WEB-BASED LANGUAGE LEARNING PERCEPTION
AND PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS
OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract

The significance of learners' personality in language learning/teaching contexts has often been cited in literature but few studies have scrutinized the role it can play in technology-oriented language classes. In modern language teaching/learning contexts, personality differences are important and should be taken into account. This study determined university students' introvert/extrovert personality types and examined their perception/ attitudes towards web-based language learning. The participants of the study who were selected through purposive sampling were 40 BA students of EFL, 22 female and 18 male. The participants attended blended classes that incorporated use of the Internet (Edublogs). Quantitative data were collected via the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ) (1975) and two modified web-based language learning attitude/perception questionnaires (Gilmore, 1998; Slate, Manuel, & Brinson, 2002). Interviews were conducted to reveal insights concerning the advantages/disadvantages of integrating use of the Internet from the participants' perspectives. T-test analyses did not indicate significant differences in attitudes between extroverts and introverts. Qualitative results indicated most of the participants considered internal, external, and psychological factors associated with the Internet use to be motivating, exciting, and stimulating. The study has implications for teachers and practitioners, particularly in blended, language learning classrooms.

Keywords: introvert/extrovert; personality types; web-based language learning

1. Introduction

In current educational contexts, the use of technology is growing. Today most college students are familiar with digital tools. Ease of access has also facilitated the implementation of technology in educational contexts. Internet resources are invaluable for language teaching

and learning because they can provide authentic contexts for language learners. Moreover, use of the Internet enables multilateral relationships with others from every corner of the world, including native and indigenous language users. Utilization of Internet resources in language teaching and learning can change traditional teaching. Traditional pedagogies often oblige students to follow a general method even though they have different learning styles, on the other hand, web-based learning assists students to follow their own styles and strategies in learning a skill or doing a language-related task. For this reason, personality types and attitudes of language learners may play a significant role in effective implementation of technology in language learning.

There are some studies that report language learners' positive attitudes towards the use of technology in their language learning process (Levine, Ferenz, & Reves, 2000). Students become motivated when they have classes integrating traditional and computer-mediated pedagogies. They appreciate opportunities for interaction and for learning some computer skills (Warschauer, 1996). In another report Jones (1992) states that familiarity with computer and Internet skills enhanced positive attitudes towards the use of technology. Recent studies in applied linguistics indicate that autonomy of language learners is important to their achievement and may be increased via computer-mediated instruction and interaction with both teachers and classmates. Brajcich (2000) also emphasizes the importance of autonomy and believes that students can develop this worthwhile and beneficial feature through web-based learning whether individually or cooperatively.

Personality types and attitudes of students also affect achievement. Incompatibility of personality types with chosen methods may result in decreased learning. Early attention to individual differences was motivated by the need to identify which learners should be taught English by devising such tests as the Modern Language Aptitude Battery by Carroll and Sapon, (1959). This test was expected to predict which learners would be both versatile and successful. Recent studies continue to explore possible links between learners' personalities and differential success.

Personality type has been discussed from different vantage points. It has been viewed as pertaining to different forms of information processing or learning styles (Messick, 1994). The effect of individual differences and studies related to the role of individual differences (IDs) has a long tradition in second language studies/teaching and everybody would certainly accept the crucial influence of IDs like aptitude, motivation, or learning styles on the success and mastering of foreign language learning (Dornyei, 2005).

However, in spite of the important role of individual differences in SLA, foregrounding those differences has been marginalized in the realm of language learning and teaching (Ellis, 2008). Individual differences, including their effect on the cognitive processes involved in language acquisition, have received little attention from researchers. This may be attributed to the overriding concerns of language researchers and practitioners with universalistic facets of language acquisition.

Personality can be considered as those characteristics of a person that "account for a consistent patterns of feelings, thinking and behaving" (Pervin and John, 2001, p. 4, as cited in Dornyei, 2005). It is generally perceived of as made up of a series of traits such as Introversion / Extroversion and stability/neuroticism (Ellis, 2008). Introversion/Extraversion have received more attention than the other personality types in the sphere of language teaching and learning. This could be the case because it is fairly easy to provide reliable measures of these traits and there are some clear commonsense relationships between extraversion/introversion and language use (Furnham, 1990). This study aims to investigate the relationship between the two personality types, Introversion/ Extraversion, and web-based language learning. The focus is on the two personality types' attitudes towards web-based language learning.

Kumaravadivelu (2001) points to the potential of the World Wide Web to allow learners to experience liberatory autonomy. He maintains that teachers can foster liberatory autonomy meaningfully by:

- encouraging learners to assume, with the help of their teachers, the role of miniethnographers so that they can investigate and understand how language rules and language use are socially structured, and also explore whose interests these rules serve;
- asking learners to write diaries or journal entries about issues that directly engage their sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world, and continually reflect on their observations and the observations of their peers;
- helping them form learning communities where learners develop into unified, socially cohesive, mutually supportive groups seeking self-awareness and self-improvement;
- providing opportunities for learners to explore the unlimited possibilities offered by on-line services on the World Wide Web and bringing back to the class their own topics for discussion and their own perspectives on those topics. (p. 547-548)

As Bueno-Alastuey and Lopez Pe´rez (2013) point it out,

> [r]esearch on blended learning has mainly focused on outlining the advantages and disadvantages of some blended courses. However, the perceptions of students on different courses, regarding the usefulness of technologies for the development of the different skills and areas of language, have hardly been explored. Knowing students' opinions and perceptions of

the potential of particular blended learning experiences and their contribution to the development of the different skills and areas of language (and whether those perceptions vary depending on the technologies used) can provide valuable information for blended learning design and implementation. (p.2)

According to previously conducted studies, there are some advantages for web-based and computer-mediated language learning. In a study by Schoepp and Erogul (2001), the findings revealed the effectiveness of computer technology on the development of learners' independence and autonomy and also the development of reflective language learning. Working in an interactive environment and "learning-by-doing" leads to increased confidence. According to Pow (1999), learners appreciate group work when experiencing online interactive activities.

However, few studies have made an attempt to investigate the potential differences between different personality variables and their attitudes towards web-based language learning. The current study seeks to examine the difference between two personality types' (Introvert & Extrovert) attitudes towards blended language teaching classes. The second phase of the study seeks to determine participants' attitudes towards the blended classes using qualitative methods.

2. The study

2.1. Participants

The study was conducted at Allame Tabatabe'I University in Iran and the participants of the study who were selected through purposive sampling were 40 B.A students of EFL, 22 females and 18 males. The students were in two classes with 20 students in each, taught by one teacher. One of the classes was held in the morning at 8:00 AM and the other one was held at 3:00 PM. Students were in their fourth term of undergraduate studies and their proficiency level was pre-advanced. Participants were familiar with the use of computers and the Internet as they were expected to do their assignments using online resources and tools. The instructor was a seasoned language teacher, familiar with the use of technology in language teaching and learning.

2.2. Instruments and materials

In order to identify the personality type of the participants, the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ) (1975) was employed. The questionnaire was made up of 90 items with Yes or No answers. The questionnaire was in English and a Persian translation was attached

to make some difficult English items understandable. Two modified web-based language learning attitude/perception questionnaires (Gilmore, 1998; Slate, et al., 2002) were employed. All participants experienced a blended language-learning course. The course included traditional classes and Internet-based classes. The main concern of the course was to teach writing skills. Edublogs were used in order to send questions and answers to the previously queried questions (see Appendix 1).

2.3. Procedure

Before collecting the desired data the participants were provided with the conditions in which they could experience language learning through the Internet from the beginning of the term, the teacher cooperated with the researcher by incorporating Edublogs in his classes. The teacher instructed the students in face-to-face classes but they were expected to complete some assignments via the Internet. During the term they had ten sessions of work online. At the end of the term the teacher asked the students to fill in the questionnaires. As mentioned above, the main instruments for collecting the data were Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ) (1975) and two modified web-based language learning attitude/perception questionnaires (Gilmore, 1998; Slate, et al., 2002). In order to avoid having mixed data we attached the attitude/perception questionnaires to the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ), so it would be easy to identify each personality type's attitudes towards web-based language learning. The obtained data were submitted to SPSS for statistical analysis and find the descriptive data. The t-test was applied to see if there was a significant difference between the two groups' attitudes toward web-based language learning.

In order to obtain richer and more sensitive data, the researchers selected 10 participants randomly to take part in the qualitative part of the study, five introvert and five extrovert. Predetermined and structured interviews were conducted including six items regarding the role of language teachers and the Internet and also psychological effect of using the Internet, if any, on participants. Each interview took approximately 30 minutes. Interviews were audio-taped for transcription and analyzed to inform our understanding of the participants' perceptions regarding the role of the Internet in language learning.

3. Results

After collecting the data the researchers used the t-test to compare the difference between the two groups' attitudes towards the target feature of the study. The computed and analyzed data

revealed that both of the groups' perception towards the use of web in their classes was positive. The descriptive statistics show both of the groups have the same perception of the web.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the groups' attitudes towards web-based language learning.

	personality	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. deviation**
attitude	Introvert	17	3.23	.17
	Extrovert	22	3.25	.41

As Table 1 reveals, the mean of the groups, M= 3.23 and 3.25, is similar. However, in order to examine none/significance of the difference between the mean of the groups we need to analyze the computed data through use of the t-test. The following table (2) presents the result of the t-test.

Table 2. T-test results comparing extroverts' and extroverts' attitudes towards web-based language learning.

	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Equal variances assumed	1.48	.23	-.27	37	.78

The results of the groups' attitudes appear in Table 2, indicating that there is no significant difference between introverts' (M=3.23, SD=.17) and extroverts' (M=3.25, SD=.41) attitudes (t (37)=-.27, p=.23) towards the role of the Internet in language learning. According to the obtained data both groups have positive attitudes towards the use of the Internet in their classes. Both personality types, introvert and extrovert, appreciate the use of the Internet in blended language classes.

The above-mentioned results may provide an inspiring message to language practitioners and teachers who encounter language learners with considerably different personalities adding to the complexity of determining best practices. Extroverts are perceived to be more sociable and more concerned with what is happening around them while introverts are less sociable and too reserved to join social activities. Language teachers may use computer-mediated instruction to provide all learners, regardless of their personality type, to have access to optimal learning conditions. When language teachers encounter students that

rarely take part in classroom activities, Internet-mediated instruction can help provide opportunities for collaboration and interaction.

Next the researchers attempted to learn more about the relationship between individual personality differences and web/internet based language learning. Some of the participants were selected randomly to participate in interviews.

3.1. Qualitative analysis

During this phase of the study, ten participants were randomly selected to be interviewed. Five of them were introverts and five extroverts. The questions asked were extracted from the questionnaire that was used in the quantitative part of the study. However, some parts of the questions were modified in order to elicit richer and more sensitive data from the participants. The interview procedure took about thirty minutes for each of the participants. The interview was audio-recorded and transcribed for detailed analysis of the attitudes of the participants and the role of the Internet in their learning process. Selected responses follow:

1. Is the Internet easier to use than the library? Which one do you prefer?

> Participant: I personally use Internet when I search some topics or I want to write about something I prefer modern technology rather than traditional one. I think using library is difficult for me maybe it's time consuming I cannot find any suitable source and there is no one to help us to find suitable source in library. We can have a lot of source and they are more available than searching in library among many books.

Most participants indicated they preferred to use the Internet as opposed to the library. Participants mentioned: *difficulty in the use and access to library, time consuming features of the library, lack of suitable sources and lack of enough guides in the library, inadequate libraries in the vicinity of the participants, and lack of time of the students.* The aforementioned factors were identified as demerits of using library from the participants' point of view. On the other hand, two of the participants acknowledged the *reliability* of sources in the library.

2. Do you find the Internet as informative as language teachers? Why?

> Participant: I think the Internet is in some ways more helpful than language teachers. Maybe you have something in your mind that you want to search about that points in the internet maybe you cannot transfer what you mean to language teachers and not expect them to help you because of psychological barriers. But if you know that what you want to search what do you want to get from this part, so you should know and search better and you should find better

through the Internet rather than language teachers. But in other ways it's absolutely that language teachers can help too. But I think I can get more results from internet rather than language teachers.

The above excerpt indicates the participant's positive perception of the Internet. According to some of the participants, *psychological barriers* may prevent them from eliciting needed information from their teachers. On the other hand, some of them said that teachers can be more specific than the Internet i.e. teachers can better pinpoint the confusing issues faced by students. Positive traits including *access to varieties of information and being up to date* were attributed to the Internet. All in all, the participants seemed to have similar attitudes towards the effectiveness of teachers and the Internet.

3. Do you like to take blended English classes? Why?

Participant: nowadays I think if we go through the new technology and if we will adopt ourselves with this world so we know that most of the world, most of the classes will help with technology and using internet than the traditional one. But maybe some teachers or depending on each student's situation or talent maybe some traditional ways help students.

The majority of the students expressed positive attitudes toward having blended classes and few opposed their use. In the excerpt above, the student implies that both language learners and teachers need to keep abreast of the latest development in technology and their use in education. The motivational effect of using the Internet was noted, while the role of language teachers in improving conversation was highlighted by two of the participants.

4. Do you think that working with the Internet will be enjoyable and stimulating? Can you elaborate your answer?

Participant: I like to learn English with the Internet. Whenever for example we search something in the Internet and you are not satisfied you search more and more but when you ask a teacher and you are not satisfied you can't ask again and again. It is a limitation. When I look for information in the Internet I feel easy and not under pressure or stress.

The majority of the participants acknowledged that in comparison to language teachers in traditional classes, the Internet does not restrict the options at their disposal for seeking answers to problematic language points. Other positive factors from the participants' perspective included *provision of stress free and low pressure atmosphere* and *up-to-date and new information*. One of the participants was averse to using the Internet in language classes.

5. Does the Internet motivate you to learn English? How do you find it motivating/demotivating?

> Participant: Yes. It is motivating because it explains very small points I think. For example I see a sentence in net and I don't know about the grammatical structure, then it motivates me to go and learn about it and I feel stress free. Nowadays I believe that we can have interaction and connection with native speakers.

The participant viewed such factors as *access to native speakers, real data, variety of sources, getting very subtle and informative points about lexical improvement and grammatical structure, and low pressure* to be the motivational features of the Internet. Conversely, some of the participants were averse to the use of the Internet, stating that in face-to-face teacher-directed classes they experience competition which improves their performance. Advocates of face-to-face only language classes believe that provision of *rewards* and *positive responses* from language teachers provide an advantage for language learners.

6. Does the Internet help you to work with your classmates?

> Participant: Not at all. I don't like to have any connection with my friends through the Internet.
> I prefer the face-to-face interactions and cooperation.

Due to the fact that most of the Internet cooperation was accomplished through writing, some of the participants favored face-to-face interaction. One of the participants explicitly asserted that she confines her interactions to classmates who are more knowledgeable than her because most of her classmates are not proficient enough to promote her linguistic development. On the other hand, some did refer to the positive effects of peer correction and feedback received through the Internet.

4. Discussion

This study explored the role of individual differences (IDs) in EFL learners' perceptions regarding the use of the Internet in their language learning process. Analysis of quantitative data did not show a significant difference between the two groups' (Introverts & Extroverts) attitudes towards the use of the Internet in their language classes. Overall participants' perceptions regarding the efficacy of the Internet was positive.

The qualitative part of the study provided richer insights into the participants' attitudes towards the target variable. Based on the elicited data we categorized driving factors in determining perceptions of the Internet as a teaching tool. Categories included: *internal,*

external, and psychological factors. It is worth noting that there is no clear boundary between the aforementioned factors, that is, some of the subcategories overlap. However, internal factors are primarily concerned with the intrinsic desire of learners to accomplish a goal, while external factors refer to ecological and extrinsic forces, which drive learners to do something and psychological factors refer to functions of the human mind which are affected by individual ways of thinking and feeling, and other cognitive traits.

Such factors as ease of access to unlimited information, access to native speakers, real data, getting very subtle and informative points about lexical acquisition and grammatical structures, were considered to be enjoyable, exciting and motivating features of the Internet from the students' perspective. All contributed to internal satisfaction. In contrast to most of the participants, one person, who was also an extrovert, viewed access to native speakers to be demotivating. This stemmed from lack of self-confidence on the part of the interviewee.

External factors including access to varieties of sources, being up-to-date, growing influence of technology, cooperation with classmates, and time-saving qualities were also influential in determining positive responses to Internet use. Psychological factors, including low pressure, feeling unstressed, and adjusting for individual differences, were also cited by participants.

Although both of the personality types had positive attitudes towards the role of the Internet in language learning, some of the participants downgraded the facilitative and pedagogical role of the Internet in their classes. This dichotomous attitude of some participants may be attributed to their comfort with traditional pedagogies. If language learners are exposed to prolonged, blended classes, they may find more value in using technology. Moreover, blended classes may provide conditions in which language learners with different personality types can have autonomy in doing language-related tasks as they favor.

In language teaching classes we encounter some students who are too reserved to take part in class activities and discussions. In such cases, language teachers complain about their inability to inspire those students to participate. The Internet may provide an ideal means for these language learners to participate in the class activities with fewer psychological barriers. In this study, the importance of the Internet in minimizing psychological barriers including stress and pressure was highlighted.

As Kumaravadivelu (2001) pointed out, the World Wide Web can provide opportunities for maximizing the liberatory autonomy of language learners in the post-method era. Liberatory autonomy of language learners is germane to language learners' critical

thinking abilities. Therefore, language teachers and syllabus designers are advised to integrate the use of the Internet resources in their classes in order to create equal conditions for language learners with different personality types, learning styles and cognitive strengths to improve linguistic proficiency.

Findings of this study are congruent with those of Lin (2002), who found that technologically based language teaching enhanced the learners' motivation for completing tasks and created a sense of excitement in learners. Similarly, a study by Bueno-Alastuey and Lopez Pe´rez (2013) showed the usefulness of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) from the perception of two groups of learners in EFL and ESL settings. The EFL group experienced full integration of ICT in their classes while the ESL group used lower level of integration. The researchers reported that the ESL group found ICT more useful in strengthening some skills (grammar and vocabulary) while the EFL group highlighted the role of ICT in influencing their pronunciation and productive skills. It may be concluded that learners' personality types can influence their attitudes towards learning varying language skills via the use of the Internet.

5. Conclusion

Nowadays the use of technology including the Internet continues to gain momentum in education. Many language teachers feel compelled to integrate the use of the Internet and computer-mediated instruction in their language classes. The current study explored the relationship between personality types (introverts and extroverts) and EFL learners' attitudes towards web-based language learning.

This study applied quantitative and quantitative methods for collecting and analyzing data. Results shed light on extroverts' and introverts' attitudes towards the use of the Internet in their blended language learning classes. The analysis of quantitative data revealed that there was no significant difference between introverts' and extroverts' attitudes. Analysis of qualitative data indicated that participants considered internal, external, and psychological factors in attributing positive effects to the Internet use. They found use of the Internet in language classes to be motivating, exciting, and stimulating. They also acknowledged that using the Internet reduced pressure and established less stressful atmosphere. Nevertheless, some of the participants preferred to pursue their language learning using traditional means with a lower level of the Internet integration in their classes. This may be attributed to the accepted authority of language teachers in some educational contexts.

Further studies are needed to investigate the role of individual differences in personality, learning and cognitive strategies, which might play a determining role in applying Internet resources in language classes. Researchers need to further examine internal, ecological, and psychological factors that affect learning. It will be important to study the aforementioned factors from the perspective of language teachers as well as language learners. In addition, Internet-based language testing needs to be evaluated and examined from the perspective of test takers themselves while individual differences affecting Internet test performance are explored.

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Appendix 1. A sample of Edublogs setting