The Relationship between Big-five Personality Traits, Learning Strategies, and English Language Proficiency in a Monotonous Assessment Method Predominant EFL Environment

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Abstract. With the continuous development of teaching reform, personality education has received increasing attention from educators. This paper summarizes the correlation among the Big Five personality traits, learning strategies, and English language proficiency in a macroscopic context of exam-oriented education. The main findings of this paper are: 1) personality is a significant predictor of academic level; 2) educators should instruct students with different personalities to implement corresponding learning strategies; 3) we should overcome the limitations of the EFL education environment, modify the exam-oriented assessment method, to create the conditions to maximize the advantages of personality. This paper makes a certain contribution to the development of personality education. By reading this paper, the relationship between personality traits and academic performance becomes clearer, which can help promote students' academic proficiency. It also motivates researchers to yield teaching innovations in the fields of integrated personality education and test-oriented education.

Keywords: Personality; Language proficiency; Assessment method; EFL.

1. Introduction

Under the current educational background in China, exam-oriented education still occupies a dominant position rather than the whole person education that shapes sound personality, and most students obtain knowledge passively when they are learning English. Nonetheless, as a student, I have observed that although we students all sit in the same classroom and receive the same knowledge input from the same teacher, our academic proficiency varies considerably. It makes me wonder if our academic proficiency is influenced by our different personalities.

The Big-Five personality traits are made up of openness (curious, fresh, and creative), conscientiousness (self-disciplined, responsible, and ambitious), extroversion (sociable, lively, talkative), agreeableness (considerate, empathetic, trusting), neuroticism (impulsive, irritable, nervous) [1]. EFL refers to the environments where English is a foreign language, just like in China. And the learning strategies consist of memory, cognitive, compensation, meta-cognitive, affective, and social strategies.

The purpose of this review paper is to figure out the following three questions. Firstly, how students with various personalities select their corresponding learning strategies. Secondly, which personality type is more advantageous or disadvantageous in English learning? Thirdly, how can teachers help students to maximize their personality strengths in an EFL learning environment? Educators should take the responsibility of further exploring this field to attract more people to pay attention to student personality as well as promote pedagogy innovation. Most importantly, it's firmly believed that the students can better understand the relationship between their personality and academic performance through reading this research essay so that they are able to identify appropriate learning strategies to promote English proficiency.

2. Personality, corresponding learning strategies, and academic proficiency

Previous scholars' perspectives are extremely useful as they shed light on the importance of whole-person education, which concentrates on students' personalities. Cognitive or mental functioning preferences are crucial to one's learning performance [2]. Therefore, it's an effective way for students to get familiar with their personality types and identify the correct learning strategies, eventually strengthening their English proficiency. For instance, students with agreeableness mostly have a better ability to control emotions, so they tend to employ metacognitive strategies, which means such students adjust their learning status by understanding and controlling their cognition [3]. Extroversion students' vitality and confident characteristics make them positively correlated with affective strategies, this type of student is more inclined to peer cooperation, questioning for clarification, and other similar strategies to increase interest in learning [1, 4]. What the students have to do is make full use of the unique academic strengths of a particular personality, or utilize appropriate learning strategies to heal their personality. At the same time, students should consciously exercise their self-control, affinity, cautiousness, modesty, etc. Those characteristics are derived from conscientiousness openness and agreeableness, which are positively correlated with all learning strategies, so that can facilitate their English proficiency [5]. Extroversion is a context-specific characteristic, and educators should give the correct guidance.

3. Stereotype about so-called good and bad personality

However, it should be noted that researchers provide sufficient evidence that neuroticism is negatively correlated with student's academic performance and all learning strategies.

Hearing this, some parents may challenge the necessity of personality education that since neuroticism is a bad personality, if students are still divided in terms of personality, neuroticism students will be in an isolated position.

Nevertheless, it doesn't mean that neuroticism is a bad personality. There must be appropriate strategies for neuroticism, but research hasn't found them yet. Appropriately maintaining certain characteristics of neuroticism, such as anxiety, hostile, and consciousness, is also beneficial to the improvement of English performance. When people are anxious about studying, it shows that they are under pressure, which can push them to progress continuously. Hostility arises because you see others as competitors, which in turn brings out your potential. Of course, once these traits become excessive, your mood will be affected and your academic performance will be poor.

As a matter of fact, personality is complex and changeable, there's no clear boundary between a good personality and a bad personality. Yan Chen's research convinces people that every personality has strengths and weaknesses [6]. Just as it's generally believed that extroverts have an advantage in spoken English due to their communicative and talkative nature, which helps them obtain more input and output opportunities. However, the accuracy and consistency of extroverts' oral expressions can't be guaranteed. On the contrary, though introverts have fewer output opportunities, they can not only gain comprehensible input from reading and speaking, but also use sentences and words properly once they get a chance to speak. Most importantly, experiments demonstrate that extroverted students and introverted students have an equal possibility of acquiring high-level oral English proficiency [7].

4. Educators apply suitable pedagogy based on students' various personalities

Not only should students be aware of the significance of using personality strength to promote academic proficiency, but teachers should also make full use of it. Educators shouldn't regard the individual differences of students as unchangeable natural conditions, but rather anticipate individuals' ability to learn English in terms of students' different personalities. It can help facilitate the development of students' personality traits as well as apply suitable pedagogy to help enhance their academic performance. It would also be productive for teachers to use them as a predictive instrument to identify appropriate learning strategies. For example, for students with the

characteristics of agreeableness, as they are earnest, practical, and good at cooperation, teachers can boost their development by organizing groups and conducting intra-group evaluations in class.

5. Assessment method for students with different personalities

Generally speaking, students' academic performance will be assessed through a large amount of coursework and examination, whereas students with different personality traits are good at different assessment methods. In other words, their performance is related to the way students' proficiency is measured [8]. As the results show in the bibliography, students with conscientiousness and agreeableness are able to achieve excellent grades in both assessments, students with openness tended to be superior at completing coursework, while neuroticism and extroversion are associated with poorer academic grades [9]. Thus, it's highly recommended for educators to be familiar with the academic assessment preference of students with different personalities in order to provide a fair and comprehensive assessment method so that the student' s academic proficiency can be precisely measured. In this way, on one hand, students can maximize their personality strengths in the AM they are good at, on the other hand, it's can strengthen the self-confidence of students with different personalities. However, for current Chinese students, examinations are the dominant way to evaluate their academic level, and students' abilities cannot be fully utilized. The meaning of exams has also been distorted, becoming a focus on grades rather than understanding and solving learning difficulties [10].

6. Previous related work

Although personality education is generally ignored in eastern countries, Shiva and Hoda from Iran have offered important perspectives that the Big-Five personality is closely related to English proficiency and academic achievement, which affirms the educational value of the Big Five personality traits. Their research indicates that students with various personalities behave differently in academics primarily because they implement different learning strategies. Several psychologists like Meera Komarraju have also suggested that different learning strategies mediate personality traits and the relationship between academic achievement [10].

According to the students' different patterns of dealing with knowledge, learning strategies are mainly divided into six sections. Previous research reveals that each personality trait has its corresponding effective learning strategy, and it can have a positive correlation with English language proficiency under the correct guidance of educators. While neuroticism was negatively correlated with all learning styles and academic achievement. Nevertheless, students shouldn't be denied their potential based on some seemingly poor traits in their existing personalities. In addition to the specific learning strategies of students, the assessment method also affects students defined scholastic level to a certain extent. As prominent psychologists, Adrian Furnham et al. put it, "the selected academic assessment methods (AM) will determine the style and content of student learning" [9].

7. Limitations on the implementation of personality education

Personality traits indeed play an important role in enhancing English proficiency and academic achievement, but language learning is largely restricted by the EFL environment. Under the exam-oriented education and input-based learning milieu, there are few natural environments where students can immerse themselves in English, except in English classes. Whereas, even English classes will be filled with countless papers, turning students into problem-solving machines instead of people who can apply English practically. More and more students hold a utilitarian view of English learning, which is only looking forward to completing the learning content prescribed by the course and blindly pursuing high scores in examinations. It is difficult to establish the ideology of shaping and recognizing their own personality in the learning process. At the same time, it's also tough for teachers

to implement appropriate pedagogy for various students with different personalities in a limited classroom environment.

8. Conclusion

Consequently, there are still many problems in the field of personality education that we need to solve. But the correctness of personality education will undoubtedly become the main trend in future education. In order to solve these problems, I'd like to put forward some hypotheses. Firstly, would it be better if students were divided into classes according to their different personality traits and let them receive targeted teaching? Secondly, if it's feasible to carry out more diversified English interesting activities, for example, through the appreciation of western literature, students are taught to integrate their own emotions with the works to adjust their mood, so that neurotic personality becomes emotional stability. As educators, we should try to modify the single scholarly assessment method, examination, which constrains the personality advantages and divergent thinking of students. Instead, implement diversified assessment methods including group work, presentation, reflection reports, and so on, so as to better promote students' learning [11]. In the future, I will further explore this field and hope to discover effective solutions to these problems.

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