

An investigation of the effects of perceptual learning style preferences on English language acquisition of Yemeni students in Faculties of Education, Hodeidah University

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Abstract

Effective language learners are those who are aware of their learning styles. Such learners know the different perceptual learning styles and how they affect their acquisition of English language better. The perceptual learning styles being six styles: visual, auditory, tactile, kinesthetic, group and individual are identified as biological to every learner but vary of strength and preference from a learner to another. Likewise, less effective learners might not be aware of their learning styles, but that does not their acquisition of language that much as the duty falls on the teacher before starting with his/her learners to try to identify their learning style preference so to cope with them and present the teaching in a suitable and matching to the learners' styles preferences.

This paper aims at investigating the perceptual learning styles preferences of Yemeni students in the faculty of Education, Hodeidah and shows to extent it is important for a teacher to try to identify his/her learners preferred perceptual learning style.

Keywords: perceptual learning style preferences, Yemeni students, visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile.

I. INTRODUCTION

A style of learning a particular piece of information is any pattern we can notice by observing in a person's way of dealing with a particular type of task. The "task" of interest in the present context is what is related to education-learning and remembering in school and

transferring what is learned to the world outside of school. A learner can use a different style while learning and varies from a learner to another. For example, some learners learn primarily with their eyes (visual learners) or with the ears (auditory learners); some people prefer to learn by experience and/or by "hands-on" tasks (kinesthetic or tactile learners); some people learn better when they work alone while others prefer to learn in groups.

II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1. The ELT Situation in Yemen

Yemen is an ancient Arab land. History of human life in Yemen dates back to a very early age. Arabic is the medium of instruction at the primary and secondary levels of Education; at the higher level, most of the subjects are taught in Arabic.

Before 1962, there were primary, preparatory and Secondary Schools, though not a large number. Around 1973, the Ministry of Education in Egypt was asked to send a few teachers to Yemen in order to improve the Education system in Yemen. Those teachers were the first to start teaching English in Yemen. According to some reports, the teaching of English started in a few preparatory schools in Sana'a and according to some other reports it began in Secondary Schools in San'a. It is not clear when and how English language teaching began in Yemen, especially the north part of Yemen. In the southern part of the country, during the British rule, there were some public schools where English teaching was given more importance. In some other private schools Arabic teaching was given more importance (Bose 2002).

Since the revolution in 1962, Yemen has attracted many foreigners to work in the field of Education, Industry, Trade, Communication, Agriculture, etc. Skilled and non-skilled workers from countries like Iraq, China, Pakistan and India have been working in a large number in these fields. Though the foreigners from the Arabic speaking countries have no problem about using Arabic, others create a situation for using non-Arabic language, the most popular of which happens to be English. It is mainly because of the large number of foreigners that English is being used in Yemen in the fields of Industry, Trade, Telecommunications and Education (Bose 2002).

The following table (1.1) illustrates the Educational System in Yemen along with the English Education in Yemeni Schools and Universities.

English Education		Educational system
(Major + Prerequisite + Medium of Instruction)	4 years	Higher Education (B.A + B. Sc)
1- Major= Arts Colleges Education colleges		
2- Prerequisite = Other colleges 3- Colleges like Medicine, Engineering	7 years	
English Education (instruction is in Arabic) English is taught as a school subject	12	Secondary Education
	11	
	10	
	9	Elementary Education
	8	
	7	
Instruction is in Arabic	6	
	5	
	4	
	3	
	2	
	1	

Table (1) English Education in Yemeni Schools and Universities

It is true that the language policy of the country since 1962 recognizes English as an important world language for the following reasons:

- 1- English is an international language. It is the mother tongue or the first language of people in the most of the countries in the world such as Britain, USA, etc. It is the important second language in countries like India. It is the most popular foreign language in countries like China, Japan, etc.
- 2- It is one of the official languages of United Nations. It is the language of international politics and relationship.
- 3- It is the language of media internationally.
- 4- It is the language of science and technology.

There is, therefore, a genuine need for teaching/learning English in Yemen for the following reasons:

- 1- Yemen is a developing country and interested in good relationship with other countries of the world; English will be helpful for international communications.
- 2- Yemen with its rich, ancient culture is becoming a major attraction for tourism industry.

- 3- The trade relationship of Yemen with other countries is daily increasing and English is very necessary to meet this growth.
- 4- The higher education in this country is expanding and there is a need for offering advanced courses in the fields of science and technology. This necessitates the use of English in higher education more.

Having realized the strong need for Yemeni children to learn English, the Government of Yemen introduced English language in the educational curriculum of this country and English education has geared up since 1962. English is taught from the first year of the preparatory level throughout the country.

2- University Level of Learning

In Yemeni universities, students who decide to study English language in higher studies have three alternatives. The first alternative is to join the Department of English, Arts College. The second alternative is to join the department of English, Faculty of Education. The third alternative is to join the Department of English, Faculty of Languages. The aforementioned streams are supposed to qualify the learners to be fluent in English and apply it accordingly. For example, if the graduate is of the first alternative, he/she will be a translator or literature writer. As another example, if the graduate of the second alternative, he/she will be supposed to be an English teacher. The case is that if those graduates are not prepared well, the unwellness will be recycled. As a part of making the graduate of fluency and well-qualified in English, the application of learning strategies and learning styles will be of great help and support during the teaching/learning process.

III. THE STUDY

1- Language Learning Styles

Upon the definition of learning style, it can be stated that as far as the learning styles are internally based characteristics, so they are of biologically for each learner which means they identify a learner's preference to a learning situation. Moreover, those characteristics are relatively stable and not likely to change due to the course of time. This point of view is highly declared by Oxford (1990) who highlights that some learner characteristics as "learning styles and personality traits are difficult to change", (p12). On the contrary Ellis' (1989) declares that the learners adjust themselves to the teaching styles rather than following their own learning styles. They tend to adapt themselves to this way to be able to cope with the teacher. This type of adaptation brings upon the learner the deficiency of the correct learning and acquisition of the language. This type of focus complicates the process of learning and acquiring the language and complain prop up as

teachers complain that some learners are lay and not clever, at the same time learners accuse the teachers' inability to convey the message correctly and skillfully.

2- Learning Styles Models

Researchers have constructed different learning style models and tools. Such models and tools are used to evaluate individuals learning styles. According to (Kolb, 1984) the concept of experiential learning explores the cyclical pattern of all learning from experience through reflection and conceptualizing to action and to the further experience. This model looks at the learners regarding the style variation as four types of learners: divergers, assimilators, convergers and accommodators. Honey and Mumford, on the other hands, classified the learners into four types: activists, reflectors, theorists and pragmatists. The third model is of Gergorc who looked at the learners as of concrete-abstract or/and sequential-random styles (Gregorc, 1985). The Dunn and Dunn learning styles model (1989) focused on five domains (emotional, environmental, psychological, sociological and physiological. Given (2002) based his categorization on the brain's natural learning systems so emerging of cognitive, emotional, physical, social and reflective.

3- Statement of the Problem

The English Language is world widely used as a language of communication and connecting nations together. The need to learn English is rapidly speeding up. It is acquired by living in society using it or mostly by learning it as the situation in Yemen. One of the facilities to acquire English language in Yemen is to join the department of English, Faculty of Education to learn English for four years. Students are noticed facing difficulties to learn and acquire the language within the allotted four years. The difficulties they face are related to the effects of their learning style preferences on their achievement. In exploring the differences that exist among second language learners, researchers have focused on different aspects of cognitive learning style- an individual's preferred means of processing information. Within the cognitive domain, perceptual learning style emerges as a neglected, yet significant factor in second language acquisition. Through the learner's perceptual channels, classified as auditory, visual, tactile and kinesthetic, information is taken in, encoded and stored. Therefore, this study aims at investigating the effects of perceptual learning style preferences while learning and acquiring a second language.

4- Objectives of the Study

Based on the discussion above, the objectives of this study will be:

1. To investigate the effects of the perceptual learning style preferences on the language acquisition of the students of 4th year level at the Faculty of Education, Hodeidah, Yemen.
2. To find out to what extent such preferences are appreciated by the teachers.0

5- Hypothesis

For the purpose of the study, the following hypotheses are developed:

The selection, unconsciously and preferably, of the type of perceptual learning style by the learner affects the acquisition of English language. There is a relationship between the preferences of the perceptual learning styles by the learners and thus lead to that many learners do not cope with all the teachers while explaining the course. Due to that a teacher is not aware of his/her learners' perceptual learning styles. This leads to that the process of language acquisition and learning by the learners of 4th year is affected.

6- Significance of the Study

The present study is considered one of the few studies that focus on factors affecting the acquisition of TEFL students of English language in Arab countries and especially in Yemen. Therefore, it will have its pedagogical implications for teaching English in the Faculty of Education, English Major in EFL contexts.

The majority of researches on language learning strategies and styles to date have been carried out in ESL or foreign language programmes in North American university settings. It is important to conduct language learning strategy and perceptual learning style preferences studies in different cultural contexts in order to value the learners' proficiency and acquisition of English language in Yemeni Universities. The current study will be carried out in the Yemeni TEFL context in the hope that it will give teachers and curriculum designers in that context a clearer picture and some thoughts of how their students approach language learning by identifying their learning strategies, and what role individual differences and what perceptual learning style preferences applied or exist play an important role in their learning process.

7- Methodology of the Study

The quantitative data will be collected using Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (PLSPQ) (an adopted version). The population of this study is the students of English

Language Department, Faculty of Education, Hodeidah University, Yemen. The sampling technique will be random sampling in which respondents will be selected randomly from the whole population. Consequently, the sample of students will be selected randomly from fourth year level in the Department of English. Data collected through questionnaires will be analyzed using descriptive statistics using IBM SPSS software.

7- Analytical Discussion and Findings

The Perceptual Learning Style Questionnaire (Reid, 1995) was used to assess the students' learning style preferences. The questionnaire consisted of 30 questions, divided in sequence into six parts and each part consists of five items. It is designed to diagnose the major, minor and negligible learning style preferences of students.

Learning Style Preferences	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	RII	Rank
Visual	2.00	5.00	3.76	0.62	75.27	5
Tactile	2.20	5.00	4.06	0.53	81.24	2
Auditory	2.00	5.00	3.94	0.58	78.73	4
Group	1.20	5.00	4.02	0.73	80.42	3
Kinesthetic	1.80	5.00	4.25	0.56	85.10	1
Individual	1.00	5.00	3.17	0.91	63.46	6

Table (2) Descriptive Statistics Concerning Learning Style Preferences (N = 142)

As it shown in the table above (85.10%) of the students preferred kinesthetic learning style with the highest mean (4.25) and std. deviation (0.56), then (81.24%) of the students preferred tactile learning style with mean (4.06) and std. deviation (0.53), (80.42%) of the students preferred Group learning style with mean (4.02) and std. deviation (0.73), (78.73%) of the students preferred auditory learning style with mean (3.94) and std. deviation (0.58), (75.27%) of the students preferred Visual learning style with mean (3.76) and std. deviation (0.62), finally (63.46%) of the students preferred Individual learning style with mean (3.17) and std. deviation (0.91).

These kinds of preferences contradict with the style of teaching going on in the classes during lecturing. Teachers tend to deliver their messages and explain in a visual and auditory style most of the time. This contradiction makes learners in pendulum of the situation. Thus this lead to learners not coping with their teachers and not understanding fully the lessons explained. This contradiction results in learners' language acquisition is disturbed and their proficiency is negatively affected.

8- CONCLUSION

It is finally clear from the elaboration of the topic of the paper that there is a need to revise the situation of teaching to suit the learners' learning styles preferences because only at the moment we can produce good and acceptable level of teaching. It is recommended that a questionnaire of perceptual learning styles preferences is to be administered at the beginning of the academic year to identify the learners' preferred styles of learning. If such styles are identified, the teachers can accommodate their way of teaching to suit the majority of the learners' learning styles and learners will acquire English language better.

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