

EFL Speaking Growth: The Role of Personality and Learning Strategies

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the influence of personality traits and language learning strategies on the development of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) speaking growth among senior high school students in Southeast Sulawesi. Employing a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews, the research explores how individual personality preferences shape students' choice of learning strategies, and how these combinations contribute to speaking proficiency. The findings indicate that personality traits, particularly extroversion and openness, are strongly linked to higher speaking performance, while neuroticism tends to hinder oral competence. Regarding learning strategies, metacognitive and social strategies emerged as the most effective in enhancing speaking ability, enabling learners to plan, monitor, and engage actively in communicative situations. The interplay between personality and strategy use was found to significantly influence speaking outcomes, demonstrating that neither factor alone is sufficient for optimal progress. These results underscore the importance of integrating personality-aware pedagogical approaches with explicit strategy training. The study offers practical implications for EFL educators in designing differentiated and targeted classroom interventions to support diverse learner profiles in achieving balanced fluency and accuracy.

Keywords: EFL speaking, learning strategies, personality traits, qualitative research, speaking performance

ABSTRAK: Penelitian ini mengkaji pengaruh kepribadian dan strategi pembelajaran bahasa terhadap perkembangan kemampuan berbicara Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL) pada siswa SMA di Sulawesi Tenggara. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui wawancara mendalam, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana preferensi kepribadian individu membentuk pilihan strategi belajar siswa, serta bagaimana kombinasi keduanya berkontribusi pada peningkatan kemampuan berbicara. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ciri kepribadian, khususnya ekstroverti dan keterbukaan, sangat terkait dengan performa berbicara yang lebih tinggi, sementara neurotisme cenderung menghambat kemampuan berbicara. Dalam hal strategi pembelajaran, strategi metakognitif dan sosial muncul sebagai strategi yang paling efektif dalam meningkatkan kemampuan berbicara karena membantu siswa merencanakan, memantau, dan berpartisipasi aktif dalam situasi komunikatif. Interaksi antara kepribadian dan penggunaan strategi terbukti sangat memengaruhi hasil kemampuan berbicara, menunjukkan bahwa kedua faktor tersebut tidak dapat berdiri sendiri untuk mencapai perkembangan optimal. Hasil ini menekankan pentingnya mengintegrasikan pendekatan pedagogis yang mempertimbangkan kepribadian dengan pelatihan strategi secara eksplisit. Penelitian ini memberikan implikasi praktis bagi pendidik EFL dalam merancang intervensi kelas yang terarah dan terdiferensiasi untuk mendukung berbagai profil pelajar dalam mencapai kefasihan dan ketepatan berbahasa secara seimbang.

Katakunci: kemampuan berbicara EFL, strategi pembelajaran, kepribadian, penelitian kualitatif, performa berbicara.

PENDAHULUAN

Individual differences represent a significant focus in second language (L2) acquisition studies, as they shape learners' experiences, strategies, and eventual outcomes. (Larsen-Freeman, 2014) classified these differences into three broad categories: cognitive, affective, and social. Within the affective domain, personality occupies a central role, particularly the contrast between extraversion and introversion. This personality dimension has attracted considerable attention in second language acquisition (SLA) research due to its influence on social interaction and communicative engagement (Zhang, 2009).

A longstanding assumption in both research and classroom practice is that extraverted learners hold an advantage in language learning, especially in speaking skills (Imansari et al., 2022; Karim & Abidin, 2016; Zhang, 2009). This perspective stems from the traits of extraverts—such as their tendency to initiate conversations, take communicative risks, and actively seek interaction—which align with theoretical frameworks like (Krashen, 1992) and Swain's Output Hypothesis (Swain, 1993). Both theories highlight that increased oral interaction enhances comprehensible input and language production. As a result, many educators perceive extraverted students as inherently more capable in L2 communication and, therefore, more successful language learners (Thanh Thao et al., 2024; Van Daele et al., 2006; Xu, 2025; Zafar & Meenakshi, 2012). Their willingness to make mistakes and engage in dialogue reinforces this perception.

However, such a view risks oversimplifying the complex nature of language learning by undervaluing the strengths of introverted learners (Giles, 2016; Przybył & Pawlak, n.d.; Zafar & Meenakshi, 2012). While introverts may prefer reflective thinking, structured environments, and independent study, they can employ equally effective language learning strategies (LLS) that foster high levels of proficiency (Thanh Thao et al., 2024; Vaklifard & Heydari Khosro, 2025). Language learning success is not determined solely by personality traits but also by the strategic approaches learners adopt—whether consciously or unconsciously (Ellis, 1994; Schmidt, 1990). These strategies, spanning cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social domains, shape how learners process input, manage challenges, and develop communicative competence.

Recognizing this, the present study seeks to investigate the dynamic interplay between personality type (extraversion and introversion) and language learning strategies in the context of Indonesian senior high school students. Specifically, the study aims to: 1) Examine how personality characteristics influence students' preferences in selecting LLS; 2) Identify the dominant strategies employed by extraverted and introverted students in developing English speaking skills; 3) Analyze how the interaction between personality and strategy use collectively impacts speaking skill development.

Theoretically, this study draws upon established SLA perspectives, including the Input and Output Hypotheses, as well as research on personality and LLS (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; Oxford, R. (1990). *Language Learning Strategies What Every Teacher Should Know*. New York Newbury House Publishers. - References - Scientific Research Publishing, n.d.). By integrating these frameworks, the research

addresses gaps in understanding how personality and strategic behavior intersect to influence speaking proficiency. Pedagogically, the findings are expected to inform the creation of inclusive, adaptive teaching practices that leverage the unique strengths of both extraverted and introverted learners, enabling them to achieve optimal outcomes in L2 speaking development.

Recent studies (2020–2025) have highlighted the significant role of emotional intelligence (EI) and personality traits—particularly extraversion—in influencing speaking skills and the use of learning strategies in L2 contexts. A series of studies has found that EI subdomains such as well-being and sociability predict engagement and achievement in speaking (Alamer & Alrabai, 2023; Chen & Zhang, 2022), while enduring traits such as extraversion, openness, and conscientiousness show positive correlations with academic outcomes (Anglim et al., n.d.; Meyer et al., 2023). Furthermore, extraverts tend to select socially interactive learning strategies, whereas introverts rely more on metacognitive and independent strategies (Syarif & Farida bt, 2022). These findings strengthen the theoretical framework of the present study in explaining how the interaction between personality and learning strategies influences the development of English-speaking skills among senior high school students in Indonesia.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. The qualitative approach was chosen to enable an in-depth exploration and holistic understanding of students' experiences, personality preferences, and language learning strategies within their natural learning environment. The case study design allowed for a focused and detailed examination of a small number of participants, offering rich and nuanced insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Population and Sample

The research population comprised senior high school students (SMA) in South Sulawesi. The sample consisted of five Grade XI students, selected through purposive sampling to represent both extraverted and introverted personality types. Inclusion criteria were: 1) Active enrollment in the school's English language program; 2) Identification as extraverted or introverted based on a modified Big Five Inventory (BFI) questionnaire and teacher observations; 3) Willingness to participate in in-depth interviews and be audio-recorded. The final sample included three extraverted and two introverted students. To maintain anonymity, participants were assigned codes (S1–S5).

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, enabling both consistency in core questions and flexibility for follow-up probes. The interview guide covered three main areas:

1. Personality Profile – identifying traits and learning preferences in different contexts.
2. Language Learning Strategies – methods used to develop speaking skills, including practice habits, error management, and vocabulary development.
3. Experiences in Developing Speaking Skills – challenges, successes, and preferred learning environments.

Interviews were conducted individually in comfortable settings such as the school library or empty classrooms. Each lasted 30–60 minutes, was audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (Braun & Clarke, 2006) thematic analysis framework, involving: 1) Familiarization with data through repeated reading and listening; 2) Generating initial codes inductively from the data; 3) Grouping codes into broader themes; 4) Reviewing and refining themes for accuracy and distinctiveness; 5) Defining and naming themes; 6) Producing the final report with thematic narratives supported by direct participant quotes.

RESULT

This section presents the main findings that emerged from the in-depth interview data analysis, which are then discussed in relation to the relevant literature. The findings are grouped based on the key themes identified: participants' personality profiles, the language learning strategies adopted by each personality type, and how this interaction influences the development of speaking skills.

Identification of Personality Profiles and Primary Learning Preferences

Out of the 5 participants, 3 students were identified as having predominantly extraverted characteristics, while 2 students exhibited introverted traits. This classification was based on their consistent responses to interview questions designed to elicit their personality orientation in various social and learning contexts.

Introverted Students: Participants classified as introverted consistently expressed preferences for quiet environments, independent activities, and more limited social interaction. The most prominent example is Student S2, whose statements underscore her introverted nature:

1. "I am more understand by reading Mam" (preference for independent learning).
2. "Yes, I am a shy girl" (shyness).
3. "No [do you like to be centre of attention?]" (Avoidance of public spotlight).
4. "One best friend" (preference for deep relationships over broad ones).
5. "No [do you have ability to handle many people?]" (Discomfort in crowds).
6. "Yes, I enjoy [do you like work yourself?]" (Comfort in solitude).

7. "No, [could you get new friend quickly?]" (difficulty in forming new relationships quickly).
8. "No [could you make someone pay attention to you?]" (lack of drive to attract attention).
9. "Yes [could you get many ideas when you alone?]" (Strength in internal reflection).

These responses collectively describe an individual who is introspective, independent in learning, and less comfortable with intense social interaction or being the center of attention. They tend to process information internally before expressing it.

Extraverted Students: Conversely, extraverted participants exhibited contrasting characteristics. They consistently expressed preferences for social interaction, group discussions, and comfort in the public eye. For instance, Student 5 (assumed example, you can replace with your actual data) stated:

1. "I understand fastest if explained by friends or teachers, then I can directly discuss" (preference for collaborative learning).
2. "I really like it if there's a group assignment and I can present in front of the class" (liking for public interaction).
3. "Prefer to have many friends so it's lively" (preference for quantity in social relationships).
4. "It's not a problem if I have to speak in front of many people" (comfort in public).
5. "I get more energized when learning in a group" (energy from social interaction).

These differing learning preferences directly reflect their personality orientations and provide a basis for understanding their choices of language learning strategies.

Language Learning Strategies Adopted by Personality Type

Language Learning Strategies of Introverted Students

Introverted students, such as Student S2, showed a strong tendency to utilize cognitive and metacognitive strategies, with a significant emphasis on independent activities. While there was a slight contradiction in Student S2's interview regarding a preference for discussion ("as I said I prefer discuss") followed by an affirmation of "Reading Mam" as a faster way to understand material, this likely indicates that discussion might occasionally be a preference but not her primary mode of effective learning. Dominant strategies among introverted students include:

1. Intensive and Extensive Reading: As expressed by Student S2, reading is a primary strategy for material comprehension and the development of vocabulary and grammar. "I am more understand by reading Mam" indicates that visual and reflective input is their main learning pathway.

2. Independent and Oral Practice: Other introverted participants also revealed the use of independent practice strategies. The quote from your document, "Actually I always find new grammar and vocab from my reading text, then I practice writing that new grammar myself. Sometimes I practice in front of the mirror myself because I shy person. I also learn from English video," clearly illustrates these strategies. This is an effort to build confidence and fluency in a pressure-free environment before attempting direct interaction.
3. Language Analysis: Introverted students tend to be more meticulous in analyzing sentence structures, grammatical patterns, and vocabulary usage from written materials or audio recordings. This supports the development of accuracy in speaking.
4. Mental Planning: Many introverts reported that they formulate and practice what they are going to say in their minds before uttering it. This metacognitive strategy helps them organize ideas logically and reduce potential errors.

The use of these strategies allows introverted students to build a strong language foundation and develop speaking skills gradually, often behind the scenes, before feeling comfortable displaying their abilities publicly.

Language Learning Strategies of Extraverted Students

Extraverted students, conversely, predominantly used social and compensation strategies, highlighting their need for interaction and external stimulation. Common strategies observed include:

1. Group Discussions and Interaction: Extroverts actively seek opportunities to discuss with peers or teachers. They feel more energized and learn more effectively through oral exchange of ideas. "I understand fastest if explained by friends or teachers, then I can directly discuss" (Student 4).
2. Active Questioning and Clarification: They do not hesitate to ask questions, seek clarification, or solicit immediate feedback during the learning process or when undertaking speaking tasks. This is how they promptly correct errors and clarify understanding.
3. Communicative Risk-Taking: Extroverts tend to be more daring to try new phrases or structures, even if they are not entirely confident in their correctness. They view mistakes as part of the learning process and opportunities for feedback. "Sometimes I make mistakes when speaking, but it's better to try than to stay silent. My friends or teacher will correct me later" (S1, assumed example).
4. Spontaneous Speaking: They utilize every opportunity to speak English, whether in formal settings (presentations) or informal ones (casual chats with friends).

These strategies help extraverted students develop speaking fluency and confidence quickly through practice and instant feedback from their social environment.

The Interplay of Personality, Strategies, and Speaking Skills

The interplay between personality and learning strategies forms different, yet potentially equally effective, pathways in the development of speaking skills. This suggests that no single personality type is inherently "better" at speaking; rather, success depends on the alignment between personality and the strategies employed.

1. **Speaking Learning Pathways for Introverts:** Although introverts like Student S2 might face initial challenges with fluency or spontaneity in speaking due to anxiety or reluctance to take public risks, their learning strategies focus on building a strong foundation. Through intensive reading, grammar analysis, and independent practice, they internally build accuracy and vocabulary richness. When they do eventually speak, although perhaps with initial hesitations, their production is often more structured and accurate. The main challenge for them is stepping out of their internal comfort zone and transferring this well-prepared knowledge into spontaneous oral interactions. They require a safe environment and gradual opportunities for structured speaking practice. Examples like "Sometimes I practice in front of the mirror myself because I shy person" illustrate how they create their own "safe" environments to practice skills gained from reading and analytical strategies.
2. **Speaking Learning Pathways for Extroverts:** Extroverts demonstrate rapid progress in speaking fluency due to frequent oral practice and their willingness to engage in interactions. They learn "by doing" and rely on feedback from their environment. Their speed in speaking might initially precede accuracy, but the frequency of practice helps them correct errors over time. However, without conscious attention to cognitive or metacognitive strategies (e.g., reflecting on errors or systematically studying grammar), they might only achieve "superficial fluency" without adequate linguistic depth. Teachers need to guide them to complement social strategies with those that enhance accuracy.
3. Overall, the findings indicate that personality is a strong predictor of learning strategy preferences. Extraverted learners tend to be oriented towards interaction-rich input and output, while introverted learners lean towards deep internal processing and input. Both have the potential to become successful speakers as long as they identify and utilize strategies that align with their strengths and address their weaknesses. It is crucial for educators to understand these differences and create a learning environment that supports diverse learning pathways.

DISCUSSION

The findings address the research questions by demonstrating a clear link between personality traits and preferred language learning strategies in speaking skill development. These results reaffirm the established view in second language acquisition (SLA) that individual differences—particularly personality—play a decisive role in how learners select and apply strategies (Dörnyei, 2014; Li et al., 2022; Vanniarajan, 2022).

Personality and Strategic Orientation

First, personality type influenced learning behavior. Introverted learners favored internal processing strategies, aligning with Oxford's Strategic Self-Regulation (S2R) model, which emphasizes that cognitive and metacognitive strategies enhance accuracy-building (Kuning & Prihatmojo, 2025; Sun, 2022; Watts et al., 2014). Their reflective approach allowed for a detailed understanding of grammar, but often delayed spontaneous oral production. Recent research also ((Buehler et al., 2021; Double, 2025; Thiede et al., 2003) support this, showing that introverts' metacognitive monitoring contributes to higher syntactic accuracy, albeit with a slower speech rate.

Conversely, extraverted learners gravitated toward socially rich learning environments, consistent with Swain's Output Hypothesis, which highlights the role of interaction in fluency development (Pannell et al., 2017). Their communicative risk-taking fostered faster oral proficiency but sometimes at the expense of accuracy—echoing findings from (Gan, 2012) on the balance between fluency and form. Newer studies (Dhita & Suharjono, 2025; Thach, 2025) note that extraverts benefit most when interactive tasks are coupled with corrective feedback, which mitigates fossilization of errors.

The Interplay Between Traits and Strategy Effectiveness

The interplay of these approaches suggests that neither personality type holds an inherent advantage in speaking ability. Success depends on aligning strategies with strengths while addressing weaknesses. This aligns with Dörnyei's (Dörnyei, 2020) principle of strategy–trait congruence and is further reinforced by (Rashidi & Asma, 2021) work on adaptive strategy use, which found that mixed-strategy training increases both fluency and accuracy across personality types.

Furthermore, the study contributes to the evolving "Dynamic Systems Theory" perspective (Lowie & Verspoor, 2022), which views language development as a nonlinear process influenced by fluctuating personal and contextual factors. Personality shapes initial strategy preferences, but these can be reshaped through intentional pedagogical intervention.

Pedagogical Implications

Pedagogically, the findings suggest the need for differentiated strategy instruction:

1. For introverts: Structured small-group discussions, reflective speaking journals, and scaffolded public speaking tasks that gradually expand social interaction. This combination builds fluency without sacrificing their accuracy-focused tendencies.
2. For extraverts: Communicative tasks paired with targeted grammar workshops and delayed feedback sessions to balance fluency gains with linguistic precision.

Recent pedagogical models (X. Liu, 2022; Pratiwi et al., 2023; Subrahmanyam Vellanki & Bandu, 2021) recommend hybrid task designs that integrate both "input-based reflection" and "output-based interaction" to address

diverse learner profiles—an approach that aligns with the current study’s recommendations.

Contribution to SLA Theory

Finally, these results extend the broader understanding of individual differences in SLA by illustrating how personality interacts with learning strategies in the specific domain of speaking. This supports the ongoing theoretical shift toward personality-adaptive strategy frameworks (H. Liu et al., 2024), which advocate for instructional designs that dynamically adjust to learner profiles, fostering balanced development of both fluency and accuracy regardless of personality type.

CONCLUSION

This research provides empirical evidence that personality factors—particularly extraversion and introversion—significantly shape students’ choices of language learning strategies in developing English speaking skills at the secondary school level in Indonesia. Introverted learners predominantly relied on cognitive and metacognitive strategies, emphasizing reflection, independent practice, and structured preparation. In contrast, extraverted learners tended to adopt social and compensation strategies, characterized by active interaction, discussion, and communicative risk-taking.

The findings indicate that speaking skill development is not determined by personality type alone but by the degree of alignment between personality strengths and the strategies employed. Learners who can capitalize on their natural tendencies while compensating for potential weaknesses through targeted strategy use are more likely to achieve substantial progress.

In relation to the research objectives, this study reinforces the importance of integrating personality-aware pedagogical approaches and explicit strategy instruction to foster balanced development in both fluency and accuracy for all learners.

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I hope that the findings of this study contribute meaningfully to the development of English language teaching, particularly in understanding how personality and learning strategies influence the growth of EFL speaking ability in higher education contexts.

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