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Verbal Learning Style as the Least Preferred Learning Style of Students in an Asian Country

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ABSTRACT

Learners develop a preferred way of choosing their learning styles because of their genetic makeup, their particular life experiences, and the demands of their present environment. Hence, the study aimed to determine the learning styles of freshmen students in the language class at Benguet State University, Philippines. Using descriptive – survey method, a questionnaire was used to gather data. It also used the Felder-Solomon Index of Learning Styles (FILS) which consisted of 44 questions designed to identify learning styles of learners. The study showed that their dominant learning style is Visual while Verbal is the least. According to their degree programs, the dominant learning style of the Bachelor in Secondary Education and Doctor of Veterinary Medicine students is Sensory while Bachelor of Science in Nursing, Bachelor of Science in Home Economics, Bachelor of Science in Information Technology, Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Engineering, and Bachelor of Science in Agriculture are all inclined to Visual. Based on the empirical findings and conclusions of the study, the researcher recommends that teachers should devise classroom activities suited for the students' learning styles focusing more on their verbal learning style that will activate their communication skills.

Keywords **—** Education, learning styles, dominant learning styles, language class, communication skills, descriptive design, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Studies have been done to explain and address the learning styles of learners, but majority of the literature on learning styles has focused on enhancing learner performance (A. Kolb & D. A. Kolb, 1999). Kinsella (1995) defines learning styles as individual's natural and preferred ways of absorbing, processing, and retaining new information and skills which persist regardless of teaching methods and content area. Allwright (1982) articulates that the investigation of learners' preferred learning styles gives one a picture of the learners' conception of learning.

Reid (1995) further asserts that: 1) every person, student, and teacher has a learning style and learning strengths and weaknesses; 2) learning styles exist on wide continuums; 3) learning styles are value-neutral; that is, no one style is better than others; 4) students are encouraged to stretch their learning styles so that they will be more empowered in a variety of learning situations; 5) students' learning strategies are linked to their learning styles; and 6) teachers should allow their students to become aware of their learning strengths and weaknesses.

When students' learning styles are matched by the design of the curriculum, with the learning styles of their teachers, or with appropriate teaching styles, academic achievement improves including communication opportunities in the classroom (R.S. Dunn & K. J. Dunn, 1979); Felder, 1993); Ford & Chen, 2001).

The study is focused on the students' learning styles in the language class considering that the knowledge of the learners' culture and learning styles help teachers examine their instructional practices and become sensitive in providing diverse learning experiences. This will improve instruction that will trigger the communication skills of the students.

Research also showed that learning which is consistent with one's learning style produces better academic results than otherwise (Domino, 1971; R.S. Dunn & K. J. Dunn, 1979; Morrison, Sweeney & Heffernan, 2006). Studies have disclosed educators' beliefs by showing how learners' styles of learning and thinking make a difference in their communication opportunities in the classroom and their academic achievement (Isemonger & Sheppard, 2003).

Hence, result of the study gave awareness to students as to their dominant learning styles and be mindful to improve their weak learning styles. It did not only determine the learning styles of the students but it will likewise remind the language teachers that learners learn in many ways. Therefore, the use of eclectic teaching practices should be considered different from the traditional teaching method where teacher talk dominates the classroom setting.

This study also gives motivation for the teachers to re-assess themselves that learning English is not merely focused on Cognitive/Academic Language Proficiency Level (CALP) but also the development of Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) of the students.

While there are many researches on learning style preferences, few researchers have embarked on investigating the learning styles of students in the language class. With the Felder-Silverman Learning Style Model with 44 questions, the study addressed this gap although its limitation is evident that the result may not exactly construe with other studies. The study of Reid (1987) on the Learning Style Preferences of ESL Students found that ESL students from different language backgrounds sometimes differ from one another in their learning style preferences; that other variables such as sex, length of time in the United States, length of time studying English in the U. S., field of study, level of education, TOEFL score, and age are related to differences in learning styles; and that modifications and extensions of ESL student learning styles may occur with changes in academic environment and experience. Further, Reid's study indicated that the adult, especially after the age of 33, learns better by doing.

Likewise, the findings of Lam-Phoon (1986) in his research revealed that Caucasians appear to have a higher preference for warmth, responsibility, intake, learning in the morning, and mobility. Males as compared to females have a higher preference for noise, tactile learning experiences, intake, responsibility, and warmth. They have a lower preference for learning in several ways, peer-oriented learning, and persistence. Caucasian males, as compared to Asian males, appear to have a stronger preference for warmth, responsibility, persistence, and intake, and a lower preference for auditory learning and learning in the late morning. Caucasian females have a higher preference for responsibility, warmth, mobility, learning in the morning, and intake than the Asian females; and they have a lower preference for visual and auditory learning experiences.

Lam-Phoon concluded that culture is a determinant of learning style as Asians are significantly different from Caucasians in their preferences.

FRAMEWORK

The Felder-Silverman Learning Style Model is used in this research as it describes the learning styles of the respondents in more detailed, elaborating and distinguishing between preferences in these learning styles (Graf, Viola, Kinshuk & Leo, 2007). The core idea of the Felder and Silverman model is that teachers

should teach learners according to their preferences while on the other hand should strive for a balanced instructional methods (Moallem, 2007).

Felder (1993) suggested the use of the so-called multi-style approach to achieve the goal of language teaching. He also urged the teachers to motivate learning by teaching as much as possible new material in the context of situations to which students can relate in terms of their personal and career experiences; balance concrete information and teaching approaches that emphasize formal training with more open-ended unstructured activities that highlight conversation and cultural contexts of the target language.

Felder-Silverman (1988), and later Felder and Solomon (2006), developed the Index of Learning Style (ILS) which has 44 questions and self-scoring instrument that assesses preferences on the four dimensions of learning styles:

Sensory or Intuitive - This dimension involves perception. Sensory learners are practical, orientated towards facts and procedures while intuitive learners are innovative, conceptual and oriented towards theories and meanings.

Visual or Verbal - This dimension considers an input of information. Visual learners prefer pictures, diagrams and graphs as models of material presentation, while verbal learners learn best with written and spoken explanations.

Active or Reflective - Information processing differs among learners. Active learners learn by trying things out, working with others. Reflective learners learn by thinking things through, working alone.

Sequential or Global - Sequential learners learn best through a linear and orderly approach and prefer small incremental steps. On the other hand, global learners are holistic and systematic thinkers and learn in large heaps.

From the above dimensions, a learner can have one or two predominant learning styles from the 10 individual styles that are found across all the five learning style dimensions.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The study aimed to determine the learning styles of freshmen students in the language class at Benguet State University, Philippines.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study used descriptive – survey method. A questionnaire was used to

gather data that are relevant to the research questions. It also used the Felder-Solomon Index of Learning Styles (FILS) which consisted of 44 questions designed to identify learning styles.

Locale and Time of the Study

The 613 respondents were the freshmen students from the following degree programs enrolled in English 12 during the second semester of school year 2012-2013 in this University: Bachelor of Science in Agriculture (87), Bachelor of Science in Information Technology (81), Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Engineering (76), Bachelor of Science in Home Economics (93), Bachelor of Science in Nursing (105), Bachelor in Secondary Education (101) and Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (70).

Data Collection Instruments

A. Felder-Solomon Index of Learning Style

The instrument used known as the Index of Learning Style (ILS), is a questionnaire based on the Felder-Silverman learning style model. This covers all four learning style dimensions. It has also been widely tested and used successfully in many studies to guide the design, development and use of learning environments. Besides, it is simple to use and the results obtained are easy to interpret (Kovacic, 2004).

The Felder-Solomon ILS questionnaire consists of four dimensions, namely, processing with poles, *processing* (active/reflective), *perception* (sensing/intuitive), *input* (visual/verbal) and *understanding* (sequential/global). Each of the four dimensions consists of 11 questions with total of 44. Every question is designed to determine if a respondent tends to belong to one category or another on that dimension. The respondents choose only one of the two options where each option represents a category. The *processing* dimension has two categories: active and reflective. If a respondent chooses (a) in one of the 11 questions that represent the *processing* dimension, then the respondent tends to be active, while one who chooses (b) tends to be reflective.

Statistical Treatment

Data gathered were summarized, analyzed and cross-tabulated. Summary statistics like weighted mean, frequency counts, percentages and ranks were computed from test results. Friedman one way analysis of variance by ranks,

t-test for one sample case, F-test (ANOVA) and Cochran Q-test were used in this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Dominant Learning Style

Of the 613 respondents, the study revealed that their dominant learning style is Visual with 60.44% followed by Sensory learning style with 57.99%; Active learning style – 55.66; Sequential learning style – 55.64; Global learning style – 44.36; Reflective learning style – 44.34; Intuitive learning style – 42.01; and Verbal learning style – 39.56.

The results showed that majority of the students are visual learners who prefer pictures, diagrams and graphs as models of material presentation, while verbal learners who ranked the lowest learn best with written and spoken explanations. These are the group of students who are rarely heard in the class discussion unless called.

Felder-Silverman (1988) asserted that since visual learners remember best what they see, they oftentimes forget what is said to them. The second dominant learning style is sensory which indicates that students are practical, orientated towards facts and procedures than those intuitive learners who are innovative, conceptual and oriented towards theories and meanings.

In the theory of psychological types, Jung and Baynes (1971), introduced sensing and intuition as the two ways in which people tend to perceive the world. In the study, it was presented that sensing involves observing, gathering data through the senses while intuition involves indirect perception by way of the unconscious – speculation, imagination, and hunches.

Some 55.66% of the respondents are active learners who learn by trying things out and working with others while only 44.34% respondents are reflective learners who learn by thinking things through and/or working alone. The fourth dominant learning style is sequential. Sequential learners learn best through a linear and orderly approach and prefer small incremental steps. On the other hand, global learners who ranked five are holistic and systematic thinkers and learn in large heaps.

From the above dimensions, a student can have one or two dominant learning styles from the eight individual styles across the four learning style dimensions. Given this model, the main characteristics are defined for identifying teaching styles that can match the learners' individual learning styles. Teachers then

should employ teaching strategies that balance learning tasks and activities so that they would accommodate all learning styles by taking into account the four dimensions of the model.

The result of the study concurs with Grosser (2007) by indicating that learning is interrelated to teaching and that the effectiveness of teaching strategies will directly or indirectly influence learning. It further indicates that learning is an incredibly complex process. It is then necessary that when learning style differences are understood and accepted, the classroom changes to a place where individual differences among learners become an incentive for teachers to provide a rich variety of lessons, teaching methods, learning activities, and testing challenges.

The English teachers can make use of this learning style knowledge to modify their classrooms and teach to address the individual learning needs of learners with the motive of improving their academic performances.

Learning styles of learners according to their degree programs

Individually, BSE student's dominant learning style is Sensory with 60.27% of responses while Visual learning style came second with 57.73%. The third learning styles are both Active and Sequential with 55.36% followed by Reflective and Global with 44.64%; Verbal – 42.27%; and Intuitive – 39.73%. For the BSN students, their dominant learning style is Visual with 64.49% of responses while Sensory is the second with 58.75%. Their third learning style is Active with 55.36% followed by Sequential – 54.37; Global – 45.63%; Reflective – 43.40%; Intuitive – 41.24; and Verbal – 35.51%.

DVM students, on the other hand, recorded Sensory as their dominant learning style with 61.43% of responses while Visual came second with 60.52%. Active learning style came third with 58.48% followed by Sequential – 56.49%; Global – 43.51%; Reflective – 40.52%; Verbal – 39.48%; and Intuitive – 38.57%. BSHE students' dominant learning style is Visual with 57.67% of responses. Sensory learning style came second with 57.48% followed by both Active and Sequential with 55.43%; Reflective and Global - 44.57%; Intuitive – 42.52%; and Verbal – 42.33%.

BSIT students also revealed Visual as their dominant learning style with 63.30% of responses followed by Sensory – 58.02%; Active – 54.99%; Sequential – 53.54%; Global -46.46%; Reflective – 45.01; Intuitive – 41.98% and Verbal – 36.70%. BS Agricultural Engineering students' dominant learning style is still Visual with 61.72% of responses while Sequential came second with 58.85%.

This is followed by Sensory – 55.74%; Active – 55.50%; Reflective – 44.50; Intuitive – 44.26%; Global – 41.15%; and Verbal – 38.28%.

Visual learning style is the dominant learning style among BSA students with 57.78% of responses followed by Sequential – 56.22%; Sensory – 54.14%; Active – 52.77%; Reflective – 47.23%; Intuitive – 45.87% Global – 43.78%; and Verbal – 42.22%.

The finding indicates that BSE and DVM are both learners who are practical and oriented towards facts and procedures. These students will soon be teachers so they need to demonstrate their lessons while the DVM students need hands-on demonstration on animal treatment and so on.

The result corroborates with the findings of Dobson (2010) that one of the commonly used methods is sensory that one prefers to use when internalizing information while according to Felder-Silverman (1988), sensors like facts, data, and experimentation. They enjoy solving problems but dislike surprises. They are patient with details but do not like complication. They, too are good at memorizing facts and they are careful but may be slow. Felder and Silverman also made a distinction between sensors and intuitors. They claim that intuitors are more comfortable in symbols and that transmitting them into what they represent comes naturally to them. Conversely, sensors' slowness in translating words puts them at a disadvantage in timed tests since they have to read questions several times before beginning to answer them.

On the other hand, Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), Bachelor of Science in Home Economics (BSHE), Bachelor of Science in Information Technology (BSIT), Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Engineering (BSAENG'G), and Bachelor of Science in Agriculture (BSA) are all Visual type of learners while Verbal learning style is their weakness.

Fleming (2009) supports the belief that students with visual preferences learn best using pictures, graphs, diagrams, etc. Similarly, Oxford (2013) cites that visual students love to read a lot which requires concentration and time spent alone and that they need the visual stimulation of bulletin boards, videos and movies. More so, they need written directions to motivate them to participate in the classroom.

Statistically, there is a significant difference in the learning styles of the students regarding the degree programs. In other words, these students learn differently and that each English teacher must prepare a lesson to suit the different learning styles they have.

CONCLUSIONS

The dominant learning style of the Bachelor in Secondary Education and Doctor of Veterinary Medicine students is Sensory while Bachelor of Science in Nursing, Bachelor of Science in Home Economics, Bachelor of Science in Information Technology, Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Engineering, and Bachelor of Science in Agriculture are all inclined to Visual. Heimlich and Norland (2002), in connection, believe that teachers should attempt to modify their style. That is, their beliefs and values regarding their roles and their learners' roles in learning should first be changed. This implies that teachers can modify their teaching styles in an attempt to be more flexible and accommodative to their learners' learning preferences. Rosenshine and Furst (1971) contend that effective teaching-learning methodology should cut across characteristics of effective teaching that will eventually activate communication opportunities among the students in and outside the classroom.

TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

Based on the empirical findings and conclusions of the study, language teachers should devise classroom activities suited for the students' learning styles focusing more on their verbal learning style that will activate their communication skills. These classroom activities may be taken from authentic materials like newspapers, photographs, broadcast media and others (Poliden, 2013). Though taxing and entails a lot of preparation, Poliden stresses that designing diverse classroom activities will enhance the communication skills of the students thereby giving them the confidence to speak and share their thoughts in and outside the classroom. Thus, it is important to always consider the students in the preparation of learning materials.

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