Adult EFL Students’ Preferred Learning Styles and Motivation

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ABSTRACT

Because of social and possibly biological influences, a number of differences i.e. gender exist in approaches to learning a second/foreign language. Adult EFL students vary in their perceptual learning style preferences. These differences influence adults learning motivation and success. This study was to explore what learning styles of adult EFL students (School of Continuing Education) prefer in order to better understand what impact and shape the language learning process and to help determine to design curriculum and instruction for classroom practice for higher achievement and increased motivation for learning.

The instrument used to gather the data of 165 adult EFL students from three randomly selected schools was Innovated PLSP Questionnaire, which was on the basis of Reid’s Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire. It was increased computer-assisted style to measure adult EFL students for their auditory, visual, tactile, kinesthetic, individual, group, and computer-assisted learning style preferences. The study also explored if there is a relationship between adult EFL students’ preferred learning style and their motivation in learning English by using two items also new added in the Innovated Questionnaire. Means and standard deviations for each of the seven learning style preferences as well as Pearson correlation and Regression Analysis were applied in this study.

Keywords: Adult students, EFL, learning style, motivation, computer-assisted, Regression analysis

INTRODUCTION

According to Alatis (1980), “English is the most widely taught foreign language in the world” (p. 88). Feeling insufficient in the knowledge, skill, or concepts provided by the traditional home and school education, adults need lifelong education (Huang, 1996). The number adult students increase every year. Teaching adults English language has played a more important and challenging role than ever before.

In general, the objective of teaching English is to pass the examinations and English is taught by using many grammatical rules and structures with emphasis on memorization (Lin & Shen, 1996). For the most part, the teachers are still authoritative and continue to employ the same traditional teaching method when facing these traditional or adult students; i.e., teachers usually give the same lectures and tests, assign the same papers and projects to students without considering the students’ individual learning abilities and preferences. The teachers’ and students’ creative response to English teaching and learning is limited.

Teaching English to adult EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students is complicated (Celce-Murcia, 1991) and is quite different from teaching children or traditional students (Yamagata, 1995). Although computer or network is flooded and Internet popular, adult students have not progressed in English. There is no research identifying what learning style (including the new computer-assisted style) adult EFL students prefer or if there is a relationship between adult EFL students’ preferred learning style and their motivation in learning English. The research and a different teaching method or strategy are imperative.
What Does Learning Style Mean

Each person has a particular approach to learning with which he or she feels most comfortable. In other words, students learn more readily when they process information in their own natural and preferred ways. Styles are that give general direction to learning behavior (Cornett, 1983). Learning styles are general, broad approaches used to learn a subject. In Reid’s (1995) research, learning styles were defined as “individual's natural, habitual and preferred way(s) of absorbing, processing, and retaining new information and skills” (p. viii). Reid (1998) also stated learning styles have been used as a focus for assisting students in higher education to realize their full learning potential.

Davidson (1990) stated that they preferred to use the style as it was familiar and made it easier to learn. Kumaravadivelu (1991) said that the more we know about the learner’s personal approaches and personal concepts, the better outcomes we can produce. Kolb (1984) found students appear to learn best when the teaching methods used fit their preferred learning styles. Understanding and addressing learning styles can be a significant help in carrying out the purpose of education. Rosse-Le (1989) showed that perceptual learning style is a neglected yet significant factor in English learning, particularly in relation to adult students of English. However, Dunn, Griggs, Olson, Beasley, and Gorman’s (1995) findings indicated that matching students’ learning-style preferences with educational interventions compatible with those preferences is STILL beneficial to their academic achievement. Oxford, Hollaway, and Horton-Murillo (1992) pointed out that language learning styles are the general approaches used to learn languages.

Reid’s Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (1987) is theoretically grounded in a perceptual modality approach with the intention of measuring a student’s preference for one of four basic perceptual learning modalities (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile) and two social interaction factors (individual or group learning).

Auditory Learning

Learning primarily with ears (Reid, 1987); auditory learners who recall at least 75 percent of what is discussed or heard in a normal forty to fifty minute period (Dunn, 1988). The instructor could use tapes, video tapes, records, radio, television, and precise oral directions when setting tasks or for any aspect of the task requiring understanding, performance, progress, or evaluation.

Kinesthetic Learning

Learning primarily by experience (Reid, 1987); kinesthetic learners who use the body to experience, do, and become involved with the specific learning (Dunn, 1988). The instructor could provide opportunities for real and active experiences for planning and carrying out objectives.

Tactile Learning

Learning through the sense of touch; learning primarily by “hands-on” tasks (Reid, 1987). They learn better by working on experiments in a laboratory, handling, and building models. Students with tactile perceptual strengths need to underline as they read, take notes when they listen, and manipulate the material when possible. Writing notes or instructions can help them remember information (Dunn, 1988). The instructor could use manipulative and three-dimensional materials to implement the objectives.
Visual Learning
Learning primarily with eyes (Reid, 1987); visual learners remember what is seen and retrieve details and events by concentrating on them (Dunn, 1988). Instructors could use pictures, filmstrips, computers, films, videos, graphs, charts, transparencies, diagrams, drawings, books, and magazines (provide resources that require reading), and written assignments and evaluations.

Sociological Styles
**Group.** The learners learn more effectively through working with other (at least one other) students (Reid, 1998). They prefer group interaction and classwork with other students and complete work more successfully when they work with others.

**Individual.** The learners learn more effectively through working alone (Reid, 1998). Individual learners prefer to work alone. They learn new material best when they learn it alone and they remember new information they learn by themselves.

Variables such as age and gender are related to the differences in learning styles and strategies.

Computer-Assisted Style
In order to pursue a better approach to achieve the goal of which both teacher-education programs and general schools can integrate diversity issues into literacy teaching and learning, Hsu (2009) found that the pre-service teachers should use reading contexts to address diversity issues, and they felt motivation to expand their diversity-themed discussions from the classroom to the blog and teach literacy through weblog technology.

Investigating learning English strategies and English needs of the undergraduate students, Souriyavongsavong, et. al. (2013) pointed out that the most frequently used strategies involved in using vocabulary books and electronic dictionaries to remember new English words. In 2004, Paran, et. al. found that most students said that they would like more CMC interaction with tutors and emphasized the importance of computer-mediated communication and used an e-mail discussion list and then a discussion board in TEFL. The researchers also indicated that computer use and access to the Internet are more widespread within most students; therefore, the EFL teachers should design the curriculum and syllabus including the instructional materials through computer/Internet access and take care of students needs and wants in CMC.

On the basis of the proposition from researchers, i.e., Paivio (1990), that using sound and video annotation with text annotation together facilitates the cognitive processes identified for successful second language reading comprehension, Marzban (2011) proposed language teachers and administrators who need to construct about multimedia programs to enhance L2 reading comprehension.

In the study of Yüksel and Kavanoz (2011), “Most countries acknowledge the need for technologically proficient teachers and start to infuse some degree of technological competency into pre-service teacher training program” and indicated that the competences in Internet use and computer access in teaching should not be ignored. Amiri (2000) argued that teachers MA TEFL/TESOL should be trained not merely as consumers but as both consumers and producers of computer-based materials and focused on the role of computer programming in MA courses and concludes that knowledge of programming is important for enabling language teachers to get involved in the design and development of computer-based materials and should be included as a part of the IT training for language teachers. And they are all emphasized the TESL/TEFL needs to include IT. Ahmadi, and Bajelani (2012) specified one of the main
barriers to English for specific purposes learning is many instructors are TESL instructors and lack the required technical knowledge and others.

Gorjian (2012) investigated and found the positive effect of Web-Based Language Learning (WBLL) approach on vocabulary teaching. Nachoua (2012) demonstrated that the use of Computer-Assisted Language Learning is a motivating method and computers are worthwhile and effective tools to be used in second/foreign language classes to develop students’ listening skill and to enhance students’ motivation hence their performance in listening.

Marzban (2011) investigated the effect of ICT and more specifically CALL on the quality of students’ reading comprehension and concluded that the use of computer assisted educational techniques can improve students’ reading comprehension. Yamada, M. (2009) also indicated that the communicative language learning needs using computer-mediated communication.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Measure Method</th>
<th>Measure No.</th>
<th>Measure Item</th>
<th>Literature Review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Computer-Assisted</td>
<td>five-point Likert-type scale</td>
<td>No. 31</td>
<td>1. I feel motivation to expand my English discussions with classmates from the classroom to the blog.</td>
<td>1. Hsu, H. Y. (2009); Yamada, M. (2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Learning</td>
<td></td>
<td>No. 32</td>
<td>2. I use Web-Approach and/or electronic dictionaries to learn and remember new English words.</td>
<td>2. Gorjian, B. (2012); Souriyavongsai, T., et. al. (2013);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No. 33</td>
<td>3. I like to learn English by listening to the programs spoken in English, such as news report, English songs, or watching movies spoken in English.</td>
<td>3. Souriyavongsai, T., et. al. (2013); Nachoua, H. (2012);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No. 34</td>
<td>4. I write e-mail, diaries, short articles, in English.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No. 35</td>
<td>5. I like to find English reading materials on the internet.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td></td>
<td>No. 36</td>
<td>6. I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.</td>
<td>6. Souriyavongsai, T., et. al. (2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No. 37</td>
<td>7. I think of my progress in learning English.</td>
<td>7. Souriyavongsai, T., et. al. (2013)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**GOALS**

The purpose of this study was to determine what the learning styles of adult EFL students preferred and the relationship with motivation. The following research questions and hypotheses guided the study.

1. What are the preferred learning styles of adult EFL students?
2. What is the relationship between adult EFL students' preferred learning style and their motivation in learning English?

**H2-0:** There is no relationship between adult EFL students’ preferred learning style and their motivation in learning English.

**H2-1:** There is a relationship between adult EFL students' preferred learning style and their motivation in learning English.
METHODOLOGY

The total sample consisted of 165 adult students from three randomly selected classes in three randomly selected universities having School of Continuing Education located Taiwan. Validity was assured through the literature review and a critical review of the instrument and greater reliability of results also was provided. This self-reporting questionnaire, developed from the Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (PLSP; Reid 1987), was added one learning style and motivation consisting thirty-seven items to cover seven learning style preferences: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile, individual, group, and computer-assisted learning. The items 1-35 measure the perception of learning style preference within various aspects of the learning environment. The auditory learning style includes items 1, 7, 9, 17, and 20. The visual learning style includes items 6, 10, 12, 24, and 29. The tactile learning style includes items 11, 14, 16, 22, and 25. The kinesthetic learning style includes items 2, 8, 15, 19, and 26. The group learning style includes items 3, 4, 5, 21, and 23. The individual learning style includes items 13, 18, 27, 28, and 30. The computer-assisted learning style includes items 31, 32, 33, 34, and 35. And 36-37 measure the respondent’s motivation (See Appendix for this instrument.) The part 1 of the instrument related to students’ demographic characteristics. It was used to address what the preferred learning styles of current adult EFL students have.

Data were collected by mailing 165 questionnaires to the randomly chosen universities after personal contacting by telephone requesting permission to conduct the study at the universities. For each university, fifty-five students were randomly chosen by the assistant of School of Continuing Education from the classes of adult extension program to complete the questionnaire. The randomly selected TEFL teachers were responsible for distributing the student questionnaires to the students selected to participate in the study. Self-addressed envelopes with return postage were provided for each questionnaire. None empty questionnaires were sent back and there were 165 valid ones. The rate of return was 100 percent.

Research questions one was answered by computing composite means and standard deviations for each of the seven teaching or learning style preferences. Research questions two was answered by using Pearson correlation to examine the relationship between adult EFL students’ preferred learning style and their motivation in learning English. Also, using Regression Analysis explained the effect possibility of preferred learning style on motivation.

RESULTS

RQ1. What are the preferred learning styles of adult EFL students?

Learning Style Preference of Adult EFL Students

The composite means and standard deviations for adult EFL students’ preferred learning style are presented in Table 2. Of the seven learning styles, students indicated the greatest preference for the Computer-Assisted style (M = 3.79) followed by auditory style (M = 3.75). Individual (M = 3.11) and visual (M = 3.27) styles of learning were preferred least by the adult EFL students.
Table 2: Learning Style Preference of Adult EFL Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Style</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S. D.</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Computer-Assisted</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auditory</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinesthetic</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactile</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 165

RQ2. What is the relationship between adult EFL students' preferred learning style and their motivation in learning English?

Relationship between Preferred Learning Style and Motivation of Adult Students

Pearson correlation was used to examine the relationship. There were significant relationships between Auditory, Tactile, Kinesthetic, and Computer-Assisted learning style and their motivation in learning English as the Table 3.

Table 3: Correlations of Preferred Learning Style and Motivation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Style</th>
<th>Motivation (Q36, Q37)</th>
<th>Pearson</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Auditory</td>
<td></td>
<td>.371(**)</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactile</td>
<td></td>
<td>.176(*)</td>
<td>.023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinesthetic</td>
<td></td>
<td>.243(**)</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer-Assisted</td>
<td></td>
<td>.248(**)</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4: Regression Analysis of Preferred Learning Style and Motivation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Style</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Collinearity Statistics: VIF</th>
<th>Adjusted R Square</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Auditory</td>
<td>.389</td>
<td>5.398</td>
<td>.000**</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.389</td>
<td>29.134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactile</td>
<td>.128</td>
<td>1.785</td>
<td>.039*</td>
<td>1.001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinesthetic</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>.149</td>
<td>.012*</td>
<td>1.232</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer-Assisted</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>.436</td>
<td>.034*</td>
<td>1.035</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Regression analysis was also used in this research question to explore further in the effect between learning style and motivation. Adults’ auditory, tactile, kinesthetic, and computer-assisted learning styles had 38.9% effect possibility on motivation shown as Table 4. Sig. = .000 ~ Sig. = .039 The value of VIF was reasonable within the limitation (< 2).

H2. The null hypothesis stated that there were no relationships between adult EFL students' preferred learning style and their motivation in learning English. However, the results from the Table 3, and 4 through Correlations and Regression were shown Partly significant, and thus the null hypothesis was rejected.
CONCLUSION

The following conclusions are based upon the data and the results from the statistical analyses.

1. Of the seven styles, computer-assisted style was perceived by respondents as being the most preferred, while individual and visual styles were perceived as the least preferred.
2. There were significant relationships between auditory, tactile, kinesthetic, and computer-assisted learning style and motivation in learning English.
3. Adults’ auditory, tactile, kinesthetic, and computer-assisted learning styles had 38.9% effect possibility on motivation in learning English.

DISCUSSION

English level is not better than it had been as the result of teaching without respect to the students’ learning styles and without computer-assisted. Reid (1998) showed that knowledge of learning styles and environment may be used to maximize students’ potential for learning and that effective management of learning styles even promotes successful language development. A better understanding in what learning style preference among adult students by the finding from the measurements would help determine the strategies or provide design management training sessions, curriculum, instructional strategies, career counselling, and classroom practice and a foundation for TEFL-related research in the country whose native language is not English.

There are lots of literature emphasizing that TEFL teachers need to have the competences in Internet use and computer access in teaching. Yüksel and Kavanoz (2011) even stated “Most countries acknowledge the need for technologically proficient teachers and start to infuse some degree of technological competency into pre-service teacher training programs” Helping adults to learn is not only matching their preferred learning style but using computer-assisted as this is the advent of the computer ages.

Ranked means of the research indicated that adult EFL students’ most preferred style was computer-assisted; while both individual and visual styles were ranked as the least preferred styles. As mentioned, most students would like more CMC interaction with tutors and emphasized the importance of computer-mediated communication and used an e-mail discussion list and a discussion board in TEFL. It is no wonder, computer-assisted learning style is most preferred by the current adult students.

Chang (1991) stated EFL students are seldom given opportunities to develop independent learning skills or creative replies, and lecturing is usually employed more than two-way interaction and communication. Kinsella (1993) have also demonstrated that approximately 90 percent of traditional classroom instruction focuses on the auditory learner. Teachers talk to their students, ask questions, and discuss facts. Sy (1991) stated that the longer students study English, the more they understand the language and the more comfortable they are with auditory learning. Therefore, next to computer-assisted, auditory style was the second most preferred styles by adult EFL students.

For the purpose of immediate use, adult learners who are more academically challenged within traditional classrooms will learn more easily through tactile/kinesthetic (Oxford 1995). These two learning styles involve a practical, experiential approach to learning and they might benefit from realistic contexts and interactive behavior as a basis for their language development. The finding of this study that the adult students who learn EFL expressed a preferences for kinesthetic, tactile, and other styles and especially showed significantly relationship on motivation in English learning is consistent with the above premise.
RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this study, the following are recommended:

1. Learning styles always change with age and experience (Mattews & Hamby, 1995) that teachers are recommended CONSTANTLY monitor adult students’ perceptions of classroom life.

2. Adult students are different from the traditional students, the EFL teachers should reform new curriculum with computer-assisted access to provide a diversity of teaching styles and create a democratic student-centered environment computer-assisted so that adult students can develop their individual learning styles to achieve real progress in English.

3. Do not ignore what adult students’ need or preference in order to just catch every weekly course schedule.

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INNOVATED PLSP QUESTIONNAIRE
PART 1 DEMOGRAPHIC DATA (OMITTED)

PART 2

This questionnaire has been designed to help you identify the way(s) you learn best-the way(s) you prefer to learn. Please respond to the statements AS THEY APPLY TO YOUR STUDY OF ENGLISH.

1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=undecided, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

Statements

1. When the teachers tell the instructions, I understand better.  1   2   3   4   5
2. I prefer to learn by doing something in class. 1   2   3   4   5
3. I get more work done than I work with others. 1   2   3   4   5
4. I learn more when I study with a group. 1   2   3   4   5
5. In class, I learn best when I work with others. 1   2   3   4   5
6. I learn better by reading what the teacher writes on the chalkboard. 1   2   3   4   5
7. When someone tells me how to do something in class, I learn it better. 1   2   3   4   5
8. When I do things in class, I learn better. 1   2   3   4   5
9. I remember things I have heard in class better than things I have read. 1   2   3   4   5
10. When I read instructions, I remember them better. 1   2   3   4   5
11. I learn more when I can make a model of something. 1   2   3   4   5
12. I understand better when I read instructions. 1   2   3   4   5
13. When I study alone, I remember things better. 1   2   3   4   5
14. I learn more when I make something for a class project. 1   2   3   4   5
15. I enjoy learning in class by doing experiments. 1   2   3   4   5
16. I learn better when I make drawings as I study. 1   2   3   4   5
17. I learn better in class when the teacher gives a lecture. 1   2   3   4   5
18. When I work alone, I learn better. 1   2   3   4   5
19. I understand things better in class when I participate in role playing. 1   2   3   4   5
20. I learn better in class when I listen to someone. 1   2   3   4   5
21. I enjoy working on an assignment with two or three classmates. 1   2   3   4   5
22. When I build something, I remember what I have learned better. 1   2   3   4   5
23. I prefer to study with others. 1   2   3   4   5
24. I learn better by reading than by listening to someone. 1   2   3   4   5
25. I enjoy making something for a class project. 1   2   3   4   5
26. I learn best in class when I can participate in related activities. 1   2   3   4   5
27. In class, I work better when I work alone. 1   2   3   4   5
28. I prefer working on projects by myself. 1   2   3   4   5
29. I learn more by reading textbooks than by listening to lectures. 1   2   3   4   5
30. I prefer to work by myself. 1   2   3   4   5
31. I feel motivation to expand my English discussions with classmates from the classroom to the blog. 1   2   3   4   5
32. I use Web-approach and/or electronic dictionaries to learn and remember new English words. 1   2   3   4   5
33. I like to learn English by listening to the programs spoken in English, such as news report, English songs, or watching movies spoken in English. 1   2   3   4   5
34. I write e-mail, diaries, short articles, in English. 1   2   3   4   5
35. I like to find English reading materials on the internet. 
36. I try to find out how to be a better learner of English. 
37. I think of my progress in learning English.