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**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN USE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES AND PERSONALITY TRAITS : A CASE STUDY**

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work in this dissertation is my own except for quotations and summaries which have been duly acknowledged.

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## ABSTRAK

Kajian ini dijalankan untuk mengenalpasti strategi pembelajaran bahasa yang digunakan oleh pelajar ekstrovert dan introvert semasa mempelajari Bahasa Inggeris. Peserta kajian terdiri daripada seorang pelajar ekstrovert dan seorang pelajar introvert yang sedang belajar di sebuah Sekolah Berasrama Penuh di Perak. Kaedah temu bual dan pemerhatian telah digunakan untuk mengumpul data bagi kajian kualitatif ini. Berdasarkan temu bual, dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa pelajar ekstrovert lebih suka menggunakan strategi sosial untuk belajar Bahasa Inggeris di luar kelas. Sebaliknya, pelajar introvert lebih selesa menggunakan strategi kognitif untuk belajar Bahasa Inggeris di luar kelas. Di dalam kelas, kedua-dua kumpulan pelajar menggunakan strategi yang sama, iaitu strategi kognitif disebabkan oleh situasi pembelajaran dan aktiviti yang disusun di dalam kelas tersebut. Secara umumnya, pelajar ekstrovert menggunakan lebih banyak strategi sosial dari pelajar introvert, manakala pelajar introvert menggunakan lebih banyak strategi kognitif dari pelajar ekstrovert. Aktiviti pembelajaran bahasa yang melibatkan kerja kumpulan adalah lebih menarik kepada pelajar ekstrovert, sebaliknya, pelajar introvert lebih menggemari aktiviti yang sistematik, terancang dan yang boleh dilakukan sendirian. Implikasi kajian ini adalah pelajar ekstrovert dan introvert mempunyai personaliti yang berbeza yang boleh mempengaruhi pemilihan strategi pembelajaran bahasa mereka. Oleh itu, pelbagai aktiviti bahasa perlu dirancang dan dilaksanakan agar pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris lebih menarik dan lebih bermakna bagi kedua-dua kumpulan pelajar tersebut.



## ABSTRACT

This research is conducted to investigate language learning strategies used by extrovert and introvert students while learning English. The participants of this study are one extrovert and one introvert student studying in a fully residential school in Perak. A semi structured interview and classroom observations were the methods employed to gather the data for this qualitative study. Based on the interview, the findings of this research reveals that the extrovert language learner preferred to use social strategies in learning English outside the class. However, the introvert language learner was more comfortable employing cognitive strategies in order to learn English outside the classroom. In class, both types of language learners utilized similar types of learning strategies, which are cognitive strategies, due to the nature of the English lesson and task involved. Overall the extrovert utilized more social strategies than the introvert participant while the introvert participant preferred to use more cognitive strategies than the extrovert. Language activities, incorporating group work were more attractive to the extrovert participant, while the introvert participant preferred structured and well-planned activities that can be completed alone. The implication of this study is that both students have different types of personalities which considerably influence choice of language learning strategies. Hence, various language tasks should be designed in order to make lessons more interesting and meaningful to both types of students.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

ESL English as a Second Language

LLS Language Learning Strategies

L1 First language

L2 Second language



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Introduction

Every human being is born in this world as a unique person with diverse physical appearance and characteristics. Similarly, students who enter any school or university have different physical and psychological background. Psychological factors will make up a student's personality, although personality is also determined by the environment. Personality is one of the qualities that makes up a person's character. A person's character, in turn, will influence his approach to academic learning. Students' personality will directly or indirectly affect students' choice of learning strategy. The academic success or failure of a student is strongly related to that particular students' learning strategies.

## 1.2 Research Background

Various variables interact simultaneously to influence and affect a learner's success in language learning. Naiman et.al (1987) suggested that success in language learning is related to a number of personality and cognitive style factors. Schuman (1978) in his *Taxonomy of Factors Influencing Second Language Acquisition*, listed personality factors as one of the variables that affect students' success in learning a second language. The personality factors are divided into four sub-factors, one of which is 'Extroversion/Introversion'. Walsh (1988) has the opinion that whether children are learning only one language or multiple languages, they always remain as individuals-in-context, hence implying that most students have individualized ways of learning a language. Individual students react to school and learn differently in class. Some language learners are outgoing and sociable and learn a language quickly. They do not worry about making any mistakes, but use limited resources to generate input from native speakers. However, other students are shy and quiet and need longer time to learn a language.

In general, psychologists are unanimous in affirming that personality is something integral; not simply a cluster of mental qualities, properties or tokens, but rather the unique combination of characteristics of each individual. (Leontiew, 1981).



It is also agreed that it is precisely personality which determines the concrete behaviour of a given man, his discrete thoughts and deeds. In addition, human beings are unique in the sense that each has his own innate attributes, which precondition the development of their personality (Leontiew, 1981). For instance, where one man has an excitable nervous system, another will have a quiet one: one will have quick reactions, another slow.

Language teachers should be aware of the types of personality that their students have. This awareness is important, since a student's choice of learning strategy and eventually his command of the language is substantially influenced by his personality. For example, if student A is an extrovert, he prefers to learn a language by talking to his peers in the target language. In contrast, student B who is an introvert may prefer to acquire a language by listening to others speaking in the target language. Schmeck (1983) urges researchers to view learning strategies in the context of general personality factors. According to Schmeck (1983), a learning strategy disembedded from personality-related factors is "only a short-term prop for learning" (1983:179).

In addition, Oxford and Nyikos (1989) suggested that better language learners generally use strategies appropriate to their personality. Second language learners may differ on a number of dimensions to do with personality, motivation, learning style, aptitude and age. Differences in all these variables will result in differences in the route along which learners pass in second language acquisition (Ellis, 1994).



According to Oxford (1995), the more teachers know about factors such as personality and learning styles, the more readily the teacher can come to grips with the nature of individual differences in the classroom. This kind of knowledge is power, the power to plan lessons so that language learners who have different personality traits and various strategies, can receive what they need.

It should be the objective of every student to excel in his study and achieve excellent academic result. Since the success or failure of a student depends considerably on his learning strategy, every student, regardless of at whichever level he is studying, should be aware of the importance of learning strategies. A brief look at published research reveals that learning strategies influence the level of proficiency obtained in a second language (Ehrman & Oxford, 1990). A few researches (for instance, Rubin, 1987, Naiman et. al, 1978; Vann & Abraham, 1990) have discovered that conscious use of suitable learning strategies typifies good language learner. Cohen (1995) also concluded that LLS have an explicit aim of assisting learners in improving their knowledge of the target language.

Hismanoglu (2001), concluded that LLS are good indicators of how learners approach tasks or problems encountered during the process of language learning. Therefore, LLS provide language teachers valuable clues about the process of acquiring a language, such as how the student remembers a new input presented in class. Furthermore, effective usage of LLS will eventually aid the learners to be independent and take control of his own learning.

According to Oxford (1990), LLS are especially important for language learning, as they are actually the tools for active, self-directed movement, which is essential in developing communicative competence. Language teachers should assist students to employ effective and appropriate LLS to promote autonomous learning. Autonomous learning can be promoted if 'learning to learn' is considered as an integral part of language learning so that learners become increasingly aware of the way they learn, the options open to them and the options best suit them (Lessard-Clouston, 1997). In fact, one objective of the New Secondary School Curriculum (KBSM) is to create Malaysian students who are independent and can take care of their own learning.

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

In schools, some teachers admit that there are some classes with which he or she feels less successful than others. This is not due to the students' abilities or intelligence. Why is it that one teacher is successful with certain students, but not with others? Similarly, why is it that two students with equivalent intelligence, age and socioeconomic background are so different in the level of academic achievement? Language teachers may often wonder why some students learn English quite easily while others struggle to learn English. In practice, language teachers often observe that students' response to a particular language task vary. Intellectual ability is a necessary condition for success in learning. However, it is not a sufficient condition to be successful.

Personality and motivation account for much of the variation in pupils' achievement, and the predictive power of tasks used in schools would be increased by the inclusion of personality and motivation measures (Cattell, 1966).

Psychologists believe that the process of education involves each student's personality as a whole. Morris (1966) claims that psychology is relevant to education only when students are considered as human beings rather than as mechanistic models. The study of personality thus helps one to understand other people and the teacher needs to understand his students. How can a teacher do this? This is possible through the study of personality. The teaching and learning process cannot be looked at in isolation from personality. Moody (1988) suggested that for language teachers, personality of language learners means that they perceive the world and interpret it in basically various ways. Thus, different students, given the same presentation may respond and react in different ways and these reactions may be fundamentally unchangeable. Language teachers have to identify their students significant individual differences in order to provide effective and sensitive instruction in class (Ehrman & Oxford, 1990).

In the field of second language acquisition (SLA), researches have been carried out concerning personality variables of successful language learners (Rubin, 1987; Stern, 1983; Naiman et. al, 1978). However, as yet, the data are limited, and in many instances, inconclusive (Reiss, 1981). Nevertheless, certain traits have been found to have significant variation with successful language learning.



For example, Naiman et. al (1978) concluded that good language learners are apt to be extroverts. Other researchers identified that self-control, assertiveness and risk-taking are relevant to success in learning a language (Stern, 1983; Rubin, 1987). All these factors seem to favour extroverts. A number of researchers (Reiss, 1981 ;Vann & Abraham, 1990) agreed that personality is certainly a complex variable in language learning.

Research about secondary school students' choice of learning strategies have been conducted in Malaysia ( for instance, Mohamed Amin Embi, 2000 ; Radha Nair, 1996; Mah Sau Fong, 1999). However, the studies do not relate students' personality to their choice of learning strategies. In addition, the majority of the research about the influence of students' personality on LLS (Wakamoto, 2000; Carrell, 1997; Moody, 1988) were quantitative research which only used questionnaires as their method of data collection. These studies of students' personality types were only carried out in other countries which certainly have different kinds of students in terms of characteristics and background from Malaysia. Thus, the researcher feels that it is important to conduct this research to discover the relationship of students' personality and their choice of LLS in Malaysian context.



## 1.4 Research Objectives

This research has the following objectives :

- 1.4.1 To know in detail the types of language learning strategies that students with different personalities (extrovert/introvert) use in class and outside class;
- 1.4.2 To investigate how students with different personalities (extrovert/introvert) choose language learning strategies in preparation for examinations; and
- 1.4.3 To find out whether students' personality influences their choice of language learning strategies.

## 1.5 Research Questions

This research attempts to find answers for the following questions :

- 1.5.1 How do students with different personalities (extrovert/introvert) learn English inside class?
- 1.5.2 How do students with different personalities (extrovert/introvert) learn English outside class?
- 1.5.3 How do students with different personalities (extrovert/introvert) prepare for their English exam?

## 1.6 Conceptual Framework

In the field of second language acquisition, a lot of attention has been given to individual differences in acquiring a language. Individual differences of language learners are affected by various variables such as motivation, age, gender, learning condition and personality factors. The conceptual framework of this research is based on Ellis's (1994) model known as the framework examination of second language learning. In this model, Ellis (1994) identified four factors which determine the learning outcomes of a language learner. The four factors are social context, learner characteristics, learning condition and the learning process. This model is described in Diagram 1 on the next page.

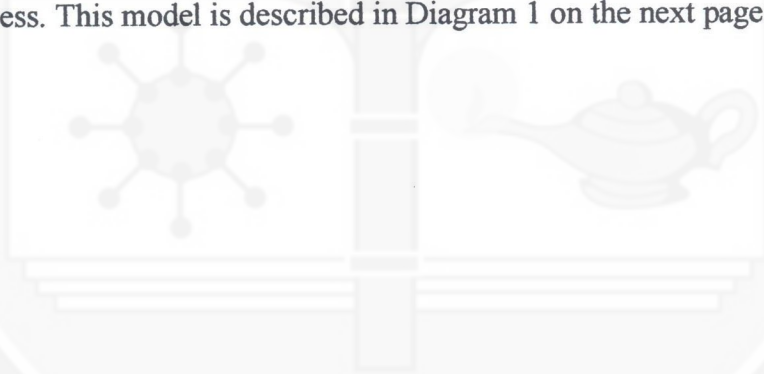
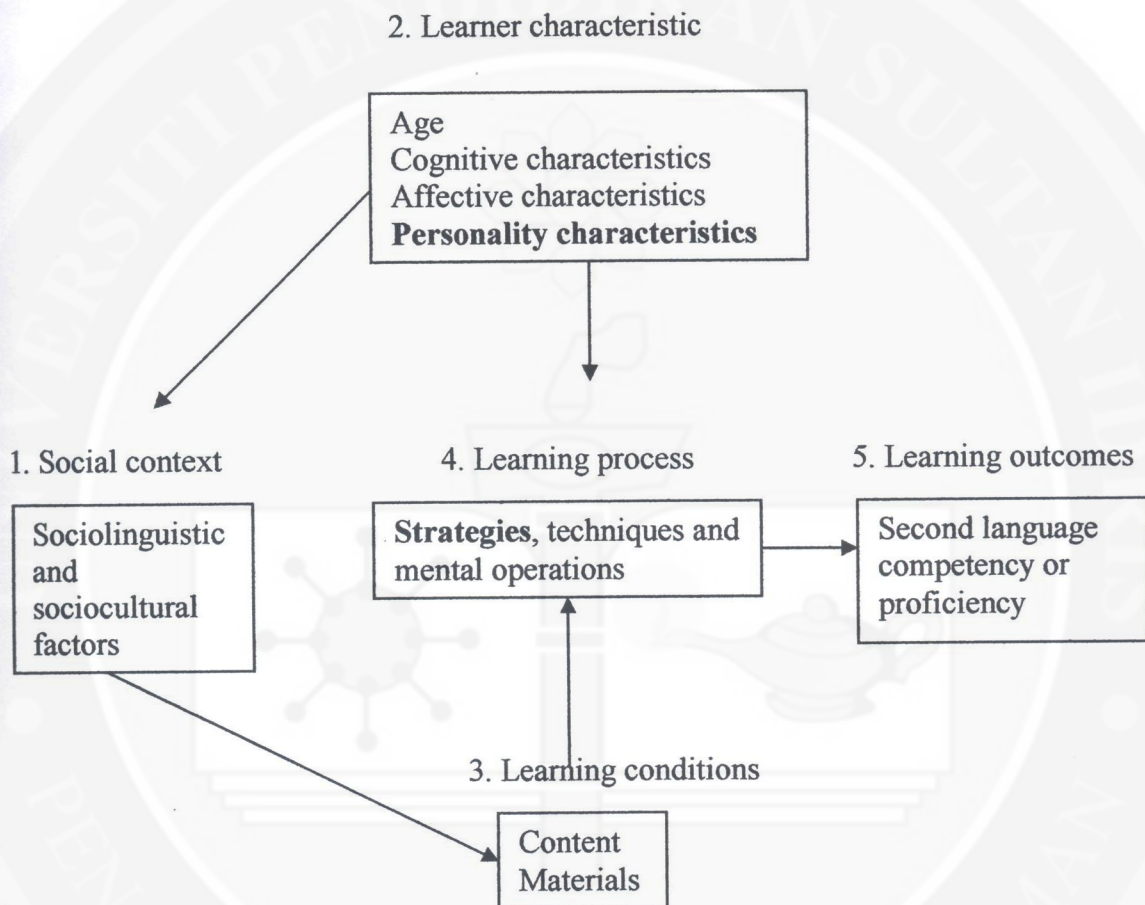


Diagram 1 : Framework for Investigating the Influence of Personality on Language

Learning

Strategy of Second Language Learning (Adapted from Ellis, 1994)



In diagram 1, five sets of variables have been identified. Three of these, namely social context, learner characteristics and learning conditions are represented as determiners of the learning process (4) and eventually, the learning outcome (5). In this study, the researcher attempts to discover and to investigate the influence of the personality characteristics of students upon their choices of LLS. The second model which is adopted as the conceptual framework of this research is by Abraham and Vann (1990). This model is described in diagram 2 below.

Diagram 2 : A Model of Second Language Learning

(Adapted from Abraham and Vann,1990)

