The Overall Relationships between the Use of English Language Learning Strategies and Personality Traits among the Female University Level Learners of English Language as a University Major

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Abstract

The current study aims to explore the overall relationships between use of English language learning strategies and personality traits of the female university level learners of English language as a university major. Four instruments were used, which were Adapted Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) of Rebecca L. Oxfords, A Background Questionnaire, NEO-Five Factors Inventory (NEO-FFI), and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). Two hundred and thirteen Iranian female university level learners of English language as a university major in Iran were volunteer to participate in this research work. The intact classes were chosen. The obtained results in this study show both types of positive and negative significant relationships at different levels of correlation. In addition, in some cases, there was not any significant relationship between reported frequency of English Language Learning Strategies and personality traits.

Keywords: English Language Learning Strategies; Personality Traits; Learners of English Language; English Language as a University Major; Female University Level Learners.

Abbreviations: SILL **-** Strategy Inventory for Language Learning; TOEFL - Test of English as a Foreign Language; NEO-FFI - NEO-Five Factors Inventory; ELLSs - English Language Learning Strategies; LLSs - Language Learning Strategies.

Introduction

In the last three decades or so, an important shift has taken place in the field of second/foreign language learning, and researchers have focused mainly on learner's individual factors, that it might be appropriate to comply with Wenden (1985) who reminds us, there is a proverb states "Give a man a fish and he eats for a day. Teach him how to fish and he eats for a lifetime. Applying such proverb in language teaching and learning, tells us that if learners are taught strategies of language learning to work out, they will be empowered to manage their own learning. In such way, Ellis (1985) claims that native language speakers use the same strategy types as learners of a second/foreign language use. In addition, Barnhardt et al. (1999) point out that "Differences between more effective learners and less effective learners were found in the number and range of strategies used" (p.166). Therefore, the importance of encouraging using Language Learning Strategies (LLSs) is undeniable. Moreover, even the researchers (e.g. O'Malley et al., 1985; Oxford, 1990) support the belief that learners who receive learner training, generally learn well than who do not.

The premise underlying line of this research is that success through English Language Learning Strategies (ELLSs) plays an important role in affecting learners' English language learning process. In addition, in the light of previous findings, a myriad of factors have been identified related to ELLSs. One of the most fundamental factors that is addressed in the current study is personality of the learners. Many researchers agree that personality variable should be taken into account when predicating the choice and use of ELLSs.

Review of Literature

Up to 1970's, language learning was studied merely based on linguistics subfields such as

syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Since 1970's, psycholinguists started to study individuals' linguistic development based on their psychological development. Such studies came as psycholinguistics theories in the studies of different researchers such as Brown (1973) and Smart (1970). In this way, research on LLSs has been inspired by two closely interwoven disciplines: cognitive psychology and second language acquisition.

Such related studies show that there are enough evidences that indicate personality factors can facilitate acquisition of second language (Ely, 1986; Reiss, 1983; Strong, 1983). Such situation causes to conclude various research works on the relationship between LLSs as one component of linguistics part and personality as psychological part.

Methodology

In the way of addition to the earlier research, the current study hopes to contribute comprehension of the relationship between ELLSs and personality traits. Such understanding is approached from different directions in order to explore the basic psychological traits and individual differences elements which influence the choice and use of ELLSs. In such way, in the present study, the following research hypothesizes are suggested:

- Ho1.There is a relationship between the use of Memory strategies and Personality traits of the female university level learners of English language as a university major.
- Ho2.There is a relationship between the use of Cognitive strategies and Personality traits of the female university level learners of English language as a university major.
- Ho3.There is a relationship between the use of Compensation strategies and Personality traits of the female university level learners of English language as a university major.
- Ho4.There is a relationship between the use of Metacognitive strategies and Personality traits of the female university level learners of English language as a university major.

- Ho5.There is a relationship between the use of Affective strategies and Personality traits of the female university level learners of English language as a university major.
- Ho6.There is a relationship between the use of Social strategies and Personality traits of the female university level learners of English language as a university major.

Participants

The selected participants of this study were 213 Iranian female students studying in third grade (year) of English major of B.A. degree at Islamic Azad University in Iran, ranging age from 19 to 28 (Mean= 23.4, SD= 2).

Instrumentation in the Current Study
Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)

The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) is a kind of self-report questionnaire that has been used extensively by researchers in many countries, and its reliability has been checked in multiple ways, and has been reported as high validity, reliability and utility (Oxford, 1996). It includes Memory Strategies (9 items), Cognitive Strategies (14 items), Compensation Strategies (6 items), Metacognitive Strategies (9 items), Affective Strategies (6 items), and Social Strategies (6 items).

NEO-Five Factors Inventory (NEO-FFI)

Factor structure resembling the five factors of personality was identified in numerous sets of variables (Digman & Inouye, 1986; Goldberg, 1981, 1990; John, 1990; McCare & Costa, 1985; Saucier & Goldberg, 1996). The NEO-Five Factors Inventory, based on such five factors, measures aspects of individual personality by asking questions about behaviors, attitudes, and reactions (Costa & McCare, 1992). It includes groups of questions related to five personality dimensions. The dimensions composing the NEO-Five Factors include Neuroticism, Extraversion and Openness to Experiences, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness (12 items for each sub-scale). Moreover, many studies used five factors of personality questionnaire shows both good internal

and external validity for such inventory (Costa & McCare, 1992).

Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)

Since generally there is a significant impact of English language proficiency on the overall academic achievement of the students (Fakeye & Ogunsiji, 2009), and specifically there is a relationship between strategy use and language proficiency (Abu Shmais,2004), therefore because of nature of this research work (regarding the use of ELLSs), a general English proficiency test was used in order to minimize the effect of English language proficiency on the results which were caused from such English language proficiency.

Based on need for the type of proficiency of English language, time limitation for administration of full parts of TOEFL, difficulty of permission to administrate full parts of TOEFL, and the other limitations are cause to choose structure and written expression, and reading comprehension of one sample of TOEFL as an English proficiency test in the current study.

| Table 1. The Classification of the Strength of Correlation Coefficient in the Current Study ||
Level of Strength	Amount of the Strength
Low	r= 0.10 to 0.29
Medium	r= 0.30 to 0.49
Strong	r= 0.50 to 1

A Background Questionnaire

The socio-economic status of participants was controlled as well by a background questionnaire.

The Procedure of Adaptation of Instruments

All the three questioners were translated to Persian in previous studies. Again, the researcher, in the case of SILL, translated it to Persian language.

Pilot Study

Thirty nine female student's university level learners of English language as a university major were asked to participate in the pilot study.

Data Collection Procedures in the Main Study

Data for the study described in this study was collected between September 2010 and November 2010, at three stages. At first stage, the participants were asked to answer TOEFL. At the second stage, the respondents were asked to fill the Persian adapted version of SILL. Along the adapted Persian version of SILL, the Background Questionnaire was administrated. At the third stage, NEO-FFI was administrated.

Data Analysis Procedures in the Main Study

Whole the data obtained through the instruments was entered into database (Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software) to enable data analysis to be carried out. Pearson Correlations was used to do data analysis. The most important point, the classification of strength of correlation is not well accepted among the researchers, and there are different classifications such as the classification suggested by Cohen (1988), Delavar (2010) and Ghiasvand (2008). In the current study, the classification that was suggested by Cohen, J. (1988) was chosen as a criterion to interpret and discuss about the strength of the correlation (Table 1).

Results and Discussion
Reliability of the Instruments

The reliability of our experimental measures were assessed by calculating Cronbach's alpha over the items of the three instruments across all the participants in the current study which were found 0.92 for SILL, 0.82 for NEO-FFI, and 0.80 for TOEFL. Such finding of reliabilities for the three instruments confirms the finding of reliabilities in the pilot study.

Frequency Use of LLSs

In the entire sample, the strategies in the meta-cognitive category were the most frequently used, with a mean of 3.7 (SD=0.64). The mean use of strategies in the other five categories were 3.2 (SD=0.63) for Compensation strategies, 3.1 (SD=0.69) for Affective strategies, 3.1 (SD=0.79) for Social strategies, 3.0 (SD=0.59) for Memory strategies, and 3.0 (SD=0.52) for cognitive strategies. Mean of the overall strategy use was 3.2 (SD=0.45), which categorized as a medium level. Except the meta-cognitive category, there was not much difference in the mean scores of strategy use among the other five categories.

Table 2. The Summary of Correlations among the Overall Memory Strategy Use and the Five Traits of Personality		Extraversion	Openness to Experiences	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness	Neuroticism
Memory strategies	Pearson Correlation	0.261[**]	0.182[**]	-0.019	0.304[**]	-0.198[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.008	0.784	0.000	0.004
	N	213	213	213	213	213
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level 2						

Table 3. The Summary of Correlations among the Overall Use of Cognitive Strategies and the Five Traits of Personality		Extraversion	Openness to Experiences	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness	Neuroticism
Cognitive strategies	Pearson Correlation	0.089	0.202[**]	0.023	0.199[**]	-0.175[*]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.195	0.003	0.733	0.003	0.010
	N	213	213	213	213	213
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).						

Determining Means of the Five Traits of Personality

In the entire sample, the means were calculated in order to determine mean of the each of five traits of personality among the total group of the respondents (N=213). The mean of trait was 23.0 (SD=8.3) for the Neuroticism trait, 27.4 (SD=5.5) for the Extraversion trait, 27.9 (SD=4.7) for the Openness to Experiences trait, 32.4 (SD=5.4) for the Agreeableness trait, and 34.7 (SD=6.3) for the Conscientiousness trait.

The Relationship between Personality Traits (as Independent Variables) and ELLSs (as Dependent Variables)

For the summary of the results, the output of Pearson Correlation which was performed to examine whether there is a relationship between each of the overall strategy use and the five traits of personality.

The Relationship between the Use of Memory Strategies and Personality Traits

Ho1.There is a relationship between the use of Memory strategies and Personality traits of the female university level learners of English language as a university major.

According to Table 2, the students' overall Memory strategy use was significant positively correlated with each one of the Extraversion trait, the Openness to Experiences trait, and the Conscientiousness trait at the p<0.01 level (2-tailed). The levels of correlations were found low for the Extraversion trait, for the Openness to Experiences trait, and medium for the Conscientiousness trait. For the Neuroticism trait, the students' overall Memory strategy use was significant negatively correlated with it at the p<0.01 level (2-tailed). The level of correlation was found low. There was not found a correlation between the students' overall Memory strategy use and the Agreeableness trait (p>0.05). In Table 2, there were found both types of positive and negative correlations, but in both types of correlations, the level of correlation was found low (except the case of the Conscientiousness trait that its correlation level was found medium). Moreover, except the case of the Agreeableness trait, all types of correlations were significant at the p<0.01 level (2-tailed). In such way, it could be concluded that there was a meaningful significant relationship between each of the personality traits and the overall Memory strategy use (except the case of the Agreeableness trait which has p>0.05).

The Relationship between the Use of Cognitive Strategies and Personality Traits

Ho2.There is a relationship between the use of Cognitive strategies and Personality traits of the female university level learners of English language as a university major.

According to Table 3, the students' overall Cognitive strategy use was significant positively correlated with the Openness to Experiences trait, and the Conscientiousness trait at the p<0.01 level (2-tailed). The levels of correlation were found low for both of the Openness to Experiences trait, and the Conscientiousness trait. For the Extraversion trait, and the Agreeableness trait, the

correlations were no significant (P>0.05). For only the Neuroticism trait, the students' overall Cognitive strategy use was significant negatively correlated with it at the p<0.05 level (2-tailed). The level of correlation was found low. In Table 3, there were found both types of positive and negative correlations, but in both types of correlations, the level of correlations was found low. Moreover, except the case of the Extraversion trait, and the Agreeableness trait, all types of correlations were significant at the p<0.01 or p<0.05 level (2-tailed).

(P>0.05). Except the case of the Extraversion trait, and the Neuroticism trait, all positive correlations were significant at the p<0.01 or p<0.05 levels (2-tailed).

The Relationship between the Use of Metacognitive Strategies and Personality Traits

H_o4.There is a relationship between use of Metacognitive strategies and Personality traits of the female university level learners of English language as a university major.

According to Table 5, the students' overall

Table 4. The Summary of Correlations among the Overall Compensation Strategy Use and the Five Traits of Personality		Extraversion	Openness to Experiences	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness	Neuroticism
Compensation strategies	Pearson Correlation	0.042	0.190**	0.141*	0.190**	-0.125
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.538	0.005	0.040	0.005	0.068
	N	213	213	213	213	213
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).						

The Relationship between the Use of Compensation Strategies and Personality Traits

H_o3.There is a relationship between use of Compensation strategies and Personality traits of the female university level learners of English language as a university major.

Metacognitive strategy use was significant positively correlated with the Openness to Experiences trait, and the Conscientiousness trait at the p<0.01 level (2-tailed), and the Extraversion trait at the p<0.05 level (2-tailed). The level of correlations was found low for the Openness to

Table 5. The Summary of Correlations among the Overall Metacognitive Strategy Use and the Five Traits of Personality		Extraversion	Openness to Experiences	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness	Neuroticism
Metacognitive strategies	Pearson Correlation	0.166*	0.265**	0.121	0.372**	-0.182**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.015	0.000	0.078	0.000	0.008
	N	213	213	213	213	213
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).						

According to Table 4, the students' overall Compensation strategy use was significant positively correlated with the openness to experiences trait, and Conscientiousness trait at the p<0.01 level (2-tailed), and the Agreeableness trait at the p<0.05 level (2-tailed). The levels of correlation were found low for the Openness to Experiences trait, for the Conscientiousness trait, and for the Agreeableness trait. For the Extraversion trait, and the Neuroticism trait, the correlation was no significant. In Table 4, in the case of the significant correlations, there was found only type of significant positive correlation, and the level of correlation was found low. There was not any significant negative correlation in the table

Experiences trait, the Extraversion, and medium for the Conscientiousness trait. For the Agreeableness trait, the correlation was no significant (P>0.05). For the Neuroticism trait, the students' overall meta-cognitive strategy use was negatively correlated with it at the p<0.01 level (2-tailed). The level of correlation was found low. In Table 5, there were found both types of positive and negative correlations, but in both types of correlation, the level of correlation was found low (except in the case of the Conscientiousness trait that its correlation level was medium). Except the case of the Agreeableness trait, all types of correlations were significant at the p<0.01 or p<0.05 levels (2-tailed).

Table 6. The Summary of Correlations among the Overall Affective Strategy Use and the Five Traits of Personality						
		Extraversion	Openness to Experiences	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness	Neuroticism
Affective Strategies	Pearson Correlation	0.022	0.239**	-0.025	0.214**	-0.020
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.747	0.000	0.721	0.002	0.772
	N	213	213	213	213	213
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).						

Table 7. The Summary of Correlations among the Overall Social Strategy Use and the Five Traits of Personality						
		Extraversion	Openness to Experiences	Agree ableness	Conscientiousness	Neuroticism
Social Strategies	Pearson Correlation	0.168*	0.212**	0.127	0.256**	-0.223**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.014	0.002	0.064	0.000	0.001
	N	213	213	213	213	213
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).						

The Relationship between the Use of Affective Strategies and Personality Traits

H_o5.There is a relationship between use of Affective strategies and Personality traits of the female university level learners of English language as a university major.

According to Table 6, the students' overall Affective strategy use was significant positively correlated with the Openness to Experiences trait, and the Conscientiousness trait at the p<0.01 level (2-tailed). The level of correlations was found low for the Openness to Experiences trait, and for the Conscientiousness trait. For each of the Extraversion trait, the Agreeableness trait, and the Neuroticism trait, the correlation was no significant (P>0.05). In table 4.5, there was not found any significant negative type of correlation (p>0.05).

The Relationship between the Use of Social Strategies and Personality Traits

H_o6.There is a relationship between use of Social strategies and Personality traits of the female university level learners of English language as a university major.

According to Table 7, the students' overall Social strategy use was significant positively correlated with the Openness to Experiences trait, and the Conscientiousness trait at the p<0.01 level (2-tailed), and the Extraversion trait at the p<0.05 level (2-tailed). The level of correlations was found low for the Openness to Experiences trait, for the Conscientiousness trait, and for the Extraversion trait. For the Neuroticism trait, the students' overall Social strategy use was significant negatively correlated with it at the p<0.01 level (2-tailed). The level of correlation was found low. For the Agreeableness trait, the correlation was not significant (P>0.05). In Table 8, there were found both types of positive and negative correlations, but in both types of correlation, the level of correlation was found low. Except the case of the Agreeableness trait, all types of correlations were significant at the p<0.01 or p<0.05 levels (2-tailed).

Conclusion

The obtained results in section four showed significant relationships between reported frequency of ELLSs and personality traits in some cases. The summary of correlations among the overall six categories of strategy use and the five traits of personality were presented in Table 1. According to Table 1, regarding the Openness to Experiences trait, and the Conscientiousness trait, the students' overall strategy use was significant positively correlated with each of them at the p<0.01 level (2-tailed). The levels of correlations were found low for the Openness to Experiences trait, and for the Conscientiousness trait (except the correlation between each of Memory, or Metacognitive overall strategy use and the Conscientiousness trait that was at medium level).

According to Table 1, regarding the Extraversion trait, the students' strategy use was significant positively correlated with the Extraversion trait for one category (the overall Memory strategy use) at the p<0.01 level (2-tailed) and for each of the two of categories of the overall strategy use (the overall Metacognitive, or Social

Table 8. The Summary of Correlations among the Overall Six Categories of Strategy Use and the Five Traits of Personality

		Memory Strategies	Cognitive Strategies	Compensation Strategies	Metacognitive Strategies	Affective Strategies	Social Strategies
Extraversion	Pearson Correlation	0.261**	0.089	0.042	0.166*	0.022	0.168*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.195	0.538	0.015	0.747	0.014
	N	213	213	213	213	213	213
Openness to Experiences	Pearson Correlation	0.182**	0.202**	0.190**	0.265**	0.239**	0.212**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.008	0.003	0.005	0.000	0.000	0.002
	N	213	213	213	213	213	213
Agreeableness	Pearson Correlation	-0.019	0.023	0.141*	0.121	-0.025	0.127
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.784	0.733	0.040	0.078	0.721	0.064
	N	213	213	213	213	213	213
Conscientiousness	Pearson Correlation	0.304**	0.199**	0.190**	0.372**	0.214**	0.256**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.003	0.005	0.000	0.002	0.000
	N	213	213	213	213	213	213
Neuroticism	Pearson Correlation	-0.198**	-0.175*	-0.125	-0.182**	-0.020	-0.223**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.004	0.010	0.068	0.008	0.772	0.001
	N	213	213	213	213	213	213

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

strategy use) at the $p < 0.05$ level (2-tailed). The level of significant correlation for all the three categories was found at low level. For each of the other three categories (the overall Cognitive, Compensation, or Affective strategy use), the correlation was not significant. According to Table 1, regarding the Neuroticism trait, for each of the three of categories of the overall strategy use (the overall Memory, meta-cognitive, or Social strategy use), the correlation was significant at the $p < .01$ level (2-tailed). For one category (the overall Cognitive strategy use), the correlation was significant at the $p < .05$ level (2-tailed). The level of significant correlation for all the four categories was found at low level. For each of the other two categories (the overall Compensation, or Affective strategy use), the correlation was not significant.

According to Table 1, regarding the Agreeableness trait, the students' overall Compensation strategy use was significant positively correlated with the Agreeableness trait at the $p < 0.05$ level (2-tailed). The level of correlation was found low. For each of the other five categories, the correlation was not significant. According to Table 1, clearly it was found that the Openness to Experiences trait and the Conscientiousness trait were only significant positively correlated with each of the six categories of the students' overall strategy use, and the level of significance was $P < 0.01$.

Although the correlations between reported frequency of ELLSs use and personality traits were statistically significant in some cases, but it was considered to provide enough support to justify further exploration of relationship. Another important point, it must be some counseling sessions with the students regarding personality traits and how to choose and use ELLSs. Such

counseling sessions can facilitate the students' understanding of their successes, failures, problems and potential related to the discussed relationship between the choice and use ELLSs and personality traits. In such situation, through ELLSs assessment, teachers can help their students to recognize the power of using ELLSs based on their personality for making language learning quicker, easier, and more effective. Moreover, generally speaking, each of ELLSs and personality traits is not "good" or "bad" *per se*, and they in themselves have neither positive nor negative sides.

Limitations of the Current Study

Regarding the issue of questionnaire, although survey studies have been very illuminating and have yielded important results, the first limitation of this study is that measuring of ELLSs and personality traits were done by using questionnaires.

Regarding the limitations related to sample of participants, the sample was chosen from the Islamic Azad University in Iran. Hence, it may not be representative of English language students in general. The second issue, conducting the study with a larger sample size would permit a greater certainly about the findings and results, but the small size sample was chosen in the present study because of the problems and difficulty in selection of large sample. In this way, generalization of findings may be limited to population with similar nature, and may not be applicable so well for other groups with speakers of different native languages, educational settings, cultural background, and gender.

Regarding the limitations related to statistical method, there is an important issue in the statistical procedures, that it is Cronbach's alpha estimates of internal consistency may not be appropriate to measure something that could fluctuate in short period of time. The test-retest reliability measurement is better indicator of reliability in this type of research.

Recommendations, Suggestions, and Directions for Further Research

The findings and possible limitations of this study lead to some intriguing avenues for future research. In such way, based on the results of this study, several recommendations and suggestions are made for further research.

However, the current study found some interesting findings regarding the relationship between reported frequency of ELLSs use by the female university level learners of English language as a university major and their personality traits, but it raised some questions which might provide fruitful areas for further study. For example, firstly, similar research might be carried out in different settings (such as male, and another majors) to find the degree to which findings are generalizable. Secondly, further research is needed to be done on developing the questionnaires which were used in this study in order to have more complete picture of the relationship between reported frequency of ELLSs use and personality traits. Thirdly, a longitudinal study is needed. Fourth, it is suggested that future research should take into consideration qualitative data collection to triangulate the data, and additional research instruments, such as diaries and observation. In addition, further work is needed which includes experimental investigations to verify the identical relationship.

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Indian Journal of Innovations and Development has not been previously published, is not currently submitted for review to any other journal, and will not be submitted elsewhere before a decision is made by this journal. I also declare that I will pay the formatting fee for the article as and when my paper is accepted for publication in Indian Journal of Innovations and Development.

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