Learning Styles: Preferred Learning Choices and Behaviors of Saudi Male and Female EFL Learners

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Abstract

Learning styles are the differences in personal characteristics, strengths and preferences, describing how individuals acquire, process and store information. Learners approach information differently from each other due to their different instincts and natural dispositions. In the pretext of learning styles what is being taught has least importance than how's being taught as in current scenario, teachers adapt their teaching techniques according to the learners preferred learning styles. Based on the review of previous context(s), the present study aims at investigating the learning style preferences of 200 Saudi male and female EFL learners at Taif University. For this purpose, a questionnaire was developed with closed ended questions by employing Likert's five point scale to collect the data from 100 male and 100 female Saudi EFL learners that represents quantitative dimension of the work. The study probed into how different learners took in information by using their senses, intellect, force and physical movements. Furthermore, the research investigated what special measures teachers should take during teaching to develop the learners' awareness about their dominant learning styles coupled with designing the strategies to promote learning according to their unique dispositions. The findings manifest significant differences in the learning style of Taif University's male and female EFL learners because of the learners' physical and biological

differences as well as their diverse social and cultural norms.

Keywords: choices and behaviors, English language learners, learning styles

Introduction

Learning styles have been defined in several ways by many scholars. Learning aptitudes or styles are learner's unique way of grasping, processing and internalizing academic information. Kinsella (1995) opines, "an individual's natural, habitual, and preferred way of absorbing, processing, and retaining new information and skills" (p. 171). These styles are part of the individual's inherent features or traits instead of the subject being studied or the skills being taught. Christison (2003) characterized numerous styles and Pojouh (2014) identified differences between cognitive, sensory and personality styles.

Since the focus has been shifted from traditional teacher centered to learner centered approaches, it is observed that researchers and methodologists paid attention in developing teaching styles and strategies corresponding to the dominant learning styles of the learners. Nunan (1988 & 1995) is of the view that such modifications in teaching styles help students become more effective and dynamic learners as well as form the basis for developing learner centered approaches. It is a matter of fact that learners who know about their learning styles make learning happen and can better exploit learning opportunities in the classroom. Similarly, such students can have the ability to practice language in social contexts.

The aim to achieve highest learning score is crucially important in any academic institution and consequently understanding the way learning can be facilitated more effectively is the key to educational improvement. It is the need of the time to develop compatibility between teachers' and students' ability to understand each other's aptitudes and styles. It may not only develop strong connection between them, but also optimize academic outcomes at any given educational institution. Presently, one of the serious challenges in teaching is faced by the teachers and pedagogues used to address the requirements of diverse learning styles. It is assumed that efforts to accommodate heterogeneous learning styles may ultimately enhance learners' curiosity, their creativity and academic results. In this paper the researchers discuss learning style preferences of the EFL learners in the

light of analysis and findings derived from the data collected from the population of Taif University.

Literature Review

Many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners feel frustrated in the classroom because the teaching styles of their teachers do not appeal to them. Such learning situation ultimately undermines learners' motivation along with diminishing their learning potential (Miller, 2001; Sitt-Gohdes, 2003). The same kind of attestations has been recorded in the universities of Saudi Arabia where the teachers are greatly embarrassed due to the inattentive and careless attitude of learners in the classroom. The educational process can be optimized by both the learners and the pedagogues when the teachers evaluate their own teaching techniques and find effective ways to address learner differences and their varied needs (Fairhurst & Fairhurst, 1995).

One of the most significant findings in education on learning styles manifests that the students in language classrooms possess different profiles. Reid (1999) mentions some of the aspects in language learning, as for instance; perceptual learning styles, multiple intelligences, analytical, reflective and field dependent and independent learning styles, which later have been investigated in numerous studies. This results in increased interest and motivation in the learning process, positive student responsibility for their own learning, and greater classroom community. These are affective changes, and the changes have resulted in more effective learning. Dunn, Beaudry and Klavas (1989) came to the findings in their studies that both low and average achievers could score high if they were given instructions according to their preferred learning choices. Chuah Chong-Cheng (1988) explain not only the importance of learners' awareness of their learning styles, but also its exploitation by the teachers at academic settings.

The research of Dunn and Dunn (1978) shows that 20-30% of school age children discover to be auditory learners, 40% prefer to learn through visual sense and 30-40% are tactile/kinaesthetic or visual/tactile learners. The work of other scholars presents hierarchy of modalities according to their preference by the learners. It reinforces that (30%) school children are visual learners or mixed learners (30%), followed by (25%) auditory and then kinesthetic learners (15%) (Barbe and Milone, 1981). VARK learning style has been designed by Neil

Fleming to measure interaction and learning environment of the students. It divides students into four categories, that is, Visual, Aural or Auditory, Reading/writing and Kinesthetic learners. Price, Dunn, and Sanders (1980) found that most of the young learners are tactile/kinaesthetic learners then gradually passing through the elementary levels their visual sense grows and in fifth and sixth level they retain and internalize information through their auditory sense. Carbo (1983), while investigating the preferred style of the good reader came to the conclusion that they learn best through visual and auditory senses, while poor readers have a stronger tendency to learn through tactile and kinaesthetic senses.

Generally, significance of the concepts of learning styles, teaching styles, matches and mismatches between the both, motivation, demotivation, and re motivation cannot be over looked at any academic settings and particularly in teaching of English as a foreign language. Demotivation and diversity in learners' learning styles are the adverse forces; one diminishes or reduces the performance, while the other enhances frustration and confusion. They both are the source and means for each other; one may lead to the other and vice versa. The presence or absence of former or latter, alternatively, is crucial for effective learning process

In order to achieve objectives of the study, the following questions have been envisaged for the present study:

1. How are male and female EFL learners of Taif University different from each other in their learning styles?
2. How do learners' awareness of their preferred learning styles and behaviors make a difference in their learning process?

Methodology

The procedure of a study maps the outline of action for a researcher. The study utilized quantitative approach to collect the data from the participants that may add to the validity and reliability of the work. The data were collected through opinionnaire with maximum close ended questions on diverse learning style preferences of Taif university's male and female EFL learners. The quantitative research tool has been utilized to avoid subjective opinions of the participants.

Instrument

The research tool selected for the study represents quantitative dimension of the work. The opinionnaire contained 20 variables and categorized into five clusters with different headings. The research tool formulated for the study employed Likert's five point scale, which clearly signifies quantitative perspective of the work. It was designed on a structured pattern in order to obtain precise and useful information from the participants. In addition to this, an Arabic translated version of the opinionnaire was provided to the learners to get more accurate and informative responses from them. The copy of the opinionnaire has been appended.

Sample

The representative sample of the population for the opinionnaire consists of Taif University's 100 male and 100 female Saudi EFL learners. The sample has been administered randomly to the EFL learners, so that the collected data may prove to be true, valid and reliable representative of the selected population.

Findings

At the stage of analysis, 200 participants' responses were analyzed to determine their preferred styles and behaviors in the EFL classroom. The significance of each variable was determined by the ranking of high and low frequency variables. The results are demonstrated in 5 Tables and all the variables are examined and compared within each cluster to determine their impacts and relative intensity.

Table 1
Style Preferences of Visual Learners

S. #	Choices that Represent Visual Learners' General Approach to Learning	Male	Female	Both
1.	I take detailed notes during the lecture and remember the lesson by writing it down.	3.44	3.66	3.55
2.	I prefer to learn through pictures, charts, diagrams, maps and videos rather than other medias or oral instructions.	3.54	3.87	4.00
3.	I like written instructions for a task.	3.90	4.33	4.11
4.	I understand lecture better when teacher writes on the board.	4.02	4.11	4.15

It was found during analysis of the data that the third variable, 'I like written instructions for a task,' was considered as the most important function of this cluster. The results show that the subjects (4.33 female and 3.90 male) were found divided

in the ranking of the impacts of this variable. Gilakjani (2012) mentioned in his work that Reid (1987) utilized Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (PLSPQ) on Iranian EFL university students and according to his findings visual learners were most comfortable to study and retain information with pictures, images and graphs. A maximum number of learners showed their consensus for the variables like "I learn better by reading than by listening to someone," or "I learn better by reading what the teacher writes on the chalkboard." Saadi (2012) quoted findings of Ramayah et al (2009) in his paper, who determined the influence of gender on learning style preferences of business students. Their response is in line with the findings of the aforementioned study that gender influences visual preferences of the learners. Furthermore, a huge strength of participants (4.11 female and 4.02 male) agreed to the statement that they understand a lecture better when the teacher writes on the board. A slight variation in the responses of the participants implies that they were in general agreement about the importance of this variable. The results indicate that teachers' use of white board is perceived as a motivational factor in language classrooms. The response is in agreement with the findings of Gilakjani (2012) that visual learners learn best by reading the text than by listening to the sounds of the text being read out.

A majority of participants (3.87 female and 3.54 male) agreed with the statement that they preferred to learn through pictures, charts, diagrams, maps and videos rather than other media or oral instructions. The findings of the present study are inconsistent with the results of Dobson (2009) whose findings reinforce the idea that male learners preferred the visual learning style more than female learners, while results of the research of Saadi (2012) are in line with the present study that female students in Saudi preparatory schools preferred visual information more than male learners.

The participants' response (3.66 female and 3.44 male) to the statement, 'I take detailed notes during the lecture and remember the lesson by writing it down', reflects that they grasp and retain information while writing the lecture. Felder (2000) explains that good learners learn more when they receive information through visual and verbal components. Reading and writing was the second most preferred style for female learners; whereas, read/write learning style was the preferred style for male learners. There may be several reasons for the differences in the results as for instance; variation in the version of the VARK and age of the participants.

Table 2

Style Preferences of Auditory Learners

S. #	Choices that Represent Auditory Learners' General Approach to Learning	Male	Female	Both
1.	I comprehend everything well in the class when teacher gives lecture than what I read.	3.72	3.34	3.53
2.	I like oral instructions for a task and easily remember jokes, facts and discussions that I hear.	3.78	3.78	3.78
3.	I remember the lesson better if I discuss it with my class fellows.	3.94	4.19	4.00
4.	When I watch the TV, I understand the sounds more comprehensively than the movements and actions of the characters.	3.10	3.17	3.13

During the analysis of the data, it was found that the variable, 'I remember the lesson better if I discuss it with my class fellows' received high consensus (4.19 female and 3.94 male) from the respondents. Carbo (1983) investigated the perceptual styles of the readers and found that good readers prefer to learn through their visual and auditory senses, while poor readers have a stronger preference for tactile and kinesthetic learning (Gilakjani 2012).The findings of the present study correspond with the statement of Felder and Silverman (1988) that auditory learners learn through listening the information and get into a lot of discussion, prefer verbal explanation to visual demonstration and learn effectively by explaining things to others.

The variable, 'I like oral instructions for a task and easily remember jokes, facts and discussions that I hear', received equal responses (3.78 and 3.78), which indicates that the respondents were in agreement about the importance of this variable. The results match with the study of Lincoln and Rademacher (2006), who found that female learners preferred to learn through their auditory senses whilst male learners learn best through reading and writing learning styles (Saadi, 2012). Contrary to the findings of present study, Dunn and Dunn (1986) believe that learners with poor auditory memory could not perform well despite working hard in the classroom because of their inability to store and retain information received through lecture, discussion or reading.

The majority of participants agreed (3.72 male and 3.34 female) that they understand well when the teachers lecture than what they read. Reif (1992) reinforces the idea in question that auditory learners learn and understand best when they hear information. These learners prefer responding to the questions like, "I learn better

in the class when I listen to someone," or "When the teacher instructs, I understand better" (Gilakjani, 2012).

The participants acknowledged (3.17 female and 3.10 male) the statement that when they watch the TV, they understand the sounds more precisely than the movements and actions of the characters. The results show slight variation in the opinions of male and female respondents. Contrary to the findings of the present study, Saadi (2012) mentioned that aural learning style was least preferred by both the genders particularly the male learners.

Table 3
Styles Preferences of Kinesthetic Learners

S. #	Choices that Represent Kinaesthetic Learners' General Approach to Learning	Male	Female	Both
1.	I understand the things better in the class when I participate in role-plays and other related activities.	3.58	3.56	3.57
2.	I prefer to learn by doing exercises and drills in the classroom.	4.06	3.67	4.00
3.	I get more benefit from practicing in computer lab classes than listening to a lecture.	3.42	3.71	3.56
4.	I move my hands and arms frequently when I pose a question or answer back to the teacher.	3.42	3.87	3.64

The participants acknowledged (4.06 male and 3.67 female) that they preferred to learn by doing exercises and drills in the classroom. This variable achieved low consensus by the female respondents and conversely a bit better consensus by the male respondents. Abidin, Abdullah, Rezaee, and Singh, (2011) explains the features of an active learner, who prefers to get involve in group discussions, interactions with others and actively engages in dialogue, role-plays and team work.

The participants (3.87 female and 3.42 male) agreed to the statement that 'they like to move their hands and arms frequently when they pose a question or answer back to the teacher'. This variable was considered as the second most important function of the category. Fischer and Fischer (1979) shares an example to identify visual, auditory and kinaesthtic learners, and explains that when Sheri studies her spelling, she looks at the word carefully, then shuts her eyes to visualize it. This is a successful method for her in learning to spell. By contrast, Steven writes the word at least eight times and seems to learn to spell kinesthetically. Kevin must spell the word aloud because he learns how to spell orally/aurally.

The participants (3.71 female and 3.42 male learners) acknowledged the statement that they get more benefit from practicing in computer lab classes than listening to a lecture. Furthermore, an important difference can be seen in the opinion of male and female learners, which signifies that participants have shown low consensus about the importance of this variable. Some special students prefer active, hands-on and experiential learning, whilst many others learn through visual and auditory styles (Abidin, Abdullah, Rezaee, & Singh, 2011).

The TU EFL learners (3.58 male and 3.56 female) agreed to the statement that they understand the things better in the class when they participate in role-plays and other physical activities. The variable corresponds closely to the results of the study by Reif (1992, p. 17), who came to the conclusion that "Role-playing, creative dramatics, and physical activities would enable kinesthetic learners to use their strengths." He further added that: "Outside the classroom the bodily-kinesthetic person may excel as an athlete. But he or she should also be able to find success in the academic arena." The findings of the works of Saadi (2012) manifest that kinesthetic style is one of the preferred styles of female learners. By the same token, Park (1997) also reported that females have a stronger preference for the kinesthetic style than males. Park used Reid's learning styles questionnaire and administered his sample on different ethnic groups. He concluded that across different ethnic groups, female learners tend to show their preference for the kinesthetic learning style.

Table 4

Styles Preferences of Extroverted Learners

S. No	Choices that Represent Extroverted Learners' General Approach to Learning	Male	Female	Both
1.	It is easy for me to approach strangers by jumping into the conversation.	3.52	3.54	3.53
2.	I learn better when I study with others than by myself.	3.86	3.78	3.82
3.	Getting to know a lot of people and Interacting with them make me fresh and energetic.	4.00	4.18	4.09
4.	I try and experience the things first then understand them.	3.28	3.65	3.46

The maximum responses (4.18 female and 4.00 male) of the participants for the variable 'Getting to know a lot of people and interacting with them make me fresh and energetic', reveal high consensus of the respondents and crucial importance of this function. . Abidin, Abdullah, Rezaee, & Singh, 2011, as cited

in Kagan & Kagan, 1970) state that impulsive students show poor academic achievement when compared to reflective ones. The responses of the learners are similar to the opinion of Hornsby "I am an extrovert, so I get excited to be around new people, meeting new people and talking to people" (Lollar, 2014 n.p). The research by Marian and Lisa (2013, p 507) reinforces the idea in question and they state that "Introverts learn via their internal processes, whereas extroverts benefit from having the opportunity to express new learning outwardly, in the form of oral communication".

Approximately 3.86% agreed to the statement that 'I learn better when I study with others than by myself'. It was considered as the second important function with small variation between male (3.86) and female (3.78) responses. This variable is in line with the opinion of (Lollar, 2014) who identifies herself as an extroverted learner and considers studying alone difficult for her. Rebecca (2003) stated that extroverts gain their greatest energy through interacting with the external world, like communicating with numerous people and have many close friends (Rebecca 2003). In this context, Marian and Lisa (2013) mention that in contrast to introverts, extroverts tend to be outspoken, gregarious, confident and quick to join class activities.

The responses of the participants (3.65) female and (3.28) male to the statement: 'I try and experience the things first then understand them', were considered as third important function. The responses of the participants is substantiated by the comments of Schmeck and Dan (1983) that extrovert learners do not like to sit quiet. They mostly prefer pursuing stimulating activities that disrupt the classroom discipline and for this reason they may be labeled as hyperactive (Schmeck & Lockhart, 1983). Farley (1981) suggests that "open-space classrooms, open discussions, discovery and inductive modes of instruction are ideally suited for students who need extra stimulation" (Schmeck & Lockhart, 1983 p. 55). Sybil (2017) used Myers-Briggs Type Indicator [MBTI] and arrived at the findings that introverts are not always shy and extroverts are not always outgoing.

Table 5

Style Preferences of Introverted Learners

S. #	Choices that Represent Introverted Learners' General Approach to Learning	Male	Female	Both
1.	I enjoy and energize by the inner world and like to spend time alone.	3.06	3.31	3.18
2.	I prefer individual or one-on-one games and activities.	3.30	2.92	3.11
3.	When I work in large crowds or groups, I tend to keep myself quiet/silent, prefer to listen others and by the end I feel bored and exhausted.	2.60	2.61	2.60
4.	I understand and contemplate on the things first then try them.	3.98	4.06	4.02

Female participants (4.06) and male (3.98) acknowledged the statement: 'I understand and contemplate on the things first then try them in hand'. The introverts get insight from their inner world and direct their attention inward. Their thoughts, feelings and memories are a great source of energy for them. The research findings of Western Nevada College indicate that introverts "can be sociable, but need space and time to recharge their batteries. Introverts want to understand the world. They prefer to figure out things before they talk about them". The participants of the research acknowledge the statement 'I enjoy and energize by the inner world and like to spend time alone', with little differences in their opinions (3.31 female and 3.06 male). In this backdrop, Marian and Lisa (2013) came to the point that in attempting difficult tasks, introverts tend to have more perseverance.

The participants' responses (3.30 male and 2.92 female) to the variable, 'I prefer individual or one-on-one games and activities', indicate that it is the third most important function of this cluster. The research carried out by Schmeck and Dan (1983) also suggest that the introvert students may seem like the ideal students, sitting quietly and creating very little trouble. They added that "the extrovert learners get profit from multimedia presentations with sound, bright colors and frequent changes in topics. On the other hand, Schmeck and Lockhart (1983) opine that "introvert learners profit from repeated emphasis on the main topic of the presentation with as little unnecessary distractions as possible" (p. 55).

The equal consensus [(2.61) female and (2.61)male participants to the variable, 'When I work in large crowds or groups, I tend to keep myself quiet/silent, prefer to listen to others and by the end I feel bored and exhausted', indicates that it is the fourth most important function of this cluster. A similar kind of finding is given by Rebecca (2003) that "introverts derive their energy from the internal

world, seeking solitude and tending to have just a few friendships, which are often very deep" (p. 5).

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Appendix A

The opinionnaire has developed with maximum closed ended statements by employing Likert's five point scale. Please encircle the most appropriate choice against each statement.

Table 1

Style Preferences of Visual Learners

S. #	CHOICES THAT REPRESENT VISUAL LEARNERS GENERAL APPROACH TO LEARNING	A	SA	NA/UC	D	SD
1.	I take detailed notes during the lecture and remember the lesson by writing it down.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I prefer to learn through pictures, charts, diagrams, maps and videos rather than other medias or oral instructions.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	I like written instructions for a task.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	I understand lecture better when teacher writes on the board.	1	2	3	4	5

Table 2

Style Preferences of Auditory Learners

S. #	CHOICES THAT REPRESENT AUDIO LEARNERS GENERAL APPROACH TO LEARNING	A	SA	NA/UC	D	SD
1.	I comprehend everything well in the class when teacher gives lecture than what I read.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I like oral instructions for a task and easily remember jokes, facts and discussions that I hear.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	I remember the lesson better if I discuss it with my class fellows.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	When I watch the TV, I understand the sounds more comprehensively than the movements and actions of the characters.	1	2	3	4	5

Table 3

Style Preferences of Kinesthetic Learners

S. #	CHOICES THAT REPRESENT KINESTHTIC LEARNERS GENERAL APPROACH TO LEARNING	A	SA	NA/UC	D	SD
1.	I understand the things better in the class when I participate in role-plays and other related activities.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I prefer to learn by doing exercises and drills in the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	I get more benefit from practicing in computer lab classes than listening to a lecture.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	I move my hands and arms frequently when I pose a question or answer back to the teacher.	1	2	3	4	5

Table 4

Style Preferences of Extroverted Learners

S. #	CHOICES THAT REPRESENT EXTROVERTED LEARNERS' GENERAL APPROACH TO LEARNING	A	SA	NA/UC	D	SD
1.	It is easy for me to approach strangers by jumping into the conversation.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I learn better when I study with others than by myself.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Getting to know a lot of people and Interacting with them make me fresh and energetic.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	I try and experience the things first then understand them.	1	2	3	4	5

Table 5

Style Preferences of Introverted Learners

S. #	CHOICES THAT REPRESENT INTROVERTED LEARNERS' GENERAL APPROACH TO LEARNING	A	SA	NA/UC	D	SD
1.	I enjoy and energize by the inner world and like to spend time alone.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I prefer individual or one-on-one games and activities.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	When I work in large crowds or groups, I tend to keep myself quiet/silent, prefer to listen others and by the end I feel bored and exhausted.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	I understand and contemplate on the things first then try them.	1	2	3	4	5