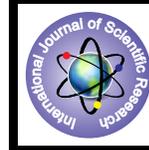


Diversity in Classroom: Learning Styles



Education

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Dr. Sarita

Assistant Professor-II, Department of Education, M.D.U, Rohtak, Haryana

Rajni Dahiya

Research Scholar, Department of Education, M.D.U, Rohtak, Haryana

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the learning styles of students in classroom in order to promote active participation of all students in the classroom. The purpose of this paper is to increase faculty awareness and understanding of the effect of learning styles on the students. Experts assert that students enjoy various learning styles. Learning style's likes cognitive, affective and physiological behaviour is that serve as relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with and respond to the learning environment (Keefe, 1979). Learning style as an individual preferred or habitual ways of processing and transforming knowledge (Honey and Mumford, 1992). The paper attempts to explore about learning styles and reveals that learning styles makes learning more interesting, satisfying and effective.

Introduction

Learning styles are not a new issue in education and much research has been conducted over past two decades. Educators have for many years, noticed that some students prefer certain methods of learning more than others. It is known that learning processes vary from person to person due to the presence of biological and psychological differences. Research shows that people have different preferences and strengths in how they take in and process, information. These preferences are sometimes referred to as learning styles and are used to describe and help us understand the different way in which different people learn. It implies that each individual has a natural inclination toward learning of some kind and that if that preferences can be identified, teaching and learning experience can be provided to help that person learn more effectively.

With different educational and cultural background, different personalities and different learning experience, everybody differs in his ways of learning which leads to different degrees of success. The different preferred ways all usually referred to as "learning style". The term "learning style" comes from general psychology. Learning styles described as a set of factors, behaviours and attitudes that facilitate learning for an individual in a given situation. Psychological attributes, resulted from individual differences, determine the particular strategies a person chooses while learning (Kolb, 1984). When learner consciously chooses strategies that fit his or her learning style, these strategies becomes a useful toolkit for active, conscious, and purposeful self-regulation of learning (Oxford, 2001). Learning style as the characteristic ways in which individuals orientate to problem-solving (Ellis, 2005).

Research in learning style has its roots in the late nineteenth century. Initial work documented that there were style differences among learners. Later researchers recognized that different learners had different learning styles and habitual information-processing strategies that determine a learner's typical mode of perceiving, remembering, thinking, and problem solving (Messick, 1976). This wave of research has shown how to use diagnostic capability to match instruction to the style of individual students (Galloway, 1984). When students have a strong preference for the manner in which new material is presented, it is difficult or even impossible for them to learn when educators fail to present material in their preferred way (Gregoric, 1985). Other efforts to explain the underlying processes of learning recognize not only cognitive styles but also affective and physiological aspects. Researchers have attempted to identify and isolate specific traits of learners in each of these areas to describe the unique processes of learning (Keefe, 1987; Messick, 1976).

Types of Learning Styles

Psychologists have identified a lot of learning styles. . In order to achieve the ultimate goal of student learning it is important to use a combination of teaching methods and to make the classroom environment as stimulating and interactive as possible. Students learn in many different ways. Some students are visual learners, while others are auditory or kinaesthetic learners. Visual learners learn visually by means of charts and pictures. Auditory learners learn by listening to lectures and reading. Kinaesthetic learners learn by doing. Students can prefer one, two or three learning styles.

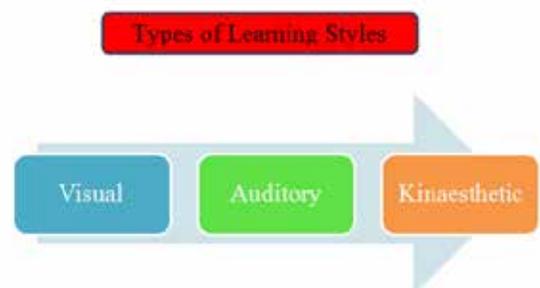


Fig.1: Types of Learning Styles

Visual learners understand concepts by being able to see them and they learn new tasks by watching them demonstrated. Many students discover that they are visual learners. It is estimated that approximately 65% of the population are visual learners. Visual learners try to visualize things that you hear or things that are read to you. These students commonly use visual aids, such as graph and diagrams to assist them in putting material into perspective. Lectures can be difficult for visual learners, but overheads, slides and writing on the board can help. They depend on the instructor's nonverbal cues such as body language to help with understanding. The most dominant learning style is visual learning. Visual learners form mental images with the things they learn and keep them in their mind (MacCarter, 2008)

Auditory learners are those who prefer to hear materials as they are spoken, such as in a lecture format. It is estimated that auditory learners comprise about 30% of the population. Auditory learners learn most effectively through audio books, oral presentation and enjoy debates and discussion. These individuals discover information through listening and interpreting information by the means of pitch, emphasis and speed. These individuals gain knowledge from reading out loud in the classroom and may not have a full understanding of information that is written. Good readers prefer to learn through their visual and auditory senses, while poor readers have a stronger preference for kinaesthetic learning (Carbo, 1983).

Kinaesthetic learners refers to the ability to absorb information best by experiencing, touching, doing and being active in some manner. It is estimated that about 5% of the population are kinaesthetic learner. People who fall into this category prefer situations which are hands-on and which provide them with opportunity to assemble parts and take part in a physical activity. While they may take a lot of notes while attending lectures or even while simply thinking something through, often they will not refer to the notes again. Young children are the most kinaesthetic, that there is a gradual development of visual strengths through the elementary grades and that only in fifth or sixth grade can most youngsters learn and retain information through the auditory sense (Price, Dunn and Sanders, 1980).

Importance of Learning Styles

Everyone is a unique learner. No two people are exactly the same and no two people learn in exactly the same manner. Students gain strong benefits when their teachers recognize their strengths and weaknesses as learner.

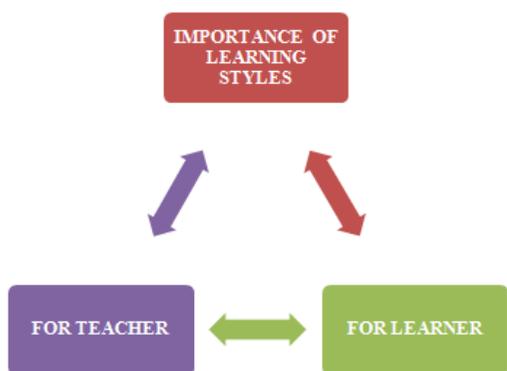


Fig. 2 : Importance of Learning Styles

People have been trying to figure out the best way to learn for centuries and there have been numerous ideas and theories over the years. Experts assert that individuals enjoy various learning styles. Teachers should make students aware of the various learning styles and encourage them to consider their preferred style as they complete their studies. Teacher should teach in a balanced way according to the range of students learning style.

It is important to understand learning styles to ensure that teachers are instructing according to the learner's style and not the tutor's. A teacher who instructs only according to his own style makes learning more difficult for the learner. Teachers should know about learning styles to be able to help learners identify their personal learning styles. This knowledge will

help learners to build self-confidence. Teachers should know what their own personal learning style is. Because learning styles influence how we teach, we need to know just what that style is and how it compares to the learner's. In other words we can conclude that learning styles are important for learner and teacher also. Recent years the focus seems to have shifted from teaching to learning. All successful teaching depends upon learning. There is no point in providing entertaining, well-constructed language lessons if students do not learn. The proof of the teaching is in the learning (Cook, 2000). Individual students learning styles and strategies can work together with or conflict with a given instructional methodology. Whether from the perspective of learner-instruction matching or of the relationship of learning style and learning strategy, it is necessary to study learning style (Oxford, 2001).

Learning Style's Implications in Teaching

Learning style is important for students as well as for teachers. Learning style is more or less fixed and it is not easy to change one's learning style as one cannot easily change one's personality or cognitive style. In this sense, it is more important for teacher to understand the theories of learning style and to get to know the student's learning style. As teachers, we have to remember that our student's learning style cannot be the same. It is the varied learning styles in a classroom that make the teaching difficult. On the basis of this, we have to adapt different teaching methods and we have to find out a balanced teaching approach. On the other hand, we can put students of the same or similar learning styles into one class and this will make teaching more student-oriented and easier. Another implication may be that one single teaching method or approach cannot work for all the students in a class. The popular communicative approach may not be suitable for students of visual learners. Task-based teaching approach may be a good choice if the tasks are designed carefully and the tasks can attract different types of learners. One teaching approach cannot work for everyone in a class. Different teaching approaches may be integrated and different tasks or activities may be done in classroom to please all the students and produce better teaching results.

Conclusion

A better knowledge and understanding of learning styles may become important as classroom sizes increase. It is important for students to have multiple learning opportunities and 'Learning Style - Shift' and teacher should achieve a match between teaching strategies and the student's unique learning styles. Learning styles could improve the whole Teaching-Learning process in Indian classroom and as a result make learning more meaningful, significant and pleasant. The purpose of using learning styles is to find the best ways for both students to learn effectively and teachers to teach efficiently.

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