

## Extroversion is not a benefit in a task-based language classroom

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**Abstract.** There is common belief that the way we learn is influenced by our personality. Also, there is a contradiction between the predictions of psychologists and applied linguists in respect to the relationship between extraversion and learning as there is still a debate to know which personality type is in advantage. On one hand, psychologists maintain that extraversion is a *disadvantage* for learning since an *extravert* has less cortical arousal, has a limited long term memory, and is more easily inhibited. On the other hand, many applied linguists declare that *extraversion* is an *advantage* for learning L2 because the extraverts elicit more input and generate more outputs. To examine such controversies, a case study was designed to observe 7 extroverts and 7 introverts performing over various task based activities in an EFL language class in Iran. Primarily, an Eysenck's Personality Questionnaire-Revised in Persian Language was given to 140 students at pre-intermediate levels of an English Institute in Mashhad Iran to determine the dominant personality type among the students. Then, 14 students were randomly chosen so that their performances of task-based activities could be observed. The authors used a reliable checklist of *Assessing Learners' Oral Proficiency (CALOP)* for observing the students' performances of the three task types namely information-gap, reasoning-gap, and opinion-gap. The results revealed that extroversion was dominant (53.6 %) in the population. More importantly, the introverts and extroverts showed no significant differences over their performances of the three task types.

**Keywords:** Extroversion, introversion, TBLT, information-gap activity, reasoning-gap activity, opinion-gap activity.

### 1. Introduction

It is believed that the difference existing in the performance of the learners in L2 courses is due to the individual differences among language learners [1]. Also, there are always some classes with which the teachers are not satisfied regarding the final performance of the students i.e. some individuals are more successful than others in mastering the language [2]. Success or failure in learning L2 is determined by particular personal factors [1]. The way we learn is definitely affected by our personality. Practitioners assume that understanding of the personality type can help teachers explain why students approach tasks differently [3] & [4]. Personality is one of the individual differences widely accepted to have an effect on learning in general and second language acquisition (SLA) in particular [5]. This case study attempted to investigate Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) as a recent version of a communicative methodology" [6] and also focused on extroverts and introverts to find out whether their performances differ significantly in TBLT activities; a teaching method which is currently popular among private English schools in Iran [7]. "Task-based learning is a very good approach to getting people to interact conversationally, without being limited to conversation classes [8]. Tasks are pieces of meaning-focused work which involve learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form [8]. In this research, three task types were chosen as central

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activities based on the Bangalore Project conducted by Prabhu in 1987 and are also proposed by Rod Ellis [9] for teaching speaking. Based on cognitive activity, these tasks can be classified into three main categories namely information-gap tasks, opinion-gap tasks and reasoning-gap tasks. An information-gap activity involves the exchange of information among participants in order to complete a task. An opinion-gap activity is identifying, and articulating a personal preference, feeling, or attitude in response to a given situation. And a reasoning-gap activity requires students to derive some new information by referring it from information they have been given [10]. Since the students get engaged in these activities, their personal traits may influence the learning outcome significantly because these task based activities require the learners to rely on their personal imagination and way of thinking and then their learning outcome is supposed to be affected by personality factors either positively or negatively [10]. It is mostly supposed that introverts are reserved and quiet and have a tendency to reclusiveness while extroverts are considered talkative. We might then misunderstand these traits because of a tendency to stereotype extroversion [1] [11] & [12].

## **2. Problem Statement**

There exists a contradiction between the predictions of psychologists and applied linguists in respect to the relationship between extraversion and learning. There is still a debate to know which personality type is in advantage [5] & [13]. Psychologists claim that extraversion is a disadvantage for learning since extraverts have less cortical arousal, are more easily inhibited and have a limited long term memory. In contrast, applied linguists predict that extraversion is an advantage for learning a second/foreign language on the assumption that an extravert elicits more input and produces more output [14], [5], [13] & [15]. These different arousal levels cause introverts and extroverts to have different behavioural and attitudinal preferences and tendencies [1]. Dewaele and Furnham (1999) relate the apparent discrepancies to biological arousal levels among extroverts and introverts. The authors argue that “extroverts are under-aroused and introverts are over-aroused”. Considering the fact that individuals operate ideally within a moderate arousal level, Dewaele and Furnham [16] argue that extroverts look for external stimulation to reach optimal arousal levels, while introverts try to avoid such stimulations. In other words, introverts would evade such states because they are prone to suffer from arousal levels that exceed their optimal tolerance. The hypothesis of applied linguists on the superiority of extraverts centers around the positive impact of input as well as output on language learning [16]. It seems that the biological aspect of extroversion and introversion is neglected probably because we can see a clear contradiction or a conflict between the predictions of psychologists and applied linguists on the effects of extroversion and introversion on general learning and SLA [5]. Such beliefs that extraversion may help or hinder developing second/foreign language skills as [15] maintains may be only half-truth, but they provide the stimulus for systematic investigations such as this current research. Having been provided with such a stimulus in observing the learning behaviors of language learners in EFL classes, on the one hand, and seeing the clear contradiction of ideas between applied linguists and psychologists, on the other hand, the researchers decided to respond to this stimulus focusing only extrovert and introvert learners through this case study because it would be helpful to see if introversion/extroversion has any impact on a particular facet of EFL learning [14].

### **2.1. Research Questions**

- What is the dominant personality trait among Iranian EFL learners?
- Are there any significant differences between the performances of the extrovert and introvert EFL learners on information-gap, reasoning-gap, and opinion-gap activities?

## **3. Method**

### **3.1. Participants**

A total number of 140 subjects were randomly chosen from the pre-intermediate level of a private English School in Mashhad, Iran. The subjects ranged in age from 17 to 19 and all had the same English background knowledge. At this level, they could express themselves more meaningfully and take part in conversations interactively and have an active role in information exchange. All these students took the

Persian version EPQ-R so that the authors could identify what quantity of this sample were extroverts and introverts.

## 3.2. Materials and Questionnaires

### 3.2.1. EPQ-R

Eysenck's Personality Questionnaire-Revised (EPQ-R) in Persian Language was used in this study to determine the students' traits and in particular the extroversion and introversion. This questionnaire which is suitable for people above 16 years old, had been widely used in Iran both educationally and psychologically and had been validated frequently through previous studies and its reliability [1]. It was selected because it had been standardized educationally and for which there was an established validity and reliability. In the questionnaire the subjects were asked to reply yes or no to 57 questions which also contained a Lie Scale to make sure a respondent does not answer questions in a manner that is simply socially correct. This scale is able to detect attempts by participants to present themselves in a favorable light. A person scoring high on the "Lie" scale will probably have invalid results. According to Eysenck and Eysenck [17] the lie scale included in the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire permits lying to be diagnosed when a set of rarely performed acts are endorsed by the respondent as being habitually done and when frequently performed non-desirable acts are denied by the respondent.

### 3.2.2. Checklist of Assessing Learners' Oral Proficiency (CALOP):

*CALOP* was used to assess each subject's performance of three task types during class setting within 6 weeks. The following criteria were included: task fulfillment, fluency & comprehensibility, grammatical accuracy, appropriateness, and vocabulary selection. Each criterion had a score range from 1 to 4, and a total score of 20 was given to the students [1]. To establish the validity, the checklist was referred to panels of experts. Through a pilot study, this checklist was used to measure its internal consistency with Chronbach's alpha and item total correlations. The components had an overall internal consistency of 0.87 [1] & [7].

## 3.3. Procedure

At first, 140 male and female students who had enrolled in the mentioned English Language School were given the EPQ-R. These students had been randomly chosen and were in different classes. Then 14 students were observed for scoring their performances of three task based activities through different sessions and using *CALOP*. A score between 0 and 20 was given to each student for each activity separately. Finally all the data (raw scores) were transferred to the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software, Version 16.0 (student Version) for data analysis and testing the research questions. To decrease the observer's effect, students were not informed their performances were under observation. Hence, it is believed that students were not significantly affected due to the presence of an observer.

## 4. Results and findings

**Research question 1:** After the data was transferred to SPSS, demographic data displayed in Table 1 were obtained. It was revealed that 65 students were introverts and 75 were extroverts out of 140 participants. The percentage of the independent variable namely extroversion/introversion was also computed indicating that 53.6% of the population was formed by extroverts and other 46.4% of the population were introverts. Based on the results that in general, the major numbers of the students available in the population of this study were extroverts (more than Introverts). Also, both male and female students reported to be more extroverted 52.5 % and 54.4% respectively.

Table 1: Percentage of Extroversion/Introversion in Main Population

Percentage of the Extroverts	53.6 %
Percentage of the Introverts	46.4 %
Total	100 %

**Research question 2:** The second research question determined whether there was difference in the performances of extrovert and introvert students on task-based activities including the information-gap, opinion-gap and reasoning-gap activities. To respond this research question, 14 students already known as extroverts and introverts were observed through different sessions during a period of one term (five weeks), and the students received a score (between 1 and 20) for performing each task based activity by the researcher. Tables 2 and 3 demonstrate the means, standard deviations, and variances obtained for the scores of extroverts and introverts respectively on various task types.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Extroverts (N: 7)

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Information Gap	16.42	1.76	3.11
Reasoning Gap	16.85	1.13	1.28
Opinion Gap	14.21	2.22	4.94

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Introverts (N: 7)

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Information Gap	16.28	1.49	2.23
Reasoning Gap	16.89	1.27	1.62
Opinion Gap	14.07	1.03	1.07

For both extroverts and introverts, lower scores were obtained for opinion-gap activities compared to other two task types. This confirms to some extent the results of the Bangalore Project because in there, such activity received less attention after the students proved to be less able to participate and interact successfully over open-ended tasks [10]. At this stage, for testing the research questions and to see whether these means differ significantly, *t*-tests were conducted as the data were normally distributed for three task-based activities. Table 4 displays the results of the Independent Samples *t*-Test for the introverted and extroverted groups. To be statistically different at the .05 level, the *t* value would need to be greater than 2.00. The Levene statistic tests the hypothesis of equality of variance of the dependent variable grades. A significance value of .87 indicates a lack of significant variance between the grades of this group over information-gap activities indicating that that there is no statistical difference in the performance of Information Gap Scores between Introvert and Extrovert groups. Similarly, for the second task based activity namely reasoning gap activity, there is no statistical difference in the performance between Introvert and Extrovert groups as the *p*-value of 0.95. Finally, there was no statistical difference between performances of extrovert and introvert students over opinion gap activities because the *p*-value was 0.88.

Table 4: Independent Sample *t*-test for All Task Type Scores

		t-test for Equality of Means		
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Information Gap Scores	Equal variances assumed	.16	12	.87
	Equal variances not assumed	.16	11.68	.87
Reasoning Gap Scores	Equal variances assumed	-.05	12	.95
	Equal variances not assumed	-.05	11.84	.95
Opinion Gap Scores	Equal variances assumed	.15	12	.88
	Equal variances not assumed	.15	8.49	.88

## 5. Conclusions

- The dominant personality type among the EFL learners selected for this study was extroversion (53.6 %).
- There was no significant difference between the performances of extrovert and introvert students over the information-gap activities.

- Similarly, no difference was observed on the performances of extroverts and introverts over reasoning-gap activities.
- Finally, extroverts and introverts performed similarly on the opinion-gap activities. Moreover, both groups obtained low scores over the opinion-gap activities.

## 6. Implications

- Since TBLT is increasingly applied in Iran, knowing that there is no difference between extroverts and introverts' performance in TBLT classes helps teachers find the solution in other sources apart from personality trait in case of any problems regarding the learners' performances in the classrooms.
- The impact of this research on L2 teachers and researchers has been to heighten their sensitivity to possible ways in which the personality traits of the learners might influence their L2 access and exposure and their linguistic performance of classroom tasks.
- It seems that extroverts and introverts are not homogenous populations who uniformly achieve or fail. Not all extroverts are achieving and not all introverts are underachieving and the debate needs to be cognizant of this.
- The obtained conclusions of this research must remain preliminary, to be confirmed, altered, or discarded in the light of further empirical investigation, because only a limited amount of serious research has been done to trace the origin(s) of personality and its effect on task based learning in Iran.
- Nevertheless, the main pedagogical conclusion is that the ESL/EFL teacher in TBLT classroom should be confident that extroversion and introversion are not determinants in the performances of their students. So, they can appraise their students' performances free of any prejudgment regarding their personality traits.

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