

The Importance of Identifying Children's Learning Styles

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ABSTRACT: Identifying learning styles is one of the most important factors to teach a student, as it helps an instructor to find practical methods and materials. Teaching a student without knowing their learning styles can lead many troubles for both sides. For this reason, this article provides the importance of learning styles and some ways to identify them with the help of a research conducted by myself.

KEYWORD: learning styles, visual learner, auditory, kinesthetic.

Introduction

Learning styles are certain approaches consciously or unconsciously chosen by learners during their learning processes or solving problems (Oxford 2001; Reid 1998). Brown (2001) states that learning styles are correlated with personalities, and are stable and anticipated. These styles provide general guidance for learning which can be preferred by some students and disfavored by others. The process of acquiring a second language happens in different formats, some learn fast when they are physically involved, some others like visual input, and so on. Sometimes learners can have more than one learning style in varying degrees that assist them to acquire knowledge better.

I have always been so curious about the styles that learners have, since I, as a student, could feel the divergence between myself and my peers at school. I used to successfully perform any task only if I see or write down, but some of my other group-mates did well by just listening to lectures without taking any notes or others did remember when they do something manually. This was remarkable that we were in the same class and were taught the same subjects, yet we received information in various ways and ranges. Due to having different styles, we sometimes found it hard to cope with some approaches that teachers applied for their lessons and I think this was the reason that they were not quite familiar with our preferred ways of learning.

Because of my interest and experience, I decided to research this topic. I want to know how important to identify learners' styles and some ways of detecting them. Finding out learners' preferable styles aids teachers to choose appropriate methods and techniques for their lessons along with making the learning process easy for students. Besides, teachers can also use or adapt the testing techniques and examples to determine their students' learning styles.

Literature Review:

According to Patrycja Marta Kamińska's book "Learning Styles and Second Language Education", learning variabilities started being investigated at the end of the 19th century when it was noted that

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some people received information verbally, while others perceived it visually (cf. Riding, 2000). Numerous conceptions and models for learning styles have been suggested so far (Patrycja Marta Kamińska, 2014), for instance, Dunn and Grigs (1998) stated that learning styles are attitude, favorites, and guidance they take advantage of during learning processes. At the same time, Felder, Felder, and Dietz (2002, p.3) tie the styles to learners' personalities; as an instance, extraverts prefer work in groups and various activities, while introverts like internal processes. When it comes to the types, Witkin (1973) proposes the other two classifications: field-dependent and field independent styles which are closely correlated with brain dominance. In 1992 Neil D. Fleming and Coleen E. Millis studied 4 different learning styles – visual, auditory, reading/writing, and kinesthetic. However, Willing (1994) classifies four major language learning styles (communicative, analytical, authority-oriented, and concrete) which are derived from learner's strategic choices.

Regardless of different types, one should always bear in mind that those styles have an effect on the educational process and learners' performance (Gordon, 1998) and for this identifying the learning style is essential. There are many practical ways of it, such as observation, questionnaires, tests, etc. Slavin (2000) explains that if you remember given information well by writing and seeing it then you are a visual learner, on the other hand, if it is better to listen to it then you are an auditory one. As said by Rebecca L. Oxford (2003), emphasizing the styles along with strategies benefit to work in a corporation with a given methodology since this harmony leads to efficient performance, confidence, and low anxiety.

Several studies have been conducted on this matter, and one of them is a study carried out in Croatia with a group of elementary students, intended to find out the relation between learning style preference and success in the language learning process. The experimenters concluded that there was a major difference between less and more successful learners in the aspects of perceptual learning styles (visual, auditory, kinesthetic). According to the study students who prefer the auditory style had lower grades (Rajić, Šegedin, & Kalebić, 2011).

To enhance students' performance in class, it is really important to find out their learning styles.

Learner's Profile:

The Participant is a ten-year-old schoolboy Simon Brown (his real name is changed due to the privacy issues) whose native language is Uzbek and he studies in the fifth grade at school. He is monolingual but has been learning English and Russian for a year and now his level at both languages is elementary (A2). His learning process has been going at a good pace even during quarantine in online sessions. When I asked his English teacher about the lessons she said that he is taught in various ways using interactive activities, audio-video materials, etc. Also, she mentioned that regardless of his limited vocabulary and grammar, he confidently expresses his opinions to people. He likes communicating, working with his peers, and asking lots of questions. According to him, although he knows that he is right he always asks his teachers or parents just to make sure. The participant said that he mainly likes the way his teacher explains a topic and listening to songs, watching cartoons or movies.

Research Design:

In this section, I decided to gain data about the participant's own preferable language learning style that improve his learning process. To carry out the study, I sorted out and designed three different methods, such as interviewing, testing. These steps are clarified with some details below:

In the first place, I interview the boy asking about his learning process in general. It includes some questions on how he learns poems or mathematical problems, whether he likes listening to his

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teachers and the people who are explaining certain things or prefers to write down, and some other similar questions. Considering his age, I do my best to be adaptable, friendly and try to make him feel at ease to answer as he wants, also my questions are suitable for him to understand the meaning better or I can repeat several times to make them clear. During the interview, I take some notes and observe him at the same time to see how he perceives the question. This process probably takes 15 minutes.

In the second place, I give him a survey which is taken from 'Learning Style Survey: Assessing Your Own Learning Styles' by Andrew D. Cohen, Rebecca L. Oxford, and Julie C. Chi and it indicates overall learning styles preferences. This survey consists of 11 major activities constituting 12 various aspects of the styles and it generally takes 30 minutes, however, I decided to adapt them to my participant as he is too young to answer all of them. So, I chose part 1 that has 3 mini-parts with 10 items each and reduced the number of questions making it 15 overall. Besides, as most of the questions were not appropriate for him to comprehend, I have changed and rewritten them. For each item the participant gives his response with numbers from 0 to 4 (0 = Never; 1 = Rarely; 2 = Sometimes; 3 = Often; 4 = Always).

In the last step, I give another questionnaire reproduced by O'Brien (1985) which has 3 sections with overall 30 questions and the participant should respond to them with numbers 1 (never applies to me), 2 (sometimes applies to me), and 3 (often applies to me). I redesigned this one, too by changing some forms of questions to simpler ones and minimizing question quantities from 30 to 21.

Data collection:

The data collection started from an interview for the subject as *the first part of the research*. These questions are made up to know his learning style generally and mostly covered all subjects that he learns. I asked him 7 questions related to his teachers, his presence in lessons, favorite activities, and so on.

From the first question, I noticed his inclination for listening as Simon told me that he likes listening to his teachers' lectures and some stories they listen to in English classes more when I asked him what he likes most of his lessons. Additionally, he said that listens to his teachers with full attention and it was clear during our conversation since he was so attentive to me and my questions. When I asked "Do you remember what your teachers say by listening or writing?" he answered, "I always write if my teachers say to write or copy something on the blackboard, but I can remember when I hear". It is clear that he has excellent listening skills, however, he also mentioned that he sometimes wants to move or do something practical. Whereas, he does not like acting very much; for the question, "Are you keen on role-plays? Have you ever played a role?" he answered "Sometimes we make up some stories and play them with my group-mates, but I do not like them so much" So, it can be concluded that he has all three types of styles, but the auditory style outbalances.

The second step includes a survey consisting of overall 15 items in three (A, B, and C) sections and Simon answered the statements by grades 0-4. The questions of the first (A) section were to identify the visual style and in this part, the highest points were given to the statements "When I listen I visualize pictures, numbers, or words in my head" and "I need to look at people to understand them" – 3 points for each. Though he gave 0 to the statement "I need written directions for tasks", and when I asked him its reason, he said that just listening to the directions is enough for him and he does not need any written ones. In the B part which was for the Auditory style the highest point 4 was given to the item "I like listening to lectures more than reading", and it drew my attention. Then I asked him whether he truly understand it because not many people consider that lectures are boring, but he said that he enjoys listening to his teachers' explanations. In Accordance with the results, he finds it a little hard to understand jokes immediately and his ability to remember discussions is also average. The

last Kinesthetic style part is the one with the lowest points. The highest point that was given in this part's statements is only 2 for items, such as movements while speaking, drawing into books, etc. He does not seem to mind long sessions without frequent breaks.

Overall, he had 10 points in the A (Visual) section, 14 points in the B (Auditory) section, and 7 points in the last (Kinesthetic) section. From this result, it is obvious that the quantity of the points in the Auditory section is more than both the Visual and the Kinesthetic sections, so this means that Simon is more an Auditory learner. However, one can say that the differences in the number of points are not at a large extent and this inclines that he is not solely an auditory style learner, but he has all styles with distinctive amounts.

The last observation involves a questionnaire with 21 statements. The results of the questionnaire are obtained by the overall points of the answers. When I received the results I ensured that Simon is an Auditory learner with Visual and Kinesthetic styles to some extent. The reason for me being so certain is that it was 19 scores for Auditory style, 13 scores for Visual style, and 13 scores for Kinesthetic style. There are statements for the Visual style in section one and it is detected that he is more inclined to picture information in his mind to remember well. Furthermore, he mostly looks at the speaker to stay focused, however, he has a very little problem with background noise or music. When it comes to the second section (the Auditory style) Simon firmly stayed in his preference that he expressed in the previous 2 observations. He said to me that he does not like writing and he easily gets tired when he writes, but he does not find it hard to read other's handwriting. In the part of the Kinesthetic style, he put the highest score to the statement "I think better if I have the freedom to move around" and this amazed me a little because he said earlier that he does not have to move a lot. So, I asked him to clarify this and he said that it happens frequently depending on the situation and the subject.

All in all, three of the observations imply the same result. He is mostly an Auditory style learner but has also the Visual and Kinesthetic styles preferences with little fewer portions.

Conclusion:

Having looked at the entire data conscientiously, one can infer that it is possible to have more than one preferred learning style of a student and it is hard to categorize them in one style. Hence teachers or instructors need to vary activities and techniques in their classes. Considering all, every learner may have the opportunity to succeed in studies if their preferred styles are catered for. This is an acknowledgment of believing that there is no best way of learning, but instead, there are many possible ways to learn. Gorgon (1998) was right when he stated that those styles have an effect on both the educational process and learners' performance.

Teachers can use many ways of determining their students' learning styles, such as with the help of questionnaires, surveys, quizzes, observing, interviewing, and others. Moreover, Dunn and Dunks' (1978/1992) suggest that the determination can be based on 21 elements which are structured into five – environmental, emotional, sociological, physical, and psychological stimuli groups. Because these groups highly affect to the learning process.

I have chosen the topic to find out whether knowing my students' learning styles helps me to improve my own teaching process and my learners' performance in L2 learning. These findings suggest that it is indeed beneficial and crucial not only for me and my learners, but other teachers and students too, even they work or study in different fields. It was a little surprising for me that people can have all of the styles at once and they can be changed as time goes, instead of being only one and stable.

However, I believe that it will not complicate the situation, but it helps teachers to be able to use a wide range of activities and other techniques in all styles for their classes.

Further implications: While working on this topic, I found out that there, not much pieces of research related to it. I consider that linguists, researchers should pay more attention to this issue in order to assist teachers to make their lessons productive and students to success in learning. Additionally, instructors should also observe learners and identify their preferences during class, and imply various effective methods to them.

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