

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STUDENT
LEARNING STYLES AND PERFORMANCE
ON ESL TASKS**

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

All successful teaching depends on learning; there is no point in providing entertaining and well-structured lessons if students do not learn. According to Cook (1996), one crucial component, very often overlooked by lecturers, is what the students bring with them into the classroom. According to Kinsella (1995), each individual has his or her own natural and preferred ways of absorbing, processing and retaining new information and skills. These are called learning styles and they persist regardless of teaching methods or content area.

Kinsella (1995:170) states that, “instead of using these personal differences as a resource, teachers tend to force the learners to perceive the world the way they (teachers) do”. As lecturers at universities or colleges, we often create classroom environments/activities that are rewarding to us and to students like us but these environments/activities can be extremely frustrating for other students (cf. Dreyer, 1996). For example, we tend to make use of one type of test (e.g. multiple choice) to assess grammar, or one or two tasks (e.g. analyze the poem; discuss in groups) for students to perform in the class without considering the implications that this might have for the diverse student population in front of us. “Style wars” typically result when, for instance, lecturer X asks students to discuss short stories in small groups and to do “free writing” about the stories, but Robert Moletsane prefers more structured tasks such as analyzing the short story in terms of, for instance, characterization; he wants an outline (cf. Wallace & Oxford, 1992). Consequently, the current situation in most ESL classrooms at colleges is that diverse learner preferences are rarely, if ever, considered in a systematic way.

Students, however, cannot be labelled as being strictly analytic or global; most students fall along the continuum between the two. All students are capable of utilizing both styles; students simply prefer one style to another in specific learning contexts and with specific tasks (cf. Kinsella, 1995; Dreyer, 1998a). Some individuals are nonetheless more adaptable than others and can more easily “stretch” their styles. Learners who, for example, strongly favour either concrete-sequential or intuitive learning, and are either reticent or unable to adjust in classes where tasks are given that are incompatible with their styles, predictably flounder in

schools/colleges with lecturers who display less flexibility in their choice of tasks and test types (cf. Kinsella, 1995; Dreyer, 1998a).

An individual's learning style is viewed as relatively fixed and not readily changed (cf. Ellis, 1994). However, Little and Singleton (1990) argue that it is possible to help adult learners to explore their own preferences and to shape their learning approach to suit the requirements of a particular learning task. Dreyer and Van der Walt (1996:470) state that: "It is, therefore, crucial for all lecturers to understand, reflect and respond to the wide range of characteristics that make students unique as learners and to have a critical awareness of their own learning and teaching preferences". Lecturers, at colleges specifically, therefore, need to create the best teaching-learning conditions possible for their students.

The following questions need to be addressed in this study:

- What does the learning style profile of college of education students (Kokstad Region) look like?
- Is there a relationship between the learning styles of these students and their performance on selected ESL tasks (e.g. grammar [cloze procedure, multiple choice]; reading novels [reading comprehension, group work, mind maps]; analyzing a poem [essay type]?)
- What are the implications of this relationship for teaching in the ESL classroom?

1.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to determine:

- What the learning style profile of college of education (Kokstad Region) students looks like.
- If there is a relationship between the learning styles of these students and their performance on selected ESL tasks (e.g. grammar [cloze, multiple choice]; reading novels [reading comprehension, group work, mind maps]; analyzing a poem [essay type]).
- What the implications of this relationship are for teaching in the ESL classroom.

1.3 HYPOTHESIS

There is a statistically significant relationship between the learning styles of ESL students and their performance on selected ESL tasks.

1.4 METHOD OF RESEARCH

A review of the literature indicates that teachers/lecturers very often teach the way they were taught. Consequently, they provide activities/tasks and test in very "rigid" ways. They very seldom make use of variety. It seems that by creating an awareness of learner and teacher/lecturer style differences, lecturers can go a long way in preventing "style wars" in the ESL class.

A total number of 90 college students, majoring in English, were included in this study. Pearson's product-moment correlations were calculated in order to determine the direction and strength of the relationship between students' learning styles and their performance on selected ESL tasks. In order to determine whether this relationship was also practically significant, Cohen's (1977) effect size r was calculated.

1.5 CHAPTER DIVISION

Chapter 2 focuses on a review of the literature on learning styles and selected ESL tasks.

Chapter 3 focuses on a discussion of the method of research used in this study.

In Chapter 4 the collected data are presented and discussed.

Chapter 5 discusses the implication of the relationship between college students' learning styles and their performance on selected ESL tasks, for teaching in the ESL classroom.

Chapter 6 includes the conclusion and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LEARNING STYLES AND SELECTED ESL TASKS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

According to Scarcella and Oxford (1992), students with different learning styles perform differently on a variety of tasks. Thus, students score well if the task at hand matches their learning styles but, if it does not, they perform poorly.

The aim of this chapter is to define learning styles and also to review the literature on the relationship between second language (L2) learning styles and performance on selected ESL tasks. The most important learning style dimensions, as identified in the literature, are discussed as well as the selected ESL tasks used mainly at the Colleges of Education in the Kokstad region.

2.2 DEFINITIONS OF LEARNING STYLES

During the past decade, educational research has identified a number of factors that account for some of the differences in how students learn. One of these factors is learning styles. A wide range of definitions of learning styles exist: Keefe (1979) describes learning styles as cognitive, affective and psychological traits that are relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with and respond to the learning environment. In other words, learning styles indicate how the mind actually functions, how it processes information or is affected by each individual's perception. Differences in people's learning styles reflect the different ways people respond to learning situations.

Dunn and Griggs (1988) define learning styles as the biologically and developmentally imposed set of characteristics that make the same teaching method wonderful for some and terrible for others.

Willing (1988) and Wallace and Oxford (1992) come to a common agreement that learning styles have four main aspects, all related to each other: cognitive, affective, physiological and behavioral. They go further to say that cognitive elements include preferred or habitual patterns of mental functioning. The affective aspect reflects patterns of attitudes and interests that influence what an individual will pay most attention to in a learning situation. The physiological element involves at least partly anatomically-

based sensory perceptual tendencies of the person. From the standpoint of behaviour, learning style relates to a tendency to seek situations compatible with one's own learning patterns. All this supports the idea that individuals have different learning styles and approach the task of learning differently.

2.3 LEARNING STYLE DIMENSIONS

According to Oxford et al. (1992) and Dreyer (1996), the following style dimensions seem to be the most significant for ESL learning: global versus analytic, feeling versus thinking, intuitive versus concrete-sequential, closure-oriented versus open, extraverted versus introverted and perceptual strengths (visual, auditory and hands-on). These styles are not necessarily bipolar opposites. Ellis (1985:114) states that "these terms do not really represent alternatives but poles on a continuum, with individuals varying in the extent to which they learn".

2.3.1 Global versus Analytic

The ESL student with a global learning style seeks the big picture right away. Oxford et al. (1992:441) state that "global learners usually choose holistic strategies such as guessing, predicting, searching for the main idea and engaging in extensive communication in English". According to Witkin et al. (1977), global learners are especially effective in situations where collaboration and social relationships contribute to achievement. Thus, global learners might perform badly in an activity that would engage them in a grammar task that is based on the rules of the language or any form of writing that requires details. Global learners may be good in picking up themes in a text and they can also score well in an activity that needs one to guess what is going to follow in a story.

In contrast, analytic students like details better than the overall picture. Oxford et al. (1992:441) state that "the analytic student has no trouble picking out significant details from a welter of background items and prefers language learning strategies that involve dissecting and logically analyzing the given material, searching for contrasts, and finding cause-effect relations". Such learners might perform best in a form-focussed activity and also succeed in comprehension exercises that need information in a step-by-step fashion. Analytic learners are also good at essay writing where they put their ideas in a logical manner. Oxford et al. (1992) state that analytic learners perform poorly when confronted by an activity that demands guessing, predicting, searching for the main idea, and engaging in extensive communication in English. Thus, it is possible that analytic

learners may not score well in a public speaking activity, but can do well in an activity that requires only writing.

Dunn and Dunn (1978) state that while learning about a particular concept in geography related to map reading, for example, analytic learners must first gather many facts before arriving at a generalization. Thus, in order to describe climate, they might need to know the temperature, the elevation, and the longitude, latitude and location of mountains. They must gather all this information in order to comprehend the concept to see the big picture.

2.3.2 Feeling versus Thinking

A feeling-oriented student is broadly sensitive to social and emotional factors. Oxford et al. (1992:442) state that “the decision making of a feeling-oriented student is likely to be globally influenced by the feeling of others, the emotional climate and personal and interpersonal values”. In other words, a feeling-oriented learner gets on very well with others in a group. He/she benefits in group work more than in an activity that forces him/her to work alone. Such learners can perform well in a group discussion. Oxford et al. (1992) state that feeling-oriented students are likely to be good participants especially when their ideas are motivated by the ideas from other learners.

According to Oxford et al. (1992:442), “a thinking-focussed student is not readily concerned with social and emotional subtleties, except possibly as data for analytically understanding a particular problem or issue”. This type of student, according to Oxford et al. (1992:442), “makes decisions based on logic and analysis”. Thus, these students may score well in an activity that demands logical thinking, like essay writing.

2.3.3 Impulsivity versus Reflection

Oxford et al. (1992:442) state that “impulsive (fast-inaccurate) students show quick and uncritical acceptance of initially accepted hypotheses”. Thus, these students are quick to make judgements or to take guesses without considering cause-effect relationships. Oxford et al. (1992:442) state that “impulsive students can be error-prone, both in the productive skills of writing and speaking and in the receptive skills of listening”. This group of learners, according to Oxford et al. (1992), demonstrate the worst case in second language acquisition, because they perform poorly in reading, writing, speaking and listening activities.

On the contrary, reflective (slow-accurate) students prefer systematic, analytic investigation of hypotheses and are usually accurate in their performance in all skills. Examining the relationship between cognitive style and achievement in L2 reading, Hamers and Blanc (1989) demonstrated that reflective L2 learners were slower at reading in the L2, but produced fewer errors than impulsive learners did.

2.3.4 Intuitive versus Concrete-sequential

According to Oxford et al. (1992:443), “an intuitive random ESL/EFL learner tries to build a mental model of the second language information”. Oxford et al. (1992:443) further state that, “an intuitive learner deals best with the ‘big picture’ in an abstract, nonlinear, random-access mode and constantly tries to find the underlying language system. If interesting, discussions that veer off the assigned topic for the day are perfectly acceptable to an intuitive-random ESL/EFL student”.

Concrete-sequential students, on the other hand, prefer language learning materials and techniques that involve a combination of sound, movement, sight and touch, and that can be applied in a concrete, step-by-step linear manner. According to Oxford et al. (1992:443), “if the ESL/EFL teacher or another student diverges from the planned topic of discussion by telling an amusing anecdote, the concrete-sequential learner is frequently distressed by the lack of continuity”. Such a learner, therefore, cannot perform well in an activity that demands critical thinking, for example, analyzing a poem.

2.3.5 Closure-oriented versus Open

Closure-oriented students have a strong need for clarity in all aspects of language learning. They want lesson directions and grammar rules to be spelled out and are unable to cope with much slack in the system. To avoid the ambiguity that such a student hates, he/she will sometimes jump to hasty conclusions about grammar rules or reading themes. Although a closure-oriented student may perform well in a grammar activity, he/she is likely to over-generalize the rules of the language.

On the other hand, a more open student may approach a language assignment or a class activity as though it were an entertainment game. Oxford et al. (1992:444) state that “this type of learner usually has a high tolerance for ambiguity, does not worry about not comprehending everything, and does not feel the need to come to rapid conclusions about the topic”. Thus, a learner who is open might perform well in a listening

comprehension activity because he/she does not worry about not comprehending everything.

2.3.6 Extraverted versus Introverted

Extraversion/introversion is another significant dimension that particularly influences classroom management, especially grouping of students. Dreyer (1996:296) states that “an extraverted person is often regarded as a life of the party person. Introverted people, conversely, are thought of as quiet and reserved, with tendencies toward reclusiveness”. Extraverted learners gain their energy and focus from the events and people outside of themselves. They also enjoy a breadth of interest and many friends, and they like group work. Dreyer (1996:296) states that “extraverted students enjoy English conversation, role plays and other highly interactive activities”. Thus, the extraverted students might score well in class debates.

Introverted learners, on the other hand, are stimulated most by their own inner world of ideas and feelings. Oxford et al. (1992:444) state that “introverted learners prefer to work alone or else in a pair with someone they know well; they dislike lots of continuous group work in the ESL classroom”.

2.3.7 Perceptual Strengths (Visual, Auditory & Hands-on)

Dreyer (1996:295) states that “the sensory channels through which each individual best absorbs and retains new information and skills, have become known as modality strengths”. Visually-oriented students like to read and obtain a great deal of visual stimulation. For them, lectures, conversation and oral directions without any visual backup are very confusing and can be anxiety-producing. Visually-oriented learners might excel in a reading activity. They also need a great deal of visual stimulation, for example, transparencies, videos, computers, chalkboard and posters. Dreyer (1996:2955) states that “these students would rather see a film on a subject than listen to a lecture or a discussion”.

Auditory students, on the other hand, are comfortable with oral directions and interactions unsupported by visual means. These students master new information by listening, repeating or discussing it with others. Dreyer (1996:295) states that most of the L2 learners in South Africa are visually-oriented, but the predominant teaching method is the lecture which may indicate why so few students are performing the way they should. Auditory students often feel frustrated when teachers write assignment and

test instructions on the chalkboard or on a hand-out, but do not go over them orally. These students master new information by listening, then repeating or discussing it with others. Auditory students might be good at listening comprehension tasks.

Hands-on (haptic, kinesthetic or tactile) students like lots of movement and enjoy working with tangible objects. According to Oxford et al. (1992:445), "sitting at a desk for very long is uncomfortable for hands-on students; they need frequent breaks and above all, physical action in games and dramatic activities". Thus, hands-on learners enjoy being exposed to learning such as building models or doing laboratory experiences. According to Kinsella (1995), these students are frequently in motion: they may fidget, get up regularly or tap their pencils. Therefore, these students like variety in classroom activities.

According to Oxford and Ehrman (1991) and Kroonenberg (1995), learning style research indicates that students absorb new material and skills through their senses and prefer some senses over others in specific situations. Dreyer (1996:296) supports this idea by stating that "a student's perceptual strengths and weaknesses are extremely important for no matter how motivated a student might be, inability to absorb and retain through an inappropriate sense tends to dampen motivation, and, certainly, inhibits achievement".

In the next section the focus is on selected ESL tasks that are used in colleges in the Kokstad region.

2.4 ESL TASKS

2.4.1 Cloze Procedure

2.4.1.1 Definition

Oller (1979:345) states that: "W.L. Taylor is credited with being the inventor of the cloze technique. He is also responsible for coining the term 'cloze' which is rather obviously a spelling corruption of the word 'close' as in 'close the door' ". In the cloze technique blanks are placed in prose where words in the text have been deleted. Filling the blanks by guessing the missing words is, according to Taylor's notion, a special kind of closure, hence the term 'cloze'. The reader's guessing of missing words is a kind of gap filling task that is not terribly unlike the perceiver's completion of imperfect visual patterns.

Hanania and Shikhani (1986) state that a cloze is considered an integrative rather than a discrete-point test because it draws at once on the overall grammatical, semantic and rhetorical knowledge of the language. To reconstruct the textual message, students have to understand key ideas and perceive relationships within a stretch of continuous discourse and they have to produce, rather than simply recognize, an appropriate word for each blank. The focus of the task involved is more communicative than formal in nature and it is, therefore, considered to reflect a person's ability to function in the language.

Hubbard et al. (1983) also support this idea by stating that a cloze procedure is a global test which requires receptive and productive skills and an underlying knowledge of lexical and grammatical systems, since both content words and structural words have to be provided. The student does not rely just on linguistic clues, of course; he relies also on semantic clues and on what he believes to be appropriate in a particular context. This shows the importance of the context because it helps or guides students to come up with an appropriate word.

According to Oller (1979:345), "the cloze is simply a story or essay from which a number of words have been deleted. We fill in the missing words much as we do while conversing. In a noisy restaurant, we guess at the words that we don't hear by relying on the whole conversation. So in cloze tests, the overall meaning and surrounding grammar help us replace the missing parts".

According to Hanania and Shikani (1986), a cloze test typically consists of a passage of about 300 words from which 50 words have been deleted at regular intervals. The first sentence is usually left intact to help establish the context. A person taking the test has to fill in each blank with the word which best fits the meaning.

2.4.1.2 Types of Cloze tests

There are many types of cloze tests. Oller (1979:345) states that "the most commonly used and, therefore, the best researched type is the cloze test constructed by deleting every n^{th} word of a passage. This procedure has been the fixed-ratio method because it deletes $1/n^{\text{th}}$ of the words in the passage". For instance, on every 5^{th} word deletion ratio would result in $1/5^{\text{th}}$ of the words being blanked out of the text. By this technique, the number of words correctly replaced by the exact word scoring procedure or the number of contextually appropriate scoring method, is a kind of overall

index of the subject's ability to process the prose in the text. Alternatively, Oller (1979:345) states that “the average score of a group of examinees on several passages may be taken as an indication of the comprehensibility of each text to the group of subjects in question”.

According to Oller (1979:346), “another type of cloze procedure (or family of them) is what has been called the ‘variable-ratio method’ ”. Instead of deleting words according to a counting procedure, words may be selected on some other basis. For instance, it is possible to delete only words that are richly laden with meaning, typically these would include the nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs or some combination of them in the text in question. Another version leaves out only the so-called function words, e.g. the prepositions, conjunctions, articles and the like.

Oller (1979:346) states that “it is also possible to use an every nth word procedure with some discretionary judgement. This is probably the most commonly used method for classroom testing. Instead of only deleting words on a counting basis, the counting technique may be used only as a general guide”. Thus, it is common practise to skip over items such as proper nouns, dates and other words that would be excessively difficult to replace.

Cloze items reflect overall comprehension of a text. It is difficult to imagine any one filling in the blanks on a cloze test correctly without understanding the meaning of the text in the sense of mapping it into extralinguistic context, hence, cloze tests seem to meet the second of the two pragmatic naturalness constraints. Although there are similarities between cloze procedure and fill-in blank tests, Taylor (1975) points out the basic differences: first, cloze procedure deals with contextually interrelated series of blanks, not isolated ones; and second, the cloze procedure does not deal directly with specific meaning. Instead it repeatedly samples the likeness between the language patterns used by the writer to express what he meant and those possibly different patterns which represent readers’ guesses at what they think he meant.

2.4.1.3 Preparing Cloze Tests

Much research has been conducted into different ways of preparing cloze tests and applying them to different types of tests. Particular attention has been given to the rules for deleting words and scoring the results. Vincent (1983) points out that in readability research it is customary to automatically delete every fifth word in a passage but in comprehension

testing a lower rate, between eight and ten, is more common. Comprehension tests also have to discriminate in selection of words to be deleted in order to control the difficulty of the test. Vincent (1983:186) suggests that “a balanced test can be created for classroom use by deleting, roughly every tenth word in a 100 word passage. Two or three of these should be simple, structural words and the remainder content words. One should ensure that all the latter words could be discovered by use of context, either because they are used elsewhere in the passage or could reasonably be inferred”.

2.4.1.4 What the teacher should know

Oller (1979:346) states that “the first and most important step is to choose a story or essay on the right level. If your class uses an ESL reader, choosing a passage that is rather difficult for your students will simply frustrate them”. Oller (1979:346) suggests that teachers should choose a passage that they can read with little or no difficulty. Teachers can even use something that has already been read and discussed in class. The length of the selection depends on the number of blanks you plan to have. Teachers should avoid a passage that is full of proper nouns, numbers and technical words. In taking a cloze test students can normally do better if they look over the whole passage first. Therefore, it is good to prepare instructions that mention this.

2.4.1.5 Advantages of a cloze test

Oller (1979:347) points out that “teachers like the cloze procedure because it is integrative, that is, it requires students to process the components of language simultaneously, much like what happens when people communicate”. Moreover, studies have shown that it relates well to various language measures, from listening comprehension to overall performance on a battery of language tests. In brief, it is a good measure of overall proficiency.

Scoring is objective and can be done by the exact-word method, for which only the word given in the original text is considered correct, or by the acceptable word method, for which acceptable alternatives are also marked correct.

2.4.1.6 Disadvantages of a cloze test

According to Oller (1979:376), “proficiency tests, as the cloze do, have some limitations. For one thing, they usually don’t measure short-term gains very well. A good achievement test could show big improvement on question tags studied over a two-to-three week period. But a proficiency test generally would not show much if any improvement”. In short, a cloze test is not a sensitive measure of short-term gains. It is also difficult for teachers who are non-native English speakers to choose acceptable equivalent words.

2.4.2 Multiple Choice Completion

2.4.2.1 Definition

Madsen (1983) states that a good vocabulary test type for students who can read in the foreign language is multiple choice completion. It makes the student depend on context clues and sentence meaning. This kind of item is constructed by deleting a word from a sentence. After reading the sentence, the student looks at the group of words and chooses which one best completes what he has read. The context is important because it guides the testee as to which word to choose.

The initial part of each multiple choice item is known as the stem; the choices from which the student relates his answers are referred to as options/responses/alternatives. One option is the answer, correct option or key, while the other options are distracters. The task of a distracter is to distract the majority of poor students (those who do not know the answer) from the correct option.

According to Heaton (1975:14), “the optimum number of alternatives or options for each multiple choice item is five in most public tests and four is recommended for most classroom tests. Many writers recommend using four options for grammar items, but five for vocabulary”.

2.4.2.2 What the teacher should know

Before constructing any test items, the test writer must first determine the actual areas to be covered by multiple choice items and the number of items to be included in the test. According to Heaton (1975:14), “the test must be long enough to allow for a reliable assessment of the testee’s

performance and short enough to be practicable. Too long a test is undesirable because of the administration difficulties often created and because of the mental strain and tension which may be caused among the students taking the test". Heaton (1975:14) further states that "the number of items included in a test will vary according to the level of difficulty, the nature of the areas being tested and the purpose of the test".

Each multiple choice item should have only one answer. This answer must be absolutely correct unless the instruction specifies choosing the best option (as in some vocabulary tests). Heaton (1975:15) states that "only one feature at a time should be tested. It is usually less confusing for the testee and it keeps to reinforce a particular teaching point". Each option should be grammatically correct when placed in the stem, except of course in the case of specific grammar test items. For example, stems ending with the determiner 'a', followed by options in the form of nouns or noun phrases, sometimes trap the unwary test constructor. In the following example, the correct answer 'C', when moved up to complete the stem, makes the sentence grammatically incorrect.

1. Someone who designs houses is a -----
- A. designer B. builder C. architect D. plumber

It is suggested that all multiple choice items should be at the level of the testees. The context, itself, should be at a lower level than the actual problem which the item is testing. A grammar test item should not contain other grammatical features as difficult as the area being tested, and a vocabulary item should not contain more difficult semantic features in the stem than the area being tested.

2.4.2.3 Advantages

Oller (1979:345) states that "the favour that multiple choice tests enjoy among professional testers is due to their presumed 'objectivity', and concomitant reliability of scoring". Scoring is easy and consistent. Further, when large numbers of people are to be tested in short periods of time with few proctors and scorers, multiple choice tests are very economical in terms of the effort and expense they require. A multiple choice test helps students see the full meaning of words by providing natural contexts. Also, it is a good influence on instruction in that it discourages word-list memorization.

2.4.2.4 Disadvantages

According to Hubbard et al. (1983:162), “most multiple choice tests present the learner with items that have no wider context. He is given no information about the speakers or the situation and consequently, finds it difficult to decide on what is appropriate”. It is also difficult to prepare good sentence contexts that clearly show the meaning of the word being tested. In a multiple choice test it is easy for students to cheat by copying what others have circled or just circling at random (i.e. guessing). It is difficult to set good items. After being set the items need to be tested and validated.

2.4.3 Reading Comprehension

2.4.3.1 Definition

According to Goodman (1976), reading has been described as externally guided thinking. In order to understand the sentence, the reader needs to do more than recognize each word and determine which words refer to each other. What is required is that we follow an argument in order to judge the validity of the conclusion. According to this definition, reading in this sense is equivalent to reasoning and helps us go beyond word meaning to the understanding of sentences and texts.

When we read we are usually attempting to recover the meaning of a passage and in order to do this we need to think about the ideas represented by the words on the page. Underwood and Batt (1996:199) state that for the most part reading is equivalent to thinking about the ideas that the writer has attempted to represent in print and beyond a mundane level of prose or tabloid journalism reading involves the understanding of inference and the development of argument.

2.4.3.2 What the teacher should know

Silberstein (1987) states that in the mid-to late 1960s reading was seen as little more than a reinforcement for oral language instruction under the influence of audiolingualism. Most efforts to ‘teach’ reading were centered on the use of reading to examine grammar and vocabulary or to practise pronunciation. This view was challenged by two major changes, one related to changing ESL institutional needs, the other related to the changing views of reading theory.

Goodman (1976) argues that reading is a selective process. Since it does not seem likely that fluent readers have the time to look at all the words on a page and still read at a rapid rate, it makes sense that good readers use knowledge they bring to the reading and then read by predicting information, sampling the text and confirming the prediction. Silberstein (1987) outlined implications for instruction which could be drawn from a psycholinguistic model of reading. Reading was characterized as an active process of comprehending and students needed to be taught strategies to read more efficiently (e.g. guess from context, define expectations, make inferences about the text, skim ahead to fill in the context, etc.). For teachers, the goal of reading instruction was to provide students with a range of effective approaches to texts, including helping students define goals and strategies for reading, to use pre-reading activities to enhance conceptual readiness and to provide students with strategies to deal with difficult syntax, vocabulary and organizational structure.

Coady (1979) reinterpreted Goodman's psycholinguistic model into a model more specifically suited to second language learners. Coady argues that a conceptualization of the reading process requires three components: process strategies, background knowledge and conceptual abilities. Beginning readers focus on process strategies (e.g. word identification), whereas more proficient readers shift attention to more abstract conceptual abilities and make better use of background knowledge, using only as much textual information as needed for confirming and predicting the information in the text.

Research has argued that fluent reading is rapid: the reader needs to maintain the flow of information at a sufficient rate to make connections and inferences vital to comprehension. Reading is purposeful: the reader has a purpose for reading whether it is for entertainment, information, research and so on. Reading for a purpose provides motivation, an important aspect of being a good reader. Reading is interactive: the reader makes use of information from his/her background knowledge as well as information from the printed page. Reading is also interactive in the sense that many skills work together simultaneously in the process. Reading is comprehending: the reader typically expects to understand what he/she is reading. Unlike many ESL students, the fluent reader does not begin to read wondering whether or not she/he will understand the text. Reading is flexible: the reader employs a range of strategies to read efficiently. These strategies include: adjusting the reading speed, skimming ahead, considering titles, headings, pictures and text structure information, anticipating information to come and so on. Finally, reading develops

gradually; the reader does not become fluent suddenly or immediately following a reading development course. Rather, fluent reading is the product of long term effort and gradual improvement.

Readers need a good knowledge of formal discourse structure (formal schemata). Grabe (1991:381) points out that “there is considerable evidence that knowing how a text is organized influences the comprehension of the text. For example, good readers appear to make better use of text organization than poor readers do”.

Grabe (1991) states that content and background knowledge (context schemata) also have a major influence on reading comprehension. A large body of literature has argued that prior knowledge of text-related information strongly affects reading comprehension. Fluent readers not only seek to comprehend a text when they read, they also evaluate the text information and compare/synthesize it with other sources of information/knowledge. Thus, synthesis and evaluation skills and strategies are critical components of reading abilities.

Metacognitive knowledge and skills monitoring are also important components of fluent reading skills. Metacognitive knowledge, according to Baker and Brown (1984), may be defined as knowledge about cognition and the self regulation of cognition. Grabe (1991:382) states that “knowledge about cognition, including knowledge about language, involves recognizing patterns of structure and organization and using appropriate strategies to achieve specific goals (e.g. comprehending texts, remembering information)”. As related to reading, this would include recognizing the more important information in a text, adjusting reading rate, using context to sort out a misunderstood segment, skimming portions of the text, previewing headings, pictures and summaries, using search strategies for finding specific information, and formulating question about the information.

2.4.3.3 Advantages

The development of reading activities will help learners reinforce listening and speaking abilities. Rivers (1987:259) points out that “clearly reading is a most important activity in any language class, not only as a source of consolidating and extending one's knowledge of the language. The reading skill, once developed, is the one which can be most easily maintained at a high level by the students themselves without further help from a teacher”. Through it students can increase their knowledge and understanding of the

culture of the speakers of the language, their ways of thinking, their contemporary activities and their contributions to many fields of artistic and intellectual endeavour.

2.4.3.4 Background information

According to Pearson and Johanson (1978), some learners do not go beyond the surface of the text, that is they become bound to single words. These learners cannot construct the meaning of the text, because they do not have the prerequisite prior knowledge. Since background information determines the levels of comprehension, learners' knowledge gaps become blocks to understanding texts.

2.4.4 Group Work

2.4.4.1 Definition

According to Hamers and Blanc (1989: 241), "a group is usually defined as a number of people who interact with one another, who are psychologically aware of one another, and who perceive themselves to be a group". Rogoff (1990), Johnson and Johnson (1974), Slavin (1983) and Vygotsky (1978) state that group work occurs when a small number of students work together. In group work, people interact and assist one another. Johnson and Johnson (1974) point out that in order for group work to be effective, it should be based on student collaboration and co-operation. Some teachers do not understand the concept of group work, as a result, this aggregate of individuals amounts to little more than individual activity in the presence of another. For others, group work is letting the better student, after completing his/her individual assignment, help the less fortunate.

2.4.4.2 The role of the individual in group work

First, group work demands that the learners establish positive interdependence. That is, learners come to realize during the activity that they need each other's resources to complete the task successfully. Second, group work implies face-to-face communication and talk. Learners in the group setting who are working silently and individually on some aspect of the total task are comparable to learners working in isolation at their desks. Third, all learners work toward a common goal and each one is held accountable for succeeding or failing to carry out task. Each group member has something to contribute and is at the same time a source of information and a needer of assistance. Group work should advance, therefore, the

equal distribution of responsibilities among group members in a spirit of positive interdependence and individual accountability.

Long and Porter (1985) state that the feeling of positively contributing to successful achievement of a task, typical for group work, increases students' motivation to learn, fosters learners' allegiance to each other, and stresses the value of every learner's contribution to the learning process.

2.4.4.3 What the teacher should know

According to Kilfoil and Van der Walt (1990: 130), "as general principle, groups are not selected by the teacher; not permanent, not always the same size". If possible, the classroom seating arrangements should be less formal. In large crowded classes pupils can work with their immediate neighbours which would obviate the necessity of any disrupting movement and noise. However, this can be a disadvantage in the long run as groups may not work because of a conflict of personality or may become too much of a unit. The problem with requiring pupils to move, besides the noise, is that some pupils become insecure.

This feeling will be overcome as pupils gain in confidence from working in different groups. The teacher has to monitor the groups carefully and guard against the use of the mother tongue by pupils. According to Kilfoil and Van der Walt (1990: 130), "pupils must speak in English for the activity to achieve its goal of encouraging fluency".

In most activities it is preferable to have pupils within a group reach consensus. It is the content aspect that should be reported on and discussed by the groups during feedback. In this way pupils evaluate their own learning. Faced with a common task, learners plan their own learning agenda in the form of questions or problems needing to be resolved.

2.4.4.4 Conducting group work

Group work is pupil-oriented and tends to lower the anxiety level in pupils because they are not expected to perform in front of the whole class. Although there is some disagreement about the optimal size of a group, Kilfoil and Van der Walt (1990: 139) state that "a group should comprise five to eight pupils". In this informal grouping there are more possibilities for interaction than in a whole class group. There are more opportunities for each pupil to produce language. There is often co-operation instead of competition within the group depending, of course, on the specific activity.

Group work is flexible and pupils acquire language in an integrated manner. Within a group context, communicative practise is maximized and pupils focus on negotiating meaning, not on producing accurate language.

2.4.4.5 Advantages

Small groups provide greater intensity of involvement, so that the quality of language practise is increased and the opportunities for feedback and monitoring are also given adequate guidance and preparation by the teacher. The setting is more natural than that of the full class, for the size of the group resembles that of normal conversational groupings. Because of this, the stress which accompanies 'public' performance in the classroom should be reduced. Experience also suggests that placing students in small groups assists individualization, for each group, being limited by its own capacities, determines its own appropriate level of working more precisely than can a class working in lock-step, with its larger numbers. According to Hamers and Blanc (1989), psychologically, group work increases the intellectual and emotional participation or involvement of the individual pupil in the task of learning a foreign language. Some pupils are more intelligent than others, while others are more gifted in learning languages; some pupils are outgoing, communicative, extravert personalities, while others are shy, withdrawn introverts. In small groups, all these types of learners can meet and mix, compensating for one another's strong points and deficiencies as language learners.

2.4.4.6 Disadvantages

In group work activity, the teacher should be tolerant of noise as long as it is constructive. In group work, gifted students can sometimes dominate the weaker students to such an extent that the weaker students do not get a chance to share their ideas with their fellow students.

2.4.5 Mind Maps

2.4.5.1 Definition

According to Hanf (1971:225), "semantic mapping is a graphic representation of information as it is a verbal picture of ideas organised and symbolised by readers". Novak (1986:28) describes semantic mapping as "a visual representation of knowledge, a picture of conceptual relationships, a pulling together of thoughts and knowledge and a knowledge map that allows the scanner to view a range of ideas". Thus,

semantic mapping can also be regarded as an exercise in critical thinking as it demands the reader's insightful judgements and discriminating decisions about the material.

According to Heimlick and Pittelman (1986:51), “the reader has to decide the map’s starting point by locating the main idea and determining principal parts. After labelling these parts, he connects them with the main idea. He now has a picture of the material. The next step is adding the supporting details”.

Murray and Johanson (1989:37) state that “one cannot make a map without being keenly involved in critical thinking”. Thus, it is as a result of judgements and decisions made by the reader that semantic mapping is an appropriate interactive approach between the reader and text by which meaning is found and created.

2.4.5.2 What the teacher should know

According to Novak (1986:17), “semantic mapping involves selecting the key-context from passages and representing it in some sort of visual display in which relationships among the key ideas are made explicit”. The teacher should understand the procedure involved in semantic mapping. The procedure generally includes a brain-storming session in which students are asked to verbalise associations with the topic or stimulus words as the teacher maps (categorises) them on the board. Murray and Johanson (1989:47) state that “this phase of semantic mapping provides students with an opportunity to engage actively in a mental activity which retrieves stored prior knowledge and see the relationships among words”. Through discussion, students can verify and expand their own understanding of the concepts. They relate new concepts to their own background knowledge, thus promoting better comprehension. Murray and Johanson (1989:47) state that “brain-storming can also bring to light incorrect concepts and stimulate pupils imagination and creativity”.

2.4.5.3 Advantages

Through its brain-storming phase, semantic mapping introduces new words to students and demonstrates the link between these words and those that they already know, thus relating new concepts to their own background knowledge and, therefore, promoting better comprehension. Mapping also increases reasoning ability as reading is essentially a language-thought activity. Mapping is also said to improve memory as researchers argue that

the proper business of school is to teach students to think. Mapping develops critical thinking. This is done through constructing and creating the organisational design of ideas, selecting information that is relevant and sorting each bit of information into its proper place, relating all the facts to the whole and relating facts to other facts as well as responding with personal reaction to the material.

2.4.5.4 Disadvantages

Locating the main idea is not easy for students who are not familiar with text analysis. Students also find it difficult to map or categorise words. Since most of our students have not been challenged to think critically in the past, they find it difficult to sort each bit of information into its proper place and respond with personal reaction to the material.

2.4.6 Poetry (Essay type)

2.4.6.1 Definition

According to the Collins English Dictionary poetry refers to “a composition in verse, usually characterized by concentrated and heightened language in which words are chosen for their sound and suggestive power as well as for their sense, and using such techniques as metre, rhyme and alliteration”. O’Brien (1988:1) defines poetry as the telling of a story, or the description of a scene or emotion, or the conveying of an idea through the medium of verse. Poetry does not necessarily rhyme; some poetry has no rhyme at all. Lines of poetry need not be the same length. However, poetry is usually a more compact form of literature than prose. Poetry is usually divided into section called verses or stanzas. It is preferable to use the term stanza because the term verse is used for sections of the same length. However, stanzas often vary in length.

An essay is a piece of writing on any one subject. This piece of writing is developed through the use of words, sentences and paragraphs. Words develop to sentences and sentences develop to paragraphs. Each one of these components is important and as such should be structured in such a way that it expresses as precisely as possible what the writer wants to convey.

2.4.6.2 The role of poetry

According to Kilfoil and Van der Walt (1990:139), “poetry forms part of authentic language use and stimulates language acquisition”. Thus, if a poem is carefully selected, it will contain vocabulary and structures used in real life. In addition, poems give pupils the opportunity to practise skills. Poems form part of the cultural heritage of a language and are, therefore, worthwhile objects of study. Furthermore, they stimulate pupils’ imaginations and often lead to creative writing.

2.4.6.3 Components of an essay

Any essay basically consists of three parts. Although these three divisions are not of equal importance, as it is the body which provides a detailed discussion of the subject, each section has nonetheless its own important function to fulfil and the sections are dependent on one another for their success or failure. Just as the most excellent introduction and conclusion cannot make up for an incoherent and poorly formulated body, the opposite is also true.

According to Dreyer (1998b), the basic quality to aim for in any good essay is a combination of relevancy, conciseness and clarity. Above all, it must arouse interest if it is to be at all effective. A lack of any of these qualities usually results from the writer not knowing what he really wants to say.

An important aspect to consider when writing an essay is the planning. The writer should spend a few worthwhile minutes in planning the pattern and also establish a clear plan of how the ideas will develop. While doing this the following points should be kept in mind:

- (i) How is the theme to be treated?
- (ii) Where is the emphasis to be laid?
- (iii) What form of construction will be most effective?
- (iv) How will the topic sentences for paragraphs be organized?

The paragraph is the basic unit that goes to make up a piece of writing, for every point you wish to make will eventually be turned into a paragraph in the essay. A properly constructed paragraph signals to the reader a unit of a number of sentences related to a single aspect of the central idea of an

essay. According to Dreyer (1998b), the four main principles of paragraphing are unity, coherence, emphasis and completeness. These four principles are regarded as the basic 'laws of the paragraph'.

2.4.6.3.1 Unity

The unity principle in paragraphing requires that the generalizations and facts in a paragraph must be logically related to the part or parts of the theme that make up the whole. Throwing in ideas or facts that are not logically related into the paragraph results in violating the unity principle. Therefore, a paragraph which has unity confines itself to the development of one basic idea, and is capable of explaining the linking of every thought and every detail used. Each sentence in the paragraph should aid in developing the central idea or purpose and making it clear. In order to develop an idea, usually one sentence states the central idea and the remaining sentences supply whatever additional information the reader will require in order to grasp the implications of the central idea.

2.4.6.3.2 Emphasis

The proper arrangement of ideas and facts in paragraphing is known as emphasis. Emphasis in paragraphing means the conscious ordering or placement of ideas and facts to give special attention to stress what is important. The writer should arrange ideas and facts to stress those of greater importance and de-emphasize those of lesser importance.

2.4.6.3.3 Coherence

An effective paragraph is not only unified and emphatic but also coherent; that is, the relationship to the preceding paragraph as well as the connection between ideas within the paragraph is clearly stated and implied. A theme should be expressed or implied through the use of linking devices, such as transitional words, phrases, sentences or paragraphs.

2.4.6.3.4 Completeness

It is important that paragraphs are not overloaded or underdeveloped. To achieve this balance one must use a detailed topic outline to marshal facts and examples before writing paragraphs.

2.4.6.4 What the teacher should know

There should be high pupil interest in the topic. It should be something to which pupils can relate meaningfully. The poem should have imaginative power, be challenging and substantive. In the lower classes, poems should be short, simple and direct with ordinary vocabulary and everyday structures. Kilfoil and Van der Walt (1990:139) suggest that “fun-filled rhythmic poems with easy rhymes and quick action and even humour are a good choice”.

The teacher should be able to identify the learning styles his/her students possess. This will help the teacher to know which students might perform well in the essay task. If the teacher is aware of the demands of the essay type exercise, it becomes easy for him/her to motivate even those students whose learning style preferences do not favour of an essay type of task.

2.4.6.5 Advantages

Making the language of a poem the basis of classroom study is a way of integrating poetry into the syllabus. Using poetry is not then seen simply as an activity done for its own sake, but as a way of improving language knowledge. The occasional use of a poem linked linguistically to a lexical or grammatical area being taught in a particular lesson is often an enjoyable way of reinforcing or revising that area. Similarly, if we can identify certain linguistic features in a poem which mesh with areas specified in the syllabus, then the poem could be used as the basis for a lesson which increases student awareness of those features. For example, a poem which mixes formal and informal registers could be used as the starting point for a lesson sensitising students to different uses of register. Making the language of the poem the basis for classroom study is a helpful first step towards enabling students to make confident interpretations of a poem.

The essay type of exercise is advantageous to the students because it develops their critical thinking. It also develops the student's ability to argue logically. Students who are exposed to this kind of task (essay) acquire the skill of planning because before they embark on any topic they have to plan first.

2.4.6.6 Disadvantages

The language of poetry is difficult for students. Students find it difficult to differentiate between figurative and literal meaning. As a result, misinterpretation of the meaning sometimes occurs.

Students who are not analytic by nature, sometimes find it difficult to perform well in the essay task. Some students find it difficult to put their argument logically on paper. They also find it difficult to prioritize and group their ideas.

2.5 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEARNING STYLES AND PERFORMANCE ON ESL TASKS

According to Scarcella and Oxford (1992), students score differently on different tasks, typically reflecting differences in learning styles. When teachers fail to identify their students' learning styles, mismatches frequently affect students' learning potential and their attitudes toward English and toward learning in general.

Ellis (1989:259) observed two learners who approached the task of learning grammar differently. In the case of these two learners, Ellis (1989:259) found that there appeared to be a mismatch between how they set about learning and what they actually achieved. For example, Monique, a global learner, appeared unable to perform either fluently or accurately in an oral communicative task but was successful in a written, form-focussed task. On the other hand, an analytic learner, Simon, demonstrated a much higher level of word order acquisition and was able to speak more fluently. Thus, it seems as if students perform well when the task at hand favours their learning styles.

Examining the relationship between cognitive style and performance in an L2 reading task, Hamers and Blanc (1989:234) demonstrated that "reflexive L2 learners were slower at reading in the L2 but produced fewer errors than impulsive learners". This seems to support the idea that, when learning styles match the task the learners perform well and become successful learners.

According to Kumaravadivelu (1991:98), "recent explorations in task-based pedagogy have pointed out that the learning outcome is the result of a fairly unpredictable interaction between the learner's learning style and

the task". Therefore, achievement of success depends largely on the degree to which learner's style and the nature of the task converge. Kumaravadivelu (1991:98) states that, "the narrower the gap between the students learning style and the nature of the task, the greater are the chances of achieving desired goals".

2.6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter a brief review of the literature on learning styles and selected ESL tasks was given. The influence of the learning styles on second language achievement manifests itself in various ways. For example, Scarcella and Oxford (1992) state that when learning styles match the task/activity, a student becomes a successful learner, but if a task does not match the learning styles, a mismatch occurs and that the student is likely to be not successful in the second language learning.

The above argument indicates that the relationship between the characteristic of a learning style and the nature of the task is important. Therefore, if the two are in harmony with each other, it is possible that students might have more success in completing a wide variety of ESL tasks.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD OF RESEARCH

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The methodology employed in this study is discussed under five main headings:

- Design
- Subjects
- Instruments/materials
- Data collection procedure
- Data analysis

3.2 DESIGN

A correlational research design was used.

3.3 SUBJECTS

The accessible population comprised 100 third-year students taking the Senior Primary Teachers Diploma (SPTD) at three different colleges in the Kokstad Region of the Eastern Cape. A random sample of thirty students was selected from each college for purposes of the investigation. The students are fairly homogeneous in that they come from similar backgrounds. Two colleges accommodate both female and male students and one college accommodates only female students.

3.4 INSTRUMENTATION

The Style Analysis Survey (SAS) was used to determine the students' general approach to learning (i.e. it gives an indication of overall learning style preference). This instrument has a reliability coefficient of 0,92 (cronbach alpha) and also has content and concurrent validity.

The following tasks were given to the ESL students:

- A grammar task using a cloze and multiple-choice format. These tasks were designed in order to assess students' understanding of the passage and their ability to infer meaning from context.
- Reading tasks, using their prescribed text (*Cry Softly Thule Nene*), included a reading comprehension test, group work activities on the themes and characterization in the novel, and the construction of a mind map. A reading comprehension test was designed in order to assess students' reading comprehension. A mind map was constructed in order to assess students' ability to locate the main idea and determine principal parts.
- An essay type task requiring students to critically analyse a poem. This type of exercise was designed in order to assess the students' critical thinking capacity.

These tasks/activities only had content and face validity.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

The Style Analysis Survey (SAS) was given to the students at the beginning of the second semester. They were told that there were no right or wrong answers to the SAS. Students were allowed to ask the meaning of the unfamiliar words used in the questionnaire from the researcher. They managed to fill in the questionnaire in a single period (35 minutes).

The task/activities were administered during the normal teaching sessions. The activities were administered in the presence of the researcher in all three colleges. The tests were not administered on the same day since the three colleges are far apart (about sixty kilometres from each other). Three days were spent administering the tasks at each college.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

The data were analysed by means of the Statistica software package. Pearson product-moment correlations were used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between learning styles and performance on selected ESL tasks.

A relationship can be regarded as statistically significant if the results are significant at the specified alpha (i.e. probability of chance occurrence). Alpha is established as a criterion and the results either meet the criterion or they do not. In behavioral research, alpha is frequently set at $p < 0,05$ or $p < 0,01$ (i.e. the odds that the findings are due to chance are either 5 in 100 or 1 in 100) (cf. Thomas and Nelson, 1990:100–102). A relationship can be regarded as practically significant if the results are of practical value to the researcher, language practitioner or teacher. Cohen (1977:20-27) has established various scales according to which a relationship or difference between means can be regarded as practically significant. Cohen's (1977:77-81) effect size r was used to calculate the correlation between two variables. Cohen uses the following scale for the r -values:

Small effect	- 0,1
Medium effect	- 0,3
Large effect	- 0,5

3.7 CONCLUSION

According to researchers (cf. Abraham and Vann 1987; Bachman 1990) the methodology of a study is very important, because many studies have "failed" as a result of methodological failure. In this chapter a complete outline of the steps involved in the study was given in order to enable future researchers to replicate similar studies.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is devoted to the presentation and discussion of the analysed data. The aim of this chapter is to attempt to answer the research questions posed in chapter 1:

- What does the learning style profile of college of education students (Kokstad region) look like?
- Is there a relationship between the learnship styles of these students and their performance on selected ESL tasks (e.g. grammar [cloze procedure, multiple-choice]; reading novels [reading comprehension, group work, mind maps]; analysing a poem [essay type]).

4.2 COLLEGE STUDENTS' LEARNING STYLE PROFILE

The average college student in the Kokstad region seemed to have a decided visual modality strength (cf. Table 1). This finding seems to support that found by Dreyer (1996; 1998). As Dreyer (1996) mentions, the implications are very important for lecturers at tertiary institutions, because most of them rely heavily on lecturing which would seem to favour auditory learners. This may be a reason why many students do not achieve as highly as we believe they should.

Table 1: Learning Style Profile

VARIABLE	X	SD	N
Visual	16,58	4,03	90
Auditory	13,70	3,76	90
Hands-on	12,82	4,48	90
Extraverted	16,27	4,75	90
Introverted	9,67	4,86	90
Intuitive	16,82	5,00	90
Concrete-sequential	15,12	4,21	90
Closure-oriented	19,05	4,83	90
Open	12,82	4,48	90
Global	18,61	4,21	90
Analytic	14,35	3,68	90

On the “How I deal with other people” (extraverted/introverted) learning style dimension the results indicated that these students were far more extraverted than introverted. According to Ellis (1985:120), “extraverted learners learn more rapidly and are more successful than introverted learners. It has been suggested that extraverted learners will find it easier to make contact with other users of the L2 and therefore will obtain more input”. However, this may not be true on all instances. It is possible that introverted students might “outperform” extraverted students on selected tasks.

The introverted learners, on the other hand, are thought of as quiet and reserved and, therefore, are stimulated most by their own inner world of ideas and feelings. According to Oxford et al. (1992: 444), these learners “prefer to work alone or else in a pair with someone they know well; they dislike lots of continuous group work in the ESL classroom”.

With regard to “How I handle possibilities” (intuitive/concrete-sequential) the results indicated that the students were slightly more intuitive than concrete-sequential. The difference was, however, not very big (cf. Table 1). Intuitive learners do not care about order, but instead enjoy thinking ahead and theorizing about why the English language operates as it does. On the other hand, the concrete-sequential students dislike theory and want the English lesson presented in a strict order.

The results indicated that the students were significantly more closure-oriented than open. According to Dreyer (1996: 296), “students oriented toward closure have a strong need for clarity in all aspects of language learning”. Thus, they want lesson directions and grammar rules to be spelled out and are unable to cope with much slack in the system. These students are likely to plan language study sessions carefully and do home work on time or early.

The difference between a holistic person (global) and a detail-oriented person (analytic) is very important in language learning, because the two types of students react differently in the language classroom. The results indicated that this group of students were more globally-oriented than analytic.

According to Oxford et al. (1992: 441), “the ESL/EFL student with a global learning style seeks the big picture right away. This kind of learner sometimes has trouble discerning the important detail from a confusing language background. Global learners usually choose holistic strategies

such as guessing, predicting, searching for the main idea, and engaging in extensive communication in English". Witkin et al. (1977) state that global learners are especially effective in situations where collaboration and social relationships contribute to achievement.

The results in this section indicated that the ESL college learners in the Eastern Cape (Kokstad Region) displayed a variety of learning styles along a continuum. This has implications for the ESL/EFL lecturers at colleges (cf. Chapter 5). It is, therefore, essential that the ESL/EFL lecturer organises a variety of activities in order to cater for the diversity of the learning styles employed by his/her students.

4.3 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEARNING STYLES AND SELECTED ESL TASKS

The principal question in this section concerns the general relationship between student learning styles and their performance on selected ESL tasks. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Pearson Product-Moment Correlations

Learning styles	ESL TASKS				
	Grammar	Reading Compre.	Group-work	Mind map	Essay type
Visual	0,10	0,52* ⁺⁺⁺	0,31* ⁺⁺	0,13	0,13
Auditory	0,13	0,14	0,51* ⁺⁺⁺	0,44* ⁺⁺	0,52* ⁺⁺⁺
Hands-on	0,13	0,16	0,52* ⁺⁺⁺	0,46* ⁺⁺	0,35* ⁺⁺
Extraverted	0,19	0,51* ⁺⁺⁺	0,56* ⁺⁺⁺	0,36* ⁺⁺	0,31* ⁺⁺
Introverted	0,48* ⁺⁺	0,56* ⁺⁺⁺	0,16	0,29	0,50* ⁺⁺⁺
Intuitive	0,23	0,48* ⁺⁺	0,46* ⁺⁺	0,50* ⁺⁺⁺	0,51* ⁺⁺⁺
Concrete sequential	0,54* ⁺⁺⁺	0,52* ⁺⁺⁺	0,19	0,53* ⁺⁺⁺	0,55* ⁺⁺⁺
Closure -oriented	0,50* ⁺⁺⁺	0,45* ⁺⁺	0,16	0,32* ⁺⁺	0,40* ⁺⁺
Open	0,34* ⁺⁺	0,54* ⁺⁺⁺	0,55* ⁺⁺⁺	0,56* ⁺⁺⁺	0,51* ⁺⁺⁺
Global	0,11	0,12	0,56* ⁺⁺⁺	0,21	0,19
Analytic	0,55* ⁺⁺⁺	0,55* ⁺⁺⁺	0,40* ⁺⁺	0,58* ⁺⁺⁺	0,50* ⁺⁺⁺

Statistical Significance* $p < 0,05$ **Practical Significance**

+ small effect size
 ++ medium effect size
 +++ large effect size

With regard to sensory preferences, visual learners did well on the reading comprehension test. This relationship was statistically as well as practically significant ($r = 0,52$; $p < 0,05$). Their performance on the group work activity was also statistically significant ($p < 0,05$), but only revealed a medium effect size (cf. Table 2). The relationship with grammar, mind map and essay tasks was not statistically significant. According to Oxford et al.(1992:445), “visually oriented students like to read and obtain a great deal of visual stimulation. For them, lectures, conversations and oral directions without any visual backup are very confusing and can be anxiety-producing”. Dreyer (1996:295) also supports this idea by stating that “these students would rather see a film on a subject than listen to a lecture or discussion”.

Auditory learners showed a preference for group work ($r=0,51$), essay ($r=0,52$) and mind map tasks ($r=0,44$). The relationships were statistically as well as practically significant (cf. Table 2). According to Dreyer (1996:295), “auditory students are comfortable with lectures, discussions, radio and television. These students often feel frustrated when teachers write assignment and test instructions on the board or on a handout, but do not go over them orally. These students master new information by listening, then repeating or discussing it with others”.

These students did well on group work because they interact and listen to each others’ points of view. Even the shy students have the opportunity to share their ideas and are listened to by their peers in the group.

Hands-on students also showed a preference for group work ($r=0,52$), mind map task ($r=0,46$) and essay type exercises ($r=0,35$). The relationships were statistically as well as practically significant (medium effect size). According to Dreyer (1996:295), “these students need frequent breaks and above all, physical action in games and dramatic activities”. Thus, hands-on learners enjoy being exposed to learning such as building models or doing laboratory experiences. They also like variety in classroom activity. These students may not perform well in an activity that would require them to sit at a desk for very long.

The results indicated that the hands-on students performed well on group work and mind maps. This could be attributed to the fact that group work and mind maps keep them actively involved. In group work, discussions keep them active because they interact with each other. Drawing mind maps is also a challenge to them because it presents them with an opportunity to construct something.

Extraverted learners did well on the reading comprehension test ($r = 0,51$) and group work exercise ($r=0,56$). The relationships were statistically as well as practically significant. Their performance on mind maps ($r=0,36$) and essay type exercise ($r=0,31$) was also statistically significant but only revealed a medium size effect. Oxford et al. (1992:444) point out that “extraverted learners gain their energy and focus from events and people outside of themselves. They enjoy a breadth of interest and many friends, and they like group work. They also enjoy English conversation, role-plays, and other highly interactive activities”.

These students performed well on group work because they like sharing their ideas with each other. Group work affords them opportunity to share ideas with each other.

On the other hand, introverted learners showed a preference for the reading comprehension task ($r=0,56$) and essay type exercise ($r=0,50$) (cf. Table 2). The relationships were statistically as well as practically significant. Their performance on grammar ($r=0,48$) was statistically significant but only revealed medium size effect. Oxford et al. (1992:444) state that “introverted learners are stimulated most by their inner world of ideas and feelings. Their interests are deep, and they have fewer friendships than extraverted students. They prefer to work alone or else in a pair with someone they know well; they dislike lots of continuous group work in the ESL/EFL classroom”.

These students performed well on the reading comprehension and essay type exercises because such tasks allow them to work as individuals.

Intuitive learners did well on mind map exercises ($r=0,50$), essay type tasks ($r=0,51$) and group work exercises ($r=0,46$). The relationships were statistically as well as practically significant. Their performance on the reading comprehension exercise was also statistically significant but only revealed a medium effect size. According to Oxford et al. (1992:443), “an intuitive learner deals best with the ‘big picture’ in an abstract, nonlinear, random-access mode and constantly tries to find the underlying language system. If interesting, discussions that veer off the assigned topic for the day are perfectly acceptable to an intuitive-random student is comfortable without having all the information and feels free to use guessing, predicting and other compensation strategies in the absence of full knowledge”. Thus, the intuitive learners might perform well in an activity that demands guessing at the theme of a novel. These students may perform well in an activity that needs details, like a mind map exercise.

These students performed well on essay type task because such a task does not confine them. They feel comfortable without having all the information. They find the essay task easy for them because they say whatever they feel is right.

On the other hand, concrete-sequential students showed a preference for grammar tasks ($r=0,54$), reading comprehension task ($r=0,52$), the mind map task ($r=0,53$) and the essay task ($r=0,55$). The relationships were statistically as well as practically significant (cf. Table 2). According to Oxford et al. (1992:443), “a concrete-sequential student prefers language learning materials and techniques that involve combinations of sound, movement, sight, and touch, and that can be applied in a concrete, sequential, linear manner”. These students ought to be good in essay writing because of their ability to put their ideas in a sequential manner. Oxford et al. (1992:443) state that “the concrete-sequential learner is frequently distressed by the lack of continuity, are likely to follow the teacher's guidelines to the letter, to be focused on the present, to demand full information, and to avoid compensation strategies that demand creativity in the absence of complete knowledge”.

These students did well on the grammar task, the mind map task and the essay task because such tasks demand details and concrete, step-by-step learning. These students want to do the task at hand and then move on to the next activity. Randomness and lack of consistency in lesson plans or instructions are difficult for such students to handle in the language classroom.

Open students performed well on the reading comprehension task ($r=0,54$), group work task ($r=0,55$), the mind map task ($r=0,56$) and essay type task ($r=0,51$). The relationships were statistically as well as practically significant. Their performance on the grammar task was also statistically significant but only revealed a medium effect size. Oxford et al. (1992:444) states that “this type of learner usually has a high tolerance for ambiguity, does not worry about not comprehending everything, and does not feel the need to come to conclusions about the topic”.

These students performed well on the group work task because the interaction involved in group work entertains them. When they exchange ideas with their peers in group work they perceive that as a game and therefore perform well. They also enjoy drawing the mind maps because they easily follow the test structure.

Global students did well only on group work ($r=0,56$). The relationship was statistically as well as practically significant. The relationship with grammar, reading comprehension, mind map and essay type tasks was not statistically significant (cf. Table 2). According to Oxford et al. (1992:441), "this kind of learner has trouble discerning the important details from a confusing language background". Therefore, these learners may not perform well in mind map activities where students have to arrange the themes/events according to their order of importance.

These students performed well on group work because they like sharing ideas with each other and also enjoy an exercise that engages them in extensive communication in English.

On the other hand, analytic students did well on the grammar task ($r=0,55$), the reading comprehension task ($r=0,55$), the mind map task ($r=0,58$) and essay type task ($r=0,50$). The relationships were statistically as well as practically significant. Their performance on group work was also statistically significant but only revealed a medium effect size. Oxford et al. (1992:441) state that "the analytic student has no trouble picking out significant details from a welter of background items and prefers language learning strategies that involve dissecting and logically analyzing the given material, searching for contrasts, and finding cause-effect relations". Oxford et al. (1992:441) also state that "analytic learners perform poorly when confronted by an activity that demands guessing, predicting, searching for the main idea, and engaging in extensive communication in English".

These students did well on the grammar task, reading comprehension task and the mind map task. They performed well because they like details and they also like following rules. This could be attributed to the fact that in many secondary schools in South Africa, English grammar has been presented in a form-focussed fashion.

4.4 CONCLUSION

In the above discussion an attempt has been made to answer the research questions in chapter one. The results indicated that style preference can influence performance on selected ESL tasks. The implication of this for the ESL teacher is that he/she should be able to organize tasks that suite the students' learning styles (cf. Chapter 5).

CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING IN THE ESL CLASSROOM

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the implications that different student learning styles and choice of ESL tasks can have for teaching in the ESL classroom. Kinsella (1995) states that the teachers' awareness about the learning styles his/her students employ, is important to good teaching. The teacher should help students identify their preferred learning styles and stretch those styles by examining and practising various learning styles. In addition, he/she needs to provide a wide variety of tasks in order to accommodate students with differing styles.

5.2 LEARNING STYLE INSTRUMENTS

Understanding the use of learning style instruments is important for the teachers to enable them to identify the wide variety of learning styles. Sharing general information about what the instruments measure demonstrates the teachers' interest not only in what students learn, but also in how students learn. In other words, the assessment instruments make it possible for the teacher to be sensitive to the learning styles his/her learners possess and, therefore, be able to cater for diversity in terms of activities to be organised in the ESL/EFL classroom. According to Oxford et al. (1992:451), "using more than one of these instruments to measure style will give a more complete picture than employing just one".

Oxford et al. (1992:451) state that "a whole-class discussion of the style assessment results is helpful as students see that the class is indeed a mixture of styles". Therefore, students can easily identify themselves with others in the class with similar learning styles. In this discussion it is suggested that the teacher should inform the learners that each person's style is neither a curse nor a blessing but simply a given. Oxford et al. (1992:451) state that "when style discussions are constructive, students' initial interest in self-awareness is rewarded and deepened". Learning style instruments and training help to sensitise teachers, making them more aware of their students' needs and they are more likely to alter the environment to accommodate those needs.

5.3 TEACHER-STUDENT STYLE-MATCHING: FOCUS ON ACTIVITIES

According to Barnett (1986), a teacher's learning style does not have to become a teaching style straight jacket; teachers can learn to be flexible and teach in a variety of ways. It is also suggested that the teacher should alter his/her teaching style in order to create teacher-student style matching through a wide range of activities. Ellis (1989) points out that "the instruction (the teaching style) should be matched when possible to the students' learning styles". Matching is best achieved by the teacher catering for individual needs during the moment-by-moment process of teaching (i.e. by emphasizing group dynamics and offering a range of activity types).

According to Oxford et al. (1992), teachers can change their own styles to provide a variety of activities to meet the needs of different learning styles. For example, the teacher who discovers he/she is highly visual probably does not need to worry about incorporating more use of the overhead projector or the blackboard because this is an automatic choice. He/she probably needs to be more intentional about providing hands-on activities or auditory opportunities for students.

With classes made up of students who are introverts and students who are extraverts, it is also helpful to remember that each class session should include a variety of groupings. According to Oxford et al. (1992:452), "the extravert really needs the chance to express some ideas orally in the presence of one or many class members". On the other hand, the introvert may need some encouragement to share ideas aloud and may want the safety of jotting down a few notes first and perhaps sharing with one other person before being invited or expected to participate in a group discussion. In this regard, Oxford et al. (1992:452) suggest that "co-operative learning structure such as Numbered Heads Together, Value Line, or Jigsaw are highly applicable to the tertiary classroom and can accommodate a variety of learning styles". The teacher should take into consideration that, while planning, there is provision for large, small group, pair and individual response.

There is always the temptation to do in class those sorts of activities which one (teacher) personally enjoys. So, the analytical teacher is naturally more interested in structure, formal correctness, getting at rules by deduction or discovery and in pointedly organised class procedures. The concrete teacher is more sensitive to social interaction, and tends to favour activities in which learners are given plenty of exposure to the language in

communicative contexts (e.g. in role plays, group projects, practise and discussion). Danger arises when students of the opposite orientation to one's own are less well catered for. For instance, a highly analytic student with a real hunger for structure feels frustrated while confronted by the communicative exercises. Whereas, a highly concrete learner is equally dissatisfied when burdened with explicit structural tasks which do nothing but interfere with his goal of communication.

5.4 ALL STUDENTS CAN LEARN

All students can learn; one style is not better or weaker than another. Guild (1994:10) states that "most schools do a better job with learners who are reflective, linear, and/or analytic than with, learners who are active (vocally and physically), holistic, personal and/or practical. Learners with these natural patterns of learning are struggling to adapt to an unfriendly environment. These students often are underachieving, rebelling and dropping out eventually". Students need to be held accountable for their academic performance. The application of learning styles and multiple intelligences allows each learner to proceed at a rate that is achievable, makes no unfair comparisons with the progress of others, assures positive reinforcement and provides assessment procedures that reflect the learning styles of all students.

According to Guild (1994:10), "once students understand their styles and how they learn, they use their strengths to assume responsibility for their own learning. They also help others learn according to their style". For example, if a student is teaching a highly visual peer during co-operative learning, he/she would try to use pictures, graphs, diagrams and other pictorial aids during the lesson. Guild (1994:12) states that "when students understand their learning styles and the learning styles of others, chances improve that everyone will pull together and no one feel singled out because he/she learns differently".

Kinsella (1995) states that students will need help in analysing why they are having difficulty with an assignment, or why they can succeed in certain classes and not in others. Leading students to a more critical awareness of their individual learning strengths, and challenges results in empowering them to more fully realize their potential in academic settings and to assume more learner responsibility. ESL teachers may use a variety of activities to provide structured opportunities for students to explore their individual learning styles and to collaborate with classmates in finding "active learner" solutions to problematic situations.

5.5 CATERING FOR VARIOUS LEARNING STYLES

Oxford et al. (1992:452) state that “teachers can put students in groups according to their styles from time to time. They can try style-alike groups for greatest efficiency and use style-varied groups for generating greater flexibility of styles and behaviours”. Oxford et al. (1992:452) also warn teachers from “grouping introverts with each other all the time, and recommend that it is often helpful to include open students and closure-oriented students in the same group; the former will make learning more lively and more fun, while the latter will ensure that the task is done on time and in good order”.

Teachers should include and code different learning styles in lesson plans. This could be achieved, according to Oxford et al. (1992:453), “by the teacher making a conscious effort to include various learning styles in daily lesson plans. A multimedia approach to presenting information can tap into many different learning styles. One simple way to be sure is a variety of activities and approaches is to code the lesson plans so that a quick look at the completed plan shows if different learning styles have been included”. Oxford et al. (1992:453) further state that “putting ‘A’ or ‘G’ beside activities that denote whether they are primarily appealing to the analytic learner or the global learner will serve as a reminder that there is a need for a mixture of both kinds of activities. Indicating the movement within the class with a star will help teachers remember that hands-on students need the opportunity to move from their desks, to change sides of the room, to go from a large to a small group setting or to stretch for a few minutes”. If the coding is used quite often by the teacher, it becomes natural and should not be perceived as an extra work for the teacher.

Another way of catering for different learning styles is to prepare an ESL/EFL learning environment that welcomes and accommodates a variety of styles. According to Oxford et al. (1992:453), “the learning environment can establish the class climate as either exclusive, limiting which styles and cultures are accepted, or inclusive, welcoming many varied styles and cultures”.

As educators we should create a learning environment conducive to comfort and creativity. The concern of the teacher for the students is appreciated by the students and establishes teacher-student rapport before the class really begins.

Also, bulletin boards containing photographs of former classes at work can do much to establish a warm, accepting class climate. According to Oxford et al. (1992:454), “snapshots of students working together in small groups or involved in a lively discussion let extraverts know there will be time for interaction, while some photos of students doing individual research reassure introverts about the balance of individual and group activities”. Therefore, ESL bulletin boards or display cases can send positive messages to students. Those that feature art or models created by students in response to literature can stimulate both the visual and hands-on learner.

According to Oxford et al. (1992:454), “the visual learner is, of course, drawn to what is seen and the hands-on learner is interested because he/she sees that students in this class are given opportunities to interpret reading or listening passages in a tactile way with art supplies”. Oxford et al. (1992:454) strongly recommend these projects in the tertiary classes.

The physical setting of the classroom should be taken into consideration. The classroom arrangement that reflects several personalities is certainly more inviting than a room that reflects none. If it is necessary to move furniture, the semi-circle is more communicatively appealing than rows of chairs.

The teachers’ awareness about the diversity of learning styles his/her students possess can help the teacher cater for different needs in terms of tasks in the ESL classroom. Richards (1994) states that while it is not necessary to put learners into boxes labelled according to cognitive styles, it is useful to try to identify which approaches to learning they favour and how teaching can accommodate their learning preferences.

5.6 GUIDED STYLE STRETCHING

Little and Singleton (1990) argue that it is possible to help adult learners to explore their own preferences and to shape their learning approach to suit the requirements of a particular learning task. It is this belief that underlies the idea of “learner training”.

According to Ellis and Sinclair (1989) and Cohen (1990), helping students understand their language learning styles can become part of general learner training. Oxford et al. (1992:453) also support this statement by stating that “it is also possible for students to alter their behaviours (strategies) and stretch their styles, but this is best done in an intentional way with guidance from the teacher”. Oxford et al. (1992:453) suggest that

“it would be good to spend some class time, talking about different learning styles and about which learning styles are generally favoured by students who prefer each style”.

Learner training consists of enabling students to understand their learning styles. It also includes training students to ‘stretch’ their learning styles through systematic use of new, relevant learning styles. For example, an analytic student might need to learn to use global strategies such as predicting, summarizing, synthesizing and guessing from context. A global learner might need training in how to apply analytic styles such as reasoning, breaking material into parts, and distinguishing key details from minor details. Learner training provides procedures to use styles that might be beyond the normal style boundaries of each student. Therefore, the burden is on the teacher to understand the preferred styles of each learner and to sow the seeds for flexibility in the learner.

5.7 CONCLUSION

According to Witkin et al. (1977), the practical implication of the different learning style preferences for education has indicated that the individuals’ different learning styles have a direct impact on their performance. This calls for the teacher to be aware of the different learning styles his/her students employ and be able to provide learning tasks that cater for all the learners.

Oxford et al. (1992) state that learners with different styles pursue quite different ways of learning. Therefore, it is recommended that students could occasionally be grouped according to preferred learning styles and also a special effort could be made to help students develop increased cognitive flexibility when they demonstrate that they are bound to only a few learning styles. It is also assumed that students of all styles can be successful learners if teachers can create a democratic learning environment which utilizes a variety of activities in order to accommodate a repertoire of learning style preferences. In other words, teachers’ awareness of the different learning styles employed by his/her students, help in the selection of appropriate teaching activities.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

6.1 CONCLUSION

This study focused on the relationship between learning styles and performance on selected ESL tasks. The fact that students are unique and, therefore, responded differently to different tasks, formed the basis of this study. Instead of using these personal differences as a resource, teachers tend to force the learners to perceive the world the way they (teachers) do. Research has shown that teachers have a tendency to create classroom environments/activities that are rewarding to them and to students like them but these environments/activities can be extremely frustrating for other students.

The results of this study indicated that the students at colleges of education (Kokstad Region) used a variety of learning styles along the continuum. The implication of this for the ESL teacher is that he/she should be able to organise different tasks that cater for the needs of these learners so that all learners are accommodated and become autonomous lifelong learners.

The results also indicated that students performed differently on a variety of ESL tasks. This manifested itself in the good performance students have on some exercises and poor performances on other exercises. This indicated that students performed well if the task at hand favoured their learning styles. In most cases the relationships were statistically as well as practically significant.

With regard to sensory preferences, visual learners did well on the reading test. This relationship was statistically as well as practically significant ($r = 0,52$; $p < 0,05$).

Auditory learners showed a preference for group work ($r = 0,51$), essay ($r = 0,52$) and mind map tasks ($r = 0,44$). The relationships were statistically as well as practically significant.

Hands-on learners also showed a preference for group work ($r = 0,52$), mind map task ($r = 0,46$) and essay type exercises ($r = 0,35$). The

relationships were statistically as well as practically significant (medium effect size).

Extraverted learners did well on the reading comprehension test ($r = 0,51$) and group work exercise ($r = 0,56$). The relationships were statistically as well as practically significant. Their performance on mind maps ($r = 0,36$) and essay type exercise ($r = 0,31$) was also statistically significant but only revealed a medium effect size.

On the other hand, introverted learners showed a preference for the reading comprehension task ($r = 0,56$) and essay type exercise ($r = 0,50$). The relationships were statistically as well as practically significant. Their performance on grammar ($r = 0,48$) was statistically significant but only revealed medium effect size.

Intuitive learners did well on mind map exercises ($r = 0,50$), essay type tasks ($r = 0,51$) and group work exercise ($r = 0,46$). The relationships were statistically as well as practically significant. Their performance on the reading comprehension exercise was also statistically significant but only revealed a medium effect size.

On the other hand, concrete-sequential students showed a preference for grammar tasks ($r = 0,54$), reading comprehension task ($r = 0,52$), the mind map task ($r = 0,56$) and essay type task ($r = 0,55$). The relationships were statistically as well as practically significant.

Open students performed well on the reading comprehension task ($r = 0,54$), group work task ($r = 0,55$), the mind map task ($r = 0,56$) and essay type task ($r = 0,51$). The relationships were statistically as well as practically significant. Their performance on grammar task was also statistically significant but only revealed medium effect size.

Global students did well only on group work ($r = 0,56$). The relationship was statistically as well as practically significant. The relationship with grammar, reading comprehension, mind map and essay type tasks was not statistically significant.

On the other hand, analytic students did well on the grammar task ($r = 0,55$), the reading comprehension task ($r = 0,55$), the mind map task ($r = 0,58$) and essay type task ($r = 0,50$). The relationships were statistically as well as practically significant. Their performance on group work was also statistically significant but only revealed medium effect size.

While all students should have ample opportunity to learn through their preferred style, they also need to be open to the idea of “style flex”, that is, students should be encouraged to diversify their style preferences. Teachers should be careful not to stereotype individual students or groups of students, each student appears to be a unique complex of variables.

6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The topic needs further research. A greater variety of ESL tasks, a bigger sample group, and different data collection methods e.g. interviews, think-aloud procedures, and ESL diaries would expand the research. Translation of the questionnaire into students’ native language so that it can be administered to English second language speakers whose English is at an elementary level would provide baseline data for a longitudinal study of these students’ style preferences.

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SUMMARY

Keywords: learning styles, English Second Language, ESL tasks, performance.

Understanding the ways in which students learn is important to good teaching. However, students' learning styles are rarely, if ever, considered in a systematic fashion in the English language classroom. The purpose of this research is to determine the learning style profile of college of education (Kokstad Region) students and also to compare their learning style profile with their performance on selected ESL tasks. The results indicated that the ESL college learners in the Eastern Cape (Kokstad Region) displayed a variety of learning styles along a continuum.

The results also indicated that students performed differently on a variety of ESL tasks. This manifested itself in the good performance students have on some exercises and poor performances on other exercises. This indicated that students performed well if the task at hand favoured their learning styles. In most cases the relationships were statistically as well as practically significant.

It is, therefore, essential that the ESL/EFL lecturer organises a variety of activities in order to cater for the diversity of learning styles employed by his/her students. It is also recommended that lecturers should help their students identify their preferred learning styles and stretch those styles by examining and practising various learning styles.

OPSOMMING

Sleutelterme: learning styles (leerstyle), English Second Language (Engels Tweedetaal), ESL tasks (ETT take/oefeninge//), performance (prestasi//).

Om die maniere waarop studente leer te verstaan is belangrik vir goeie onderrig. Studente se leerstyle word selde, indien ooit, op 'n sistematiese manier in die Engelse klaskamer in ag geneem. Die doel van hierdie studie is om die leerstylprofiel van studente van die onderwyskollege (Kokstad streek) te bepaal, en ook om hulle leerstylprofiel met hulle prestasie in geselekteerde Engels Tweedetaal (ETT) take te vergelyk. Die resultate van hierdie studie het aangetoon dat die ETT kollegestudente in die Ooskaap (Kokstad streek) 'n verskeidenheid leerstyle op 'n kontinuum gebruik.

Die resultate van die studie het ook aangedui dat studente verskillend presteer in 'n verskeidenheid ETT take. Hierdie bevinding is gemanifesteer deurdat studente goed gevaar het met sekere take en swak gevaar het met ander take. Die studie het aangetoon dat studente goed gevaar het indien die betrokke take versoenbaar was met hulle verkose leerstyle. In die meeste gevalle was die verhoudinge statisties sowel as prakties beduidend

Dit is daarom noodsaaklik dat die Engels tweedetaal dosent 'n verskeidenheid aktiwiteite moet organiseer om aan die verskillende leerstyle soos deur sy/haar studente gebruik te voldoen. Dit word ook aanbeveel dat dosente hulle studente moet help om hulle verkose leerstyle te identifiseer, en ook om die gekose style uit te brei deur 'n verskeidenheid leerstyle te ondersoek en toe te pas.