

Overview of Personality as Individual Differences and Factors in EFL Learning Context: A Literature Review Study

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The diversity of learners as individuals is one of the phenomena explored in the field of educational psychology. One of the numerous factors examined in the study of individual differences is personality. However, because each theorist interprets this concept differently, there is no one universal definition that defines what the term "personality" means. The aim of this article is to identify the various personality theories used in the earlier literature as well as to provide a synthesis of earlier research that focuses on personality factors as they relate to individual differences in the context of English language learning. With narrative literature review design, a number of prior studies based on keywords linked to personality in the context of EFL (English as foreign language) learning were collated and reviewed. The findings of the review of the literature revealed that the majority of earlier research characterize learners' personalities using the idea of personality traits. The study examines students in the context of the big 5 personality traits in a broad sense. The other studies, in other hand, classified personality as introverts or extroverts in a more specific sense. There are also a few studies that employed a different framework to define personality factors in the context of EFL learning. In conclusion, this varied definition of personality suggests that researchers have contributed by exploring the role of personality in the EFL learning process from many perspectives.

Keywords: Individual Differences, Personality, English Language Teaching

Introduction

One of the phenomena studied in the field of educational psychology is the diversity of students as individuals. The differences that make each individual unique and different are generally shown in the form of various behavioral tendencies. In educational setting, awareness of individual diversity forms an understanding that each student is diverse and has their own uniqueness. In the context of English learning process, for instance, not all students are good at using verbal language skill, while on the other hand, expressing ideas through writing may be a more mastered language skill. An understanding of individual differences can help implement an educational curriculum that can provide equal opportunities to diverse students (Butler & Evans, 2013; Ehrman et al., 2003). In addition, teachers also benefit from knowing the learning difficulties experienced by each student (Chamoro-Premuzic, 2011) so that they can develop appropriate learning instruction (Griffiths & Soruç, 2020).

There is no universal categories of individual differences aspects in English learning setting (Griffiths & Soruç, 2020) because there is no consistency in defining, characterizing, classifying, and measuring the concept of the explored factors (Pawlak, 2012). Table 1 displays various individual differences factors in language learning context. In terms of classification, it was found that each study has different ways in categorizing the individual differences factors. There is literature that classified the factors into certain categories (Pawlak, 2012) while another explained a list of factors without necessarily distinct them into particular categories (Griffiths & Soruç, 2020).

Table 1. Individual differences factors in EFL learning

References	Category and ID Factors
Griffiths & Soruç (2020)	Age, Sex/Gender, Race/Nationality/Ethnicity/Culture, Aptitude, Personality, Learning style, Language learning strategy, Autonomy, Beliefs, Affects/emotion, Motivation.
Pawlak (2012)	Cognitive: Aptitude, memory ability, age, intelligence Affective: anxiety, motivation, and willingness to communicate.
Kidd et al. (2018)	Language domain: vocabulary, pragmatic development, quality of lexical, syntactic processing Environment: frequency of language use, variation in input, lexical diversity, socioeconomic status (SES)
Ehrman et al. (2003)	Cognitive: working memory and executive functioning learning styles, learning strategies, affective variables

Personality is one of the many aspects studied in the study of individual differences. Diverse human behavior is a manifestation of latent aspects that are not visible such as personality (Butler & Evans, 2013). However, the study of personality and its relationship to the language learning process did not attract the attention of scientists at the beginning of its development (Dewaele & Furnham, 1999). Personality was not considered very important compared to other individual diversity factors (Dewaele, 2012). It was only later, in the last few decades that research examining personality in the context of individual diversity in language learning has begun to be widely carried out. Many studies have been conducted to explore the role of personality in shaping individual differences. Specifically in the context of learning foreign languages, the diverse personalities of students produce diversity in the process of learning and acquiring language (Hakim, 2015; Lestari et al., 2015; Rofi'i, 2017; Travolta et al., 2018).

In terms of personality aspect, it is known that there is no one standard definition to explain the meaning of the term personality (Engler, 2014) which resulted various perspective of researchers in defining this factor in the field of EFL learning context research. The aim of this article is to identify the various personality theories applied alongside to provide a synthesis of past studies on personality traits as they relate to individual differences in the context of English language learning. Furthermore, the previous studies compiled in this review article do not cover all conducted investigation in this field however it is hoped to be appropriate to draw the variety of researchers' approach in understanding individual differences and personality in EFL learning context. Lastly, the results of this literature study are expected to provide insight into the role of personality aspects and individual diversity in the process of learning a foreign language.

Methods

This article attempt to draw the overview of the ID factor and the personality concept in the field of EFL learning Several keywords associated with personality in the context of studying EFL were entered into the search engine in order to gather relevant material. After the data was gathered, a selection was made based on the literature published in the previous ten years. In other words, works published before 2013 are not included. Data extraction was done by noting the type of personality theory each study employed after gathering the 20 published article that fit the requirements. To come to conclusions from the literature that has been read, a synthesis is then completed. This review method is useful for identifying the extent of exploration and providing conclusions from previous studies on ID and personality factors in the field of EFL learning process (Grant & Booth, 2009).

Findings dan Discussion

Personality could be defined as the combination of several aspects within and outside of individual that manifested into a certain pattern. That pattern reflects the uniqueness of each individual which distinct oneself from the other. According to APA (American Psychology Association), personality shapes the way individual behave and adjust in their life. This relevant to what (Dewaele et al., 2008) stated that hidden constructs such as personality and intelligent are the primary sources of human behavior diversity. Furthermore, the pattern formed from personality could be used to predict how individual think, feel, and act. Regarding to the fact that personality makes people different from one another, (Ashton, 2013) explained that diversity does not occur from the absence of certain behavior, thought, or feeling, instead it is because each individual has different tendency, either strong or weak, in the way they think, behave, and feel.

There is no one standard definition to explain the meaning of personality term (Engler, 2014) because every theorist in personality psychology has different approach in perceiving this aspect. In EFL learning setting, personality is one of the topic that being explored in terms of its role in language acquisition process. These research findings suggested that the way in which pupils learn a foreign language is influenced by their personalities. Also, different personality types that each student, possesses as a sort of individual differences, result in different learning processes and outcomes. Table 2 displays the diversity of personality concept conducted in the literature in EFL learning field.

Some researchers used Big 5 personality trait theory as reference to be investigated in language acquisition process. These studies included all 5 traits from Costa & McCrae personality theory (i.e Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism). Some researchers used more narrow personality concept by only including extrovert/introvert personality type. Most of those studies investigated the distinct of those two personality types in EFL learning context. The other study used MBTI to assess personality aspect which is based on Jung’s personality theory. Besides those major approaches, there is also a broader view of personality in EFL learning context which is including other personal aspect like risk-taking, tolerance/intolerance of ambiguity, self-efficacy, foreign language (classroom) anxiety, and perfectionism (Dewaele, 2012).

Table 2. Personality in EFL learning literatures

Personality variable	Literature	Personality variable	Literature
Extrovert vs Introvert	(Liyanage & Bartlett, 2013) (Suliman, 2015)	Big 5	(Kelsen, 2019) (Kelsen & Liang, 2019) (Fabbro et al., 2019) (Zhang et al., 2020) (Griffiths & Soruç, 2020)
	(Chen et al., 2015) (Lestari et al., 2015) (Bergil, 2016) (Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2016) (Rofi'i, 2017) (Travolta et al., 2018) (Syed & Kuzborska, 2019) (Alharbi, 2021) (Almusharraf & Almusharraf, 2021)		(Parviz et al., 2017)
Big 5 traits & other individual aspects	(Dewaele, 2012)	MBTI	(Medjedel, 2021)

From some of the literature that has been collected, it is found that there are trends in research topics for each personality perspective used. The majority of studies using the introvert-extrovert personality types focus on the distinctions that learners exhibit in each of these personality types. The subjects that are extensively researched have to do with the learners' language proficiency skills, like speaking (Bergil, 2016; Chen et al., 2015; Lestari et al., 2015; Rofi'i, 2017; Syed & Kuzborska, 2019) and listening skills (Travolta et al., 2018). The choice of this topic is mostly based on the extrovert-introvert personality traits, which depend on a person's propensity for socializing (Engler, 2014). Each study's investigation yielded unique findings. There are research that reveal distinctions between introverted and extroverted students, while other studies come to the conclusion that Extrovertness does not play a major role in the effectiveness of EFL learning (Chen et al., 2015; Liyanage & Bartlett, 2013).

The majority of research themes explored in some of the literature that employs the idea of the "big 5 personality traits" are connected to more general psychological issues rather than just specific linguistic abilities. These psychological characteristics include motivation (Brent A. Kelsen & Liang, 2019), anxiety (Brent Allan Kelsen, 2019), attachment and mindfulness (Fabbro et al., 2019), as well as willingness to communicate (Zhang et al., 2020). In addition, this personality method is used to study issues connected to

the EFL learning process, such as performance and proficiency (Griffiths & Soruç, 2020; Brent A. Kelsen & Liang, 2019). The findings of the research in this literature show that other personality types also play a role in students' EFL learning processes, in contrast to research that only uses the extroversion personality category. For instance, a study by Kelsen (2019) discovered that every personality attribute, with the exception of intelligent trait, was a predictor of students' anxiety when learning English. The potential that personality traits other than extroversion may have an impact on the EFL learning process is also explored in other publications (Fabbro et al., 2019; Griffiths & Soruç, 2020; Brent A. Kelsen & Liang, 2019; Parviz et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2020).

One of the reasons that make Individual Differences understanding essential in learning context generally because of the potential to establish flexible curriculum that provide learning opportunity for diverse students. Regarding to this, Griffiths & Soruç (2020) explain that better learning material, teaching style, and strategy could be obtained through teachers' awareness of students' differences. Specifically in language learning setting, experts pointed out some particular benefits including improving learning performance and language acquisition knowledge development. In connection with learning performance, having good awareness toward student differences encourage teacher to promote fun and comfortable learning process which acquired through implementing students' preferred learning styles. Lastly, the diverse approach in defining personality implies the contribution of researchers to investigate personality role in EFL learning process from different angle of view.

Conclusion

There is diversity in defining the individual factors and personality aspect that contribute to EFL learning process. That variation does not necessarily a bad sign since it shows the disunity of the experts instead it brings more benefit because it enriches the discussion in this field. Particularly in individual differences factors, various perspectives in determining the factors give more opportunity to understand ID of EFL learner in a more comprehensive way. Similarly, different approaches in defining personality factors give the researcher the option to use the personality concept that suits the research needs. On the whole, this diversity is hope to be able to promote quality education by providing the curriculum that is flexible enough to ensure equal learning opportunity for various types of EFL learners.

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