Which Personality Trait Performs better on IELTS Speaking Test? Extroverted or Introverted?

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**ABSTRACT**

First, this investigation is an endeavor to find out whether there is a meaningful relationship between each of the extraversion/introversion personality styles and the performance on IELTS speaking test. Second, this research aims at making a comparison between EFL extraverted students and their introverted peers in terms of their speaking performance, achieved through IELTS speaking module. To this end, 47 EFL students (13 male and 34 female learners), who had previously taken the IELTS test, were selected out of 66 initial participants based on their scores on Oxford test of placement. The selected participants' IELTS speaking scores were utilized in order to examine their L2 speaking Performance. Based on Eysenck's (1973) Extraversion Questionnaire, Students' personality styles (extraversion/introversion) were determined. Results indicated that not only is there not a meaningful relationship between each of the extraversion/introversion personality styles and the performance on IELTS speaking test, but also there is no significant difference between the performance of the extraverted and introverted groups on IELTS speaking module, utilizing correlational analysis and independent samples t-test, respectively.

**INTRODUCTION**

As Murphy [47] states, “oral communication is a complex and multifaceted language process” (p. 51). In fact, “speaking in a second language involves the development of a particular type of communication skill which, in turn, differs from reading and writing skills” [4]. Skehan suggests that “speakers’ fluency, accuracy and complexity of speech demand capacity, and that there is likely to be a trade-off between these aspects of the skill” [4]. This complexity may be due to three general sets of factors which contribute to individual differences in learning this communicative skill consist in cognitive, affective, and social factors. Among the affective factors, “personality traits” comprise a particular dimension called Extraversion/Introversion which has received the greatest attention in L2 learning. In second foreign language teaching, if we, as teachers, want to develop the learners’ communicative abilities, obviously, we must consider those factors which influence the learners’ use of communication and compensatory strategies. One of the significant factors which has been claimed to influence the learners’ use of communication/compensatory strategies is the personality trait of Extraversion/Introversion [44]. Many psychologists [17] consider extraversion/introversion to be, in essence, biologically determined and inherited, though they do not disregard the effects of environmental factors altogether. The differences in the patterns of behaviour of the two psychological types and their consequences are explained in some personality theories especially in Eysenck theory on the bases of the biological phenomena of “cortical arousal” and “reactive inhibition”. Extraverts in comparison to introverts have less cortical arousal and more mental reactive inhibition. The cortical under-arousal of extraverts and over-arousal of introverts have to be balanced with different kinds of behavior. To this effect, extraverts would tend to seek more “excitation” which is mainly manifested through “impulsive” and “outgoing” behavior. However, introverts would tend to show more “reflective”, “less exciting” behavior. As to reactive inhibition, according to Eysenck (1957) extraversion is partly identified with “fast accumulation” and “slow dissipation” of reactive inhibition. In other words, extraverts are mentally more easily inhibited which implies that they are more susceptible to mental distraction hence do not have as much mental concentration as introverts do. The phenomenon of cortical arousal has also been related to memory span [17,18] which is believed to play a major role in learning. It is hypothesized and to some extent confirmed by research that introverts poses a wider long term memory span while extraverts would have a wider short term memory.
Regarding the relationship between extroversion/introversion and L2 learning, in fact, there are two major contradictory hypotheses. The first which has been the most widely researched and is accepted more by applied linguists is that extroverted learners will do better in acquiring basic interpersonal communication skills. The rationale for this hypothesis is that sociability will result in more opportunities to practice, more input, and more success in communicating in the L2. The second hypothesis is that introverted learners will do better at developing cognitive academic language ability. The rationale for this hypothesis comes from studies which show that introverted learners typically enjoy more academic success, perhaps because they spend more time reading and writing [15]. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that extroversion may facilitate the learning of spoken English, but that introverts have more patience and thus may excel in areas of pronunciation, reading, and writing [2].

2. Objective of the Study:
This investigation is an endeavor to make a comparison between EFL extroverted students and their introverted peers in terms of their speaking performance, achieved through IELTS speaking module. Therefore, in particular, this investigation, aims at providing answers to the following research questions:
1. Is there a meaningful relationship between each of the extroversion/introversion personality styles and IELTS speaking performance?
2. Is there a significant difference between EFL extroverted students and their introverted peers in terms of their IELTS speaking achievement?

3. Literature Review:
According to Dewaele and Furnham [11], studies on language and extraversion are relatively few in number. Although different studies have investigated the relationship between personality variables (extraversion and introversion) and second language acquisition [27, 46, 6, 41, 11, 10], it is evident that the question whether certain personality traits help language learning is still an open question, due to the contradictory results of these studies. Furthermore, as Van Dale [76] states, “the study of the relationship between the personality traits and L2 speech production remains somewhat underexplored”. Some studies have been carried out in this area, but the results are so mixed and contradictory that the need for further investigation is obvious.

For example, Naiman, Frohlich and Stern found that teachers viewed successful students as meticulous, mature, responsible, self-confident, extrovert, independent. These contradictory traits, particularly ‘extrovert’ and ‘introvert’ which are at the opposite ends of Eysenck’s personality continuum, will raise more ambiguity. Unsuccessful students, on the other hand, were most frequently described as demonstrating a lack of self-confidence and as being timid, shy, careless, afraid to express themselves, passive, shy, introverted, and nervous.

While Pritchard [63] reported a particularly high correlation of 0.94 between sociability and ratings of French fluency of grammar school students, Smart et.al, found that a dimension of ‘social spontaneity’ differentiated overachievers from average achievers but did not distinguish underachievers from either group. That is, overachievers were significantly lower in social spontaneity than average achievers, indicating that they tended to be introverted. They do not enjoy social activities, prefer not to be in crowds, do not spend their free time at social functions, seldom take the initiative at social gatherings, work better by themselves, and prefer to work alone.

Rossier [67] utilized one of Eysenck’s personality scales to determine if there is any relationship between introversion/extraversion and the learning of English as a second language by Spanish speaking high school students in the United States. Results of the study revealed a positive correlation between extraversion and oral English fluency as measured by a pictorial stimulus test.

Tapasak, Roodin, and Vaught [74] investigated the effects of extraversion, anxiety, and sex on children’s verbal fluency and coding task performance. Using the Junior Eysenck Personality Inventory, the Children’s Manifest Anxiety Scale and administering a simple and a complex verbal fluency task and the coding subtest of the WISC (Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children), they found that extraverted children of both sexes did better than introverted children on both measures of verbal fluency and the nonverbal coding task.

Similarly, studies conducted by Guiora, Acton, Erared and Strickland emphasized the necessity for permeable ego boundaries in order to successfully overcome barriers to second language acquisition. That is, the more extraverted a student’s ego boundary, the more easily he/she is to overcome barriers toward acquiring skills for proficiency in the ESL areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

On the other hand, Bush [3], looking at the written and oral L2 production of a group of 39 Japanese learners of English, found a negative correlation between extraversion (EPI) and expert ratings of fluency in nonsynchronous speech.

Strong [73] working on a group of kindergarteners in a California school did not find any relationship between a measure of extroversion and various measures of structure, vocabulary and pronunciation of the
target language. The faster learners did not seek to befriended or identify more with English speakers than did the slower learners. Faster learners, however, were more talkative, responsive, and gregarious than slower learners.

In another study by Ely [16] assessing risk-taking and sociability as the functions of extraversion for 75 English speaking adult learners of Spanish, no correlations was found with fluency measured by means of an oral interview.

Bledsoe [1] examined the relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and extraversion/introversion. The study verified a moderately strong linear relationship between trait-like communication apprehension and introversion.

Kiany [39] gave the Persian restandardized form of the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire twice to forty Iranian, non-English Major Ph.D. students who took the TOEFL and IELTS. They were also asked to report their grade point averages (GPAs) for their school diploma, Bachelor's and Master's degrees. A negative but non-significant relationship was found between extraversion and GPAs. An even weaker but still negative relationship emerged between extraversion and both the totals and sub-scores for TOEFL and IELTS. Thus extraversion may not help in developing either linguistic skills or even communicative skills in such an Iranian EFL situation where there is no exposure to English and where non-communicative teaching methods are used in English classes.

Dewaele and his colleagues have carried out extensive studies in this field and came up with interesting results. For example, in their study, Dewaele and Furnham [11] reviewed 33 SLA studies that had included the extraversion variable, and discovered that no systematic relationships were ever found between extraversion and linguistic variables or test results based on written material. Significant correlations were found in studies that used linguistic variables extracted from oral language. In fact, they suggested that the more extraverted the second language learners the higher their ability in speaking that language. The strength of the relationship was also found to depend on the task that the speaker was asked to perform. Correlations between extraversion and linguistic measures were much higher for complex verbal tasks than for simple ones, especially when the complex tasks were executed in stressful situations such as oral exams. No significant differences in linguistic accuracy existed between extraverts and introverts.

Working within the theoretical framework of Levelt and de Bot, Dewaele and Furnham [12] analysed the French oral interlanguage of 25 Flemish university students and related this to their EPI scores. Correlational analyses between extraversion scores and 6 linguistic variables reflecting fluency and accuracy revealed that extravert bilinguals are more fluent than introvert bilinguals, especially in interpersonal stressful situations. Some cognitive and physiological characteristics associated with extraversion, such as superior short-term memory and better resistance to stress, can explain the variation among individuals in speech production.

Venugopalan [77] investigated the relationship between personality variables of extraversion and introversion and subject proficiency in reading, writing, speaking and listening in advanced-level (TOEFL score of 500 or greater) English as a second language classrooms. The results of this study showed that extroverts scored higher in ESL reading and speaking classes. Furthermore, introverts scored higher than extroverts in ESL listening. The interesting point of this study was the fact that strong relationships were present between independent variables when controlling for several secondary variables, including gender, native language clusters, and personal experience. For example, introverts seem to outperform extroverts when controlling for secondary variables.

Gregerson [29] divided twenty students in the first semester of their fourth year in the English Education program at the University of Atacama into two groups: those that participated with high frequency and those who participated less. The purpose of this study was to create an affective profile (considering the variables of anxiety, motivation, self-esteem, and learning styles), that could possibly distinguish one groups from the other. After administering surveys that measured the affective variables in question, it was discovered that while no significant difference existed in the students' levels of global motivation and the learning styles that deal with possibilities and ideas, significant differences were found in the students levels of anxiety, self-esteem, and the learning styles focusing on the physical senses, introversion/extroversion, and tasks. That low producers are more introverted (90%) seems obvious, but the surprise comes with the results of the high language producers who demonstrated a high percentage of introversion (60%) as opposed to extroversion (30%). One would expect that a person who orally participates with high frequency would tend to be more extroverted. The author justifies the results of the study by declaring that the questions on the SILL were more focused on social behavior than on classroom behavior. It could be possible that while a student enjoys parties and going out with friends socially, he does not necessarily feel comfortable participating in the classroom setting.

In his study on Psychological and sociodemographic correlates of communicative anxiety in L2 and L3 production, Dewaele [13] found that Psychoticism, extraversion, and, to a lesser extent, neuroticism did however significantly predict levels of communicative anxiety in English L3 production. Students who scored high on the extraversion and psychoticism scales reported significant lower levels of communicative anxiety in English. Those who scored low on the neuroticism scale also tended to report lower levels of communicative
anxiety in English. The same pattern emerged for communicative anxiety in French without reaching statistical
significance.

Dewaele and Pavlenko [13] examined five factors that might impact the use of L2 emotion vocabulary. The
first study considered the impact of language proficiency, gender, and extraversion on the use of emotion words
in the advanced French interlanguage of 29 Dutch L1 speakers. The second examined the influence of
sociocultural competence, gender, and type of linguistic material on the use of emotion vocabulary in the
advanced English IL of 34 Russian L1 speakers. Combined, the results of the two studies demonstrated that
the use of emotion words in IL is linked to proficiency level, type of linguistic material, extraversion, and, in some
cases, gender of IL speakers.

In the case studies carried out by Mard [43], a relationship between SLA in an immersion preschool and
children’s different classroom personalities was found although it was clear that all four children in the case
studies followed an individual path of second language development. The productive second language of the
talkative children had in many ways developed to a higher level than the productive second language of the less
talkative children. The gap between structured and spontaneous use of second language was bigger among the
less talkative than the talkative children.

Oya, Manalo, and Greenwood [61] investigated the relationship between personality and anxiety
characteristics of Japanese students and their oral performance in English. The participants were 73 native-
speakers of Japanese who were studying English at various language schools in New Zealand. They were
administered the Maudsley Personality Inventory, the Spielberger State Anxiety Inventory, and a story-retelling
task which was scored in terms of oral fluency, accuracy, complexity, and global impression. Significant
correlations were found between extraversion and global impression scores, and state anxiety and clause
accuracy scores. These findings suggest that participants who were more extraverted produced better global
impressions during their oral performance, and those who were experiencing higher levels of state anxiety made
more errors in their spoken use of clauses.

Van Daele [76] investigated the effect of extraversion on L2 oral proficiency and found that, extraversion
had little effect on the oral speech production of Flemish L2 learners of French and English. Although
extraverted pupils outperformed introverted learners in terms of lexical complexity in both languages at the
beginning of the study, no effects were found for fluency measures. The influence of extraversion on lexical
complexity disappeared for French and was even reversed for English.

Using the Myers-Briggs type indicator (MBTI), Schweda Nicholson [70] investigated the personality
characteristics of several groups of interpreter trainees and found that the hypothesis that most interpreter
trainees and, subsequently, interpreters are outgoing and gregarious extraverts was not supported. The sample
contained about the same number of extraverts as introverts. As a result, the common impression held by those
both within and outside the field was not verified by the data in the study.

In their study, Pulford and Sohal [64] found that being introverted and female were predictive of lower
confidence in speaking, as were low conscientiousness and the perfectionistic desire to be organized. On the
other hand, conscientiousness, extraversion, and the perfectionistic desire to be organized were strong
predictors of confidence in time-management skills.

Through a narrative retell task, Howard investigated the effects of extraversion on the spoken English
performance of 25 native speakers of Spanish. Extraversion was measured with a Spanish version of the
Eysenck Personality Questionnaire or EPQ (1975). Narratives were elicited using the wordless picture story
Frog, Where Are You?. Drawing on the work of Dewaele [10], Dewaele and Pavlenko (2002), and Oya,
Manalo, and Greenwood, the researcher analyzed the narratives in terms of complexity, verbal accuracy, clausal
accuracy, and emotion word quantity. Native speakers of English rated each narrative on a holistic global
impression scale. Extraversion was found to correlate negatively with verbal accuracy ($r = -.438$, $p < .028$).
However, the sample tested at an unusually high level of extraversion ($M = 17.12$, $SD = 3.72$). Only one
subject’s extraversion score was lower than eleven. When this outlier was removed, all correlations between
extraversion and the variables involved proved to be non-significant.

4. Method:
4.1. Participants:

The participants in this study were 47 EFL students. They consisted of 13 male and 34 female students, who
had previously taken the IELTS test.

4.2. Instruments:

Since the main objective of the study was to make a comparison between EFL extroverted students and
their introverted peers in terms of their speaking performance, achieved through IELTS speaking module, two
different instruments were used. These included: 1) second language proficiency test, and 2) extraversion/introversion personality questionnaire. In addition to these instruments, the participants’ IELTS
Speaking score was asked as the basis of such a comparison. In the following paragraphs each of the two instruments utilized in the study are described.

- **Oxford Placement Test by Allen (1985) has been used for proficiency level:**
  
  This test consists of 50 short items, each with three alternative choices from which the testees have to choose the correct response. The first 20 items are meaning-wise independent of one another, the remaining 30 items, however, are sequential.

- **Extroversion/introversion personality questionnaire:**
  
  Students’ degree of extroversion and introversion was measured by Eysenck’s (1973) extraversion questionnaire (Appendix D). This questionnaire consists of 24 items. The odd-numbered items are concerned with introversion, and the even-numbered items are related to extroversion. The subjects were supposed to choose ‘yes’ or ‘no’ for each item.

  Francis, Lewis, Christopher and Ziebertz examined the reliability of the questionnaire and found an alpha reliability of 0.84. In a cross-cultural study, Francis, Brown, and Philipchalk compared the psychometric properties of the EPQR-S in four English-speaking countries among a total of 685 undergraduate students, including 59 men and 153 women in England, 57 men and 92 women in Canada, 51 men and 81 women in the USA and 53 men and 139 women in Australia. According to this study the short form extraversion scale achieved alpha coefficients of 0.78, 0.83, 0.85 and 0.87 in the four samples [21]. Rocklin and Revelle [66] also examined and approved the content validity of the questionnaire correlating it with Eysenck personality inventory [19], a questionnaire measuring personality traits of neuroticism, psychoticism and extroversion.

  Reliability of this questionnaire was also calculated by the researcher of the present study. To achieve this aim split-half method was applied since this questionnaire has odd and even items. In other words, the odd items of this questionnaire test extraversion and the even ones test introversion. The obtained reliability was 0.69.

  To avoid any confusion and enhance validity, the Persian version of the questionnaire was utilized. First, the items were translated into Persian. Then, in order to make sure that the translated version conveys the same information as the original one, it was back-translated by a B.A. student of English Literature. Finally, the congruency between the two texts was computed and was equal to 91.63%.

4.3. Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis:

To gather data, students were asked to do the Oxford Placement Test and complete the extraversion/introversion personality questionnaire. Following clear instructions on how to take the test, they were given Oxford Placement Test. Subsequently, the extraversion/introversion personality questionnaires were given to them. After the scores of Oxford Placement Test were obtained, those students whose scores were within one SD minus and one SD plus the mean were selected (N=47) and the rest were excluded. Independent sample t-test was run to determine whether there is any significant difference in the performance of the extrovert and introvert participants on L2 speaking ability test.

5. Results:

5.1. Correlations between extraversion/introversion and IELTS speaking performance:

As it was revealed in Table 1 & 2, there was no significant relationship between the personality styles and IELTS speaking performance. In other words, these tables illustrate the non-significant relationship of each personality style with IELTS speaking performance. Moreover, these correlations indicated that these non-significant correlations are negative; i.e. there is a negative but not significant correlation exists between extraversion and IELTS speaking performance (Table 1), and a more negative but still not significant correlation was found between introversion and IELTS speaking performance (Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extroversion</th>
<th>L2Speaking</th>
<th>Extroversion</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>0.34</td>
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<td>47</td>
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5.2. Independent samples t-test on the performance of the extraverted and introverted groups on IELTS speaking test:

After making sure that the two groups of extraverts and introverts were at the same level of L2 proficiency by conducting an independent t-test (sig. = 0.55), another independent sample t-test was run to determine whether there is any significant difference in the performance of the extravert and introvert participants on IELTS speaking test. The results in Tables 3 suggest that although the extravert subjects gained a higher mean (6.06) than the introvert group (5.46), there was no significant difference between the two groups’ performance on IELTS speaking ability test.
Discussion:

According to the obtained results, no significant correlation was found between the personality style variable and IELTS speaking ability. In fact, neither extraversion nor introversion showed any significant relationship with IELTS speaking ability. Also, there is no significant difference between extroverted and introverted EFL students in their performance on IELTS speaking test. This particular outcome can be exactly in opposition to what Dewaele and Furnham [12] stated in their article. They suggested that the positive effect of extraversion manifests itself most clearly in a highly formal situation. On the one hand, although the setting in this investigation seemed to be stressful to some of the participants, it may have been neutral to most of them, because the IELTS speaking tasks which were given to the students were very similar to the tasks their instructor would give them as class activities; i.e. talking about themselves, a particular topic, or describing a thing or place. As a result, their familiarity with the tasks prevented them from being anxious on the IELTS speaking test. However, on the other hand, since there had beena face to face interview in the IELTS speaking test and the students had not been alone and not felt free to perform the tasks in their own ways, they might feel some sort of stress or anxiety during the IELTS speaking task. All this resulted in a formal and inconvenient situation where the effect of extraversion was clear, and still there exists a non-significant relationship. With regard to the lack of relationship between introversion and IELTS speaking ability, Ellis (1994) stated that introverted learners do better at developing cognitive academic language ability. The rationale for this hypothesis came from studies which showed that introverted learners typically enjoy more academic success, perhaps because they spend more time reading and writing. Consequently, since the test in the present study was a speaking test, no positive correlation between introversion and IELTS speaking ability is expected. This result is in line with that of Ely (1986) who did not find any correlation between risk taking and sociability as the functions of extraversion and fluency. In addition, Dewaele [14] found that extraversion had little effect on the oral speech production.

Furthermore, the correlations between the individual learning styles of extraversion and introversion and IELTS speaking ability showed negative relationships. A negative but non-significant relationship (-0.01) was found between extraversion and IELTS speaking ability. A more negative relationship (-0.17) emerged between introversion and IELTS speaking ability. The negative relationship between introversion and IELTS speaking ability is natural according to Ellis’s [15] hypothesis that introverted learners do better at developing cognitive academic language ability rather than oral skills such as speaking. However, the negative relationship between extraversion and IELTS speaking ability is unexpected. This result is in line with the findings in Busch’s [3] study. He found a negative correlation between extraversion and fluency in nonsessional speech. Kiany also found a negative but non-significant relationship between extraversion and GPAs. An even weaker but still negative relationship emerged between extraversion and both the totals and sub-scores for TOEFL. He justified the results by stating the fact that extraversion may not help in developing either linguistic skills or even communicative skills in such an Iranian EFL situation where there is no exposure to English and where non-communicative teaching methods are used in English classes. The same could be true for the results of the present study which was conducted in the similar EFL context of Iran. Moreover, the current research can also be against Rossier’s [67] results, which revealed a positive correlation between extraversion and oral English fluency as measured by a pictorial stimulus test, though its type of oral measurement had been totally different. Furthermore, the present study is also in opposition to Naiman, Frohlich and Stern’s viewpoints who found that teachers viewed successful students as meticulous, mature, responsible, self-confident, extrovert, independent and unsuccessful students, on the other hand, were most frequently described as demonstrating a lack of self-confidence and as being timid, shy, careless, afraid to express themselves, passive, shy, introverted, and nervous. Based on the present research, these contradictory traits, particularly ‘extrovert’ and ‘introvert’ which are at the opposite ends of Eysenck’s personality continuum, turned out not to be the determiners of success, at least with regard to the speaking ability.

Therefore, all in all, according to the results of the T-test, no significant difference was found between the extraverted and introverted students with respect to their performance in IELTS speaking test. In fact, the results did not support Dewaele and Furnham’s [11] hypothesis that extroverts are better in oral skills than introverts. Once again, it is probable that the formality and inconvenience of the speaking test situation did not reveal the
effect of extraversion personality style which is, according to Dewaele and Furnham [12] evident in highly formal and highly stressful settings of speaking such as that of IELTS speaking test.

**Conclusion:**
This research generally made a comparison between EFL extroverted students and their introverted peers in terms of their speaking performance, achieved through IELTS speaking module. Using correlational analysis and independent samples t-test on the performance of the extraverted and introverted groups on IELTS speaking test, it was revealed that not only is there not a meaningful relationship between each of the extraversion/introversion personality styles and the performance on IELTS speaking test, but also there is no significant difference between the performance of the extraverted and introverted groups on IELTS speaking module.

**Pedagogical Implications:**
How can the finding of the present research on extroversion/introversion styles and IELTS speaking performance be made use of in the classroom teaching or in IELTS speaking test? It has been suggested that a better overall picture of speaking skill is needed to improve oral elicitation procedures. Some scholars believe that formal and usually distressing condition of IELTS speaking test would give the extroverted students more chances to demonstrate their capabilities in the second language, in ways in which they feel more comfortable. However, the results of the current study do point to the fact that the type of opportunities for speaking in the second language, especially in conditions like that of IELTS, is not in interaction with the extroversion or introversion types of personality styles. This belief that better opportunities should be encouraged among the quieter students in order to provide them with plenty of comprehensible input, as well as with chances to practice expressing themselves in the new language is not empirically supported. There are many factors which contribute to the learners’ IELTS speaking performance. However, it might not be reasonable to take extroversion/introversion personality styles into account as the contributing factors leading to better or worse performance in IELTS speaking tests. Moreover, although it has been suggested (Chastain, Cathcart ET AL.) that one possible way of dealing with personality differences in the classroom would be to stream students according to whether they are more or less outgoing, or alternatively to provide for more individualized instruction to match individual students’ personality styles, this does not seem to be the prudent and logical approach to believe that the reason behind better or worse speaking performance lies in the extraversion or introversion styles of personality.

**REFERENCES**


