

The Relationship between Personality Traits and Vocabulary Learning Strategies

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Abstract

This study examined the possible relationship between Iranian female intermediate EFL learners' personality traits and their vocabulary learning strategies. The participants in this study were 90 female intermediate English language learners. To make sure of their homogeneity, all the participants sat for the Oxford Solution Placement Test. Vocabulary Learning Strategies and Eysenck Personality questionnaires were also administered to the participants. Subsequently, the data were subjected to statistical analyses. The results showed that there was not any statistically significant relationship between Iranian intermediate EFL learners' personality type and their use of vocabulary learning strategy. However, it appeared that introverts tended to have higher use of memory, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies, while extroverts achieved higher mean scores on determination and social strategies. Furthermore, according to the findings of phi and crammers' v , the highest degree of relationship was reported for the correlation between social strategy and personality types. In contrast, the lowest amount of correlation was found between metacognitive strategy and personality types.

Keywords: Personality, language learning strategies, vocabulary learning strategies

Introduction

Vocabulary has a significant role in language learning. Limited vocabulary impedes successful communication. According to Schmitt (2000, p.5), "lexical knowledge is central to communicative competence and to the acquisition of a second language". The role of vocabulary in language learning is complementary because knowledge of vocabulary enables language use and, conversely, language use leads to an increase in vocabulary knowledge (Nation, 2001). With the emergence of the concept of language learning strategies (LLS), scholars have attempted to link these strategies with language learning skills believing that each strategy enhances learning of vocabulary, pronunciation, etc. Vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) enable individuals to take more control of their own learning and more responsibility, especially for their studies (ibid). Thus, strategies foster "learner autonomy, independency, and self-direction" (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989). Equipped

with a range of different VLSs, learners can decide up on how exactly they would like to deal with unknown words. In fact, to language learners, VLSs help facilitate their vocabulary learning. A large and rich vocabulary items can be acquired with the help of VLSs (Nation, 2001). VLS has been increasingly recognized as essential to language learning as can be seen from the increasing body of research studies on VLSs, particularly in the last two decades (Khatib & Hassandeh, 2011). Since, it seems that students with different language levels can learn a large amount of vocabulary by using VLSs, and these strategies have been so useful for them. Different learners use different strategies for learning English vocabularies (ibid). The present study is designed to investigate the relationship between the vocabulary strategies and Iranian EFL learners' personality. Therefore, the following research question was put forth:

RQ. Is there any statistically significant relationship between Iranian intermediate EFL learners' personality type and their use of vocabulary learning strategy?

And then the following null hypothesis was suggested:

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H0. There is not any statistically significant relationship between Iranian intermediate EFL learners' personality type and their use of vocabulary learning strategy.

Literature Review

In vocabulary learning, VLSs are considered important and have received much attention in the area of second language learning (Schmitt, 2000). The merit of all learning strategies including VLSs is to facilitate learners to take control of their own learning so that they can take responsibility for their own studies. Ellis (1994) believed that VLSs help stimulate explicit vocabulary learning which involves many aspects, such as making conscious efforts to notice new vocabulary items, selective attending, and storing into long-term memory. Gu and Johnson (1996) pointed out that learners who employ selective attending strategies may know which words are important and necessary for them to learn so that they are able to comprehend the passage. Learners who employ self-initiation strategies may use a variety of means to understand the meaning of vocabulary items. If learners are equipped with a range of VLSs, they may be able to deal with the new or unfamiliar vocabulary items without difficulty as VLSs help simplify the new vocabulary learning process for them. The effectiveness of the strategies may depend upon a number of factors, such as proficiency level, context of learning and learners' characteristics, etc. (Schmitt 1997).

Nikoopour and Amini Farsani (2011) attempted to find out the kinds of language learning strategies that Iranian EFL learners mostly utilize. They found that the students use a variety of language learning strategies, and they prefer to use certain types of strategies depending on the context of language learning, it can be helpful for language teachers to predict their personality types and do understand their characteristics more and more. Therefore, it is suggested that EFL learners should be exposed to a complete inventory of language learning strategies to be able to use the strategies they prefer depending on their personality type. Also, Nosratinia, Divani, and Zaker (2013) tried to investigate the relationship among EFL learners' autonomy (AU), critical thinking (CT), personality type (PT), and use of vocabulary learning strategies (VLS). The results revealed the existence of a statistically significant relationship between AU and CT, AU and overall use of VLS, among the components of VLS and AU, CT and overall use of VLS, and among the components of VLS and CT. However, no significant relationship was

observed between PT and other variables of concern. Sarani, Abusaeedi, and Ahmadian (2011) in their study aimed to explore the relationship between introversion/ extroversion and the use of vocabulary learning strategies. It was found that there is no difference between introverts and extroverts in the overall use of vocabulary learning strategies as well as in the use of cognitive, memory, and social strategies. Moreover, the results also revealed that extroverts used vocabulary learning strategies more frequently than their introverted counterparts. Wakamoto (2000), in a study conducted on 254 Japanese college students, also found that extraversion was significantly correlated with functional practice and social strategies, while, introversion was not correlated with any preferred use of Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) strategies. According to Adamopoulos (2004) introverts prefer tasks in which they are assigned to memorize vocabulary and deal with grammatical structures while extroverts seem to be in favor of communicative language learning tasks. In a follow up study done by Gu (2002), use of vocabulary learning strategies on Chinese undergraduate students was explored. In this study, gender was found as an influential variable in specifying utilization of vocabulary learning strategies and EFL outcomes. A fore mentioned issues have shown the main goal of the current study, i.e., to investigate the relationship between learners' personality type and their use of vocabulary learning strategies.

Method

The Design of the Study

The present study employed a true-experimental design, which required randomization, administration of an OSPT (Oxford Solution Placement Test), the personality and vocabulary learning strategy questionnaires to 90 Iranian female intermediate EFL learners. The schematic presentation of the design is as follows:

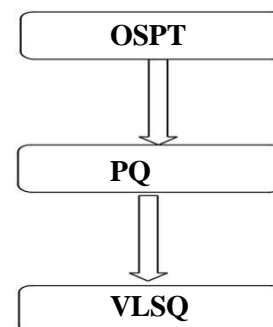


Figure 1. Schematic Presentation of the Design of the Study

Note: SPT= Oxford Solution Placement Test, PQ= Personality Questionnaire, VLSQ=Vocabulary Learning Strategy Questionnaire

Participants

The study was conducted with 90 Iranian English learners in Rasht, Iran. The participants were all female. The participants were selected from three intact classes. Their age varied from 15 to 16. In order to make sure of their homogeneity, the participants were selected out of 100 intermediate students based on their results in the OSPT. The maximum score was 60 points. Based on OSPT test direction 90 intermediate students who scored 31+ in grammar and vocabulary and 8+ in reading part of the test were selected as the main sample for the present study.

Instruments

The OSPT (Oxford Solution Placement Test, 2005) test was given to 120 EFL learners to pick out homogeneous participants for the main sample with respect to their general foreign language proficiency. The OSPT had three parts and the participants answered items related to grammar, vocabulary and reading comprehension parts of the test. The maximum score was 60 points. The Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ) was used to assess the personality traits of a person. It consists of 57 questions. In addition, Vocabulary Learning Strategies Inventory proposed by Schmitt (1997) was applied. He distinguished the strategies which learners use to determine the meaning of new words. He determined social, memory, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies. It contains 53 questions. The reliability of the Eysenck personality inventory and vocabulary learning strategy questionnaire were estimated through

a pilot study on 20 EFL learners. Moreover, the levels of the reliability were interpreted according to the reliability standards suggested by DeVellis (1991). The values of Cronbach's Alpha for the Eysenck personality inventory and vocabulary learning strategy questionnaire were ($\alpha=.764$ and $\alpha=.702$), respectively that were both higher than the least minimum required and were considered "respectable" values based on DeVellis's (1991) guideline.

Procedure

The main concern of the present study was to explore the possible relationship between extrovert / introvert personality types and Iranian intermediate EFL learners' vocabulary learning strategy to describe how extrovert / introvert personality types affect EFL learners' use of vocabulary learning strategies. To determine the possible degree of correlation value, the results of the vocabulary learning strategy questionnaire as well as Eysenck personality inventory were collected and analyzed. In order to find out whether this relationship was statistically significant or not, a chi-square along with directional measure (phi and Cramers' V) was run to the result of the vocabulary learning strategy questionnaire and personality type inventory.

Findings

Descriptive statistics including means and standard deviations were computed to summarize the students' responses to the vocabulary learning strategy questionnaire. The results of descriptive statistics for the total vocabulary learning strategy use and its five subcategories are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Statistics of Vocabulary Learning Strategy for the Extrovert and Introvert Students

DET:	SOC	MEM	COG:	MET	Total strategy use	
introvert	41 2.65 .42	41 2.33 .48	41 2.67 .38	41 2.28 .59	41 1.74 .36	41 2.33 .25
extrovert	49 2.90 .32	49 2.97 .46	49 2.42 .57	49 2.11 .61	49 1.64 .44	49 2.41 .31

Note. DET: Determination strategies, SOC: Social strategies, MEM: Memory strategies, COG: Cognitive strategies, MET: Metacognitive strategies, Total strategy use

As it was shown in Table 1, the number of introvert and extrovert EFL learners were (N introvert= 41, N extrovert= 49). The mean of the vocabulary learning

strategy for the introvert participants amounted to (M introvert= 2.33, SD= .25) that for the extrovert came to (M extrovert= 2.41, SD= .31). In other words, the

mean of using vocabulary-learning strategy for the introverts was lower than the mean of the extroverts suggesting that extroverts used vocabulary-learning strategies more frequently than introverts did. For the five subcategories of the vocabulary learning strategy questionnaire, different results were reported for the EFL learners with different personality type. Introvert EFL learners used memory strategies more frequently than other four subcategories ($M=2.67$, $SD=.38$). In contrast, they used metacognitive strategies less frequently than other strategies (M metacognitive strategy use = 1.74, $SD=.36$). For the extrovert EFL learners, the most frequently used vocabulary learning strategy was determination strategy with the mean of (M determination strategy use = 2.90, $SD=.32$). In comparison, the extrovert participants reflected that they used metacognitive strategies less frequently than other categories (M metacognitive = 1.64, $DS=.44$).

Overall, extrovert EFL learners used determination and social vocabulary learning strategies more frequently than introvert EFL learners did. However, introvert EFL learners used memory, cognitive and metacognitive strategies more compared to extrovert EFL learners. The highest difference in the use of strategies was reported for the social strategies. In fact, extrovert learners used social strategies in a much

higher frequency range than the introvert learners. Nevertheless, they were somehow similar in terms of their use of metacognitive strategies although the mean reported for the extroverts was slightly lower than that obtained for the introverts. Following descriptive statistics, to provide answer to the research question and to examine the possible relationship between EFL learners' personality type (nominal data) and their vocabulary-learning strategy use (ordinal data), Chi-square tests were run. In fact, the descriptive summary in Table 1 implied a possible relationship between types of personality and EFL learners' use of vocabulary learning strategies. Therefore, first, the ratings made for each of the five categories for the introverts and extroverts were calculated. Next, in order to check the possible relationship between EFL learners' personality type and their strategy use, the results of the ratings were analyzed using chi-square tests followed by phi & Cramer's V. In other words, the relationship between two categorical variables including strategy use (determination, social, memory, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies) and personality type (introvert / extrovert) was explored. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

Chi-Square Tests for the Personality Type and Strategy Use

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square (DET & personality type)	25.497	18	.112
Pearson Chi-Square (SOC & personality type)	37.002	20	.012
Pearson Chi-Square (MEM & personality type)	34.346	33	.403
Pearson Chi-Square (COG & personality type)	18.191	19	.510
Pearson Chi-Square (MET & personality type)	13.899	15	.533
Pearson Chi-Square (Total strategy use & personality type)	90.000	88	.421
N of Valid Cases	90		

Note. DET: Determination strategies, SOC: Social strategies, MEM: Memory strategies, COG: Cognitive strategies, MET: Metacognitive strategies, Total strategy use

The value of Pearson chi-square for the correlation between determination strategy use and personality types was ($X^2=25.49$), degree of freedom equaled (18). The two-sided level of significance was (.112) which was higher than (.05) indicating that the relationship between personality type and EFL learners' use of determination strategies was not statistically significant ($P>.05$). For the relationship between social strategies and personality type, the two-sided asymptotic significance of the chi-square statistic was lower than (.05). Therefore, it could be concluded that the relationship between these two sets

of variables (social strategy use and personality type) was statistically significant ($p \leq .05$).

However, the two-sided asymptotic significance of the chi-square statistics was higher than (.05) for the relationship between memory, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies and personality type and were not statistically significant ($p \geq .05$). Finally, the two-sided asymptotic significance of the chi-square statistic for the total strategy use reported by introvert and extrovert EFL learners was also higher than (0.05). The value of Pearson chi-square for the correlation between total vocabulary-learning strategy use and personality types was ($X^2=90.00$), degree of

freedom equaled (88), and level of significance was (.421). In order to find out the extent of association between these two types of personality traits and

strategy use, the directional measure namely phi and crammers' χ^2 were run. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.

Directional Measure for the Personality Type and Strategy Use

		Value	Approx. Sig.
(DET & personality type)	Phi	.532	.112
	Cramer's V	.532	.112
(SOC & personality type)	Phi	.641	.012
	Cramer's V	.641	.012
(MEM & personality type)	Phi	.618	.403
	Cramer's V	.618	.403
(COG & personality type)	Phi	.450	.510
	Cramer's V	.450	.510
(MET & personality type)	Phi	.393	.533
	Cramer's V	.393	.533
N of Valid Cases		90	

Note. DET: Determination strategies, SOC: Social strategies, MEM: Memory strategies, COG: Cognitive strategies,

MET: Metacognitive strategies, Total strategy use

Based on the results of Phi and Cramer's χ^2 , there were not statistically significant association between EFL learners' personality type and their strategy use except for the social strategies. The value of Cramer's χ^2 for the relationship between personality type and use of social strategies came to (.641; sig. (.012) < .05). In fact, the highest degree of correlation was reported for the relationship between social strategy and personality types closely followed by the relationship between memory strategy and personality types ($r=$

0.618) and determination strategy and personality type ($r= .532$). Furthermore, the lowest amount of correlation was found between metacognitive strategy and personality types ($r=.393$). Thus, the results showed that the association between personality type (extrovert/ introvert) and strategy use is very low. Figure 2 depicts the comparison between the means of the two groups (introverts vs. extroverts) in terms of their use of vocabulary learning strategies.

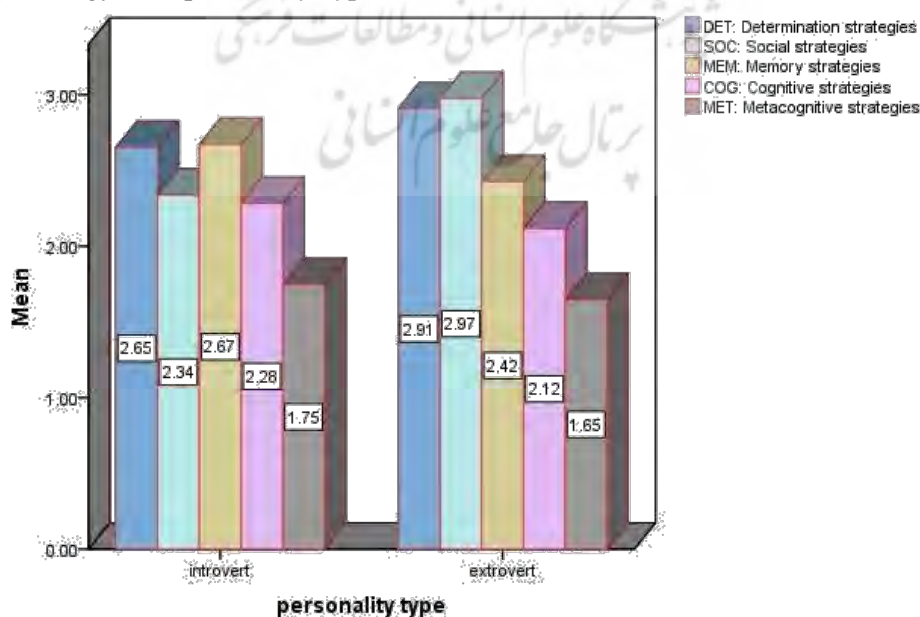


Figure 2.

The Comparison between the Means of the Groups (Introverts vs. Extroverts) in Terms of Their Vocabulary

Learning strategy

The low relationship as reported in Table 3 showed that introvert and extrovert EFL learners did not reflect statistically significant differences in their ratings for their use of vocabulary learning strategies. However, the results showed that the participants with different personality type had particular degree of social strategy use that was distinctive for their personality type. In other words, extrovert EFL learners used social strategies more frequently than introverts did. Thus, the null hypothesis was supported indicating that there is not any statistically significant relationship between Iranian intermediate EFL learners' personality type and their use of vocabulary learning strategy.

Discussion and Conclusion

In order to examine the possible correlation between Iranian EFL learners' personality type (introversion vs. extroversion) and their use of vocabulary learning strategy, cross tabs were provided. The two-sided *asymptotic significance* of the chi-square statistics for all subcategories of the strategy use (except for the use of social strategies) was higher than 0.05. Therefore, it was safe to say that the differences were simply due to chance variation, which implied that level of using vocabulary-learning strategy for both personalities typed was nearly the same. Since the p-value were higher than 0.05, the null hypothesis was supported and it was concluded that there was not a significant relationship between personality types and use of vocabulary learning strategy at 5% significant level. From the descriptive table, it appeared that while introverts tended to have higher use of memory, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies, extroverts achieved higher mean scores on determination and social strategies. According to the findings of phi and crammers' v, the highest degree of relationship was reported for the correlation between social strategy and personality types. In contrast, the lowest amount of correlation was found between metacognitive strategy and personality types.

The findings of the present study are in accordance with those of Sarani et al. (2011) and Nosratinia et al., (2013) who believed that there is no difference between introverts and extroverts in the overall use of vocabulary learning strategies. The findings of the current study in some ways are in line with Nikoopour and Amini Farsani (2011). They demonstrated that students use a variety of language learning strategies, and they prefer to use certain types of strategies. Moreover, this research is congruent with the studies

conducted by Wakamoto (2000) and Adamopoulos (2004). They found that introverts prefer to memorize vocabulary while extroverts tend to use social and communicative strategies.

To communicate effectively, students need to know a large number of word meanings. The learners' vocabulary knowledge determines their proficiency (Cardenas, 2001). Due to this fact, vocabulary is a crucial element in learners' communication. To have an effective communication, students need to overcome the lack of vocabulary knowledge. Therefore, the findings of this study can be of interest to different groups such as EFL teachers, curriculum planners, L2 specialists, EFL learners, and EFL vocabulary researchers. It is not enough just to train learners how to use strategies; it is also important to emphasize a motivational training component for learners with different personality because different learners employ different strategies. Apart from the issues concerning the learners like the good and poor learners' different choices of strategies, the range and amount of the strategies use and learners' individual differences, it is necessary for a teacher, who is thinking of teaching language learning strategies in a real classroom setting, to make a careful plan to balance the teaching of subject matter and of language learning strategies.

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