

THE INTROVERTED STUDENTS IN THE MODERN ESL/EFL CLASSROOM

Elena Shalevska

University of St. Clement of Ohrid, Bitola, North Macedonia, Faculty of Education – Bitola, Department of English language and literature,

elena.salevska@gmail.com

ORCID no. 0000-0002-3270-7137

Abstract

As ESL/EFL studies become more focused on group-work and pair-work, introverted students remain in the background of the modern classrooms. With the majority of the newer student textbooks focusing on team building and joint activities, introverted students cannot step out of the extroverts' shadow. Research even suggests that teachers prefer the extroverted students who happily participate in class discussions and group activities over the quiet, inward-oriented introverts.

Many regard the introverted students as shy, but introversion is not limited to shyness. This paper will discuss the ways in which introverts can improve their participation in class and improve their skills for working as a part of a group.

Small but meaningful changes to the ways we teach ESL/EFL can influence the teaching process for the introverts greatly.

Keywords: Introverts, extroverts, ESL, EFL

Introduction

As the educational systems throughout the world develop to accommodate different students' needs, one area is oftentimes neglected: the shy, quiet, or introverted students continue to be frowned upon and neglected in the everyday teaching process as more and more attention is given to the extroverts and their abilities to work better in groups, voice out their opinions, participate in class and accomplish more in the activities now considered "standard" in the modern ESL/EFL classroom.

The introverted students, more times than not, are perceived as students that have certain learning difficulties and their "shyness", as oftentimes introversion is confused with general shyness, is considered a problem that is to be addressed and somehow, cured.

The modern ESL/EFL coursebooks are another pillar of this on-going problem. The majority of the books' activities now focus on team-work and group-work and individual activities, like the ones introverted students actually prefer, are overshadowed.

To top it all off, ESL/EFL teachers generally tend to put a lot of emphasis on class participation, since speaking skills are essential when it comes to language learning. However, such participation is something introverts have a hard time dealing with.

Luckily, there are numerous methods that can be employed and certain techniques that can be implemented in order to make the ESL/EFL classroom a welcoming learning area for both introverts and extroverts. Even some small, well-thought adjustments can have excellent results in improving introverts' class participation and team-working skills.

Methodology

This review paper aims to describe, in a qualitative manner and assess, the classroom activities and techniques used when working with a large group of students with unique educational needs.

Ultimately, the goal is to provide better understanding of the benefits that small, but meaningful changes can bring in the modern ESL/EFL classroom – changes that could aid the teaching process and make classes more fitted to the educational needs not only to the outspoken extroverts, but also to the more contemplative and quiet introverts.

The notion of Introversion and Extroversion

The theory of human personality was first introduced by the psychologist Carl Jung in the early 1920s. Upon introducing the said theory, Jung introduced and defined the term Psychological Type. According to him, this term was to refer to the level to which individuals show inclination to multitude of what he referred to as extraverted and introverted behavioral patterns. Carl Jung elucidated these two notions in regards to the way individuals derive

personal energy. Upon defining extraversion, Jung stated that extraverted individuals are outwardly oriented i.e. they derive energy from their surroundings and the people in their proximity. Introverted individuals, according to him, are inner oriented i.e. they derive energy in an inward manner from inner psychological activities. According to Jung's theoretical claims, extroverts are the individuals who focus primarily on ventures and undertakings in the world around while introverts focus on self-reflection. Furthermore, Jung claims, introverts find ventures and activities in the outer world rather draining energetically. Rather than replenished, like in the case of extroverts, their energy levels decline after exchanges in large groups of individuals. (Jung, C. 1971)

In the psychological literature, the notion of extroversion and introversion (also known as extraversion and introversion) is considered an extremely important dimension of an individual's personality – a dimension that has influence, and can impose a variety of physiological limits on who one is and how one acts. One individual's level of said extroversion or introversion is said to influence greatly a vast number of aspects: in what ways does a particular person think, how does he feel and how he interacts with the world at large (Wilt, J. and Revelle, W. 2009)

As the theory became more popular, numerous tests have been developed in the past decades in order to determine whether one tends to be more on the introverted or on the extroverted side, and to what extent. The most commonly conducted tests of such types are the psychometric tests, the Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and the Revised Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI).

Ever since emerging, Jung's theory has been rather controversial. As a result, numerous psychologists and theorists have discussed it, and in some cases, have even disputed it in a noteworthy manner. One such instance is Isobel Myers (Myers, I.B. and Briggs, P. 1980), who developed the aforementioned MBTI test. Myers conceptualized the concepts of extraversion and introversion as polar opposites on a continuum unlike Jung's theoretical basis. Another such instance is the case with McCrae and Costa. (McCrae, R.R. and Costa, P.T. 1990) These theorists have included the notion of extroversion in their *Five Factor* (openness, conscientiousness, extroversion, anxiety and neuroticism) model of human personality. They have also defined introversion as a noteworthy lack of amiability as well as self-confidence and self-assurance, and not just an inner-directedness energy-wise.

It is important to note that although introversion can sometimes result in a shyness characterised by a quiet and unforthcoming manner, the main distinction between the notions of extroversion and introversion, is to do with the operating of the brain lies and goes further than simple interaction patterns.

Although introverts do struggle with what nowadays is considered sociable and assertive, modern research suggests that with the right guidance, introverts can become more comfortable with working with larger or smaller groups and can improve their public speaking skills.

Introversion vs. shyness

Although oftentimes wrongfully used interchangeably, shyness and introversion are not the same thing and are not to be used as synonyms, despite the fact that these two notions share some characteristics and can sometimes even look the same. The main difference is: introverts find joy in time spent on their own and they feel drained emotionally when they spend time with a large group of individuals.. Individuals who are shy, on the other hand, more often than not, want to spend time with peers and friends, although they feel discomfort when they are to interact with them. Hence, one can conclude that there are many introverts who are not shy. Many have outstanding people skills and communication skills. But, after spending time with a large group of people, interacting and taking part in different things, introverts get emotionally drained and crave solitude time to replenish and "recharge" their emotional batteries. (C. Bainbridge, 2018)

Understanding this can lead to better understanding of the students and their individual needs. For illustration, consider two students. Let us assume that one of them is introverted and the other is shy. During the class, has put together an activity for each and every one of the students in her class. An introverted student would love it if he could remain seated, write and/or work alone, or reflect on the given assignment. The introverted student is simply more comfortable working on his own and finds working with peers energy-draining. A shy student, on the other hand, would want to engage in the activities, even the group ones, alongside other students, but would eventually remain seated, working alone if given the chance, simply because he is apprehensive about the interaction or anxious about what his peers may think of him.

Another thing to note is that shyness can be helped to eventually overcome. Introversion, on the other hand is not something that is to be helped –though certain skills can be improved with careful planning, the concept of energy-draining is as much a part of a person as is one's hair or eye colour.

Learning styles of introverts

Generally speaking, introverted students prefer working on school assignments on their own. They enjoy the solitary and prefer it to group work and joint assignments. They enjoy brainstorming and they appreciate the logical theory behind the things they learn. They tend to prefer to ponder a problem and carefully assess their options before raising their hands and providing an answer. The most widely used term to do with introverts' learning style is *reflective*.

According to Mecchia, in large classroom, the introverted students

- prefer to work on their own,
- prefer to be allowed to observe
- get uncomfortable when they are called out or pressured to answer or speak publicly,
- need to participate in class in a meaningful manner; if not, they will become rather absent minded,
- are influenced by different changes of pace and this requires a lot of readjustment time for them (Mecchia, 2017)

Their learning style, however, ought not to be confused with passive for reflecting and pondering is a rather active process, just as active as speaking in class (The Master Educator, 2007) Introverts learn in a unique manner and to do so, different internal processes must be employed, for, as stated, introverts are inner-oriented. Extroverts, however, improve significantly when given the chance to show what they have learned outwardly, via speaking.

The most important thing to note is that teachers should understand introverted students and their needs, and try to be a bit more patient with them: Introverted student might take a few minutes longer to answer, when called upon during class. This is because these students ponder and think carefully before answering. They evaluate their answer before speaking out, and this process takes time. By allowing enough time to evaluate their answers and think, without interrupting them or assigning other students to answer, teachers can help introverts become more confident or assertive. This can also encourage their way of logical thinking.

In the end of the day, incorporating activities addressing the educational needs of both introverts and extroverts is the key to having a classroom where real learning happens every single class.

Curricula designed around extroverts

The problem with the ESL/EFL classes nowadays and with the other subjects really, is that they focus excessively on extroverts and their learning style. Our own research, upon conducting this paper revealed that the majority of ESL/EFL coursebooks and the state's official curricula rely on numerous group-work assignments that are ideal for extroverts, but not for their introverted classmates.

Furthermore, the grade a student gets is influenced heavily on class participation. More times than not, in order to promote learning, teachers encourage their students to be actively involved in class discussions by asking and answering questions. Even if the teacher does not explicitly include class participation in the overall grades, students' behavior in class undoubtedly influence the teacher's perception of the student's abilities. This perception is especially important if the student's grade in the particular class is on the borderline or if the student asks for a letter of recommendation.

In fact extroverted students are and have been considered "ideal", which just adds to the issue. A recent study that 91 teachers proves this exact point. In the study, these teachers were asked to distinguish their 'ideal student'. The Murphy Meisgeier Type Indicator for Children (MMTIC) and the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) were both employed and the results proved the initial hypothesis – teachers preferred extroverted students. 76% of the teachers chose the extrovert as the 'ideal student' type that they would enjoy teaching and having in class (Meisgeier, 1994).

All of this adds to the fact that lessons and classes are truly designed with extroverts in mind, and not exactly introverts. In today's learning environment, however, where the process of learning is student-centered, such practices are to be changed in order to promote inclusion and inspire learning by all.

Lessons fit to introverts

Understanding introverts and how their mind is wired is crucial to finding activities that introverts will find enjoyable. One sure way is to encourage asynchronous communication (e.g. writing). This is ideal for introverts because it gives them the chance to have a private space where they can get in touch with their inner selves and express their thoughts and ideas in their own way, at their own pace.

Class participation of introverts can be improved by directly asking the student to respond rather than waiting for him to raise his hand. Rotations can also help. These rotations in which all students, in a particular order, are asked to take part in class, could encourage introverts to feel like they belong. This would also potentially alleviate the pressure of public speaking. Another strategy that can be employed is assigning students with questions (and corresponding answers) to do with the material that is to be learned on the following class.

What could also be beneficial, as advised by Cain (Cain, 2012) is changing the mindset and expectations going into the classroom: the concept of class participation is to be changed by classroom engagement. If participation ends up rewarded, some students will raise their hands just for the sake of talking. But engagement, on the other hand, recognizes that there are a lot of different ways to engage with the material and with your peers. Engagement rewards quality over quantity: an introverted student who listens carefully and then proceeds to give one well-thought-out answer should be valued equally, if not more than the extroverted student who's always raising his hand.

Using certain applications that could provide students with the chance to contribute to in-class discussions, anonymously or not can also help class engagement and class participation for introverts. Introverted students will most probably find it more appealing to engage in an online activity via Moodle or Kahoot, anonymous or not since such participation brings less pressure and can be done individually.

Group assignments that work for introverts

Although introverts do prefer to work independently, they may perform well in small groups. As long as the group is not too large and each and every member knows their own role, introverts can perform well. Assigning different roles to each member is the key element in such activity for otherwise introverts are almost certainly going to be outshined by the loud, expressive extroverts in the group. Shy introverts can help by taking notes, keeping the time etc. Such activities will not make them excessively anxious about being in a group and the assignment will not be as energy-draining.

Another useful strategy is the "think-pair-share" one. When the teacher poses a question, talk to their partner. In this way, they only have to share their answers with one peer, rather than the whole class. The teacher can further implement a *journal time* where students put down their notes. This would also give them a chance to work in solitude.

Speaking and presenting in class

One thing that introverts and shy students seem to have in common is that they are both uncomfortable and anxious when called upon in class. Public speaking is simply not their strong suit, especially full-class discussions where topics often change quickly – quicker than the introverts can switch their attention and focus. As mentioned above, working in parts or in a rather small group discussion is preferable for introverted students, especially if they are familiar with the topic and their classmates. It is important to note that forced participation will have nothing but a negative effect on introverted students.

One quote by Robert J. Coplan, a shyness researcher from Ottawa, Canada, as noted in Cain (Cain, 2012) wonderfully sums up the plight of the shy and introverted students in modern schools: *"Whoever designed the context of the modern class-room was certainly not thinking of the shy or quiet students. With often-crowded, high-stimulation rooms and a focus on oral performance—the modern classroom is the quiet student's worst nightmare—if a teacher asks a question and the student doesn't answer right away, the most common thing is the teacher doesn't have time to sit and wait, but has to go on to someone else, and in the back of their head might think that student is not as intelligent or didn't do the homework."*

Making small but significant changes in the way group assignments and presenting in class are thought-out can bring introverts and extroverts closer together and encourage them to shine in their own unique way. If nothing else, simply having their introversion and/or shyness noted, known and accepted as normal by a teacher, and seeing effort of using appropriate mechanisms can help introverts feel appreciated in the classroom

Conclusion

Being a teacher nowadays is more challenging than ever, and considering the unique educational needs of both extroverts and introverts is just another challenge in the list of ongoing educational challenges for teachers all over the world. But, however challenging, teachers should strive to harness each student's unique talent and work around their difficulties and needs.

Recognizing introverts and their learning style and making small but significant changes in the class dynamic can benefit those students greatly. Tailoring group assignments, for instance and assigning each member individual tasks can do wonders! Knowing how their brain works and what kind of assignments they find challenging can be a step towards understanding them and their learning path; understanding their unique needs and taking them into consideration when making specific lesson plans can help introverted students feel appreciated and included.

Teaching is not and should not be a one-size-fits-all matter, and the sooner teachers realize that, the sooner important changes can be made – changes that will mean a pleasant working environment for all, and not just for the ones who are not afraid to raise their hand over and over again.

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