

Learning Styles in EFL Classes

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study is to investigate the students' learning styles at The English Department at The School of Education, Misurata University. It also investigates whether the match between teaching method and learning styles can result in a better academic achievement.

The researcher used the descriptive method in order to first identify the participants' individual learning styles, and second to study whether there is a match between students' learning styles and the way information is presented to them.

The study revealed that most participants were visual learning styles, followed by auditory learners with the kinaesthetic learners being the least. The findings of the study can be used as a beginning point for collaboration with the department course designers at the Faculty of Education.

Keywords: Learning Styles- Kinaesthetic- Visual Learners- Auditory Learners.

أساليب التعلم عند طلبة قسم اللغة الإنجليزية

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الملخص:

تهدف الدراسة إلى إجراء بحث في أنماط التعلم عند عينة من طلاب قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بكلية التربية جامعة مصراتة، بالإضافة إلى دراسة ما إذا كان التوفيق بين أساليب التعلم عند الطلبة وطرق التدريس قد ينتج عنه تطور في الأداء الأكاديمي.

استخدم الباحث المنهج الوصفي للتعرف أولاً على أنماط التعلم الفردية للمشاركين في الدراسة، وثانياً لدراسة ما إذا كان هناك تطابق بين أنماط التعلم لدى الطلاب وطريقة تقديم المعلومات لهم.

كما كشفت الدراسة عن أن النسبة العظمى من المشاركين كانت للمتعلمين المرئيين، ويليهما المتعلمون السمعيون ثم المتعلمون الحركيون. وبهذا قد يكون من الممكن استخدام نتائج الدراسة الحالية كنقطة بداية للتعاون مع مصممي المقررات بقسم اللغة الانجليزية في كلية التربية جامعة مصراتة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أساليب التعلم – المتعلمون الحركيون – المتعلمون المرئيون – المتعلمون السمعيون.

Introduction:

This paper presents the concept of learning styles within the field of language learning, and it sets the background about some problems related to language acquisition.

Learning things requires learners to analyze data using a particular technique. Whether you are learning applied courses such as Mathematics, or you are learning theoretical courses like Geography. In all cases, learners still need to understand and grasp information the way they prefer.

In the case of foreign language learning, it is important for educators to establish an excellent relationship with their students. This relationship will help teachers eliminate any barriers which might interrupt the learning process. In other words, teachers of foreign languages need to understand not only their students' individual interests, needs, motivations and goals of learning but also how they process information.

The currently existing methods and approaches seem to be very productive and motivating most of the time and for most of the students. The process of varying tasks and activities in one class can serve many students' needs and interests (Harmer 2009). Moreover, the way teachers present their lessons also helps make their classes motivating enough. However, focusing on motivation alone may not be the key to more successful classes. It is very crucial to know that learners do not catch information in the same way even though they seem motivated enough. This due to the students different learning styles.

Learning style is a way that students prefer to learn and interpret information, this requires teachers to adopt different teaching techniques in a single class to make sure all students understand the lesson in the way which suits their learning styles.

Nevertheless, the problem is that many teachers today come to their classes with their favorite teaching approach in mind, ignoring or neglecting the idea that they are expected to meet learners with variant learning preferences.

Statement of the Problem:

Due to the extremely large number of learning styles that might face a teacher in one class, it is very difficult for him/her to choose the most effective teaching methods which could meet the needs and interests of all or the majority of his/her students. Specifically, the researcher seeks answers to the following questions:

1. Do students recognize their learning styles?
2. Does matching between method and learning style help learners gain information easily and quickly?
3. What is the effect of knowing learners' learning style on their summative test?

Significance of the Study:

The findings of the study are significant to:

The Teachers: the present study will help teachers pay more attention to the students' different learning styles and make better understanding for the relationship between teaching methods and learning styles which could lead to a better academic achievement.

The Students: the study would help learners identify their learning styles and hence be aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Identifying one's learning style could help them process information more quickly.

Review of Related Literature :

This part carries a general overview for some studies related to learner personalities and styles of learning which have been an important issue in psycholinguistic research. A number of studies have been carried out to find out more about learner differences in terms of behaviour. Also, a number of questions related to language learning have been raised.

A. Definition of Learning Styles:

As a general concept, learning styles refer to the innate receptive abilities that humans as learners have and which could enable them to process information in the way they find it comprehensive and simple. According to Reid (1995), learning styles were defined as “individual's natural, habitual and preferred way(s) of absorbing, processing, and retaining new information and skills” (Reid, 1995, p.8)

- Common Types of EFL Learners:

Auditory Learners

This type of learners learn mostly by ears. In a normal forty to fifty minute class, auditory learners can remember 75 percent of what is discussed

or heard. On the part of the teacher, they can use video tapes, recorders, radio, television, and practice oral directions when delivering tasks or for any part of the task requiring understanding, performance, progress, or evaluation. (Dunn, 1988)

Kinesthetic Learners:

This type of learners learn mostly by experience. Kinesthetic learners use their body to experience, and become a part of the learning process. In other words, they feel more comfortable when they are involved in real tasks. The teacher could provide opportunities for real and active experiences for preparing and carrying out objectives. (Dunn, 1988)

Visual Learners:

This type of learners mostly learn with eyes. Visual learners recall what is seen and evoke details and events by focusing on them. The teacher could use pictures, filmstrips, computers, films, videos, graphs, charts, transparencies, diagrams, drawings, books, and magazines. That is to say, teachers should supply resources that require reading, and writing assignments and evaluations. (ibid)

- Some Other Classifications of Learners:

There have been a number of attempts to put learners of different specializations into different categories. Some psycholinguists were concerned with the classification of learners based on their learning preferences. Wright (1987), for example, classified learners into four categories, the enthusiast, the oracular, the participator and the rebel. The first category "the enthusiast" considers the instructor as a point of reference. This type of learners is mainly concerned with the goals of the learning group. The second category of learners "the oracular" has tendencies towards his/her teacher but focuses more on the fulfillment of personal goals. The third category is "the participator" who focuses more on group benefit and group solidarity. The last category is called "the rebel". This type refers to learners who have tendency towards team work but after all they seek the satisfaction of their own goals.

Other scholars like Willing (1987), suggested a different classification. He put his students into four types: converges, conformists, concrete, and communicative learners. The first group indicates learners who are solitary by nature and tend to avoid groups because they have their own independent abilities. Whereas the second group prefer to focus on learning 'about language' at the expense of using it. The third type include learners who enjoy the social aspect of learning in addition to learning from direct

experience, the last group are learners who are comfortable, confident and willing to take risks outside the classroom.

It seems that it is a hard mission for researchers to count how many types of learning styles there are. More recently, an extensive study carried out by Frank Coffield, David Moseley, Elaine Hall and Kathryn Ecclestone identified a large number of opposed styles of learning (Coffield et al 2004).

- Teaching Methods and EFL Students' Needs

As language learners, EFL students need to improve their cognitive, visual, auditory as well as communicative abilities. According to Sitt-Gohdes (2001), the majority of teachers use teaching methods they have already known. This could result in some frustration for some learners when they realize that their learning preferences are not taken into consideration by many teachers. In fact, in several EFL contexts the issue is more complicated as learners come from various educational experiences with different cultural backgrounds. One vital area often neglected is the exploration of learning styles in the classroom. Kolb (1984) concluded that learners seem to learn best when the teaching methods followed fit their preferred learning styles. He added that recognizing and addressing learning styles can be a key element in achieving the goal of education. Thus, Harmer (2009) presented a question concerning how teachers can adapt their teaching methods to suit the learning styles of their students.

B. Related Studies:

Different studies have been conducted to investigate learning styles in a variety of contexts. A rather recent study was conducted by Abidin (2011) to find out the relationship between learning styles and overall academic achievement. To examine this relationship, a sum of 317 students participated in this survey study. The Learning Styles Survey (LSS) instrument which is based on Joy Reid's Perceptual Learning-Style Preference Questionnaire (1987) was used. The analyses of the data indicated a considerable relationship between overall academic achievement and learning styles. It was also established that the high, moderate and low achievers have a similar preference pattern of learning in all learning styles. Moreover, the learning styles framework does not change with subjects, where it actually plays an important role across all the subjects. Therefore, the results here suggest avenues of future research to understand this phenomenon.

Another study was carried out by Gilakjani (2012) to explain learning styles, teaching styles and the match or mismatch between them. The investigated types were visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles among Iranian learners. Over 100 students complete a questionnaire to determine if their learning styles are auditory, visual, or kinesthetic. The study concluded that selecting a teaching approach which will match different learning styles sounds practical in theory, considering the diversity of student learning styles in the real world. However, it is not practical within the classroom. Another solution is to identify the learners' learning styles preferences and then assist them to widen their learning styles and develop their learning comfort factor.

Methodology:

This part presents the research procedures undertaken by the researcher in order to gather the needed data.

Research Design

In the present research, the researcher used a descriptive method to clarify whether matching between the method and the learning styles can help learners gain the information easily and quickly. It also aims to help students recognize their learning styles.

Participants and Setting:

The current study took place at The Faculty of Education, English Department. It consisted of 20 male and female students studying English at the first semester. The observed class was Vocabulary I.

Research Instrument:

To identify learners' learning style, the researcher distributed a questionnaire. This questionnaire was developed from the Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (PLSP; Reid 1987). A 15 item questionnaire measures the participants' preferred learning styles. To see whether there is an improvement on the students' achievement, the researcher did two observations.

Data Collection:

The aim of this study is to identify learning styles for EFL students and discuss the most suitable techniques to help each type of learner learn more quickly and easily. To find answers for the two questions, the researcher has worked on two levels: first, to identify the participants' style of learning, a questionnaire was designed and distributed and students were given enough time to write their responses. Second, the researcher did a first

observation to examine the level of interaction and motivation during a traditional lecture where the lecturer paid little or no attention to his students' learning styles. Then, learners were classified according to their responses to the questionnaire. The next step, the researcher asked the lecturer to divide the students into groups based on their learning style. This time the lecturer adopted certain teaching strategies that match students' needs. While the lecturer was delivering his lesson, the researcher did a second observation to notice the improvement of the learners' interaction.

Data Analysis:

This study is based on a qualitative data. Here the researcher selected his participants with special care. The researcher will try to interpret the collected information from participants' answers, and put forward some suggestions to answer his research questions.

Results and Discussion:

This chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of the gathered data.

Table 1 Frequency and percentage distribution of learners according to their learning style:

The table above shows the classification of learners according to their learning styles. Auditory, visual, and kinesthetic are the learning styles

Learning style	Frequency	Percentage
Auditory	06	30%
Visual	09	45%
Kinesthetic	05	25%
	20	100%

covered in this study. As you can see, and based on the questionnaire distributed, there are 6 participants who have been classified as auditory learners which makes 30%. The most common type of learning styles is visual learners with 45%. The 25% of participants are kinesthetic learners, which makes it the least common type among the three learning styles.

Results of First Observation

The class attended was Vocabulary I. it consists of 20 students. The class was teacher-centered and the main interaction was student-teacher. The teacher kept introducing the new vocabulary while some students tried to

give the meaning of each word. It was such a traditional class where the teacher did not use any external material to match all types of learners sitting in front of him. It seemed that the lecture was interesting to auditory learners only. By the end of the lecture, the students had a quiz and the average mark percentage was 64%.

Results of Second Observation

Students have been classified into 3 groups according to their learning style. This time the teacher used data show to introduce the new vocabulary. First, he showed a list of words on the screen, pronounced the words as clearly as possible and asked the students to pronounce each word individually. It was clear that all students were paying more attention than the traditional class. Next, the teacher moved the slide to explain the meaning of each word through some pictures with some focus on the part of speech of each one. Students seemed to be more motivated in the way they participated. The teacher finished his presentation stage and he encouraged his students to figure out the meaning of the words from the pictures and then act out the words. Then, the teacher asked the students to move to the course book to practice the new words and see the words in different context. By the end of the lecture, a quiz was distributed to check students' comprehension. After marking the researcher noticed a slight improvement on the students' marks with an average mark percentage of 72%.

Discussion:

Table1 above shows some significant results. It reveals that most of students were visual learners.

The results of the present study proved the importance of recognizing one's learning style in making progress in their learning. Therefore, teachers should be aware of the effectiveness of learning styles for effective learning to take place.

Reid (1998) also stated that knowledge of learning styles and environment may be used to increase students' potential for learning and that effective management of learning styles even promotes successful language development.

The finding of the second observation revealed a noticeable improvement in teacher-student discussion which means that focus on leaning style may increase the level of interaction in class. Dunn (1983) found that dramatic improvement in students' interaction in cases where learning styles have been taken into account show that the way things are

taught had a greater impact than the content covered in a course of study. Another conclusion of the study suggested that focusing on learning styles can have a positive effect on the learner's interaction and motivation. Tai (2013) pointed out that there were significant relationships between auditory, visual, kinesthetic, and learning style and motivation in learning English.

However, the study seemed to have made little improvement on learners' summative test, with progression percentage of 8%. The reason behind this little improvement is the time. In other words, there was not enough time for students to develop more as there were only two weeks between the first and second observation.

A similar study carried out by Moradkhan and Mirtaheri (2011) concerning the connection between learning style and proficiency level did not reveal a significant relationship between the two variables. This finding is in keeping with previous studies by Castro and Peck (2005). They also stated that more proficient students (high level) were likely to use multiple learning styles, which may be interpreted as the reason behind their success in language learning process.

Conclusion and Recommendations Conclusion:

The purpose of this study is to investigate the students' learning styles and whether the match between teaching method and the students' learning styles can result in a better academic achievement. In reference to the students' learning styles, the findings revealed that most participants were visual learning styles, followed by auditory learners with the kinesthetic learners being the least. The study also revealed that the match between teaching method and learning styles can make learners more motivated and interactive. However, the improvement of the learners' marks was not very significant.

Finally, the researcher agrees with Willingness's suggestion (1988) that increased awareness of learning styles should be part of lecturer training, development, and assessment.

Recommendations

1. The findings of the study can be used as a beginning point for collaboration with the department course designers at the Faculty of Education. Lecturers of the Faculty of Education should accommodate their teaching to the learning styles of their students to improve the results of the students' learning and increase their motivation in their studies.

2. The lecturers should have a balanced teaching style and adapt activities such as role-playing to outfit their students' learning styles. It is helpful to design class tasks and activities which students can utilize based on their different learning styles. This will definitely motivate almost all, if not all, students to participate in class and become engaged with the real learning.

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Appendices Appendix A

No	Statement	Agree		Uncertain		Disagree	
1.	When someone tells me how to do something in class, I learn it better.	09	45%	03	15%	08	40%
2.	I remember things I have heard in class better than things I have read.	09	45%	05	25%	06	30%
3.	When the teachers tell the instructions, I understand better.	07	35%	08	40%	05	25%
4.	I learn better in class when the teacher gives a lecture.	10	50%	05	25%	05	25%
5.	I learn better in class when I listen to someone.	09	45%	05	25%	06	30%
6.	I learn better by reading what the teacher writes on the chalkboard.	09	45%	03	15%	08	40%
7.	When I read instructions, I remember them better.	09	45%	03	15%	08	40%
8.	I understand better when I read instructions.	12	60%	02	10%	06	30%
9.	I learn better by reading than by listening to someone.	07	35%	06	30%	07	35%
10.	I learn more by reading textbooks than by listening to lectures.	08	40%	04	20%	08	40%
11.	I prefer to learn by doing something in class.	13	65%	06	30%	01	05%
12.	I enjoy learning in class by doing experiments.	13	65%	05	25%	02	10%
13.	When I do things in class, I learn better.	12	60%	04	20%	04	20%
14.	I understand things better in class when I participate in role playing.	07	35%	03	15%	10	50%
15.	I learn best in class when I can participate in related activities.	13	65%	03	15%	04	20%

Appendix B Quiz

Name..... group ()

Choose the correct word to complete the following sentences:

Blowing – Proper – Duty – Miserable – Inquire.

1. People in Somalia live a..... life.
2. The children need to learn..... behavior.
3. The wind was..... strongly last night.
4. It is the..... of the students to keep their school clean.
5. My uncle always visits the patients to..... about their health.