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**THE USE OF LEARNING STYLES AND LEARNING STRATEGIES IN LEARNING  
ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Who says the people with a high IQ (Intelligence quotient) is the only one that can succeed in learning might think it twice. Many people feel frustrated when trying to study, they think they are not intelligent or they are not born to enroll in any learning process because they are unable to succeed. On the other hand, there are some others who without apparently much effort do well. However, latest research about the usefulness in learning English as foreign language has found important information on learning strategies which mean mental processes or actions used in the acquisition and the use of the English Language. Nevertheless, to make more productive those strategies students should know their learning style; this is the manner that a person has to acquire and manipulate information. Once the people know their learning style they can choose the strategies that best fit for them.

This bibliographic research is a study of the use of learning styles and learning strategies in learning English as a foreign language. Its purpose is to inquire about learning styles and strategies that could be used in the process of learning English as a foreign language. It also describes the four dimensions of language learning styles: sensory preferences, personality type, desire degree of generality and biological differences. Besides, it presents the types of learning strategies direct and indirect and the benefits that these learning tools represent for teachers and students who are in the process of teaching and learning English as a foreign language.

## II. METHODOLOGY

The present work is a bibliographic research. Its purpose is to know the different learning styles and the learning strategies that could be used in the process of learning English as a foreign language. The information was gathered from books and some digital material on the web. The methodology used to carry out this research is presented in the follow steps.

First, we selected the topic. Taking into consideration our experience, as students and as new English teachers, we got to know the necessity that students have to know the way they learn and the application of strategies that could help them to reinforce and make easy the language learning process. As teachers emerged the necessity to know our students' learning styles in order to adapt our teaching to reach the majority of them.

Second, we searched the literature gathered from the web and books to determine what information could be useful for us to support our thesis. We read and highlighted all the relevant information. After, we organized all the material and we made a document of the selected pieces of information.

Third, we developed the argument, narrowed the topic and wrote the thesis statement. We arranged the supporting information in a logical way to present the topic organizing the relevant data to explain what is already known about the topic.

Fourth, we analyzed the data to form the arguments and present the evidence to defend our conclusions. In here we chose the authors to be included in the work and the most important definitions related to learning styles and strategies.

Fifth, we critiqued the literature and we compared the different authors and our experiences as students and teachers. We could deep understand the learning styles, teaching styles and learning strategies and found the answer for our doubts based on the previous knowledge.



Last, we wrote the bibliographic research document; once the document was written down it came the time for revision. First revision was done by us looking for coherence, spelling and grammar mistakes. Then, some others revisions were done by our advisor for us to correct and improve the final version of the work.

### **III.OBJECTIVES**

#### **GENERAL OBJECTIVE:**

To carry out a bibliographic research in order to know the different learning styles and the learning strategies that could be used in the process of learning English as a foreign language.

#### **SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES:**

1. To provide a reference source for teachers and students who are studying the teaching major at the Foreign Language Department.
2. To motivate students of the Foreign Language Department be conscious of their learning styles by using them in the classroom.
3. To persuade students to become skillful in the use of strategies that reinforce their learning styles.
4. To encourage teachers to take into consideration the learning styles of their students and adapt them to their teaching process.

#### **IV. JUSTIFICATION**

There are many factors that can block the learning process in the English as a foreign language classroom. Among these factors we can mention language itself, different learning styles, differences in teaching and learning strategies, etc. However, it is the responsibility of the instructor to identify the difficulties and make all the possible changes to eliminate them. The student's responsibility is to react to the instructor's attempt at teaching to the best of their ability.

As students of the Foreign Language Department for about seven years; we did not know about learning styles and learning strategies. It was not until the graduation process that we reflected on our learning styles and realized that there was not a course or encouragement for students to inquire on the personal learning styles. Learning strategies were never consciously used. However, knowing the importance of learning styles and strategies, we find necessary that students as well as teachers should know their learning styles and teaching styles respectively so that both can contribute to have an effective learning environment. Teachers could adapt their teaching with the purpose of reaching the majority of the students and get better results at the end of the term. On the other hand, students could be aware of their learning styles and use the appropriate learning strategies to facilitate the acquisition of the language.

This research will help teachers and students of the Foreign Language Department to get a better insight of what learning styles and learning strategies are and the benefits that they provide in the English teaching and learning environment. The benefits may not be seen immediately; however, if teachers and students are willing to make this process easier, fruitful and enjoyable this research is a beginning.

## **V. THE USE OF LEARNING STYLES AND LEARNING STRATEGIES IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

English teachers should encourage students of every course to be aware of their learning styles and use of learning strategies. A learning style is “the biologically and developmentally imposed set of characteristics that make the same teaching method wonderful for some and terrible for others” (Dunn & Griggs, 1988); while for Oxford & Ehrman, (1988) “it is a blend of cognitive, affective, and behavioral elements in the context of overall approach to learning and the environment”. Taking into consideration those definitions emerges the importance mainly for students to identify their learning styles and for teacher to adequate their teaching.

This work discusses the four dimensions of learning style that are likely to be among those most strongly associated with Language learning: sensory preferences, personality types, desired degree of generality, and biological differences (Oxford and Ehrman). The awareness of students’ learning styles are usually ignored by teachers and that makes the learning experience for them more complicated. Most of the time, teachers have their own teaching styles and do not take time to reflect and adapt their teaching to their students. The same happen with students who do not take time to reflect on their learning styles neither look for strategies that help them in their learning process. Below the four dimensions associated with second language learning are described according to Rebecca Oxford.

Firstly, students should understand the way they learn and take an active role in their learning process. Taking into consideration the sensory preferences which refers to “the physical, perceptual learning channels with which the student feels more comfortable; it can be broken down into three main areas: visual, auditory, kinesthetic /tactile (Ehrman and Oxford, 1990) . As teachers of English as a foreign language those differences can be understood by just taking a look to the way in which students like to learn. For example some students enjoy the class by listening to the teacher, some others like to learn by reading, there are some who prefer the teacher to use visual aids in the classroom and the students who enjoy working with real things. Ehrman and Oxford, (1990) explain those differences as follows.

First of all, the visual students are the ones who “like to read and obtain a great deal from visual stimulation; for them, lectures, conversations, and oral directions without any visual backup can be very confusing” (Oxford and Ehrman, 1990). These types of students prefer the information to be presented with pictures, diagrams, charts, videos, and expressions instead of speeches or written words. When teaching English as a foreign language the use of visual aids is very common due to the belief that it is the best way for students to grasp the meaning of the words; however, according to most recent research the visual students are the most benefited from it and not every student in the classroom as it is believed.

Next, the auditory students are the ones “comfortable without visual input and therefore enjoy and profit from simple lectures, conversations, and oral directions” (Oxford and Ehrman, 1990). They are excited with role-plays and similar activities; on the contrary they have difficulty with written work. Auditory learners understand the meaning of a dialogue through listening to the tone of voice, pitch and speed. They do not understand the meaning of written information till they can hear it; research shows that they can benefit by reading the text aloud and using a tape recorder. English teacher should take advantage of these types of learners providing to them activities that develop their listening skill like listening to conversations and practicing with their peers.

Lastly, the Kinesthetic and Tactile students “like lots of movement and enjoy working with tangible objects, collages, and flashcards. Sitting at a desk for very long is not for them; they prefer to have frequent breaks and move around the room”. (Rebecca L. Oxford ,2003).With these type of students teachers in an English class could make the time very interactive and work with a lot of activities that require moving around the classroom. They can also implement the learning by doing in the classroom. Providing this type of environment the students get the knowledge very well and remember it for long time.

An important factor for students who are learning a foreign language is to discover their role and their personality type because by knowing their personality type they will be able to work in order to strengthen the limitation that they may have and also take an active role in the process. According to Ehrman and Oxford (1989-1990) Personality type “consists of four

strands: extroverted vs. introverted; intuitive-random vs. sensing-sequential; thinking vs. feeling; and closure-oriented/judging vs. open/perceiving”. In an English classroom most of teachers can agree that there are some students who are very shy, some others very talkative; there are some who are very independent and study by their own while others look for being guided by teachers; it can be found students that are very rude and some who show empathy to their classmates; and it cannot be left out the hardworking ones and the ones who dislike deadlines. The explanation that Ehrman and Oxford gives to it is as follow.

The first strand of personality type is Extroverted vs. Introverted. “Extrovert students are the ones that gain their greatest energy from the external world. They want interaction with people and are very friendly. On the contrary, introvert students get their energy from the internal world, looking for isolation and tending to have just a few friendships”. (Rebecca Oxford, 1992) With these types of personality teachers could take advantage of group work to balance the environment in the classroom not to be noisy neither quiet. Extrovert students can help teachers with introverted ones helping them to take an active role during the class which at the same time will equilibrate the participation of extroverted ones. All mentioned before lead to the ending of a better classroom management.

The second strand is Intuitive – random vs. Sensing- sequential. “The Intuitive-random students think in abstract, futuristic, large-scale, and non sequential ways. They like to create theories and new possibilities, often have sudden insights, and prefer to guide their own learning. While that sensing-sequential learners are grounded in the here and now. They like facts rather than theories; they want guidance and specific instruction from the teacher, and look for consistency”. (Ehrman and Oxford, 1989- 1990) The important key for teaching intuitive-random and sensing-sequential learners is to provide a variety of options so they are able to get the ones that work best for them. Sometimes, teacher should present the grammar points inductively and some others deductively.

The third strand is thinking vs. Feeling. Thinking students are “oriented toward the bare truth, even if it hurts some people’s feelings. They want to be viewed as competent and do not tend to offer praise easily. In comparison, feeling learners value other people in very personal

ways. They show empathy and compassion through words”. (Ehrman and Oxford, 1989-1990) Teachers need to be careful of not hurting students’ feelings. Moreover, they should help to keep a respectful classroom environment; even when students can tell the truth they have to look for the softest way to do it. If so, there will not be chance for jealousy among students and it will help to have a cooperative classroom atmosphere.

The final strand is closure – oriented /judging vs. Open / perceiving. “Closure-oriented students want to reach judgments or completion quickly and want clarity as soon as possible. In contrast, open learners want to stay available for continuously new perceptions and are therefore sometimes called “perceiving.” (Ehrman&Oxford, 1989). The closure – oriented student work better under pressure, like detailed tasks and prefers teachers to give the information on paper rather than in spoken. On the other hand Open learners take learning lightly enjoy working by their own without the pressure of the teacher. The advantage with Open learners in fluency is due to their risk taking attitude contrary to closure oriented students who monitor so much their speaking to avoid mistakes.

One more style element to be considered is the desire degree of generality. It contrasts the learner who focuses on the main idea with the learner who gives attention to details they are called Global or holistic students. “Global students like social interaction, and communicative events in which they can emphasize the main idea and avoid analysis of grammatical things. On the other hand, there are the Analytic students who tend to concentrate on grammatical details and often avoid more free-flowing communicative activities” (Rebecca Oxford, 2003). This element can be observed mostly in reading where guessing meaning from context is necessary. Global students are good at guessing on the contrary analytic are not because of the necessity to feel confident with the exactitude of their assumptions.

An additional aspect of learning styles can also be related to biological factors, such as biorhythms, sustenance, and location. According to Ehrman & Oxford (1990) “Biorhythms reveal the times of day when students feel good and perform their best. Sustenance refers to the need for food or drink while learning. Location involves the nature of the environment”. Most of the time

English language teachers forget about the biological aspects, but observant teachers can often make adjustments and negotiations when needed. For example there might be chances for students to study during the morning or the afternoon. Also, in some cases teachers should be flexible with the food rule in the classroom; allowing people have some snacks mostly when the class is almost at the same as the meal time. The classroom setting should be as much comfortable as possible having at least lighting, good temperature, cleanliness and furniture in good conditions.

The sensory preferences, the personality type, the desire degree of generality and biological differences should be taken into consideration by every teacher at the Foreign Language Department, because of the importance that it represents for the students. The learning style not only affects the acquisition of the knowledge through the whole career but also the teaching style which is the end of the major. The learning styles by themselves are not as effective as the combination of both learning styles and learning strategies. Anybody can know the way he or she learns but they can also be unable to take full advantage of the knowledge without the use of effective learning strategies. Follows the learning strategies associated with English as a foreign language are explained.

Secondly, the reason why learning styles are very important when learning English, is because students need help to overcome the challenges that learning represent. It is when Learning Strategies appear to facilitate the acquisition of English and they can be understood as “specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques such as seeking out conversation partners, or giving oneself encouragement to tackle a difficult language task used by students to enhance their own learning” (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992, p.63). Teachers should teach Learning strategies before starting a learning process. “The most effective strategy instruction appears to include demonstrating when a given Strategy might be useful, as well as how to use and evaluate it, and how to transfer it to other related tasks and situations. So far, research has shown the most beneficial strategy instruction to be merge into regular, everyday language teaching, although other ways of doing strategy instruction are possible” (Oxford & Leaver, 1996). This work describes the direct and indirect strategies that Rebecca Oxford has identified.



The Direct strategies have three branches which are Cognitive, Memory-related and Compensatory. “Cognitive refers to strategies that allow the learner to control the language material in direct ways, e.g., through reasoning, analysis, note-taking, summarizing, synthesizing, outlining, reorganizing information to develop stronger knowledge structures, practicing in naturalistic settings, and practicing structures and sounds formally. Memory-related help learners to link one Language item or concept with another but do not necessarily involve deep understanding” (Oxford, 1990). A variety memory-related strategies enable learners “to learn and retrieve information in an orderly string, while other techniques create learning and retrieval via sounds and images, a combination of sounds and images, body movement, mechanical means, or location” ( Oxford, 1990). “Compensatory strategies are used to overcome deficiencies and gaps in one's current language knowledge. For example; guessing from the context in listening and reading; using synonyms and “talking around” the missing word to aid speaking and writing; and strictly for speaking, using gestures or pause words. It helps the learner make up for missing knowledge” (Oxford, 1990).

Indirect strategies such as things as organizing and evaluating the learning, managing the emotions, learning and cooperating with others include three branches as well. Meta-cognitive, affective and social. Meta-cognitive are “abilities that helps students to guide, plan and evaluate their learning that means managing the learning process in general” (Dreyer & Oxford, 1996). “The affective strategies such as identifying one’s mood and anxiety level, talking about feelings, rewarding oneself, and using deep breathing or positive self talk, have been shown to be significantly related to Language proficiency” (Dreyer and Oxford,1996). And the last of this group are the social strategies that help the learner work with others and understand the target culture as well as the language. Social strategies were significantly associated with Language proficiency in studies by Dreyer and Oxford (1996).

The learning styles and strategies cannot be taken lightly due to the great importance that it represents. By knowing those features, teachers can help students to become more effective. Jones et al (1987) set out to determine whether there were differences between effective and ineffective learners in terms of their awareness of different type of strategy. They found that

effective learners are aware of the processes underlying their own learning and seek to use appropriate learning strategies to control their own learning. Nuna (1991) also found that one of the characteristics of the “good” language learner was an ability to reflect on and articulate the processes underlying their own learning. Similarly, O’ Malley and Chamot (1990) found indications that more effective learners differ from less effective ones in their use of strategies and a significant relationship between strategy use and language learning success. From those studies it can be concluded that active use of strategies could help students achieve high proficiency.

In the Language learning field, early studies of so-called “good language learners” Naiman, Fröhlich, Stern, Rubin & Todesco (1975) determined that such learners consistently used certain types of learning strategies, such as guessing meaning from the context. Latest studies found that there was no single set of strategies always used by “good language learners,” but what those studies show is that less able learners used strategies in a random, unconnected, and uncontrolled manner (Abraham & Vann, 1987; Chamot et al., 1996), while more effective learners showed careful orchestration of strategies, targeted in a relevant, systematic way at specific language tasks.

Language teachers could also benefit by identifying the learning styles and strategies used by their students so they can be aware of students’ preferences and adapt their teaching to the majority of them. “Many learners are unaware of the strategies they use, and therefore do not take full advantage of the available strategies” (Oxford and Crookall, 1989), for that reason it is wise to teach strategies to people who are determined to learn a second language. “If students do not see they are learning in classes, they tend to be bored and inattentive, do poorly on tests, get discouraged about the course, and may conclude that they are no good at the subject of the course and give up” (Felder & Silverman 1988; Godleski 1984; Oxford et al. 1991; Smith & Renzulli 1984). However, the cause by which the interest of the students may be lost is due to; their learning styles do not match with the teacher teaching style. Teachers can avoid student’s discouragement by searching their student’s learning style and accommodate their instruction in order to reach the majority of them.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

Although, learning styles and strategies are usually overlooked, it does not mean that they are not important. English teachers and students involved in an educational process should inquire about those learning matters in order to accomplish successfully the learning English journey. However, it is important to take into account some considerations. Every person has one predominant learning style. Besides, each style has a neutral value none of them is better or worse than the other. In addition people and learning styles extend and transform over the time. Moreover, teachers and students should focus on the predominant one and extend the knowledge to use strategies that benefits them. All mentioned before demands a more active attitude from students and open minded teachers in order to take full advantage from it. The benefits when trying to take into consideration learning styles and learning strategies are not seen immediately, it takes time but it is worth the effort. Students will take an active role and they will get an organizational tool for their whole learning process and teachers will see the results of the teaching process in a cooperative classroom environment where both teacher and students seek out to achieve the same goal.

## **VII. RECOMMENDATIONS**

According to what we have read and according to our experience as students in the Foreign Language Department for about seven years, there is a clear need to take into consideration language learning strategies and learner styles among language teachers, curriculum developers and learners themselves. Therefore, as a group we make the following recommendations to be taken into account by teachers of the staff of the Foreign Language Department.

- The Foreign Language Department should include an additional course of instruction that focuses on the learning styles and strategies which could be integrated along with the language learning instruction.
- The teachers of the Foreign Language Department should improve and update the activities that supply the different learning styles in the classroom.
- The students should search and be conscious about their own learning style and find out what their best learning strategies best fit to their learning style.

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