

Students' Learning Style (S) in an EFL Context: A Case Study

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Abstract: The aim of the study was to demonstrate that the educational strategies based on the learning styles applied to the teaching of the English language can contribute to improve the learning of the English language. It tried to identify the different leaning styles and their effect on students' attitudes. The researcher used qualitative methods. The participants of the study were students in first Business Computing and Business English and Management and Business English Department at the Faculty of Economics Sciences and Management at the University of Kinshasa during the academic year 2023-2024. The instrument of the study was a questionnaires. The results revealed that teachers do not identify students' styles before they get started their teachings, students like video, audio and textbook. The implication of this study suggests that teaching in students learning styles have the capacity to change students' negative attitudes toward English learning, improve motivation to learn, facilitate various learning styles.

Keywords: Learning Style, EFL.

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I. INTRODUCTION

This article is entitled: “**TEACH IN STUDENTS' LEARNING STYLE (S): A case study**”. As the title suggests, it investigates students' learning styles and new technologies that teachers use to help L1 IGAF (Informatique de Gestion et Anglais des Affaires: Business Computing and Business English) and GAF (Gestion et Anglais des Affaires : Management and Business English) students at the Faculty of Economics Sciences and Management at the University of Kinshasa during the academic year 2023-2024.

“The term learning styles refers to the way or the mode of learning or teaching and the mode refers to different semiotic resources especially language, image, sound and music in texts and communicative events” (Van Leeuwen 2014: 281). It clearly shows that meaning is not encoded through the written text only, but also through other modes. Kress (2010:79) defines a mode as a resource for meaning making and he adds that “Different modes offer different potentials for making meaning”.

Educational institutions are places where many students come from different backgrounds and who were trained under different particularities. Therefore, their way(s) of learning is/are also different.

It should be noted that not all students learn in the same way, each one of them has their differences and ways of obtaining information and above all of assimilating it.

Some students are visual learners, they learn better when they see through observation and analysis of things, some are tactile learners, they need to do activities or practice to understand, some others need to feel the concepts to understand. Then, there are some who need read, listen to audio books. There are those who need combine two or more to understand. These different ways of understanding in education are defined as "Learning Styles" and even though all students learn in a combined way, at least one of them almost always predominates (Analytikis, 2022).

In this regard, it is considered that the research related to the Learning Styles applied to the teaching of the English language is of transcendental importance because it allows to reveal the lack of knowledge that many teachers have regarding this subject.

It is about understanding that the center of the teaching activity is student learning and that the responsibility as teachers is to design and execute strategies so that they build their own knowledge based on their relationship with the learning styles of each one of them (Wong & Nunan, 2011; Oxford et al., 1992; Aryani & Rahayuni, 2016).

➤ Research Problem

It was observed in the previous years that after the first session of exams; almost all the students of first year IGAF and GAF failed. Students attended classes, they did their practical works, sit for quizzes and exams, but after deliberation, it was noticed that almost all the students fail.

But only after the second the second session, some students hardly pass. This has drawn our attention to carry out this piece of research to identify students' learning styles and the new technologies which accompany them in their learning with their different learning styles. It would not be correct to draw conclusion that students who fail after the first session exams are not intelligent. The main question to answer is: Do teachers identify their student's learning styles before they start their teachings? The subquestions are also raised: Do students learn in their learning styles? Are there new technologies to help students learn in their styles?

➤ *Hypotheses*

This research formulates the following three hypotheses

- Teachers do not identify their students' learning styles before start their teachings
- Students do not learn in their learning styles
- There are not new technologies to help students learn in their styles

➤ *Objectives*

The objective of this research is to demonstrate that the educational strategies based on the learning styles applied to the teaching of the English language can contribute to improve the learning of the English language.

➤ *Learning Styles Theory*

Multiple Intelligences entail the multiple styles in learning, which should affect the ways of learning and teaching. Learning styles are simply different approaches or ways of learning. Ellis (2005:4) defines learning style as "the characteristic ways in which individuals orientate to problem-solving". From this definition, one can understand the meaning of "learning style" as "the ways in which an individual characteristically acquires, retains and retrieves information". They can acquire, retain and retrieve information by seeing, hearing and acting or involving in that kind of information. A learning style could be described as a student's consistent way of responding to and using stimuli in the context of learning. We can definitely assume that learning style is not really concerned with "what" the learner learns, but rather "how" he/she prefers to learn.

➤ *Kinds of Learning Styles*

Psychologists have identified lots of learning styles. According to Wen Xu (2011:414-415) there are four kinds of learning styles: Perceptual learning styles, cognitive learning styles, personality learning styles and compound learning styles.

➤ *Perceptual Learning Styles*

Perceptual learning style also refers to as sensory learning style, concerns itself with the involvement of learners' sense organs in the process of learning, such as eyes and ears. Learners employ their sense organs to process the stimuli from outside. There are five styles which fall into this type, namely, visual learning (learn by seeing), auditory learning (learn by hearing), reading/writing (learn by processing text), tactile learning (learn by touching), and kinesthetic learning/practical learning (learn by action

doing). Visual learners prefer to learn by reading books, seeing words and pictures, or looking at some teaching tools. They prefer to look at the written words on the blackboard rather than to only listen to the teacher. Therefore they like the teacher to write more than to talk more in classroom. Auditory learners, also refers to as verbal learners, prefer to learn by listening. For them, they may enjoy to have interactions with others by talking. They may dislike reading books. So in formal instruction settings, they would rather listen more than to see more. The teaching approach that may suit them is audio-lingual approach. Tactile learners and kinesthetic learners are similar. The former prefer to learn by feeling or touching something with their hands while the latter like movement. Learners of these two kinds will feel comfortable when teacher uses the total physical response approach.

➤ *Cognitive Learning Styles*

Cognitive learning styles include the learners who would like to focus on details of a foreign language and to break down a whole thing into parts or pieces. They may ignore the whole picture when concentrating on details. They are good analysts. They would like to analyze a reading passage or a sentence into parts trying to get the exact meaning. They also would like to focus on the whole thing of the learning material, whether a passage or a sentence. They are good at grasping the main points and the general structure.

➤ *Personality Learning Styles*

There are two types of learners in terms of personality: reflective learners or risk avoiders and impulsive learners or risk takers. Reflective learners prefer accuracy to fluency. They would like to think more carefully and more thoroughly before they speak or write or do any other production tasks. And they try to avoid making mistakes. They are careful learners. On the other hand, impulsive learners, as the name suggests, are bold in character and they would like to take risks. They prefer fluency to accuracy. They probably make more mistakes than reflective learners.

➤ *Compound Learning Styles*

Learners of compound learning styles refer to those who have more than one strong learning style. It is possible that a learner may be a visual learner and an audio learner at the same time.

From these learning styles mentioned above, one can say that learners present different ways to receive and learn new information and experiences. However, one or the combination of these receiving styles is normally dominant. It is dominant in the sense that it is this dominant style which defines the best way for a learner to learn new information by filtering what is to be learned. As we have just said, this style may not always be the same for some tasks. The learner may prefer one style of learning for one task, and/or a combination of others for a different task.

In the same vein, (Jarmila, 2008: 26) argues that VAK theorists, present three kinds of learning styles. These are Visual, Auditory and Kinesthetic which seem to be the most popular model nowadays. According to them, Visual learners

have two sub-channels - linguistic and spatial. Learners who are visual - linguistic like to learn through written language, such as reading and writing tasks. They remember what has been written down, even if they do not read it more than once. They like to write down directions and pay better attention to lectures if they watch them. Learners who are visual –spatial usually have difficulty with the written language and do better with charts, demonstrations, videos, and other visual materials. They easily visualize faces and places by using their imagination and seldom get lost in new surroundings. Auditory learners often talk to themselves. They also may move their lips and read out loud. They may have difficulty with reading and writing tasks. They often do better talking to a colleague or a tape recorder and hearing what was said. Kinesthetic learners do best while touching and moving. It also has two subchannels: kinesthetic (movement) and tactile (touch). They tend to lose concentration if there is little or no external stimulation or movement. When listening to lectures they may want to take notes for the sake of moving their hands. When reading, they like to scan the material first, and then focus on the details (get the big picture first). They typically use color, highlighters and take notes by drawing pictures, diagrams, or doodling. VAK (Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic) is the most popular model nowadays.

II. DATA ANALYSIS

➤ Data Collection

Data were collected through student surveys. The questionnaire included questions on demographic variables, technology use, and learning style preferences.

➤ Variables

The variables included in the analysis are:

- Sex
- Nationality
- Do you use new technologies in your learning?
- What kinds of new technologies do you use to learn?
- What is your best style of learning
- Which kinds of technology that makes understand better when you learn with
- What else do you do if you want to understand a course better?
- What kind(s) technology (ies) do your teachers use when they teach?
- Do you like it (them)?
- Why or why not?

➤ Frequencies by Variables

Table 1 Sample Characteristic for Gender

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------|-----------|------------|
| Male | 55 | 55.0 |
| Female | 45 | 45.0 |
| Total | 100 | 100.0 |

As shown in table.1, the study has examined 55 males (55.0%) and 45 Females (45.0%). From the analysis, it arises that males dominated females in the participation.

Table 2 Sample Characteristics by Nationality

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Congolese | 100 | 100.0 |

As far as nationality is concerned, the result shows that all the participants in this study were Congolese, (100%) participants.

➤ Interest Variables Results

Table 3 Do you use New Technologies in your Learning?

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------|-----------|------------|
| Yes, they do | 79 | 79.0 |
| No, they do not | 21 | 21.0 |
| Total | 100 | 100.0 |

As far as the use of new technologies is concerned, 79% of the students reported that new technologies used in

their learning, and 21% of the students said that new technologies are not used in their teaching.

Table 4 What kinds of New Technologies do you use to Learn?

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------|-----------|------------|
| 0 | 2 | 2.0 |
| Audio | 13 | 13.0 |
| textbook | 20 | 20.0 |
| video episodes | 46 | 46.0 |
| I don't know | 19 | 19.0 |
| Total | 100 | 100.0 |

As for the kinds of new technologies that students use to learn English, it is revealed that 46.0% use video episodes,

19.0% said they do not know, 20.0 %, 13.0% use audio and 2.0% did not express what they use.

Table 5 What is your Best Style of Learning?

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------|-----------|------------|
| 0 | 1 | 1.0 |
| audio | 5 | 5.0 |
| textbook | 15 | 15.0 |
| videos | 44 | 44.0 |
| the three | 26 | 26.0 |
| other | 9 | 9.0 |
| Total | 100 | 100.0 |

For students' best style of learning, table 5 shows that 44.0% of the students said videos, 26.0% of the students said the three, 15.0% said textbook, 9.0% said other, 5.0% said

audio and 1.0% has not expressed. This clearly shows that videos are the predominant style of learning with.

Table 6 Which kinds of Technology that makes Understand Better when you Learn with?

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------|-----------|------------|
| 0 | 4 | 4.0 |
| Audio | 19 | 19.0 |
| Textbook | 13 | 13.0 |
| Video | 52 | 52.0 |
| Other | 12 | 12.0 |
| Total | 100 | 100.0 |

As far as the kinds of technology that makes understand better when students learn with, table 6 shows that 52.0% of the students have said video, 19.0% have said audio, 13.0% have said textbook, and 12.0% have said other and 4.0% have

not expressed their opinions. From these results, we can say that video is the predominant kind of new technology which makes students understand when they learn English with, followed by audio and textbook.

Table 7 What else do you do if you want to understand a course better?

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------------|-----------|------------|
| 0 | 1 | 1.0 |
| I use audio | 20 | 20.0 |
| I read a textbook | 12 | 12.0 |
| I use video | 46 | 46.0 |
| I walk around by reading | 21 | 21.0 |
| Total | 100 | 100.0 |

As for what else students do if they want to understand a course better, it is revealed that 46.0% of the respondents use video, 21.0% walk around by reading, 20.0% use audio,

12.0% read a textbook and 1.0% has not expressed his/her opinion. This clearly shows that students have different kinds of styles to learn.

Table 8 What kind(s) Technology (ies) do your Teachers use when they Teach?

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------|-----------|------------|
| 0 | 1 | 1.0 |
| Audio | 5 | 5.0 |
| Textbook | 83 | 83.0 |
| Video | 10 | 10.0 |
| Other | 1 | 1.0 |

| | | |
|-------|-----|-------|
| Total | 100 | 100.0 |
|-------|-----|-------|

As for the kind(s) technology (ies) that teachers use when they teach, table 8 shows that, 83.0% of the teachers use textbook, 10.0% use video, 5.0% use audio, 1.0% said

other and 1.0% has not expressed his/ her opinion. This shows that the majority of teachers use textbook when they teach students.

Table 9. Do you like it (them)?

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| 0 | 3 | 3.0 |
| Positive response | 86 | 86.0 |
| Neutral response | 3 | 3.0 |
| Negative response | 8 | 8.0 |
| Total | 100 | 100.0 |

To know if students like the new technology(ies) that their teachers use when they teach them, 86.0% gave positive responses, that is, they like it/them, 8.0% gave negative responses, that is, they do not like it/them, 3.0%

have not expressed their opinions and were neutral. The researcher, got confused when some students were neutral and some others did not express their opinions.

Table 10 Why or why not?

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| Positive feeling | 97 | 97.0 |
| Neutral sentiment | 2 | 2.0 |
| Negative feeling | 1 | 1.0 |
| Total | 100 | 100.0 |

As for the reason(s) why or why not they like new technology(ies), table 10 reveals that 97.0% feel positive,

2.0% have neutral sentiment, and 1.0% has negative feeling, that is, he/she does not like.

Table 11 Do you have any Comment?

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| 0 | 23 | 23.0 |
| Use of technologies | 32 | 32.0 |
| Interactivity and practical examples | 5 | 5.0 |
| Group work | 1 | 1.0 |
| Preferred teaching methods | 4 | 4.0 |
| Other suggestions and comments | 35 | 35.0 |
| Total | 100 | 100.0 |

As for comment, 35.0% of the respondents have other suggestions and comments, 32.0% like the use of technologies, 23.0% have not expressed their opinions, 5.0% said that video helps for interactivity and practical examples, 4.0% said that technologies are their preferred teaching methods, and 1.0% said to encourage group work.

III. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to identify the learning style preferences of students in the IGAF/GAF Department at the UNIKIN. Videos are widely preferred, and technology plays a crucial role in learning. Recommendations are made to integrate more video content and increase interactivity in the classroom.

The study investigated on students of the first year IGAF (Informatique de Gestion et Anglais des Affaires: Business Computing and Business English) and GAF (Gestion et Anglais des Affaires: Management and Business English) students at the Faculty of Economics Sciences and

Management at the University of Kinshasa during the academic year 2023-2024.

The population of students consisted of all students who took English classes in Business Computing and Business English and Management and Business English program. Participants in 2023-2024 constituted the sample. The study posed the question of non-appropriate approach,describes learning styles. The main question to answer is: Do teachers identify their student's learning styles before they start their teachings? The subquestions are also raised: Do students learn in their learning styles? Are there new technologies to help students learn in their styles?

The hypotheses, Teachers do not identify their students' learning styles before start their teachings, Students do not learn in their learning styles were confirmed and the hypothesis ,there are not new technologies to help students learn in their styles.

Teaching in students' styles is helpful since it is an inclusive approach by the fact that it considers many styles to the teaching and learning of English such as textbook, audio and video. It accounts for the students' individualities and learning styles in English teaching and learning process.

It is assumed that some students learn better by (1) seeing, others by (2) listening, others by (3) reading and (4) there are those who learn better by combining two or the three styles. Data for the research was obtained through a questionnaire.

The main findings of the research were that almost all the teachers do not identify students' styles before they get started their classes. Therefore students were not given chance to meet their learning styles.

Students had on the whole positive attitudes toward lessons with multimodal approach and acknowledge their influence on the development of the four language skills, culture and vocabulary growth. Finally, lessons with multimodal approach seemed to provide most students with a low-stress learning environment.

The researcher's contribution is that, since learning styles exert such powerful influence on the learning process, it is important that teachers start identifying students' styles before they start teaching .

All the respondents were from Democratic Republic of Congo. The study examined 100 students from Business Computing and Business English and Management and Business English Department, academic year 2023-2024 at the University of Kinshasa(UNIKIN).

Since the study shows that most learners like it when their teachers use video, audio and textbook so the researcher recommends teachers to turn to the use of video, audio and textbook while teaching English since using them is viewed by learners as a good/ better way of teaching

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