

Who learns foreign language better—introverts or extraverts?

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Some studies have suggested that introversion tendency hinders Chinese students' ability to learn English as a second language. Credit: Wang Tom/123rf

Extravert Chinese students learning English as a second language are likely to perform better in speaking and reading, but less proficient in listening than their introvert counterparts, according to a study published in *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (JSSH)*.

In Chinese culture, students are expected to listen to their teachers attentively, as opposed to Western culture where class participation is encouraged. The Chinese culture is influenced by Confucian values, including collectivism, socialisation for achievement, and high acceptance of power and authority. Some studies have suggested that such introversion hinders Chinese students' ability to learn English as a second [language](#).

However, it is unclear if a relationship exists between extraversion-introversion traits and English language proficiency for nonnative

speakers. In an ongoing debate, psychologists argue introverts are less susceptible to distraction and have better long-term memory, while linguists claim the extraverts' sociable and outgoing attitudes, as well as their high tolerance to risk, help with learning a foreign language.

Study of this topic that involves Chinese students based in Asia is lacking, explains Assistant Professor Shahcla Zarfar at the University of Central Punjab, India.

Zarfar and colleagues examined whether Chinese students are introverted by nature, whether extravert-introvert tendencies affected English language proficiency among Chinese students in India, and how these traits influenced language learning.

The researchers analysed the data from 145 Chinese exchange students aged between 18 and 21 at VIT University, Vellore, India. The data comprised of English language test scores and two types of questionnaires—one asked about personality and linguistic information, and the other only about their personality.

They found the majority of the students were introverts (47 percent), followed by extroverts (35 percent), and 'no tendency towards the extroversion-introversion traits' (18 percent). The team confirmed a significant relationship between the two personality traits and English language proficiency, with higher scores in speaking, reading and overall language proficiency for extravert students. There was little difference in writing between the two groups.

However, surprisingly, the researchers found introvert students were better listeners than extravert students, contradicting some claims that academic excellence relies solely on the extravert tendency. They speculate that this might indicate introverts' ability to focus more effectively on

listening than extraverts.

The researchers suggest that instructors should adjust their teaching strategies depending on different personality traits among students learning English as a second language. Further studies should involve a bigger sample group, and investigate why introvert students perform better than their peers in some conditions.

More information: Extraversion-Introversion Tendencies and their Relationship with ESL Proficiency: A Study of Chinese Students in Vellore, India. www.pertanika.upm.edu.my/Perta...47-2015-3rdProof.pdf

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