





**Personality, Attitudes and their Association with the Speaking Ability of Iranian
EFL Learners**

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Declaration

No portion of this work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification to this or any other university or other institution of learning.

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- استفاده از اطلاعات و نتایج موجود در پایان نامه بدون ذکر مرجع مجاز نمی باشد

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated with love and respect to the soul of Imam Khomeini who helped us look at our Iranian, Islamic culture with fresh eyes and appreciate the values previously ignored, and to the souls of all those who sacrificed their lives for this revival to let us become culturally, socially, and politically cognizant to be able to resist deculturation forever!

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

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List of abbreviations

SEM: Structural Equation Modeling

CFA: Confirmatory Factor Analysis

BFI: Big Five Inventory

AMTB: Attitude/Motivation Test Battery

CFI: Comparative Fit Indices

GFI: Goodness of Fit

RMSEA: Root Mean Square Error of Approximation

NC: Normed- chi square

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Abstract

Speaking is an important skill which is needed to be mastered by English language learners for making effective communication. Research has shown that the ability to speak is affected by certain individual characteristics. Following a similar path, this research sought to examine the influence of Big Five human personality traits and attitude toward learning English on English language speaking ability measured by the IELTS test. A total of 166 learners who studied English as a foreign language at English language institutes in Mashhad participated in this study. The 44-item Big Five Inventory (BFI) questionnaire was used as a measure of learners' personality dimensions. Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) as a measure of learners' attitude toward learning English and their IELTS speaking scores were considered as their English language speaking ability. To clarify the relationships among variables, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was conducted to examine the model fit. The data were collected through the questionnaire in which the goodness of the 44-item questionnaire of BFI and 10-item questionnaire of AMTB was studied by Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). Whilst neuroticism, agreeableness and conscientiousness were not predictors of English language speaking, SEM revealed significant paths from extroversion and openness to experience to speaking. Moreover, in relation to the influence of attitude toward learning English on speaking ability, SEM indicated a significant path between these two variables. The final structural regression model also showed a significant path between extroversion personality trait and attitude toward learning English. Bearing the findings of this study in mind, English language teachers need to provide effective, sensitive instruction and a more fruitful learning and teaching environment for the learners. Moreover, teachers' expectations about the oral performance of their students should to some extent be fair depending on what they know about the personality characteristics and attitude of their students and the relative anxiety-reducing nature of the situations in which the students are required to talk. This might result in the development of a more humanistic approach to learning.

Key words: Personality, Extroversion, Neuroticism, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Openness to experience, Attitude toward learning English, Structural Equation Confirmatory Factor Analysis. Modeling,

1.1. Overview

This chapter begins by discussing the importance and current state of the speaking skill for the English language learners to communicate effectively. Following that, the statement of the problem is presented. Then, the importance of the findings of this study in relation to language learning and teaching is discussed thoroughly. After that, the main purpose of undertaking this study is summarized. Then, the research questions and research hypotheses are stated. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of the limitations of this study and definitions of key terms.

1.2. Background

Speaking is an important skill which English language learners need to master to communicate effectively. In recent years, much of the discussion related to proficiency-oriented instruction and testing has focused on the development of oral skills (Garjian, Moosavinia, & Sharamiri, 2011). According to Fillmore (1979), language proficiency refers to the ability to talk in coherent and semantically dense sentences. In fact, for most people the ability to speak the English language is associated with proficiency in that language. Research has shown that the ability to speak is affected by certain individual characteristics. Personality and attitude toward learning English is widely accepted to have an effect on learning in general and second language acquisition (SLA) in particular (Kiany, 1995).

Various studies have prompted the suggestion that certain personality variables (e.g. extroversion and neuroticism) may play a critical role in the ability to speak English as a

second/foreign language with a native-like authenticity. Some studies (e.g. Kine, 1993; Qmarudin, 2010; Zabihi, 2011) have indicated that the association between these personality traits and L2 willingness to communicate (particularly English speaking ability) is positive, yet others (e.g. Curtone, 2009; Kamprasertwong, 2010; Nemati & Shahini, 2011) has found a negative relationship. Hence, one crucial point which is rather obvious is that there is no robust finding in regard to the association between these personality traits and English speaking ability.

Moreover, most of the research projects have concluded that students' attitude is an integral part of learning and that it should, hence, become an essential component of second language learning pedagogy (Ghazali, 2008; Tamimi & Shuib, 2009). There are several reasons why research on students' attitudes toward language learning is important. First, attitudes toward learning are believed to influence behaviors such as selecting and reading books and speaking in a foreign language (Kaballa & Crowley, 1985, cited in Weindburg, 1998). Second, a relationship between attitudes and achievement has been shown to exist. Researchers argue that attitude influences achievement and also it manages to summarize, explain and predict linguistic behavior (Baker, 1992; Crystal, 1997). But all of these studies demonstrate the association between learners' attitude and language proficiency in general, and very few research projects indicate the relationship between attitude toward learning English and speaking ability in particular. Therefore, the undertaking of this study becomes more essential.

Despite this, studies about personality types and learners' attitude toward learning English, in general, and speaking English as a second/foreign language, in particular, have apparently failed to demonstrate overall robust findings. Accordingly, the present study highlights the importance of recognizing learners' personality and attitude toward learning English in relation to oral performance of Iranian English language learners.

1.3. Statement of the Problem

Speaking is one of the central elements of communication. In order to provide effective instruction, it is necessary for foreign language teachers to examine the factors, conditions, and components that underlie speaking effectiveness. According to Bachman (1990), performance on language tests is affected by factors other than communicative competence. These factors can be categorized into three broad groups, namely, test method facets, attributes of the test taker that are not considered part of language abilities that are to be measured, and random factors that are largely unpredictable and temporary, such as learners' mental alertness or emotional state. Attributes of the individual characteristics can be cognitive style or knowledge of particular content areas. These attributes of individuals are systematic in the sense that they are likely to affect a given individual test regularly. Bachman (1990) pointed out that many attributes of an individual's personality, attitudes, and motivation of learners would affect performance on language tests. He has emphasized that this would be an area that is ripe for further research. So, consequently, the present study highlights the importance of recognizing factors such as learners' personality and their attitudes toward learning English that can influence Iranian EFL learners' speaking ability measured by IELTS.

1.4. Significance of the study

One of the primary objectives in foreign language learning and teaching is certainly learning more about the students and increasing the awareness in personal differences in the language classroom. Bearing the findings of this study in mind, language teachers can provide effective, sensitive instruction and a more fruitful learning and teaching environment for learners. Moreover, teachers' expectations about the oral performance of their students should be fair depending on what they know about the personality characteristics of their students and the relative anxiety-reducing nature of the situations in which the students are required to talk. This can result in the development of a more humanistic approach to learning on the part of language teachers. In addition, students' attitudes are an integral part of learning and it should become an essential component of