

# A Review of Learning and Teaching Styles in Second and Foreign Language Education

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## ABSTRACT

Teaching and learning styles in foreign and second language education have been crucial for students and professionals studying and teaching English. Through a review of the learning and teaching styles in foreign and second language education, this paper aimed to offer insights into how lecturers, teachers, and students view English and hopefully improve the teaching methods used by lecturers and teachers to support student achievement. The researcher will provide a summary and analysis of this study, its strengths, and weaknesses. From 45 collected samples answering the questions by non-English-majored students at HUFU and the observation of a case study, findings from analyzing the questionnaire, the research makes recommendations for implementing the innovation. The qualitative method has been used and the process of the experiment had supervised to remark on the results of students' progress over 10 weeks. The results show that there are two factors that positively affect students' satisfaction with the quality of teaching and learning English: lecturers' preferred method and students' presentations. It will then be discussed and adjusted in light of other discoveries. The final section comprises the researcher's experience, the use of teaching strategies, and, if necessary and feasible, some modifications to the current teaching methodologies. Students, teachers, and lecturers will also benefit from the advice by better understanding how to learn and teach English.

**Keywords:** Teaching and learning styles, Strategies, Methodologies, Experiences.

## 1 Introduction

It is said that the success of a second or foreign language classroom is the combination of many factors such as learner's competence, a good teacher's teaching approach, the well- designed activities, exercises, etc. However, researchers have shown that the underlying reason for making it successful is the excellent match between the learning styles of students and the teaching styles of teachers (Zhenhui, 2001). Numerous scholars, including Felder and Nelson, have demonstrated that there may be inconsistencies between students' and teachers' preferred methods of instruction. There are many different learning styles in a language class, and no problem will arise when the teaching style is matched with the learners. The article "Learning and Teaching Styles in Foreign and Second Language Education" covers all the above issues. For the aforementioned reasons, the researcher, who also happens to be an instructor, would like to suggest that the best method to accommodate these learning styles may be for teachers to alter their own teaching strategies and attempt to offer a variety of activities to suit different learning styles. Instructors should balance their approaches and organize the class so that all learning styles are addressed simultaneously in order to achieve effective learning. Afterward, all students will have at least a few activities that appeal to them based on their learning preferences, and they will be more likely to succeed in these activities and find learning a language to be easier.

## 2 Literature review

This article has mentioned several dimensions of the learning styles of students who learn in a second or foreign language classroom and provided teaching methods that most language instructors prefer for some specific learning styles and suggested ways to address the educational needs of all students. First of all,



learning style is defined as how an individual characteristically acquires; retains, and retrieves information (Felder & Henriques, 1995). There are five learning style dimensions as well as ten kinds of learners who acquire various teaching approaches. Firstly, sensing learners tend to be concrete and methodical so they like to use drills or flash cards (Felder & Henriques, 1995) while intuitions are abstract and imaginative so they are bored with drills but interested in complexity and anxiety (Felder & Henriques, 1995). Here come the second pair of learners: visual and verbal. Visual learners can acquire more when information is presented visually- in pictures, diagrams, flow charts, timelines, films, and demonstrations (Felder & Henriques, 1995) whereas verbal learners prefer spoken and written explanations (Felder & Henriques, 1995). The third pair is active learners who can learn well in situations that enable them to do something physical (Felder & Henriques, 1995), and reflective learners who enjoy the situations which provide them with opportunities to think about the information being presented (Felder & Henriques, 1995). Sequential and global learners are also different. Sequential ones acquire an understanding of the material in small connected chunks (Felder & Henriques, 1995) so they are comfortable with structured teaching approaches. Unlike them, global learners like holistic strategies (Felder & Henriques, 1995). The last dimension includes two kinds of learners: inductive and deductive. The acquisition process of inductive learners takes place from particulars to generalities but the process of deductive students moves in the opposite direction. As the dimensions of learning style have been identified, it can be easily seen that teachers should not place all students into one style category and present information in only a single mode. To achieve effective foreign language learning, using the combination of some techniques such as motivating learning, balancing concrete information, or making liberal use of visuals (Felder & Henriques, 1995) is highly recommended. The methods and approaches that instructors find most comfortable make up their teaching styles; if they tried to adopt entirely new methods, they would be forced to use only those that are strange, awkward, and uncomfortable, which would likely have disastrous effects on the students. Fortunately, teachers who want to accommodate a wide range of learning preferences don't have to make significant adjustments to their teaching methods. (R. Felder, 2018). At this time, the perfect match between learning and teaching styles occurs and enhances academic achievement, student attitude as well as behavior.

As it is mentioned above, the match between learning and teaching style plays a crucial role in the success of a language class. Therefore, if a mismatch occurs, the quality of the student's learning and their attitudes toward the class as well as the subject are badly affected. Besides, instructors may also question their competence (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995). The following example will illustrate this point. Jenny, an American teacher from California has kinesthetic and global styles of teaching. She specializes in applied linguistics and was well-trained in the TESOL area in the U.S.A. However, her Vietnamese students give her only negative responses. It seems that all her teaching competence and experience become useless when teaching in Vietnam (Zhenhui, 2001). To reduce student-teacher style conflicts, learning and teaching styles have to be well-matched. To make it a perfect match, it is completely right for teachers to cover the two issues as suggested in the article which has been summarized above: being aware of various students' learning styles and selecting suitable teaching methods.

When having strong awareness and correct identification of learning styles, teachers may find it easier and more convenient to adjust their approaches. Therefore, the dimensions described in the article are really useful. The teacher can categorize their students when they attentively observe the three aspects of how students study: perceiving information, processing information, organizing, and presenting information (Fleming, 2001). Normally, people use all senses to receive information around them. However, some employ one sense more than others. Some students rely much on sight (visual learners), hearing (auditory learners), speaking and writing (verbal learners), or other sensations (kinesthetic learners) (Fleming, 2001). If teachers observe the ways students process information which includes grasping, ordering, and engaging

with information, they will see differences. Some learners prefer to deal with abstract concepts (intuition) or concrete, practical examples (sensors). Moreover, some tend to receive facts in logical, sequential ways (sequential learners); others like being shown the big picture first, then the details (global learners). When engaging with information, reflective learners do the processing in their heads while active ones prefer doing something physical. With this detailed description of learning styles, identification seems to be easier for instructors. However, not every student has a single style. They can have both visual and reflective styles. For example, in a reading class, visual learners acquire better when they can see new words and information on the blackboard. Besides, they are more thinking-oriented than feeling-oriented. They only base judgment on logic and analysis (Nelson, 1995).

Other students can own active and kinesthetic or more styles. More things, teachers have to deal with several different styles in one class because of individual differences. Hence, it is advised by the article that teachers should not group their students into one or two styles and then teach all of them according to that or those styles (R. M. Felder & Henriques, 1995). So, as for instructors, what should they do?

From the viewpoint of Richard M Felder and Eunice R. Henriques, they aim for a balanced style in all classes, at all levels. In a language class with various learning styles, one of the best ways to teach is to combine many approaches which is known as Multi-Mode Teaching because nearly any teacher can teach in more than one style. A specific teaching method is also suggested for each style in the article. For example, with inductive and deductive learners, teachers can apply grammar-translation methods or direct methods (R. M. Felder & Henriques, 1995). The application of the Task-Based Instruction (TBI) approach can be suitable for active students. However, the selective combination is always strongly recommended. Instructors may make use of many teaching approaches such as TBI, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Grammar- Translation, and Direct, or Audiolingual at the same time, in one class. To be more specific, many useful techniques have been suggested for all language teachers. Firstly, they are advised to balance concrete and conceptual information (R. M. Felder & Henriques, 1995) although the balance does not have to be equal. Next, they should motivate learning by teaching new material (vocabulary, rules of grammar) in the context of situations in which the students can relate in terms of their personal and career experiences (R. M. Felder & Henriques, 1995). Learners always react positively and show much interest when they learn something real and close to their own lives. In a language class, teachers also need to give students opportunities for cooperation because learners, especially active ones, learn the best when they can interact with others. Furthermore, making use of visuals is useful as well (R. M. Felder & Henriques, 1995). Instructors can use photographs, drawings, films, videotapes, etc. to illustrate lessons and vocabulary words. It is not good to overdo repetitive drill exercises but only some are appropriate as intuitions easily get bored with drills. The other technique is balancing the inductive and deductive presentation of the course material (R. M. Felder & Henriques, 1995). For reflective learners, brief writing exercises are required while problem-solving tasks are needed for active ones. In general, there are always several applicable methods for teachers to select and combine to address the needs of the specified learning style categories. So far the theories of learning styles, as well as multi-style approaches, have been discussed, clarified, and commented on. However, do they work or work well in reality?

After referring to the above research, the author found that the factors of lecturers' preferred methods, and students' presentations, have a certain influence on satisfaction with quality. Amount of teaching and learning English. Therefore, in this study, the author investigates the influence of the above two factors on student satisfaction with the quality of teaching and learning English. The researcher conducted this study in the hopes of discovering the most effective method for guiding students more effectively. The study addresses the following research queries.

## **2.1 Research questions**

The survey was designed to provide information on the following research questions in order to achieve the study's objectives:

- 2.1. What should the instructors do to help students study English well?
- 2.2. Do the instructors carry out their aims well in reality?

## **3 Materials and Methods/ Methodology**

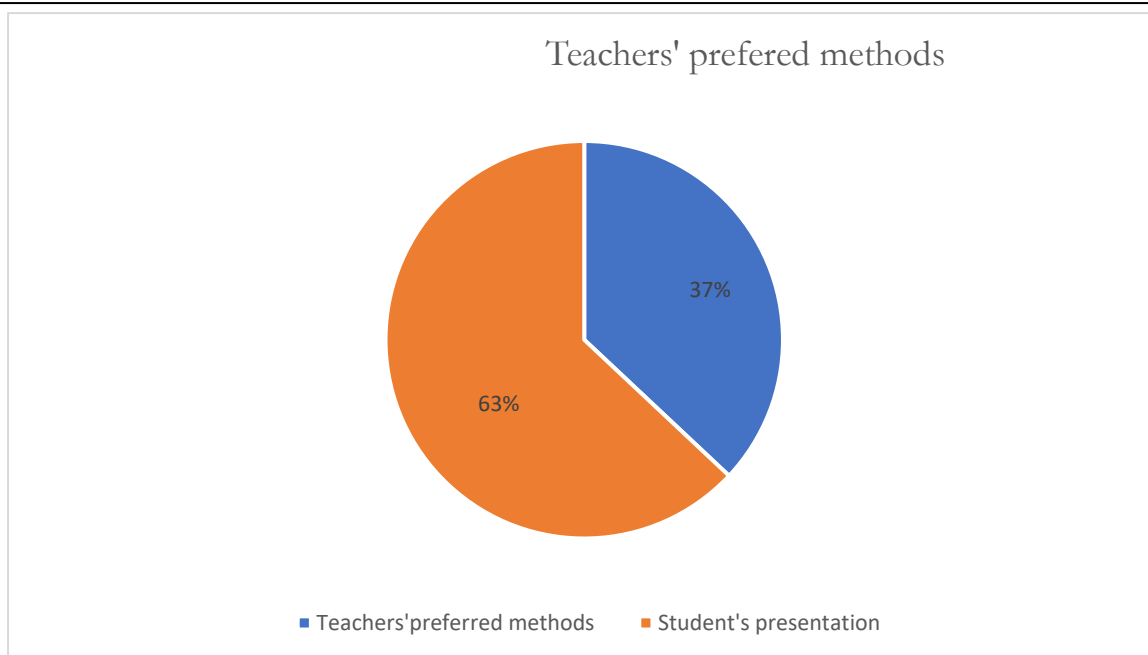
### **3.1 Teaching culture context**

Ho Chi Minh City University of Food Industry (HUFI) is located in Ho Chi Minh City - a dynamic center of Vietnam. Founded in 1981, it was named a Vocational School until 2002 it was called Food Industry College, during the stage of economic and social transition to global integration and changed into HUFI in 2008. HUFI identified its objectives for progressive education and training to directly meet the needs of society. Following an educational methodology that is student-centered with an underlying philosophy of "Humanity – Unity- Forwardness- Innovation", the manager of the Faculty of Foreign Languages always asks teachers to make a change in teaching approaches to focus on student-centered classes. Teachers themselves have realized this and made a deliberate change in their own classes to engage students in learning provided that they can finish their curriculum and improve their students' language skills. Why do not teachers take advantage of students' positive attitudes toward teaching and exploit effective methods and activities to motivate the teaching and learning process?

### **3.2 Pedagogical setting & participants**

First of all, in this part, the researcher would give a full description of her students' styles and how to identify them. The next part is about what she had done before and what she did after discovering students' learning dimensions. Last but not least, thanks to the theories and findings mentioned above, she will take into consideration the changes in her style to make a perfect match.

The action research was carried out with 45 non-major sophomore students of one class at HUFI including 25 boys and 20 girls, aged from 18 to 24. The percentage of females and males in these classes was 55% and 45% respectively. She has been teaching them for one semester and always tried to help her students become competent English users. This class is pre-intermediate level. At the beginning of the course, the researcher used her preferred method to teach them and did not care about their feelings. Then, she found that they were different. Therefore, she decided to observe them to understand more about their learning styles. Thanks to the activities in class, such as reading, speaking, and doing grammar exercises. She could know the ways they acquire information and which category each student is in. Consequently, it is crucial that the researchers must know their learning style preferences to design activities that cater to their students' classroom needs effectively. The pie chart below (Figure 1) shows evidence of her changes in methods.



**Figure 1:** *The percentage of teachers' preferred methods and student's presentation*

#### **4 Results and Discussion**

Most of her students like presentations. They said they memorized one lesson faster and remembered it longer when they had an opportunity to talk about it. They also prefer discussions or conversations. Many of them are very interested in films, videotapes when the researcher introduces a topic or in photos, and drawings when she teaches vocabulary. Some enjoy hands-on activities but a few refuse to do that. They like reading books, copying information from the blackboard, and listening to lectures instead. When doing reading exercises, some students were concerned about precision so uncomfortable if she asked them to guess. Another style was shown when she paid attention to the way they learned grammar. Nearly all found the inductive method easier and less boring than the deductive method. Besides, sometimes there were abstract concepts that caused many students big trouble. They could not understand and memorize it clearly, although she explained it several times. In summary, the learning styles in her class are various. She has active, visual, reflective, inductive, and intuitive learners. Since she realized that, she had to adjust her teaching style.

The first time, she used the TBI method in her class. She sometimes did combine some approaches for example, in reading and speaking class, she can use thematic discussions of issues presented in a reading text for small group interaction. This provides students with an opportunity for students to reflect and actively participate in the target language. Most of the time, she asked her students to do problem-solving tasks. A very good excuse for her method is that her students learn to be accountants in the future and she assumed that interactive tasks, especially problem-solving ones are always good for them. However, she was completely wrong. Although the TBI approach aims to ensure learners are given plentiful opportunities both for meaningful input and for language use (Klapper, 2006), it still has problems. One of the serious problems is that TBI tasks lead to uneven oral development and tasks which fail to provide adequate linguistic support are highly likely to prove inappropriate for beginners (Klapper, 2006). It is right when some of her students found it too difficult to do the tasks she assigned. Then, they got bored and did not attend her class or not participate in classroom activities. Since she realized that, she has adjusted her

teaching style. She still keeps on using the TBI but less frequently. Besides, she spends more time on other techniques. For reflective and active learners, she designed more small-group exercises. Some students especially reflective ones are supplied with charts, and diagrams and required to write something. When teaching vocabulary, she makes use of visual aids: objects, pictures, photos, and gestures. She also exploits different kinds of games to get them involved and help them acquire difficult structures or new words. Another option is repetitive drills. She uses it for sensors but does not overdo it. The Grammar-Translation method is applied as well. To a certain extent, it is good for the students who are not as good as others. With a variety of such techniques, she has got positive results. Her students are interested more in her lessons. She can see their improvement throughout their final exam and the ways they respond to her. Therefore, she realizes that there is a match between their styles and her style. However, thanks to the article, other findings in the textbook, and this reflection paper, she finds that to make an excellent match, to enhance my learner's acquisition, she needs some more changes although a few suggestions are not easy to implement in her real situation.

In the next semester, as suggested in the article, she will try to limit the time lecturing while making notes on the board. Instead, she will give them breaks to reflect on what they have learned (R. M. Felder & Henriques, 1995). Too much teacher-talk time can destroy learners' interest. With the observation of students' learning styles, she will use the chart she found on the Internet when searching for information for this paper to identify exactly which learning style her students are familiar with. From this discovery, she hopes that her adjustment can be more appropriate. Nevertheless, the advice of balancing concrete and abstract information is hard to apply in her class. She teaches idioms so there are many strange sentences such as it is raining Cats and Dogs, etc. Although she has tried to visualize some, most of them are good, some students are still confused because their English is not good. The students cannot express themselves because they do not understand their meaning. Moreover, it cannot easily be seen that theories seem to be perfect but not all of them can be applied in real life. Despite that, what she changed and will change based on these theories is very useful and she strongly believes the match in her class will become better.

In this article, the researcher has talked about how important it is for teaching and learning styles to align at her school and has given some empirical evidence showing her students have distinct learning style traits. She suggests that teachers use tools to identify students' learning styles, offer instructional alternatives to address their differences and plan lessons to match students' learning styles while simultaneously encouraging students to diversify their learning style preferences in order to understand and respect individuals' diverse learning styles. We can help our students learn languages more effectively by doing this.

## **5 Conclusions**

The process of selecting a technique and putting it into practice when teaching a language is more complicated than, say, following a recipe or a set of instructions to put together a piece of furniture (Klapper, 2006). Hence, you should never ask which teaching method is right. The researcher will say it again: a language class's effectiveness depends on how well learning and teaching styles mesh. This may subsequently lead to an enormous effect on the quality of teaching and learning.

## **6 Declarations**

### **6.1 Study Limitations**

Because this innovation was carried out on a small scale just only from the 45 collected samples answering the questions by non-majored students at HUFU and the observation of a case study, findings from analyzing the questionnaires may not provide large data to give an exact conclusion. Improving teaching

strategies might not follow the schedules that had been required by managers and cost a lot of time. Some classrooms did not have good equipment for lecturers to apply a variety of teaching ways.

## **6.2 Acknowledgements**

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## **6.3 Publisher's Note**

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