The Effects of Matching Iranian EFL Learners’ and Teachers’ Personality Types on the Student’s Oral Skill Achievement

Hamid Reza Shahroosvand¹, Zahra Dehghani²

¹Iran University of Science and Technology, PO Box: 7198977833, Shiraz, Iran; ²Shiraz, Iran

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Abstract

A lot of research has been done on the importance of paying attention to individuals in the language classroom. Part of the individuality refers to learner’s personality traces which describe why they learn differently. On the other hand, the teachers themselves have stable preferences in their teaching. This is, to a large expense, related to their personality type which is also important when one is talking about the importance of their tailoring to different personalities in the classroom. Therefore, it may be beneficial to determine the teachers’ personality type and the way they are matched to that of the students and the pattern of its effects on student’s achievement in the classroom. The purpose of the present study is to determine whether there is any significant difference between oral achievement of Iranian EFL learners whose personality types are matched with that of their teacher, and oral achievement of Iranian EFL learners whose personality types are not matched with that of their teachers. The subjects were chosen from the students majoring in English language at Yazd University. To determine the personality types of the teachers and the students, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). The result of data analysis shows that the similarity of learners’ and teachers’ personalities has a significant effect on their oral achievement. The findings of this study can be used in teacher education. The students and teachers should be aware of their own personality types and the way it can affect the students’ learning in the classroom. They can be taught different activities suitable for each personality type as stated by some researchers.

Keywords: EFL, teachers’ personality type, student’s oral skill achievement

Introduction

Personality factors have been used in area of individual differences. Discussing the meanings of personality, Walsh and Betz (2001, p.85) state that the word person in personality “suggests an individual identity having certain uniqueness”. They state two definitions for personality. In the first definition, personality is viewed as “a cluster of characteristics (abilities, interests, attitudes and values) indicative of a pattern of behavior”. The second definition defines personality as “an individual’s total behavior in social settings” (p.85). Richards and Schmidt (2002) defines personality as those “aspects of individual behavior, attitudes, beliefs, thought, actions, and feelings which are seen as typical and distinctive of that person” (p.395). They state that personality types can influence language learning because they can contribute to motivation and the choice of learning strategies.

The term personality type has been used and discussed by other researchers as well. Brown (2000, p.156) states that in the last several decades there has been a “tremendous wave of interest in western society” in the relationship between personality types and ones success in different pursuits of his life including academic and educational ones. Other researchers have proposed an understanding of personality type can help explain why we learn differently (Ehrman & Oxford, 1989, 1995). Ehrman & Oxford (1989, p.2) use another term i. e. psychological type with the same meaning and state that “psychological type can be viewed as a combination of a number of personality and cognitive variables”.

Researchers and practitioners use learning style research with personality and cognitive styles to de-

Grasha (1996), discussing teaching style, states that one of the ways the elements of teaching style can be determined is through determining the teachers’ personality traits. He believes that the teachers’ personality types affect the way they manage the classroom and their choice of activities and methodology. He then stresses the importance of matching teachers and students personality types.

**Statement of the Problem**

Much research has been done on the importance of paying attention to individuals in the language classroom. It is stated that the student’s personality type can describe why the students learn differently, hence the importance of taking their types into account in the language classroom. However, the teachers should know how to pay attention to every individual student in the limited time he has and under other constraints available.

However, little research has been done on matching teachers’ and student’s personality type and its effect on the students’ achievement. According to Diaz-Maggioli (1996) teachers can dwell on how to match the personalities in their classes. On the other hand the teachers themselves have stable preferences in their teaching (Peacock, 2001). This is to a large extent related to their personality type (Grasha, 1996). Thus the teachers’ personality type is also important when one is talking about the importance of their tailoring to different personalities in the classroom. Therefore, it may be beneficial to determine the teachers’ personality type and the way they are matched to that of the students and the pattern of its effects on student’s achievement in the classroom.

Considering the importance of learners’ and teachers’ personality discussed above, the purpose of the present study is to determine whether there is any significant difference between oral achievement of Iranian EFL learners whose personality types are matched with that of their teacher, and oral achievement of Iranian EFL learners whose personality types are not matched with that of their teachers.

**Research Question**

Is there any significant difference between oral achievement of Iranian EFL learners whose personality types are matched with that of their teacher, and oral achievement of Iranian EFL learners whose personality types are not matched with that of their teachers?

**Hypothesis**

There is no significant difference between oral achievement of Iranian EFL learners whose personality types are matched with that of their teacher, and oral achievement of Iranian EFL learners whose personality types are not matched with that of their teachers.

**Significance of the Study**

Personality type is one of the important factors of Individual Differences in language learning (Oxford, 2001; Grasha, 1996). With the shift of attention from teacher’s teaching in the classroom to learners’ learning the individual differences including personality types have been considered as important in language learning. However, when considering the importance of students’ individual differences it may be also of importance to take into account the possible unique characteristics or preferences their teachers have. This has also been mentioned by different researchers and has been the basis for a number of studies. According to Reid (1987) a mismatch between teaching and learning styles causes learning failure, frustration and demotivation. In his study Peacock (2001) found that 72% of the students were frustrated by a mismatch between teaching and learning styles and 76% said it affected their learning (p. 1). Rao (2002) emphasizes on the importance of matching teaching and learning styles as well. If matching teachers’ and students’ personality type affects the students’, this will have a lot of implications for teachers, material and program developers and students.

**Review of Literature**

The results of research on learning style and
personality and cognitive styles have been used to determine ability, predict performance, and improve classroom teaching and learning (Oxford et al, 2003). According to Ehrman & Oxford (1989), personality traits that appear to correlate moderately to highly with language learning success include “sense of humor, achievement orientation, assertiveness, outgoingness, impulsivity, risk taking, adventurousness, flexibility, tolerance of ambiguity and frustration, confidence, determination, and empathy”. They state that some of these may be classified by some researchers as elements of cognitive style because “cognitive style can be viewed as a specialized set of personality dimensions (Ibid: 2)”. Most of these traits have also been discussed by Chastain (1988) as effective factors in language learning.

Apart from the traits mentioned, the term personality type, has been used and discussed by some researchers with a somehow different definition or focus. Brown (2000: 156) states that in the last several decades there has been a “tremendous wave of interest in western society” in the relationship between personality types and ones success in different pursuits of his life including academic and educational ones. Ehrman and Oxford (1989, p.2) use another term i.e. psychological type with the same meaning and state that “psychological type can be viewed as a combination of a number of personality and cognitive variables”. Ehrman and Oxford (1989, 1995) have proposed an understanding of personality type can help explain why we learn differently.

Myers and Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is one of well-known and widely used instruments for determining different individuals’ personality types which was developed by Isabel Myers (1962) and is based on the theories of Carl Jung (Brown, 2000, p.156). Jung, one of the pioneers of psychology, developed his theory of types as a means of accounting for differences in the way people take in information and make decisions. The theory remained a cornerstone of his thought and practice over many decades. His work was studied by Briggs and Myers who produced, the MBTI. Jung (1923, as stated in Brown, 2000, p.156) stated that “people are different in fundamental ways, and that an individual has preferences for “functioning” in ways that are characteristic, or “typical” of that particular individual”. In other words “behavior in daily life is the manifestation of underlying stable and unchanging preferences for certain ways of functioning” (Ehrman & Oxford, 1989). After the decline of behaviorism and with the increase in research on individual differences, Jung’s theory was revived in MBTI in 1962 (Coffield et al, 2004; Walsh and Betz, 2001).

**Myers and Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)**

The MBTI is a self-report instrument, designed to measure differences on four personality dimensions and 16 possible personality types based on Jung’s theory of personality types. According to personality type theory, individuals are predisposed to one of four alternatives in their behavior (Ehrman & Oxford, 1990). This instrument, which has been widely used in educational, career, and family counseling settings, identifies the preferred way an individual perceives (gather data) and judges (make decisions), according to four components: Extroversion vs. Introversion, Sensing vs. Intuition, Thinking vs. Feeling, and Judging vs. Perceiving.

The MBTI is a 93-item, forced choice, self-report questionnaire” which has been designed to determine the basic personality preferences on the four dimensions stated above (Coffield et al, 2004). According to MBTI “individuals have preferences that affect what they pay attention to in a given situation and how they draw conclusions or make decisions about what they perceive” (Ehrman and Oxford, 1989, p. 3). This instrument is used “to describe different personality types and the different ways individuals with these traits approach a task” (Sharp, 2004). The four dimensions of personality are assessed by MBTI on four bi-polar scales namely, Extraversion/Introversion, Sensing/Intuition, Thinking/Feeling, and Judging/Perceiving.

Different type preferences lead to different ways of living and working, taking in information and making decisions. They describe different, effective approaches to working and learning styles and methods, managing, leading, coaching and teaching as well as general communication, teamwork, relationships, counseling etc.

Because the MBTI is based on a comprehensive and coherent theory of personality, applications can be found in almost anything which involves people e.g. communication, leadership, change management, team building, planning, marketing, writing, counseling, personal development, career planning, teaching and learning and so on.

Each of these four dimensions is independent from the others. As the result there will be 16 possible combinations of preferences called types (Ehrman and Oxford, 1989). A type is designated by an
acronym made up of the initial letters of the preferences described above. For example, a person preferring Extroversion, Intuition, Thinking, and Judging is referred to as an ENTJ. (Note that Intuition is abbreviated “N” since Introversion has already used “I”. Bellow these types are shown.

However, in the area of research on personality type in EFL, most of the studies are survey studies determining the relationship between achievement and proficiency to learners’ personality types. In most of the studies done in Iranian EFL settings on the issue, the relationship between personality types and proficiency (Javadi, 2004), writing ability (Marefat, 2006), and performance on IELTS (Hoseini, 2003) have been determined. Alibakhshi (2011) studied the impacts of gender and personality types on Iranian EFL teachers’ teaching efficacy and teaching activities and found that gender and personality influence teachers’ teaching activities preferences. Another way in which research can be done on the relationship between personality types is the effects of matching teachers and students personality types in a language course. Little research has been done in this area and its relationship with oral skill achievement as one of the major language skills.

Methodology

Participants

One hundred nineteen Iranian EFL learners studying English at university participated in this study after their knowledge of English on an English proficiency was considered homogeneous. All the participants were fresh college students doing an English conversation course. All of the students received the same instruction. To ensure the homogeneity of the participants in terms of speaking ability, they were interviewed and rated based on IELTS speaking band descriptors. The homogeneous students in terms of English proficiency and speaking ability entered the final phase of the study.

Instruments

Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), a 93-item, forced-choice survey based on Jung’s (1923) theory of psychological type, was administered to them to determine the participants’ personality types. At the same time, the MBTI was also administered to the teachers to determine their personality types. In the process of data analysis, those students whose personality types were matched with that of their teachers were considered as one group (matched) and those whose personality types were not matched with that of their teachers were considered as another group (mismatched) by the researcher. This process of grouping was done separately for male and female student as well. At the end of the instruction, the students’ speaking achievements were measured through an oral interview test given and rated by two raters based on IELTS speaking band scores. Separate t-tests were run to determine the differences between the mean scores of matched and mismatched groups.

Results and Discussion

In order to test the hypothesis of this study, a t-test was run for the speaking achievement scores of matched and mismatched groups. Based on table 1, the value of t observed (3.55) was greater than the critical value of t (2.00). Therefore, the difference between the mean scores was significant at the p<0.05 level. It can be claimed that there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the matched and mismatched groups. Table 1 presents independent t-test for achievement speaking scores of all students regardless of their gender.

Table 1. Independent Samples Test for speaking achievement scores of all students (male and female)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score</td>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>3.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In order to investigate the effects of gender, a t-test was run for the speaking achievement scores of matched and mismatched groups of male students. The value of t observed (3.71) was greater than the critical value of t (2.01). Therefore the difference between the mean scores was significant at the p<0.05 level. It can be claimed that there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the matched and mismatched groups of male students on the oral achievement test. In other words, matching male students’ personality types with that of their teachers significantly affected the performance of the participants on the oral achievement test. Table 2 presents independent t-test for speaking achievement scores of male students.

A t-test was run for the speaking achievement scores of matched and mismatched groups of female students as well. The value of t observed (7.60) was greater than the critical value of t (2.04). Therefore the difference between the mean scores was significant at the p<0.05 level. It can be claimed that there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the matched and mismatched groups of female students on the oral achievement test. In other words, matching female students’ personality types with that of their teacher significantly affected the performance of the participants on the oral achievement test. Table 3 presents independent t-test for speaking achievement scores of female students.

**Table 2. Independent Samples Test for speaking achievement scores of male students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>.178</td>
<td>.675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>3.710</td>
<td>40.426</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3. Independent Samples Test for oral achievement scores of female students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>5.112</td>
<td>.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>7.600</td>
<td>31.220</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1 shows the percentage distribution of MBTI types within the whole sample of English students. As shown in the figure ISTJ (Introvert Sensing Thinking Judging), ENFP (Extrovert
Intuition Feeling Perceiving) and ESTJ (Extrovert Sensing Thinking Judging) outnumber other students respectively, ENTP (Extrovert Intuition Thinking Perceiving), INTP (Introvert Intuition Thinking Perceiving) and ESFP (Extrovert Sensing Feeling Perceiving) subjects were less than others respectively.

基于描述性统计分析，发现参与者的大多数为SJ和NF类型。这些百分比在某种程度上与Ghafar Samar et al (2007)的研究结果相似，他们的研究对象主要是英语学生，主要来自ESTJ, ISTJ, ISFJ, and ESFJ。这可能表明SJ类型的学生更倾向于外语学习，而不是其他类型组。ISTJ, ENFP and ESTJ的人数相对较多，因此值得简要说明他们的特殊特征。

Table 4 shows the distribution of MBTI temperaments among male and female students. As we can see the SJ temperaments which consist of ISTJ, ESTJ,ISFJ and ESFJ is the largest. The second largest group is NF which compromise ENFP, INFP, ENFJ and INFJ. SP group with the subtypes of ESTP, ISTP, ESFP and ISFP accounted for 10% of population and NT temperament that include ENTP, INTP, ENTJ and INTJ were less than others respectively.

Based on the descriptive statistics it was found that the majority of participants in both universities have SJ and NF temperaments. These percentages are to some extend similar to what was found by Ghafar Samar et al (2007) who found that their research subjects who are English students of Payam Nour University were mainly from ESTJ, ISTJ, ISFJ, and ESFJ. This may indicates that students of SJ temperament are more attracted to foreign language learning than other temperament groups. The large number of NF types was in contrast with the 8.5% reported by Ehreman (1994) and the 6.4% reported by Li & Qin (2003) for foreign language learners in US and China respectively. In this study the number of ISTJ, ENFP and ESTJ are more than others respectively so its worth to mention their especial characteristics briefly here..

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MBTI Temperaments</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SJ</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NF</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. The percentage distribution of MBTI types within the whole sample
Based on the results, SJ and NT temperaments outperformed others in speaking skill. The difference between SJ groups and NF, SP groups was significant but it was not so for SJ and NT temperaments. As the teacher’s temperament is also SJ, this supports the main tenet underlying this research. That is students whose personality temperaments are matched with that of their teacher do better than other students in the oral course. This was also supported by statistical measures run i.e. t-tests. But since NT groups also work well in the class we can conclude that mismatch of students teachers personality type does not necessarily produce negative effect on teaching and learning. As mentioned by Kolb (1984) a mismatch might be beneficial for some students and some learning situations. There is a possibility that a mismatch can help learners overcome their weaknesses in their intellectual styles and promote them to learn from different perspectives. Our subjects with SP personality type scored the lowest on oral achievement test. It indicated that they should try to improve their language learning strategies and teachers should encourage them to use their potentials and abilities as much as they can.

Based on the result of T-test run for the comparison of matched and mismatched groups, it was founded that students whose personality temperaments were the same as their teachers did better than others and this rejects our first null hypothesis. The matching effect is consistent with Marefat (2006) findings. She found that in writing course if the raters’ personality type corresponds to that of their students’, the students ‘grade will be significantly better, i.e. the more similar the personalities of students and their teachers, the higher they will be rated. She also found that personality type did not affect students writing performance.

Our findings are in contrast to the results of Cronbach & Snow (1979), Peterson (1979) and Doyle & Rutherford (1984) who found weak effect of personality on students’ achievements and said that personality type cannot be the basis for designing programs and instructions.

Since the results of this research shows that students’ personality types affect their learning and students who are the same as their teachers regarding personality types and temperaments better than others its worth to suggest teachers not to be biased toward students of similar personality type but by using balance strategies and teaching style create a situation in which all students take advantage of courses.

Conclusion

The results of this study have implications for teachers, students and material developers. Of course it would not be possible for the teachers to match their personality types to every individual student. However, the hypothesis is supported that matching teachers and students’ personality types positively affect their achievement; the teachers can use a wide array of activities in the classroom, although not matched with their own preferences, in order to provide opportunities for the students with different personality types. Moreover the teacher can help the student cope with activities which are not matched with their preferences. Material developers can focus of personality-based materials for students of different types.

The findings of this study can also be used in teacher education. The student teachers should be aware of their own personality types and the way it can affect the students’ learning in the classroom. They can be taught different activities suitable for each personality type as stated by some researchers (Grasha, 1996). In this way they can use the suitable activities if the majority of their students have a specific type; or a variety of them when they have different personality types.

References


