Secondary Level Students' Choice of Learning Styles in Nepalese English as a Second Language Classrooms

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Abstract

Many research studies agreed that learning is an idiosyncratic process since individual learner possesses a unique style of learning. This research is an attempt to investigate the learning style students in grades 11 and 12 employ in learning academic and nonacademic texts. For the same, 10 students from five higher secondary schools were chosen as the sample for the study using a judgmental sampling procedure. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, and data were analyzed descriptively. The findings suggest that learning style depended on the type of texts they learned and the time-bound contexts of learning. In this, it was identified that each of the learners shifted from creative learning to rote learning when they needed to prepare for the examination.

Keywords: Learning style, visual, auditory, kinesthetic, pictorial

Introduction

Learners feel uncomfortable when they try to learn something in ways that are not natural or easy for them to learn. Different researchers advocate that learners do not learn in the same ways (Anderson & Adams, 1992). For Keefe (1985), learning style is an expressive, intellectual, and affective behaviour that serves as a reasonably stable indicator of how individuals distinguish, respond to, and interact with learning environments. Every learner has a unique approach to learning and this approach makes him or her feel comfortable. Similarly, Guilds (1989) asserts that there is never one "right" way to teach or to learn. Since the late 1960s, educators have been studying whether individual differences can result in variations in concept formation, problem-solving techniques, and

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shared meaning (Goodson,1993) and have found that a variety of patterns appear in classrooms conditioned by time and contexts (Guild,1989). Goodson (1993) asserts that students learn more readily when they process information in their natural, preferred ways, and they vary in how much they rely on visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic (or tactile) perception as they learn. Following Reid (1995), learning style is a preferred way of taking in, processing, and maintaining new information and skill for effective learning. Fleming (2009) demarcates learning style as an individual's preferred techniques of collecting, shaping and thinking about information.

Learning styles are understood in many different ways. According to learner characteristics, some are visual, auditory, and others are kinaesthetic (Higbee, 2003). Learning style inventory recognizes and classifies student learning behaviour preferences as avoidant, dependent, participant, independent, competitive, and collaborative (Lang et al., 1999).

Models of learning styles. This section presents several models of learning styles.

Fleiming and Mill's (1984) VARK Model. Fleming and Mills (1992) proposed VARK model of learning comprises visual, auditory, read-write, and kinaesthetic styles. Visual learners favour to learn by seeing, acoustic learners acquire by hearing information, the read-write style has the preference for written descriptions and interpretation, and kinaesthetic learners learn by doing things.

Ehrman and Oxford's (1990) Model. Ehrman and Oxford (1990) model shows a great dimension of learning styles, such as sensory preferences (visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, and tactile), personality types (demonstrative vs. reserved, intuitive-random vs. sensing-sequential), and worldwide or all-inclusive vs. logical learners.

Reid's (1987) Perceptual Learning Styles. Another significant arrangement has been made by Reid (1995). She first ordered learning styles into two groups, such as perceptual and sociological learning styles. The record made for her study on Russian English as a Second Language (ESL) learners is known as Perceptual Learning Style Preferences Questionnaire (PLSPQ) (Isemonger & Sheppard, 2007).

The learners have their own preferences of learning styles as each learner is different from one another. For example, a study (Reid, 1987) showed that ESL students strongly favoured kinaesthetic and physical learning styles. Likewise, another study (Lincoln & Rademacher, 2006) found that learners were significantly less pictorial and more read-write than either auditory or kinaesthetic, but males and females differed significantly in their choice of auditory learning. Kara's (2009) study found students favoured visual and auditory styles, as well as teachers, also preferred visual and auditory styles. Another study (Melton, 1990) showed that Chinese students prefer kinaesthetic, tactile, and individual learning as major styles and considered visual and auditory as minor learning styles, while group learning was a negative learning style. Similarly, Ozeki (1996) study revealed that Japanese students exhibited a variety of learning style preferences. They did not like group learning as much as visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, tactile, and individual learning. They seem to be able to adjust learning concerning visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, and tactile learning styles. However, they seem to have trouble developing single and group learning styles. Furthermore, students who were less auditory, kinaesthetic, and group-oriented tend to acquire better marks on the TOEFL. Psaltou-Joycey and Kantaridou (2011) revealed that the overall learning style preferences of Greek university students were visual, extroverted, intuitive-random, closure-oriented, and global.

Many factors influence the learning preferences. For example, a study (Slater et al., 2007) revealed gender differences in preferred methods of information delivery and suggested that the female learners were more diverse than the male learners, encompassing a broader range of sensory modality preferences.

Methodology

The study employed qualitative phenomenological procedure to obtain information from students. It investigated the perception of learning style preferences of post-secondary students sharing their frame of reference (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). To obtain the data semi-structured interviews were conducted to elicit rich and in-depth

information (Cohen et al., 2010). Moreover, it interpreted the meaning and practices of the learning strategies that participants employed within their intention to furnish the information about their preference of learning style that they employed (Kumar, 2019). The research was conducted in Pokhara Metropolitan City since it is the place where one can get different types of institutions since the purpose of the study was to bring multiple perspectives of learning styles students employ in learning different stuff (Gardner, 2000). Additionally, the study included students studying management in five different private secondary schools. Two students from each school were selected purposively as the participants of the study. The additional information about the participants, such as their age, gender, grades they were in have been presented in the following Table 1:

Table 1. *Additional Information of Participants*

S.N.	Gender	Grade	Age	Code
1.	Male	11	16	S-1
2.	Female	11	17	S-2
3.	Male	12	17	S-3
4.	Female	12	17	S-4
5.	Male	11	16	S-5
6.	Female	11	16	S-6
7.	Male	12	18	S-7
8.	Female	12	18	S-8
9.	Male	11	18	S-9
10.	Female	12	18	S-10

All ethical considerations have been maintained while collecting data. First, to obtain permission to conduct the study, the written request letter was submitted to the schools' administration, the intention of the study was revealed to the participants and mentioned that their participation in the study is voluntary one and information that they would provide would be kept strictly confidential (Denzin, 2019). Moreover, the information that participants provided has been maintained strictly anonymous and has been used only for the present study. The participants were pre-informed about the recording of the interview.

Results and Discussion

The data obtained from the interview has been categorized into different themes and whenever necessary, coding was done so that personal and professional ethics about the sensitive information that participants have provided could be made (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Based on the information elicited from the participants the following themes have been introduced.

Students' Choice of Learning Styles

Huda (2013) asserted that EFL students had a diverse set of style preferences which included reflective learning, field-dependent and field-independent, auditory and tactile styles. A study of (Gilakjani, 2012) found that the Iranian EFL university students preferred learning style was visual. So far the participants were concerned most of them agreed that the learning style that they have been adopting made their learning process effective and easier. Even if different styles were prescribed to them, the participants in the study preferred to read the materials based on the instructions of their teachers. For example, one of the participants advocated that:

> *For me, reading is the most preferred way of obtaining information. Whenever I read something I better understand it. The best way that I learn is when my teacher writes something on the whiteboard since I get an opportunity to ask for clarification to him and in most of the circumstances, the instructions given by my teacher make the written concept clear to me. Additionally, when I try to remember the thing that I learned, those written and explained by the teacher become long-lasting to me. When I read in the environment where there is no noise, I learn better and I can remember such whenever the need arises. In summary, for my friends reading is boring stuff but it is a way of removing monotony for me as such since I enjoy reading whenever I have free time and reading materials can be academic or non-academic texts (S-5).*

From the remark of the students, it is clear that the learning style of an individual is idiosyncratic since the idea one employs and others employ can be quite different and the way of grasping information has also been found different. For example, one of the participants reported that:

Analysing the view of the third participant, reading made learning more durable and effective. In the same vain the second participant also added her view as:

> I normally read during the examination time or whenever something important text is being taught by the teacher but I prefer to read in a peaceful environment. Therefore, whenever I have to read something important I read it early in the morning since reading that time ensures me to grasp all the content. I mostly prefer to grasp the given reading material in audio form. Some months back one of the cousins gave me a novel and I read it twice but could not get the plot of it but later on, I was given an audio version of the same novel by one of my friends and after listening to it, I was able to merge in the content of the novel. Moreover, whenever I watch something on YouTube or in audio form, it becomes very easy for me to understand it very easily than by reading in the printed matter (S-9).

The context in which one is reading and the purpose for which reading is done is also another determining factor for ensuring smooth learning and retention. In this connection, one of the participants advocated:

> I rarely read because I mostly rely on the discussion with my friends. It is because whenever I want to learn something, I can learn more effectively with interaction with my friends so instead of rote learning the textbook or note provided by the teacher, we talk in the Facebook messenger. We have the messenger group of Facebook applications and there are 10 friends of ours and we mostly talk about taught materials and such include Principal of Management and English. After talking with my friends, I do not read the textbook and notes because the discussion we make in the group call makes me understand the content in a good way. On the other hand, whenever I have to read I prefer to choose such a place where there is

no disturbance because I am disturbed by the noise of radio or television from far too if I am reading an impotent reading material or preparing for the examination.

Even if the reading style was the most preferred one, the second strategy favoured by the participants was the use of visual materials. Skorge (2006) found that teachers felt that the course books which were full of pictures were helpful in teaching foreign languages rather than the course books which only had texts. Pictures and graphics, it seems, are supposed to speak for themselves as one picture is better than thousand words (Bland, 2015). Dolan (2014) appeals picture books as 'windows and mirrors' and a powerful vehicle in the classroom in terms of intercultural education for all students, including those working through the medium of a second language.

In the present study one of the questions asked to the participant was the role of visual materials as the learning style. One of the participants contented:

Learning by reading becomes a bit difficult since whenever I try to remember what I have read, it becomes more difficult for me to retrieve but the subject matter presented on pictures, graphs, and another paraorthographic text becomes easier for me to learn. Even if I find it difficult to grasp in the beginning but gradually it becomes easier for me to understand those things that are presented in pictorial form. Additionally, when I read or learn something from pictures, I try to relate the similar type of ideas or concepts in my context and it might be the reason for me to learn it in a better way. Therefore, for me, the subject matter presented in the visual form becomes easier for me to understand and remember for the longest time too (S-4).

There is a general tendency that people learn something more effectively once the things are presented in the reading form but the assertion of the participants revealed that not only printed letters helped one learn better but also something that is presented in the pictorial form yielded better understating too. So, learning style is not only through reading but it can be done through other mediums too. In this connection, one of the participants recounted:

I remember something which is done in using a hands-on approach. This was particularly helpful to me when I study high school and it was specifically beneficial for me to carry out scientific experiments. I rarely understood whatever science teachers taught; but once they took me to the lab and showed how something is done (for example, dissecting a worm), I understood it quite easily. Even at present also I prefer to learn using a play -way method in which I can be involved in doing and by doing I can learn something. Being a student of management it is possible for me only in Maths, Economics, and Accountancy (S-4).

From the above discussion, it is clear now that the style of learning an individual adopts has been found different and some of the students' approach was found to be kinaesthetic or tactile mode too. Moreover, some students (for example, S-1 and S-3) reported that they best learn using visual mode but their preferences in learning through auditory mode continued. According to them, it is possible once learning materials started coming in audio forms, and these days because of technological innovations, such has been massively used.

On the other hand, some of the students (S-3, S-2 and S-10) reported that seating pattern in the classroom has also impeded them to learn effectively. They reported that once they sit in the place from where the things written on the board is visible and they become able to understand what they were learning once they had a problem of seeing written things on the board and teachers while delivering the lesson, they could not learn effectively. Additionally, some participants (S-4 and S-6) reported that when they had chances of "learning by doing" their learning became faster and lasted longer. In some theoretical subjects, they did not have such facilities so they could not perform well in the examinations. Some female participants (for example, S-2 and S-10) reported that they had felt discomfort due to their gender characteristics, such as menstruation that caused them not perform efficiently.

The participants reported that the nature of the learning content is also a determining factor for the choice of learning style (S-4, S-6, S-8, and S-9). The students

advocated that once they have to learn something worth important, they used to avoid factors that caused a distraction in one hand, and on the other, they chose the appropriate time and environment too. They even preferred to learn easier content using kinaesthetic style (drama, role plays, etc.), interacting with peers and friends if the content is of moderate difficulty and staying in quiet place and rote learning to deal with the difficult content. For example, S-5 used a strange strategy of analogy and differences. He tried to find similarities between previous and current learning. After that, his concentration would be on memorizing the similarity or differences.

Finally, the participants in the study reported that the medium of instruction also played a significant role in the choice of learning style. For example, one of the participants reported that:

> *I completed my schooling from community school and most of the classroom discussion and interaction used to be in the Nepali language because of which I used to understand all taught content in an effective way. When I joined this school, I was like a crow in the fog (this meant he did not understand anything). It was because all the teachers and students in this school speak and interact in the English language which I could not grasp. This impedes my understating of the content for two and a half months and now I do not have any problem with language since I developed my competence in English too.*

Conclusion

Overall, the study explored learning style preferences of the secondary level students and found that better knowledge and understanding of learning styles is crucial as technological advances continue to mould the learning preferences of students. Likewise, teachers should make concentrated efforts to teach in a multi-style fashion that both reaches the greatest extent of students in a given class and challenges all students to grow as learners. It is very essential to comprehend and discover each individual's learning style. Analysing specific learning styles of students is essential for assisting them in becoming

successful learners, which eventually will proliferate educational achievement. Teachers can integrate learning styles into their classroom by recognizing their styles. It is important for learners to have several learning prospects and "learning style-shift" and teachers should achieve a match between teaching strategies and the students' unique learning styles. Integrating teaching to learning styles develops students' efficiency and motivation towards language learning. But, we have to consider the fact that learning style is an idiosyncratic phenomenon and one which is suitable in one context might not be useful in another one. Moreover, as teachers we have to focus on such skills which are based on learning by doing and teachers have to consider the seating pattern of the students to ensure smooth learning on the part of students. Finally, the language of classroom teaching and discussion should also be considered as another factor since it is also solely responsible for smooth learning on the part of students.

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