



Influence of grade level on perceptual learning style preferences and language learning strategies of Taiwanese English as a foreign language learners

Mei-Ling Chen*

Department of Applied English, Hung Kuang University, 34 Chung-Chie Rd, Sha Lu, Taichung, Taiwan, ROC

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 19 September 2008

Received in revised form 13 February 2009

Accepted 20 February 2009

Keywords:

Perceptual learning style preferences

Language learning strategies

Age

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate relationships between grade level, perceptual learning style preferences, and language learning strategies among Taiwanese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in grades 7 through 9. Three hundred and ninety junior high school students participated in this study. The instruments for data collection were the Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (PLSPQ) and the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). Results showed that statistically significant relationships were found to exist between grade level and kinesthetic learning style preference ($p = .001$), tactile learning style preference ($p = .047$), and individual learning style preference ($p = .02$). Results also showed that statistically significant relationships were found to exist between grade level and the use of memory strategies ($p = .005$), cognitive strategies ($p = .02$), metacognitive strategies ($p = .000$), affective strategies ($p = .000$) and social strategies ($p = .000$). Implications are that it is critical for classroom teachers to be more aware of the differences in their students and ensure that their courses present information that appeal to students in different grade levels.

© 2009 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

In Western countries, there has been a prominent shift in focus from teaching to learning within the field of foreign/second language education over the past few decades (Lessard-Clouston, 1997; Nunan, 1988; Peng, 2002). A considerable number of studies have shown that students' individual differences play an important role in foreign or second language learning (Ehrman, 1990; Galbraith & Gardner, 1988; Oxford, 1992; Oxford & Ehrman, 1993; Scarella & Oxford, 1992; Skehan, 1989). Learners' individual differences include learning styles, learning strategies, learning aptitude, age, gender, culture, and the affective domain (i.e., motivation, anxiety, self-efficacy, tolerance of ambiguity, etc.).

Among these individual-difference variables, "language learning styles and strategies appear to be among the most important variables influencing performance in a second language" (Oxford, 1989a, p. 21). In addition, learning style was found to be related to the choice of learning strategies (Oxford, 1990b). As a result, "language teachers should provide a wealth of information to students in order to raise their awareness about learning styles and strategies,....and finally, to work with students' learning strengths" (Reid, 1996, p. 3).

Ethnicity or nationality has a strong influence on language learning strategy use (Bedell, 1993). For example, it was found that Hispanic students were more likely to choose certain communication type

strategies than Asian students, and Asian students tended to use more strategies involving rote memorization (Politzer, 1983; Politzer & McGroarty, 1985). As a result, "it's important to recognize that culture is critical when defining an individual because cultural values influence the socialization practices of all ethnic groups, which, in turn, affect how people prefer to learn" (Dunn & Griggs, 1995, p. 38). Many research studies of language learning strategies were conducted with students in Western societies. Therefore, it may be risky to generalize the findings from Western societies to the learning situation in Taiwan (Huang, 1997).

1.1. The statement of the problem

Dunn, Griggs, Olson, Gorman, and Beasley (1995) synthesized 42 experimental research conducted between 1980 and 1990, in which the Dunn and Dunn Learning Style Model was used. The meta-analysis results revealed that when taught in ways that complemented their learning styles, learners would achieve 75% of a standard deviation higher than learners whose learning styles were not accommodated.

Dunn and Griggs (1995) indicated that learning styles evolved as the individual advanced through developmental stages. Few attempts have been made to investigate the perceptual learning style preferences and language learning strategies of Grade 7 to Grade 9 students by grade level, and examine the relationship between perceptual learning style preferences and language learning strategies in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environment in Taiwan.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +886 4 26318652; fax: +886 4 26338210.
E-mail address: mlchen@sunrise.hk.edu.tw.

1.2. Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to investigate relationships between grade level, perceptual learning style preferences, and language learning strategies among Taiwanese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in grades 7 through 9. The research questions were as follows:

1. Are there relationships between grade level and perceptual learning style preferences among Taiwanese EFL students in grades 7 through 9?
2. Are there relationships between grade level and language learning strategies among Taiwanese EFL students in grades 7 through 9?
3. Are there relationships between perceptual learning style preferences and language learning strategies among Taiwanese EFL students in grades 7 through 9?

2. Literature review

2.1. The influence of age on perceptual learning style preferences

Children develop tactual and kinesthetic modalities first, followed by visual modalities at about the third grade and followed by auditory modalities at about the sixth grade and early secondary school years (Price, 1980). Barbe and Milone (1981) examined the perceptual learning style strengths of 1000 elementary and high school students. The results showed that 30% of the participants were visual learners, 25% were auditory learners, 15% were kinesthetic learners, and the remaining 30% were a combination of modalities.

Price, Dunn, and Sanders (1981) found that very young children were the most tactile/kinesthetic learners and they gradually shifted toward the visual mode through the elementary grades. Later, Crino (1984) and Keefe (1987) also found that children were primarily tactile and kinesthetic learners and evolved to visual and auditory learners as they matured.

2.2. Perceptual learning style preferences of EFL students in Taiwan

Chen (1999) adopted O'Brien's Learning Channel Preference Checklist to examine 187 first-year students in a junior high school located in central Taiwan. The Learning Channel Preference Checklist is used to examine three sensory learning style preferences: visual, auditory and haptic (kinesthetic and tactile). Chen (1999) found that among the 187 participants, 51% had visual preference, 24% had auditory preference and 16% had haptic preference.

Chen (2004) adopted Dunn, Dunn, and Price's (1989) Learning Style Inventory (LSI) and the Multiple Intelligences Inventory (Hsieh, 2000) to explore the differences in the learning styles and multiple intelligences between the high and low achievers. The participants were 107 first-year students in one senior high school in northern Taiwan. She found that the high achievers showed significantly stronger motivation but weaker preferences for auditory and tactile learning styles.

Only a few studies have so far been made that examine Taiwanese junior high school EFL learners' perceptual learning style preferences. As a result, no clear conclusion could be drawn in this specific context.

2.3. The influence of age/course level on language learning strategies

According to Rubin (1975), learners' use of learning strategies might be affected by the type of task, the age of the learner, the learning stage (beginning, intermediate, advanced), the learning environment, learning style, and cultural background. Several researchers indicated that language course level was related to learners' language learning strategy use. For instance, in Politzer's (1983) study, higher-level foreign language learners reported using

more positive, student-directed, communicative or functional strategies. Chamot, O'Malley, Kupper, and Impink-Hernandez (1987) found that higher-level foreign language learners used metacognitive more frequently than did less advanced students.

The study by Oxford (1990b) stated that students of different ages and learning stage of second language employed somewhat different strategies; older or more advanced students used certain strategies more frequently than did younger or less advanced students. There are few research studies that examine the relationship between the age of the learner and strategy use (Oxford, 1989b). As a result, the linkage between the age of the learner and learning strategy use is "far from clear or conclusive" (Spolsky, 1989, p. 92).

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants and sampling

The target junior high school is located in southern Taiwan. The students in this study's target junior high school are normally distributed in terms of grade level.

Four seventh-grade, four eighth-grade, and four ninth-grade classes ($N=480$) were randomly chosen from one junior high school and volunteered to participate in this study. Consent forms were signed by parents/guardians and participants. Of those, 451 students had parental permissions and participated in the study.

In order to gather data, volunteers participated in two surveys, including the Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (PLSPQ) and the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). These surveys took about 40 min total to complete and were completed during class time. The return rate of the questionnaires was 100%.

Of the 451 respondents, 390 respondents' responses were valid for statistical analysis. The responses provided by 61 respondents were not used for statistical analysis. The reasons were described as follows. First, 5 respondents had incomplete answers. Second, in order to use chi-square tests to investigate the relationship between the most preferred perceptual learning style preference and the most frequently used language learning strategy, the data should be independent. Therefore, 56 respondents' responses were discarded because they had more than one first highest mean score among the six learning style preferences in the Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (PLSPQ) or among the six strategy categories in the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). The total 390 participants, 141 (36.2%) were 7th graders (aged 12–13), 130 (33.3%) were 8th graders (aged 13–14), and 119 (30.5%) were 9th graders (aged 14–15); 217 (55.6%) were male students and 173 (44.4%) were female students.

3.2. Instrumentation

Reid's (1984) Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire is used to measure the participants' preferences in the six learning style preferences: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile, individual learning, and group learning. Reid's (1984) Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire was chosen for this study because it was the most widely used learning styles instrument for non-native speakers of English (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2004). Additionally, the PLSPQ has been reviewed by non-native speaker informants and United States consultants in the fields of linguistics, as well as education, and cross-cultural studies (Reid, 1987). Cheng (1997) conducted a pilot study to investigate the reliabilities of Reid's (1984) Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (PLSPQ). The reliability of Cheng's (1997) Chinese PLSPQ was .81 using Cronbach's alpha.

Participants were asked to read all statements and respond to each statement on a five-point Likert scale in terms of their degree of agreement or disagreement (Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, Undecided = 3,

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/365217>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/365217>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)