

Exploring the Relationship between Various Learning Preferences and Final Results Achieved by Iranian EFL Learners: A Case Study

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Abstract: In this study it was aimed to investigate the relationship between various learning preferences and final results achieved by 50 advanced ELF learners in Avay-e-Danesh English Language Institute in Ahar city located in Eastern Azerbaijan province. This study was performed by VAK Learning Preferences which is a Self-Assessment Questionnaire including 39 questions on various learning preferences. It was observed that 40% of learners were of visual .35% auditory and 25% kinesthetic preferences of learning. The results achieved by these learners in final exam of the term were almost the same that is they were around 80 out of 100. It was concluded that nearly there is no significant relationship between various learning preferences and exam results achieved by EFL learners at the end of the term that is no specific learning preference has any priority over the other ones when the results are compared.

Key Words: Learning Preferences; Final results; EFL Learners

Introduction

Students preferentially take in and process information in various ways: by seeing, hearing and acting i.e. they have various ways of learning visual, auditory and kinesthetic. Teaching methods also vary. Some instructors lecture others demonstrate or lead students to self-discovery especially in the classes with students of multi learning preferences. (Freeman etl, Spr 1992). One popular approach to helping children grasp educational material most effectively and retain that information is through understanding the child's learning style or approach to learning. Learning preferences have been the basis for best – practice teaching within the public school arena for many years, and are featured in the most popular homeschooling literature, including Cathy Duffy's 100 Top Picks for Home school curriculum, Mary pride's Complete Guide to Getting Started in Homeschooling, and many others. There are a number of various learning preferences, but the three most prominent are:

1. Visual –Learn through seeing. Tend to think in terms of pictures, and use visual cues to organize and retain information.
2. Auditory-Learn by hearing. Need to talk through things and hear things verbally to process information.
3. Kinesthetic –Learn by moving, doing, and touching. Use experience and activity to understand and remember information.

With such widespread popularity and strong support for teaching according to a child's style of learning,

shouldn't homeschoolers jump on the learning preferences band wagon and ride all the way to academic success? Despite popular belief, the answer to that question is not an unequivocal "yes" and recent research has muddied the waters of what was previously thought to be a clear-cut "win" in educational approaches. A study from December 2009 in Psychological Science in the Public Interest found that virtually all of research which claims that students learn best according to specific learning preferences fails to satisfy key criteria for scientific validity. In other words, after examining all of the major studies related to learning preferences, researchers found that science has yet to demonstrate that students learn better when taught according to their own learning style. So what does this mean? Should homeschoolers ditch the idea of teaching according to a child's learning style all together? Of course this does not mean that teachers should ditch the idea of teaching according to a child's learning style together. After then I decided to do a co relational research about various learning preferences and their language learning results which was of a quantitative kind. To put it simply I wanted to see if there is any relationship between learning preferences and Students results in foreign language classes. (Cathy C. Shank, 1999). This research was done by distributing a questionnaire on learning preferences and observing their final grades at the end of the term.

1. Review of literature

Learning preferences and their relationship with final results researches are drawn out of studies about different dimensions of the educational processes. It has yet to be precisely (or singularly) defined. Still, the scholarly literatures provide a range of working models that can help instructors deal with some of the mysterious terrain between learning style and teaching. Many researches have been done in this area one of which is an "study examining the application of learning preferences research to higher education" by O'Connor (1999) in Indian state university center for teaching and learning styles. This research suggested that better results would be gained if teachers could construct activities that include specific (and multiple) learning preferences. This can be done by adding some alternatives by utilizing all kinds of learning preferences (styles).

Another research in this area is done by John L. Dobson (2009). The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between preferred learning style, gender, and course scores in an undergraduate physiology class. Students from the fall 2008 and spring 2009 Applied Human Physiology courses completed an online questionnaire in which they were asked to both provide descriptive information about themselves (e.g., gender and major) and self-assess their preferred sensory modality. A total of 901 students completed the questionnaire, 75% of which were female and 25% were male. The results from a χ^2 -analysis ($\chi^2 = 9.59$, $P < 0.05$) indicated that females and males had significantly different learning style preferences. Females most preferred visual learning (46%) followed by aural (27%), read/write (23%), and kinesthetic (4%). Males most preferred visual learning (49%) followed by read/write (29%), aural (17%), and kinesthetic (5%). There was also a significant relationship ($P < 0.05$ by ANOVA) between preferred sensory modality and course scores.

Another recent educational research by Felder Richard (1993) showed that students are characterized by significantly different learning preferences: they preferentially focus on different types of information, tend to operate on perceived information in different ways, and achieve understanding at different rates. Students whose learning styles are compatible with the teaching style of a course instructor tend to retain information longer, apply it more effectively, and have more positive post-course attitudes toward the subject than do their counterparts who experience learning/teaching style mismatches. As this research indicates if students are taught according to their learning preferences they would learn better and would gain more course success of the term.

1.1 Statement of problem

The reason of performing this study can be viewed from two points of view, personal and academic. Personally speaking; for me a class of EFL students means a number of various learning preferences as many as students. As an EFL instructor in ministry of education and facing with

many different classes of students in different schools and language institutes, one point was more outstanding rather than any others and it was various learning preferences by learners. This, existence of various learning preferences, is a matter of fact in all foreign language classes particularly for me in English. Teaching in these kinds of classes means being aware of and dealing with many different learning preferences of auditory, visual and kinesthetic by learners and consequently choosing the appropriate method for teaching in those classes. Academically speaking one of the general goals of studying learning preferences and their relationship with learners' performance in exams is to develop a/some methods of instruction that achieves the satisfying degree of learning and success achieved by EFL learners in final exam results. However several studies that used the appropriate type of research design found results that contradict the most widely held version of the learning-style hypothesis namely a specific learning style leads into different degree of learning and finally different final results (Kamuche, 2005). This study was concerned with investigating different learning styles and to see if there is any significant relationship between learning styles and results obtained at the end of the terms done with EFL learners of Avay-e-Danesh English Language Institute in Ahar city. Since the result of this research was a kind of criterion for classifying learners, according to their learning styles, it was done by great care.

1.2 Research Question/Hypotheses

To achieve the purpose of this study, the following research question is raised:

Is there any relationship between various learning preferences and final results achieved by Iranian EFL learners?

To answer the above question two hypotheses were proposed:

1. AH (Alternative Hypothesis): There is relationship between various learning preferences and final results achieved by Iranian EFL learners.
2. NH (Null Hypothesis): There isn't any relationship between various learning preferences and final results achieved by Iranian EFL learners.

2. Methodology

This research is of quasi-experimental type with non-random assignments. This research was conducted by a questionnaire investigating Students attitudes and responses towards various preferences of learning. The questionnaire was VAK Learning Preferences Self-Assessment Questionnaire (See Appendix 1). All questionnaires were valid because of the willingness of students as they interestingly participated in the study. The questions of questionnaire included 3 choices A, B and C each of which standing for a specific kind of learning preferences Visual, Auditory and Kinesthetic respectively. Sample of study included all 50 advanced students (those who have passed

12 terms in the Institute and now their levels range from 12-17) of Avay-e-Danesh Foreign Language Institute located in Ahar city. Participants were from various ages ranging from a freshman in high school to a senior in university. They were from both genders male and female Students¹. No additional and personal information was added and collected from participants. First Students were

justified to the importance of the research that it would help their teachers to teach according to their various learning preferences as far as they could. They were asked to read questions carefully and then answer based on their own preferences. In the following table you see our subjects' characteristics.

Table 1: Subjects' Characteristics.

| Level No | Number of participants | Age range of participants | Male | Female |
|----------|------------------------|---------------------------|------|--------|
| Adv 1 | 9 | 16-23 | 4 | 5 |
| Adv 2 | 8 | 15-21 | 4 | 4 |
| Adv 3 | 8 | 16-19 | 4 | 4 |
| Adv 4 | 10 | 15-19 | 6 | 4 |
| Adv 5 | 8 | 16-24 | 3 | 5 |
| Adv 6 | 7 | 16-22 | 4 | 3 |

3. Analyses/ Results

This research was done by comparing the Students answers to the questions of the questionnaire and their final results in the previous term. By observing and comparing the results we came to this conclusion that there is almost no relationship between students various learning preferences and final grades achieved by them at end of the term. As there was no much difference in final grades of Students in a case that they were various in preferences of learning from each others. For example final grade of a student with auditory learning style was 78 out of 100 while

Students with kinesthetic and visual were 75 and 79 out of 100 respectively.

We saw that 40% of participants had visual, 35% had auditory and 25% had kinesthetic learning preferences. That we would like to show these various learning preferences and their achieved results in a comparing way. We will see various kinds of results in various groups demonstrating that any kind of results would happen in any preference that is there is no significant relationship between preference of learning and final results at the end of the term. The following tables explain exactly what we mean in the language of statistics.

Note: All grades are out of 100.

Table 2: percentages of learning preferences.

| | Students. No | Preferences of learning | | |
|----------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|----------|-------------|
| | | Visual | Auditory | Kinesthetic |
| Subjects of Sample Society | 1 | 72 | 93 | 78 |
| | 2 | 76 | 76 | 77 |
| | 3 | 68 | 75 | 69 |
| | 4 | 79 | 90 | 93 |
| | 5 | 84 | 73 | 89 |
| | 6 | 88 | 70 | 76 |
| | 7 | 85 | 100 | 89 |
| | 8 | 81 | 71 | 93 |
| | 9 | 72 | 70 | 75 |
| | 10 | 78 | 83 | 80 |
| | 11 | 79 | 98 | 76 |
| | 12 | 75 | 73 | 74 |
| | 13 | 92 | 85 | 71 |
| | 14 | 67 | 80 | - |
| | 15 | 94 | 76 | - |
| | 16 | 90 | 71 | - |
| | 17 | 89 | 90 | - |
| | 18 | 81 | - | - |
| | 19 | 85 | - | - |
| | 20 | 80 | - | - |
| Avera | | 80/75 | 80/82 | 80/01 |

| | | | | |
|----|--|--|--|--|
| ge | | | | |
|----|--|--|--|--|

Table.3 Comparison of various preferences and achieved results.

| Style | Percentage | Final grades' average |
|-------------|------------|-----------------------|
| Visual | 40% | 80/75 |
| Auditory | 35% | 80/82 |
| Kinesthetic | 25% | 80/01 |

As it is seen in table.2 there is almost no difference in among achieved results in a case that they refer to various preferences of learning.

4. Discussion/Interpretation of Results

As it is clear from the tables although students are categorized into 3 various groups i.e. are various from each others in preferences but they have almost the same or near results. In table.1 you can see number of students with their learning preferences and achieved final results with their average also. It can be seen from the results that there is no specific relationship between learning preferences and achieved results at the end of the term as table.4 which is a prove to this claim. The findings of our research are consistent with other studies. According to a study in Psychological Science in the Public Interest in December 2009 in contrary to the public idea that certainly there is a relationship between learning style and achieved results but in fact it isn't the case i.e. researches and statistics do display it at least.

5. Conclusion /Recommendations

There is no doubt that Students have various preferences of learning(as shown in this research through tables) it is in a case that they are sitting in the same class students which the method of teaching mat just be consistent with one kind of it although it was also shown that there is almost no relationship between style of learning and Students final grades at the end of term that in this case the second hypothesis of the research ,null hypothesis, is approved We can deduce from these findings that teachers should be so careful in their teaching procedure and methodology because they are dealing with various Students each of which may have various learning preferences. Of course there are some questions raising here that what if Students had multi-learning preferences? Would they get the same results as they did with mono

learning style of leaning? Or what would the results be like if they had two kinds of learning preferences? If so which of them would be the dominant one i.e. having more effect?

According to findings of our research and other similar researches various preferences of learning exist. If a mismatch exists between learning preferences of most students and teaching method of a professor in a class the students may become bored and inattentive in learning activities and do poorly on tests. So it is recommended that teachers do the followings as far as possible for them.

*.They should make balance between their teaching methodology so that students will be taught partly in a manner they prefer which leads in high level of comfort and willingness to learn.

*.They should give a diagnostic test to find out differences in learning preferences among students of the class.

*.They should, if possible for them, categorize students into various groups according to their preferences.

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* Psychological Science in the Public Interest in December 2009

Appendix 1

VAK Learning Preferences Self-Assessment Questionnaire
Circle or tick the answer that most represents how you generally behave.

It's best to complete the questionnaire before reading the accompanying explanation.)

1. When I operate new equipment I generally:

- a) read the instructions first
- b) listen to an explanation from someone who has used it before
- c) go ahead and have a go, I can figure it out as I use it

2. When I need directions for traveling I usually:

- a) look at a map
- b) ask for spoken directions
- c) follow my nose and maybe use a compass

3. When I cook a new dish, I like to:

- a) follow a written recipe
- b) call a friend for an explanation
- c) follow my instincts, testing as I cook

4. If I am teaching someone something new, I tend to:

- a) write instructions down for them
- b) give them a verbal explanation
- c) demonstrate first and then let them have a go

5. I tend to say:

- a) watch how I do it
- b) listen to me explain
- c) you have a go

6. During my free time I most enjoy:

- a) going to museums and galleries
- b) listening to music and talking to my friends
- c) playing sport or doing DIY

7. When I go shopping for clothes, I tend to:

- a) imagine what they would look like on
- b) discuss them with the shop staff
- c) try them on and test them out

8. When I am choosing a holiday I usually:

- a) read lots of brochures
- b) listen to recommendations from friends
- c) imagine what it would be like to be there

9. If I was buying a new car, I would:

- a) read reviews in newspapers and magazines
- b) discuss what I need with my friends
- c) test-drive lots of various types

10. When I am learning a new skill, I am most comfortable:

- a) watching what the teacher is doing
- b) talking through with the teacher exactly what I'm supposed to do
- c) giving it a try myself and work it out as I go

11. If I am choosing food off a menu, I tend to:

- a) imagine what the food will look like
- b) talk through the options in my head or with partner

c) imagine what the food will taste like

12. When I listen to a band, I can't help:

- a) watching the band members and other people in the audience
- b) listening to the lyrics and the beats
- c) moving in time with the music

13. When I concentrate, I most often:

- a) focus on the words or the pictures in front of me
- b) discuss the problem and the possible solutions in my head
- c) move around a lot, fiddle with pens and pencils and touch things

14. I choose household furnishings because I like:

- a) their colors and how they look
- b) the descriptions the sales-people give me
- c) their textures and what it feels like to touch them

15. My first memory is of:

- a) looking at something
- b) being spoken to
- c) doing something

16. When I am anxious, I:

- a) visualize the worst-case scenarios
- b) talk over in my head what worries me most
- c) can't sit still, fiddle and move around constantly

17. I feel especially connected to other people because of:

- a) how they look
- b) what they say to me
- c) how they make me feel

18. When I have to revise for an exam, I generally:

- a) write lots of revision notes and diagrams
- b) talk over my notes, alone or with other people
- c) imagine making the movement or creating the formula

19. If I am explaining to someone I tend to:

- a) show them what I mean
- b) explain to them in various ways until they understand
- c) encourage them to try and talk them through my idea as they do it

20. I really love:

- a) watching films, photography, looking at art or people watching
- b) listening to music, the radio or talking to friends
- c) taking part in sporting activities, eating fine foods and wines or dancing

21. Most of my free time is spent:

- a) watching television
- b) talking to friends
- c) doing physical activity or making things

22. When I first contact a new person, I usually:

- a) arrange a face to face meeting
- b) talk to them on the telephone
- c) try to get together whilst doing something else, such as an activity or a meal

23. I first notice how people:

- a) look and dress
- b) sound and speak
- c) stand and move

24. If I am angry, I tend to:

- a) keep replaying in my mind what it is that has upset me
- b) raise my voice and tell people how I feel

c) stamp about, slam doors and physically demonstrate my anger

25. I find it easiest to remember:

a) faces

b) names

c) things I have done

26. I think that you can tell if someone is lying if:

a) they avoid looking at you

b) their voices changes

c) they give me funny vibes

27. When I meet an old friend:

a) I say "it's great to see you!"

b) I say "it's great to hear from you!"

c) I give them a hug or a handshake

28. I remember things best by:

a) writing notes or keeping printed details

b) saying them aloud or repeating words and key points in my head

c) doings and practicing the activity or imagining it being done

29. If I have to complain about faulty goods, I am most comfortable:

a) writing a letter

b) complaining over the phone

c) taking the item back to the store e or posting it to head office

30. I tend to say:

a) I see what you mean

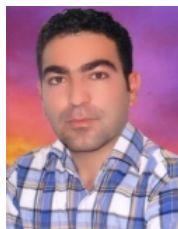
b) I hear what you are saying

c) I know how you feel

Now add up how many A'S, B'S and C'S you selected.

A'S= B'S= C'S=

Vitae



Mr. Taleb Yari was born in 1986 in Tabriz, Iran. He obtained his BA in TEFL in 2009 from Foreign Languages Faculty of Shahid Rajaei Teacher Training University (SRTTU), Tehran, Iran. He got his MA in TEFL in 2012 from Islamic Azad University Ahar-Tabriz, Iran. He has worked as an official EFL instructor in Ministry of Education since 2009. His research interest includes ELT, Applied linguistics, Teacher Training Course and CALL.

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