

## The Relationship between Teachers' Personality Traits and Doing Action Research

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### Abstract

Teachers' personality traits are reflected not only in their classroom performance, especially in their selection of instructional activities, materials, strategies, and classroom management techniques, but also their interaction with students (Henson & Chambers, 2002). The present study aimed at examining the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' personality traits and doing action research. The study examined ninety-one male and female EFL teachers teaching English in public guidance schools and high schools in Mashhad, Iran. The instrument implemented was the Big Five Inventory (BFI), developed by John, Donahue, and Kentle (1991), measuring extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience. The findings indicated that personality trait of EFL teachers' that doing action research is not significantly different from those teachers that not doing action research. It was also found that there was not any significant difference between male and female teachers on their big five personality traits.

**Keywords:** personality traits; action research; EFL teachers; the Big Five Model

### INTRODUCTION

Personality consists of stable characteristics which explain why a person behaves in a particular way (Mullins, 2005). According to Hogan (1991), a person personality is a relatively stable precursor of behavior; it underlies an enduring style of thinking, feeling and acting. However, Guthrie, Schwoerer and Coate (1998) stated that personality can be defined as a predisposition to act or behave in a characteristic fashion in response to one's environment. Personality may be viewed as the dynamic organization of those traits and characteristic patterns of behavior that are unique to the individual (Callahan, 1996).

As stated by Curtis and Liying (2001), teacher performance is influenced by the teachers' personality characteristics. Teachers' personality traits are reflected not only in their classroom performance, especially in their selection of instructional activities, materials, strategies, and classroom management techniques but their interaction with

students as well (Henson & Chambers, 2002). As mentioned by Talbert and Mc Cloughlin (1994), teacher's work occur within a community supported by administrators and peers who provide tools and support for effective work. Since there are commitments from schools, the teachers can improve the quality of their work.

Personality aids teaching, for communication takes place between the teacher and the learner— even in the absence of the spoken word (nonverbal communication). The teacher whose personality helps create and preserve a classroom or learning environment in which students feel contented and in which they are provoked to learn is said to have an enviable teaching personality (Callahan, 1996).

Wright, Horn and Sanders (1997) single out the teacher as the most important factor for learning. "If the ultimate goal is to improve the academic growth of student populations, one must conclude that improvement of student learning begins with the improvement of relatively ineffective teachers regardless of the student placement strategies deployed within a school". They further stress improving education by improving the effectiveness of teachers. According to Guskey the idea of action research is that educational problems and classroom issues are best identified and investigated where the action is: at the classroom and school level.

According to Simmons "Engaging in action research influenced teachers' thinking skills, sense of efficacy, willingness to communicate with colleagues, and attitudes toward professional development and the process of change" (as cited in Hewitt and Little, 2005).

Action research is a tool and the process of striving towards positive change through a cycle of actions. Hewitt and Little (2005) define action research as a "process in which teachers systematically investigate instructional practices and techniques in order to improve their teaching. The impact of a specific instructional practice on student learning is measured, and the results become the basis for educational planning and decision-making" (p.8).

Research on teachers' personality is based on the assumption that the teacher as a person is a significant figure in the teaching-learning process. Personality influences the behavior of the teacher in diverse ways, such as in interaction with students, teaching methods selected, and learning experiences chosen. The effective use of a teacher's personality is essential in conducting instructional activities. Students learn from a teacher's personality even if there is no formal interaction between student and teacher.

Smith (1977) has claimed that teacher's personality in the attitudinal sense is significant factor in teacher behavior and it has great impact on students' achievement. The teachers as a professional must know the art of communication, understanding others and ability to learn from the experiences. They should be able to facilitate learning effectively. The main purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of teacher's personality on doing action research in their classrooms.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review focuses on personality and the dimensions of personality through the Big Five Model.

### Personality

Personality consists of stable characteristics which explains why a person behaves in a particular way (Mullins, 2005). During the last several decades, more than 1000 articles have been published that concentrate upon some aspect of teacher personality (Nussbaum, 1992). The potential importance of teacher personality has long been of interest to education researchers (e.g., Barr, 1952; 1965; Tyler, 1960). Most of the research on personality focuses on the types of people who enter the teaching profession, rather than their effectiveness.

Research on teacher personality is based on the assumption that the teacher as a person is a momentous variable in the teaching-learning process. Personality influences the behavior of the teacher in various ways, such as interface with students, methods selected, and learning experiences chosen (Murray, 1972).

It was further found that although "teachers" did not significantly differ on personality traits from the general population, there was a large and surprising amount of diversity in "teachers" personality characteristics when they are examined by sex, level of teaching service, and area of specialization within the profession (Getzels and Jackson, 1963).

Personality recognition has been used for many purposes in various organizations; to forecast a worker's aptitude to fill definite roles, to set up pleasant-sounding relationships, to conclude team effectiveness, and to predict future behavior (Barbian, 2001).

The above mentioned literature related to teacher's personality and its importance suggest that a lot of research has been conducted to investigate the personality traits of teachers, but unfortunately no specific research has been conducted in relation to doing action research. Especially no study has been conducted to examine the effect of personality traits on doing action research among EFL teachers in Iran and other countries. This study was conducted to remove the deficiency of research in this specific area.

### Dimensions of Personality (The Big Five Model)

According to Piedmont and Weinstein (1994), the five factors usually labeled neuroticism (the tendency to experience negative affect, such as anxiety, insecurity and psychological distress), extraversion (the quantity and intensity of interpersonal interaction and activity level), openness to experience (the proactive seeking and appreciation of new experiences), agreeableness (the quality of one's interpersonal

interaction along a continuum from compassion to antagonism) and conscientiousness (the amount of persistence, organization and motivation in goal-directed behaviors).

According to Paunonen and Ashton (2001), the Big Five personality dimensions of neuroticism, extroversion, agreeableness, openness to experience and conscientiousness have been studied extensively and have been associated with a variety of work attitudes and behavior. As stated by Harris and Fleming (2005), the Five Factor Model has enjoyed widespread popularity in the field. Five personality traits collectively classify the higher-level dispositions of an individual according to the Five Factor Model. Mount and Barrick (1995) mentioned that it appears that many personality psychologists have reached a consensus that five personality constructs, referred to as the Big Five, are necessary and sufficient to describe the basic dimensions of normal personality.

Regarding the aforementioned literature, the researchers aimed to investigate the effect of teachers' personality on doing action research in Iranian context. The following research questions and null hypothesis will be answered in this research:

- Is there any significant relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' personality type and doing action research?
- Is there any significant difference between the performance of male and female EFL teachers in terms of the Big five personality traits (Conscientiousness, Emotional stability, Openness to experience, Extraversion, Agreeableness)?

For above research questions, the following null hypotheses were formulated:

- There is not any significant relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' personality type and doing action research.
- There is not any significant difference between the performance of male and female EFL teachers in terms of the big five personality traits (Conscientiousness, Emotional stability, Openness to experience, Extraversion, Agreeableness).

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Participants**

The study included ninety-one male and female EFL teachers teaching English in public guidance schools and high schools in Mashhad, Iran. There were 76 female and 15 male teachers. They had from 1 to 30 years of teaching experience and participants' academic degree were from B.A. to PhD in linguistics, teaching English, literature and English translation.

### **Instrumentation**

Big Five Inventory (BFI): The BFI, developed by John, Donahue, and Kentle (1991), is a 44-item Likert-type scale measure of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience. Shokri et. al. (2008) reported the reliability

coefficients of the BFI scales by Cronbach's Alpha respectively 0.84 (N), 0.72 (E), 0.76 (A), 0.60 (O) and 0.85 (C).

## Procedure

The present study was *ex post facto* in design since there is no treatment to the subjects of the study which may change their entry behavior (Ary et al., 1985: 271-291). In this design the researcher had no control over what has already happened to subjects. In this study the teachers' personality traits has been taken as independent variable, doing action research as the dependent variable and gender was the moderator variable. The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of teachers' personality traits on doing action research among EFL teachers in Iran and compare the big five personality traits of male and female EFL teachers. Eighty males and females EFL teachers teaching English in public guidance schools and high schools in Iran, Khorasan Razavi were selected randomly. The investigators utilized the instrument of Big Five Inventory (BFI) to measure teachers' personality traits.

This inventory was originally developed by Oliver P. John, (1999) and it was distributed among the selected teachers. The "Big Five" factors of personality are five broad domains or dimensions of personality which are used to describe human personality. These Big five personality traits are Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism and Openness. It consisted of a 5 point Likert Scale. The response categories to each of questions were in descending order of weighting: Strongly Agree (5 points), Agree (4 points), Neutral (3 points), Disagree (2 points), and Strongly Disagree (1 points). The coefficient alpha reliability of BFI is (.83). Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement on each statement of the inventory.

## RESULTS

To answer the research questions, version 17 of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was utilized. Tables 1 to 4 display the descriptive statistics of the study.

**Table 1: Gender**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	male	15	16.5	16.5	16.5
	female	76	83.5	83.5	100.0
	Total	91	100.0	100.0	

As shown in Table1, 15 participants (16.5%) are male and 76 participants are female (83.5%).

**Table 2: Academic degree**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	BA	74	81.3	81.3	81.3
	MA	10	11.0	11.0	92.3
	PhD	7	7.7	7.7	100.0
	Total	91	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 indicated the participants' academic degrees which were B.A., M.A. and PhD. According to this table, there are 81.3% with B.A. academic degree, 11.0 % M.A and 7.7 % PhD in the study.

**Table 3:** Years of teaching experience

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1-10	59	64.8	64.8	64.8
	11-20	12	13.2	13.2	78.0
	21-30	20	22.0	22.0	100.0
	Total	91	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 showed participants' years of teaching experience that from 1 to 30 years. As indicated in this table, 64.8 % participants have 1-10 years of teaching experience, 13.2% have 11-20 and 22 % has 21-30 years of teaching experience.

**Table 4:** Doing action research

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	24	26.4	26.4	26.4
	no	67	73.6	73.6	100.0
	Total	91	100.0	100.0	

The Frequency of EFL teachers' who are doing action research were summarized Table 4. According to this Table, twenty-four out of the 91 (26.4%) participants are doing action research in their classrooms and sixty seven participants (73.6%) are not doing action research.

In what follows, the first thing you should check is whether you have violated one of the assumptions of chi-square concerning the 'minimum expected cell frequency', which should be 5 or greater (or at least 80 per cent of cells have expected frequencies of 5 or more). This information is given in a footnote below the Table 6 (labeled Chi-Square Tests). Footnote indicates that '3 cells (30.0%) have expected count less than 5'. This means that we have violated the assumption, as our entire expected cell sizes are greater than 5.

The main value is the Pearson chi-square value, which is presented in the final table, headed Chi-Square Tests. Pearson Chi-Square value is 3.194, with an associated significance level of .52. To be significant the Sig. value needs to be .05 or smaller. In this case the value of .52 is larger than the alpha value of .05, so we can conclude that our result is not significant. This means that the personality trait of participants that doing action research is not significantly different from those that not doing action research. So the null hypothesis 1 is accepted.

**Table 5:** Personality trait \* doing action research Cross tabulation

		doing action research		Total
		yes	no	
extraversion	Count	4	13	17
	Expected Count	4.5	12.5	17.0
	% within personality trait	23.5%	76.5%	100.0%
	% within doing action research	16.7%	19.4%	18.7%
	% of Total	4.4%	14.3%	18.7%
agreeableness	Count	3	16	19
	Expected Count	5.0	14.0	19.0
	% within personality trait	15.8%	84.2%	100.0%
	% within doing action research	12.5%	23.9%	20.9%
	% of Total	3.3%	17.6%	20.9%
conscientiousness	Count	3	12	15
	Expected Count	4.0	11.0	15.0
	% within personality trait	20.0%	80.0%	100.0%
	% within doing action research	12.5%	17.9%	16.5%
	% of Total	3.3%	13.2%	16.5%
neuroticism	Count	2	5	7
	Expected Count	1.8	5.2	7.0
	% within personality trait	28.6%	71.4%	100.0%
	% within doing action research	8.3%	7.5%	7.7%
	% of Total	2.2%	5.5%	7.7%
openness	Count	12	21	33
	Expected Count	8.7	24.3	33.0
	% within personality trait	36.4%	63.6%	100.0%
	% within doing action research	50.0%	31.3%	36.3%
	% of Total	13.2%	23.1%	36.3%
Total	Count	24	67	91
	Expected Count	24.0	67.0	91.0
	% within personality trait	26.4%	73.6%	100.0%
	% within doing action research	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	26.4%	73.6%	100.0%

**Table 6:** Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3.194 <sup>a</sup>	4	.526
Likelihood Ratio	3.227	4	.521
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.174	1	.140
N of Valid Cases	91		

a. 3 cells (30.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.85.

According to Table 7, 17.6 per cent of males were extraversion, while for female this is 82.4% per cent. For males, 15.8% per cent were agreeableness, 84.2 per cent of females were. Also, 6.7% of males were conscientiousness, although this is 93.3% for females. There was no man with neuroticism type of personality traits; in contrast 100.0% of females were neuroticism. 24.2% of males were openness, while for female this is 75.8%.

**Table 7:** Personality trait \* Gender Cross tabulation

		Gender		Total
		Male	female	
extraversion	Count	3	14	17
	% within personality trait	17.6%	82.4%	100.0%
	% within Gender	20.0%	18.4%	18.7%
	% of Total	3.3%	15.4%	18.7%
agreeableness	Count	3	16	19
	% within personality trait	15.8%	84.2%	100.0%
	% within Gender	20.0%	21.1%	20.9%
	% of Total	3.3%	17.6%	20.9%
conscientiousness	Count	1	14	15
	% within personality trait	6.7%	93.3%	100.0%
	% within Gender	6.7%	18.4%	16.5%
	% of Total	1.1%	15.4%	16.5%
neuroticism	Count	0	7	7
	% within personality trait	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% within Gender	.0%	9.2%	7.7%
	% of Total	.0%	7.7%	7.7%
openness	Count	8	25	33
	% within personality trait	24.2%	75.8%	100.0%
	% within Gender	53.3%	32.9%	36.3%
	% of Total	8.8%	27.5%	36.3%
Total	Count	15	76	91
	% within personality trait	16.5%	83.5%	100.0%
	% within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	16.5%	83.5%	100.0%

**Table 8:** Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3.898 <sup>a</sup>	4	.420
Likelihood Ratio	5.143	4	.273
Linear-by-Linear Association	.445	1	.505
N of Valid Cases	91		

a. 4 cells (40.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.15.

As shown in table 8, the main value is the Pearson chi-square value, which is presented in the final table, headed Chi-Square Tests. Pearson Chi-Square value is 3.898<sup>a</sup>, with an associated significance level of .42. To be significant the Sig. value needs to be .05 or smaller. In this case the value of .52 is larger than the alpha value of .05, so we can conclude that our result is not significant. As a result the H02, which states there is no significant difference between the performance of male and female EFL teachers in terms of the Big five personality traits (Conscientiousness, Emotional stability, Openness to experience, Extraversion, Agreeableness) is accepted. This means that the personality trait of males is not significantly different from the personality trait of females.



## DISCUSSION

In a study conducted by Othman (2009) entitled "A study on personality that influences teaching effectiveness" the finding shows that there are significant relationship between extrovert, agreeableness and conscientiousness with teaching effectiveness, while the neuroticism and openness have no significant relationship. Even there are relationship between personality and teaching effectiveness, but the other results show that personality only has a small effect on teaching effectiveness which means that there are several other factors that influence the teaching effectiveness. While The findings of research entitled "The Relationship between Teachers' Personality and Feedback with EFL Learners' Self-Efficacy" demonstrated that students' self-efficacy was significantly and positively correlated with teacher' extraversion, conscientiousness, and openness to new experiences (Hosseini, et. al, 2014).

Results of study by Soliemanifar and Shaabani (2012) showed that personality traits played a major role in predicting academic burnout. The results of this study were in contrast with Irfan Arif, et al.(2012) since there was a significant difference between male and female prospective teachers on their big five personality traits. Female prospective teachers got greater score on their big five personality trait instrument as compared to male prospective teachers.

## CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' personality traits and doing action research. Results indicated that personality trait of EFL teachers' that doing action research is not significantly different from those teachers that not doing action research. So the null hypothesis 1 is accepted. The results from cross tabulation showed that the personality trait of males is not significantly different from the personality trait of females. Hence, the null hypothesis 2 is accepted.

Regarding the findings of the study, some pedagogical recommendations, mostly for EFL teachers can be suggested. First and foremost, engaging in doing action research should not simply be a matter of personality type and every teacher can be start to be a practitioner or researcher in his classroom.

Moreover, as the results of this study indicate, females are not superior in terms of the Big five personality traits (Conscientiousness, Emotional stability, Openness to experience, Extraversion, and Agreeableness) compared to male teachers. This suggests that teachers should take into consideration the fact that doing action research is independent from gender.

The target population for this study was ninety-one male and female EFL teachers teaching English in public guidance schools and high schools in Mashhad, Iran. Future research on similar topics may need to include larger research samples and more locations because personality traits (Conscientiousness, Emotional stability, Openness to experience, Extraversion, Agreeableness) is worthy of continued examination and application. However the results of this study show that no correlation was identified

between Iranian EFL teachers' personality traits and doing action research, so future researchers with similar research topics may want to examine the relationship between each of the Big five personality traits (Conscientiousness, Emotional stability, Openness to experience, Extraversion, Agreeableness) and doing action research in EFL contexts.

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