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The Effect of Personality Traits on Speaking Ability across Gender: A case of Iranian EFL Learners

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Abstract

The present study was an attempt to investigate the relationship between personality traits and their speaking ability. The existence of relationships between gender and student's personality traits and their speaking ability taken into consideration, too. To this end, the present study surveyed and analyzed 50 males and females in Shokouh language institute in Darab in the summer of 2012-2013. Regarding the aims of the study, they took part in Eysneck personality questionnaire and also were interviewed about " a trip they had". The result of the correlational procedure analysis indicated that there is no relationship between two variables. Furthermore, regression analysis is not allowed. Findings also indicated that there is a neutral relationship between students' personality traits and their speaking ability. The results of the t-test showed that students' gender has a relationship with their personality traits. In this study statistical techniques such as mean, standard deviation, Pearson correlation, multiple regression and independent sample t-test were used.

Keywords: Personality traits, Gender, Speaking Ability, EFL, Eysneck

Individuals vary in learning a second language; some of them learn it more easily than the others. There are many factors which may affect the process of learning a foreign language such as motivation, personality traits, and anxiety. However, personality traits does not prove or ensure one's success in life and education.   Language learning strategies are special activities taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations (Oxford, 1990). They have attracted much attention in the studies that were conducted by Cohen (1998), O'Malley & Chamot (1990), and Oxford (1990). Language learning strategies have long been considered as an important matter in learning a second or a foreign language. These strategies are those tactics and elements of the language learning process which depend on the learner and are related to personality traits, learning style, age, sex and cultural background. By the use of these strategies learners can improve their skills in a second or foreign language. One of the most important challenges that learners will face during the process of second language learning is speaking ability.

One area which is very important in communication is speaking. Speaking in the mother tongue requires ample exposure and skill as well as having normal behavioral/psychological development. Speaking in the foreign language, however, is "often cited by students as their most anxiety producing experience" (Young 1990, p.539) and also "difficulty in speaking in class is probably the most frequently cited concern of the anxious foreign language students"(Horwitz et al. 1986, p.126). The problem gets worse in an EFL setting, in this study Iran, where learners have little, if any, exposure to the target language outside the classroom (Barjesteh, 2012). There are not ample opportunities for the students to practice English and their practice is limited to classroom environment. A brief review of the literature available shows that although there has been some studies dedicated to factors affecting Iranian EFL learners' speaking ability, there is not any emphasis on students' personality traits as a probable construct contributing to learners' speaking ability. Moreover, there has not been any consideration of learners' gender in this respect.

This study uses the Eysenck's Personality Traits as an organizing framework to explore the effects of personality on speaking ability of the intermediate level learners who are learning English as a foreign language and the effects of their gender as well. Given the fact that the goal of language teaching is to encourage learners to communicate effectively, it is really crucial to find out why some learners are reluctant to speak in language classrooms. For the

purposes of the study, the four Personality Traits (Eysenck's personality theory, 19…) as an organizing framework is used to explore the effects of personality features on speaking ability of the intermediate learners who are learning English as a foreign language. The 'four personality traits' are viewed as broad factors underlying more specific personality traits of each learner. The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between personality traits and speaking ability of the intermediate learners who are learning English as a foreign language in one institute in Darab, Iran. Moreover, male and female participants are compared in terms of their personality traits and their speaking ability. More specifically, answers to the following questions are sought:

1. What is intermediate Darabi EFL learners' index of personality traits and their speaking ability scores?
2. How do male and female Darabi participants compare in terms of their personality traits and their speaking ability?
3. What is the relationship of Darabi participants' personality traits and their speaking ability?
4. Can any of personality traits' sub categories predict speaking ability?

According to the research questions of the study, two null hypotheses are formulated here:

H01. There is no significant relationship between intermediate EFL learners' personality trait and their ability in speaking.

H02. There is no significant difference between male and female intermediate EFL learners' in terms of their speaking skill and their personality traits.

This study gains importance as it embarks on examining a variable, namely personality traits, concerning learners' speaking ability. This study is also significant in terms of employing a mixed-method design that combines both quantitative as well as qualitative data collection and analysis methods. This allows the researcher to examine the relationship between EFL learners' personality traits and their speaking ability using multiple data collection techniques providing the researcher with the best information available. Traits, such as neuroticism, extraversion, Lie scale and Psychoticism could be mentioned as some of those personality traits which have not been investigated in speaking ability development. Extraverts are sociable and active, they enjoy meeting people and going to parties. The original conception of extraversion linked it to arousal (Eysenck, 1967).

Extraverts are described as showing low levels of cortical arousal, while introverts were seen as over-aroused (ibid). Furthermore, because of their higher arousal, introverts are claimed to condition more readily and were therefore more socialized, more sensitive to social constraints (ibid). Eysenck (1967) believed that individuals high on psychoticism are tough-minded, non-conformist, willing to take risks and may engage in antisocial behavior. The name of the scale reflects Eysenck's original suggestion that the trait tapped personality traits related to psychosis, just as neuroticism seems to measure traits related to anxiety and depression (Zuckerman, 1989). Later revisions to the scale have moved away from this view and recent explanations emphasize impulsive nonconformity or tough-mindedness. The scale has obvious similarities to sensation seeking and if the trait relates to a disorder it is psychopathy/antisocial personality disorder, rather than psychosis. The Eysneck personality Lie Scale is a uni-dimensional measure that completes the Eysneck personality questionnaire by providing a set of items to provide an indication of the extent to which the respondent has answered truthfully in other parts of the task.

Hans Eysenck (1967) was the first psychologist to make this trait into something more mathematical (Boeree, 1997). His first trait dimension was, extraversion-introversion. But rather than tell you were one or the other (an I or an E), he gave you a score on extraversion-introversion: A low score meant you were introverted, a high score extraverted. His second trait dimension was neuroticism. If you scored high on this scale, that meant you tended to be a very nervous, emotional sort of person. While it doesn't mean you are necessarily a neurotic, it does mean you are more likely to develop neurotic problems such as phobias, obsessions, compulsions, and depression than someone who scores low. Low neuroticism is nowadays often called emotional stability. The third dimension was called psychoticism. He added this later in his research, after he had gotten more data from people who were in mental institutions. As the name implies, these are people with tendencies to psychosis, meaning that they are more likely to have problems dealing with reality. The fourth dimension was the Lie (L) scale. This dimension was a uni-dimensional measure that completes the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire by providing a set of items to provide an indication of the extent to which the respondent has answered truthfully in other parts of the task.

Today, many researchers believe that they are five core personality traits. Evidence of this theory has been growing over the past 50 years, beginning with the research of D. W. Fiske (1949) and later expanded upon by other

researchers including Norman (1967), Smith (1967), Goldberg (1981), and McCrae & Costa (1987). The "big five" are broad categories of personality traits.

1. Extraversion: This trait includes characteristics such as excitability, sociability, talkativeness, assertiveness and high amounts of emotional expressiveness.

2. Agreeableness: This personality dimension includes attributes such as trust, altruism, kindness, affection, and other prosocial behaviors.

3. Conscientiousness: Common features of this dimension include high levels of thoughtfulness, with good impulse control and goal-directed behaviors. Those high in conscientiousness tend to be organized and mindful of details.

4. Neuroticism: Individuals high in this trait tend to experience emotional instability, anxiety, moodiness, irritability, and sadness.

5. Openness: This trait features characteristics such as imagination and insight, and those high in this trait also tend to have a broad range of interests.

It is important to note that each of the five personality factors represents a range between two extremes. For example, extraversion represents a continuum between extreme extraversion and extreme introversion. In the real world, most people lie somewhere in between the two polar ends of each dimension. McCrae and his colleagues have also found that the big five traits are also remarkably universal. One study that looked at people from more than 50 different cultures found that the five dimensions could be accurately used to describe personality. Based on this research, many psychologists now believe that the five personality dimensions are not only universal; they also have biological origins. Psychology David Buss has proposed that an evolutionary explanation for these five core personality traits, suggesting that these personality traits represent the most important qualities that shape our social landscape. Many researchers believe that they are five core personality traits which are Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, Openness (McCrae & Costa, 1987). According to Nauert, R. (2013) personality traits may not be consistent across cultures. Scientists now believe that five personality traits are universal across cultures may be an inaccurate view of humanity. According to this study, researchers spent two years looking at 1,062 members of the Tsimane culture and found that they didn't necessarily exhibit the five broad dimensions of personality – openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism – also known as the "Big Five".

This study was measured with the Individual Learning Profile (ILP) scale, to validate the ILP factor analysis of data from 3003 students extracted six factors (Reading and Writing, Hard IT, Numeracy, Time Management, Speaking, and Easy IT) with good internal reliability. Then, 130 students completed the refined ILP, and scales measuring the Big Five, Perfectionism, Anxiety, and Self-Esteem. Between 10% and 31% of the variance in four ILP factors, but not IT skills, could be predicted by personality traits, but Self-Esteem and Anxiety were not influential. Hogan et al. (1997) examined what the Big Five predict about behavior, and how different combinations of traits can lead to very different behaviors. Generally speaking, low agreeableness and low conscientiousness can predict juvenile delinquency. Neuroticism and low conscientiousness can predict internalizing disorders (such as mental disorders). Conscientiousness and openness can predict school performance. Conscientiousness is also a general predictor of job performance, while other Big Five traits predict job performance in specific types of jobs. For instance extraversion predicts success in sales and management positions. High conscientiousness is related to better health and longevity, whereas low agreeableness and high neuroticism seem to be health risk factors. Extraversion is associated with leadership behavior. Agreeableness is associated with behaviors such as helping others and donating to charity. Neuroticism is related to vulnerability and depression. Openness is related to behaviors associated with creative performance.

Many of the studies that claim to highlight differences between the brains of males and females are spurious. They are based on tasks carried out on only a small number of individuals and their results are often not repeated by other scientists. There are differences between male and female abilities from map reading to multi-tasking and from parking to expressing emotion. There are basic behavioral differences between the sexes, too, but we should note

that these differences increase with age because our children's intellectual biases are being exaggerated and intensified by our gendered culture. Children don't inherit intellectual differences. Men instinctively like the color blue and are bad at coping with pain, while women cannot tell jokes but are innately superior at empathizing with other people. Key evolutionary differences separate the intellects of men and women (Neisser et al., 1996). The belief has become widespread, particularly in the wake of the publication of international bestsellers such as John Gray's Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus that stress the innate differences between the minds of men and women. But now a growing number of scientists are challenging the pseudo-science of "neurosexism", as they call it, and are raising concerns about its implications. These researchers argue that by telling parents that boys have poor chances of acquiring good verbal skills and girls have little prospect of developing mathematical prowess, serious obstacles are being placed in the paths of children's education. In short, our intellects are not prisoners of our genders or our genes (Costa et al.,2001).

In general view, there are four sections to present. The first section deals with the participants of the study, the second section concerns the questionnaire and interview used in this project to collect data. The third section elaborates on data collection procedures, and the final section reports on the analysis of the collected data. The participants of the present study were 25 male and 25 female students studying English as a foreign language in Shokouh language institute in Darab, Iran in the summer of 2012-2013. The age of the learners ranges between 14 to 30. A Majority of them were high school students and a few of them were university ones. They were selected among intermediate learners randomly, indeed, those with even number in teacher's list. Then, the participants were divided into four groups of Extraversion, Neuroticism, Lie scale, Psychoticism after taking the Eysenck personality Questionnaire.

The present study employed both a qualitative and quantitative research methods using interviews and questionnaires respectively. To evaluate participants' speaking ability, they were asked to talk about a selected topic. Moreover, a questionnaire was used to collect the required data for the quantitative part. This instrument, namely Eysenck personality Questionnaire (EPQ-S) was used as a direct measure of participants' personality traits in this study.

Eysenck personality Questionnaire (EPQ-S) that was a paper and pencil questionnaire containing 48 items. The participants were asked to answer each item based on yes or no. Those who answered YES were scored (1) and those who answered NO were scored (0). There were 12 items for each subscale of the Eysenck questionnaire. So if an individual scores the maximum 12 in on subscale, he possesses the highest amount of that feature. A time limit of 30 minutes were given to participants. The reliability of the questionnaire was calculated using Cronbach Alpha. The result was.712, which is reasonable and reliable enough.
Table 3.1 Reliability index for Eysenck's questionnaire:

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.712	48

The second instrument used in this study was a speaking ability task. This task was applied for checking participants' accuracy, fluency, pronunciation and diction. Participants were required to talk about "a trip they had". A time limit of 20 minutes were given to participants. The respondents' talks were recorded on a recorder and then they were transcribed for further analysis. The reliability of the task using the scores from the four subscales was .835, so it was reasonable and reliable enough.

Table 3.2 Reliability index for the Speaking Task

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.835	4

First, the personality task was administered to 50 participants, 25 female and 25 male students. After rating the personality task answer sheets, the researcher identified participants' features in terms of Extraversion, Neuroticism, Lie scale, Psychoticism, each of which was divided into two groups of males and females to explore the gender effects as well. Then, both groups of males and females in each subgroup were asked to talk about a trip they had. The respondents' talks were recorded on a recorder and then they were transcribed for further analysis. The researcher scored the participants' accuracy, fluency, pronunciation, and diction based on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (very bad) to 5 (excellent). The scores obtained from speaking task were analyzed in relation to the data obtained from the Eysenck personality Questionnaire (EPQ-S). The speaking tasks were scored by the researcher as mentioned. As the purpose of this study was to investigate speaking ability, an analytic scale was needed in scoring the discussions. The statistical analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

The following table summarizes the performance of the 50 participants (25 females & 25 males) in terms of their speaking ability and their personality traits. This is in answer to the first research question. We have information from 50 respondents, ranging in age from 14 to 30 years, with a mean of 9.3400 for speaking ability and 26.7400 for personality traits and with a Skewness of .795 for the personality traits and a .298 for speaking ability. The two indices for skewness is positive suggesting that the participants lean more toward the right side of the normal distribution curve. The kurtosis indices are different in respect of their polarity though.

Table 4.1 participants' performance in terms of their speaking ability and their personality traits

Statistics

		speaking ability	personality traits
N	Valid	50	50
	Missing	0	0
Mean		9.3400	26.7400
Skewness		.795	.298
Std. Error of Skewness		.337	.337
Kurtosis		.235	-.712
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.662	.662
Minimum		4.00	19.00
Maximum		17.00	39.00

Table 4.1. summarizes the descriptive statistics of the participant's performance for personality traits and speaking ability. It shows that the participants' scores ranged from 19.00 to 39.00 on Eysenck personality questionnaire and from 4.00 to 17.00 on speaking ability interview.

A further analysis compares males and females in terms of their personality traits and speaking ability. This is reflected in Figure 4.1:
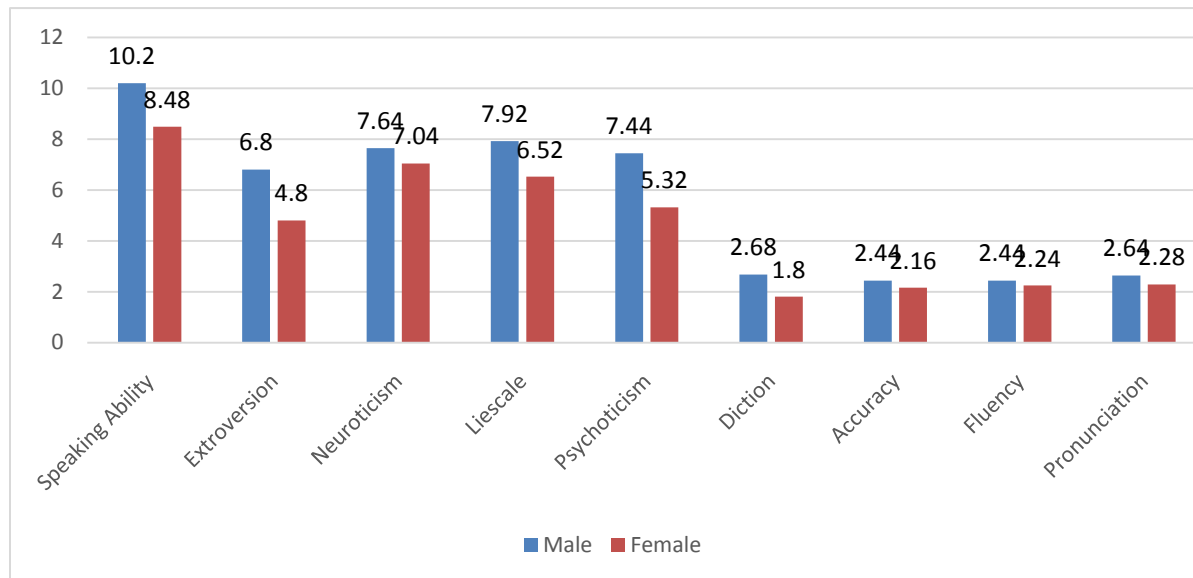

Figure 4.1 Comparison of male and female participants

The figure presented above suggests that males had higher personality traits and speaking ability subscales scores than females, and that this difference is more pronounced among personality traits subscales.

A further inferential analysis is required to find out if the observed differences are statistically significant or not. A series of Independent-sample tests are performed on the data which appear in Tables 4.2 and 4.3.

Table 4.2 Group statistics for participants' personality traits and their speaking ability

Group Statistics

	gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Diction	male	25	2.6800	1.21518	.24304
	female	25	1.8000	.91287	.18257
Accuracy	male	25	2.4400	.91652	.18330
	female	25	2.1600	.80000	.16000
Fluency	male	25	2.4400	.91652	.18330
	female	25	2.2400	.66332	.13266
Pronunciation	male	25	2.6400	1.11355	.22271
	female	25	2.2800	.93630	.18726

speaking ability	male	25	10.2000	3.59398	.71880
	female	25	8.4800	2.48529	.49706
Extroversion	male	25	6.8000	1.75594	.35119
	female	25	4.8000	2.14087	.42817
Neuroticism	male	25	7.6400	2.23383	.44677
	female	25	7.0400	1.71950	.34390
Lie scale	male	25	7.9200	1.11505	.22301
	female	25	6.5200	1.47535	.29507
Psychoticism	male	25	7.4400	1.68523	.33705
	female	25	5.3200	1.57374	.31475

Table 4.3 Independent Samples Test for Participants' Personality Traits and their Speaking Ability

Independent Samples Task

		Levene's Task for Equality of Variances		t-task for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Diction	Equal variances assumed	2.816	.100	2.895	48	.006	.88000	.30397	.26882	1.49118
	Equal variances not assumed			2.895	44.545	.006	.88000	.30397	.26759	1.49241
Accuracy	Equal variances assumed	3.112	.084	1.151	48	.256	.28000	.24331	-.20921	.76921

	Equal variances not assumed			1.151	47.139	.256	.28000	.24331	-.20944	.76944
Fluency	Equal variances assumed	4.311	.043	.884	48	.381	.20000	.22627	-.25495	.65495
	Equal variances not assumed			.884	43.730	.382	.20000	.22627	-.25611	.65611
Pronunciation	Equal variances assumed	1.274	.265	1.237	48	.222	.36000	.29098	-.22505	.94505
	Equal variances not assumed			1.237	46.626	.222	.36000	.29098	-.22549	.94549
Speaking ability	Equal variances assumed	5.383	.025	1.968	48	.055	1.72000	.87392	-.03713	3.47713
	Equal variances not assumed			1.968	42.681	.056	1.72000	.87392	-.04280	3.48280
Extroversion	Equal variances assumed	2.492	.121	3.612	48	.001	2.00000	.55377	.88656	3.11344
	Equal variances not assumed			3.612	46.230	.001	2.00000	.55377	.88546	3.11454
Neuroticism	Equal variances assumed	.414	.523	1.064	48	.293	.60000	.56380	-.53359	1.73359

	Equal variances not assumed			1.064	45.051	.293	.60000	.56380	-.53551	1.73551
Liescale	Equal variances assumed	.438	.511	3.785	48	.000	1.40000	.36986	.65634	2.14366
	Equal variances not assumed			3.785	44.673	.000	1.40000	.36986	.65490	2.14510
Psychoticism	Equal variances assumed	.168	.684	4.597	48	.000	2.12000	.46116	1.19278	3.04722
	Equal variances not assumed			4.597	47.777	.000	2.12000	.46116	1.19267	3.04733

Initially, Table 4.3 displays the result of the t-task between the two groups of males and females. The difference in speaking ability is not significant (p=.055, CI=.95%) but the subscale diction is significant (p=.006, CI=.95%). This means that both participants had more or less similar ability in their speaking except for using vocabulary items which is higher for males. The story for personality traits is slightly different. Here the only personality subscale whose difference is not significant is Neuroticism (p=.293, CI=95%). For the other three subscales the difference is significant. Surprisingly, males have significantly higher features of personality traits.

In answer to the third research question a series of correlational analysis were performed on the data. The result of this analysis appears in Table 4.4. Based on the obtained results, no significant correlations were found, therefore, it is advisable not to carry on with regression analysis. This is in accordance with statisticians' suggestion in such cases. In other words personality traits have no effect on speaking ability. This study was an attempt to investigate the relationship between Darabi students' personality traits and their speaking ability. The discussion addresses the findings. The first two research questions of the study were about the participants' personality features and their speaking ability and also about the difference between male and female participants in this regard. A quick look at Figure 4.1 reveals that male participants have higher scores in all personality features and speaking ability. The t-test also confirmed that this difference is not accidental. No extreme cases of personality traits can be observed in the data, however. In other words, the participants somehow stand in the middle, which is slightly surprising. In terms of extroversion, males are more extroverts (they are actually ambiverts as their mean score is in the middle), suggesting that females are more introverted. In a traditional community such as Darab this is a normal expectation. Darabi people are very much known for being devout religious individuals. The code of practice and standards of behavior in the Islamic Iran would not cherish extroversion in the sense understood in the west (mixing of sexes, being outgoing, outspoken, and talkative). This might be one of the causes of such findings.

In terms of neuroticism, males also outperform females. The difference was not confirmed by the t-test performed on the data, however. The means scores for both males and females are around 7, which is slightly away from the average 6. This means that both participants are slightly neurotic and experience some emotional instability, anxiety, moodiness, irritability, and sadness. Regarding psychoticism, the difference between males and females is

significant. Again the case favors the male participants. This means that the male participants in this particular Darab institute lean more toward a personality pattern typified by aggressiveness and interpersonal hostility. The mean score for the males is just slightly higher than the mid score of 6, however. The female participants stand below the average, suggesting that they have moderate temperament and lack feelings of hostility.

The lie scale functions as a check as to how the participants have answered the questions. As is clear from Figure 4.1 the participants have been more or less faithful in their responses to the questions. The male participants have been somehow less faithful in their responses. This does not mean that their responses cannot be trusted. In fact, their mean score is still leaning toward the mid score. Generally speaking all the responses can be trusted.

Regarding the participants' speaking ability and the subcategories of diction, accuracy, fluency, and pronunciation, again the male participants outperform the female ones. The scores for the speaking ability show that the participants are not strong enough in this regard. As the results of the correlational analysis showed no significant correlation was found between the personality traits and speaking ability of the participants. Part of this might be because of the participants' lack of enough proficiency. As the scores showed the participants are not strong enough in this regard. That may be why they could not perform reasonably well to have this reflected in the relationship.

This was the main objective of the study which, on the face of it, might be disappointing for some. In essence, this is the real outcome of the study and as such must be considered useful. In fact quite a few studies have reported lack of a correlation between personality traits and language skills, academic achievement, and other features such as in reading (Carrell,1991; Bossers, 1991; Bernhardt & Kamil, 1995; Lee & Schallert, 1997; Mehrpour, 2004), writing (Yun, 2005), and listening (Vandergrift, 2006).

The fact that there was no significant relationship between extroversion and the speaking ability can be explained by referring to what Dewaele and Furnham (2000) stated. They suggested that the positive effect of extraversion manifests itself most clearly in a highly formal situation. Although the setting in this study seemed to be stressful to some of the participants, it may have been neutral to most of them, because the speaking tasks which were given to the students were very similar to the tasks their instructor would give them as class activities; i.e. talking about themselves, a particular topic, or describing a thing or place. As a result, their familiarity with the tasks prevented them from being anxious on the speaking test. In addition, Dewaele (2005) found that extroversion had little effect on the oral speech production.

This study was after exploring the relationship of personality traits and the speaking ability of some Darabi EFL learners. For this reason, the study posed four questions to answer. The first research question was to identify the current status of Darabi EFL learners' personality traits and their speaking ability. The results showed that in terms of both these two variables the participants were mediocre. The second research question sought the difference between male and female learners in terms of the two variables. The results indicated that male participants had higher personality features and higher scores in their speaking ability. The third research question was the main aim of this study which is repeated in the previous paragraph. As reiterated here and there in this study, there was no relationship. The analysis for the final question which was to identify the effect of personality traits on the speaking ability of the learners was refrained as the previous analysis showed no relationship. The study had two null hypotheses which were posed in the introductory chapter. Based on the results of the analysis the first null hypothesis is retained but the second one is rejected.

The present study, through its descriptions of the construct of speaking ability, offers valuable information for the purpose of teachers' reflection and classroom practice. As demonstrated in the study, teachers should not attribute students' reticence to one single factor such as personality or shyness. They need to be aware of the factors that could encourage or discourage communication among learners. Therefore, it is really necessary for language teachers to promote factors that facilitate speaking and remove those that hinder communication in EFL classes.

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