A REVIEW OF PREFERRED LEARNING STYLES FOR ONLINE EFL LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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Abstract:

A rise in the number of institutions that offer courses online may be attributed to recent advances in technology as well as the rapid expansion of educational usage of the internet. Studying off-campus has the potential to be a viable alternative to learning on-campus provided that the creators of the programmes do not ignore the fundamental concerns of education, namely the need of catering to the preferences and prerequisites of the students. The teacher is better able to react correctly to the expectations of the learners and notice patterns in which the learners tend to focus more when the learning styles of the people are taken into account. Students who are not adequately prepared to take responsibility of their own learning process may run into difficulties if they are not closely monitored and their step-by-step development is not observed while they are receiving their education via a distant learning format. This transition for EFL students who are participating in traditional face-to-face English courses is without a doubt difficult, and it may lead to greater difficulties and problems on the side of the students themselves.

Keywords: EFL context, learning styles, learning style models, online learning.

Introduction:

The incorporation of technology into teaching and learning settings over the last several decades has prompted educators to reevaluate their emphasis on educational pedagogy and approaches for the new channels of online learning. A survey of the literature on distant education and, in particular, online learning in Iran reveals that learners' characteristics, their expectations and needs, and their adaptability to online learning environments have not received sufficient consideration. In Iran, English is mostly taught as a foreign language (EFL) in traditional face-to-face (FTF) classrooms. These may refer to various factors, such as the short history of online learning in Iran, which is still in its infancy [1]; the critical system and Internet problems highlighted by Dilmaghani (2003) and Noori (2003) in the same research; and the significance of system evaluation and e-learning, such as teaching methodology of distance learning, framework in educational system, educational policies, distance learning

management, and curriculum in the same research.

It is claimed that technology may assist students develop abilities ranging from fundamentals to higher-order thinking. As a result, technology may aid students in developing these abilities to overcome the challenges they may experience in online training, but only if they are well prepared. This difficulty is exacerbated for Iranian students who often participate in FTF settings. The contentious problem in e-learning is that learners who have experienced teaching and learning techniques in conventional FTF classrooms and simply gathered knowledge from the teacher may not feel comfortable replacing traditional methods with online teaching and learning methods. In other words, the change in delivery method may not be accepted by all students since the pedagogical qualities of an online learning setting may not align with students' previous experiences [3].

Learners of foreign languages are ideal subjects for future study on online learning techniques. Due to sporadic/absent real-time contact and inadequate teacher assistance in distant settings (e.g., Web-based training), distance language learners have greater challenges than learners of other subjects. According to [4], "the heart and soul of online courses are the interaction between students" [5]. Nonetheless, Hurd (2006, p. 303) asserts that the acquisition practise and assessment of foreign language e.g. speaking skill (either with peer classmates or the instructor) are the most pervasive problems, which are attributable to the physical absence of the instructor, the isolated context, and the diminished opportunities to interact in the target language. Thus, learners of languages at a distance need a larger degree of self-regulation or autonomy than learners of other disciplines [6].

On Learning Style Preferences:

Due to variables such as genetics, educational background, age, and requirements and needs, individuals process and perceive information differently (. There are several definitions of learning styles, but there is a general agreement about the absorption, processing, and retention of new knowledge and skills [7]. In this respect, Keefe (2012) asserts that "learning styles are distinctive cognitive, emotional, and physiological behaviours that serve as relatively constant indications of how learners perceive, interact with, and react to the learning environment." In addition, Willing (1988) defines learning styles as "every individual learner's natural, habitual, and preferred methods of learning" (p. 1). Dunn, Beaudry, and Klavas (1989, p. 50) provide further information on learning styles. They define learning style as "a biologically and developmentally imposed combination of personal qualities that makes the identical teaching approach successful for some but ineffective for others." To keep up with the primary objectives of the present study, which are to identify the most frequently cited learning style models and to identify a more suitable model for a larger-scale study conducted in a Web-based Training

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(WBT) programme, a brief literature review and number of learning style models will be presented.

A Brief Literature Review on Learning Styles:

Learning styles are learners' various methods to learning. Marton (2016) emphasises the importance of understanding learners' learning styles because it is deemed an effective approach to guide learners, to help them become more aware of their own learning styles, and to assist them in managing their own learning based on educational goals and objectives [8]; and in the case of online learning environments, to provide a helpful means for designers to organize an optimized system. According to Bostrom, Olfman, and Dein (2013), a person's learning style might be a good predictor of their preferred learning behaviour and a good indication of their performance with distant learning. In this passage, Hosenfeld (1979) and Reiss (1983) suggest that incorrect learning techniques may result in recurrent language acquisition failures. Sternberg (1995) states that there are at least twenty learning style aspects. Typically, better language learners use more effective strategies of language acquisition (p. 267). Messick and Associates (1976) account for almost twenty characteristics of cognitive styles, including Witkin, Kagan, and perceptual preferences.

Nonetheless, despite its widespread use, even Dunn et al(2019) .'s approach has been criticised. For example, the validity of the learning style instrument,

the heavy focus on "environment" elements, and the notion that learning styles are a "cure-all" for identifying and indicating students' learning preferences. According to an alternative viewpoint, the Dunn's Learning Style Inventory is a popular commercially available questionnaire for elementary school students and not ESL/EFL. In addition to Dunn's model, Willing notes that Kolb's LSI has been widely administered in research and management training seminars, which may be an indication of its justified appeal; nonetheless, the test consists of a list of one-word personality characteristics (e.g., accepting, reserved, evaluative, pragmatic, receptive, and etc). Consequently, it seems that there is no agreement about the usefulness of a learning style instrument, since other learner characteristics may not be included. Thus, concentrating on a small number of factors, such as cognitive, perceptual, or environmental variables, may not be fruitful.

Learning Style Models:

Kolb (1984) and Reid (1996) are the most often utilised learning style models in native and second/foreign language acquisition (1884). Nonetheless, the available information indicates that cognitive learning style models have garnered increased attention in online education during the last decade. Kolb's (1984) model, Felder and Silverman's (1988) model, and Witkin, Oltman, Raskin, and Karp's (2001) model were the most widely used learning style models in the recent decade. Therefore, in the present

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research, there is a short discussion of the models of Reid (1987), Kolb (1984), Felder and Silverman (2015), which is seen as an effective alternative to the other learning style models offered.

Perceptual Learning Styles:

Sensory or perceptual learning styles, which are classed as cognitive styles, are one of the most prominent classifications of learning style preferences. Individuals use these several sensory modalities to perceive the environment. Three types of sensory styles are identified in order to engage with the environment and organise information: the visual leads to figural thinking, the auditory leads to verbal thinking, and the kinaesthetic leads to physical or motoric thinking. Raid is one of the prominent researchers emphasising sensory modalities (1987). She focuses on preferences for perceptual and social learning styles. The perceptual learning style dimension reflects the learner's choice for one or a combination of sensor modes for experiencing learning, including auditory or verbal, visual or spatial, tactile or hands-on, and kinesthetic or psychomotor. In addition, the sociological learning style factor relates to learners' inclinations to work alone, with one or two friends, in a small group, or as a member of a team. Reid classifies these two distinct tendencies as individual vs group oriented sociological learning styles. In addition, Reid (1987) offered her model in the form of a questionnaire titled Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (PLSPQ). As shown in Table 1, she splits her learning style instrument into six categories to handle visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, and tactile learning, as well as group and individual learning.

Table 1: Definitions of Reid's Perceptual Learning Style Preference

Learning Styles	*Definition*
Auditory	Listening to lectures, oral explanation, audio tapes, and discussions in class
Visual	Reading or studying from texts and notes, requiring less oral explanation
Tactile	'Hands-on' experiences in classroom learning, for example, taking notes
Kinesthetic	experiential learning, active participation, or physical movement in learning activities such as role-play, drama, or moving around
Individual Preferring	studying alone such as self-directed study or independent reading and study
Group preferring	studying with others and group interaction

Kolb's Learning Styles Inventory:

Identifying the several Kolb-introduced aspects of learning styles becomes crucial (1976, 1985). Kolb argues that "learning is the translation of experience into knowledge" (p. 38). Kolb (1984) suggests a four-stage cycle model consisting of real experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active exploration. The explanations

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were as follows: Concrete experience (CE) refers to a stage in which a learner actively experiences an activity; reflective observation (RO) refers to a stage in which a learner consciously reflects back on that experience; abstract conceptualisation (AC) refers to a stage in which a learner attempts to use logic and ideas rather than emotion to understand and solve problems; and active experimentation (AE) refers to a stage in which a learner attempts to plan for testing a model or theory (Kolb & Kolb, 2005, p. 184).

Felder & Silverman's Learning Style Model:

Felder and Silverman (1988) present a paradigm that consists of 32 learning types. Their approach also incorporates learning style factors. Each of the five dimensions contains two variables: perception (sensitive and intuitive), input (visual and verbal), processing (active and reflective), comprehension (sequential and global), and organisation (inductive & deductive). Felder and Silverman discuss precise requirements for each variable and dimension. Sensitive pupils, for instance, like facts, data, and exploration. They are attentive to details yet dislike complexity. In contrast, intuitive students favour ideas and theories, find details tedious, yet like complexities. b) Visual learners recall information better when it is presented in the form of images, diagrams, time lines, videos, and demonstrations, but verbal learners retain a significant amount of what they hear, read, and speak. Active students cannot learn in passive conditions and prefer to work in groups, while reflective students cannot learn in

situations where they are unable to reflect on the offered material. In addition, reflective learners prefer to work alone or with no more than one other person. Sequential pupils follow a linear thinking process in problem-solving situations and can handle their job even if they just have a partial or superficial understanding of the content. Global kids, on the other hand, make intuitive jumps and may not be able to describe how they arrive at answers. e) Regarding the Organisation dimension, induction and deduction are at opposing ends of the continuum. In the former, reasoning development proceeds from particulars to generalities, but in the latter, progression is in the other direction (Felder & Silverman, 1988, cited in Garca, Schiaffini, & Amandi, 2008, p. 307). This learning style approach is primarily intended for engineering students enrolled in scientific courses like Math and Computer Science.

Discussion:

Asian students have been portrayed as rote learners who rely on memorization rather than comprehension and who rely on textbooks. However, concentrating on various learning styles may not be the only way to determine how pupils manage their own learning. In the field of subjective requirements, 'learning style' is perhaps the most important idea currently known. Similarly, the researcher of this study seeks to emphasise the significance of learning styles. Notable efforts are being made to determine which of the aforementioned models is/are most applicable to online environments;

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nonetheless, overgeneralization may not place us in a secure position. Notably, the appropriateness of a model relates to its capacity to accommodate a broad variety of students with different learning styles. To put it another way, while assessing the efficacy of learners' own learning activities, additional features of learning styles should be taken into account.

Similarly, when it comes to language, learning styles are not limited to perceptual or cognitive types. Consequently, learning style is seen as a combination of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural factors. In a similar vein, Bloom (1976) presents an important model of classroom learning. He emphasises the importance of three factors: student characteristics, teaching, and learning result. Bloom finds three independent factors that explain the largest variety in student learning: cognitive entrance behaviours, emotional entry features, and instructional quality. Therefore, what has been discussed thus far is mostly consistent with Keefe's description of learning styles. Thus, it is clear that a model of learning style that just considers cognitive and perceptual styles is insufficient for language acquisition; rather, all styles, including cognitive, emotional, and physiological, should be emphasised (Thang, 2003). Among the competing approaches, Keefe's definition of learning styles seems to be more congruent with Willing's (1988) psychological model of learning styles, which is the subject of this investigation.

In conclusion, online learning may be more profitable for a well-equipped learner, despite the fact that not all sorts of students find it easy to grasp the given topics and study them effectively and equitably in online situations. In other words, learners should be taught how to autonomously improve their learning process; otherwise, online learning would be difficult and painful. In actuality, learners cannot be assessed based on particular characteristics and then the results generalised to the person as a whole; rather, it is necessary to estimate the most significant sources of motivation.

Conclusion:

Different cognitive styles and habitual information-processing techniques that affect a learner's usual manner of seeing, remembering, reasoning, and problem-solving have been emphasised, according to research. In addition, some academics believe that cognitive styles should be taken into account when evaluating web-based applications. Other efforts have been attempted to characterise the unique process of learning; nevertheless, research indicates that cognitive, emotive, and physiological aspects are of the biggest relevance in describing this process. Attention to their perception or cognition alone is insufficient for language learners who are engaged in language learning via various forms of remote education as opposed to traditional face-to-face classes. In other words, as different channels are designed to accommodate different learning styles, it is important to outline the various sources that can influence the learner's level of receiving input,

processing and evaluating data, and making connections with prior knowledge through knowledge construction. Due to the absence of rapid teacher input, online learning is far more sensitive. Therefore, an e-learner should comprehend how to be a good learner, what to do to become more engaged in the process of independent learning, how to solve problems, how to read and write critically and creatively, and how to maximise the cognitive, affective, and physiological aspects of the self that influence the levels of comprehension, understanding, analysing, evaluating, and so on.

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