Identifying the Learning Styles of TESOL Master's Students in King Abdul-Aziz University

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Abstract

This study aims at exploring the concept of LEARNING STYLES in the context of second language acquisition, and it also seeks to identify the learning styles of 16 TESOL Master's students. The study is divided into two main parts. Part one is a theoretical framework. It covers the concept of learning from a second language acquisition perspective, individual differences and personality in SLA, personality & learning, adults' perception of learning, learning styles and culture, the differences between learning style and learning strategies, the relationship between learning style and cognitive style, broader models of learning style, and finally learning style and teaching. The second part is a case study which attempts to investigate the learning styles of around 16 TESOL masters students. The data-gathering tool was VAK learning styles measurement tool which aims to identify the learning styles of students according to three main styles: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. The most important findings are that the majority of students' learning styles are auditory, few are visual, and only three out of 16 are visual auditory; while one candidate is visual kinesthetic.

Keyword: Learning, learning styles, individual differences, personality traits, the Big Five, VAK measurement tool, learning style models

A) Conceptual Framework

The Concept of Learning from Second Language Acquisition Perspective:

Learning and learners are the main focus of second language acquisition rather than teaching and teachers. Gas and Selinker define SLA as the "study of how learners create a new language system", and they add that it is the "study of what is learned of a second language and what is not". (Patten and Benati, 2010, p. 1). "*What* is learned in acquiring a second language, as well as *how* it is learned, is often influenced by whether the situation involves informal exposure to speakers of other languages, immersion in a setting where one needs a new language to meet basic needs, or formal instruction in school, and these learning conditions are often profoundly influenced by powerful social, cultural, and economic factors affecting the status of both languages and learners." (Troike, 2006, page 5).

"The intriguing question of *why* some L2 learners are more successful than others requires us to unpack the broad label "learners" for some dimensions of discussion. Linguists may distinguish categories of learners defined by the identity and relationship of their L1 and L2; psycholinguists may make distinctions based on individual aptitude for L2 learning, personality factors, types and strength of motivation, and different learning strategies; sociolinguists may distinguish among learners with regard to social, economic, and political differences and learner experiences in negotiated interaction; and social psychologists may categorize learners according to aspects of their group identity and attitudes toward target language speakers or toward L2 learning itself." (Troike, 2006, page 5).

Since 1970, the focus on learner differences in SLA has been most concerned with why some learners are more successful and competent than others in the field of second language acquisition. This major concern is generated from the humanistic framework within psychology, which is highly interested in that discipline, and has a huge influence on second language teaching and SLA research (Williams and Burden 1997). The aim of this framework is to consider emotional involvement in learning, such as *affective factors of attitude, motivation, and anxiety level*. It also considers biological differences associated with age and sex, in addition to some differences associated with aspects of processing. (Troike, 2006).

Individual Differences and Personality in SLA

It is really essential to draw some attention towards the field of individual differences (ID) which came out as sub discipline of the uniqueness of the human minds . So many studies in the field of psychology have been conducted in order to understand the differences between the general principles of the human minds, and the uniqueness of them. Studies on the latter gave birth to the field of IDs. "ID constructs refer to dimensions of enduring personal characteristics that are assumed to apply to everybody and on which people differ by degree." (Dörnyei, 2005, p.4). It is related to some main processes in the field of second language acquisition, and it has been researched extensively in L2 studies, making the area one of the most thoroughly studied psychological aspects of SLA." (Dörnyei, 2005, P.6).

Since we are trying to address individual differences from an educational scope, one needs to consider personality, aptitude/ability, and motivation as they are viewed as main learner variables. In this article the focus will be on personality more than the other two variables as it is directly attached to "learning styles". Pervin and John define personality as" it is the part of the field of psychology that most considers people in their entirety as individuals and as complex beings." It represents those characteristics of the person that "account for consistent patterns of feeling, thinking, and behaving" (Dörnyei, 2005, pp. 10-11). Changeable attitudes or behaving are not considered parts of a personality; a person must be repeating certain behaving patterns in order to be considered as parts of his/her personality. There are four personality types proposed by Hippocrates and Galen over 2,000 years ago, and they are: "*phlegmatic* (unflappable and slow to take action), *sanguine* (easily but not strongly excited and having short-lived interests), *choleric* (impetuous and impulsive, often ambitious and perfectionist), and *melancholic* (inclined to reflection). These four personality traits have been labelled as "The Classic Greek temperamental taxonomy" and it is still seen as one of the most valid and stable models in many countries today." (Dörnyei, 2005, p.11).

The Big Five Framework

Between 1930s and 1940s, scholars "Allport, Odbert, and Cattell thought that certain consistent behaviours should be grouped and named as adjectives that people could use to describe each other. They can also be gathered in a particular language and used as "comprehensive list of personality factors" and by submitting these adjectives to factor analysis we might distil a smaller number of underlying personality dimensions or traits." (Dörnyei, 2005, P.14). They are the following:

Table 1: (Dörnyei, 2005, p.15)

Traits	High Scores	Low Scores
Openness to experience	High scores are imaginative, curious, flexible, creative, moved by art, novelty seeking, original, and untraditional	Low scores are conservative, conventional, down-to-earth, inartistic, and practical
Conscientiousness	High scorers are systematic, meticulous, efficient, organized, reliable, responsible, hard-working, persevering, and self-disciplined	Low scorers are unreliable, aimless, careless, disorganized, late, lazy, negligent, and weak-willed.
Extraversion–introversion	High scorers are sociable, gregarious, active, assertive, passionate, and talkative	Low scorers are passive, quiet, reserved, withdrawn, sober, aloof, and restrained
Agreeableness .	High scorers are friendly, good-natured, likeable, kind, forgiving, trusting, cooperative, modest, and generous	Low scorers are cold, cynical, rude, unpleasant, critical, antagonistic, suspicious, vengeful, irritable, and uncooperative
Neuroticism–Emotional Stability	High scorers are worrying, anxious, insecure, depressed, self-conscious, moody, emotional, and unstable;	Low scorers are calm, relaxed, unemotional, hardy, comfortable, content, even tempered, and self-satisfied.

So, as it can seen noticed from the previous table, that there are several traits of each personality types; these traits are classified under high or low scores. High scores learners' traits are generally positive as they lead to successful social and academic performance; however, there are few negative traits related to high scores learners such as worrying, anxious and insecure which usually occur due to learners' pressured condition when they attempt to work hard or think of exams. On the other hand, the majority of traits related to low scores learners are negative ones as they tend to be a bit lazy, and unrealistic in their learning experience. Few positive traits are related to them such as content, relaxed, and comfortable due to their relaxed and stable personalities that are not highly affected by grades or results.

Personality and Learning

There is no doubt that there is a huge effect of variable personality types on learning. "The term *learning style* is often used interchangeably with *personality*, although the former is undoubtedly more variable, whereas the latter refers to a stable trait of an individual." (Silinker and Gas, 2008, p. 432). There have been so many studies which associate high academic achievements and personality types. If we are concerned with the learning process in particular, there are two main traits that have to be taken into consideration, and they are: openness to experience and conscientiousness. The latter is associated with positive attitudes that would lead to exquisite academic achievements, while, extraversion, has a negative relationship with academic success due to learners' preference to spend time with people rather than books, however, some studies doubt this stereotypes and claim both introversion and extroversion are beneficial in certain ways depending on the teaching methods used in the classrooms, the ability to merge in the learning experience, level of distractibility, and the study habits norm (Selinker & Gas, 2008).

A study done by Duff, Boyle, Dunleavy and Ferguson (2003) states that there are three types of approaches to study that have a strong relation to personality; particularly to the Big Five personality traits. They are: first, deep approach "(I'm not prepared to accept things I'm told. I have to think them out for myself)". Second, surface approach "(I often have trouble making sense of the things I have to remember)". Third, strategic approach "(I know what I want to get out of this course, and I am determined to achieve it." Deep approach is related to extraversion, surface approach is related to neurotics and agreeableness, and strategic approach of learning is related to extraversion and conscientiousness according to the Big Five classifications. (Kamarulzaman, 2012, p.5). So, their study found that individual's learning orientation and approach to learning, is partially determined by their personality."(Kamarulzaman 2012, p. 1).

If we focus more on learning styles, we would notice from so many theorists such as Ehrman, Leaver, and Oxford (2003) that "the influence of personality variables on learning styles has increased greatly in recent years, promoted by the use of the 'Big Five' personality model and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). This is mentioned in their recent overview of ID variables. For this reason, Ehrman (1996) actually characterized certain learning styles as 'personality-based learning styles,' which are personality dimensions that have cognitive style correlates." (Dörnyei, 2005, p.123).

Personality Traits

The most popular personality traits are: "anxious vs. self-confident, risk avoiding vs. risk taking, shy vs. adventurous, introverted vs. extroverted, inner directed vs. other directed, reflective vs. impulsive, imaginative vs. uninquisitive, creative vs. uncreative, empathetic vs. insensitive to others, and finally tolerant of ambiguity vs. closure-oriented." (Troike, 2006, p. 89). ""Although personality factors are defined as individual traits, systematic cultural differences are found between groups of learners. For example, oral performance in English classes generates relatively more anxiety for Korean students (Truitt 1995) than for Turkish students (Kunt 1997). This may be because of cultural differences in concepts of "face" (Troike, 2006, p. 90).

"Anxiety has received the most attention in SLA research, along with lack of anxiety as an important component of self-confidence. It correlates negatively with measures of L2 proficiency including grades awarded in foreign language classes, meaning that higher anxiety tends to go with lower levels of success in L2 learning"

Peter MacLntyre (1995) argues that's because "anxious students focus on both the task at hand and their reactions to it ... [they] will not learn as quickly as relaxed students. In addition to self-confidence, lower anxiety may be manifested by more risk-taking or adventuresome behaviours." (Troike, 2006, p. 90).

More recent research investigating learner anxiety in second language classrooms acknowledges that anxiety is more likely to be dynamic and dependent on particular situations and circumstances. One of the most important factors to boost learners' motivation is to have a low anxiety level and high self-confidence; a situation which would encourage learners to use L2 even outside their classrooms. However, it is still not clear whether more successful learning is a result of low anxiety or high level of motivation. (Troike, 2006).

 "*Little study has been carried out on other personality factors in relation to differences in L2 outcomes, but there is some evidence that being imaginative or creative, empathetic, and tolerant of ambiguity is advantageous.*" (Troike, 2006, p.91).

 However, these ideas can never be generalized to cover all the personality traits and their relationship with human behaviours. There must be some kind of deviance from the norm due to so many factors such as: environment, superstraits or primary traits, culture etc.

 "The major difficulty in investigating personality characteristics is that of identification and measurement. Another explanation that has been offered for the mixed findings of personality studies is that personality variables may be a major factor only in the acquisition of conversational skills, not in the acquisition of literacy or academic skills. The confused picture of the research on personality factors may be due in part to the fact that comparisons are made between studies that measure communicative ability and studies that measure grammatical accuracy or metalinguistic knowledge. Personality variables seem to be consistently related to the former, but not to the latter." (Lightbown and Spada, 2006, p.62).

Learning Styles

Learning styles is an essential part of second language acquisition. It is a quite complex, huge, and controversy field as stated by Snow et. al (1996) "No category we have covered contains a more voluminous, complex, and controversy-laced literature than that of personal styles" (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 121). " broad preferences for going about the business of learning". In other words, the concept represents "a profile of the individual's approach to learning, a blueprint of the habitual or preferred way the individual perceives, interacts with, and responds to the learning environment." (Dörnyei, 2005, p.121).

They refer to "personal preferences" in a way that shows how each individual prefers a certain learning style more than the other, and there is no right or wrong style of learning, because one can be successful or academically competent in every style position, even when he/she uses a different learning style. "Thus, ideally, the concept of learning styles offers a value neutral approach for understanding individual differences among linguistically and culturally diverse students"(Dörnyei, 2005, p.122). The problem is that learning—and consequently the related concept of learning styles—is associated at the same time with perception, cognition, affect, and behaviour, and a term that cuts across these psychologically distinct categories does not lend itself to rigorous definition.(Dörnyei, 2005, p.124).

Adults' Perception of Learning

Since we are making a study on a group of adult students, we realize that it is essential to introduce the notion of adults' learning, how they perceive learning, and certain styles usually associated with their learning experience. Malcolm Knowles, in his theory of adult learning (1972, revised 1980), presents adults as motivated, self-directed learners. Basically, once a person starts seeing himself or herself as an adult, he or she has an expectation of being independent in decision-making, valuing personal experience, and desiring respect. In general, we have to facilitate the maturation process. This moves from dependence to autonomy, passivity to activity, subjectivity to objectivity, ignorance to enlightenment, few responsibilities to many responsibilities, focus on particulars to focus on principles, imitation to originality, impulsiveness to rationality, and finally narrow interests to broad interests." (Leith, 2002, p. 4).

Knowles identifies four principles that characterize adult learners: first, they are self-directed, take responsibility for their own actions, and resist having information randomly imposed on them. Second, their experiences tend to be deep, which serves as a critical aspect in the foundation of their self-identity. Third, they are ready to learn. As most adult learners return to college voluntarily, they are likely to actively engage in the learning process. Fourth, they are task motivated. Adult students returning to college attend for a specific goal and the main force behind their enthusiasm in the learning process is their internal motivation (Knowles, 1984).

One of the main differences between adults and youth is their volume and quality of experience. Adults' learning provides a great recourse from which to draw on. Group discussions, problem solving, case study, and stimulation, can enhance and benefit learning. Peer activities, where adults learn from each other, are another valuable learning resource. Their different background, learning style, motivation, needs and goals can create a kind of a challenge to the teacher in terms of used teaching methods; the focus should shift from generalized to individualized teaching methods.(Kistler, 2001).

Certain factors tend to affect adults' learning experience; they are: the previous or old learning experience, readiness to learn, and motivation. First, their learning experience if associated with bad memories could create a sort of "closed mindedness"; so it is the job of the educator to create a positive atmosphere in order to regain the learners' trust and make them more willing to be involved in the learning experience again. Also, adults tend to define their identities according to the experiences they have gone through, so educators should not underestimate the previous experiences. Second, readiness to learn means that adults are ready to learn if there is an effective reason related to their real life behind this learning; for example, supervisors are more willing to learn about management rules, teachers are more willing to know or learn about teaching methods, etc. Finally, adults are more responsive to internal motivators than external motivators. The majority of adults become motivated when they have a better job or high salaries, but they are more motivated when they encounter internal motivational factors such as self-esteem, job satisfaction, and quality of life. (Kistler, 2001).

Learning Style & Culture

There have been few studies which focus on the effect of culture on learning style. "Hofstede (2001) defines culture as " the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another". Irrespective of the discipline, the scholars have come to more or less a common ground with respect to defining culture. Culture can be conceptualized as "shared motives, values, beliefs, identities, and interpretations or meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives that are transmitted across generations'' (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004, p. 15).

Several studies believe that   one's learning style is highly related to his/her cultural background. "Hofstede (1997) argues that a country's culture shapes its peoples' preferred modes of learning through their socialization experiences. Hayes and Allinson (1988) think that the culture of a country may be one of the powerful socialization agents that have a great impact upon the development of learning styles. (Sywelem, Al Harbi, Fathema, and Witte, 2012, p. 14).

Since our study is done among Arabic students, our focus will be around the Arabic culture. There was a study done in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. The participants were some student teachers from Jazan University and Suez Canal University. The study's main aim was to measure whether students are Auditory, Visual or Kinaesthetic. "Saudi students demonstrated a preference for the Aural Modality, therefore a higher level of lecture among Saudi students than the other nationalities would be appropriate to support their expressed learning preferences." (Sywelem, Al Harbi, Fathema, and Witte, 2012, p. 20).

Learning Styles versus Learning Strategies

According to Riding (2001), the main differences between learning styles and strategies are that styles are highly related to the person's psychology; they are mainly consistent, and unchangeable, while the learning strategies develop throughout time and they are highly sensitive to the learner's situations. Sternberg and Grigorenko (2001) added a difference in the level of conscious between both of them; they claimed that learning style happens naturally without the learner's awareness, whereas, strategy demands a conscious choice of alternatives. A further distinction is proposed by them when they related strategy to certain task based situations, while style is related to a halfway stable situation between ability and strategy. (Dörnyei, 2005). From this latter distinction, we can sense that there is some kind of a relation between style and situation; situations have an impact that would force the learner to choose a specific learning strategy associated with a particular style. "When we even relate the term "preference" which means choice and it is part of our style to situations, we would realize that we sometimes change our learning style if the situation or the circumstances require us to take some kind of a different choice". (Dörnyei, 2005, p.122).

Learning Style and Cognitive Style

If the learning style is viewed as a profile of someone's way of learning, we can view it from two different layers: a cognitive layer which is related to one's way of thinking and it is usually stable, and a learning activity layer which is subject to change as it tends to adapt to the environment in which it is practiced. So, we have a cognitive style which is a partially biological way of thinking and responding to situations, and when this cognitive style is related to a fixed educational context and is being influenced by different factors, it is referred to as "learning style". (Dörnyei, 2005).

In general, cognitive style is usually defined as "an individual's preferred and habitual modes of perceiving, remembering, organizing, processing, and representing information." (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 124). Scholars have identified two main areas related to cognitive processing: those related to ability and those related to style. According to Messick (1994), abilities refer to the content and level of cognition (the questions of What? and How much?), whereas cognitive styles refer to the manner or mode of cognition (the question of How?). (Dörnyei, 2005, p.125). Both cognitive style and learning style have been under huge criticism since the 19th century. According to Riding (2000b, p: 365):

In the past, the study of cognitive style has been rightly criticized for being vague and superficial. It has suffered from a number of serious problems, particularly with respect to there being too many labels purporting to being different styles, the use of ineffective assessment methods, and the lack of a clear distinction between style and other constructs such as intelligence and personality. (Dörnyei, 2005, p.126)

In the previous quotation, we notice that the term "cognitive style" is a bit loose and "instrument bound"; that means that is because the style is being measured according to how the researcher viewed style itself and most of the questionnaires were mainly related to the ideologies of those who constructed them. The situation would get even more problematic when we notice that certain measured styles cannot be separated from certain abilities or personalities. So, they would fall into "field dependence and independence" problem; that is why so many scholars refuse the concept "cognitive style" and put it under several questions. (Dörnyei, 2005).

Riding's Cognitive Style Taxonomy

Riding, who is a famous scholar in the field of cognitive style, has suggested a cognitive taxonomy that would work as a remedy to cure the previous problems scholars faced in the field of cognitive style.

Table 2: (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 127)

Cognitive Style	Characteristics
Holistic-Analytic style	determining whether individuals tend to organize information as an integrated whole or in discrete parts of that whole (i.e., take a whole view or see things in parts).
Verbal–Imagery Style	determining whether individuals are outgoing and inclined to represent information during thinking verbally or whether they are more inward and tend to think in mental pictures or images; in other words, verbalizers are superior at working with verbal information, whereas imagers are better at working with visual or spatial information.

As mentioned in Riding's taxonomy, holistic learners tend to view things as a whole and they just cannot focus on the details; such people would really appreciate having a title in the reading passage to take an overall idea about what they will read, while other learners who are called *analytic* tend to focus more on details rather than the whole picture, therefore, having a title will not be a help to enhance their performances. The analytics are better in detecting similarities and differences between two things. The danger with analytics is that they would view details and lose parts of the whole picture.

 "The verbal–imagery style dimension concerns the way information is represented as well as the external and internal focus of attention. The former aspect refers to the extent to which one constructs mental pictures when reading or thinking, rather than thinking in words. The latter aspect has implications for social relationships." (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 129). Verbalizers tend to think outwards and would rather be in a stimulating environment, whereas, imagers tend to be more passive with inward focus and more likely to be active in static environments. Learners may be in between those two extremes, and some scholars complicate the process when they claim that the combination between these two would occur resulting in "various combining patterns". (Dörnyei, 2005).

Broader Models of Learning Styles

Kalbs' Learning Style

We have mentioned earlier some models related to cognitive style; now let us move to learning style in particular. There is Kalb's learning style model. It is mainly based on two dimensions: Concrete versus abstract thinking, and active versus reflective information processing. Concrete thinkers focus on being part of experiences one would face, and they deal with human experiences in a personal manner; thus feeling is more important to them than thinking. On the other hand, abstract conceptualization tend to focus on logic, ideas, concepts, thus thinking is more important to them than feeling. If we would shift to active versus reflective processing, we would notice that active people are happier with being actively involved in experiences as they are more practical than reflective. Whereas, reflective learners tend to observe and reflect on ideas as they tend to be less practical than observers. (Dörnyei, 2005).

As an outcome of the combination of these two broad learning styles, four learning styles have emerged and they are:

Table 3: (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 130)

Style	Characteristics
Divergers (Concrete and reflective)	They love situations which force them to think and generate ideas such as brainstorming. Down to earth people Like to look at concrete situations from a reflective point of view Emotional in dealing with people They usually specialize in arts and like to work in groups.
Convergers (abstract and active)	Interested in active experiences to find practical uses. Good at solving specific problems especially the technical tasks rather than the social ones. People prefer experiments, laboratory assignments, and practical applications.
Assimilators (abstract and reflective)	Able to understand so many ideas and information then organize them in a logical manner. They are less interested in people than in abstract concepts.
Accommodators (concrete and active)	They like active experiments and they challenging them to the extent that they could take a risk. They follow their "gut" rather than logic grounds. They succeed in action orientation careers such as marketing and sales.

As one can notice from the above description, there is not a pure distinction between these style descriptions; many people tend to look at them according to their own learning style. So, we need an instrumental tool that would adequately observe the learning styles rather than merely describing them.

Field Dependant and Field Independent

The distinction between field independent and field dependent has gained the attention of so many scholars and psychologists in the field of second language acquisition. Field dependent people are those who look at the whole ideas and cannot recognize pieces and details, while field independent people are those who are free from the control of their whole environment and would rather focus on details and tiny things. Filed independent seem to surpass field dependent in their cognitive skills. Their ability to focus on the details regardless of the background or the environment let them more powerful in experiencing things, while they may not be as powerful as field dependent in the field of language learning, because the latter focuses on details and background; a situation which makes them better in understanding language and its detailed information. However, they both has an advantage; FD are more skilful when they communicate with others, so they are socially wise, and FI are more powerful in their ability to disconnect essential things from the inessential ones, along with their notice of important aspects of language. (Dörnyei, 2005).

Sensory Preference

Most teachers and students are aware of the categorisation of "sensory preferences" into 'visual,' 'auditory,' 'kinaesthetic,' and sometimes 'tactile' types (Dörnyei, 2005 p.139); these are called sensory preferences. Sensory preferences "are the physical channels through which students take in and perceive new information: ears, eyes, and touch, and directly relate to the perceiving (or attentional) aspects of cognition. The typical categories used by specialists in learner differences are visual, auditory, and motor." (Leaver, Ehrman, and Shekhtman, 2005, p.67).

Table 4: (Dornyei, 2005, p. 14)

Sensory preference	Characteristics
Visual Learners	"As the term suggests, these learners absorb information most effectively if it is provided through the visual channel. Thus, they tend to prefer reading tasks and often use colourful highlighting schemes to make certain information visually more salient. In general, visual learners like visual stimulation such as films and videos, and if some large chunk of information is presented orally (e.g., in a lecture) their understanding is considerably enhanced by a hand-out and various visual aids, such as overhead transparencies, as well as by taking extensive notes."
Auditory learners	"Use most effectively auditory input such as lectures or audiotapes. They also like to 'talk the material through' by engaging in discussions and group work."
Kinaesthetic and tactile learners	"The kinaesthetic style refers to learning most effectively through complete body experience (e.g., whole-body movement), whereas tactile learners like a hands-on, touching learning approach. The key issue for the former group is movement, while for the latter the manipulation of objects. Kinesthetic learners thus require frequent breaks or else they become Fidgety—sitting motionless for hours is a real challenge for them. They often find that walking around while trying to memorize something helps. Tactile learners enjoy making posters, collages, and other types of visuals, building models, and they also happily engage in creating various forms of artwork. For them conducting a lab experiment may be a real treat."

Learning Style and Teaching

"There has been a recent shift towards an increasingly *personalized* approach to teaching and learning that is, *tailoring* teaching and learning to individuals needs where inclusively for learners is the key. This approach has highly incorporated learning styles theory throughout the last thirty years; a theory which is based on the belief that learners have different personality characteristics, brain function, and suitable environments, leading to varied strengths and weaknesses in receiving, assimilating, and retaining information." (Allcok & Hulme, 2010, p.67). The claim is that knowing which style the learner will adopt or prefer to use while learning will improve motivation and, thus leads to a better learning condition. The purpose of analysing learning style is to plan lessons that would suit a range of learning methods. (Hulme & Allcok, 2010). Gardner's multiple intelligence theory is the most widely used and practiced theory in education. Gardner suggests seven intelligences possessed in differing degrees by individuals, and they are: linguistic intelligences, the logical mathematical intelligences or the conventional academic intelligence, the bodily Kinaesthetic intelligence, musical intelligence, naturalistic intelligence, spatial intelligence, and the personal intelligences. This theory provides opportunity for personalising learning, although a practical way of effectively applying this kind of teaching to an average classroom is not clear; however, all teachers should consider all intelligences in lesson planning (Hulme & Allcok, 2010, p.68).

There are positive aspects of using learning styles theory in education which are agreed by a number of researchers, for example, identifying and addressing individual learning needs and creating 'self-awareness' of learners, along with informing a range of learning and teaching methods. Halstead and Martin suggest creating a culture of engaging teachers and learners in the learning process to shift the focus from teaching methods to the methods of learning and to allow students to understand they are intelligent in more than one way (Hulme & Allcok, 2010, p.70).

Research on learning styles should make us doubt the claims that a single teaching method will suit the needs of all learners. Instead, we have to find instructional approaches that meet the needs of learners with a variety of learning styles.

(B) Case Study

Methods

Design

We have distributed a one version survey among 16 TESOL Masters students. The survey consists of 20 multiple choice questions; the answers depend on choosing one choice from three available choices (a, b, c). It is based on VAK learning style measurement, which is the most widely used measurement. It attempts to figure out how many students are labelled under which learning style (visual, auditory, Kinaesthetic. The design of the survey is quite simple and easy to finish in quite a short time.

Participants

The participants are all TESOL masters students. Most of them (around 13) are English language instructors in King Abdul-Aziz University. Two of them are teachers in public schools, and one of them is a fresh bachelor graduate who does not work. One candidate is a male and the rest are females. They are all Saudi students, so their learning styles have some kind of a relation to their cultural background. Their age ranges between 23 years to 34 years old.

Instrument

We have conducted this study using VAK learning style measurement.. The VAK learning styles model suggests that most people can be divided into one of three preferred styles of learning. There is no right or wrong learning style. These three styles are as follows:

1. **Visual** learning style:

 Here one has a preference for seeing or observing things, including pictures, diagrams, demonstrations, displays, handouts, films, flip-chart, etc. These people will use phrases such as 'show me', 'let's have a look at that' and will be best able to perform a new task after reading the instructions or watching someone else do it first. These are the people who will work from lists and written directions and instructions.

2. **Auditory** Learning Style :

Someone with an **Auditory** learning style has a preference for the transfer of information through listening: to the spoken word, of self or others, of sounds and noises. These people will use phrases such as 'tell me', 'let's talk it over' and will be best able to perform a new task after listening to instructions from an expert. These are the people who are happy being given spoken instructions over the telephone, and can remember all the words to songs that they hear.

3. **Kinaesthetic** Learning Style :

Someone with a **Kinaesthetic** learning style has a preference for physical experience - touching, feeling, holding, doing, and practical hands-on experiences. These people will use phrases such as 'let me try', 'how do you feel?' and will be best able to perform a new task by going ahead and trying it out, learning as they go. These are the people who like to experiment, hands-on, and never look at the instructions first. (VAK learning styles test, n.d., para. 3).

Results

The analysis of the data about the learning style of the TESOL MA group revealed that the dominant learning style is auditory; since 6 of the students are pure auditory. The second most common learning style is visual; around 4 candidates are pure visual. The third most common learning style is visual auditory; around 3 candidates. Finally, only one candidate is visual kinesthetic. Two candidates apologized and didn't contribute in the survey. So, the results are similar to the results of the study conducted by Al Harbi at Jazan University which stated that the majority of Saudi students are auditory.

Conclusion

Finally, we have noticed that each human being learns knowledge differently, and although we receive the same information, the style of learning of each individual makes him/her unique in one way or another. This study concerning LEARNING STYLES in the context of second language acquisition works as an eye-opener to notify us about the variable styles of 16 TESOL Masters students at King Abdul-Aziz University. The study begins with a theoretical framework part starting from the concept of learning in SLA, and moving towards individual differences and personality in SLA, personality & learning, adults' perception of learning, learning styles and culture, the differences between styles and strategies, the relationship between learning style and cognitive style, broader models of learning style, and finally learning style and teaching. Then, the study presents a practical section in which it examined the learning styles of around 16 TESOL masters students. The most important findings are that the majority of students' learning styles are auditory, few are visual, and three are visual auditory; while one candidate is visual kinesthetic. We will conclude this article with Ellis's words:

At the moment there are few general conclusions that can be drawn from the research on learning style. Learners clearly differ enormously in their preferred approach to L2 learning, but it is impossible to say which learning style works best. Quite possibly it is learners who display flexibility who are most successful, but there is no real evidence yet for such a conclusion. One of the major problems is that the concept of 'learning style' is ill-defined, apparently overlapping with other individual differences of both an affective and a cognitive nature. It is unlikely that much progress will be made until researchers know what it is they want to measure (Ellis, 1994, p. 508).

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Appendix 1:

Learning Style Questionnaire

This survey is made in order to identify the learning styles of 16 TESOL masters students. One of the candidates is a male student and the rest are all females. In our study, we went through the following: the definition of learning style, individual differences (ID) and its relationship with personality, the differences between learning styles, learning strategies, and cognitive style, the effect of learning style on teaching, and finally some learning style measurements in the field.

VAK Learning Styles Self-Assessment Questionnaire

Q) Write the letter that represents your choice:

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

Answer:………………………………..

2. When I need directions for travelling, I usually:

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

Answer:………………………………..

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

Answer:………………………………..

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

Answer:………………………………..

5. I tend to say:

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

Answer:………………………………..

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

Answer:………………………………..

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

Answer:………………………………..

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

Answer:……………………………..

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 different types

Answer:……………………………..

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.

Answer:……………………………..

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 my partner
c) imagine what the food will taste like

Answer:……………………………..

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

Answer:……………………………..

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

Answer:……………………………..

14. I choose household furnishings because I like:

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

Answer:……………………………..

15. My first memory is of:

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

Answer:……………………………..

16. When I am anxious, I:

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

Answer:……………………………..

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

Answer:……………………………..

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

Answer:……………………………..

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

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

Answer:……………………………..

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 or dancing

Answer:……………………………..