



The relationship between personality traits and academic achievements: The case of Yemeni EFL undergraduates

Dr. Hussein Almaktry

English Department, Faculty of Education, Taiz University, Taiz, Yemen

Abstract

This study is an exploration of the personality traits of Yemen EFL undergraduates and the effects these traits overshadow on their academic achievements. Two instruments were used to collect the data: a personality questionnaire and performance record analysis. The former measured the personality and the latter was used to measure accumulative academic achievement throughout their undergraduate studies. The investigation was carried out by comparing the personality scores of 50 senior EFL learners against their scores of academic performance. The study showed (a) a positive correlation between personality and English performance, (b) insignificant differences in the participants' performance based on gender variable, and (c) extraversion and agreeableness—among the Big Five Personality traits—accounted for a statistically significant amount of variance in EFL achievements. The study brings to the foreground some pedagogical implications and venues for further research.

Keywords: academic achievement; personality traits; EFL learners; EFL context; L2

1. Introduction

Learning a second language (L2) is a complex process. Arguably, several factors affect foreign language learning in a way or another. In addition to environmental factors, there are some other human variables that possibly affect, to some extent, the performance of L2 learners. These variables include intelligence, aptitude, personality type, motivation, attitude, age, among others (Lightbrown & Spad, 2003; Sahin, Tezcan, Türkcan & Savran, 2014) [18, 25]. Personality, a case in point, has been mooted as a factor that significantly influences the degree of success in learning an L2 (Erfani & Mardan, 2017; Liu, 2012; Kirkağaç & Öz, 2017 16; Miri & Shamsaddini, 2014 21) [11, 19]. This is based on an assumption that some features of an L2 learner's personality might encourage or inhibit language learning by enhancing certain facets of language aspects while impeding others (Cook, 1996; Erfani & Mardan, 2017) [7, 11]. Many researchers have made considerable endeavors to study this phenomenon from different angles (e.g. Araghi, Fam & Ziaei, 2012; Qomarudin, 2010; Moqaddas, Haqshenas & Gol, 2013; Nejad, Bijami & Ahmadi, 2012; Kirkağaç & Öz, 2017) [2, 22, 23, 16]. Nonetheless, the results of the above-mentioned studies lack inconsistency, and their conclusions were viewed as controversial and inconclusive for they yielded tendency-based findings rather than digging into the phenomenon through direct observations, case studies, and the like. In addition, those studies recruited small sample sizes so that they produced ungeneralizable results. It would be useful to examine how personality traits work in different settings. Thus, this study strengthens the line of research by accumulating evidence from another EFL context. It unveils the contributions of personality characteristics on academic achievements in learning English in Yemen where English is taught as an FL.

2. Rationale

Arguably, not all learners are well suited for learning second/foreign languages. Successful L2 learners plausibly have a certain type of personality that drives them towards achieving a good command of the target language (Erfani & Mardan, 2017; Kirkağaç & Öz, 2017; Miri & Shamsaddini, 2014) [11, 16, 21]. For a long time, there has been awareness among language researchers to understand why some L2 students achieve better results than others (Moqaddas, Haqshenas, Gol, 2013; Liu, 2012; Araghi, Fam & Ziaei, 2012) [22, 19, 2]. Noticeably, the bulk of successful language learners who top the list of graduates of the English departments are female. This aroused an impulse to shed light on the extent of success in EFL learning at the university level. In other words, it might be predicted through a test of personality whether a candidate of the English program has success or difficulties in achieving better results. This could be useful for policymakers, educators, teachers, and students. Before taking decisions on introducing any language program, a test of personality would give an implication of the degree of success in the language taught, and some supplementary programs might be introduced to enhance personality traits of the applicants to the intended language program.

3. Objectives of the study

This paper builds on prior research that there is a correlation between personality type and L2 learning (e.g. Barekat & Tabatabaei, 2013; Chen, Jiang & Mu, 2015; Erfani & Mardan, 2017; Hanafiyeh & Afghari, 2017; Kirkağaç & Öz, 2017) [5, 6, 11, 13, 16]. The study is an attempt to explore such relationship in the EFL program in the Yemeni EFL context. Specifically, it intends to achieve the following objectives:

- Identifying the distribution of personality traits among Yemeni EFL learners.

- Exploring the extent to which personality traits are capitalized on their overall performance throughout a 4-year undergraduate EFL program.
- Elucidating gender-based differences in performance of the learner, if any.

4. Research questions

The objectives of study were operationalized into the following three research questions:

1. What is the distribution of personality traits among Yemeni EFL university students?
2. Is there any correlation between EFL learners' personality traits and their academic achievements in a 4-year English program?
3. Are there any statistically significant differences with regards to the personality traits based on the gender variable?

5. Significance of the study

The significance of the study lies in its contribution to the body of literature in the area of personality and pedagogy. It accumulates evidence and clarifies the effects of personality traits on EFL learners' performance. It also highlights the inconsistent results of similar previous studies (e.g. Sahin, Tezcan, Türkcan, & Savran, 2014; Araghi, Fam & Ziaei, 2012; Hanafiyeh & Afghari, 2017; Aziz, 2010; Chen, Jiang, & Mu, 2015; Liu, 2012; Altunel, 2015) [25, 2, 13, 4, 6, 19, 1]. Identifying the characteristics of students' personality brings about some implications to the stakeholders so as to enhance English learning program. It helps teachers to describe why students approach class activities differently, and why some achieve the goals of EFL program while others fail. It can also guide educators to deal with individual differences resulting from the different personality traits. Knowing and respecting students' individual differences is helpful to further the understanding of students' different performance under the same instruction. Similarly, the findings expectantly will help the policymakers and pedagogues in (a) re-orienting the EFL learning materials and adopting more appropriate learning strategies, and (b) offering more help to students to develop their learning outcomes.

6. Review of the literature

6.1 Effects of personality traits on L2 outcomes

The effects of personality type on L2 learning is an ongoing topic of debate. The crux of the problem in studying the phenomenon lies in the difficulty of identifying and measuring its variables. Although applied linguists dutifully refer to the – relatively limited – research on the effects of personality traits on L2 production (Dörnyei, 2009) [10], they are typically cast in a supporting role. Moreover, applied linguists rarely include more than one personality trait in their research design, and when they do, they often tend to have relatively unsophisticated and unrealistic expectations of its effects on informants' learning outcomes (Dewaele, 2009) [8]. In spite of the overwhelming focus on the personality impact, the results of early studies were inconsistent. They can be categorized into two extremes: First, studies which discussed personality characteristics as having positive, negative, or neutral effects on L2 outcomes. While studies support the idea that

personality variables such as assertion, extroversion, adventurousness, and responsiveness, among others, positively correlate with L2 performance, the results of some others came up with contradictory results. The second extreme of studies includes studies which approached the issue from different linguistic angles. For instance, Littlewood (1984) argued that the personality characteristics might have positive effects on communicative abilities but not grammatical accuracy or metalinguistic knowledge. In other words, personality traits such as extroversion may be useful in learning communication but not necessarily in learning grammar. On the contrary, learners who are touted to be introverted might be of low communicative abilities but good at grammatical accuracy (Pourqardash & Soori, 2017) [24]. In both cases, personality is a general responsible factor for learners' success in learning L2.

6.2 The Big Five personality traits & performance

Personality traits include a long list of characteristics: assertiveness, extroversion, risk-taking, adventurousness, self-esteem, empathy, dominance, talkativeness, responsiveness, etc. (Ibrahim, Yusof, Razak & Norshahidi, 2014; Altunel, 2015) [14, 1]. Arguably, when exploring the effects of personality characteristics in general may be misleading. Even within the Big five model, there might be some traits having bigger effects than others. The sub-categories of the personality traits were identified and correlated with the participants' performance by running the Linear Multilevel Regressions in previous investigations, too (e.g. Kirkağaç & Öz, 2017; Miri & Shamsaddini, 2014; Erfani & Mardan, 2017) [16, 21, 11]. The regression model was used to account for the interdependence of personality trait scores among EFL learners. Based on this statistical procedure, the association between the dependent variable (referred to as achievement, performance, proficiency, etc.) and the independent variable (personality) was evident – holding all other covariates (student, ambiance, test, characteristics) in the model constant. When taken as a whole, the Big Five personality traits predict L2 learners' academic performance (Kirkağaç & Öz, 2017; Erfani & Mardan, 2017) [16, 11]. Erfani & Mardan (2017) [11] examined the relationship that bond the Big five personality model, academic performance, and English proficiency of 202 Iranian students (undergraduates, graduates, and postgraduates) who studied at foreign universities in in Armenia, Australia, Austria, Canada, Cyprus, Germany, Hungary, India, Italy, Malaysia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Sweden, UAE, UK, Ukraine, and USA. Adopting a correlational and multiple regression analyses, the study showed (a) a significant relationships between the Big-Five personality traits (extraversion, openness, agreeableness, conscientiousness) and the informants' language proficiency, and (b) a high correlation between the IELTS scores and academic success of the respondents. The study backs up the cognitive approach that one's underlying mental processes are responsible for L2 learning process. According to the author, the participants “who were open to new experiences, able to agree, extroverted, and well careful achieved higher scores on IELTS, and higher levels of academic success” (p. 1055). Likewise, Kirkağaç and Öz (2017) [16] alleged that the personality traits predict more success in learning English as a

foreign language with a particular reference to the variables of agreeableness and extroversion (predictors) which account for a statistically significant amount of variance in achievement scores. In a similar vein, in a meta-analysis study, Ibrahim, Yusof, Razak, and Norshahidi (2014) ^[14] explored the association between the Big Five personality components (extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience) and students' academic success. The study comprised 6 relevant studies out of initial 64 studies. The sample size of the studies under examination varied between 1753 and 140 learners. The study concluded that conscientiousness is the dimension that highly correlates to the academic achievements of the informants.

6.3 Evidence from various EFL contexts

It would be useful to document the results of some previous studies that examined the phenomenon in different EFL contexts and from different angles. In this section the correlation between personality and English performance is reviewed with relevance to the variables of anxiety, gender, context-soundness, and social networking in addition to the well-versed factors of personality traits: Introversion and extroversion.

6.3.1 Introversion-extroversion & learners' performance

The issue under examination has been widely discussed in the literature under two broad categories: extroversion vis-à-vis introversion with emphasis on the dimension of extroversion among the other major personality characteristics. This is probably because of the common sense that successful L2 learners are supposed to be open, talkative, and bold; these qualities are embedded under the label extroversion. In the literature, there is a wide acceptance that extroverted learners are better language learners for they are more successful than introverted individuals and learn more rapidly (Sahin, Tezcan, Türkan, & Savran, 2014; Erfani & Mardan, 2017) ^[25, 11]. Following Littlewood's (1984) argument, "an extrovert person is well-suited to L2 learning," (p. 64). As such, extroverts (unreserved and outgoing students) acquire a second language better than the introverts. According to such claims, the extroverts have more opportunities to practice L2 inside and outside the classroom. Learners of this type tend to join groups, engage themselves in conversations, contact with other users of the target language easily and therefore have more language exposure. Additionally, extroverts tend to be risk-takers, trying a variety of different word types and grammatical structures at a higher speech rate (Swain, 1985) ^[26].

In fact, the effects of introversion-extroversion, being the most important factors of personality characteristics, on performance of English learners has received due attention worldwide. In the Iranian context alone, there is a plenty of instances. For example, Araghi, Fam, and Ziaei (2012) ^[2] studied the relationship between extroversion- introversion personality of 140 EFL Iranian learners and their English performance in terms of listening strategies. The study used Eysenck Personality questionnaire and compared the results of this questionnaire to IELTS listening comprehension test (final exam of their course). The sample was divided into introverts and extroverts. The results showed that the

extroverts outperformed the introverts. In the Iranian context, too, Nejad, Bijami, and Ahmadi (2012) ^[23] highlighted the relationship of extroversion-introversion of 30 EFL Iranian students and their academic writing using the Eysenck Personality Inventory to test personality traits. The results revealed that there was no significant relation between personality and writing abilities. Likewise, Hanafiyeh and Afghari (2017) ^[13] examined the personality characteristics acting as a predictor of Iranian EFL learners' speaking abilities of 250 learners, using a six-dimensional model of human personality (HEXACO). The findings showed (a) a positive relationship between HEXACO personality traits and speaking performance of the learners, (b) revealed that extraversion, conscientiousness and altruism could predict 90% of variance of speaking abilities. Furthermore, measuring relationship between the Big Five personality inventory and L2 speaking ability was also the theme of Barekat and Tabatabaei's (2013) ^[5] study. It aimed to identify personality traits acting as a predictor of Iranian EFL learners' speaking skills. The results indicated that only the conscientiousness trait had a significant correlation with the learners' speaking ability. That is, it can act as the best predictor of learners' L2 speaking ability. Furthermore, Pourqardash and Soori (2017) ^[24] investigated how extroversion and introversion influence grammatical improvement based on Quick Oxford Placement Test. The results showed that the introverted learners significantly outperformed extroverted learners - a quite similar result to that of Swain (1985) ^[26], Dornyei (2005) and Ellis (1994).

Similarly, Aziz (2010) ^[4] examined the relationship between extraversion-introversion personality type and oral performance of 40 Kurdish senior students of English, recruited from the department of English, Koya University in Iraq. The study explored the effects of extraverted and introverted personality type on fluency, accuracy, complexity, pronunciation, and global impression of the participants. The results of the study showed that extraversion- introversion did not correlate significantly with these oral performance components in so far as the sample is concerned. According to the author, this is probably due to cultural differences, i.e. cultural features and values in Northern Iraq- the setting of the study. Another reason- according to the author- could be related to the instructions in the course programs wherein teacher-centeredness contributed to the lack of a relationship between the variables. This is a class environment in which personality types neither poses difficulty nor benefit from the instruction.

In the Chinese context, Chen, Jiang, and Mu (2015) ^[6] analyzed the correlation between introversion/extroversion type of personality and spoken English performance of 117 Chinese students of English. The results of the study showed that the two are not correlated. The study also indicated that the personality type of learners is not a factor of success in oral English learning. However, the study suggested that students with different personality types may employ different kinds of strategies for learning, a quite similar conclusion to Moody (1988) who stated that "personality traits make a difference in how people learn and what they learn" (p. 389). In the Chinese context, too, Liu (2012) ^[19] explored the effects of personality traits on Chinese EFL learners' performance at

the university level. The study included self-esteem, risk-taking and sociability. The co-relational analyses indicated that self-esteem, language class risk-taking and sociability were significantly correlated with one another. Such individual differences as personality traits interacted with one another to yield certain impact on the students' performance in English.

6.3.2 Gender & learners' performance

The phenomenon was also explored with regard to the difference in gender and its effect on performance. Moqaddas, Haqshenas, and Gol (2013) ^[22] investigated, by using qualitative and quantitative research methods, the relationship between personality traits and speaking ability of 50 males and females in Shokouh language institute in Iran. The results of the t-test showed that students' gender has a relationship with their personality characteristics. In terms of neuroticism (emotional stability-instability) and extroversion the males outperformed the females. This is probably due to the fact that females were more introverted which is, according to the author, a normal expectation in a traditional community which might have generated the finding.

6.3.3 Anxiety & learners' performance

Some other studies studied the relationship between personality-anxiety and performance. In the Turkish context, Asmali (2017) ^[3] disclosed the correlation between personality traits and test anxiety of 180 Turkish EFL learners, by using a questionnaire of the five big personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, imagination). Results of this study showed that the participants mostly had a confidence problem that triggered the test anxiety to be high. They did not trust their language ability. The results, concerning the relationship between personality and the anxiety test, showed similarities and differences with previous studies.

6.3.4 Context-soundness factors & learners' performance

Taking into account the instructional setting, Altunel (2015) ^[1] studied the impact of extroversion and introversion on learning EFL in the Turkish context recurring 56 students at the university level. The study used Oxford Online Placement Test to measure the learning outcomes of the sample and Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to measure their personality type. In light of the results of the study, extroversion and introversion in an input-based instruction can predict success or failure of an input-based instruction setting. The author argued that the input-based instruction that include a silent period favors introversion personality type. Providing an appropriate environment in the classroom, reducing anxiety, and providing a secure setting suit introverts better than extroverts. In other words, introvert students have more possibilities to reveal their abilities in language learning in classrooms where they feel more comfortable.

6.3.5 Technology-minded personality & learners' performance

In the same vein of research, using technology in learning English and its relation to personality was the theme of some other studies. To illustrate, Kao and Craigie (2014) ^[15]

correlated English usage on Facebook and the big five personality traits of 164 Taiwanese students at the university level. The study found that there was a positive association between learning EFL on Facebook and extraversion and conscientiousness and a negative correlation with neuroticism. In summary, previous studies can be divided into (a) studies showing no relation vs. (b) studies proving positive relation of the variables, and (c) miscellaneous (the mix of the two). The study at hand reinforces one of these research directions. Although the majority of the previous studies has focused on and encompassed the perceptions of the participants, the topic remains an ongoing scholarly inquiry. Noticeably, prior research accentuated the impacts of personality on oral skills (listening and speaking) (e.g. Barekat & Tabatabaei, 2013; Moqaddas, Haqshenas, Gol, 2013; Chen, Jiang & Mu, 2015; Aziz, 2010; Araghi, Fam & Ziaei, 2012) ^[5, 22, 6, 4, 2] and writing (e.g. Nejad, Bijami, Ahmadi, 2012 23), whereas there is a scarce research on the effects on reading. Other few studies included other variables such as learning ecology (Altunel, 2015) ^[1] and social networking (Kao & Craigie, 2014) ^[15]. The majority of these studies examined particular aspects of L2 and only a few has taken the wholeness of L2 performance (e.g. Ibrahim, Yusof, Razak, & Norshahidi, 2014; Liu, 2012) ^[14, 19]. Additionally, all these studies adapted the Big Five personality traits (extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience) and some others used taxonomy—extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, imagination, in addition to self-esteem, risk-taking and sociability. These traits in the previous studies were measured by using Eysenck Personality Inventory, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator in addition to HEXACO model (honesty-humility, emotionality, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience. In the literature, a big deal of studies focused on introversion- extroversion variables; the other personality traits warrant further investigation.

As for the current study, it approached the topic primarily from a holistic point of view. It departed from the premise that personality is wholeness, and likewise learning L2 is wholeness. Thus, the study measured personality traits as wholeness and similarly measured the overall performance of EFL learners through accumulative academic records. Again, to replicate the previous findings in the Yemeni EFL context, the study examined the effects of sub-categories of personality of the learning outcomes as well as gender-based differences. Exploring the effects of personality characteristics in general may be misleading. That is, even within the personality traits there might be some traits having bigger effects than others.

7. Method

The study adopted a descriptive correlation design to decipher the relationship between the Big Five personality traits and academic performance of university EFL learners. The investigation has the Big-Five personality components, viz. extraversion, openness, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism as the independent variables (predictors), and the learners' performance as the dependent variable.

7.1 Participants

The sample of the study consisted of 50 senior EFL learners

who recently finished a 4-year program in English studies at the Faculty of Education, Taiz University. They are assumingly socio-linguistically homogeneous, aged between 23 and 27. They voluntarily took part in the study during the academic year 2016-2017.

7.2 Research Instruments

7.2.1 A Test of personality Traits

Personality traits were assessed by a standard measure adopted after James W. Pennebaker (The University of Texas, Austin). It is a 44-item online survey retrieved from <http://www.utspsc.org/Big5/>. According to this scale, personality is assessed along each of five dimensions which are generally unrelated to one another. A person can score high in one and low in another. Personality traits in this study refer to the internal qualities, characteristics, and features of the Big five relatively independent dimensions: extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience. This model is used as a point of reference for it has been widely accepted in a range of behavioral and psychological research.

7.2.2 Academic transcript analysis

The participants' achievement test scores were used to assess their overall performance in the EFL program. The program includes 54 courses, divided into linguistics, literature, and language-based courses. The academic transcripts encompass the participants' achievement scores in all subjects. The scores are awarded on the basis of written tests, research projects, classroom discussion, group work and role-play, seminars, etc.

7.2.3 Procedures

First, a link to the webpage of the personality survey was texted to all the participants. They were requested to fill it in online. At this stage, the researcher assured confidentiality that the results would be used solely for this research project and whatever the result, it is not going to affect their achievement test results. Upon completion, the respondents received feedback about their personality scores automatically. Out of the initial cohort, only 50 surveys were complete and valid for analysis. Incomplete surveys were excluded because their overall scores did not appear in the electronic automatic system. As for the achievement test results, the accumulative scores of the sample were obtained from the concerned department where the researcher works as a teacher of English. Then, the results of the personality test and the overall academic achievement scores were outlined and interpreted appropriately in the following section.

8. Data analysis, results, and discussions

The statistical package of social sciences (SPSS) software was used to analyze the quantitative responses of the research tools. The results were arranged and analyzed with due explanation. Each participant's total score of the academic achievement was tabulated against personality test scores. Data were treated quantitatively by using suitable statistical procedures with the help of a statistician. The statistical procedures, Pearson Correlation test and Mann-Whitney Test, were used, and each of these procedures is justified. The

package of analysis is displayed according to the order of the research questions.

8.1 Research Question # 1:

The first research question, "What is the distribution of personality traits among Yemeni EFL university students?" measures the personality characteristics across the sample. The informants' responses on a five-option scale were coded as such: very inaccurate=1, moderately inaccurate =2, neither accurate nor inaccurate =3, moderately accurate =4, and very accurate=5. By calculating the participants' (n=50) scores, the overall result scores ranged between 75 ($M=3.6190$) and 120 ($M=4.7524$) as shown in Table 1 below. According to this scale, the participants have a moderate level of personality traits. As data in the table indicates, the personality scores distributed among the five dimensions are fairly close. The informants are generally extroverts with mean score of 4.7524, followed by agreeable, conscientious, open, and neurotic (Mean scores=4.6548, 3.9905, 3.9029, 3.6190) respectively.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the distributions of personality traits among the sample

Personality dimensions	No.	Test scores		Mean	Std.
		Min.	Max.		
Extraversion	50	93	120	4.7524	1.50396
Neuroticism	50	75	111	3.6190	1.35927
Conscientiousness	50	97	116	3.9905	1.11697
Agreeableness	50	99	119	4.6548	1.13599
Openness	50	92	102	3.9029	1.10841

Although the difference in the mean values is not big, the scores of *agreeableness* and *extraversion*, among the other traits, are notable (Mean score= 4.6548 and 4.7524). According to the personality measurement this study has made use of, the extroverts tend to spend time talking with others, enjoy the company of others while the respondents with the traits of agreeableness are seen as friendly and trusting. They avoid conflict and rarely criticize others (Kirkağaç & Öz, 2017) ^[16]. This is generally the overall impression about the personality of most educated Yemenis.

Noticeably, the respondents' tendencies towards extroversion or agreeableness affect their performance in English learning skills, suggesting that students who score high in these two dimensions tend to be more successful language learners at the university level more than their counterparts. This is parallel with the findings of prior research that introverted students prefer working on their own and perform better in written tests while –on the other hand– extroverted students favor interaction and perform better in oral tests. For example, Sahin, Tezcan, Türkcan and Savran (2014) ^[25] and Littlewood (1984) argued that extrovert individuals are well-matched to L2 learning. Likewise, among the five-big traits, Erfani and Mardan (2017) ^[11] found that "*Neuroticism* (emotional stability) was the only psychological trait, negatively correlated with both language proficiency and academic success of Iranian foreign students" (p. 1046).

Such assertions suggest that extroverted learners have more opportunities to practice L2 inside and outside the classroom more than the introverted learners. The extrovert finds it easier

to contact with other users of the target language and thus obtains more language input. They tend to join groups, and engage themselves in conversations inside and outside the classroom (Swain, 1985) [26]. Similarly, while in the classroom, the extroverts get more practice in using L2, they are believed to be prone to risk-taking a larger amount and variety of different word types and grammatical structures at a higher speech rate (Sahin, Tezcan, Türkcan & Savran, 2014; Littlewood, 1984) [25]. However, this is in contrast to the study of Aziz (2010) [4] in the Iraqi context where the investigation included participants who belong to the Kurdish culture with its specialties that Aziz’s study reflected.

8.2 Research Question # 2

The second research question, “Is there any correlation between EFL learners’ personality traits and their academic achievements in a 4-year English program?” is of a correlational type. To answer this inquiry, a statistical procedure was applied. The correlational significance between English learning outcomes and personality traits was determined by using Pearson product-moment correlation as it measures the relationship between two variables of continuous scales (Dörnyei, 2007) [9]. According to Statistics, the size of the value of Pearson correlation generally ranges from -1.00 to +1.00 which indicates the strength of the relationship between the variables: 0 indicates absence of relationship, +1.00 indicates a perfect positive correlation (as one variable increases, so does the other variable), and -1.00 indicates a perfect negative correlation (as one variable increases, the other variable decreases (Dörnyei, 2007; Lazaraton, 2005) [9, 17]. Following the guidelines of this statistical procedure, two hypotheses were attested.

- H₀: There is no significant relationship between EFL learners’ personality traits and their English academic performance (H₀: $p=0$).
- H₁: There is a significant relationship between EFL learners’ personality traits and their performance (H₁: $p\neq0$).

Table 2: Pearson correlation between personality traits and performance

Correlations	P. traits	Aca. achievement
Pearson Correlation	1	0.205
Sig. (2-tailed)		0.523
N	50	50
Pearson Correlation	.205	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.523	
N	50	50

The table displays the results of the correlation between personality type and English performance. As data in the table shows, the correlation coefficient measured through Pearson product-moment correlation (p -value) was 0.523, suggesting a positive relationship i.e., higher personality scores were positively correlated with a high English performance. In statistical terms, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. Briefly, the results of personality test positively correlate with the majority of the participants’ academic performance. This is in accordance with the results of previous research (e.g. Chen, Jiang, & Mu,

2015; Araghi, Fam & Ziaei, 2012; Qomarudin, 2010; Nejad, Bijami, Ahmadi, 2012) [6, 2, 23]. The result also confirms the results that Hanafiyeh and Afghari (2017) [13] came up with in the sense that those personality traits have positive relationship with EFL learners’ language abilities.

8.3 Research Question # 3

The third research question, “Are there any statistically significant differences with regards to the personality traits based on the gender variable?” deciphers the gender-based differences ($\alpha<0.05$) between personality traits and performance. To this end, the Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis test was applied. The results of the test are outlined in Tables 3 below. This statistical procedure testified the following two hypotheses:

- H₀: There is NO statistically significant gender-based differences in the performance of the EFL learners with respect to their personality traits.
- H₁: There is statistically significant gender-based differences in the performance of the EFL learners with respect to their personality traits.

Table 3: Results of Mann-Whitney test based on gender

	Dimension	test	Sig.	Decision
1	Personality	Mann-Whitney U Test	.066	Retain null hypothesis
2	Performance	Mann-Whitney U Test	.122	Retain null hypothesis

As shown in the table, there are no statistically significant differences regards to the personality traits based on gender variables where Sig. values are .066 and .122 ($\alpha<0.05$) respectively. This is an obvious indication that the gender variable is not an influential factor of English performance in the context of the study, i.e. the personality of the participants (male and female) show no striking differences in their academic success (on the basis of gender). In the local context, it is common that the more successful language learners who top the list every year are female, contrarily to the assumption in the rationale section of this study. This might be due to some other reasons but not the gender factor. However, in the literature, Moqaddas, Haqshenas, and Gol (2013) [22] found that males outperform females in terms of neuroticism and extroversion in the Iranian context which is at odds with the result of Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis test as discussed in this section.

9. Pedagogical Implications

The results imply that there is a need for an appropriate means to measure the learners’ personality traits before joining the university so as to predict whether the EFL program suits their personality types. Besides, some courses on personality may be embedded in the EFL program at the undergraduate level to enhance the learners’ personality traits that suit language learner’s characteristics. Likewise, the web-based tools and applications such as blogs and wikis, Facebook or twitter may be used as informal channels of language learning. Learners can access such electronic applications freely, spontaneously and independently of the classroom human constrains. This supports the introvert students to come out of their shells.

Another implication is instigated by Dewaele (2009)^[8] and Asmali's (2017)^[3] assertions that the introverts' performance is affected by pressure and anxiety. This accentuates the need of an appropriate classroom environment that encourages introvert students perform better.

Similarly, understanding how personality correlates with L2 performance is important when selecting language teaching methods, techniques, tasks, and procedures. The policymakers and pedagogues should re-think of various teaching methods and choose materials that suit the personality of their learners. This spawns more opportunities for students to effectively get engaged in language classes; teachers can direct their goals and plans in accordance with their students' personality types, regardless of their gender.

10. Conclusion

The findings of this study support—like the majority of studies in the literature— that there is a link between learners' personality and academic achievements of EFL learners. This study explored the phenomenon in the Yemeni higher education context with a reference to the learners of English as a foreign language. The findings are consistent with some previous research findings and at odds with some others. The consistency lies in the fact that personality affects L2 learning outcome (Araghi, Fam & Ziaei, 2012; Liu, 2012)^[2, 19]. Some other studies (e.g. Altunel, 2015; Aziz, 2010)^[1, 4] came up with contradictory results.

The contradiction might be due to some limitations that this study has undergone through. First, although the personality of a language learner is a factor deemed important for second or foreign language learning, it is a complicated aspect affected by some other factors, such as ethnic background, culture, environment, and the like. There might be some other factors combined with the personality that contribute to L2 learning. The study was also constrained by the correlational findings which are not meant to identify a cause-effect relationship between personality and L2 performance. Some other variables are expected to have a causal relationship between these two variables. In other words, an association between the variables in question might be caused by a relationship with a third confounding variable (e.g. motivation, ambiance, etc.). As the study excluded the context-bound factors, they might have influenced the results of this study which arguably have remarkable impact on the phenomenon as reported in Altunel's (2015)^[1] study. Furthermore, notwithstanding the standard personality test and official results of English performance this study instrumented, the results are limited to the respondents' self-reporting answers to the personality questionnaire (adopted after James Pennebaker at the University of Texas) which might imprecisely measure the personality traits in such an Arab country with dissimilar religious, ethnic, and social factors.

Finally, the study has highlighted some points for further research. Since the participants of the study came from one university and the sample is relatively small, it is difficult to generalize the results to other population. On the contrary, other researchers might fill in or decrease this gap by including a bigger sample using some other instruments or a triangulation of research instruments. Additionally, the current

research work suggests that the Big Five personality approach is really an indicator of how well a person fits into his or her culture at the time. Hence, further research might look into the students' personality types utilizing a specific and context-related personality questionnaire, having the social and cultural background of the students in mind. Additionally, other researchers might explore the influence of personality on different aspects of English adopting English standardized English test such as TOEFL or ELTS rather than taking academic achievements as whole or specifically focus on a particular language skill for language skills are integrated and inseparable. Additionally, in an era of new aids to second and foreign language acquisition and learning, there might be some other personality traits— other than the five components included in this study— that may play an important role in students' experience of L2 learning. There is a need for more socially-situated focus on a specific personality trait. Such a study should be tackled by a team of psycholinguist, sociolinguist, and pedagogues. They should put head together to have an in-depth investigation of the ongoing debate.

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