

## LEARNING STYLE AS A TEFL TOOL

*The article increases faculty awareness and understanding of the effect of learning styles in the teaching process. The research focuses on the analysis of learning styles and the importance for teachers to know students preferred learning styles of acquiring the English language. Practitioners can incorporate these learning styles in their curriculum activities for successful teaching.*

**Key words:** *learning styles, visual learners, auditory learners, kinesthetic learners, theory of multiple intelligence.*

### Introduction

Researchers (R. Felder, D. Kolb, H. Gerdner, A. Fleming) have involved several instruments to assess students' learning styles and developed an instrument to measure learning styles that related to environment, emotion, and sociology, especially in the XX century.

During the 1970s, several other researchers also developed instruments and techniques to assess learners' learning styles. As a result, they share the goal of identifying the nature of human differences in learning and improving the effectiveness of learning by providing criteria for individualizing instruction.

Learning styles have been extensively discussed in the educational psychology literature and specifically in the context of language learning [1].

From the 1980s to the present day, different learning-style models have been developed on the basis of researchers. In 1984, David Kolb published his learning-style model, where he determined learning styles to be closely related to cognitive skills. In the '90s, the emphasis was placed on having teachers address learning styles in the classroom through adjustments in curriculum that incorporate each style, giving an equal chance for students to learn [4].

According to David Kolb, the learning cycle consists of four stages: experiencing, reflecting, thinking and acting. The learner experiences the material, reflects on its outcome, thinks about or assimilates the information and finally acts on the information. Acting can lead to experiencing, which starts the cycle over. Kolb designated each level with a unique name: diverger, assimilator, converger and accommodator [5]. Further, the researcher combined all level only in three types of learners: visual, auditory and kinesthetic [4].

Pedagogy, which refers to the method of teaching according to learning styles, has been used to train teachers to accommodate different learning styles in the classroom. Since teachers are accustomed to teaching in their individual style, the move has been to introduce other styles into the classroom [4].

American scientist Donna Dunning, learning style is a term used to portray individual differences in the

way that people prefer to learn. Learning styles are typically patterns individuals used to process information or approach learning situations [9].

Craig L. Frisby, American psychologist, accented that «learning style» can be thought of as habitual patterns in how a person learns or in how a person prefers to learn. The manner in which people think, learn, and process information is often influenced by their attitudes, feelings, and preferences. Furthermore, the nature of this influence differs from person to person [9].

In addition, learning style research has examined the effects of adapted teaching to students' learning styles. It has shown that matching learning styles has a positive impact on learners' achievements, interests, and motivation [6]. The results of several investigations of learning styles indicate that learners' performances can be enhanced by adapting the educational methods to individual differences in learning styles.

As a result, they argued that identifying a student's learning style and providing appropriate instruction contribute to more effective learning.

In order to identify the learning styles of the students in the classroom, many scientists base their researches on the Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences<sup>1</sup>. Students are all individuals and of course, are most effective when they are taught in their personal learning style [2].

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<sup>1</sup> Multiple Intelligence Theory was developed in 1983 by Dr. Howard Gardner, professor of education at Harvard University. It suggests that traditional ways of testing for intelligence may be biased to certain types of individuals. According to Howard Gardner, human beings have nine different kinds of intelligence that reflect different ways of interacting with the world. Each person has a unique combination, or profile. According to this theory, «we are all able to know the world through language, logical-mathematical analysis, spatial representation, musical thinking, the use of the body to solve problems or to make things, an understanding of other individuals, and an understanding of ourselves. Where individuals differ is in the strength of these intelligences – the so-called profile of intelligences -and in the ways in which such intelligences are invoked and combined to carry out different tasks, solve diverse problems, and progress in various domains.»

A widely-used model of learning style is Fleming's (2001) Visual Auditory Kinesthetic (VAK) model. According to this model, most students possess a dominant or preferred learning style; however some

of them have a mixed and evenly balanced blend of the three styles: visual learners, auditory learners, kinaesthetic learners (s. Tab. 1. below):

Table 1

Visual Auditory Kinesthetic Model

Learning Style	Characteristics	Strategies
Visual Learners (see)	Process new information best when it is visually illustrated or demonstrated	Images, demonstrations, viewing, activities
Auditory learners (hear)	Process new information best when it is spoken	Lectures (information sessions), discussions, meetings
Kinesthetic Learners (touch)	Process new information best when it can be touched or manipulated	Emails, Taking notes, participation in activities or demonstrations, memos

According to VAK model, visual learners tend to: learn through seeing; think in pictures and need to create vivid mental images to retain information; enjoy looking at maps, charts, pictures, videos, and movies; have visual skills which are demonstrated in puzzle building, reading, writing, understanding charts and graphs, a good sense of direction, sketching, painting, creating visual metaphors and analogies (perhaps through the visual arts), manipulating images, constructing, fixing, designing practical objects, and interpreting visual images [9].

Auditory learners tend to: learn through listening; have highly developed auditory skills and are generally good at speaking and presenting; think in words rather than pictures; learn best through verbal lectures, discussions, talking things through and listening to what others have to say; have auditory skills demonstrated in listening, speaking, writing, storytelling, explaining, teaching, using humour, understanding the syntax and meaning of words, remembering information, arguing their point of view [5], and analysing language usage.

Kinaesthetic learners tend to: learn through moving, doing and touching; express themselves through movement; have good sense of balance and eye-hand coordination; remember and process information through interacting with the space around them; have skills demonstrated in physical coordination, athletic ability, hands on experimentation [7], using body language, crafts, acting, miming, using their hands to create or build, dancing, and expressing emotions through the body.

There are some techniques that can be used to help students develop, explore, and enhance their learning strengths. The more a student can learn through a combination of all the modalities – visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic –, the more embedded the learning will be.

Encourage visual learners to: use graphics to reinforce learning; colour code to organise notes and possessions; use colour to highlight important points in text; illustrate ideas as a picture before writing them down; ask for written directions; use flow charts and

diagrams for note taking; visualise spelling of words or facts to be memorised [7].

Encourage auditory learners to: recite information to learn; use tunes or rhymes as mnemonic devices; read aloud and tape test questions or directions; use verbal analogies and storytelling to demonstrate their point [9].

Encourage kinaesthetic learners to: make models or role play to physically experience learning; skim through reading material before reading it in detail; annotate text and write questions while reading; translate information into diagrams or other visual study tools; listen to music while studying [5].

Students take in and process information in different ways. A learning style is the method a person uses to learn. Learning style<sup>2</sup> is sometimes defined as the characteristic cognitive, affective, social, and physiological behaviors that serve as relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment [3].

By knowing a student's learning style, a teacher can use teaching methods that maximize their learning. Learners can use recognition of their individual learning styles to find what study methods, environment, and activities help them learn best. Understanding learning styles is the best way for teachers to present educational materials in ways that best benefit their learners [8]. While most students display characteristics of more than one learning style, most have a dominant style. Therefore, one set of

<sup>2</sup> Learning style can also be described as a set of factors, behaviors, and attitudes that facilitate learning for an individual in a given situation.

Learning style can be considered a «contextual» variable or construct because what the learner brings to the learning experience is as much a part of the context as are the important features of the experience itself.

Keefe (1979) defines learning styles as the «composite of characteristic cognitive, affective, and physiological factors that serve as relatively stable indicators of how a learner perceives, interacts with, and responds to the learning environment.» Stewart and Felicetti (1992) define learning styles as those «educational conditions under which a student is most likely to learn».

teaching materials may not be effective for all types of learners. This may explain why some students seem to process information easier than others do. Learning styles have been studied for decades and there are several models that have been proposed by various researchers [6].

In fact, there are three major types of learners: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic.

#### **Audio Learning Style (Auditory Learners)**

Auditory learners prefer to listen. They often have a finely tuned ear and remember what they have heard – they tend to have a wide vocabulary and are usually good speakers who enjoy group discussions. They learn by listening and speaking. These students enjoy talking and interviewing [8]. They learn best by hearing and repeating sentences and words. They are phonetic readers who enjoy oral reading. The use of sound files enhances audio learning. Therefore, the invention of audio books has improved learning strategies for auditory learners. Asking questions in class and reading aloud are ways of enhancing their learning.

#### **Visual Learning Style (Visual Learners)**

Visual learners like pictures, diagrams, images and colour coding. They'll notice their environment and rely on visual memory, picturing where things belong, learning words by visualising their shape, for example: «a cat», «a dog». Visual learners learn by visually examining things [7]. A visual learner will often say, «I see» to show that she/he understands a concept, and it is likely that she/he sees it as a picture in her/his mind. Visual learners depend on the instructor's or facilitator's non-verbal signs such as body language to help with understanding [4].

Enhancement of their learning benefits from taking notes, designing diagrams and drawing pictures to represent concepts.

#### **Kinesthetic Learning Style (Kinesthetic Learners)**

Kinesthetic learners also learn by touching or manipulating objects. Kinesthetic learners need to touch and manually work with objects because they learn best by doing things. They are tactile. They express themselves through movement. They use large hand gestures when talking and use body language to communicate. They need to actively explore the physical world around them [1].

Incorporating activity into studying and learning enhances kinesthetic learning. Therefore, in a classroom setting, kinesthetic learners can take notes, ask questions and use role-play to improve their learning.

#### **Discussion**

It is very important to present a technique that can be extremely useful in helping to teach English with using learning styles.

Firstly, to draw a picture or diagram and divide words into groups. For example, you can draw a body and write the parts of the body, or draw a flat and write the names of the rooms. This technique works perfectly for visuals, as drawing the pictures stimulates the creative thinking what leads to easier memorisation [4].

It is important to draw pictures and words not only on the paper but in the air with hands.

Secondly, to write words on sticky notes with translations, synonyms and examples. Then stick them in places where your learners spend the most time [6]. Encourage students to take a look and revise the words every time they are near. This is another good technique for the visuals.

Thirdly, to create word associations. Encourage learners to make their own word associations. The teacher can give some hints, however the students should create their own. The point is that the word will be memorised and in years they will remember it. This technique is as appropriate for visuals as it is for auditory and kinaesthetics, as visuals will draw a picture in their minds, the auditory will memorise using sound association, but the kinesthetic will feel it emotionally.

Fourthly, to read books. Get the students to read books and write down new words, learning them in the context of the book [8]. The visuals will be able to remember not only the word but even the page where this word was printed.

Further, to listen to audio. For more experienced learners, it may be useful to listen to audio and focus on new words [3]. This technique is most useful for auditory learners.

In addition, to work with a dictionary. One of the best techniques to expand vocabulary is to write down compound nouns from the dictionaries, consisting of two nouns: snowman (snow and man). This technique could be useful for visual and kinaesthetic learners [6].

And one more, to use games. Get students to play game with words and they learn them in playing. This technique is useful not only for kinaesthetics, but also for auditory learners (they can hear the words).

So, teachers need to assess and understand how to reach all students by understanding how to present information for students with different learning styles. As a result, if practitioners are aware of learners' learning styles and can assist them in determining their preferences.

#### **Conclusion**

Certainly, understanding learning styles may become important as classroom increase of good results in teaching English. Styles influence how students learn, how teachers teach, and how the two interact. Each person is born with certain tendencies toward particular styles, but these biological or inherited characteristics are influenced by culture, personal experiences, maturity level, and development. Style can be considered a «contextual» variable or construct because what the learner brings to the learning experience is as much a part of the context as are the important features of the experience itself.

Teachers can incorporate learning styles into their classroom by identifying the learning styles of each of their students and learning styles strategies for them. Therefore, using learning styles gives an opportunity to involve all class in learning English. To make English learning successful, educators must understand and respect individuals' diverse learning styles and

make efforts to create optimal learning environments for learners. The teacher is expected to bring strategies of learning styles to the attention of learners regardless of the subject matter. This includes encouraging students who already exhibit use of these strategies so that others might «notice» and imitate them.

As a result, teachers should plan lessons to match students' learning styles while at the same time encouraging students to diversify their learning style preferences. However, it is important to remember that all existing learning style, teachers need to deepen and maximize the potential of their using during the lesson.

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*Стаття підвищує обізнаність викладачів та розуміння значення навчальних стилів у процесі викладання. Дослідження аналізує стилі навчання та декларує важливість визначення провідних стилів навчання учнів у процесі оволодіння англійською мовою. Практики можуть включити ці стилі навчання в навчальну роботу для успішного викладання.*

**Ключові слова:** стилі навчання, візуали, аудіали, кінестетики, теорія множинного інтелекту.

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*Статья увеличивает осведомленность преподавателей и понимание значения стилей обучения в процессе преподавания. Исследование анализирует стили обучения и деларирует важность определения ведущего стиля обучения для преподавания английского языка. Практики могут включить эти стили обучения в их учебную деятельность для успешного преподавания.*

**Ключевые слова:** стили обучения, визуалы, аудиалы, кинестетики, теория множественного интеллекта.

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Дата надходження статті до редколегії 25.10.2014 р.