

Learning Style Preferences with Reference to Learning English and Sanskrit Languages: A Survey based Study conducted among BAMS Undergraduates of Gampaha Wickramarachchi Ayurveda Institute

Ven. M. Dhammissara¹, S. A. R. R. P. Dissanayake², A. K. H. Dharmapriya³

Introduction and Research Problem

Language learning processes vary from person to person due to the existence of biological and psychological differences. Learning style can be viewed as a set of factors, behaviors, and attitudes that facilitate learning for an individual. These factors and attitudes include whether learners prefer aural style over visual style, and individualistic style over co-operative style. Jowkar (2012) conducted a study to explore the relationship between learning style preferences and comprehension strategies of Iranian learners of foreign languages and found that these two variables are positively correlated. Ehrman's (1994) study too suggested that learners with some identified styles had higher performance in speaking, while others performed comparatively better in reading. Most of these researchers seem to agree that some learners prefer visual style over aural style; these learners benefit by reading exposure to language over spoken exposure. Apart from that, learners who prefer individualistic style learn on their own without actively taking part in co-operative activities. Some learners are highly flexible in their learning approach. This study was designed to investigate the hypothesis that preferences in selected learning styles of students learning Sanskrit and English are independent in learning each language.

¹Gampaha Wickramarachchi Ayurveda Institute (palithad12@yahoo.com)

²Gampaha Wickramarachchi Ayurveda Institute

³Gampaha Wickramarachchi Ayurveda Institute

Methodology

This study was conducted on BAMS students studying at Gampaha Wickramarachchi Ayurveda Institute, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka. The Institute offers Bachelor of Ayurveda Medicine and Surgery (BAMS) degree. The undergraduates are required to study both Sanskrit and English languages during the first three years of the study programme. The total student population of the Institute exceeds five hundred students. Using the random sampling technique, 78 learners were selected for the study.

Based on three selected learning styles, namely visual vs. aural, individualistic vs. co-operative and flexible vs. non-flexible, a questionnaire comprising twenty one objective-type questions was administered among the selected subjects. The questions attempted to identify the preferred learning style; for instance, the question on the use of external sources for learning discovered within the range of learning materials from visual to oral. Descriptive survey method was adopted to conduct this study. Students' preferences were marked with the help of a pre-determined scoring key.

Discussion, Results and Conclusions

The results obtained are not significant even at 0.05 of confidence. This indicates the fact that Sanskrit and English students were found to be significantly associated to their preferences in case of all learning styles. This suggests that learners make use of learning styles irrespective of the language being learnt. It is likely that learning styles adopted by learners may not change whether they learn a language for communicative purposes or for literacy purposes. Generally, Sanskrit language is learnt for developing abilities in reading Ayurveda texts, while English language is learnt for using it in communication. Nevertheless, learners approach both these languages, using their preferred individual styles, rather than changing them according to the purpose of study. Alternatively, it can be stated that no significant difference was found between Sanskrit and English students with regard to their preferences for flexible vs. non flexible, individualistic

vs. co-operative and visual vs. aural. Both Sanskrit and English students preferred to display more attraction for flexible, co-operative and visual styles. However, pattern of preferences does not appear the same. Sanskrit students inclined to show more inclination for individualistic (58%), visual styles (59.04%) while English students inclined to show more inclination for oral (60.2%), co-operative styles (56.8%). Both Sanskrit and English medium students exhibited overall same pattern of learning style preferences, though preferences are not identical. The preferences of majority of both Sanskrit and English students were found to prefer a flexible style (59% and 62%, respectively). Understanding a student's learning style preference is a vital reflection when designing classroom instruction. The findings of the study have imperative inference for both Sanskrit and English students. Present study has shown the effect of language on learning styles is minimal. In other words, students do not vary to a great extent, depending on different languages they learn. On the basis of these results one can argue that learning styles preferences may be an inherent feature of the learner. If such an assumption were found to be true, learners who prefer co-operative learning styles will undoubtedly benefit in learning languages which involve oral practices and communicative competencies as in the context of learning English language. This assumption can only be tested with the comparison of test scores of both these subjects at the end of instructional intervention, a further research that can be dealt with in future. However, the results of the present study insist that more research studies should be carried out on the same line to have more affirmation in generalizations regarding the association of learning style preferences with the languages being studied, partly because the sample used in this study is not true representation of the wider population of students studying two languages simultaneously.

Keywords: Learning style, Individualistic style, Visual style, Flexible style, Co-operative style

Selected References

Ehrman, M. E. 1994. The type differentiation indicator and adult foreign language learning success. *Journal of Psychological Type*, 30, 10-29.

Jowkar, M. 2012. The Relationship between Perceptual Learning Style Preferences and Learning Comprehension Strategies of Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners. *Academic Research International*, 2 (2) : 739-745.