Personality Traits: A Comparison Study of Muslim and Non-Muslim Students

1. Munir Laeha, M.A. Student in Teaching English as an International Language Program, Department of Languages and Linguistics, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Prince of Songkhla University, Hat Yai, Thailand, munir_leaha@yahoo.com
2. Nisakorn Charumanee, Corresponding Author, Ph. D., Assoc. Prof. of English languages and linguistics, Department of Languages and Linguistics, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Prince of Songkhla University, Hatyai, Thailand, nisakorn.j@psu.ac.th

Abstract

The study aimed to investigate personality traits specifically to extroversion and introversion dimensions. Using purposive sampling, the participants of the study consisted of 372 Matthayomsuksa 4 students: 268 Muslim and 114 non-Muslim learners from two large-sized schools in Narathiwat. Participants were divided into high and low achievement learners by using O-NET scores for English (167 Muslim high and 101 achievers, and 59 non-Muslim high and 55 low achievers). The study employed two instruments: a modified personality traits questionnaire and a guided interview. Means, standard deviations and t-test were used as statistical devices. Quenk’s (2009) dichotomy was adapted for the interpretation. The result indicated that Muslim high achievers were clearly introverts, while the Muslim low achievers were clearly extroverted. For non-Muslim students, both the high and low achievers were clear and very clear extroverts respectively.

Keywords: Personality traits, extroversion, introversion, high and low achievers.
Introduction

Since the mid-1960s, the massive amount of language research has emphasized investigating language learning success. Researchers explored what prospects make a good language learner and what makes him/her a better learner. Many researchers draw an assumption that inner learners’ individual variations, such as personality traits, are among prominent elements pushing students to be successful. Personality traits refer to inner unique aspects of behaviors as Richards, Platt and Platt (1998 cited in Deweale & Furham, 1999) defined personality traits as “those aspects of an individual’s behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, actions, and feelings which are seen as typical and distinctive of that person and recognized by that person and others”.

The major personality traits specifically extroversion and introversion, perform an integral part in language learning (Brown 2000) and are not only important for acquiring L1 but also L2 (Deweale & Furham, 1999) Yet a common assumption has been made among scholars that the extrovert type of personality trait might reach a greater degree of success in second language learning than the introvert type (Kezwer 1987; Saville-Troike 2006; Wong, 2011). To be more emphatic on the essence of personality, a relationship has been found between personality and language outcomes. For example, consuming seven years in observing the prediction of personality towards academic performance of medical students in Belgium, Livens, Ones, and Dilchert (2009) found that extroversion relating to openness and consciousness were reported to positively predict the grade point average of the students. Relevant to a study by Paunonen and Ashton (2001), correlations were found between extroversion and academic performance.

Specifically on extroversion-introversion, an extrovert normally communicates without inhibition, which is convincing enough to attract a teacher to believe in the notion that he or she is better and more successful in language learning. For example, Naimen, Frohlich, and Stern (1975, cited in Busch (1982) carried out an observation research in classroom study. They found that a certain type of extrovert personality trait such as raising the hand for asking questions correlated with the positive outcome of language proficiency. Students who had done a lot of speaking in the class gained higher scores in a test. Proposed by Rubin (1975), certain extroversion personality types such as intensive desire and motivation to seek for opportunities to communicate might be one indicator to categorize a good language learner. However, in an EFL
context such as Japan, Carrell, Prince, and Astika (1996) found positive correlation between extroversion/introversion personality traits and vocabulary learning. The former type appeared to gain higher scores in the vocabulary examination than the latter. However, what they found seemed to be inconsistent with what was found in the western context. Introversion gained higher proficiency scores than their counterparts. Therefore, to conclude that extroversion is better is too extreme.

In the Arabian context, where Muslim culture is prevalent, there is the scarcity of studies in connection with extroversion and introversion personality types. Some studies already claimed that based on religious demands in Islamic cultures people tended to prefer introversion and taught their children to be the kind of person who could be identified as introverted. Islam is regarded as being conservative, and gender sensitivity appears to be an important element shaping the characteristic of Muslim students. For example, in such a conservative society, females might not have opportunities as much as males to socialize with people (El-Dib 2004). In Thailand, the same conservative characteristic was reported in a study relating to Muslim students’ attitude towards English language study in Yala province where the majority of the population is Muslim (Rattanayart, 2007). Yet the study did not aim to explore their personality traits as successful and unsuccessful students.

In spite of the growing attention to extroversion and introversion personality traits, attention has been scant to compare if the high and low achievement students from two different ethnic groups, specifically Muslim and non-Muslim secondary students, displayed similar or different personalities. The aim of the current study was to examine the personality traits of Muslim and non-Muslim learners by attempting to answer the following research questions.

**Research Questions**

1. What kinds of personality trait do the high and low achievement Muslim students have? Are there any significant differences between the two types of students?
2. What kinds of personality trait do high and low achievement non-Muslim students have? Are there any significant differences between the two types of students?
3. Are there any significant differences between high and low achievement Muslim and non-Muslim students in terms of their personality traits they have?

Methodology

Setting and Participants

Purposive sampling was used to qualify students due to the unique characteristic of their mother tongue. Two schools, categorized as large sized schools having students exceeding 4,000 were picked to represent Muslim and non-Muslim students or Melayu-speaking and Thai-speaking students: Darussalam school representing Muslim/Melayu-speaking students and Narathiwat school representing non-Muslim/Thai-speaking students.

To stratify the participants, the study employed English scores from 2014 O-NET (Ordinary National Educational test) as a central core of score measurement before categorizing students as high and low scorers. Based on Hughes’s twenty-seven percent technique, only those scorers within the top 27% and bottom 27% in each school were targeted for investigation as high and low achievement students, respectively.

As a consequence, from the population of 733, there were 268 Melayu-speaking students divided into 167 high and 101 low achievers, and 114 Thai-speaking students divided into 59 high and 55 low achievers who could participate in the study.

Instrumentations

To investigate what types of personality students displayed, this study employed two instruments: 1) modified Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) questionnaire, 2) guided interview questions.

MBTI consists of four dimensions which are described below:

1. Extroversion and Introversion (E-I):

Extroverts are easily let the people and things come in. They seem to be impulsive in making decisions. In the classroom setting, they are more comfortable with pair and group activities and normally seek opportunities to get to know people in non-classroom situations. They are seen to be outgoing and have a large number of friends. In addition, they tend to actively communicate through speaking more than writing.

Introverts are said to be very focused on their inner world. They seem to be more interested and motivated when they work quietly without interruption. In the
classroom, they tend to keep quiet and most of the time they say no words. In making
decision, they normally need time to process before reaching conclusions. They are
understood to be shy.

2. Sensing and Intuitive (S-I):

In searching for information, sensing tends to be gained through physical reality,
seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling. Such students are concerned the most
about facts and explanations and like to remember details that seem to be important to
them.

The intuitive tend to be drawn by abstract meaning, relationships, theoretical
aspects, and possibilities about events. When remembering something, they are
interested in memorizing them in the bigger picture more than from actual facts and
details.

3. Thinking and Feeling (T-F):

The different characteristics of the thinking and feeling tend to depend on the
situation when they have to make a decision. The thinking tend to conclude their
decisions through logical explanations, principles, and cause and effect. In classroom
settings when they are with friends, they tend to avoid all conflicts even in a normal
debate.

The feeling tend to make decisions based on values. The involvement of others’
opinion is important to them. In addition, they will do whatever they can to assure
harmony between people (Leaver, Ehrman, and Shekhtman 2005).

4. Judging and Perceiving (J-P):

The judging persons prefer to live in planned and systematic ways. They like to
have things well-organized and settled. In learning, they prefer to have their exercise
and homework done before going out to play with friends.

The perceiving persons tend to be more flexible. They invite new experience and
information, and like to expose to them spontaneously without planning.
(Leaver, Ehrman, and Shekhtman 2005).
However, due to the aim of the current study which focused only on extroversion and introversion, only relevant questions were employed. Examples of the questions are “Are you usually a good mixer, or rather quiet and reserved?”, “Among your friends are you full of news about everybody, or one of the last to hear what is going on?”, “Do you tend to have broad friendships with many different people, or deep friendship with very few people?”, "When you are with the group of people, would you usually rather join in the talk of the group, or imaginative people?"

Guided interviews, consisting of 6 questions, was applied to elicit in-depth extroversion and introversion information. Examples of interview items are “Do you like talking to people you do not know? Why?”, “In the English classroom, do you like group activity or individual activity the most? Why?”

The questionnaire and guided interview items were modified and translated into Thai. The content validity was examined and approved by three experts, while its reliability was tried out with 40 students to check whether the items conveyed the intended meanings.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

To collect the data, the questionnaire was distributed to all the target students in both schools. Working with their supervisors, the instructions were explicitly explained and the corrections were examined. When the questionnaires were accomplished, students were asked to participate in 4 group interviews which consisted of 10 students in each group: 10 Muslim high achievers, 10 Muslim low achievers, 10 non-Muslim high achievers, and 10 non-Muslim low achievers.

Data from the questionnaires and the interviews were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. Descriptive statistics were employed to find means, standard deviations and independent t-test to observe any significant differences between groups of participants. Data collected from the interview sessions were summarized and used to complement data from the questionnaire.

To categorize students in a particular dimension, the interpretation followed the following intervals adapted from Quenk (2006)’s dichotomy:

- The mean score between 0.01 - 2.75 means slight E-I personality
- The mean score between 2.76 - 5.50 means moderate E-I personality
- The mean score between 5.51 - 8.25 means clear E-I personality
- The mean score between 8.26 - 11.00 means very clear E-I personality

The data from guided interviews were summarized and categorized to supplement and nourish the questionnaire data.
Results

1. Personality Traits of Muslim High and Low Achievers

As illustrated in table 1, it was found that Muslim high and low achievers fell into significantly different dichotomies of personality trait dimensions (P<0.02). Muslim high scorers were reported as being clearly introverted (HMx=6.90, S.D.=3.22) even though they also fell into the moderate extroversion type of personality (HMx=4.10, S.D.=3.22), while their counterparts fell clearly into the opposite side of the personality dimension, that of being clearly extroverted (LMx=7.07, S.D.=4.00) and moderately introvert (LMx=3.93, S.D.=4.00).

Relevant data derived from interview sessions revealed that 6 out of 10 Muslim learners were reluctant to give a clear answer and put themselves in both extrovert and introvert sides. It also could be noticed that some were eager to give away their answer, while some found it more difficult to give answer. However, it was found later that those former students were extroverts with lower competencies and the latter had higher proficiency.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personality Traits</th>
<th>H-Muslim (n=167)</th>
<th>L-Muslim (n=101)</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EXTRO</td>
<td>4.10 3.22</td>
<td>7.07 4.00</td>
<td>6.32</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRO</td>
<td>6.90 3.22</td>
<td>3.93 4.00</td>
<td>6.32</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Personality traits of Muslim high and low achievers

2. Personality Traits of non-Muslim High and Low Achievers

It was found that although non-Muslim high and low scorers fell into the extroversion category (HNMx=7.00, S.D.=2.68; LNMx=8.4, S.D.=2.60), the lower proficiency students were significantly more extrovert. Furthermore, high performers perceived themselves as moderately introverted students (HNMx=4.00, S.D.=2.68) with only slight introversion (LNMx=2.51, S.D.=2.60) for the lower proficiency students.

Consistent with the data in the interview, and unlike the Muslim students, non-Muslim students were very attentive and eager to express their opinions.
3. Personality Traits of Muslim High Achievers and Non-Muslim High Achievers

As indicated in table 3, it can be seen that Muslim and Non-Muslim high performers reflected different dimensions of extroversion and introversion. Their personality traits were significantly different (P<0.02) which can be said to have been opposite. Muslim high performers saw themselves as clear introverts (HMx=6.90, S.D.=3.22), whereas the Non-Muslim high performers considered themselves clear extroverts (HNMx=7.00, S.D.=2.68). However, the Muslim high performers were also seen as moderate extroverts while the non-Muslims behaviors were reflected as being moderate introvert.

In addition, the data derived from the questionnaire were consistent with the interview data. Most of Muslim students claimed introversion, whereas most of the non-Muslim students preferred extroversion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personality Traits</th>
<th>H-Muslim (n=167)</th>
<th>H-NonMuslim (n=59)</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EXTRO</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>2.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRO</td>
<td>6.90</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>2.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Personality traits of Muslim and non-Muslim high achievers

4. Personality Traits of Muslim and non-Muslim Low Achievers

As far as the personalities of the low performers were concerned, it was found that they mutually fell into the clear and very clear extroversion range of personality (LMx=7.07, S.D.=4.00; LNMx=8.49, S.D.=2.60). However, low achievement Non-Muslim students showed a clearer picture of being extrovert learners as indicated by the degree of significant difference in Table 4. The comparison further illustrated a moderate
degree of being introvert among Muslim low performers and a slight degree of that trait among the Non-Muslim low performers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personality Trait</th>
<th>L-Muslim (n=101)</th>
<th>NonMuslim (n=55)</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EXTRO</td>
<td>Mean 7.07</td>
<td>Mean 8.49</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S.D. 4.00</td>
<td>S.D. 2.60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRO</td>
<td>Mean 3.93</td>
<td>Mean 2.51</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S.D. 4.00</td>
<td>S.D. 2.60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4:** Personality traits of Muslim and non-Muslim low achievers

**Summary of the Results and Discussion**

1. **The personality traits of Muslim high and low achievers**

   Extroversion has long been associated with success in language learning in massive amounts of investigation. The common belief is that the extroversion related to being outgoing, to openness, to easily initiating conversation might get higher proficiency in language learning achievement (Brown, 2000; Lightbown & Spada, 2006). However, this may not have been relevant to these Muslim high performers whose introverted type of personality could be seen as being calm, quiet, enjoying solitude, and preferring space.

   The interpretation may be explained in many ways. First, in language production, the introverted students tended to be more reserved, enjoying privacy. To be involved in language communication, they were usually slow to initiate conversation, but the quality and accuracy were better than that of the extroverted students. On the other hand, the extroverted learners might have produced an outcome of lower quality compared with their counterparts. This was observed in Wong’s (2011) study, showing that introverted students usually accomplished higher quality homework.

   The reluctance of students to give answers in interview sessions could be explained alternatively with the work of Busch (1982) conducted in Japan. Based on situational demands, Japanese students are required to show introversion. Similarly, an exhibition of introversion is expected from Muslim students who are generally brought up to be rather conservative. The results might have been too extreme for the Muslim low achievers who displayed clear extroversion. However, these lower achievers still displayed introversion to some extent.
2. The personality traits of non-Muslim high and low achievers

Both groups clear and very clear extroverts who also possessed moderate and slight introvert traits. The dominant extrovert trait was clearly perceived during the interviews with these two groups. They were not reserved but were very eager to express themselves as it was found in the interview sessions. They were highly confident talking in groups especially the low achievers who seemed to be friendly and rather talkative.

However, their proficiency was different. It might be explained by the quality of their production. Based on definition proposed by Quenk and Kummerow (2001), the high achievement extrovert tended to contribute only what they knew well, while the low achievement extrovert might have volunteered their ideas even though these were not correct or relevant.

3. The personality traits of Muslim and Non-Muslim students

Due to the outcome that only Muslim high performers displayed more on introversion which contrasted to non-Muslim high performers, it may be explained as follows. First, personality traits may not tie to achievement level as both personalities were found specialized in different protocol. According to Gan (2008), both might be expert in different ways; the introverted are better written, while the extroverted seemed at ease in oral communication and some of them might do better in producing accuracy.

Second, students are from different language background, thus the background itself might play a significant role. The reservedness of Muslim society (El-Dib, 2004) and also the expected personality in some society (Busch, 1982) may-to some extent-play a role to explain the difference. The preference of introversion type in Muslim society may create a typical acceptance that being an introvert refers to proper manners and respect. Thus, it could be said that those students owned unique personality.

Muslim low performers might have the degree of extroversion more than Muslim high performers. However, the reluctance of defining themselves in interview session could reassure that these Muslim students possessed also the introversion personality to some extent.

Implications
1. The personality traits found in this study can help teachers understand their students' personalities and these can be used as a guideline to develop learning contexts that suit students' personalities or to individualize teaching. The implications can be drawn on creating a balanced classroom environment to facilitate language learning for both traits.

2. This study revealed that low achievement students both Muslim and Non-Muslim, were extrovert. It can be implied that being extrovert or too relaxed sometimes may not help them in learning. However, English teachers can make use of this trait in designing relevant activities as these students are willing to participate in class. By doing this the weak extrovert students can improve their proficiency.

**Limitations**

To investigate learners’ variations, specifically the extroversion and introversion dimensions, the current study employed merely two types of data assessment which were interpreted quantitatively and qualitatively: Myer-Briggs questionnaire and interviews. It is recommended that other instruments, for example, class observation and portfolio should be used in the assessment. Furthermore, the study investigated only from the perspective of students. Thus, the reflections from parents, teachers, or their peers may be considered in future research.

**References**


discourse analysis approach. The Hong Kong Institution of Education, 23:3, 116-
127.


language acquisition*. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press.

Lievens F, Ones D, Dilchert S (2009)  Personality scale validities increase throughout
medical school. *J Appl Psychol 94*: 1514–1535

Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Newbury House Publisher.

*Journal of Research in Personality, 35*, 78–90. http://dx.doi.org/
10.1006/jrpe.2000.2309

CPP, Inc.


religious schools in Yala. Prince of Songkla University, Songkhla, Thailand.

Rubin, J. (1975). What the “Good Language Learner” Can Teach Us. *TESOL Quarterly,
9*(1), 41. doi:10.2307/3586011

York: Cambridge University Press.

literature review. *日本大学歯学部紀要, 39*, 1-10.