

LANGUAGE LEARNING STYLE PREFERENCES OF SUCCESSFUL EFL LEARNERS OF BANGLADESH

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Abstract: A learner's learning style is a complex paradigm. This study was conducted to explore the most dominant language learning style of the successful learners of the Department of English, Jagannath University, Dhaka, Bangladesh. The study used a mixed method. The data was obtained from a questionnaire, learners' scores, and interview. Twenty learners who participated in this study were classified as high achievers. This study used a 24-item Barsch Learning Style Inventory (BLSI) as a research instrument and measured learners' learning styles through short answer questions and categorized them as visual, auditory, or kinesthetic. The learners' academic achievement was determined by their Grade Point Average (GPA) of the last term-final examination. Five learners were selected for the semi-structured in-depth interviews. The findings indicate that the dominant learning style of the high achiever learners was visual learning style preferences, with a mean score of 63.75. The results of the study will contribute to the current understanding of good language learners' preferences of learning styles and provide insight for learners, teachers, curriculum designers, administration, and future researchers.

Keywords: *language learning style preferences, successful learners*

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INTRODUCTION

A learner's learning style is a complex paradigm. Learning styles are "characteristic cognitive, affective, and psychological behaviors that indicate how learners perceived, interacted with, and responded to the learning environment" (Keefe, 1979: 4). According to Oxford (2003), "Learning styles are the general approaches – for example, global or analytic, auditory or visual –that students use in acquiring a new language or in learning any other subject" (p. 2). She also adds that "Learning styles generally operate on a continuum or on multiple, intersecting continua" (p. 3). A successful learner always nurtures a dream to succeed. A high Grade Point Average (GPA) indicates that the student is a high-achiever who knows how to become successful by being enthusiastic and giving vigorous effort. The teacher's adoption of teaching methods might influence a learner to learn a language attentively. Therefore, mismatches of individual learning styles of the high achievers with a

teacher's teaching style might hinder optimal language learning. The gifted learners can fail to achieve the learning goal since they cannot use their preferred learning styles in the given situation (Reid, 2005). A teacher can construct appropriate teaching strategies and prepare innovative teaching activities for the learning styles of the high achievers of the class as a solution to this problem.

Passet (2015) finds in his study that gifted students require a different style of pedagogy; therefore, he encourages teachers to give these students an opportunity for autonomous learning where the teachers can assist them without interference. Traditional teaching methods cannot adequately assist good learners of the class because of their unique individual learning styles. If teachers have a thorough knowledge of their students' learning styles, they will be able to find out their problems and solve them in a friendly manner. They should design effective classroom materials according to their students' choices. Moreover, an awareness of the process of learning and retention of language components through continual practice accelerates a student's eagerness to delve into the depth of the language realm. Lack of awareness about a learner's own learning style strength makes him indifferent toward his study. Therefore, language teachers' initiatives might motivate him to attain his standardized achievement.

Acquiring knowledge about the high achiever language learners' learning styles can assist language teachers to take such initiatives. They can find out the characteristics of these learners. Some good learners prefer information that is spoken and heard. They are auditory learners who internalize lectures through listening. The "auditory students are comfortable without visual input and therefore enjoy and profit from unembellished lectures, conversations, and oral directions. They are excited by classroom interactions in role-plays and similar activities. They sometimes, however, have difficulty with written work" (Oxford, 2003, p. 4). Their preferences are for oral directions, group work, discussions, conversations, dialogues, etc. They dislike note-taking in classes; rather, they listen to lectures, recordings, audiobooks, and text-to-speech online, e.g., "ReadPlease," to retain new information. They enjoy language classrooms equipped with CD players and music systems. They like to read aloud to themselves for retention, and they remember any information by repeating what teachers ask them to do in the classroom.

The language teachers might find another type of high achievers who are keen observers and write down whatever they want to learn. They are visual learners. "Visual students like to read and obtain a great deal from visual stimulation. For them, lectures, conversations, and oral directions without any visual backup can be very confusing" (Oxford, 2003, pp. 3-4). They prefer reading a lot of books, handouts, magazines, own hand-written notes, etc. It is easier for them to learn by looking at pictures, images, diagrams, bulletin boards, movies, videos, and animations. In the language classroom, they require the teacher's written directions and gestures. In this digital era, they learn vocabulary comfortably with online materials, e.g., "Visuwords," which is an interactive visual dictionary and to learn new vocabulary. These students' learning endeavors can be further stimulated by wall hangings decorated with various language items.

Another group of successful learners is there who prefer kinesthetic style. "Kinesthetic and tactile students like lots of movement and enjoy working with tangible objects, collages, and flashcards. Sitting at a desk for very long is not for them; they prefer to have frequent breaks and move around the room" (Oxford, 2003,

p. 4). They learn by doing something in class and try to get information through physical activities. They like taking part in role-plays, performing plays, interviewing, conducting experiments, listening to audio tapes which are combined with activities, taking part in field trips, preparing posters, creating flashcards and quizzes, using online interactive tools that provide activities, making power-point presentations of things, and conducting experiments. They retain information by using their hands while talking and also by walking.

In Bangladesh, many researchers have investigated the language learning styles of the students. Huda (2013) conducted a study on learning style preferences of the higher secondary level students. Jahan et al., (2019) also researched the secondary level language learners' preferred styles. Mamun (2018) chose the learners of eight universities in Bangladesh to explore their learning styles. Moreover, Rafiq (2017) carried out her research on ELT graduate students of the University of Dhaka to find out their learning styles. However, no research has attempted to explore the learning styles of the high-achiever students of Jagannath University, Dhaka, Bangladesh. The results of this study might contribute to the current understanding of good language learners' preferences of learning styles. This might help teachers to become conscious and adopt effective teaching methods to complement the high achievers' learning styles. Students might also be benefitted from assessing their learning style to choose more appropriate language learning strategies to enhance their strengths. This study might also help curriculum developers as they can avoid mismatches between students' learning styles and teachers' teaching methods.

The objective of this study was to find out the learning style strengths (visual, auditory, and kinesthetic) of successful learners.

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

Twenty undergraduate EFL learners of the Department of English of Jagannath University, Dhaka, Bangladesh, participated in this study; they were classified as high achievers. The age of participants was between 18-20 years. There were eleven female students and nine male students.

Design and Procedures

The study used a mixed-method approach. The data were obtained from a questionnaire, learners' scores (documentation), and interview. Purposive sampling method was used in this study. The high achiever students were selected by their Grade Point Average (GPA). The students whose GPA was 4 (80% or above marks) in the last term-final examination were selected as successful learners. The scores were collected from the result sheet documents. The questionnaire was distributed among these students.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

This study used a 24-item Barsch Learning Style Inventory (BLSI), developed in 1991 by Jeffrey R. Barsch, which is a widely used research instrument. It measured learners' learning styles through short answer questions and categorized them as auditory, visual, or kinesthetic. The questionnaire consists of 24 items (3-point Likert-type scale). The researcher distributed the questionnaires among the high achiever students who were supposed to respond to the three choices: "Often",

“Sometimes” or “Seldom” where 5 points were assigned to “Often”, 3 points for “Sometimes”, and 1 point for “Seldom”. A learner’s preferred learning style was measured by the highest score obtained by him from auditory, visual, or kinesthetic learning styles. Afterwards, to answer the research question, descriptive statistics were used as means and percentages to classify learning styles. Five learners were selected for the semi-structured in-depth interviews. The statements of Barsch Learning Style Inventory were the focus of the interview. The participants answered the questions, and the conversation was recorded.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative Findings

Research findings on the Auditory, Visual, and Kinesthetic learning styles of the high achiever students were analyzed below:

Table 1. High academic achievers’ frequency of use of auditory learning style

Items	Often		Sometimes		Seldom	
	Freq.	Percentage	Freq.	Percentage	Freq.	Percentage
Barsch no. 1	12	60	3	15	5	25
Barsch no. 5	16	80	3	15	1	5
Barsch no. 8	5	25	12	60	3	15
Barsch no. 11	10	50	6	30	4	20
Barsch no. 13	6	30	6	30	8	40
Barsch no. 18	17	85	2	10	1	5
Barsch no. 21	9	45	5	25	6	30
Barsch no. 24	4	20	5	25	11	55

Table 1 showed that 85% of the high achiever students often attended a lecture which brought more learning motivation than reading the same material in books (Barsch Inventory no. 18). Looking at any diagram or graph, 80% of learners often could not comprehend effectively. In that case, they needed someone’s briefing (Barsch Inventory no. 5). 60% often preferred listening to any interesting thing if they wanted to know about that subject, and they avoided reading (Barsch Inventory no. 1). Sometimes pairs of sounds assisted 60% of learners in understanding the sound (Barsch Inventory no. 8). Recorded versions of study materials sometimes helped 30% high achievers to learn effectively at their educational institutions (Barsch Inventory no. 11). If they were instructed orally, 55% of them seldom learned better than reading a written note (Barsch Inventory no. 24). 40% of them seldom felt more comfortable with repeating spelling the words orally than writing it (Barsch Inventory no. 13). 30% seldom came to know about an incident better by listening than reading about it (Barsch Inventory no. 21). Table 1 revealed that the mean score of auditory statements was 49.38. The mean value indicated that the high achievers sometimes used auditory styles.

Table 2. High academic achievers' frequency of use of visual learning style

Items	Often		Sometimes		Seldom	
	Freq.	Percentage	Freq.	Percentage	Freq.	Percentage
Barsch no. 2	12	60	6	30	2	10
Barsch no. 3	13	65	6	30	1	5
Barsch no. 7	11	55	8	40	1	5
Barsch no. 10	13	65	3	15	4	20
Barsch no. 14	13	65	4	20	3	15
Barsch no. 16	14	70	6	30	0	0
Barsch no. 20	10	50	8	40	2	10
Barsch no. 22	16	80	4	20	0	22

Table 2 showed that 80% of the high achiever students often read resources that ignited their interest if they wanted to know anything on any subject (Barsch Inventory no. 22); 70% of learners often sharpened their memory by giving the content a shape of a picture in their brain (Barsch Inventory no. 16); 65% learners often developed their writing habit and note-taking practice to think about the topic again to make a decision about it (Barsch Inventory no. 3). 40% of high achiever learners sometimes learned spontaneously if provided with graphs and charts (Barsch Inventory no.7) and learned easily by looking at the content rather than listening to anything (Barsch Inventory no. 20). 30% sometimes found teacher's instructions difficult to understand which was expressed in spoken words (Barsch Inventory no. 2). Only 20% of them seldom learnt if they were directed with maps (Barsch Inventory no. 10). Table 2 showed the mean score of the visual statements was 63.75 which was an indicator of the high achievers' frequent preferences.

Table 3. High achievers' frequency of use of kinesthetic learning style

Items	Often		Sometimes		Seldom	
	Freq.	Percentage	Freq.	Percentage	Freq.	Percentage
Barsch no. 4	6	30	6	30	8	40
Barsch no. 6	13	65	5	25	2	10
Barsch no. 9	17	85	3	15	0	0
Barsch no. 12	0	0	4	20	16	80
Barsch no. 15	4	20	1	5	15	75
Barsch no. 17	2	10	8	40	10	50
Barsch no. 19	3	15	13	65	4	20
Barsch no. 23	7	35	4	20	9	45

Table 3 showed that 85% of the high achiever students often practiced one task several times by writing which enhanced their retaining capability (Barsch Inventory no. 9). Machine tools or other apparatuses often provided pleasure to 65% learners during any work (Barsch Inventory no. 6). Thirty-five of the students often shook their hands with their classmates during learning language. They also hugged to show compassion to them (Barsch Inventory no.23). Sometimes jigsaw puzzles attracted the attention of 65% of learners (Barsch Inventory no.19). Forty percent

sometimes preferred finger spelling (Barsch Inventory no.17). When they wrote anything, 30% sometimes exerted full strength and concentrated attention to the writing instrument (Barsch Inventory no.4). Eighty percent seldom did their learning activities playing with keys or coins (Barsch Inventory no.12). Seventy five percent seldom learned by taking food, smoking, or chewing gums. Table 3 revealed that the mean score of kinesthetic statements was 32.5. The result indicated that there was very limited use of kinesthetic style.

Table 4. Score of individual learning styles

	Visual	Auditory	Kinesthetic
Student no. 1	26	24	14
Student no. 2	32	32	18
Student no. 3	24	24	16
Student no. 4	26	30	18
Student no. 5	36	32	28
Student no. 6	36	26	22
Student no. 7	38	24	28
Student no. 8	32	26	16
Student no. 9	30	34	18
Student no. 10	36	26	24
Student no. 11	32	30	20
Student no. 12	34	30	18
Student no. 13	34	16	28
Student no. 14	38	36	26
Student no. 15	34	28	22
Student no. 16	32	28	26
Student no. 17	34	30	30
Student no. 18	34	30	30
Student no. 19	36	32	28
Student no. 20	36	23	26

Table 4 showed 20 high achiever students' individual students' scores. It was found that 90% of learners (18 learners out of 20) preferred the visual learning style, 10% (2 out of 20) preferred auditory learning style and 0% preferred kinesthetic learning style. Therefore, it was revealed from this table that the majority of the high achievers had visual learning style preferences.

Qualitative Results

The quantitative data gathered from the questionnaire survey was supported by the interview. The data showed that the high achievers' preferred learning style was visual. In the interview sessions, also they opined that they preferred learning English through visuals. High achiever student 1 reported the following:

"I prefer visual written directions because directions provide explanations while the oral ones do not." (Student 1, Female)

High achiever student 2 stated,

"I think by writing again and again, written items are saved in brain, and in this way, I can recall information easily. I believe that writing things down is very

useful for me. It helps me to keep my mind active and avoid feelings of distractions.” (Student 2, Male)

Another high achiever student 3 responded,

“I use graphs and charts because I condense large amounts of information into easy-to-understand formats and store my learning parts in my brain. He deems graphs are needed to understand anything properly so that I can perform well in examinations and real life.” (Student 3, Female)

Meanwhile high achiever 4 added,

“By reading a newspaper article, I can store information in his memory than by listening to it. I remember study materials by imagining a picture in my mind. I also gather information and retrieve it later by reading relevant materials.” (Student 4, Female)

The findings of the interview revealed that the successful learners preferred visual learning styles in language learning.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the language learning style preferences of the successful learners of the Department of English, Jagannath University, Dhaka, Bangladesh, which revealed that most of the high achievers preferred the visual learning style. Based on the data obtained from the Barsch questionnaire, the researcher found that the most prominent learning style of the high achiever students was visual style, with a mean value of 63.75. This was followed by the auditory learning style with a mean value of 49.38. The responses to the kinesthetic statement had the lowest mean score of 32.5.

The reason behind preferring the visual style could be attributed to several factors. The successful learners preferred the visual learning style (e.g., reading books, looking at the whiteboard where the teacher writes something to make them understand, etc.), which was very natural because, from their childhood days, they had been learning English by following these ways. It might be possible that successful learners preferred the visual style over the other styles to acquire the English language, as eighty percent of knowledge is acquired through vision.

Visual learners liked written instruction, and learned comfortably through videos, pictures, maps, mind maps, flashcards, demonstrations, diagrams, posters, slides, online visuals, etc. Assessment of their styles might transform them into autonomous learners to unleash their potential.

High achievers employ effective language learning styles, and the teacher can encourage them to strive at the optimum level. After being informed about the high achievers' learning style preferences, awareness might be created among the average learners. This consciousness might impact their learning, too. Therefore, different facets of the high achiever learners' learning style preferences can be discussed in the classroom, and every detail can be seen from various perspectives. Teachers can request high achievers to share their learning styles with their classmates. Gradually, the average proficient students can share their styles too. By sharing with the other learners, each and every learner will be conscious about his use of learning style, which will eventually lead to his participation and progress in class. Supportive teachers can make the students confident and make the class interesting by giving them quality time and incorporating appropriate teaching techniques.

Being aware of the learners' learning styles, teachers can take some initiative. They can divide the classes into several groups (one group consists of visual learners, another group consists of auditory learners, etc.) and set the seating arrangements in such a way that they receive instruction according to their styles. In this way, the teachers can avoid the mismatch of teaching and learning styles. Reid (2005) maintains that "Teacher perceptions, teaching style and willingness to engage in learning styles and help students to take charge of their learning are basic to the success of learning styles teaching" (p. 85). Being conscious during the planning phase, a teacher can ask himself: "How can I cater for the full range and diversity of learning styles in my class?" (Reid, 2005, p. 91). Through this self-questioning and realization, he can facilitate effective learning. He can orient his lectures according to each learner's preferred learning style and assist them in learning the language consciously. Majority of the learners of this study prefer visual learning styles; therefore, the concerned English language teachers can accommodate their preferences for the beneficence of the learners. In their personal tutorial classes, they can devise a few teaching strategies that match that particular student's learning style. Usually a tutorial group consists of five students and the class duration is one hour. Therefore, the teacher can implement personalized teaching techniques during this period. He can provide flashcards to the visual learners or can give them an opportunity of reading aloud to auditory learners.

Kinesthetic learners feel shy to do activities in a large class due to the limited scope. But in a small group (e.g., tutorials), they can spontaneously communicate with others and do something without any inhibition.

As a qualitative element, the interview complemented the quantitative findings of this study. From the interview, it was found that the learners had in-depth knowledge of their learning styles. They also realized that it could be a beneficial tool to help them to perform better.

The finding of this research is supported by Reid (1987), who found that the preferred learning style of successful learners was visual. This result is also in line with the study of Abdullah et al., (2011) where most high achievers were visual (85.37%). It is congruent with another study carried out by Kia et al., (2001) at Payame Noor University in Iran, where maximum high-performance learners used visual learning style, auditory learning style came next, and kinesthetic style was adopted as the least used preference. Furthermore, this is consistent with the finding obtained by a research done by Gilakjani (2012), who showed that Iranian university students had a dominant learning style preference for visual learning. This is also commensurate with the findings uncovered by Salam et al., (2020) who showed in their study that a high-proficiency student of Indonesia had two major learning styles: visual and individual. This finding is supported by Kob and Abdullah (2018), who conducted research with 403 high achievers at Seberang Perai Polytechnic, Malaysia whose preferred learning style was visual. Again, Marzulina et al., (2019) found in their research that 34% of EFL learners of One state Islamic University in Sumatera, Indonesia used the visual learning style, which was followed by the auditory learning style (43%), and the kinesthetic learning style (23%).

On the other hand, the result of this study is inconsistent with the findings of other studies. Khmakien (2012) found in his study that Thai successful learners chose auditory styles. In Bangladesh, Rafiq (2017) and Mamun (2018) also found that most of the tertiary level learners used auditory learning styles. Huda (2013) found that

Bangladeshi learners were field-independent, reflective, auditory, and authority-oriented. Jahan et al., (2019) showed that kinesthetic and tactile learning styles were Bangladeshi learners' chosen styles. Jayanama (2018) and Mubarok et al., (2016) found in their studies that the good language learners' preferred styles were tactile. The findings of the study of Ural et al., (2015) revealed that high achievers employed both auditory and visual styles. In a study on learning styles, Tale (2016) found that most learners used an amalgamation of the three learning styles. The research of Phantharakphong (2012) and Alnujaidi (2019) revealed that kinesthetic occupied the highest position.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the findings of this research, it can be concluded that in this study, the high achiever students' most preferred style was the visual learning style. It sheds light on the high achievers' specific learning behavioral patterns, which may help learners, teachers, administrators, and researchers use the data for the beneficence of learners. This finding of the study will create awareness among the high achievers about their learning styles; consequently, they will recognize their strengths to match appropriate language learning strategies. The study will also give English language teachers essential information to integrate appropriate teaching techniques and prepare student-friendly lesson plans. To accomplish this goal, they can act as researchers by conducting questionnaire surveys to find out the learning styles in the first class of the semester. It will eventually lead them to assist the learners in using appropriate strategies to learn the language effectively. Being aware of the learners' learning styles, they can also incorporate variety in preparing tasks and activities for diverse learners. High achievers are intellectually advanced; therefore, teachers should develop materials and design curricula that complement students' learning styles. Synchronization between teachers' well-thought-of teaching methods invigorates high achievers and makes them more competent. Teachers can use technology-enhanced language teaching to cater for the modern high achievers' visual learning style. They can encourage them to use online visuals to enrich the teaching-learning process. Moreover, the findings will also help the university authority to take some measures. They can reduce the large classes into small language classes. Consequently, teachers can accommodate every student's learning style and take care of them. They can arrange teacher training programs, workshops, conferences, webinars etc., to equip the teachers with the techniques and strategies to support the learners and engage them in classroom activities. This research will provide insight for future researchers in conducting further research on a similar topic by using a large population, different variables, and various instruments.

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