

The Interaction of Extroversion and Oral and Written Proficiency/ Achievement in English of First year AAU Students

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Abstract: This study investigated the relationship between students' tendency towards extroversion and oral and written proficiency/ achievement scores of first year students at Addis Ababa University. It was hypothesized that there would be a significant relationship between subjects' tendency towards extroversion and oral and written proficiency/ achievement scores. In order to test the hypothesis, randomly selected students from thirteen departments of the College of Education (four from Science and nine from social Sciences and Language Education) completed the personality questionnaire (EPI). Each student who completed the questionnaire was given oral and written proficiency tests. Then, the same subjects' oral and achievement test scores were collected from individual instructors for comparison.

The findings showed that some of the correlation values such as those between extroversion and oral proficiency, extroversion and total proficiency, extroversion and income status of the subjects' family, extroversion and FL anxiety are negatively significant.

Background of the Study

Many teachers and language researchers claim that outgoing, sociable and empathic learners have the ability to communicate and express themselves well using a foreign language. They say that such learners who show the above characteristics have a strong desire and motive to communicate using the target language. Thus, teachers and researchers assume that extroverts are better language learners, especially in oral skills, than the reserved, silent and analytic ones (introverts).

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In Ethiopia and many other countries where English is treated as a foreign language, people with outgoing personality may be considered as better language learners for the reason that outgoing people have the ability of creating opportunities to practice the foreign language (Bedilu, 1996; Busch, 1982). These opportunities may be created both inside and outside the classroom. In addition to this, outgoing people may create the opportunity to conversationally engage foreigners and reap the developmental opportunity in EFL.

Contrary to this, other teachers and researchers argue that the assumption that extroverts are better language learners is just a common belief based on the bias towards those learners who show up and take initiatives to appear to be better performers. This bias, as Brown (1991) states, is what the western world appreciates and encourages. Alongside the appreciation of the outgoing and the sociable ones, the silent and reserved ones are considered and treated as persons with problems. As a result, many teachers may attempt to force the silent ones to act against their desire and interest to satisfy the norm of a specific environment and outlook.

What is more, some other researchers also claim that the reason for differences among individuals may be differences, not only of personality, but also of sex, age, family background and socio-cultural situations. Accordingly, some research findings of the earlier times by Eysenck (1967), Entwistle and Entwistle (1970), Tilahun (1998), and others indicate that young school children with tendencies towards extroversion have been found to be better language learners than their introvert counterparts. However, in the comparison of older school children's performances, those with tendencies towards introversion have been found better in their language achievement than their extrovert counterparts. The cause of such changes from positive to negative for extroverts and from negative to positive for introverts as age increases is believed to be that introverts are late developers.

In a study conducted on Japanese students to investigate whether introversion-extroversion has a relationship with oral skills, it was found that extroversion has a negative relationship with pronunciation with senior college level students, whereas the relationship was found to be positive with junior college level students. In other

words, college students, at different levels, showed a difference on their oral skill tests. Thus, college beginners who are outgoing and sociable, when compared with the reserved and silent ones, perform better in their oral skills, while the seniors of the same personality type perform less than the silent and reserved ones (Busch,1982).

It is important to take seriously that individuals show differences in their classroom performances. Thus, even if outgoing and sociable (extrovert) students may appear to be better performers in oral language skills, it is also important to consider the issue in relation to other factors that attribute to the implementations of the teaching-learning activities. In spite of the fact that the debate about which individuals (introverts or extroverts) perform well is continuing, very few studies have tried to investigate the issue. The reason that few researchers took the issue seriously may again reveal the problem behind the debate itself. In fact, one serious problem can be the context in which the language is being taught or learnt; in other words, whether the language is a foreign or a second language complicates the situation.

Unlike the outgoing people, reserved individuals (introverts) may show gradual development of proficiency and achievement in a foreign language when compared with the outgoing (extrovert) people (See Busch, 1982; Brown, 1991; Bedilu, 1996; Tilahun, 1998). In some cases, as some findings show, differences in personalities result in differences in language proficiency skills.

These findings still invite many researchers, including the current one, to further investigate the issue from different directions. For instance, there is a need to look into individual differences in responding to task and test difficulty levels (proficiency and achievement), which may be either above or below the optimal level. In this case, introverts are expected to perform well when the task difficulty level is optimal or below.

Furthermore, introverts are well known in their behaviour of developing 'CAD' (Conditioned Avoidance Drive) after failing in their performances. As most researchers seem to agree, failure or non-receipt of reward for introverts is compared to punishment, which seriously affects them to the extent that they may not make

any effort to change in their future endeavours. It may be this kind of difference between students' ways of responding to tasks or quizzes that may lead them to a disastrous failure (Eysenck, 1967).

The implementation of the communicative approach in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) settings itself faces many challenges. First of all, it is evident from the setting itself that students have little daily exposure to the language outside the classroom.

Although there are many challenges that teachers and students face in implementing the communicative approach in EFL contexts, the rationale in pursuing the CLT approach is very strong. This is particularly true in light of the emphasis given to the learner-centred approach in teaching/learning in general. In fact, the aim of learning English in foreign language contexts is to be able to use the language for higher educational goals or career advancement.

In EFL settings, most students clearly lack frequent exposure to the language, especially outside the classroom. Thus, the majority of the students are highly dependent upon what they get from the communicative practice in the classroom.

It is these and other reasons that encourage proponents of the CLT approach to recommend the implementation of the CLT approach in order to build up students' confidence in using English. The CLT approach, with its features of low profile of teacher's role, frequent pair and group work, etc., emphasizes student centred activities. Accordingly, the activities are designed in such a way that students are encouraged to solve problems; respond to authentic samples of English, and actively take part in discussions. Also, the four basic skills, namely speaking, listening, reading and writing are presented in an integrated manner. As a result of this, teachers are discouraged to make students engage in extensive drills, to give them quizzes that force them to memorise materials, and to give them extended comments on forms of English (Claridge, 1967).

Objectives of the Study

In an English as a Foreign Language context, which is the case here in Ethiopia, it would seem that overenthusiastic students should attain a higher proficiency in English, especially in oral English. This is because they are expected to take advantage of the few opportunities they get to receive input in English and practice the language both inside and outside the classroom. They can have contacts with foreigners, as a result of which they may have the chance to speak in the target language. Similarly, the introverts, since they prefer writing to talking, may be higher scorers in skills that need comprehending ability, analysis and careful observation in the target language. Based on these and other assumptions, this research aims at investigating whether first year students of different fields of studies at government and private colleges or universities in Addis Ababa with tendencies towards extroversion, defined as high sociability and impulsivity, tend to score higher in the EFL oral and written tests as measured by proficiency and achievement tests in the productive skills mentioned above. Similarly, the study aims at finding out whether the students, at the same levels and institutions as indicated above, with tendencies towards introversion and neuroticism, defined as low sociability and impulsivity, tend to have higher scores on their total English proficiency and achievement results.

Many of the findings on the interaction of personality factors and language learning show different results and conclusions. Because of this, reliable conclusions are not found. Thus, many researchers suggest/recommend further research to be undertaken. They also claim that only very few studies have been undertaken worldwide. The majority of these even few studies are concentrated only on European languages that are learned by other European language users (Busch, 1982).

The current researcher has tried to investigate the differences and similarities between introverts' and extroverts' language performances considering the productive skills. The findings show agreement as well as disagreements with some previous research.

The research first identified subjects by sex, age and interest of field of study. Then, their language proficiency and achievement, both oral and written, was measured to find out which group will show a difference in one or two of the major productive skills. This, the researcher believes, enables language teachers, researchers, material designers, curriculum planners, etc., at the lower and higher levels of teaching-learning activities to look into the process of teaching English as a foreign language and review the whole process from the point of view of psycholinguistics as applied to those of language teaching theories, principles and practices.

Based on these and other facts, this study tries to find answers to the following research questions in broad terms:

1. Is there any interaction between personality factors (introversion-extroversion) and language learning?

H⁰: There will be no interaction between personality factors (extroversion-introversion) and oral/written English language proficiency/achievement on the one hand, and between personality factors (introversion-extroversion) and age, sex, income, where the individual comes from, field of interest, and FL anxiety level, on the other. ($r=0$) at $P<.05$ level, one-tailed (directional) decision.

H₁: There is positive interaction between personality types (extroversion-introversion) and oral/written English language proficiency and achievement ($r>0$ at $P<.05$) level, one tailed (directional) decision.

2. Are there other factors, such as: age, sex, field of interest, income, FL anxiety level which may interact with personality types and oral and written English language proficiency and achievement on the part of students at higher learning levels?

Subjects, instruments and data collection procedures

The subjects of the study are 193 first year students from thirteen departments of Addis Ababa University. The researcher tried to study the effects of extroversion, as a single personality factor, on the areas of productive skills (students' oral and written proficiency and achievement) of the subjects.

The researcher has employed the Revised Eysenck Personality Inventory, which has about 46 items (see *similar minds.com*) and each item has been presented in the form of a statement. Moreover, as these items have five choices, there is a belief on the part of the researcher that the respondents would have better alternatives than the "yes" or "no" response items in deciding on their answers.

Regarding the investigation of students' oral and/or written proficiency and achievement skills, the researcher has given oral tests to the target students and recorded their speeches while they were making a debate on a given topic (*Technology has a positive / negative effect on the environment of a country*) to test their oral proficiency. A written proficiency test was also given in the same way as the oral test was administered. The target students were required to write a paragraph on a given topic (*The future environmental situation of my village*). The oral proficiency test, which was recorded on a tape cassette, was evaluated by an assistant evaluator and the researcher himself. The written proficiency test was evaluated by the researcher himself based on criteria taking account of content, organization and language use.

For the oral and written achievement test results the researcher consulted target students' instructors and collected the results from them. The collected achievement test results of both oral and written skills included the results of 193 first year students from thirteen departments. Here, it is important to mark that it was a challenge to elicit honest responses from all participants the researcher contacted. Thus, the number of participants mentioned above refers only to those with acceptable responses.

However, to bring a balance in the number of participants from different colleges, the researcher consulted Addis Ababa University evening students who are involved in other private colleges for other courses which they take during the day time. The number of these students was about 200. However, only 80 students' responses were found acceptable. Thus, these students' responses are treated separately in order to avoid unexpected mismatch (in age, income, where they come from, etc.) between them and the regular respondents. The total number of participants was about 300. Out of this, only 193 students responded appropriately. Although equal chances were given to both sexes, the number of male and female participants was not equal. Thus, about 25 male and female students from each department were taken based on random selection using their ID numbers. The students were expected to take first year English courses at least for a semester. The reason for focusing on first year English courses is that all such courses are designed to enable first year students of various fields of study to build their oral and written skills so that they may be able to perform well in their specific fields of study. The researcher has tried to give both female and male subjects equal opportunities to participate on the study.

Table 1: The number of participants, by campus

Subjects	College of Science Education	College of Social Sciences & Language Education	Total
Number of Participants	57	136	193

Table 2: Distribution of participants in the two campuses, by sex

Sex	College Of Science Education		College Of Social Sciences & Language Education		Combined	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Male	44	77.2	66	48.5	110	57.0
Female	13	22.8	70	51.5	83	43.0
Combined	57	100.0	136	100.	193	100.0
Overall Percentage		29.53		70.47		100.0

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of subjects' average scores for all variables, by sex

Variable	Extroversion			
	a) Males		b) Females	
	X	SD	X	SD
EPI	56.4	11.4	56.0	10.7
Oral Proficiency	6.52	2.03	6.00	1.72
Oral Achievement	8.06	0.59	8.06	0.57
Written Proficiency	7.90	0.78	7.83	1.09
Written Achievement	7.90	0.54	7.66	0.71

Findings

The results of this study showed significant average score differences between extroversion and introversion as a whole for both sexes. In addition to this, average score differences have been observed between the subjects' oral and written proficiency, as well as their total proficiency averages. The same is true as far as achievement scores are concerned. The subjects' oral achievement averages are not the same with their written and total achievement scores. Moreover, the differences are so significant that the null hypothesis has been rejected in both cases.

A preliminary overview of the data shows that subjects with a tendency to extroversion (both for males and females) have higher averages than those with tendencies to introversion for their EPI.

The comparison of average scores for males and females shows that male subjects with a tendency to extroversion have higher figures on their EPI, while female subjects with a tendency to only introversion have higher averages than those of males on their EPI.

The comparison of the averages of the subjects' oral and written proficiency scores by sex reveals that male subjects with a tendency to extroversion have scored better than female subjects. It has also been observed that the differences are not only between the two sexes. The differences in English proficiency averages are also observed between subjects of the same sex. In this regard, male subjects with a tendency to extroversion scored higher in the written proficiency than in the oral proficiency. The same kind of score difference has also been observed on the part of female subjects; they showed higher proficiency in writing than in speaking.

With regard to average age differences, the results have shown that there is no significant age difference between subjects. Therefore, the effect of age on the subjects' personality or proficiency and achievement scores is considered as insignificant.

The average score comparison based on sex has shown significant t observed value for the subjects' total proficiency, written achievement, and total achievement scores only.

The other major difference has been observed in the comparison of age averages. Both male and female subjects in the College of Social Sciences and Language Education have been found to be older than those in the College of Science Education.

The results of the correlation coefficient analyses for the relationship between extroversion-introversion and oral and written proficiency and achievement scores have shown very few significant r observed values. The subjects' tendency towards extroversion has shown significant correlation coefficient value with oral proficiency, total proficiency, income status of subjects' family, and FL anxiety levels.

Because the correlation coefficient values, which are significant in this study, are found to be negative, it has been interpreted that the higher a subject's score on EPI, the lower his/her score on a given English language score or vice versa. These

findings agree also with the findings of Busch (1982) and Entwistle and Entwistle (1970)

Thus, the answer to the research question, 'Is there a significant systematic relationship between the extroversion-introversion tendencies of first year students at Addis Ababa University, on the one hand, and between oral and written English proficiency and achievement scores of subjects, on the other?', is yes only for a few of the findings. For the majority of the findings the answer is 'no'.

Conclusions

On the basis of the results obtained in this study, the researcher has reached the following conclusions:

1. There is a statistically significant correlation between the subjects' tendency towards extroversion and oral proficiency. However, the relationship is negative. This means that subjects with lower extroversion (higher tendency towards introversion) are better in their oral proficiency than those with higher extroversion.

With regard to the relationship between a tendency towards extroversion and oral and written achievement, it has been observed that, except with income status of subjects' family and foreign language anxiety, the relationships are not statistically significant at $P < 0.05$ level of significance.

2. The existence and absence of significant and insignificant correlation between different variables could be explained in relation to different factors other than age and sex differences. Factors such as culture and family background, classroom or environmental situations and foreign language contexts can be taken as reasons for the insignificant correlation between the different variables

Recommendations

Finally, on the basis of the findings described and discussed and the conclusions made, the following recommendations are given:

1. Students with a tendency towards extroversion seem to be superior over their partners with a tendency towards introversion (both males and females) in achieving higher scores in oral and written English proficiency and achievement tests. However, as findings revealed such type of students may have the problem of producing a better work in productive language skills such as writing and speaking. Therefore, classroom teachers, parents or the family and the community at large should help all students equally in creating the desire in them to communicate in English. At the same time, evaluating students only in one language skill and generalizing that for the other skills could be misleading. Thus, a continuous assessment of students for all skills should be taken in to consideration.
2. Students with a tendency to extroversion are believed to be favored by their teachers as well as recruiting organizations. This, according to some researchers and teachers, is because of their sociable and outgoing characteristics. As a result, they can create more opportunities to practice the language in question, obtain input and become successful in communicating. On the contrary, students with a tendency to introversion may not have any desire to create such opportunities like those with a tendency to extroversion. Moreover, the culture here in Ethiopia is largely inhibitive to children and young boys and girls towards being outgoing in their personality. The family, parents and the community, as a result, pressurize children and the young, especially girls, to withdraw from talking in public and in front of strangers and this is considered as a way of showing respect to others. Therefore, instead of treating such tendencies towards shyness and silence as signs of weaknesses, classroom teachers, parents, concerned people and the community at large should find ways of removing such obstacles and promote widespread interaction.
3. Extroversion and introversion should be studied along with other factors such as socio-cultural and environmental ones.

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