

Personality Traits of ESL Learners at Private Higher Learning Institute in Johor Bahru

Latipah Nordin¹, Noor Zainab Abdul Razak², Wan Nor Hana Wan Ismail¹

¹Student Development Section, Universiti Kuala Lumpur-Malaysian Institute of Industrial Logistics (UniKL MITEC), Persiaran Sinaran Ilmu, Bandar Seri Alam, Johor Bahru, Johor, Malaysia

²Language Academy, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Skudai, Johor, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Each individual colours the teaching and learning process because each one is unique. Each one is different in personality, nevertheless, not everyone realises that their personality determine the way they approach learning such as learning English. Teachers should also know personality traits of learners as that will assist them to design activities which enable maximum acquisition of language. Thus, this study looks into the personality traits of undergraduates who are at the final semester of their foundation program. Another objective is to identify relationship between personality traits and other variables such as gender and other respondents' background. The instrument employed for this study was questionnaire of Big Five Inventory (BFI) with bi-lingual provided as to assist the respondents in answering the questionnaire. The data obtained was analysed statistically focusing more on descriptive statistics as that explained more about the students or the respondents. Nevertheless, this study checked on the correlation between race and gender over personality traits. It is hoped that the finding can be utilised by both parties, teachers and learners so that they can improve teaching and learning process with the aim to improve learners' language performance.

KEYWORDS: Personality Traits, Working Adults, Long Distance Program, Big Five Inventory, Five Factor Model.

INTRODUCTION

Each individual is unique and differs in personality. These differences create learning environment which is important for teaching and learning. For quite some times, studies on second language learning have shifted the focus more towards learners rather than other elements [15]. In addition, in [13-14] have identified that one of the factors which influence learning outcome is individual differences. In [1, 15] also encouraged and highlighted that teachers should know more about learners personality as the information gives suitable answer or guidance on the kind of activities for teaching and learning to take place in the classroom. It is also an important factor in development of language abilities in each learner [7]. Furthermore, personality trait influences how learner thinks and behaves, and in other words, personality trait has significant relationship with learning outcomes [36-37].

In this study the respondents were undergraduates who were in their final semester of foundation program at UNITAR Johor Bahru. They were students fresh from schools and they are still trying to adapt learning environment at the university. Learning at university is different than school as the students are expected to be independent learners and proactive in seeking of knowledge. Hence, it is important for teachers to know as that determines suitable language learning activities to be used in the classroom. As highlighted by [16], teachers need to know the students characteristics as that show their future.

In details this study intends to look into the personality traits of foundation students who are still adapting to university life. In addition, the researchers also look into the correlation between gender and other variables of demographic over personality traits.

LITERATURE REVIEW

First of all, in terms of definition, in [10] define personality traits as stable individual differences in characteristics inclusive of behaviour, thinking and feeling. Later, in [31] highlighted that personality is exclusive to each individual that differentiates one from the other in terms of thoughts, feelings and actions. Another, comprehensible definition of personality is personality is a stable set of characteristics and tendencies that determine those common abilities and differences in the psychological behavior (thoughts, feelings and actions) of people that have continuity in time and that may not be easily understood as the sole result of the social and biological pressures of the moment [33]. Based on definitions from [31-33] concluded that

personality is “a dynamic and organized set of characteristics possessed by every person that distinctively and uniquely influences his or her behaviors, motivations, and cognitions in various situations”.

Among the established theory is Big Five Factor Model which consists of five domains of personality namely Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. Individual with dominant of conscientiousness have certain features such as dependable, responsible, able to plan, organise and keep on the spirit of achievement. As for neuroticism, the features are towards negative elements rather than positive [38] and some of the features are poor critical thinking skills, surface learning approach [39]. Individual with Openness personality trait tends to be open-minded, to have active imagination, prefers variety and independent judgement. Extraversion personality portrays characteristics such as sociable and assertive, excitement seeking, positive emotions while Agreeableness consists of attributes like sympathetic, helpful [17], straightforwardness and trust of others [23]. The Big Five Model is usually measured via NEO Personality Inventory-Revised (NEO-PI-R) or NEO Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI) [35]. Both instruments have been translated to other languages such as Russian [25] and Chinese [24]. However, both instruments are not available for any access which means researchers will be charged in order to use the questionnaire. Anyhow, NEO-FFI consists of 60 items with 12-items for each domain and five options of scale for each item, 12 for the factors of Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Openness to Experience. It has been used widely in measuring personality traits and with good internal and external validity [35].

Due to accessibility, this study employed to another instrument which is available at public domain and it is called Big Five Inventory (BFI) which consists of 44-items with 5 Likert-Scale. Another questionnaire for personality traits is the Myer-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) which consists of 126 forced-choice items and it measures introversion-extroversion, sensing-intuiting, thinking-feeling and judging-perceiving [30].

In [2-3] have identified the factors which contribute to success language learning and they are cognitive factors, affective, motivational, personality and learner's demographic factors. Among all the factors, personality trait is the most influential factor among others [3]. In addition, in [12] mentioned that personality traits influence learning behaviour and it is also been agreed that personality assists in accomplishing certain objectives [4]. This shows that personality is vital to look into as it affects how learner learns and performance.

A study with the respondents of undergraduate students in Philippines was conducted looking into their personality traits and other variables [15]. The study employed Manchester Personality Questionnaire Version 14 (MPQ) to assess learners' personality. The respondents involved in the study were college students from 1st year until the 4th year and they were 230 of them. The finding shows that communicativeness and independence are the highest type of personality traits among the learners which the 1st year and 4th year students mostly were independence, while 2nd and 3rd year students were communicativeness of personality traits. In [40] highlighted that each individual has more than one personality traits yet there is one which is the most dominant personality. In another study in Iran which involved 213 female undergraduates who were in their 3rd year majoring in English found that the respondents have the personality trait of conscientiousness as the highest, followed by agreeableness [41]. The respondents were also selected based on their socio-economic status which was middle class and with intermediate level of language proficiency. NEO-FFI was employed to gather the data for the study and it is based on the theory of Big Five Factor Model. It is among the most popular questionnaire for personality traits and has been used in various fields.

Studying race differences in personality is socially controversial, scientifically complex, and practically important. Nevertheless, this is still understudied and no meta-analysis [22] was done between races and personality traits [28]. This was previously highlighted by [29] which emphasized the unavailability of review on personality traits and racial status.

METHODOLOGY

Survey was employed as the method of data collection and questionnaire was chosen to be distributed to the targeted respondents. In details, the questionnaire was divided into two parts which the first part is on demographic data such as gender and age, while the second section is on personality traits. There are 44 items of the questionnaire and BFI was employed to gather data for personality traits. The questionnaire was in bilingual consists of English and Malay language. This is to avoid any issue of misunderstanding of meaning and since BFI uses short phrases, there is possibility that the respondents find it difficult to guess the meaning. During the distribution of questionnaire, one of the researchers was around as to assist the respondents for any difficulty or enquiry in answering the questionnaire. The duration to answer the questionnaire in average was 15 minutes and it was administered during class time as that is the most convenient time to meet the respondents. They are on the third semester of their foundation program and the class was operated as common where they meet three hours a week. Thus, that is the only time to meet and they were to ask to complete the questionnaire during the class session as to ensure 100% return rate of the questionnaire. Prior to that, the questionnaire was checked to find out its reliability and the Cronbach alpha was 0.65 and it shows that the questionnaire was fit to be used for the study.

The respondents were in their third semester which is the final semester of their foundation program before they proceed to their degree program. English is compulsory subject that they have to enrolled and passed. This study only involved students from foundation program who were in semester three, studied at Johor Bahru centre. For this study, there were only thirteen respondents involved with 100% participation. The number of respondents was small due to number of intake registered and the institute does not have big number of intake per session. It is a common number as UNITAR has other regional centres across the nation.

As for the analysis of data, Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software was employed. Descriptive statistics is mainly used part of Pearson Correlation to find any relationship between personality and other variables.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The descriptive results showed that 53.5% of the respondents were female and 46.7% were male. For the program that they enrolled, female students outnumbered male students. In addition, 76.9% of the respondents were Indian, while the balance was Malay. It seems that there were more Indian students as compared to Malay or any other races. In details, the respondents tend to have personality trait of Agreeableness with the mean of 3.70, followed by Conscientiousness with mean score of 3.57. Female respondents outnumbered male in Extraversion where female scored 3.30, while male mean score was 3.00. Besides that, female also scored higher in Agreeableness and Neuroticism. Meanwhile, male respondents outnumbered female respondents in Conscientiousness and Openness based on the mean score. While, the least mean score generally is Neuroticism with mean score of 3.01, which female outnumbered male for this domain with mean score of 3.08 than 2.75. The details for each domain as stated below.

Table 1: Mean for each domain of personality traits

Personality Domain	Mean
Openness	3.55
Conscientiousness	3.57
Extraversion	3.25
Agreeableness	3.70
Neuroticism	3.03

Based on the mean score in Table 1, it can be said that the respondents are friendly, generous, helpful and they appreciate working in group. Apart of that, the second highest score is Conscientiousness and it means that the respondents are reliable, intelligent and persistence towards high achievement. They are also highly responsible, achievement-oriented and industrious learners. In addition, individual with the personality of Conscientiousness tends to have strong-willed, responsible, purposeful and trustworthy [35]. As for the least personality trait, Neuroticism has the lowest score and it means that the respondents do not prefer to be negative individual with features such as low self-esteem, pessimistic, and emotional instability. These were only few of the negative characteristics of Neuroticism. In brief, this has provided the answer to the first objective which is the personality traits of the respondents. This finding produced a slight similarity with the study conducted in Japan with nine undergraduates in Japan which scored high in Extraversion, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness [19]. Nevertheless, a study among international post-graduate students of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia found that the respondents scored high in Conscientiousness and Openness [20]. It shows that this study has similar results even though the respondents are from different background and different level of study.

Table 2: Mean score for each domain according to gender

Personality domain	Male	Female
Openness	3.70	3.57
Conscientiousness	3.72	3.55
Extraversion	3.00	3.30
Agreeableness	3.61	3.72
Neuroticism	2.75	3.08

There are interesting points to highlight which male respondents surpassed female respondents in Openness and Conscientiousness in terms of mean score. Generally, female respondents still have higher score than male respondents. This study produced result which is equivalent to [8] since female scored higher in Neuroticism than male counterpart. In fact, there are many other studies which have shown that female has higher level of Neuroticism than male [5-6, 9]. This finding is in agreement to finding from [42] where they concluded that men were more dominant, aggressive and less nervous compared to women. This study also produced the same average finding as compared to other studies [26] since female respondents scored higher in Agreeableness than

male respondents. Agreeableness was said to be the only domain which correlated to femininity rather than masculinity [27] and again, this study produced an expected result. As for the Conscientiousness, there is slim consistency in previous studies and as for this study, female respondents outnumbered its counterpart with the difference of 0.17 which might be considered as small and as expected according to previous studies, there is a small difference. Women generally tend to score high in Extraversion as they are expressive [26] and so did the female respondents on this study. In addition, female respondents also tend to have high score in Neuroticism as they are more anxious than male respondents.

In addition, Malay students scored higher in Extraversion as compared to Indian students. However, Indian students scored higher in the other four personality traits including Neuroticism. This portrays that teachers have to design learning activities which can reduce learners' nervousness to that they may acquire the language easier. Learners with high score of Neuroticism look at language learning as stressful. Thus, teachers should design fun activities to avoid the students from being nervous to participate in learning the language [18].

Apart of that, this study also looks into the connection between learners who use English in their social conversation at home and with friends over personality traits. Based on the finding, it shows that respondents who use English actively in their social interaction, scored higher in Conscientiousness and Agreeableness, while those who do not actively use English in their daily conversation scored high in Agreeableness, followed by Openness personality trait. Hence, it portrays that respondents who converse in English with family or friends are high achievers, intelligent and reliable. Besides that, they are also very cooperative, friendly, helpful, and even willing to compromise their interest with others. However, the respondents who do not converse in English with friends or family have the characteristics of Openness and in addition they are imaginative, creative and appreciate art.

The second objective of this study is to find any relationship between variables such as gender towards personality traits. Based on the analysis done by using SPSS, it was found that there is no correlation between gender and personality traits. This is similar with finding from a study which involved 285 students from Iran where there is no relationship between gender and personality traits [21]. However, study which involved working adults in United States of America, found average correlation between gender and personality traits [29]. Apart of gender, this study also looks into the correlation between race and personality traits. Again, there is no correlation between both variables. As for the variable on the use of English in daily conversation and personality traits, no correlation was found. It seems that, even though they are confident to use English in their daily conversation with family or friends, they do not over confident with their language skills. Further study is needed on order to understand the situation better.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The finding of this study may assist lecturers or educators in helping the learners to improve their command of language by knowing learners' personality. It is important for teachers to be alert to learners' personality as each individual is different and learner is one of the influence elements in teaching and learning. Teachers depend on learners' personality in planning for teaching strategies which appropriate to the learners [25]. As mentioned by [11, 34], teachers need to identify and understand individual differences which personality trait is one of them in order to provide effective, sensitive instruction of teaching and learning activities. In [32] also highlighted that teachers should pay attention on learners' personality as each one is different and unique.

It functions as a guide to teachers in designing teaching and learning approach, apart of teaching materials and activities. Based on the finding, the respondents were high on Openness and Extraversion and due to that the teaching strategies should include the element of creative activity as to facilitate the feature of Openness. As for Extraversion, there should be group work as characteristics of Extraversion prefer to socialise with others. In addition, the task should have the elements of innovative and creative as that are among the features of Extraversion and Openness. Nevertheless, this finding does not able to draw a conclusion to the whole population as the number of students is limited to only one particular semester and from one center only. The number of gender was also not equal as there were more female respondents than male. However, it is challenging to find equal number of gender as respondents for study. However, it is hoped that the finding from this study can give better understanding on personality traits or the learners including the differences between gender as more research on personality traits especially employing Five Factor Model or Big Five Model are needed as that may determine better understanding of FFM as a tool and at the same time better understanding of gender differences in personality traits. Besides that, there are many possible perspectives to be looked into for this study as the current one is very limited which focused more towards the kind of personality traits of the respondents involved. For instance, future study may investigate on the differences between the nature of work among the respondents, designation and other variables. In fact, future study may look into the relationship between each domain and gender and other variables in depth [26]. Lastly, as to highlight again, this study was conducted as to provide information and to alert the lecturers when preparing for teaching and learning. It is

hoped that other lecturers could also utilise the information to provide better teaching and learning to the students.

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