

Language Learning Style Preferences: KSA ESL Learners

IRIN SULTANA Lecturer,
Department of English Faculty of Sciences and Arts,
King Khalid University, Saudi Arabia

Abstract:

This research intended to investigate the language learning style preferences of KSA ESL learners and the degree to which teachers are aware of them. For this purpose, I took some students from my own College as the subjects of the study. Furthermore, this study also included few teachers who were teaching the subject students. The results showed the learning preferences of students in different areas. The results also indicated that teachers are aware of the learning preferences of their students in several cases, but unaware in several others. Hence, a closer cooperation between teachers and students in some instances is necessary.

Keywords: Communicative language, material design, syllabus planning, individual learning

Introduction

Language learning styles have aroused a great deal of attention. With the advent of the Communicative Language Teaching Approach, the focus of language teaching theories has shifted from the teacher or instructor to the learners. It is beyond any doubt that individual learners adopt different manners or styles for their comprehension, apprehension, and understanding of the language they learn. The different ways of how a learner takes in and processes information are collectively referred to as learning styles or learning preferences (Reid, 1987; Celce – Marcia, 2001; Riazi and Riasati, 2007). Mismatches between the learning preferences of the learners in a given class and the teaching style of the teacher will normally lead the learners to become bored and inattentive in classes, do badly in tests, get discouraged about the course and curriculum, and in some cases change to other curricula drop out of the program.

In the perspective of KSA, most of the teachers are little aware of the ways and media their students prefer to learn the language. Even if some are a bit aware of them, they hardly pay or have little scope to pay little attention to it, which naturally leads to the failure of the instructional program to attain its general as well as specific goals and objectives. Therefore, teachers need to discover their students' preferred ways of learning the language, by which they can make their style of teaching appealing to the students to the optimum level. Alongside the

teachers of a language teaching program, people involved in material designing and syllabus planning can also be substantially helped by such information. That is why; the present researcher thinks that it is very important to find out the language learning styles and preferences of the learners. This researcher also believes that this study can help teachers, in general, and KSA ESL / EFL teachers, in particular, attain more efficiency and success in their professional career.

Literature Review

Categorization of learning styles

Reid (1995) categorizes learning styles into three major types:

- (a) Cognitive learning styles
- (b) Sensory learning styles, and
- (c) Personality learning styles

(a) Cognitive learning styles

Field-independent vs. Field-dependent: Field-independent learners learn more effectively step by step, beginning with analyzing facts and proceeding to ideas. On the other hand, field-dependent learners prefer to learn on context and holistically.

Analytic vs. Global: Analytic learners learn individually, and they prefer to achieve the set goals. Global learners, defiantly, learn more effectively through concrete experience, and by interaction with others.

Reflective vs. Impulsive: Reflective learners learn more effectively if they get some time to consider options before the response is made. Impulsive learners, in contrast, are able to respond immediately, and they take risks.

(b) Sensory learning styles

Sensory learning styles are further divided into two types: perceptual learning styles and environmental learning styles.

Perceptual learning styles

Auditory learner: An auditory learner learns more effectively through the ears (hearing).

Visual learner: A visual learner learns more effectively through the eyes (seeing).

Haptic learner: A haptic learner learns more effectively through touch and body involvement.

Environmental learning styles

Physical vs. Sociological: Physical learners learn more effectively when variables such as temperature, sound, light, food, time and classroom arrangement are considered.

Sociological learners, in contrast, learn more effectively when variables such as group, individual, pair and team work, and level of teacher authority are regarded.

(c) Personality learning styles

Extroversion vs. Introversion: Extroverted learners' interests include concrete experience, contact with outside, and relationship with others. Introverted learners, on the other hand, are more interested in individual, independent situations.

Sensing vs. Perception: Sensing learners learn best from reports of observable facts and happenings, and they rely on their five senses. On the other hand, perception learners learn more effectively from their meaningful experiences and relationships with others.

Thinking vs. Feeling: Thinking learners learn best from impersonal circumstances and logical consequences. On the other hand, feeling learners prefer personalized circumstances and social values.

Communicative learners: these learners learn by watching, and listening to native speakers, talking to friends in English and watching television.

Learners' learning preferences

Researchers have started working on the learning preferences over the past three decades. A number of researchers have taken interest and worked to find out the language learning modalities by the means of self-reporting questionnaires, where students select their preferred learning styles.

Reid (1987), for example, based on the findings of a survey, distinguished four perceptual learning modalities. These perceptual learning modalities include:

1. Visual learning (for example, reading and studying charts)
2. Auditory learning (for example, listening to lectures or audiotapes)
3. Kinesthetic learning (involving physical responses?)
4. Tactile learning (hands-on learning, as in building models)

According to the findings of Reid's study, ESL students strongly prefer Kinesthetic and tactile learning styles. Group learning is marked as a negative preference by most of the learners. Reid comes to the conclusion that ESL students from different language backgrounds sometimes differ from one another in their learning style preferences, and that variables such as sex, field of study, level of education, TOEFL score, and age are related to differences in learning styles.

To sum up, the importance of understanding and exploring each individual's learning style is beyond any question. Exploring and analyzing a learner's individual particular learning style can be very helpful and beneficial to the learner by aiding them in becoming a more focused and attentive learner, which ultimately can argue educational success.

Objectives of the study

The present study intends to investigate the language learning preferences of the Saudi ESL students along with the extent of teachers' awareness of them. To be more specific, the study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the learning style preferences of the Saudi ESL learners?
2. To what extent, if any, are teachers aware of their students' learning preferences?

Method

Participants

The present study was carried out among more than 150 students studying at the graduate level in King Khalid University. The study also incorporated some English teachers teaching these students in the same institutions. All of the teachers have the experience of teaching English in the tertiary level in Saudi Arabia.

Instrument

The instrument used in this study was a 13-item language learning preference questionnaire adopted and adapted from Brindley (1984). The questionnaire had two versions: Version 1 for students and Version 2 for teachers. In the students' version, the students were asked to express how they prefer to learn the language. In the teachers' version, the teachers were asked to provide opinions as to how they feel their students prefer to learn the language.

Data collection and analysis

The questionnaires were administered in one single session for the same students. Students were provided the questionnaires during their class periods. Necessary information for completing the questionnaire was provided in English. Version 2 of the questionnaires was given to the teachers when they were free in their rooms. The data obtained to define the significance of the difference between the responses.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of the responses to some of the items in the questionnaire, which seemed noteworthy. Some of the responses received rendered significant results, while some others did not. This section briefly presents those responses which were statistically significant.

Students were asked to express whether they preferred working individually, in pairs, in small groups, or in a large group. The results are presented below:

Table 1: Learning Mode

Learning Individually	Observed	%
Yes	65	33.20%
No	145	66.80%

Table 1 reveals that 33.20% of the students expressed their preference for working individually. On the other hand, 66.80% of the students preferred other modes of learning the language, such as learning in pairs or in groups.

Hence, conclusion can be made from the results of this item that learners seemed that to be in favour of a communicative approach to language learning by showing reluctance to working on their own. It seemed they felt more comfortable, productive, and relaxed by working in other ways, e.g. in pairs, or in groups where their voices would be heard, and views listened to and valued.

Teachers, in the teachers' version, were asked whether their students liked working individually, in pairs, or in groups. The following table illustrates the results:

Table 2: Teachers' views on the students' learning mode

Learning Individually	Observed	%
Yes	06	75%
No	02	25%

As Table 2 illustrates, 75% teachers were of the opinion that their students liked working individually, while 25% did not hold such a belief. Teachers generally believed that students did not like to have interaction with their classmates and from groups.

Conclusion

The study provides some major implications which can be summarized through the following points:

Regarding studying style, students did not prefer working individually, but teachers were not found to be aware of this fact.

Students did not favour the types of learning activities which emphasize receptive skills, thus only leaving the students passive during the learning program. They did not like to remain passive in the classroom, but wished to participate actively in classroom activities.

Students seemed to be bothered about being corrected immediately in front of everyone. Rather, they thought it better to be corrected later in private and individually.

“Learning about culture” caught the interest of both students and teachers. This fact shows that they were aware of the crucial importance of developing cultural competence in the process of language learning and teaching.

Finally, students got a sense of satisfaction not only by getting high grades, but also by seeing that they were more successful than before in using the language to communicate.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire (Version – 1) : For Students

How do you like learning? Please put a circle in your response.

- | | | |
|--|-----|----|
| 1. Are you satisfied with your achievement in English? | Yes | No |
| 2. In class, do you like learning | | |
| (a) Individually? | Yes | No |
| (b) In pairs? | Yes | No |
| (c) In small groups? | Yes | No |
| (d) In one large group? | Yes | No |
| 3. How would you like to spend this time? | | |
| (a) Preparing yourself for the next class? | Yes | No |
| (b) Reviewing the previous lesson? | Yes | No |
| (c) Others (specify please) | | |
| 4. Do you like learning | | |
| (a) By listening? | Yes | No |
| (b) By reading | Yes | No |
| (c) By copying from the board? | Yes | No |
| (d) By listening and taking notes? | Yes | No |
| (e) By reading and making notes? | Yes | No |
| (f) By making summaries? | Yes | No |
| 5. When learning new vocabulary, do you like learning | | |
| (a) By using new words in a sentence? | Yes | No |
| (b) By saying or writing words several times? | Yes | No |
| (c) By guessing the unknown word? | Yes | No |
| (d) By reading without looking up words? | Yes | No |
| 6. How do you like to find out how much your English is improving? | | |
| (a) By written tasks set by the teacher? | Yes | No |
| (b) By seeing if you can use the language you have learnt in real-life situations? | Yes | No |
| © Others (Specify please) | | |

Prepared by: Ms. Irin Sultana

Questionnaire (Version 2): for the Teacher

How do your students like learning? Please put a circle around your response.

- | | | | |
|--|-----|-----|----|
| 1. Are you satisfied with your students' achievement in English? | | Yes | No |
| 2. In the class, do your students like learning | | | |
| (a) Individually? | | Yes | No |
| (b) In pairs? | | Yes | No |
| (c) In small groups? | | Yes | No |
| (d) In one large group? | | Yes | No |
| 3. Do they like learning | | | |
| (a) By listening? | | Yes | No |
| (b) By reading | | Yes | No |
| (c) By copying from the board? | | Yes | No |
| (d) By listening and taking notes? | | Yes | No |
| (e) By reading and making notes? | | Yes | No |
| (f) By making summaries? | | Yes | No |
| 4. When learning new vocabulary, do they like learning | | | |
| (a) By using new words in a sentence? | | Yes | No |
| (b) By saying or writing words several times? | Yes | | No |
| (c) By guessing the unknown word? | | Yes | No |
| (d) By reading without looking up words? | | Yes | No |
| 5. When they speak, do they want to be corrected | | | |
| (a) Immediately in front of everyone? | | Yes | No |
| (b) Later, at the end of activity? | | Yes | No |
| (c) Later, in personally? | | Yes | No |
| (d) Others (specify please) | | | |
| 6. Do they like learning from | | | |
| (a) Video/ films? | | Yes | No |
| (b) Written/ printed materials? | | Yes | No |
| (c) The blackboard? | Yes | | No |
| (d) Pictures / posters? | | Yes | No |
| 7. How do you think students like to find out how much their English is improving? | | | |
| (c) By written tasks set by the teacher? | | Yes | No |
| (d) By seeing if you can use the language you have learnt in real-life situations? | | | |

Yes

No

© Others (Specify please

8. Do you think students get a sense of satisfaction from

(a) Having their work graded?

Yes

No

(b) Being told that they have made progress?

Yes

No

(c) Feeling more confident in situations that they found difficult before?

Yes

No

(d) Others (specify please

I'm thankful to you for using your valuable moment