

## Correlation between Personality Traits and Language Learning Strategies among IUS Students

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### Abstract

Success in a second language learning and ultimate attainment in target language can be associated with the concept of personality traits. Personality of a learner can impact the overall success in second language learning. Language learning strategies also can impact successful second language acquisition to a great extent. These two trends, although not closely related, when considered in a second language classroom can significantly help students in their endeavor while learning second language. 70 students from International University of Sarajevo participated in the research. The Five Factor model questionnaire was distributed in order to determine students' personality traits, which is composed of Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism (Costa & McCrae, 1992), and for language learning strategies we used the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). The results showed that students exhibited very high preferences for social learning strategy. Students' dominant personality trait was Openness to Experience. The results also showed that there is a significant relationship between the predominant personality traits and language learning strategies of the respondents.

**Keywords:** the Five Factors, SILL, Personality traits, language learning strategies, language acquisition

### INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades in the field of language learning and teaching, there was a shift from teacher-centered classroom to student-centered one. This trend provided an opportunity to the students to become more independent learners and at the same time self-governed. The focus was more on learner centered approach in language teaching (Reiss, 1987; Wenden, 1991; Tamada, 1996). Another issue that was taken into consideration when it comes to successful second language learning was language learning strategies and styles and to what extent they influence successful acquisition of a second language. Oxford (1990) is the most prominent researcher and very often cited

in literature related to language learning strategies. She argued that while considering the processes through which students are going while acquiring the language, researchers have to pay attention to the process of learning rather than the product. Beside teaching approaches, learning styles and strategies another important factor in SLA is personality traits of a language learner. According to Chamorro-Premuzic and Furnham (2005) personality traits of an individual are:

.... a very general mental capacity that, among other things, involves the ability to reason, plan, solve problems, think abstractly, comprehend complex ideas, learn quickly and learn from experience.... it reflects a broader and deeper capability for comprehending our surroundings- 'catching on' 'making sense' of things, or 'figuring out' what to do.... (p. 40).

When it comes to personality traits it has got prominent attention among language learning specialists. It has been determined through numerous researches that there is a great variability among learners when it comes to personality factors. Because of this variability researchers focused their attention to this issue in order to help students pursue their goals in second language acquisition. Personality traits have special characteristics among individuals that usually could be traced to an unchanged pattern of traits. Researchers have focused their attention on anxiety, locus of control, achievement orientation, intrinsic motivation, self-esteem, social competence etc. Among the most prominent and very often used instrument to measure personality traits is Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers, McCaulley, Quenk, & Hammer, 1988). Costa and McCrea's (1992). Five Factor model of personality is also very prominent and often used in language acquisition field. The model includes five factors that mark person's personality, namely they are: Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism. The research on personality traits and language learning strategies has not been popular and not much researched in the field. There are a number of researchers who called on a wider research in this field because of its importance and potential contribution in the language studies (Bongeaerts, Planken & Schils, 1995; Dorney, 2009, 2010, Moyer, A. 1999, Moyer, M. 2007).

Current research main aim is to determine personality traits among IUS students as well as the preferences towards language learning strategies. Besides, the researchers' intention was to determine to what extent personality traits and language learning strategies correlate between each other. The first part of the research will present statement of the problem and why the research was instigated. Statistical analysis will be presented through descriptive statistics, the Pearson product-moment correlation, and t-test for the differences among male and female students in regards to personality factors and language learning strategies.

### **Statement of the problem**

The study investigated the concept of personality traits and preferred learning strategies among IUS students. The most important concern was to determine how

these two variables correlate and to what extent they influence language learning. Researchers posed the following questions: What are the dominant personality traits of the respondents? What are preferred learning strategies of the students while learning a second language? What is the predominant personality trait according to the gender differences? What are the predominant learning strategies of the students according to the gender? Is there a significant correlation between predominant personality trait and the most preferred language learning strategy employed by the respondents?

## **METHOD**

The study was conducted among 70 students at the International University of Sarajevo attending freshman courses ENG111 and MAN111. The particular study took place in the fall semester school year 2015-2016. The researcher used two set of questionnaires; Big Five and SILL. Quantitative and descriptive study was employed in this research.

## **Instruments**

### ***Strategies Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)***

Researchers used Oxford's, 1990 The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL version 7.0 for ESL/EFL learners, 50 items). This is a self-report questionnaire, on which students marked their choices based on how they perceive themselves while learning a language. In this way, we were able to determine how often students use language learning strategies. The SILL questionnaire has been widely used as a key instrument in many studies. Those studies have reported reliability coefficients for the SILL ranging from .85 to .98. This means that the questionnaire is a trustworthy measure for determining students' reported language learning strategy use (Bremner & Narayan, 1988; Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995; Park, 1997; Sheorey, 1999; Wharton, 2000). In the SILL, language learning strategies are grouped into six categories for assessment: Memory strategies for storing and retrieving information, Cognitive strategies for understanding and producing the language, Compensation strategies for overcoming limitations in language learning, Meta-cognitive strategies for planning and monitoring learning, Affective strategies for controlling emotions, motivation, and Social strategies for cooperating with others in language learning.

### ***Five Factor Model***

Five Factor Model was the second questionnaire used in this study. Five Factor model is composed of Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Extraversion is related to the people who like to be engaged with the external world, usually very friendly and easy going. It is the personality trait according to which people look for the fulfillment from sources outside the self or in community. High scorers are usually associated with being social while low scorers have a preference towards working on their projects alone. Agreeableness personality trait refers to modesty, compassion, tender-mindedness and honesty. It reflects an individual who adjust their behavior to suit others. High scorers are typically

polite and they like people. Conscientiousness is the personality trait of being honest and hardworking. People who possess this personality trait are usually punctual and reliable at work. They prefer planned and structured behavior to spontaneity and creativity. High scorers tend to follow rules and prefer clean homes. Low scorers may be messy and cheat others. Neuroticism is the personality trait of being emotional. Neurotic people express instability and they are very impulsive. They cannot handle stress, they usually have fear. Openness to Experience is the personality trait of seeking new experience and intellectual pursuits. High scores may day dream a lot. Low scorers may be very down to earth.

## RESULTS

The first research question was to define the dominant personality traits of the respondents? In order to determine personality factors of the students the following were considered Extroversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism and Openness. According to the table 1. below and the mean value (M=23,69) students exhibited preferences of personality trait for Openness to Experience. Agreeableness (M=21, 53) and Conscientiousness (M=21, 34) were the next ranked personality trait among students. Extroversion (M=18, 50) and Neuroticism (M=18, 87) had the lowest mean.

**Table 1.** One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Extroversion	70	18,50	2,477	,296
Agreeableness	70	21,53	3,124	,373
Conscientiousness	70	21,34	2,675	,320
Neuroticism	70	18,87	2,983	,356
Openness to experience	70	23,69	3,295	,394

Besides investigating the personality trait, the researchers tend to investigate the preferred learning strategies of the students when learning the language? According to the table below the most preferred leaning strategies among students was Cognitive (M=29, 21) learning strategy. Memory (M=19, 97) learning strategy was the second ranked learning strategy among students, followed with Metacognitive (M=18, 90) learning strategies. The least preferred learning strategy was Compensation (M=12, 56) learning strategy, followed with Social (M=12, 37) strategy.

**Table 2.** One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Memory	70	19,97	3,757	,449
Cognitive	70	29,21	4,800	,574
Compensation	70	12,56	2,512	,300
Metacognitive	70	18,90	4,076	,487
Effective	70	14,66	3,116	,372
Social	70	12,37	3,018	,361

The second research question was to find if there is any difference between male and female students regarding personality traits? According to table 3 below, the mean value implies that there is statistically significant difference between male and female students only on the Openness personality trait. All other personality traits did not differ significantly between male and female students. It can be concluded that because female students are more open they differ on the Openness personality from their male counterparts.

**Table 3.** Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Extroversion	Equal variances assumed	2,727	,103	,652	68	,517	,404	,621	-,834	1,643
	Equal variances not assumed			,695	59,443	,490	,404	,582	-,760	1,569
Agreeableness	Equal variances assumed	2,525	,117	,860	68	,393	,671	,781	-,887	2,229
	Equal variances not assumed			,965	65,948	,338	,671	,696	-,718	2,060
Conscientiousness	Equal variances assumed	5,313	,024	1,354	68	,180	,898	,663	-,426	2,221
	Equal variances not assumed			1,566	67,862	,122	,898	,573	-,246	2,042
Neuroticism	Equal variances assumed	5,124	,027	1,854	68	,068	-1,356	,731	-,2815	,104
	Equal variances not assumed			1,696	38,432	,098	-1,356	,799	-,2973	,262
Openness to experience	Equal variances assumed	1,903	,172	3,031	68	,003	2,356	,777	,805	3,906
	Equal variances not assumed			3,306	62,651	,002	2,356	,712	,932	3,779

**Table 4.** Group Statistics

	gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Extroversion	female	25	18,76	2,127	,425
	male	45	18,36	2,664	,397
Agreeableness	female	25	21,96	2,300	,460
	male	45	21,29	3,501	,522
Conscientiousness	female	25	21,92	1,754	,351
	male	45	21,02	3,041	,453
Neuroticism	female	25	18,00	3,512	,702
	male	45	19,36	2,560	,382
Openness	female	25	25,20	2,500	,500
	male	45	22,84	3,404	,507

The next research question was to find if there is any difference between male and female students when it comes to their preferences towards language learning strategies? The results indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between male and female students in their strategy use. There was only slight, but not significant difference, between male and female students in metacognitive strategy use. Female students used metacognitive strategy more than male students (for Female students  $M = 19,04$  and for Male students  $M = 17,82$ ).

**Table 5.** Group Statistics

	gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
memory	female	25	20,36	3,463	,693
	male	45	19,76	3,932	,586
Cognitive	female	25	29,00	4,975	,995
	male	45	29,33	4,753	,709
compensation	female	25	12,68	2,780	,556
	male	45	12,49	2,380	,355
metacognitive	female	25	19,04	4,036	,807
	male	45	18,82	4,141	,617
effective	female	25	14,40	2,309	,462
	male	45	14,80	3,501	,522
social	female	25	12,12	2,818	,564
	male	45	12,51	3,145	,469

The third research question investigated if there is a significant correlation between predominant personality trait and the most preferred language learning strategy employed by the respondents? According to the table below results show that there is a strong correlation between personality traits and language learning strategies at the 0.01 level (2 tailed) and at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). The strongest correlation is between Extroversion and all the strategies (Memory, Cognitive, Compensation, Metacognitive, Effective, and Social) employed by students. The strong correlation also was found between Agreeableness and Effective learning strategy. The strong correlation has also been found between Consciousness and all the learning strategies except Metacognitive and Social strategy. The weakest correlation was found between Neuroticism and all the

language learning strategies except Effective learning strategy where correlation was significant ( $S=$ , 293). The weak correlation was also found between Openness and language learning strategies except Compensation and Effective learning strategies. Overall results showed that there is correlation between personality traits and strategy use in the language classroom. Having this in mind, it has to be stated that second language instructors should pay more attention to their students' personality traits and their success or failure to acquire second language.

**Table 6.** Correlations

		Memory	Cognitive	Compensation	Metacognitive	Effective
Extroversion	Pearson Correlation	,269*	,437**	,241*	,438**	,282*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,024	,000	,044	,000	,018
	N	70	70	70	70	70
Agreeableness	Pearson Correlation	,203	,074	,075	,079	,370**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,093	,540	,539	,514	,002
	N	70	70	70	70	70
Conscientiousness	Pearson Correlation	,354**	,253*	,444**	,212	,385**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,003	,035	,000	,078	,001
	N	70	70	70	70	70
Neuroticisms	Pearson Correlation	,076	,116	,161	,018	,293*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,532	,338	,184	,882	,014
	N	70	70	70	70	70
Openness to experience	Pearson Correlation	,214	,163	,272*	,186	,245*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,076	,178	,023	,122	,041
	N	70	70	70	70	70
	N	70	70	70	70	70

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

## DISCUSSION

In the current research from the data presented above it can be concluded that students exhibited preferences of personality trait for Openness to Experiences. Agreeableness and Conscientiousness were the next ranked personality trait. This is in agreement with the previous research done on this topic (Kang, 2012). Extroversion ( $M=18$ , 50) and Neuroticism ( $M=18$ , 87) had the lowest mean, which means that students were not extroverts and they did not feel neurotic while learning the language.

The results of SILL showed that the most preferred learning strategies among students was Cognitive ( $M=29$ , 21) learning strategy. Memory ( $M=19$ , 97) learning strategy was the second ranked learning strategy among students, followed with Metacognitive ( $M=18$ , 90) learning strategies. The least preferred learning strategy was Compensation

(M=12, 56) learning strategy, followed with Social (M=12, 37) strategy. Current research findings do not correspond with the results of the previous research done on the similar topic. Su's (2005) results showed that students exhibited preferences for social strategy. She investigated Taiwanese vocational college students majoring in Applied Foreign Language. Wharton (2000) also conducted study among University students in Singapore and found that they preferred social learning strategy. However, Politzer (1983) in her study found that her students preferred memorization learning strategy. This is more in line with the results from the current research. From this it can be claimed that student's learning strategies have changed, most probably with the current changes and trends in technology and approach to education.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The main objective of this study was to determine the level of the Five Factors among IUS students, and to find out whether there is any relationship between personality traits and language learning strategies. The analysis confirmed strong correlation between personality traits and language learning strategies. The personality factor that has the most powerful modifying personality in this research is Openness to Experience. This is most probably due to its relationship with intellectual functionality and huge dependence on genetic factors. Being aware of what works for a student in successful language learning may play decisive role towards foreign language success. It also can increase self-confidence and motivation in students. Personality traits of the students should be taken into consideration when planning foreign language classes as it can add an extra value and guidance in successful language learning.

Using this information, professional course developers will be able to bring important issues in language learning closer to the students, so that they will be able to achieve best learning results. Making students aware about their personality trait and the type of strategy they employ while learning the language may also increase their interests and motivation. Once made aware about these different issues students will be able to explain their personality traits so that they will be empowered to learning in a variety of learning situations. Since Cognitive strategy was the highest ranked strategy in the current research context, students should have been given an opportunity to approach their learning tasks from this perspective. Language instructors should take into consideration the research results and try to plan and structure their classes so that they reflect students' preferences.

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