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GENDER COMPARISON IN STYLES' OF LEARNING ENGLISH LANGUAGE AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL IN SOUTHERN PUNJAB

Abstract

This study evaluated differences in learning style of English language between male and female students at university level. The study was conducted on 230 (115 male and 115 female) students randomly selected from population of postgraduate students studying at The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan. The data was collected by administering a questionnaire consisting of 25 items. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 18 was used to analyze the data and the results were presented as mean (\pm SD) scores. Learning styles of English language of male and female students were compared through an independent sample t-test. The results reflected that majority of postgraduate students learn English language through practical activities, teachers' instructions, reading, speaking, audio visual aids, group discussion, and cross-questioning. Moreover, male students' learning styles of English were different from that of their counterparts –female students. Obviously, it is thoughtful that learning English language is rather difficult for female students; their teachers would have to address it.

Keywords: Learning Styles, English Language, Learning Strategies, Audio-lingual Approaches, Learning Behavior

Introduction

Learning style is a personal trait of a student. It helps him/her to learn in the classroom and /or environment. The pace of learning of a student is directly related with his/her leaning styles.

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According to Hedge (2001) it is basically, characteristics of an individual to help in understanding information in a better way through appropriate instructional strategies. Learning styles indicate learning behavior of students and help teacher to understand the way students learn. The research conducted by Stebbins (2007) reflected learning style as a distinctive feature of students' learning English language. On the other hand, Oxford (2002) defined learning strategy as specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations.

Reid (1987) by following Dunn and Dunn (1979) viewed learning style as a term that illustrates distinctions amongst different learners in using one or more senses to understand, manage, and retain information. Students face different problems in learning English as second language. Teachers use different strategies approaches to involve students in classroom activities in learning process. These approaches include communicative activities, audio-lingual approaches and grammar learning. Besides, there may be other factors specifying learning styles of students particularly, English language learning.

Learning style is regarded as a key to developing students' exposure and personality. Naturally, all individuals are different with their unique traits and statures. The natural differences in learning patterns and learning process also have an effect on students' learning styles. The use of learning strategies appears to be a major factor affecting learning and learning styles of students (Jones, Reichard, & Mokhtari, 2003).

Literature Review

Instructional strategies and learning styles are closely related with each other and later help teacher in selecting different activities offered to learners. Innovative participatory instructional strategies can be used to modify and build learning behavior and style among students in learning English as second language.

Many researchers identified gender differences in English language learning. Restak (1979) explored such differences and concluded that female students were more proficient in learning English than their counterparts – male students. On the other hand their counterparts demonstrated poor performance in some activities like arranging things properly but excelled in other activities including coordinating the things. Similarly, Dunn, Dunn, and Price (1981) documented various gender differences in learning styles of elementary school Mexican and Anglo-American students. The study found that female students were more persistent to learning than male students. However, the study of Park (2002) revealed no gender differences in learning styles of Vietnamese, Korean, Filipino, Chinese, and Anglo secondary school students. However, Ehrman, Leaver, & Oxford (2003) asserted that students prefer certain strategies according to their own learning style.

Different researchers (Reid, 1987; Rossi-Le, 1989; Hsu, and 2007; Yang and Chen, 2007) evaluated learning styles of elementary, junior high and senior high school students and found that group learning style in learning English language to be the preferred learning style. Likewise, the study of Lee (1997) demonstrated that students learn English by using less controlled and more open ended exchange programs. The Spanish students improved their listening comprehension through video conferencing (Glisan, Dudt, and Howe, 1998).

Nonetheless, different studies (Salaberry, 2001; Clark, 1995; Keri, 2002; Wehrwein, Lujan, and DiCarlo, 2007) were conducted on effectiveness of different approaches used in English language learning. These studies reported that students learn English in a better way by using audio-visual aid and other recorded programs. Moreover, these studies reflected that both of the genders have different learning styles. Their learning styles varied from each other, especially female students liked to participate in group discussions and male students preferred writing everything in their notebooks.

The Objectives of the Present Research

This study was conducted with objectives;

1. to evaluate learning styles of students in learning English language
2. to differentiate the learning styles of male and female students

Research Questions

The main research questions of this study were;

1. What are the different learning styles of male and female students in learning English language learning?
2. What is the difference between learning styles of male and female students in learning English language?

Hypotheses

The study based on following two hypotheses;

H₀: There is no significant difference between learning styles of male and female students in learning English language.

H₁: There is a significant difference between learning styles of male and female students in learning English language.

Population and Sampling

The postgraduate students of Universities located in Southern Punjab consisted of target population of the present study. Two hundred and thirty (230) students (115 male and 115 female) were selected randomly from The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, (a progressive university of Southern Punjab), Pakistan. All the students were taken from the department of English.

Instruments

A questionnaire (as Annexed at the end) was developed and administered for data collection. The questionnaire, consisting of 25 items related to learning styles was scored on a five-point Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) to find out the different styles of learning among male and female students regarding English language learning.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

The questionnaire was personally administered to male and female students to collect data. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 18 was used to analyze the collected data. At the first stage, average response for each item was computed through descriptive analysis. At the second stage, t-test was used to differentiate learning styles of male and female students in learning of English language.

Results and Findings of the Study

Keeping in view objectives of the study, all the variables were analyzed for comparing styles of male and female students. The table-1 demonstrates quantitative results of analyzed data. However, the findings of study are listed below;

1. The data analysis illustrates that 73.91% of the male students agreed with the statement that they learned English language by their active involvement in activities. Similarly, 80% of their counterparts -female students also affirmed it. The average response of male students was 2 which shows that male students agreed with this statement and the average response of female students was 1.78 that was closer to option 2 (agree). In overall, 77% of both of the genders agreed with the statement that they learned English language through activities. However, there was slight difference in average of their responses. It is obvious that active pedagogies play an important role in language learning.

2. Learning styles are individualized attributes and vary from individual to individual. Majority (78% male and 82% female) of the respondents affirmed that they preferred to learn English language through individualized instruction. In overall a significant majority (80%) of the students viewed individualized instruction and activities proved to be helpful in learning English language at postgraduate level.
3. As learning styles are personal attributes and therefore, students set their own ways of learning a language. Majority 73.4% of the respondents (68% male and 79% female students) preferred to selecting and setting their own manners and strategies.
4. Instruction and instructional strategies play an important role in language learning in the classroom environment. In overall, an overwhelming majority 82.5% of the respondents (79% male students whereas 86% female students) asserted that teachers use appropriate instructional strategies to make the properly understand and comprehend the English language. However, there was slight difference between average responses of male and female students.
5. Learning is a dynamic and continuous activity and requires active participation of learning whereas; language learning is a social activity. The majority (77%) of the respondents (76.5%) male students agreed and 78% female students) viewed learning of English language appeared to be a hard and uncomfortable task for them. However, there was insignificant difference among average score of responses of both of the genders.
6. Learning by doing appears to be useful strategy in enhancing learning of students. In overall a prominent majority (84.5%) of the respondents (78% male students and 91% female students) affirmed that they did learn

English language by exploiting learning by doing in classroom environment. However, there was a significant difference between average score of responses of both of the genders. The female students appreciated more than their counterparts.

7. Reading is one of the basic skills of English language learning. Majority (84%) of the respondents (male students 76.5% and female students 92%) acknowledged that reading skill helped them learn English language properly. The average response of female students was greater than male students. Therefore, it can be said that female students take more interest in reading than male students.
8. Similarly, 62% of the respondents (48% male and 76.5% female students appreciated speaking skill of learning English language properly. The average score of female students was higher than male students.
9. According to question numbers, 9,11,12,13, 15, 17, 18,20,21,22, and 23, both the male and female students strongly agreed with the relevant statements. The average response of each statement was not similar with a minor difference. Contrary to this, with reference to question numbers, 10, 14, 19, 25, both the male and female students agreed with the relevant statements. They have minor differences in their average scores. Whereas, according to the statement numbers 16, male and female students disagreed and according to the statement number 24, male students agreed, and female students disagreed with the statement. Their average score was also different.

Difference between male and female students' styles of learning English language

Following two types of hypotheses were formulated to compare the differences of male and female students' styles of learning English language.

H₀: There is no significant difference between male and female students' learning styles of the English language.

H₁: There is a significant difference between male and female students' learning styles of the English language.

With reference to the hypotheses stated above, a comparison was made to differentiate the styles of male and female students regarding learning English. According to table 1, the results illustrated that there is a significant difference between the styles of male and female students' learning English language. The calculated t-value (1) for styles of learning English was significant at $p \leq 0.05$ level of significance because this calculated t-value does not lie between the accepted region, therefore the null hypothesis (1-H₀) was rejected and it can be concluded that the male and female students' styles of English language learning was not the same. There is also a difference in a few variables such as a majority of male students disagree that they learn English through speaking whereas a majority of female students strongly agreed that they learn English through speaking (refer to question 8). Furthermore, a majority of the male students disagreed that they learn English when they read English newspapers and English books. Contrary to this, female students agreed that they learn English when they read English newspapers and English books (refer to question 16).

Table-1 Comparison of Male and Female Students' learning styles regarding the English Language Learning (n=230)

Statement/ Q. No (refer to Annexure A)	Male Students (n=115)						Female Students (n=115)						t- va lu e
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Average Response	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Average Response	
1	61	24	12	5	13	2.00	71	21	9	5	9	1.78	1
2	51	39	11	4	10	1.98	55	39	10	6	5	1.84	
3	45	33	18	11	8	2.17	56	35	5	1 4	5	1.93	
4	55	36	8	10	6	1.92	57	42	7	4	5	1.77	

5	41	47	11	8	8	2.09	51	39	8	7	10	2.01
6	54	36	5	12	8	1.99	58	35	6	8	8	1.90
7	51	37	15	6	6	1.95	53	39	7	1	5	1.92
8	24	31	24	31	5	2.67	49	39	9	9	9	2.04
9	51	39	4	8	13	2.07	55	35	7	1	7	1.96
10	38	43	7	23	4	2.23	43	44	7	9	12	2.16
11	39	34	19	14	9	2.30	49	39	10	9	8	2.03
12	48	33	12	10	12	2.17	51	36	11	8	9	2.03
13	49	32	6	12	16	2.25	52	37	9	9	8	1.99
14	41	42	4	12	16	2.30	44	47	8	7	9	2.04
15	55	37	5	10	8	1.95	54	34	7	9	9	1.95
16	15	14	16	38	32	3.50	35	43	15	1	11	2.30
17	35	33	17	20	10	2.45	47	39	12	8	9	2.07
18	53	38	12	7	5	1.90	44	42	7	1	10	2.15
19	41	43	12	12	7	2.14	45	54	3	7	6	1.91
20	49	44	8	3	11	1.98	56	45	6	4	4	1.74
21	44	43	7	9	12	2.15	61	35	2	1	5	1.83
22	45	39	7	8	16	2.23	54	45	3	7	6	1.83
23	43	36	8	8	20	2.36	51	35	8	9	12	2.10
24	43	53	7	5	7	1.96	66	36	2	5	6	1.69
25	37	42	8	11	17	2.38	41	55	8	6	5	1.95

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of present study based on data analysis affirmed diversification among student's styles of learning English language. It coincides with results of various studies (Razawi, Muslim, Razali, Husin, and Samad, 2011; Zhou, 2011; Jones, Reichard, and Mokhtari, 2003; and Tabanlıoğlu, 2003) conducted to assessing learning styles of students in learning of English language.

The results of study indicated that students exhibited different learning styles which specified their learning approaches accordingly. According to the data, the main approaches included learning activities, instructional recordings & audio-visual aids, and group discussion in the classrooms. It helped them enhance their learning by reading, speaking, communicating and/ or discussing, writing (by note taking), listening (to the English

recorded programs), asking and responding to questions, participating in role-playing, and thinking & reflecting in English language.

Similarly, the study also revealed difference between styles of learning English language of male and female students. Both of the participants of the study appeared to be demonstrating different styles of learning the English language. The studies of Dunn, Dunn, and Price (1981) and Kobayashi (2002) also reported similar results. In overall, the students appeared to be having different styles of learning English language and they preferred and exploited learning strategies according to their own learning styles.

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Annexure I

SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agreed, U = Undecided, DA = Disagree, SDA= Strongly Disagree

Q	Statement	SA	A	U	DA	SDA
1	I learn English from activities					
2	I like to learn English individually					
3	I like learning English in my preferred setting and manner					
4	When the teacher tells me instruction, I understand better					
5	Sometimes real learning of English is hard and uncomfortable for me.					
6	I prefer to learn by doing something in class.					
7	I learn English through reading.					
8	I learn English through speaking.					
9	I learn English easily through A.V. Aids.					
10	I learn English easily in groups discussion.					
11	In class, I learn best when I work with others.					
12	I learn better by reading what the teacher writes on the chalkboard.					
13	When someone tells me how to do something in class, I learn it in better way.					
14	I learn English when I communicate with others in English.					
15	I learn English through writing English.					
16	I learn English when I read English newspaper and English books.					
17	I learn English from listening English programs.					
18	I understand English when I read instructions.					
19	I learn English easily when I use English dictionary.					
20	I learn English easily when I listen the lecture attentively.					
21	When I study alone, I remember things better.					
22	I learn more when I make something for a class project.					
23	I learn English when I ask questions in English.					
24	I understand things better in class when I participate in role-playing.					
25	I learn English when I write my own thinking in English.					