

# **THE CORRELATION OF PERSONALITY AND ANXIETY WITH THE RESULT OF ENGLISH LEARNING**

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## **Abstract**

This article looks into the two factors in individual learners, i.e, personality and anxiety and how the two factors take part in determining the success of language learning. The focuses are in examining how students with different personality traits deal with their anxious feeling in learning a foreign language; and how their personality and anxiety relate with their achievement in learning different language skill. The research was done by administering a personality test and questionnaire to 30 respondents who are all students of English Department, Diponegoro University. Students' results in learning English skills; reading, speaking, listening, and writing skills were also examined from the grade they earn from their classroom teachers. The data then were examined descriptively and their correlation was also measured by using Pearson's product moment coefficient. The product moment measurement showed significant coefficients of the correlation of anxiety with most of the achievement in English skills; only in speaking skill, the correlation showed insignificant correlation. The coefficients show that students' anxiety influences their achievement in learning skills in English. The research also reveals that the extrovert and introvert learners have their own way to adapt with their anxiety. Part of the reasons was because they have their own tendency in using the strategies for learning the foreign language, and also because their personality traits affected their degree of anxiety naturally.

## **1 Introduction**

For learners, learning English as a foreign language in classroom setting is a very complex activity. It is not merely a matter of absorbing the material and instruction given by the teacher, but also adjusting themselves into the whole environment where the learning process takes place. This kind of learning always involves many learners, each of whom has a particular characteristic that may vary in some aspects. Since "a learning experience is a highly individualistic experience" (Bloom, 1976:21), when English learning, which involves a group of learners, takes place, the presence of individual differences is inevitable.

According to Spolsky (1989) there are at least five factors related to learners and causing differences among the learners. Those factors are intelligence, aptitude, learning style and strategies, personality, and anxiety in language learning. This article will focus on two of those factors; i.e the personality, and anxiety in language learning and therefore aimed at examining how students with different personality traits deal with their anxious feeling in learning a foreign language; and how their personality and anxiety relate with their achievement in learning different language skill.

## **2 Personality**

Personality is considered as internal factor (Spolsky, 1989), therefore it is also considered that every person is different. Based on their behavior, people can be grouped into two traits called extroversion and introversion trait (Eysenck, in Peck and Whitlow, 1975). “Extrovert is a lively person who likes to be with others and to attract attention” (Hornby, 1995:410). As learners, they are more talkative and demonstrative. They have high self confidence, are more spontaneous, and gregarious. They are also more relaxed and take problems easily (Littauer (1996).

Meanwhile, “introverts is a person who is more interested in his or her own thought and feelings than things outside her/himself, and is often shy and unwilling to take part in activities with others” (Hornby, 1995:627). Littauer (1996) added that as learners, introverts are more careful and quiet people. They are unable to take problem easily and having less self confidence.

## **3 Anxiety in Foreign Language Learning**

In language learning, especially those of classroom learning, where many learners, teachers, and sets of lessons and goals are involved, some conditions of uneasiness can be experienced by some learners. This condition is defined as anxiety, a pervasive sense of worry, concern or uneasiness (Fisher, 1988). Anxiety, in contrary with self evidence, is associated with the negative attitude toward learning, while self-confident is the positive one (Koppitz in Reynolds and Gutkin, 1982). It might be assumed that positive attitudes will cause successful learning and negative attitudes will bring the learners into failure, or vice versa, the successful learning may encourage learner’s confidence, and failure will stimulate anxiety. Stressed on this view is stated that

....successful learners developed favorable attitudes as the course progressed, and in their turn, these attitudes encourage more success ....  
The converse of this is, of course, that failure may produce negative attitudes which may help to breed further failure (Littlewood, 1984:56)

It is not only failure that cause anxiety, but it can be yielded as a result of lacking prerequisite knowledge; when they are asked to perform something that they have not been ready yet. In speaking class, Littlewood (1984) notices anxiety and distraction may be resulted from premature demands that they should produce utterances. Anxiety is also due to the fear of suffering a reduced respect from themselves, their teachers or their peers if they do not master or perform the language learning task well (Sizer, 1984)

Spolsky (1989) also mentions communicative apprehension (a kind of shyness that interferes with talking to other people) and test anxiety as other causes of anxiety. He points out Horwitz *et.al.* (1986)’s study as an evidence to show why anxiety often happens on listening and speaking, with difficult in speaking in class being the most common complaint of anxious student, and it also shows up in other stressful situation such as test.

There is a general thought that anxiety will influence the learning process and somehow will lead to the bad result of attainment. Littlewood (1984) illustrates that in classroom, anxiety can hinder learning and makes learners reluctant to express themselves through the second language. This illustration is emphasized by Brundage and MacKeracker in Nunan (1988:23) by stressing that “adults do not learn when over-stimulated, or when experiencing extreme stress or anxiety”.

#### **4 Research method**

In conducting this study, there are two methods that will be used, i.e. the descriptive and the correlation methods. The descriptive method has a purpose to systematically describe a situation or area of interest factually and accurately; while the purpose of correlation method is to investigate the extent to which variations in one factor correspond with variations in one or more other factors based on correlation coefficients (Issac and Michael, 1971).

Due to the aims of the study, the descriptive method is used to describe the existence of respondents' personality and anxiety. The other method, the correlation method is used to examine the correlation between the respondents' anxiety and the respondents' academic grades of speaking, writing, reading, and listening. The correlation assessment is measured by using Pearson's product moment coefficient.

Population of the study is all students of English Department belonging to the 2008 academic year. There are 60 students, and the writer take 30 students as samples. The 30 students taken as samples in this study are representative enough since they represent 50% of the population. The samples are taken by using random sampling. It is used because the members of population have the same chance to be taken as samples; therefore they can be chosen randomly (Effendy, 1994). In this study the random sampling is used by using this following procedure; the respondents are chosen based on the number of students needed. The writer asks the respondents to do some written tests together. Because she needs 30 students as respondents, she asks whomever students of 2008 academic year to do the test. The 30 students who come first to do the written tests are chosen as respondents.

The data gained from the anxiety and learning results are assessed by using Karl Pearson's Product Moments to check the correlation between them. The data from anxiety and academic grades are suited for having the same interval, as illustrated below:

Anxiety: very	: 1	Academic grades: C	: 1
A little	: 2	B	: 2
No	: 3	A	: 3

The interval, then are assessed by using formula stated in Pearson Product Moments, and the coefficient are stated to be significant if it above 0,36 when the number of the respondents are 30 (Hadi, 1989).

## **5 Test of personality**

Tests of personality are administered by Fitriyati, S.Psi, and M.Si (one of the members of HIPsi (Himpunan Psikolog) who then determines the respondents' personality traits. She used Personality Test and Personality Puzzle.

## **6 Questionnaire**

The questionnaires used in this study are both the structured and unstructured ones. Most of the questions are close questions because they are considered to be more efficient and can also be scored objectively, while the open questions are given to get more information on respondent's preferences which are not available in options.

The questionnaire for measuring students' anxiety consists of 10 questions, comprises into two different models; i.e. the rating-scale items model which provides varying degree of answers and the free-choice items model with yes or no answers. From the questionnaire, the writer gets information on the level of anxiety felt by the learners, the condition that may cause anxiety, and how the respondents react toward it. It is also used to know the conditions that may encourage the learners' confidence on their English learning.

## **7 Finding**

From the assessment of personality tests, the respondents are classified as follow; there are 12 learners classified as extrovert learners and there are 18 learners classified as introvert learners.

### ***7.1 The correlation between Anxiety and the result of English learning***

The assessment of correlation between anxiety and learning result shows that anxiety correlates with writing, reading and listening academic grades as shown by significant correlation coefficient, i.e 0,44 in writing, 0,42 in reading, and 0,39 in listening. Through these correlation coefficients, it could be concluded that the less anxious they feel, the better grade they will get and the more anxious they feel, the worse grade they will get. This also explain the extrovert learner better grade (as shown in table 7), stated that extrovert learners are able to achieve better grade due to the less anxiety they feel.

The only different case occurs in speaking skill. Here, the correlation coefficient is not really significant, i.e 0,33, (0,36 is the minimum coefficient to be able to conclude that the coefficient is significant). In general perhaps we can assume that anxiety will influence the speaking grade, as the correlation coefficient is close to the significant level. However, in this case, the insignificant coefficient is perhaps due to the maximum effort that learners make in speaking class; that they still try to perform as best as they could, no matter how anxious they are. This may be true as all of the learners get only A and B grade, and none of them gets grade below than that.

7.2 Learners' Anxiety in foreign language learning

Table 1. The level of Anxiety experienced by the learners

No.	Learning activities	No		A little		Very		Total
		E	I	E	I	E	I	
1.	Doing task in the writing class	41,7	50	50	50	8,3	-	100 100
2.	Doing task in the reading class	58,3	55,6	41,7	38,8	-	5,6	100 100
3.	Doing task in the listening class	33,3	27,8	58,4	61,1	8,3	16,6	100 100
4	Doing task in the speaking class	41,7	5,6	50	77,8	8,3	16,6	100 100
5	Doing the written test	41,7	44,4	58,3	50	-	5,6	100 100
6	Doing the oral test	33,3	-	50	27,8	16,7	72,2	100 100
7	Presenting paper work in the class	16,7	-	58,3	38,9	25	61,1	100 100
8.	Talking to native speakers	50	5,6	25	55,6	25	38,8	100 100
9.	Attending a class without preparation	50	38,9	41,7	50	8,3	11,1	100 100
10.	Doing tasks in a tense situation because of the questions given by the teacher	25	11,1	16,7	16,7	58,3	72,2	100 100

In general, the introvert learners are more anxious than the extrovert learners are. As can be seen in table 12, there is only one activity (doing task in the writing class) in which none of the introvert learners feel very anxious, and nearly in all activities there are more introvert learners who feel very anxious. Thus, this might give clearer view that basically the introvert learners are getting anxious easier than the extrovert learners. Their personalities are accounted as the factors that give greater correlation than the strategies of learning, since they still feel more anxious than the extrovert learners in learning through activities that offered as much opportunities as possible to use the cognitive strategies, although their anxious feeling is not as high as their anxious feeling in learning through socioaffective strategies.

In activities that involve cognitive strategies, most of the learners do not feel anxious that much. The introvert learners do not feel very anxious possibly because these activities offered as much opportunities as possible to learn through the cognitive strategies. This may also be the consequences of activities that do not require many direct performances. In other words, the learners do not have to show their ability directly in front of the class. Some learners may become very anxious if they ought to show their ability directly, therefore, if they can avoid it, they will feel more relaxed. For example, in reading and writing – the subjects that require many cognitive strategies – they have time to think or discuss the answer with their friends, consequently this will reduce their anxiety. A quite different case occurs in reading class. If most of the learners still feel a little anxious in other activities, here a lot of learners do not

feel anxious at all. This may be owing to the assumption that if reading is compared to the other cognitive activities as stated on table 1, the reading will be considered as the easiest subject among others, since the material are written – unlike the listening task – hence enable the learners to re-read as many as they want. Furthermore, it also does not compel the learners to use up all their creativity, as in writing task.

With regard to activities that represent the socioaffective, the extrovert learners are seemed to be more confident that the introvert learners are. The majority of them only feel a little anxious for being in speaking class, doing the oral test and presenting the paper work in the class. Many of them even admit that they they do not feel any anxious when they must talk to native-speakers.

A quite opposite condition is related to introvert learners. None of them feel absolutely confident in learning through those activities. A large number of introvert learners feel a little anxious in the speaking class and talking to native speakers. Regardless of their ability in facing the oral test and presenting the paper work, many of them complain for being very anxious if they ought to do those activities. The anxiety that emerged is possibly as the effect of their communication apprehension, which comes from their inner feeling. The extrovert learners' confidence in talking to native speakers probably because the activities are challenging enough, giving more fun and expected experience, and also the learners do not have to be bothered with the grade or evaluation, since this activity is usually done in informal activity. Perhaps for this reason also, the introvert learners only feel a little anxious although they must learn through the socioaffective strategies that compel them to maintain interaction.

There is also a slight difference of learners' level of anxiety in dealing with the activities that represent the metacognitive strategies. Introvert learners, who are used to making some preparation before the class will feel rather anxious if they are forced to attend a class without any preparation. Some of the extrovert learners, on the other hands, still feel confident, for they do not usually make any preparation, even when they are facing the test (as shown in table 4). However, although most of the learners admit for being rather or even confident completely, if they are supposed to be in the tense class situation because of the questions given by the teacher, nearly all of them complain for being very anxious. There are still more introvert learners who feel very anxious in dealing with that situation regardless all their preparation to anticipate it.

### ***7.3 Other causes of Anxiety***

In speaking activities, where the teacher may have opportunity to correct the students' sentences during the process, the degree of anxiety felt by the learners may arise. When learners' sentences are corrected, it may trigger different attitude toward it, as illustrated in the following table:

**Table 2. The influence of having corrected directly in speaking class**

No	The Condition after Being Corrected	No		Yes		total
		E	I	E	I	
1.	Just feeling as usual and keep talking fluently	16,7	55,6	83,3	44,4	100 100
2	Feeling uneasy, anxious and unable to speak as fluently as before	83,3	44,4	16,7	55,6	100 100

As can be seen from the table, the correction given to the extrovert learners does not seem to give much effect, for the majority of them are still able to talk as fluent as before. In the case of introvert learners, however, half of them feel that the correction given by the teachers makes them feel more anxious, and therefore feel that they are unable to speak as fluent as before.

Anxiety can emerge when the learners are forced to participate actively under the conditions that they dislike, for example in difficult discussion, stressing class, or under unsupported environments. Therefore there are some learners who choose to be quiet or inactive. There are three conditions considered as the cause of inactivity in the class. The table below will illustrate the percentage figures of learners' reason for being inactive.

**Table 3. The cause of inactivity in the class**

No	The Cause of Inactivity	No		Yes		total
		E	I	E	I	
1.	Ashamed	83,3	50	16,7	50	100 100
2	Fear of giving incorrect statements	66,7	50	33,3	50	100 100
3	Fear of being judged as a fool/stupid	-	-	-	-	- -

Among the three conditions provided, there are only two conditions chosen by the learners as the cause of their inactivity. They do not choose the last options, as they must have thought that they are not that inferior to have such a feeling. Since the reason for inactivity might be due to the anxiety felt by the learners, and it is proved that the introvert learners are getting anxious easier than the extrovert learners, so it can be assumed that, there are more introverts who will admit the two conditions as stated as the reasons for their inactivity.

Another source of anxiety is a test. A test could stimulate anxiety easily especially for learners who do not make any preparation. However, since the materials of English tests are usually new, in the sense that they have never been given before, and this is generally known by the learners, some learners decide not to make any preparation – by studying the previous material – while some other learners do the opposite. The clear percentage can be seen from the following table:

**Table 4. Learners' preparation in facing English tests**

No	Activities	No		Yes		total
		E	I	E	I	
1.	Unnecessary to spent a lot of time to study for the materials are usually new	25	66,7	75	33,3	100 100
2	Keep on studying the previous material well, because of the fear of unable to do the test well.	75	33,3	26	66,7	100 100

Table 4 shows that more extrovert learners will not make any preparation, while the introverts will do the opposite. This possibly caused by their anxiety. The anxious learner will suffer from their anxiety; therefore they will try to reduce it by making themselves as ready as possible. On the contrary, more confident learners, like extrovert learners think that it will be all right if they do not prepare, as the material will be new anyway.

Although some learners feel confident enough in facing the test, most of them admit that they sometimes still have difficulties in doing the test. Several learners even state that they experience the difficulties in every test, as illustrated in the following table:

**Table 5. The difficulties in doing the test because of no preparation**

No	Condition	No		Sometimes		Yes		total
		E	I	E	I	E	I	
1.	The difficulties in doing the test because of no preparation	-	-	91,7	83,3	8,3	16,7	100 100

Nearly all of the learners admit that they still feel difficulties in doing the test, and only few learners get difficulties in every test. But compared with the extrovert learners, there are still more introvert learners who feel difficulties in every test. This might be due to the assumption that their greater anxiety may somehow disturb their concentration.

#### **7.4 Learners' reaction towards Anxiety**

Anxiety experienced by the learners is a displeasure feeling; therefore, the learners have their own way to anticipate anxiety. Many learners, who may get anxious easier, as in the case of introvert learners, will prepare themselves well before the class rather than let their anxious feeling ruin their concentration. However, although the extrovert learners are more confident, a lot of them also choose to make preparation before the class.

A contradicted behavior is seen through the second point, where the majority of extrovert learners are likely to be just relaxed. Even if it is possible, they will try to avoid the lecture or at least sit in the back during the class with the hope that the teacher will not notice their relaxation. This might be due to the extrovert learners' confidence in taking risk, while the introvert learners may not let themselves in the risky condition. Another reaction that might be brought about is feeling of being unable to learn well. More than half of introvert learners admit this. They state that occasionally their anxiety would prevent them to learn well, in the sense that it will make them unable to concentrate well, and extremely could vanish their courage to perform the task, especially in speaking task. On the other hand, many extrovert



learners admit that anxiety would not affect them that much, for they are still able to learn well. The following table gives clearer view of what has been explained above.

**Table 6. Learners' reaction towards Anxiety**

No	Activities	No		Yes		total
		E	I	E	I	
1.	Preparing themselves well before the class	8,3	5,6	91,7	94,4	100
2	Feeling unable to learn well	75	44,4	25	55,6	100
3	Feel relax, even if it is possible, they will try to avoid the class or at least sit in the back during the class, hope that the teacher will not notice	25	72,2	75	27,8	100

### 7.5 The learning result

The table below gives illustration of the learners' learning result – known as the learners' academic grades.

**Table 7. The learners' academic grades**

English skills	Learners	A	B	C	Total
Speaking	Extrovert learners	62	38	-	100
	Introvert learners	47,2	52,8	-	100
Writing	Extrovert learners	41,7	33,5	24,8	100
	Introvert learners	38,9	38,8	22,3	100
Reading	Extrovert learners	20,8	62,5	16,7	100
	Introvert learners	5,6	44,4	50	100
Listening	Extrovert learners	25	50	25	100
	Introvert learners	14	41,8	44,2	100

According to table 7, it can be inferred that generally extrovert learners' grades are better than introvert learners', in all English skills. The extrovert learners may get the benefit from their tendency to use the socioaffective strategies in learning. Together with their extrovertness, their socioaffective strategies may lead them to be more dynamic and active learners than the introvert learners; therefore, they are willing to get more input during the learning process. In addition, the extrovert learners' ease may help them to be less anxious and be able to learn well; therefore, they rarely feel any difficulties when they do the tests, although without any preparation.

On the other hand, the introvert learners, in spite of their carefulness, still seem to be not as good as the extrovert learners. Their personality may be counted as the reason for this phenomenon. Their introvertness that is considered as the reason for their cognitive strategies in learning may lessen their opportunities to interact with others; so that they tend to be inactive and therefore may get less input. Their communicative apprehension and their less self-confidence could also be said as their obstacles in learning.

## **8 Conclusion**

The learners' personalities influence the learners in adapting themselves in language learning situation. Their personality plays role in determining what strategies in learning that suit them best. Their personality also influences the degree of their anxiety. Likewise, their anxiety is also considered as one of the factors that make student choose the strategies they used in learning foreign language. In general, introvert learners are more anxious than the extrovert learners. Therefore they tend to be more careful, usually make their preparation before the class or the test, and are likely to feel uneasy whenever they are corrected during their task performance, and tend to be reluctant in getting more input, either by asking the teacher or by using other sources such as talking to native speakers. Because of these tendencies also, introvert learners are unable to get a better grade than the extrovert learners. Although they tend to be more careful, and prefer to make their preparation, their communicative apprehension keeps these learners from being spontaneous, and therefore they get fewer chances to practice more in situations that are not suitable/easy for them.

The extrovert learners, on the other hands, are benefited from their spontaneous and confidence traits. They are willing to interact with other easily, and therefore get more input in learning. Their less anxiety also helps them to easily adjust themselves though they are in difficult learning situations. These suggest why the extrovert learners get better grades in all of English skills.

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