
THE IMPLICATIONS OF LEARNING STYLE ON THE DESIGN OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING MATERIALS IN THE TERTIARY LEVEL

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ABSTRACT

One of the important concerns of teachers and instructional developers or designers should be the students' style of learning, as research found that the quality of a learning material is enhanced if it is designed taking into account learners' individual learning styles. Thus, this paper aimed to explore the different learning styles and strategies of students, and how these can be accommodated in the design and development of instructional and learning materials in English Language Teaching (ELT) or English as a Second Language (ESL). In the study, there were 128 respondents who were freshman college students taking English 16.1, a basic English course offered in Xavier University, a reputable university in Northern Mindanao, Philippines in which the study was conducted. The method used in the study was a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods done through a survey questionnaire. The instrument utilized in the study is called, The Learning Style Survey designed by Cohen, Oxford and Chi published by the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition at the University of Minnesota. Results and findings revealed that the Visual Learners dominate the freshman college students who have preference for seen or observed objects including pictures, diagrams, paradigms, demonstrations, displays, handouts, films, and flip-charts, and can work well from checklists, written directions/instructions, scripts and texts. Therefore, the most effective and appropriate materials for these types of learner are maps, flow charts and webs. The use of highlights, color codes, book/marginal notes are effective strategies. Moreover, being in the era where the hype of technology is observable, students are comfortable in studying with visual contextual information not just by seeing or reading the material but also seeing materials that are animated or moving. The use of technological materials for studying helps students in their creativity in the use of different gadgets and applications in many ways.

KEYWORDS: Implications, Learning Styles, Instructional Materials, Visual Learners, Instructional Designers/Developers

INTRODUCTION

The effect of individual differences on the efficacy of learning has been an enduring question for

educational research. Aspects of individual differences relate to differences in learning styles, strategies and notions of learning. As such, these differences pose a profound challenge for instructional materials designers and developers, as research found that the quality of a learning material is enhanced if it is designed taking into account learners' individual learning styles (Rasmussen, 1998; Riding & Grimley, 1999, as cited by McLoughlin, 1999).

In the context of this research, learning style is taken to mean, a habitual or consistent mode of acquiring or imparting knowledge through study, direct or vicarious experience and instruction. On the other hand, learning strategies are taken to refer to "specific actions, behaviors, steps or techniques used by students to perform or tackle particular language tasks and enhance their own learning". Thus, the purpose and significance of this study is to propose ways by which individual differences may be considered or taken into account and accommodated when designing instructional learning materials (IM's) for students or second and foreign language learners. Further, it is advocated that instructional materials designers and developers may turn to researches on learning styles in order to come up with adaptive instructional and learning materials in English Language Teaching (ELT) or English as a Second Language (ESL).

In open, communicative and flexible learning contexts, instructional materials (IM) ideally have the capacity to cater to individual needs while making collaborative forms of learning possible. Moreover, ideally the way teachers teach should match the way students learn. One of the important concerns of teachers and materials developers should be the students' style of learning. Educators and materials developers or designers must work hand in hand in adapting their teaching styles and instructional materials to suit the learning styles of students. In short, they do materials adaptation in order to cater to students' learning preferences. In fact, Pask (1988) examined students' distinctive learning strategies and found that students learned more effectively if material was provided in their preferred style. It was then backed up by a study done by Dunn & Dunn (1978) which revealed that when instruction is tailored toward their learning styles, students learn more easily. At the outset, when materials designers design materials for a given group of learners, they must carry out needs analysis or profile of the learners in order to assess their prior knowledge, backgrounds, motives, interests, experiences, attitudes and personality. The reason for such investigation is that individual dispositions may somehow affect or influence the readiness of learners to gain from instruction, and eventually influence academic achievement and progress (McLoughlin, 1999) Instructional materials then, must acknowledge individual differences in terms of learning styles, strategies and preferences, and adapt instruction to the individual learners' needs. Information gained from such needs analyses will make the design of instructional/ learning materials tailored or customized closely to the learners' needs and learning preference.

The reality in many institutional and academic contexts is that the pressure of student numbers, class sizes, scarcity of resources, and lack of time brought about by overwhelming work loads, limit the opportunity of gaining information on learner needs through conducting needs analyses. Hence, instructional materials remain fixed, too generic, unvaried and static, and perhaps adaptive to individual needs in very limited ways.

In this light, the researcher sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the different learning styles and strategies? How can these be best accommodated in the design and development of materials?
2. What are the most common learning styles or preferences among freshman college students taking English 16.1?
3. What instructional materials in ELT can be created or designed in order to suit the learning styles or preferences of these students?

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Research Setting and Respondents

The study was conducted in Xavier University- Ateneo de Cagayan. The subjects of the study were Freshman College students enrolled in English 16.1 with the course title of Study, Thinking and Language Skills in English. English 16.1 is the first basic English course taken by the freshmen who passed the English Placement Test (EPT) conducted by the English Department upon their enrolment in the university. This course is required by CHED as a prerequisite for the other higher English courses. The participants of the survey were English 16.1 students of Xavier University in the 2nd semester of the AY 2015-2016. There were a total of 128 participants which was 10% of the entire population of the English 16.1 students in the second semester.

Research Design

The researcher used the combination of quantitative and qualitative method as the scores and other relevant data and information gathered through survey questionnaires were tallied and interpreted according to the guidelines set in the research instrument. A purposive, random sampling was also done in the actual conduct of the study while assuring that the process will be bias-free and reliable. The study was considered as a practical action research since it aimed to create an action towards a probable problem.

Research Instrument

The data was collected through a survey. The survey questionnaire, particularly named as The Learning Style Survey, was made by Andrew D. Cohen, Rebecca L. Oxford, and Julie C. Chi for the Maximizing Study Abroad series, published by the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition at the

University of Minnesota. The questionnaire consists of 11 parts representing 12 different aspects of learning styles namely: Visual, Auditory, Tactile/Kinesthetic, Global, Particular, Field-Independent, Field-Dependent, Extroverted, Introverted, Synthesizing, Analytic, Impulsive, Reflective, Random-Intuitive, Concrete-Sequential, Sharpener, Leveler, Metaphoric, Literal, Closure-Oriented, Open, Deductive and lastly, Inductive. Furthermore, the survey may have lasted for 30 minutes since the total number of items in the questionnaire is 109.

Data Gathering Procedure and Analysis

Upon getting permission from the concerned English 16.1 faculty, a cover letter was attached to the survey questionnaires asking for the students’ informed consent to participate in a survey of learning styles while taking advantage from becoming aware of their learning styles and helping them recognize their strengths. The researcher then informed and coordinated with the faculty who were handling English 16.1, and then scheduled the survey in the different classes. The faculty was encouraged to choose the most convenient time for his/her students to answer the survey questionnaires. The completed surveys were then collected, and turned over to the researcher. Scores and other relevant data obtained from the responses of the students were tallied and analyzed to determine the final results and interpretation. The most appropriate instructional materials were then matched with the most common learning style discovered as the result of the analysis and interpretation in the study.

Summary of Results and Findings

Aspects	Characteristics	Results	Percentage
Part 1: Usage of Physical Senses	Visual	88	69%
	Auditory	26	20%
	Tactile/ Kinesthetic	14	11%
Part 2: Exposure to learning situations	Extroverted	50	39%
	Introverted	57	45%
Part 3: Handling Possibilities	Random-Intuitive	63	49%
	Concrete-Sequential	50	39%
Part 4: Dealing with ambiguity and deadlines.	Closure-Oriented	70	55%
	Open	38	30%
Part 5: Receiving information	Global	63	49%
	Particular	54	42%
Part 6: Processing of Information	Synthesizing	71	55%
	Analytic	42	33%
Part 7: Committing material to memory	Sharpener	50	39%
	Leveler	48	38%

Part 8: Dealing with language rules	Deductive	68	53%
	Inductive	32	25%
Part 9: Dealing with multiple inputs	Field-Independent	45	35%
	Field-Dependent	51	40%
Part 10: Dealing with response time	Impulsive	44	34%
	Reflective	58	45%
Part 11: Take on reality	Metaphoric	45	35%
	Literal	46	36%

DISCUSSION

In the survey conducted, the data gathered revealed that there were 88 participants out of the total number of 128 participants which fell under the visual learner category. The visual learners’ population of the entire survey participants took the 69% of the total number, alongside are the auditory and tactile learners that took 20% and 11% of the entire English 16 students population, respectively. The majority preferred physical sense in terms of learning style is through visual means such as books, videos, charts, pictures, graphs and the like. This explicitly reveals about how the educational system of the country followed and kept up with the trend in the world. Ilagan (2012) of De La Salle Zobel stated that, “De La Salle Santiago Zobel implemented the PEARL program to allow students to bring and use iPads in school for educational purposes. The iPads will be replacing the textbooks as students will be using e-books instead...teachers said that the iPads would allow students to be more interested and involved in what they are learning in school.” And through this gadget, it clearly means that most of the students preferred learning in visual manipulation such as through the easy access in the internet by reading articles, or e-books readily available in the gadget or the easy manipulation and transition of watching videos to make class lessons easier. Supporting the claim of the researchers from De La Salle - Zobel, this type of learning style is also applicable to most of the students in Xavier University.

Congruently, it also developed the intro-personality of a student to work in an individualistic way or learning class works independently. As class sessions would integrate social importance such as working cohesively in activities or even more than that; participants still preferred to work individually. This also says how they were used in most classroom activities which require working on their own and conceptualizing answers in a manner that constitutes within themselves. In the results of the survey on the English 16 Students of Xavier University, 57 participants, or roughly 45% of the total number of partakers are introverted, where they prefer the learning in inwards direction. In the survey done, 21 of the participants were counted out of the results because result was equal. Students have the privilege to work in taking risks amidst all pressure. This has been consequently proven for students are well-informed that the classroom is where they have the opportunity to make and correct mistakes. It clearly says about how the participants handle possibilities out of intuition in which they can find comfort and

way in making solutions and taking risks in their subjects. In the survey, 49% of 128 participants, roughly 63 of them preferred random-intuitive handling of possibilities.

According to Tervooren (2016) a study done at MIT shows even top performing students struggle with deadlines. This study clearly amplifies the participant's learning style which constitutes that the majority work faster, more efficiently, having greater results if they work under pressure-having a deadline. It is even through narratives that this kind of system, having a strict imposition between teacher and student relationship in terms of activities makes a student work faster. This time and pressure bounded kind of system has been evident up until the present. In equivalence to the report of the survey, the students of English 16 of Xavier University are also closure-oriented learners when dealing with ambiguity and deadlines. Hence, work is faster if a deadline is set.

On the other hand, there is a thin margin between the participant's preference in working a global preference and a particular preference. Global preference means directly getting the gist of the idea without working in particular to learn directly the unified whole. This is clearly why students prefer to understand through summaries which are still prevalent in text books or works in outline. In the survey, the students are also inclined to the global preference in obtaining ideas. This, basically, is in line with the efficiency of learning in a more simplified way and understanding in a creative way. Most likely, these participants prefer to work on outlines and graphs which clearly give them the distinct gist of a particular subject to easily conceptualize and understand the main idea.

Moreover, the participants have a very keen observation in terms of error or in retrieving memory they never know it existed. There is a trend wherein people are fighting against people who are "Grammar Nazis" These are people who shame other people for speaking or writing the wrong grammar or wrong pronunciation. This trend has been completely going on for there are a lot of Grammar Nazis evolving in the sphere. This clearly means that people are more aware when other people commit such mistake for it trickles down a piece of their memory which has been clearly taught by them. Thus, the learning style of these participants is to tickle their memory through the smallest things that can make them remember important points which they can use in their varied fields. For the part 7 of the survey, 39% of the participants are similar to these Grammar Nazis mentioned. They are the sharpener learners versus the levelers.

In general people will most likely prefer learning generalizations such as abstract values by applying it to real life. This is a complete manifestation of a deductive learners who apply theories out of little things that are evident in real life in day to day experiences., such as remembering these language rules in times when they used them erroneously in activities or in casual conversation or through a higher speech variety. In the survey, 53% of the participants are dealing with language rules in a deductive

manner. Thus, through these kinds of varieties it makes students more conscious of the language rules that they will apply in their everyday life.

The participants preferred to use multiple inputs through specific basis which makes them excel more in handling these inputs to make sure that these inputs are well-understood and responded. They think that the best way to handle varied inputs is to holistically understand them in a way that they can apply it to their day to day life. In the survey, 40% of the participants are field-dependent when dealing with multiple inputs. The environment matters in dealing multiple inputs. Thus, they embrace every particular of it, working without distractions. In contradiction from these participants take in a stance in taking risks in their activities and works well under pressure through deadlines and such, these participants, conversely, also reflects more before taking an action. Most of them agreed that before taking a stance in terms of learning, they need to understand the particular holistically to be able to know the consequences and how they will apply it on their studies. 45% of the participants are reflective in terms of dealing with response time. Thus, they need to take time in thinking things through before taking action. They need understand it, and reflect upon it, when they make decisions that may cause significant changes.

Lastly, these participants enjoy a way of learning that understands points literally. It means that they want to go direct to the point or the gist of every topic. These learners prefer a relatively literal representation of concepts and like to work with language material more or less as it is seen on the surface. In the survey, thirty-six per cent (36%) of the participants were known to be literal learners compared to only 35% who are metaphoric learners.

A similar research was done by the Primary Schools of Winneba. Purposive sampling was also used to select 80 respondents comprising 60 Environmental Studies teachers and 20 pupils drawn from six public schools in Winneba. The main instruments used for their data collection were questionnaire and an observational guide. The same is true with the students of English 16.1 of Xavier University who prefer visual instructional materials for learning, such as, chalkboards and textbooks where the materials are palpable. Due to the change of time, new addition to the types of visual materials were made such as iPads and other gadgets that are used with the help of technology.

These are basically the participant's preferred learning style which makes them understand lessons and points clearly to them through narratives of how they really used in understanding things and also how they keep up with the trend in the world. Thus, it is best to make students as a whole involve in a more advanced way of learning, applying different learning styles that will help them choose a way they can conform to.

CONCLUSION

Based on the data gathered, it is concluded that Visual Learners dominate the English 16.1 population of the freshman students in the second semester of the Academic Year 2015-2016. They are also more of Introverted rather than Extroverted learners. Nevertheless, it is a fact that every student has a way in which s/he best learns. Therefore, every student in a classroom has a different preferred learning style which can make it difficult for every teacher to be the most effective one. However, by trying to incorporate various methods into one's teaching, s/he may be able to reach the majority of his/her students. At the college level, students are expected to have an idea of how to adapt to most teachers, although it may not hurt to help them out a little by adapting ways in which the learning styles can be accommodated.

A learner with Visual learning style has preference for seen or observed objects including pictures, diagrams, paradigms, demonstrations, displays, handouts, films, flip-charts. S/he is the type of learner who can be best able to perform a task after reading instructions or watching someone else do it first. Moreover, this type of learner can work well from checklists, written directions/instructions, scripts and texts. Therefore, the most effective and appropriate Instructional Materials (IM) according to the Tips for Educators provided by the UMass, are maps, flow charts, webs in order to organize materials. The use of highlights, color codes and book notes or marginal notes are effective strategies. Effective activities include having students pick out ideas in their own writing and highlighting them in different colors to clearly reveal organizational patterns. Other helpful appropriate activities are writing out checklists of needed formulas, commonly misspelled words and the like. Writing flash cards, as well as drawing pictures or cartoon concepts, and slips of paper that move around in proper sequence are also very appropriate activities for these types of learners.

Finally, the use of new technological gadgets that will be the main device for learning and also the use of the traditional chalkboard and textbook cannot be underestimated. Also to keep in mind that technology means many things. It is not just computers. It means all the tools and resources we use in education. Being in the era where the hype of technology is observable, the students are more comfortable in studying with visual contextual information, not just by seeing or reading the material but also those materials that are animated and moving. The use of technological materials for studying is helping students in their creativity in the use of different gadgets and applications in many ways.

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