
Research-based Implications for the Enhancement of the EFL Teaching/Learning

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This paper reports a number of crucial implications for the profession of teaching and learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Based on his career as an EFL teacher educator, the author presents - in brief - the conclusions derived from six quasi-experimental researches conducted on the effects of some psycholinguistic variables (i.e. brain-hemisphericity; personality type; learning style; learning strategies; and multiple intelligences) on teacher and /or student performance, Language materials development, learning style-stretch, and language self-efficacy.

The first study highlights the dire need for utilizing the students' full potentials in learning EFL which has become the universally acknowledged means of knowledge production. Currently, most research suggests that we barely use 10% of our brain capacity, yet we can learn to plug in the other 90%. We can learn to tap the reserves of the mind. Language learning strategies enable us to take responsibility for our own learning by enhancing our autonomy and help us assimilate new information more effectively. Geared to this purpose this study had four major questions: 1) Are there significant differences in the frequency of language learning strategies (LLSs) used by secondary school students in relation to their sex , specialization , and achievement level? 2) Are there significant differences in the type of LLSs used by secondary school students in relation to their sex, specialization, and achievement level? 3) Are there significant differences in brain-hemispheric preferences of secondary school students with respect to their sex, specialization, and achievement level? 4) Are there significant differences among the means of the scores of brain- hemispheric preference groups in their use of LLSs with respect to their sex, specialization and achievement level?

Oxford's SILL and Torrance SLT scale were the major instruments used in this study to gather the data from the 642 student sample.

Results indicate - among other things - that there are significant differences in the frequency of the LLSs used in favor of female over male students and good over poor students. On the other hand, "cognitive", "metacognitive", and "memory" strategies were found to be the most popular among Saudi students. The results also revealed that male students favor the left- hemisphere, females favor the integrated mode, and no differences were reported in reference to the right hemisphere. Good students tended to prefer to the left-hemisphere and the integrated mode. Other significant differences among the brain-hemispheric preference groups in their use of LLSs were reported. Results were analyzed, interpreted, and discussed.

Among the important conclusions and implications of this study is that:

- all students of all levels, abilities, specialization, and brain preferences use LLSs when working with EFL, but differences exist in how many and what type of LLSs they use. These differences seem to contribute to differing degrees of success in language learning . Effective use of LLSs appears to lead to more effective language learning .
- learning strategy instruction can be expected to increase the ability of learners to learn the complex skills of English as a foreign language.
- the expectations imposed by the traditional academic approaches to teaching and testing in Saudi secondary schools limit the motivation of most EFL students to try new, creative, communicatively oriented LLSs. In addition, they also limit their chances of using the functions of the whole brain.
- increasing teachers' and learners' repertoire of strategies could enhance students' learning by creating a broader context within which achievement would be maximized.

- the aim of training students in learning how to learn is not to direct students to use the same set of LLSs or to prescribe a right way to plan, manage, and assess performance, but to help each learner to explore consciously the effective options available; to consolidate and systematize those strategies that best fit his learning style and the learning task at hand.
- designing activities will motivate students to try new LLSs and will provide sufficient practice opportunities to enable students to internalize the new strategies.
- training students to use their whole brain could drastically enhance their language learning. This can be done by providing them with a plethora of learning activities that require them utilize the LH, RH, and the IM. Exercises that include brain teachers, problem solving, critical thinking, puzzles, visualization, imaginative storytelling, ideas sketching, kinesthetic concepts, will conflict mediation, brainstorming, ... etc. will definitely help EFL students do better.

The second research reiterates that success of EFL / ESL learners is due not only to cognitive factors such as language aptitude but also to affective, motivational, personality and demographic factors. Furthermore in order to provide effective, sensitive instruction, teachers of EFL need to learn to identify and understand their students personality type (PT) and language learning styles (LSs)

This study was set out to identify PT and LSs most common amongst prospective teachers in Mansoura FOE. It also investigated the relationship and correlations of PT and LSs on one hand with achievement in EFL, gender, age, and academic major (among other variables) on the other hand.

Kolb's LSI and Myers - Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) in addition to an achievement test were used as basic instruments in the study . Statistical analysis (i.e. Chi2 , one way ANOVA , and correlation coefficient) revealed that neither PT nor LSs have

any significant effect on the teachers' achievement in EFL . It also showed that neither gender nor academic major relate to PT or LSs. These results contradict those of other studies because of differences that could be ascribed to culture, educational context and system , nature of academic courses and instrumentation and sample size.

In spite of the fact that different types of learners may approach language learning in different ways and through various LSs, the relationships between these approaches and styles and the learning outcome are not direct. We cannot say for example that Introverts succeed while Extraverts do not, nor can we say that Divergers outperform Accommodators in learning EFL. However, a great deal of educational and instructional bearings and connotations could be deduced from both LSs and PT theories in relation to the teaching and learning of EFL because without an understanding of LSs and PT, we will continue to operate in ways that are educationally ineffective, even counteractive.

Implications for EFL curricula and instruction are :

- In responding to students' different LSs, educational settings need to be modified to promote the students' learning. This study proposes several recommendations concerning the educational use of LSs:
 1. Matching learning tasks to the students LSs. The danger with this expectation is that students could be denied the opportunity to learn the broad range of intellectual skills they need to function in society.
 2. Developing cognitive flexibility . Teachers can help students acquire skills in different LSs. Then students can use the appropriate skills that are required by the intellectual task. Students must thus be encouraged to "stretch" their LSs so that they will be more empowered in a variety of situations. In this way, students will be able to shift from one style to another as the situation warrants.

3. Creating curriculum flexibility. Open education where the teacher provides alternatives gives the students the opportunities to select from those alternatives. They must expand their repertoire of techniques for accommodating the students diverse LSs.
4. Preparing a learning environment that welcomes many different LSs. The secret is variety. If the teacher varies the activities in an almost cyclical fashion, all the different kinds of LSs will find satisfaction. Not every student will love every activity but all students, no matter what their basic LS, will find activities that meet their needs. There are at least two benefits to this approach:
 - a. All students will have some activities that appeal more to them based on their LSs and they are more likely to succeed in these activities . The feeling of success will be a motivating force in their studies.
 - b. All students will get practice in learning styles they are not strong in and this broadens their LSs and the accompanying skills.

In order to solve the problem of teacher-student style conflict, research recommends changes in the curriculum where lessons can be organized as a series of episodes , each of which has a different objective and a different style with the teaching-learning style chosen that best matches the objective. For example in the language classroom, a grammar task might use an analytical style, but a listening task might require a global style.

Faculties of education should encourage other LSs as well (i.e. Accommodators and Convergents) since we need more effective people in specialist and technology careers as well as people who enjoy new and challenging experiences and cherish cooperating and interacting with other people for the sake of solving urgent problems.

Faculties of education should also cater for other personality types, for those who tend to be global learners , have

a natural flair for abstract thinking , and have tolerance for theory (N), those who have broad interests and interaction (E), and for those who like to live life in a flexible, spontaneous , and adaptable manner (P).

In one of the few studies that investigated the possibility of stretching students' preferred learning style to include other learning styles , the third study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the language learning styles (LLSs) used by successful EFL field-dependent (FD) and field-independent (FI) students?
2. What are the components of a strategies- based program that helps in style- stretching for the English Language Center (ELC) students?
3. What is the effectiveness of the proposed program in enhancing ELC students' achievement?
4. What is the effectiveness of the proposed program in stretching students' learning styles?
5. What is the attitude of ELC students towards the proposed program?

In order to answer the research questions, five instruments were used (i.e. Cognitive Style Inventory, Language Learning Strategies Inventory, An Attitude Scale, The Embedded Figures test, and An English Language Achievement Test). Results of this research that was conducted on forty four female students revealed that language learning strategies provided by the proposed program had benefited the experimental groups, especially the FI in reading and the two groups, FI and FD in Writing. The proposed program also improved the experimental groups attitudes towards learning EFL.

As for stretching students' styles (i.e. helping the two experimental groups use the language learning strategies typical of their counterparts'), results indicated that some shift in style use was evident in general strategies (i.e. cognitive and compensation strategies).

Findings also showed that the two experimental groups used more of their typical language learning strategies but did not shift to use the language leaning style typical of their counterparts'. The F1 group was found to be more amenable to change than he FD although that change was not significant.

This study asserts that changing the learning style seems to be difficult. However, providing variety of learning and teaching strategies may lead to better learning in general and attitudes towards EFL learning in particular.

Bearing in mind that learning in general and EFL learning in particular is a complex process. Learning at times requires great effort and at other times, proceeds with relative ease. It compasses a multitude of competencies. The results of learning are often observable, but the process is less obvious. Numerous theories of learning exist in an attempt to explain learning. The theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI) offers one perception into the complexity and applicability in human learning. The fourth study investigated the gap between intelligences used by both students and teachers in EFL classrooms in pre-university education (N=977 students and 35 teachers) as well as correlations between MI, self-efficacy, and achievement. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to explore and describe pre-university EFL classrooms by examining four factors: (1) intelligences students report as their most highly developed or strongest, (2) intelligences that teachers report using in EFL classrooms, (3) relationship (if any) between MI in EFL classrooms and self -efficacy, and (4) relationship (if any) between MI in EFL classrooms and students' achievement scores.

Results of the fourth study revealed that about 62.5% of student and teacher intelligences do not overlap; they do not report preferences for using the same intelligences. In other words, teachers in this sample succeeded in catering for 37.5% only of the students' intelligences while the rest of the students' intelligences were left behind. Therefore, teacher preparation programs should equip teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills in accommodating the various intelligences of their

students. Course-book writers must take students' preferences into consideration when writing their exercises, activities, content, and assessment devices. In light of this theory, effective EFL teachers are those who are highly prepared to deal with multi-level and mixed ability classes.

In order to determine whether students' intelligences differ according to their school level and/or gender results illustrate that interpersonal intelligence was reported by students at all school levels to be their highest strength superseded only by visual/ spatial intelligence at the secondary school level. On the other hand, verbal/linguistic intelligence was students' lowest intelligence at all school levels. As students move to a higher level (i.e. secondary school) their visual intelligence intensifies. They receive new knowledge more through reading than through listening. By that age they can read the lines, between the lines and behind the lines because most of their knowledge comes from the printed materials.

These findings seem to be plausible since learning a new language requires interpersonal intelligence that incites verbal interaction between students and teacher and among students themselves. The exclusive majority of language learning activities at these school levels involve group work, group projects, peer correction, dialogs, and language games that entail interpersonal interaction and team work.

Weakness in linguistic intelligence throughout pre-university stages could be due to the fact that English is a foreign language and reflect the facts of life when we address the TEFL profession in Egypt. A considerable number of schools are not well-equipped with technology that facilitates English language learning (ex. language labs, computer facilities, etc.). In addition, many course-books currently used in general education schools do not reasonably nurture students MI including the linguistic intelligence, and a considerable number of EFL teachers are not kept abreast with new advances in the field of TEFL and suffer from dealing with overcrowded classrooms. These conditions do

not support nor make provision for catering for students MI in general and linguistic intelligence in particular.

It can also be noticed that logical/mathematical and verbal/linguistic intelligences were almost constant across the three school levels whereas visual/ spatial was steadily growing stronger across school levels.

It can be concluded from this study that in order to be successful in educating all our students, we need to be aware of their individual MI. To be more effective, EFL teachers of the diverse students, need to use concise and efficient ways to learn more about their students' strengths and weaknesses. For example, students who have one area of intelligence which is more fully developed than the others should be encouraged to approach their learning using that particular intelligence as an entry point. Students in this study scored very high in interpersonal Intelligence. They should, therefore, be provided the opportunities to develop their knowledge of English using their interpersonal strength.

Teachers should not only observe the highest scores registered by each of their students in order to discover appropriate entry points for effective learning; they should also examine the lowest scores obtained by their students (i.e. natural, bodily;/ kinesthetic and verbal/linguistic intelligences in this study) in order to discover which areas of intelligence need to be developed during the course. Some of these areas of strength and weakness might not normally be obvious in a traditional language learning classroom, but if teachers try to be flexible in their approach to the learning process and use as many different entry points as possible, then the students soon begin to appreciate that the best students have weaknesses and the apparently weak students have strengths.

It can also be concluded from this study that the gap that exists between students' and teachers' MI scores must be addressed and worked on. Teachers, as well as, course writers should think of all intelligences as equally important and not to

typically place a strong emphasis on the development and use of verbal and mathematical intelligences only.

The differences in MI in terms of gender and school level revealed by this study in addition to the results concerning the relationship between the application of the MI theory and the increase in students' achievement and self-efficacy scores make one concludes that students are more successful when they are taught the way that they are taught the way that they are naturally inclined to perform better.

Finally the positive and statistically significant correlations between students' **MI** scores and their **EFL** self-efficacy evidently demonstrate the importance of providing supportive feedback to our students during teaching and in assessment.

In the same line of investigating MI theory and its application in the EFL field, the fifth study aimed at evaluating the English language series "*Touchstone*" in terms of the MI theory in order to determine which of these textbooks topics, activities, and exercises cater to the Preparatory Year students' MI. In this process, students' MI were profiled; textbook topics, activities, and exercises were analyzed and evaluated. Suggestions for modifying this EFL textbook series in light of the MI were provided.

The two major questions of the study were: 1.What are the MIs that characterize the English Language Center (ELC) students? 2.How far does the EFL textbook "*Touchstone*" series cater to these MIs?

A number of 658 students constituted the sample of the study. Of them, 326 were male students (49.5%) and 332 were female students (50.5%) enrolled in the preparatory year at Taibah University in Al-Madinah Al-Munawwarrah. 219 were in the humanities track (112 males and 107 females), 292 were in the Medical track (214 males and 78 females) and 147 (all females, since the track is not open for male students) were in the applied track, representing 33.3 %, 44.4 % and 22.3% of the sample respectively.

For the purposes of this study, the researchers developed an MI inventory -based. This instrument was designed for the collection of MI type's profile that characterizes ELC students both males and females. In other words, to determine the MI most prevalent among Saudi ELC students, an MI-activities based Menu was developed and used to evaluate the textbooks in light of the MI theory. Based on this menu, an MI profile was formed for each of the four textbooks analyzed in this study.

Results showed that male students had the following order of preference for the intelligences: Linguistic (88.3%), Intrapersonal (76.1 %), Logical (75.8%), Visual (75.1%), Bodily (74.5%), Interpersonal (67.4%), Natural (58.6%), Musical (34.6%). On the other hand, female students had the following order of preference for the intelligences: Linguistic (86.7%), Logical (78.9%), Visual (77.7%), Intrapersonal (75.6%), Bodily (74.1%), Interpersonal (69.9%), Natural (56.4%) and Musical (30.7%).

Calculating the frequencies and percentages for each type of intelligence for each book, and for all the four textbooks were carried out. The profile of the four textbooks was predominantly a combination of the three intelligences: linguistic, interpersonal and logical. These intelligences were present in more than 85% of all the topics, activities, and exercises of the textbooks analyzed. The other intelligences were present in about 15% of the topics, activities and exercises. This result indicates that the *Touchstone* series do not provide for the majority of the MI preferred by the ELC students.

In view of these results, authors of *Touchstone*, and other courses taught in the preparatory year in Saudi Universities are advised to consider the different types of intelligences Saudi students prefer in the process of course development. Course instructors are advised to vary their teaching techniques to respond to the different types of intelligences preferred by their students even if the course does not cater for all the intelligences. They can do this by following different teaching techniques and active learning strategies to make their teaching a success.

Finally, paper six investigates the effectiveness of MI-based EFL materials in improving both students' achievement in EFL and their attitudes towards learning English. This study had aimed at:

1. Identifying the most prevalent MIs among 2nd year female secondary school students.
2. Identifying the extent to which learning activities in *English for Saudi Arabia-2* provide for students most prevalent MIs.
3. Investigating the effectiveness of a MIs- based unit designed by the researcher in improving both students achievement in EFL and their attitudes towards learning EFL.

The participants were 115 secondary female students (Scientific and Literary Sections) from EFL 2nd year from the 13th Secondary School in Al-Madinah Al-Munawarah.

Three instruments were used for collecting the data of this study : the MIs questionnaire to determine the students' preferred types of intelligences, pre and post achievement tests to compare between their level before and after the experiment, and a pre-post attitude towards learning EFL scale to explore their thoughts and feelings towards learning English . A MIs-based unit was designed and implemented in order to detect its effectiveness in improving the experimental group's achievement in English and their attitude towards learning it.

The findings indicated that logical followed by visual and interpersonal were the most popular MIs among the 2nd secondary students whereas bodily, intrapersonal and verbal were not so popular among the students. Furthermore, musical intelligence was the least preferred by the study sample. As for the extent to which the textbook *English for Saudi Arabia-2* addresses students' MI the profile of the sample units was predominantly a combination of the two intelligences: linguistic, and logical. These intelligences were presented in more than 59.18% of all the activities in the units analyzed. The other

intelligences were presented in about 11.7% of the activities. Broadly talking, the above table showed that the activities in the textbook of the series of *English for Saudi Arabia-2* did not match the MIs that preferred by the female secondary school students as 76.90% of them preferred logical intelligence whereas the activities in the book presented only 11.48% drills based on logical intelligence. Also, while 76.80% of students preferred learning via visual intelligence, the book gave them only 8.7% visual activities. Moreover, the book presented 47.7% verbal activities whereas 72.17% of the students preferred to learn by using verbal intelligences. From the above percentages, it was concluded that there was no doubt that the activities in the series of *English for Saudi Arabia – 2* did not fairly cover the eight types of MIs. Therefore, they stood short of matching the needs of all students learning EFL.

On one hand, the statistical analysis indicated that the MIs-based unit had a considerable effect on the students' achievement level in writing, reading, grammar and vocabulary on one hand. On the other hand, means for the pre and post attitude scale applications show that all differences were in favor of the post application which give a good momentum for the experimental MIs-based unit in enhancing students' attitudes towards learning English. It is also evident that all items that did not reach the significance level related to future plans, family support and study abroad which seem to be a distant goal for students at that age. Moreover, some parents do not necessarily encourage their children at that age (secondary school) to travel abroad. These significances in the exclusive majority of the scale items and in the total number of the items indicate the effectiveness of the experimental MIs-based unit in improving students' attitude towards learning English.

Based on the results, a number of implications have emerged:

1. EFL teachers as well as students should be aware of the MIs theory and its applications.

2. Teachers should build the activities based on MIs according to the students' abilities.
3. Text book activities, exercises should be built in the light of the MIs theory.
4. EFL teachers should be trained in lesson planning, according to MIs theory.

This author believes that affective and psycholinguistic variables are crucial in the teaching and learning of EFL.