



The Learning Styles And Strategies Of Effective Language Learners

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Abstract

This paper presents the results of a comparative investigation into the learning styles and strategies of effective and ineffective language learners. Subjects for the study were one hundred and ten undergraduate university students in Hong Kong. They were categorized as ‘more effective’ or ‘less effective’ learners, on the basis of their scores on a standardized public English examination administered at the end of secondary school. Subjects completed an online questionnaire through which data were collected on their learning strategy preferences as well as patterns of language practice and use. The study revealed key differences in learning strategy preferences, learning styles and patterns of language use. Implications of the study are presented and discussed.

Keywords;

Learning styles, Learning strategies, Effective language learner, Less effective language learner, Tertiary

Learning is not about cramming in information. It is about learning by doing. It is about looking at issues in various ways and developing capacities, especially the ability to dig below the surface to reach the truth. .



That is why our goal is to teach students to learn how to learn rather than merely passing information to them. Research into learning styles and strategies has focused on a wide variety of questions and issues.

‘Styles’ is the more general term, being “an individual’s natural, habitual, and preferred way of absorbing, processing, and retaining new information and skills”

Learning styles are the general approaches –for example, global or analytic, auditory or visual –that students use in acquiring a new language or in learning any other subject.

Ehrman and Oxford (1990) cited 9 major style dimensions relevant to L2 learning, although many more style aspects might also prove to be influential. Learning styles are not dichotomous (black or white, present or absent). Learning styles generally operate on a continuum or on multiple, intersecting continua. Sensory preferences can be broken down into four main areas: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic (movement-oriented), and tactile (touch-oriented). Sensory preferences refer to the physical, perceptual learning channels with which the student is the most comfortable. Another style aspect that is important for L2 education is that of personality type, which consists of four strands: extraverted vs. introverted; intuitive-random vs. sensing-sequential; thinking vs. feeling; and closure-oriented/judging vs. open/perceiving.

Learning strategies are defined as “specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques --such as seeking out conversation partners, or giving oneself encouragement to tackle a difficult language task -- used by students to enhance their own learning”. As seen earlier, L2 learning strategies are specific behaviors or thought processes that students use to enhance their own L2 learning. The word strategy comes from the ancient Greek word *strategia*, which means steps or actions taken for the purpose of winning a war.



A given strategy is neither good nor bad; it is essentially neutral until the context of its use is thoroughly considered. However, teachers can actively help students “stretch” their learning styles by trying out some strategies that are outside of their primary style preferences. This can happen through strategy instruction, as discussed later in this chapter. In relation to language learning styles, Willing (1994) identified four major styles: communicative, analytical, authority-oriented and concrete.

Learning strategies enable students to take more responsibilities of their own language learning and personal development. “Learners’ proactive contribution to enhancing the effectiveness of their own learning” is essential in developing skills in learning-how-to-learn.

Learners can take advantages of their learning styles by matching learning strategies with their styles; similarly, learners can compensate for the disadvantages of their learning styles to balance their learning by adjusting learning strategies.

Not surprisingly, given the fact that styles are derived from strategy preferences, there were differences between the most preferred strategies of the effective and ineffective learners. The five most popular strategies of more effective learners were:

- 1 “I like to learn by watching/listening to native speakers.”
2. “I like to learn English words by seeing them.”
3. “At home, I like to learn by watching TV in English.”
4. “In class, I like to learn by conversation.”
5. “I like to learn many new words.”

The five most popular strategies of less effective learners were:

1. “I like the teacher to tell me all my mistakes.”
2. “I like to learn English words by seeing them.”



3. “I like the teacher to help me talk about my interests.”
4. “I like to have my own textbook.”
5. “I like to learn new English words by doing something.”

The breath of applied linguistics has expanded from the typical lexical based areas such as lexicology, discourse analysis particularly doctor-patient communication, English for Specific Purpose, genre analysis, gender difference in verbal communication, written and oral discourse to more anthropological based areas such as linguistic competency of savants, language pathology like aphasia, neuron firing and language acquisition, and animal and language;

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