Learning Style Preferences among English as Second Language (ESL) Learners 
In Ado Ekiti Local Government

Author Details: Dada, Esther M. (Ph.D.)
Department of Arts and Language Education, Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti. Ekiti State

Abstract
The issue of learning styles has become crucial in teaching and learning because when teachers are able to teach using methods that conform to the learners’ preferred learning styles, the learners will be able to learn better. This study, therefore, investigated learning style preferences among English as Second Language (ESL) Learners in Ado Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria. The study adopted the descriptive research design of the survey type and 100 randomly selected senior secondary school students constituted the sample. The instrument was Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire adapted from Reid (1987) in Richard and Lockhart (1996). The face and content validity were ensured, and the reliability coefficient of 0.72 was obtained. Findings from the study revealed that auditory, visual, group, individual, kinesthetic and tactile were learning style preferences among ESL learners in the study area. The most preferred learning style is auditory learning style while the least referred is tactile. There was no significant difference in the learning style preferences of male and female students, but there was a significant relationship between the style preferences of the students and their home background. Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended among others that ESL teachers should use a variety of teaching strategies in order to take care of students’ different learning style preferences.

Key Words: Learning Style Preferences, Perceptual Learning Style, English as Second Language, Home Background, English as Second Language Learners.

Introduction
Academic achievement among learners has become a matter of common concern among many scholars in recent years. This might be due to the fact that it is students’ achievement that justifies the huge investment in education. Many factors are believed to influence students’ achievement among which is learning styles also called cognitive styles. It is regarded as a crucial factor that can go a long way to influence effective classroom learning and students’ outcomes.

Research finds revealed that students learn in many ways which include: seeing and learning, reflecting and acting, reasoning logically and intuitively and memorizing and vitalising (Sywelym, Dahawy and Wang 2010). These different ways of learning are seen as the individual’s predispositions to particular ways of learning. According to Richards and Lockhart (1996), learning styles reflect the different ways people respond to learning situations. In their words, some people like to work independently, while others prefer to work in a group; some people can focus on one task at a time while others can do several things at once. It was also found in research that differences in cognitive styles affected students’ preferences for certain approaches to learning.

Learning styles like many other concepts in education has been given different definitions by scholars, Mackeracher (2004), defines learning styles as the characteristic cognitive, affective, social and physiological behavior that function as relatively firm indicators of how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment. According to Dunn, Dunn, and Perrin (1994), it is the way in which each learner begins to concentrate on, process and retain new and difficult information and that interaction occurs differently for each individual. Felder and Spurlin see learning style as characteristic strengths and preferences in the ways they take in and process information. One common fact from these definitions is that learning styles explain how individuals learn and everybody learns in different ways. In the words of Gilbert (2008), individuals have the tendency to both perceive and process information differently. Some factors are also believed to influence learning styles which include: hereditary, upbringing, and environmental factors.

The initial intention for investigating learning styles was to look for ways to make course presentation (teaching) and materials combine to match the needs of the learners (Kirby, 1979). Experts agree that students can learn better when their individual needs are taken care of in advance. These needs include their prior knowledge, learning styles, and cognitive traits (Arora, Lesane and Raisinghani, 2011). Maduekwue (2015) asserts that knowing each learners’ learning style may be the most important key to improving achievement in
schools. Students can perform better if they change their study habits to fit their own personal learning styles. Although researchers identify and describe different learning styles with different attributes, they agree that a variety of patterns appear in a typical classroom (Guild, 1989).

Experts have attempted to categorize learning styles in different ways. Knowles in Richards and Lockhart (1996) puts forth four categories as:

i. Concrete Learning Style;
ii. Analytical Learning Style;
iii. Communicative Learning Style;
iv. Authority-Oriented Learning Style.

Maduekwe (2015) categorizes them as:

i. Visual Learning Style;
ii. Auditory Learning Style;
iii. Kinesthetic Learning Style;
iv. Read-Write Learning Style.

According to Davis (2007), the perceptual learning styles theory lists seven different styles as:

i. Print.
ii. Aural
iii. Interactive
iv. Visual
v. Haptic
vi. Kinesthetic
vii. Olfactory

These seven are based on the belief that most of what is learned come from our five senses.

These categorizations seem not to be mutually exclusive. Their explanations show that some are similar in meaning but only different in the name/tag given to it by the author.

For the purpose of this study, the learning style categorization adapted by Richards and Lockhart from Knowles (1982) was used. It is tagged perceptual learning style, which are:

i. Visual learning style.
ii. Auditory learning style.
iii. Kinesthetic learning style.
iv. Tactile learning style.
v. Group learning style.
vi. Individual learning style.

There are quite some studies on learning style preferences. Omid and Somayeh (2013) conducted a study in the relationship between EFL learners’ learning styles and their L₂ achievement and found that there was no significant relationship between the participants’ learning styles and their achievement. They also found that course of study and gender did not influence their learning style preferences. Chevyl and Carla (2003) also conducted a study to determine the relationship between students’ area of study (discipline) and their learning style preferences and found that students’ learning style preferences varied according to their disciplines but not according to their gender.

Learning a second language may not be as easy as one supposes. According to Omid and Somayeh (2013), Language learning is one of the most challenging activity one has to deal with. However, when certain factors are taken into consideration, it can be made much easier. One of such factors is the learning style preferences of the learner. In order to achieve desired learning outcomes from the learners, the teacher can provide teaching interventions that are compatible with the learners’ learning styles. Previous studies have reported that students’ learning performance could be improved if proper learning style dimensions could be taken into consideration when developing any learning or instructional process (Graf and Liv, 2010).

Many factors are believed to influence the learning of a second language among which are: motivation, age, intelligence, gender, personality, learning style preferences and anxiety. Learning a second language can constitute a big challenge to the learners if appropriate measures that can make it easy are not put in place. This is why a second language must be taught using different approaches. Unfortunately, most second language classrooms are still teacher centered or teacher dominated with little or no consideration for the learners (Dada, 2015).
Students are often reluctant to participate in the classroom, and many are unwilling to give responses, seldom ask questions and are overly dependent on the teacher (Kun-huei, 2010). In recent years teachers are advised to take the learners into account considering their autonomy, idiosyncrasies and learning strategies because students react individually despite the centrality of teaching. Students adopt different strategies in the process of language learning, and these can make them be effective or less effective learners. It is believed that effective learners can be more successful on a learning task as they have better control and understanding over their learning more than less effective learners. English language learners are highly heterogeneous and complex with diverse gifts, educational needs, backgrounds, languages, and goals (National Council of Teachers of English, 2008). This calls for a need to assist them to learn using different learning styles that they prefer.

The issue of gender differences in language learning has remained largely inconclusive. Many studies on different aspects of language learning have found contradicting results. According to Tatarintseva (2002), many researchers who worked on document reading skills found that females were more successful than males in eight countries among 9-year-olds but in six other countries, boys were found among 14-year-olds to be at an advantage than girls in eight countries and girls were found to be at an advantage than boys in six countries. Choudhary, Dullo, and Tandon (2011) found a significant difference in the learning style preferences of first-year male and female medical students in Kota. Also, Yemane et al. (2017) conducted an assessment of gender differences of the learning style preferences among regular and undergraduate students of Mekelle University College of Health Sciences and found no significant difference between the two genders. There is need therefore to investigate further the influence of gender on learning styles.

The home background has been a variable for consideration among researchers because of its influence on students learning. Quite a lot of home variables like the socio-economic status, parental educational background and availability of learning materials in the home are all considered as factors that can influence students’ learning. According to Adeyemo (2010), some factors which are attributes in the home contribute greatly to the academic performance of the students, and the interplay of these factors determines to learn readiness.

**Statement of the Problem**

All students do not learn in the same way as they are seen to process and assimilate information in different ways. English as second language students encounters different learning environments while acquiring massive information. They also preferentially take and process information using different styles: seeing, hearing, reflecting, analyzing, visualizing among others. Despite these diversities of learners, teachers of English as a second language seem not to have understood how learners learn the English language. Students, on the other hand, appear not to be aware of their preferred learning styles for different materials or content.

One major problem faced by students of English as a second language in the classrooms is the mismatch between learning styles of most of them and the teaching styles of the teachers. The utilization of inappropriate teaching method to match the learning styles of the students seems to have contributed to a low achievement in the English language among learners.

**Purpose of the study**

Based on the observed problem, this study sought to:
- find out the learning style preferences of English as second language learners in the study area.
- ascertain the interaction effect of sex on the learning style preferences of the learners.
- investigate the interaction effect of students’ home background and their preferred learning styles.

**Research Question**

The following research question was raised to guide the study:

1. What are the learning style preferences among ESL students in the study area?

**Hypotheses**

Two hypotheses were generated for the study:
1. There is no significant difference in the learning style preferences of ESL learners based on their sex.
2. There is no significant difference in the learning style preferences of ESL learners based on their home background.

**Methodology**
The study adopted a descriptive research design of survey type. The study sought to find out the learning style preferences among ESL learners in the study area and reported the phenomenon as found in the field of study without any manipulation of variables.

The population for the study was all ESL students in all secondary schools in Ado Ekiti local government. These included both public and private schools. The sample consisted of 100 students selected from 5 schools (2 private and 3 public) using simple random and purposive sampling techniques. Twenty students (10 boys and 10 girls) were selected from each selected school. The instrument for the study was a questionnaire titled Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire adapted from Reid (1987) in Richard and Lockhart (1996). Some of the items of questions on the original format were rearranged, and a section on student’s home background was added to it. The researcher visited the selected schools and administered the instrument by herself. Data collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics.

**Results and Discussion**

The results of data analysis included both descriptive and inferential statistics and are presented as follows:

**Research Question 1**

What are the Learning style preferences among ESL students in the study area?

**Table 1: Learning Style Preferences among ESL Students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Learning Style Preferences</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Auditory</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Group</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>4th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Kinesthetic</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Tactile</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>6th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The result in table 1 shows that 67% of the respondents agreed to have preferred auditory learning style while 33% disagreed. Also, visual learning style is preferred by 62% of the respondents while 35% did not prefer visual learning style. On the preference of group learning style, 50% agreed that they preferred it and 41% did not. 58% of the respondents agreed that they prefer individual learning style while 55% preferred Kinesthetic learning style and 51% preferred Tactile learning style. The ranking indicates that auditory learning style is the most preferred among the respondents followed by visual learning style, group learning style, individual learning style, Kinesthetic learning style and Tactile learning style.

**Hypothesis 1**

There is no significant difference in the learning style preferences of ESL learners based on their sex.

**Table 2: t-test of Learning Style Preferences of ESL Students Based on Sex**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t_cal</th>
<th>t_table</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>71.00</td>
<td>16.52</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>0.069</td>
<td>1.960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>71.22</td>
<td>15.74</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p>0.05

Table 2 shows that t_cal (0.069) is less than t_table (1.960) at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is therefore not rejected. This implies that there is no significant difference in learning style preferences among ESL learners and their sex in the study area.

**Hypothesis 3**

There is no significant difference in the learning style preferences of ESL learners based on their home background.

**Table 3: t-test of Learning Style Preferences of ESL Students Based on Home Background**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t_cal</th>
<th>t_table</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>62.80</td>
<td>21.31</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.139</td>
<td>1.960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>74.46</td>
<td>15.22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P<0.05
Table 3 shows that $t_{cal}$ (3.139) is greater than $t_{table}$ (1.960) at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that there is a significant difference in learning style preferences among ESL learners based on their home background.

**Discussion**

Findings from this study revealed that auditory, visual, group, individual, kinesthetic and tactile were learning style preferences among ESL learners in the study area. The most preferred among them is auditory learning style while the least referred is tactile. The reason for this might not be far from the fact that in this part of the world the most common method of teaching is the chalk-talk method wherein the teacher disseminates information to the learners who are always required to listen to the teacher and are not allowed to talk most of the time. It seems they are adapted to listening to their teachers. This is in line with the submission of Kun-huei(2010) that many students are often reluctant to participate in the classroom and many are unwilling to give responses, seldom ask questions and are overly dependent on the teacher. The study also indicated that there was no significant difference in the learning style preference of boys and girls. This also may not be unconnected with the fact that they both share the same school background wherein they were not exposed to too many varieties of teaching and learning strategies. This finding is also in consonance with Omid and Somayah (2013), Cheryl and Carka(2003) who did not find any significant relationship between learning style preferences and gender. However, the study found a significant relationship between students’ learning style preferences and their home background. This confirms the assertion of Adeyemo (2010) that home factors interplay with how students learn.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that students have different learning style preferences. Learning style preferences of ESL learners were not influenced by their sex. However, ESL students’ home background influenced their learning style preferences.

It is recommended therefore that ESL teachers should use a variety of teaching strategies in order to take care of students’ different learning style preferences, gender differences, and different home backgrounds.

**References**


