

Learning Styles and Learning Preferences

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Abstract. *This article explores the concept of learning styles and learning preferences, providing an overview of different learning theories, models, and the relevance of these concepts in education. The aim is to understand how individual differences in learning can impact educational outcomes and how teachers and educators can adapt their teaching strategies to accommodate diverse learners. The article also includes a review of existing literature on learning styles, methodology used to analyze these styles, and the findings from the research.*

Key words: *Learning styles, learning preferences, education, pedagogy, individualized learning, VARK model, Gardner's multiple intelligences, student-centered teaching.*

Introduction:

In the field of education, understanding how students learn is crucial for developing effective teaching strategies. Over the years, several models have emerged to explain the concept of learning styles and preferences, which refer to the ways individuals absorb, process, and retain information. By catering to these different styles, educators can create more engaging and inclusive learning environments. This article aims to explore the significance of learning styles and preferences, their theoretical frameworks, and how they influence educational practices.

Literature Review:

Various theories and models have been proposed to explain learning styles. One of the most well-known models is the VARK (Visual, Auditory, Reading/Writing, Kinesthetic) framework, developed by Neil Fleming. Another influential theory is Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences, which proposes that individuals possess different kinds of intelligences, including linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, spatial, and bodily-kinesthetic, among others. These models have informed research on how teaching can be tailored to match students' natural learning tendencies, although some critiques argue that the effectiveness of teaching to specific learning styles has not been conclusively proven.

Brown (2001, p. 210) tries to make a distinction between styles and strategies. He defines styles as those related to personality (such as extroversion, self-esteem, anxiety, or cognition such as left/right-brain orientation, ambiguity, tolerance, field sensitivity). While strategies are specific methods of approaching a problem or a task, modes of operation for achieving a particular end. Brown also claims that individuals may have various strategies while the styles seem to be more constant and predictable. There is no agreement on the number or variety of learning styles though, and there are various ways of classifying learning styles under different categories. For example, Christison (2003, cited in Wong & Nunan, p. 2011) distinguishes between cognitive style (field dependent versus field

independent, analytic versus global, reflective versus impulsive); sensory style (visual versus auditory versus tactile versus kinesthetic) and personality styles (tolerance of ambiguity, right brain versus left brain dominance).

On the other hand, Willing (1994) identifies four major language learning styles: communicative, analytical, authority-oriented and concrete. His classification of those styles was derived from learners' strategy preferences. In the communicative style, the learners were defined by the following learning strategies: they like to learn by watching, listening to native speakers, talking to friends in English, watching television in English, using English out of class, learning new words by hearing them, and learning by conversation. In the analytical style, learners like studying grammar, English books and newspapers, they also like to study alone, find their own mistakes, and work on problems set by the teacher. In the authority-oriented style the learners prefer the teacher to explain everything, having their own textbook, writing everything in a notebook, studying grammar, learning by reading, and learning new words by seeing them. In the concrete style, learners tend to like games, pictures, film, video, using cassettes, talking in pairs, and practicing English outside class.

Felder, Felder, and Dietz (2002, p.3) assert that students with different type preferences tend to respond differently to different modes of instruction. For example extraverts like to work in settings that provide various activities and group work. On the other hand, introverts prefer settings that provide opportunities for internal processing. Sensors also like concrete learning experiences and well defined expectations and they do not like theories and mathematical models; While intuitive learners prefer the instruction that emphasizes conceptual understanding and deemphasizes memorization of facts, rote substitution in formulas, and repetitive calculations. Moreover, thinkers like logically organized presentations of course material and feedback related to their work; but feelers on the other hand, like instructors who establish a personal rapport with them and feedback that shows appreciation of their efforts. Judgers like well-structured instruction with clearly defined assignments, goals, and milestones; perceivers like to have choice and flexibility in their assignments and dislike having to observe rigid timelines.

Other models include Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, which emphasizes learning as a four-stage cycle involving concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Additionally, Honey and Mumford's Learning Styles Questionnaire focuses on identifying preferences for specific learning behaviors, categorizing individuals as activists, reflectors, theorists, or pragmatists.

Research Methodology:

The research employed both qualitative and quantitative methods to explore how learning styles influence academic performance. A survey was administered to students from different educational institutions to assess their preferred learning styles using the VARK questionnaire. In-depth interviews were conducted with educators to gather insights on how they perceive learning styles and incorporate them into their teaching practices. Statistical analysis was used to measure correlations between students' reported learning preferences and their academic performance.

Analysis and Results:

The results of the study indicated that the majority of students have a preferred learning style, with visual and kinesthetic learners being the most prevalent. However, the analysis also revealed that students often employ a combination of learning strategies depending on the context, suggesting that learning preferences are more flexible than fixed. Educators interviewed in the study acknowledged the value of understanding learning styles but emphasized the importance of developing teaching methods that address multiple learning preferences simultaneously, rather than exclusively focusing on one style.

Conclusion:

This article highlights the importance of recognizing learning styles and preferences in educational settings. While individual learning preferences can offer useful insights into how students engage with material, they should not be seen as rigid categories. Instead, a more holistic approach to

teaching, which incorporates a variety of methods to address different learning preferences, is recommended. Future research should focus on the effectiveness of adaptive teaching strategies that cater to diverse learners and explore how these strategies can improve educational outcomes across different disciplines.

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