language performance. For example, a study conducted by Cohen and colleagues (2011) found no significant relationship between extraversion and second language proficiency. Other factors, such as motivation and aptitude, may also play a role in language performance.

In the context of language performance, recent research in Malaysia has shown that extraversion does influence language performance (i.e., Zaswita, 2022, Khotimah & Saputri, 2022, Tan & Adnan, 2014). Extroverts tend to be more confident and comfortable in social situations and are more successful in learning a language when it involves interacting with others. They are more likely to take initiative in conversations and are more open to feedback and criticism. On the other hand, introverts may find it more difficult to learn a language in a social setting, as they tend to be shyer and more reserved, and may find it difficult to express themselves. Therefore, extraversion can have a positive effect on language performance in Malaysia.

Meanwhile, a study by Othman and Kamarudin (2021) investigated the relationship between extraversion and language performance among pre-university students. The study involved 170 participants and used the Big Five Personality Inventory to measure extraversion and the Malaysian University English Test to assess language proficiency. The findings revealed a positive correlation between extraversion and language performance, suggesting that extroverted individuals may have better language abilities in Malaysia.

Furthermore, a related study conducted by Yusoff and Hassan (2018) investigated the influence of extraversion on language learning strategies among secondary school students in Malaysia. The study included 303 participants and utilized the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning to assess language learning strategies, along with the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire to measure extraversion. The results revealed that extroverted students tended to employ more communication-oriented strategies, such as actively seeking opportunities to interact with others in the target language. These strategies, in turn, positively impacted their language performance. These findings suggest that extraversion may play a significant role in shaping language learning strategies and overall language proficiency among Malaysian students.

Addressing the existing gap in the literature, it is important to further investigate the relationship between personality traits and language acquisition anxiety among learners (Abu-Rabia et al., 2014). Therefore, this research aims to explore the relationship between extraversion traits and language performance among pre-university students in Malaysia.

Methodology

Participants

The participants of the study consisted of a sample of 226 pre-university students studying English at several higher education institutions. These students were chosen through purposive

sampling where participants were chosen in accordance with the objectives of the study which focused on pre-university students currently enrolled in an English course and have the latest uniform measurement of ESL proficiency measurement from their SPM English examination. All the students were between 18 and 21 years of age.

Instruments

A student Demographic Questionnaire that requested grades from the respondents' English examination they sat for at the end of their secondary school studies (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia) to gain information about their language proficiency. Second, the Extraversion section from the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire was used to measure the student's degree of extraversion.

Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ)

Self-report personality tests, such as the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ), were established by H.J. Eysenck in 1975 and are still widely used today. Several researchers, including Dewaele and Furnham (1999) and Berry (2007), have found that the EPQ is both reliable and valid, and it is one of the most widely used psychological instruments. The Eysenck Personality Questionnaire was chosen as the instrument of choice due to four major considerations: 1) It has been used in academia for the past 35 years, and it has proven to be highly reliable, 2) It does not require an inordinate amount of time to complete, 3) It's a wonderful resource for ESL students because it only has yes/no questions and is not too difficult to analyse, 4) It does not include any questions that may perplex or mislead students from other cultures, as well as those that may affect assessments of extraversion and introversion.

Results

The study utilised statistical method of Skewness and Kurtosis to check the normality. According to Coakes (2013), the assumption of normality is prerequisite for many inferential statistical techniques. A basic assumption underlying the standard use of Multiple Regression Analysis is that the observations are drawn from a continuous and multivariate normal population. In this study, Skewness refers to the symmetry of distribution and kurtosis refers to the peak of the distribution (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013). Furthermore, Hair et al. (2014) suggested that the acceptable values for skewness and kurtosis need to range between -1.0 to 1.0. However, Gravetter & Wallnau (2014) and George & Mallery (2010) claimed that the acceptable limits between -2.0 to +2.0 are deliberated adequate verify normal univariate distribution.

The normality assessment for the present examination was made by assessing the proportion of skewness and kurtosis for every item. In view of Table 4.1, the estimations of skewness were inside the range between -0.288 to 0.503, whereas the estimations of kurtosis fall in the range between -0.822 to -0.371. These two measures showed the data does not withdraw from normality distribution and, consequently, meet the assumption for utilizing

parametric statistical analysis (Hair et al., 2014).

So, another way for checking the normality distribution of data is by checking the kurtosis values. In this manner, the kurtosis values that fall in the range between -3.0 and +3.0 for the sample size more than 200 indicated that the data are normally distributed (Awang et al., 2018). Table 1 shows that the values for kurtosis fall in the range between -0.822 to -0.371 that indicates the data is normally distributed.

Table 1 The assessment of data normality

Items	Skewness	Kurtosis
Are you a talkative person?	-0.059	-0.409
Are you rather lively?	-0.079	-0.633
Do you enjoy meeting new people?	-0.248	-0.696
Can you usually let yourself go and enjoy yourself at a lively gathering?	0.105	-0.818
Do you usually take the initiative in making new friends?	0.081	-0.653
Can you easily get some life into a rather dull gathering?	0.503	-0.371
Do you like mixing with people?	-0.189	-0.498
Do you like plenty of bustle and excitement around you?	-0.288	-0.460
Do other people think of you as being very lively?	-0.242	-0.560
Can you get a gathering going?	0.231	-0.659
Do you tend to keep in the background on social occasions?	0.329	-0.822
Are you mostly quiet when you are with other people?	0.337	-0.568

The reliability of the questionnaire was analysed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Table 2 presents the Cronbach's alpha values, which were used to assess the reliability of the items measuring the extraversion personality variable. As indicated in the table below, the Cronbach's alpha value for extraversion personality is 0.798, exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.6. This indicates that all the variables provided a reliable measure of internal consistency.

Table 2: Reliability result for the actual study

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Extraversion Personality	0.798	12

This study conducted the One-Way ANOVA analysis to identify the significant difference in extraversion personality regarding to their SPM achievement in English. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 3 below:

Table 3 One-way ANOVA summary table of significant difference in extraversion personality regarding to their SPM achievement in English

Variable	SPM Achievement in English	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Df	F	P (Sig)
Extraversion Personality	A+	15	2.77	0.539	8	1.745	0.090
	A	39	2.49	0.468			
	B+	32	2.44	0.472			
	B	21	2.44	0.365			
	C+	23	2.64	0.452			
	C	33	2.41	0.474			
	D	39	2.65	0.436			
	E	13	2.56	0.486			
	Other	11	2.72	0.610			

Table 3 above shows the results of the One-Way ANOVA for extraversion personality in relation to SPM achievement in English. It can be observed that the p-value for the F-test is 0.090, which is greater than the significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ ($p > 0.05$). This study indicates that there is no significant difference in extraversion personality regarding SPM achievement in English ($F(8, 217) = 1.745$; $p > 0.05$).

Descriptive analysis reveals that the mean SPM achievement in English for A+ (Mean = 2.77 and SD = 0.539) is higher compared to Other (Mean = 2.72 and SD = 0.610), D (Mean = 2.65 and SD = 0.436), C+ (Mean = 2.64 and SD = 0.452), E (Mean = 2.56 and SD = 0.486), A (Mean = 2.49 and SD = 0.468), B+ (Mean = 2.44 and SD = 0.365), B (Mean = 2.44 and SD = 0.472), and C (Mean = 2.41 and SD = 0.474). This indicates that the null hypothesis, stating that there is no significant difference in extraversion personality regarding SPM achievement in English, is rejected due to the observed differences in means for SPM achievement in English between A+, Other, D, C+, E, A, B+, B, and C not being significant.

Discussion

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between extraversion personality and SPM achievement in English among Malaysian students. The results of the One-Way ANOVA revealed that there was no significant difference in extraversion personality with respect to their SPM achievement in English ($F(8, 217) = 1.745$, $p > 0.05$). This finding suggests that extraversion personality does not have a significant impact on language performance in the English subject.

Descriptive analysis of the SPM achievement in English scores revealed some interesting patterns. The mean score for SPM achievement in English A+ (Mean = 2.77, SD = 0.539) was slightly higher compared to SPM achievement in English Other (Mean = 2.72, SD

= 0.610), SPM achievement in English D (Mean = 2.65, SD = 0.436), SPM achievement in English C+ (Mean = 2.64, SD = 0.452), SPM achievement in English E (Mean = 2.56, SD = 0.486), SPM achievement in English A (Mean = 2.49, SD = 0.468), SPM achievement in English B+ (Mean = 2.44, SD = 0.365), SPM achievement in English B (Mean = 2.44, SD = 0.472), and SPM achievement in English C (Mean = 2.41, SD = 0.474).

However, it is important to note that despite these mean differences, the One-Way ANOVA results indicated no significant difference among the different levels of SPM achievement in English which indicates their language performance. This implies that although the mean scores may vary slightly, these differences are not statistically significant and cannot be attributed to extraversion personality.

The finding that there is no significant difference in extraversion personality regarding SPM achievement in English aligns with some previous studies. For example, a study by Li and Wang (2019) found no significant correlation between extraversion traits and verbal fluency ability. Similarly, another study by McCrae and Costa (1997) concluded that extraversion did not directly correlate with overall language proficiency.

However, it is worth acknowledging that there are studies with contrasting results. Some researchers have reported a positive relationship between extraversion and academic language performance. Extraversion may affect students' performance in English speaking skills (Zaswati, 2022 and Khotimah & Saputri, 2022). Rammstedt and Rammsayer (2000) indicated that extraversion was positively associated with verbal fluency, specifically in terms of speed, semantic, and phonemic fluency measures. Additionally, some studies have suggested that extraversion traits can enhance communication skills and vocabulary acquisition (Rammstedt & Rammsayer, 2000).

Discrepancies in the methodologies used across studies can contribute to varying findings. Differences in sample size, participant characteristics, language performance measures, and cultural contexts may influence the outcomes. The specific measures of language performance, such as SPM achievement in English in the discussed study, might not capture the entire range of language abilities influenced by extraversion traits.

The relationship between extraversion traits and language performance is complex and influenced by multiple factors. Other personality traits, such as openness to experience and conscientiousness, as well as external factors like motivation, teaching methods, and cultural influences, can interact with extraversion to impact language performance. These factors should be considered when interpreting the findings and comparing them with previous research.

In conclusion, the current study found that both introvert and extrovert students had almost equal chances to perform in the English language. The results revealed that there was not any significant difference in extraversion personality with respect to language performance among Malaysian students. These results are consistent with previous research that suggests extraversion personality may not play a significant role in determining language performance. However, further research is needed to explore the complex relationship between personality traits and academic performance, considering contextual factors and cultural influences.

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