The Role of HEXACO Personality Traits in Predicting the Speaking Ability of Male and Female EFL Learners

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Abstract

This study investigated the predictive role of HEXACO personality traits (honesty-humility, emotionality, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience) in the speaking performance of Iranian EFL learners, as well as the role of gender in the relationship between HEXACO personality traits and EFL learners' speaking ability. To this end, 250 learners (125 male and 125 female learners) were selected using a random cluster sampling method and were asked to complete the HEXACO personality traits questionnaire. The speaking ability of all the learners was checked via a scored interview and then was evaluated by three interviewers based on the IELTS speaking bands. Fisher's Z and multiple regressions were used to analyze the data. The results indicated that extraversion, conscientiousness, and altruism could predict 90.3 percent of the variance in the speaking ability of the participants. The findings also showed that the gender of the language learners did not have a predicting role in the relationship between personality traits of the language learners and their speaking ability.

Keywords: HEXACO, Iranian EFL learners, personality traits, speaking ability

Introduction

Mastery of speaking English is a priority for many second or foreign language learners and language learners evaluate their success in language learning based on how much they were successful in improving their speaking ability. Speaking is one of the four language skills through which learners can communicate with each other and can express themselves orally, coherently, fluently and appropriately in a given meaningful context (Richards, 2008). Burkart and Sheppard (2004) expressed that the degree of success in learning a language is evaluated in terms of the ability to conduct a conversation in the target language. Also, Moqaddas, Gol, and Haghshenas (2013) claimed that "speaking in the mother tongue requires ample exposure and skill as well as having normal behavioral/psychological development" (p. 34). Speaking in the foreign language, however, is "often cited by students as their most anxiety producing experience" (Young, 1990), and also "difficulty in speaking in class is probably the most frequently cited concern of the anxious foreign language students" (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986). Although language learners practically discuss some topics to develop their speaking ability, teachers need to provide explicit instruction for the learners to improve their language proficiency (Shumin, 2002).

People differ in how they acquire a target language. Individual differences can affect human thinking and behavior, and researchers have shown that there is a significant relationship between language learning and learners' personality (Dörnyei, 2005, 2006, cited in Oz, 2014).

Different researchers, such as Dewaele (2013), have confirmed that individual differences, especially the learners' personality, influence their language learning. "Personality is made up of the characteristic patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that make a person unique. It arises from within the individual and remains fairly consistent throughout life" (Pervin & John, 2001, p. 4). Language learners' personality

traits can make the process of language learning easy or difficult (O'Connor & Paunonen, 2007).

In spite of the fact that language learners learn the target language in the same environment, different language learners achieve different levels of speaking ability. Our personality and emotions are all involved while learning a second / foreign language. Learners' personality, such as what kind of motivation the learner brings to the learning task, as well as personal values, beliefs and attitudes related to learning; whether they prefer to work alone or in groups, and the kind of relationship the learner prefers to have with the teacher and other learners are all key factors in the learning process (Sepehri, Rakhshani, Keshavarz, & Kiani, 2013). The learner's personality types as well as these various emotional factors form the affective side of a learner's total learning style. Therefore, it can be concluded that the learning method used must match the students' personality type (Van Daele, 2005).

Different theories have been proposed on the classification of personality types. For example, the Big Five Model which was designed by McCrae and Costa (1987) explains the personality types in five dimensions, including agreeableness, conscientiousness, extravert-sion, neuroticism, and openness. This model has its root in the lexical hypothesis. These five dimensions of the personality existed in many countries such as Germany, Portugal, the Czech Republic, Turkey, etc. They are also consistent in children and adults. Unfortunately, the Big Five Model has been criticized for some issues, such as lack of explanatory power for other personality dimensions and being inappropriate for studying early childhood. Therefore, HEXACO was considered an alternative to the five-factor model of personality (Schultz & Schultz, 2013).

HEXACO proposed by Ashton and Lee (2004) consists of six personality traits, including honesty-humility (H), emotionality (E), extraversion (X), agreeableness (A), conscientiousness (C), and openness to experience (O). HEXACO is different from the Big Five by having an additional sixth factor, i.e., the honesty-humility trait (Ashton & Lee, 2008). According to Ashton & Lee (2007), the six-factor model of personality traits is unique due to the addition of honesty-humility.

Despite the fact that the relationship between personality traits and language proficiency has received attention since a long time ago, studies conducted on personality types and language learning in general and speaking ability in particular have not yielded consistent results. Consequently, researchers believe that personality types can be best measured using qualitative methods. Moreover, there are some methodological problems with studies on the relationship between personality traits and language learning. For example, some researchers (e.g., Barekat & Tabatabaei, 2013; Oz, 2014; Souzandehfar, Souzandehfar, Farsi, & Sharif, 2014) use small number of participants in their studies.

Foreign language learners are not sure whether they possess the ability to speak the foreign language (Moqaddas et al., 2013). Iranian EFL learners do not have any exposure to English in their daily life situations, and their exposure to the target language is limited to the English class. Therefore, they are not provided with ample opportunities to speak. Even though certain studies were conducted to investigate factors influencing the language proficiency of learners, there is not any emphasis on the learners' personality traits as a predictor of learners' speaking ability. Furthermore, few studies (e.g., Maghsoudi et al., 2013; Moqaddas et al., 2013) have considered the role of gender in the relationship between personality traits and language learning success.

Adelifar, Jafarzadeh, Abbasnejhad, and Shoa Hasani (2016) investigated the relationship between personality traits and willingness to communicate in an EFL context. Also, the role of gender in the level of willingness to communicate was examined. The findings showed that there is a positive and significant relationship between neuroticism and willingness to communicate, while there is a significant negative relationship between agreeableness and conscientious-ness and willingness to communicate. Also, gender did not have any moderating role in the relationship between WTC and the Big Five personality factors. Yusef-Hasirchin (2014) investigated the effect of extraversion and introversion on fluent speaking of Iranian EFL students. The results showed that the extravert students significantly outperformed the introvert ones, but there was no significant gender difference between the performance of extravert and introvert students. Moreover, Barekat and Tabatabaei (2013) examined the relationship between the Big Five personality traits and Iranian EFL learners' speaking ability. Findings indicated that the conscientiousness trait had a significant correlation with the learners' speaking ability. It should be mentioned that since HEXACO and its questionnaire are new instruments to assess the psychological traits, few studies have been conducted about the individuals' personality traits and language learning or success using the HEXACO questionnaire. Also, Ranjbaran Oskouei and Ramezani (2011) investigated the effect of emotionality and openness to experience on vocabulary learning strategies of Iranian EFL students. It was found that there is a positive relation between emotionality and

cognitive strategies and also between emotionality and metacognitive strategies. The results also showed that there is a positive correlation between openness to experience and memory and social strategies. Therefore, the researchers posed the following research questions:

– Does learners' gender have any role in the relationship between EFL learners' HEXACO personality traits and their speaking ability?
– Which personality traits can act as predictors of Iranian EFL learners' speaking ability?

Method

This research was a descriptive-retrospective study with a survey design in which the relationship between the variables was studied.

Participants

The population of this research included all the male and female language learners registered in the language institutes in Amol, Mazandaran Province. Of all the language institutes, eight were randomly selected (four institutes for the females and four for the male language learners). Then, two classes were randomly selected from each institute. Of all the language learners in these eight institutes and classes, 250 learners (125 male and 125 female learners) were selected using a random cluster sampling method. The age of the learners ranged from 14 to 25. The proficiency level of the participants was evaluated earlier by the language teachers of the institutes through OPT, and all of the learners were at the intermediate language proficiency level.

Instruments

HEXACO Personality Inventory-Revised

The HEXACO personality inventory-revised (Ashton & Lee, 2004) was used in this study. This questionnaire consists of 6 factors: honesty-humility (H), emotionality (E), extraversion (X), agreeableness (A), conscientiousness (C), and openness to experience (O). It includes 100 items. Each factor contains four facets, and there are four questions for each facet. An additional 25th narrow facet, called Altruism, is also included and represents a blend of the honesty-humility, emotionality, and agreeableness factors. Items are scored on a 5-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree (from one to five, respectively). Ashton and Lee (2004) estimated the reliability and validity of HEXACO personality questionnaire through Cronbach's alpha for each

factor, yielding these coefficients: honesty-Humility, .92; emotionality, .90; extraversion, .92; agreeableness, .89; Conscientiousness, .89; and Openness, .90.

Interviews

In order to evaluate the speaking ability of the learners, an interview was conducted by three interviewers (the researcher and two trained raters) based on IELTS speaking bands in four areas: 1) Fluency and Coherence; 2) Lexical Resource; 3) Grammatical Resource; and 4) Pronunciation. In this study, the interview was scored out of 9. To determine the inter-rater reliability, the correlation between the scores obtained from the three raters' evaluation of the learners' speaking ability was calculated and was equal to 0.78.

Procedure

After selecting the participants of the study, the students were informed that their participation is voluntary. Learners were convinced that their answers will not jeopardize their status and score in any way.

Participants were asked to fill out the HEXACO questionnaire. Administering the questionnaire lasted three weeks, and an interviewed was immediately conducted to find whether there was any relationship between the personality traits of the participants and their speaking skills. The interview was similar to the speaking module of the IELTS test; it was 11-14 minutes long and in three parts. Also, it was interactive and close to a real-life situation. In part 1 of the speaking test, students were asked to confirm their identity. Then, general questions on familiar topics were asked. The second section of the speaking test gave learners the opportunity to speak longer on a topic. Students were given a card that asked them to talk about a person, a place, or an event. The learners had one minute to prepare to talk about the topic on the task card. A pencil and paper was provided for them to make notes. Participants had to talk for 1-2 minutes, and then they were asked one or two questions on the same topic. Part 2 took 3-4 minutes in total. In the third part the learner talked with the examiners about issues related to the topics on the card. This part of the test was designed to give students the opportunity to talk about more abstract issues and ideas. It lasted 4-5 minutes.
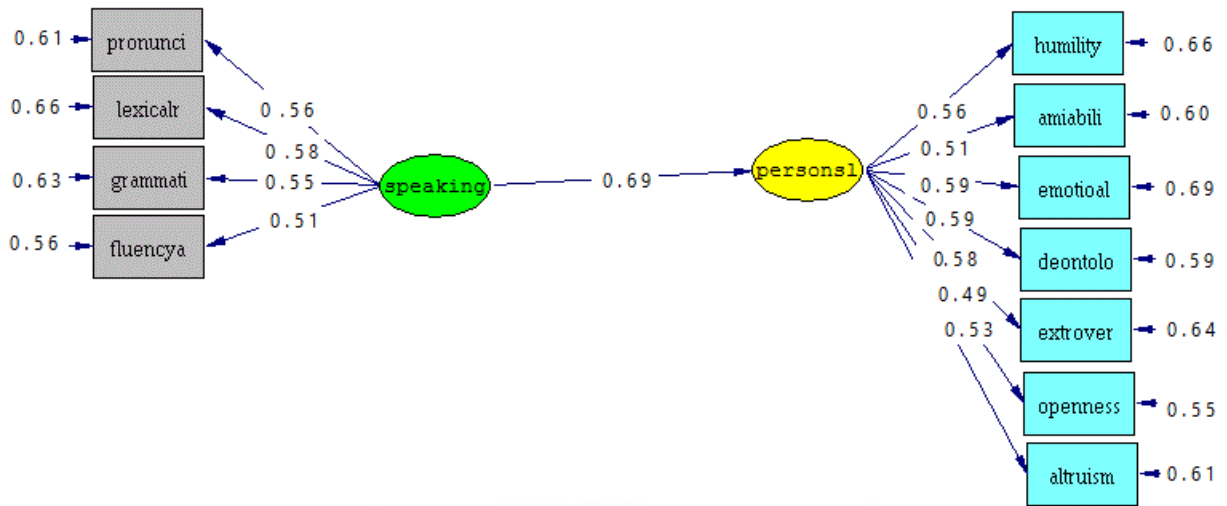
Design and Data Analysis

In order to answer the research questions, Fisher's Z and multiple regressions with step-wise method using LISREL were run.

Findings

In order to examine the first research question, t-value was calculated. Moreover, the final model of examining the first research question is presented in figures1, 2, 3, and 4.
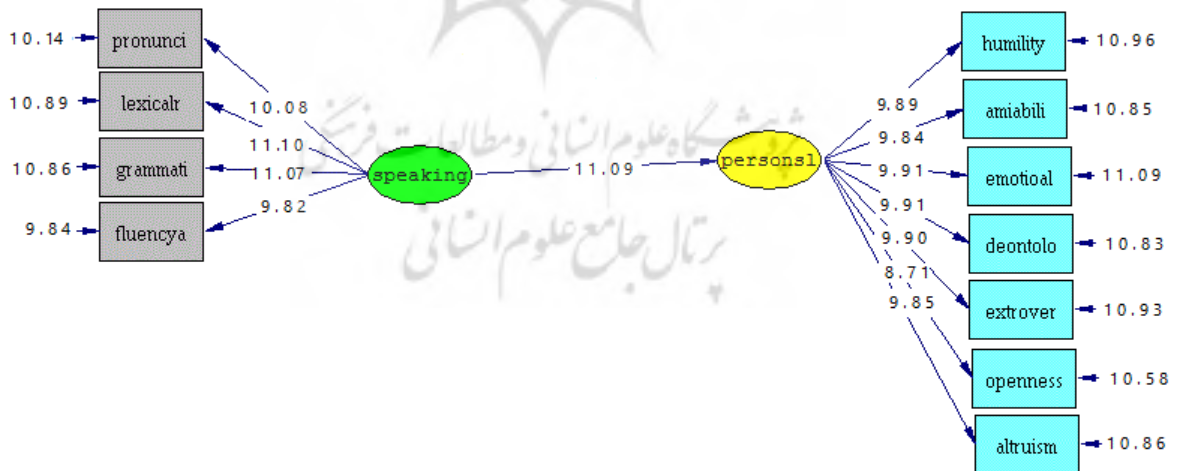

Chi-Square=335.24, df=169, P-value=0.00000, RMSEA=0.031

Figure 1.
Result of the Final Model Confirmation about the Relationship between HEXACO Personality Traits and Speaking Ability *in Female Students*

The obtained findings regarding the assessment of the significance of the data in the model is shown in Figure 2.

Chi-Square=335.24, df=169, P-value=0.00000, RMSEA=0.031

Figure 2.
T-value Statistic: Results of the Final Model Confirmation about the Relationship between HEXACO Personality Traits and Speaking Ability in female Students

Based on Figures 1 and 2, the power of the relationship between the HEXACO personality traits and EFL learners' speaking ability in girls was equal to 0.69. To determine whether the observed correlation is

significant, t-value was calculated. Since the amount of the observed t-value (t= 11.09) was larger than 1.96, the obtained correlation was significant (P<0.05).

Goodness of Fit Model

Normal chi-square index was calculated to measure the goodness of the main structural equation model.

$$\frac{\chi^2}{df} = \frac{335.24}{169} = 1.98$$

According to the amount of normal chi-square, it can be concluded that the model has an acceptable goodness of fit index.

Since root mean square error of approximation is equal to 0.031, and the observed amount of other goodness indexes match the acceptable amount, the model has an acceptable goodness of fit index. In addition, other goodness of fit indexes were also acceptable and are shown in Table 1.

Table 1.
The Goodness of Fit Indexes of the Model for the Relationship between HEXACO Personality Traits and Speaking Ability in Female Students

Goodness index	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	NFI	NNFI	IFI
Acceptable amounts	<0.1	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	0-1
Observed amounts	0.031	0.95	0.94	0.98	0.95	0.93

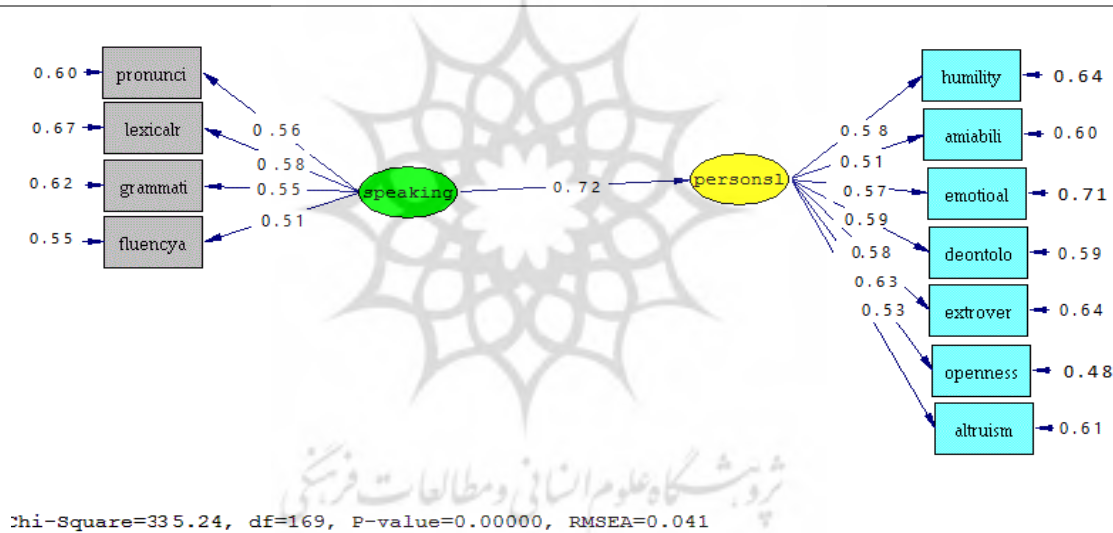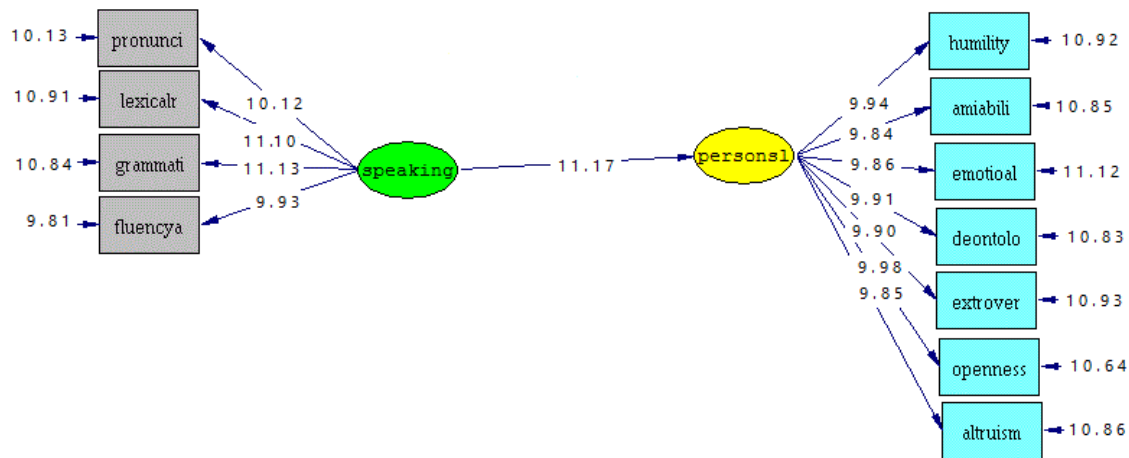Chi-Square=335.24, df=169, P-value=0.00000, RMSEA=0.041

Figure 3.
Result of the Final Model Confirmation about the Relationship between HEXACO Personality Traits and Speaking Ability in male Students

The obtained findings regarding the assessment of the significance of the data in the model is shown in Figure 4.

Chi-Square=335.24, df=169, P-value=0.00000, RMSEA=0.041

Figure 4.
T-Value Statistic: Results of the Final Model Confirmation about the Relationship between the HEXACO Personality Traits and Speaking Ability in Male Students

Based on Figures 3 and 4, the power of the relationship between the HEXACO personality traits and EFL learners' speaking ability in boys was equal to 0.72. To determine whether the observed correlation is significant, t-value was calculated. Since the amount of the observed t-value (t= 11.17) was larger than 1.96, the obtained correlation was significant (*P*<0.05).

Goodness of Fit Model

Normal chi-square index was calculated to measure the goodness of the main structural equation model.

$$\frac{\chi^2}{df} = \frac{335.24}{169} = 1.98$$

According to the amount of normal chi-square, it can be concluded that the model has an acceptable goodness of fit index.

Since root mean square error of approximation is equal to 0.041, the model has a good goodness. In addition, other goodness of fit indexes were acceptable and are shown in Table 2.

Table 2.
The Goodness of Fit Indexes for the Relationship between the HEXACO Personality Traits and Speaking Ability in Male Students

Goodness index	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	NFI	NNFI	IFI
Acceptable amounts	<0.1	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	0-1
Observed amounts	0.041	0.99	0.96	0.96	0.94	0.91

In order to examine whether gender has any role in the relationship between the HEXACO personality traits and Iranian EFL learners' speaking ability, Fisher's Z was used, and the results showed that z-score was smaller than 1.96 (Z= 0.234, P>0.05). Hence, the findings indicated that there is no significant difference between the correlation of HEXACO personality traits and Iranian male and female EFL learners' speaking ability. So, the first research hypothesis is confirmed, and it can be said that gender does not have any role in the relationship between the HEXACO personality traits and Iranian EFL learners' speaking ability.

In order to determine the best predictor of speaking ability, multiple regressions with step-wise method were used. It should be mentioned that extraversion, conscientiousness, and altruism have been entered into the regression equation. The obtained results are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3.
The Stepwise Regression Analysis of Extraversion, Consciousness, and Altruism

Steps	Predictors	R	R^2	ΔR^2	Standard error
1	extraversion	0.948	0.899	0.899	0.298
2	Extraversion Consciousness	0.950	0.903	0.902	0.293
3	Extraversion Consciousness Altruism	0.951	0.904	0.903	0.291

The results shown in Table 3 indicate that extraversion can explain 89.9 percent of variance in thespeaking ability (ΔR^2=0.899), and in the second step, by adding conscientiousness to extraversion one percent of variance in the speaking ability happens (ΔR^2=0.902).

Finally, adding altruism caused one percent increase in the variance of the speaking ability (ΔR^2=0.903). Extraversion, conscientiousness, and altruism could predict 90.3 percent of variance in the speaking ability of the participants.

Table 4.
The Significance of the Regression of Extraversion, Conscientiousness, and Altruism

Sources of changes	sum of squares	df	mean squares	f-ratio	Sig
Regression extraversion	196.35	1	196.35	2206.7	
	22.07	248	0.089		0.000
Residual	248.42	249			
Total					
Regression extraversion	197.18	2	98.59	1146.64	
Conscientiousness	21.24	246	0.086		
Residual	248.42	249			0.000
Total					
Regression extraversion					
Conscientiousness	197.52	3	65.84		
Altruism	20.45	246	0.085	774.97	0.000
Residual	248.42	249			
Total					

The results presented in Table 4 show a correlation between extraversion, conscientiousness, and altruism. It was shown that extraversion, conscientiousness, and altruism have the ability to predict the criterion variable (speaking ability).

Table 5.
Results of Regression Coefficients

Models	Sources of changes	Unstandardized B	SE	Beta(β)	T-value	sig.
1	Constant	0.187				
	Extraversion	-1.882	0.040	0.948	46.976	0.000
2	Constant	-0.236				
	Extraversion	1.873	0.039	0.943	47.417	0.000
	Conscientiousness	-0.168	0.061	0.062	3.105	0.002
3	Constant	-0.330				
	Extraversion	1.852	0.041	0.933	45.560	0.000
	Conscientiousness	0.123	0.044	0.056	2.813	0.005
	Altruism	0.056	0.028	0.041	1.994	0.047

As shown in Table 5, at the first step, the extraversion variable entered in the model and its equation was formulated as follows:

$$\hat{Y} = a + b_1 x_1$$

Speaking skill=0.187+ (1.882) × (extraversion)

Based on the finding shown in Table 5, it was revealed that the amount of standardized β for extraversion is equal to 0.948, indicating that extraversion directly affects speaking ability, and extraversion can predict 0.948 of the variance in the speaking ability.

At the second step, extraversion and conscientiousness were entered in the regression equation and its equation has been formulated as follows:

$$\hat{Y} = a + b_1 x_1 + b_2 x_2$$

Speaking skill= -0.236+ (1.873) × (extraversion) + 0.135 (conscientiousness).

Based on the finding shown in Table 5, one can see that the amount of standardized β for conscientiousness is equal to 0.062, indicating that conscientiousness directly affects the speaking ability, and conscientiousness can predict 0.062 of the variance in the speaking ability.

In the third model, all the related variables, such as extraversion, conscientiousness, and altruism have been entered in the regression equation, and the equation has been arranged as follows:

$$\hat{Y} = a + b_1 x_1 + b_2 x_2 + b_3 x_3$$

Speaking skill= -033+ (1.85)× (extraversion) + 0.123 (consciousness) + 0.056 (altruism).

Based on the finding presented in Table 5, the amount of standardized β for altruism is equal to 0.041, indicating that altruism directly affects the speaking ability, and altruism can predict 0.041 of the variance in the speaking ability. Therefore, it can be said that among the HEXACO personality traits, extraversion, conscientiousness, and altruism are the best predictors of speaking ability (P≤0.01), and the second hypothesis is rejected.

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to investigate the moderating role of gender in the relationship between HEXACO personality traits and Iranian EFL learners' speaking ability. Moreover, the predictive role of HEXACO in explaining the variance in EFL learners' speaking ability was examined. The findings of the study showed that the gender of the learners does not have any role in the relationship between HEXACO personality traits and speaking performance of the learners. Moreover, results of the study revealed that extraversion, conscientiousness, and altruism could predict 90.3 percent of variance in speaking ability.

The results of Fisher's Z showed that the observed z was smaller than 1.96 (Z= 0.234, P≤0.05). Hence, the findings indicated that there are not any significant differences between the correlation of HEXACO personality traits and Iranian EFL learners' speaking ability in terms of their gender. The results of this study are in line with the study conducted by Adelifar et al. (2016) which indicated that there is not any significant difference between HEXACO personality traits and speaking performance of male and female learners. Yusef-Hasirchin (2014) study supported the results of the present study in that that there was no significant relationship between the personality types of the language learners and their speaking proficiency.

The findings of the present study are not in harmony with Moqaddas et al. (2013)'s finding that students' gender has a relationship with their personality traits. Also, the results of this study are not in accordance with the study by Maghsoudi et al. (2013). The findings of their study revealed that gender has a significant role in the relationship between personality traits of the language learners and their language proficiency. It was shown in their study that female and extrovert learners outperformed the male and extrovert ones.

One may reasonably argue that the uniform teaching method and materials, the formal context of language acquisition, and the age and level of the respondents account for the fact that the gender of the learners does not have a moderator role in the relationship between the leaners' personality traits and speaking ability.

Apparently, by accepting the hypothesis that all human beings have the same genetic roots, many personality psychologists emphasize cultural and gender similarities more than differences. For example, Goldberg (1981; cited in Triandis & Shu, 2002) believed that the five personality factors are universal, because these personality traits lead to the survival of the human species in all cultures. Therefore, based on the psychologists' beliefs and attitudes, it can be concluded that personality traits affect male and female performance equally.

Based on the review of the studies, it can be understood that there are some inconsistencies in investigating the moderating role of gender in the

relationship between personality types and oral performance; therefore, further studies should examine the impact of gender on the relationship between personality traits and foreign language learning in general and speaking performance in particular.

The findings of the study also revealed that among the HEXACO personality traits, extraversion, conscientiousness, and altruism are the best predictors of speaking ability (P≤0/01). Extraversion, conscientiousness, and altruism could predict 90.3 percent of variance in speaking ability.

These findings are in line with several studies (Abdallah, 2014; Bouhenika, 2015; Yusef-Hasirchin, 2014). Furthermore, the results of the study conducted by Ghapanchi, Hassan Khajavy, and Asadpour (2011) support the findings of this study. The findings of their study revealed that openness to new experiences, extroversion, and conscientiousness could predict learners' speaking ability. Therefore, the difference between the results of the study conducted by Ghapanchi et al. and that of this study is that in this study extraversion, conscientiousness, and altruism could also predict the speaking performance of the participants.

The results of this study are also in line with those of Oz (2014) in some parts. Oz (2014) investigated the relationship between personality traits and the speaking performance in a second language. The results showed that the Big Five factors of extraversion agreeableness, and, openness to experience were significant in predicting the speaking performance of the students. It can be understood that extraversion can predict the speaking ability of the language learners, since extrovert students are sociable, tend to engage in group work activities and conversation, take more risks, and talk more. However, in this study, conscientiousness and altruism predicted learners' speaking performance in the second and third step. The findings of the study are in accordance with the study conducted by Barekat and Tabatabaei (2013) indicating that among the five personality traits the conscientiousness trait can act as the best predictor of learners' L2 speaking ability. Therefore, another personality factor which had a positive relationship with the learners' speaking ability and predicted it in this study was conscientiousness. Takač and Požega (2011) also found a positive relationship between conscientiousness and L2 speaking. Conscientiousness is related to successful academic performance in students and intellectual capacity. Individuals with low intellectual capacity tend to be highly conscientious. That is, there is a negative correlation between conscientiousness and intellectual capacity or intelligence. It may be due to

the fact that individuals who are less able to work in an educational or work environment gradually become more conscientious because they try to compensate their relatively low intellectual ability (Moutafi, Furnham, & Crump, 2003). It should be mentioned that there is no literature on the relationship between altruism and speaking ability of language learners, so further studies should be conducted about the correlation between these two variables.

Based on the results of the study, one can assert that, to improve the speaking ability of the foreign language learners, it is suggested that the extraversion and conscientiousness dimensions of the learners' personality should be promoted and paid attention to. Second, if the learners were taught some strategies to control their anxiety, and if less stressful situation for speaking is provided for the language learners, they can achieve higher levels of accuracy and fluency in their speaking performance. Furthermore, teachers should match their expectations about the language proficiency of the students with the personality characteristics of their students. Given the importance of the learners' personality traits in their language proficiency, material developers and syllabus designers can consider the personality traits of the language learners, especially the extraversion factor, when designing speaking tasks, choosing topics and themes for different foreign language learners. In addition, it might be essential for the instructors to rethink the methods they use to teach the language skills in general and the speaking skill in particular, and more opportunities should be provided for the learners to get engaged in classroom speaking activities.

There are many contradictory findings on the relationship between personality traits and speaking ability of the language learners, so reinvestigating this relationship seems necessary. This study might contribute to the literature by providing additional data and analysis on the relationship between personality traits and oral performance. This study explored the relationship between students' oral performance and their personality types, hence it can be said that it is beneficial for the students in general to gain insight into possible contributing factors to their own speaking performance in English language, and make better decisions on how to enhance their performance. EFL teachers can benefit from the results of this study. Knowing about the specific dimensions of students' personality, teachers can adopt the most suitable teaching practices. Teachers need to be aware of the personality factors that can encourage or discourage communication among learners and affect their speaking confidence. Thus, they need to promote

factors that facilitate speaking and enhance learners' speaking and remove those that hinder communication in EFL classes. Teachers can also decide how to implement their teaching goals in accordance with students' varying levels of English language oral proficiency and their personality styles. The results will help teachers decide how best to direct their teaching styles and goals to the curricula and to understand reasons behind student's various oral performance. This study intended to become a pathway for further studies in finding the influence of personality types on the other components of language learning skills. By determining the effect of affective and psychological factors in language learning, teachers' teaching methodology can be adapted to the individual differences in personality in order to enhance the progress of second / foreign language learning. Moreover, recognizing the role of students' personalities in second/ foreign language learning processes provides a good opportunity to solve the affective related issues in L2 acquisition by Iranian learners.

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