

CAN LEARNING STYLES PREDICT TURKISH UNIVERSITY PREP CLASS STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE?

Abstract

In this study, first, the relationship between learning styles and Turkish university prep class students' achievement in foreign language was examined. Next, whether the learning styles would predict students' achievement was checked. The subjects were 376 university prep class students from 8 different universities in İstanbul. Turkish version of Cohen, Oxford and Chi's (2001) Learning Style Survey was used to reveal the students' learning styles. For the achievement in foreign language, the English Language Test developed by the researcher was given to the students. In conclusion, it was found that styles, except for auditory learning style, are not the variables predicting the achievement in foreign language significantly.

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In literature there is growing evidence proving that learning styles (LS) are one of the constituents of language learning procedures (eg., Cohen, 2003; Ehrman, 1990, 1993, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2001; Ehrman & Leaver, 2003; Ehrman & Oxford, 1990, 1995; Ehrman, Leaver, & Oxford, 2003; Oxford, 1999; Oxford, Ehrman & Lavine, 1991). LS refer to an individual's natural, habitual, and preferred ways of absorbing, processing, and retaining new information and skills (Reid, 1998). In other words, the concept of LS represents individual approach to learning; habitual way the individual perceives; interacts with and responds to the learning environment (Dörnyei, 2005). In fact, LS is a concept which falls between ability and strategy. First of all, language learning strategies (LLS) are used for task-dependent situation. While styles are applied without individual awareness, strategies involve conscious choice (Dörnyei, 2005; Ehrman, 1993; Riding, 2000; Snow, Corno & Jackson, 1996; Stenberg & Grigorenko, 2001). Secondly, compared to abilities, however, most styles are bipolar- forming a continuum between two poles with specific characteristics- while abilities are unipolar (Brown, 2000; Dörnyei, 2005; Riding, 2000). LS does not reflect innate endowment which leads to success, but they rather refer to personal preferences. Thus, one can be successful in every style position (Kinsella, 1995). In addition, ability is related to the level of performance, whereas styles refer to the manner of performance (Dörnyei, 2005; Riding, 2000).

To reveal the relation between LS and achievement in language learning (AinLL) might be of great benefit for the learners, teachers and researchers. Thus it is reasonable to expect that this might increase academic achievement and efficiency in language learning and teaching. It would also be possible to design language programs with regard to this study explaining and predicting the relationship between LS and AinLL. Finally the study could contribute language learning and teaching procedure and direct the researchers to develop new methods and approaches in ELT, because in the literature there are many studies

showing the relation between language achievement and the styles playing role in determining strategies to use in learning language (Cohen, 2003; Cohen & Dörnyei, 2002; Ehrman, 1990, 1993, 1994, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2001; Ehrman & Leaver, 2003; Ehrman & Oxford, 1990, 1995; Ehrman and et al., 2003; Kinsella, 1995; Morton-Rias, Dunn, Terregrossa, Geisert, Mangione, Ortiz, & Honigsfeld, 2008; Lincoln & Rademacher, 2006; Oxford, Ehrman & Lavine, 1991; Jie & Xiaoqing, 2006). The study might also describe the profile of Turkish university prep class students' LS and how far they would explain the AinLL. Besides, the researches done so far in Turkey have uncovered the style profile and language achievement of high school and ELT department students in universities (Gorevanova, 2000; Güven, 2004; Karakış, 2006; Tabanlıoğlu, 2003). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explain and predict the relation between Turkish university prep class students' LS and AinLL.

Method

First, in order to reveal the relation between Turkish university prep class students' LS and AinLL Pearson correlation was checked. Second, a regression analysis was carried out to define if LS can predict AinLL.

Participants

The subjects participated in the study were 368 university prep class students from 8 different universities in İstanbul, Turkey. The aspects of subjects are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Aspects of the Subjects

Demographic Characteristics		f	%
Sex	Male	188	50
	Female	188	50
	Total	376	100
Field of Study	Social	187	49,7
	Science	188	50
	Missing	1	0,3

	Total	376	100
Level	A	107	28,5
	B	146	38,8
	C	114	30,3
	Missing	9	2,4
	Total	376	100
University	Government/ Public	188	50
	Foundation/ Private	188	50
	Total	376	100

Measurement

Turkish version of Cohen, Oxford and Chi's (2001) Learning Style Survey (LSS) was used to reveal the students' LS. For AinLL, the English Language Test (ELTe) developed by the researcher was given to the students.

In order to check reliability and validity checks of the scales, LSS and the ELTe were applied to the subjects of 768 prep students who were enrolled English Prep Classes in seven different universities such as Yildiz Technical University, Istanbul Technical University, Bogazici University, Maltepe University, Bahcesehir University, Istanbul Bilgi University, and Sabanci University, in Istanbul, Turkey.

For the Turkish version of LSS, Pearson's correlations between Turkish and English versions of the survey ranging from, except for the items 46, 86 and 87, 0.36 to 0.83 among the 23 subscales indicated acceptable reliability. The correlations were significant at the 0.00 and 0.01 level. The results of factor analysis for construct validity of the survey addressed 12 subscales under the six dimensional constructs with 52 items. The total internal reliability of scale was 0.88 reliability coefficients. Findings demonstrated that the subscales had internal consistency reliabilities, item total correlation, ranged from 0.20 to 0.45. Test re-test reliability for external reliability of subscales was between 0.51-0.79.

Procedures

Turkish versions of the scales and the proficiency exam were applied simultaneously in spring semester in 2006-2007 academic years. LSS contains 110 statements and took about 15 minutes to complete. The proficiency test, ELTe, has 20 multiple choice reading comprehension questions and lasted 20 minutes to respond.

Data Analysis

The values from Pearson correlation to show the relation between Turkish university prep class students' LS and AinLL was given in Table 2.

Table 2: Pearson correlation values between Turkish university prep class students' LS and AinLL

Variables	N	r	p
Auditory<-----> AinLL	337	.005	.92
Visual<-----> AinLL	337	.10	.06
Random<-----> AinLL	337	.04	.42
Sequential<-----> AinLL	337	.06	.21
Synthesizing<-----> AinLL	337	.11*	.02
Analytic<-----> AinLL	337	-.05	.34
Inductive<-----> AinLL	337	.17**	.00
Deductive<-----> AinLL	337	.21**	.00
Introverted<-----> AinLL	337	.09	.07
Extroverted<-----> AinLL	337	.11*	.03
Reflective<-----> AinLL	337	.16**	.00
Impulsive<-----> AinLL	337	.27**	.00

**p<.01 *p<.05

As for the findings from correlation analysis it has been seen that there are meaningful relations between impulsive learning style and AinLL ($r=.27$, $p<.01$),

deductive learning style and AinLL ($r=.21$, $p<.01$), inductive learning style and AinLL ($r=.17$, $p<.01$), reflective learning style and AinLL ($r=.16$, $p<.01$), extroverted learning style and AinLL ($r=.11$, $p<.01$) and synthesizing learning style and AinLL ($r=.11$, $p<.01$).

Secondly, for the regression analysis, not every LS listed above but the LS which the students preferred in LSS are included. These styles are auditory, introverted, random, synthesizing, deductive and reflective learning styles. The results of regression analysis are given in Table 3.

Table 3: Regression weights for LS preferred

Variables	Estimates	Standart Error	Critical Ratio	p
Auditory -----> AinLL	-6.78	2.33	-2.91	.00
Introverted -----> AinLL	.64	1.71	.37	.70
Random -----> AinLL	-.231	2.12	-1.08	.27
Synthesizing -----> AinLL	.79	2.08	.38	.70
Deductive -----> AinLL	-.12	1.72	-.07	.94
Reflective -----> AinLL	1.96	1.43	1.37	.17

As can be seen in Table 3 styles are not meaningful predictors of AinLL except from auditory learning style. In other words, the only meaningful predictor of AinLL is auditory learning style. On the other hand, it predicts AinLL in negative way.

In Table 4 another regression analysis was given only for auditory learning style.

Table 4: Regression analysis for auditory learning style only

Variables	B	Standard Error	Standardized Beta	t	p
Constant	-7.91	7.27		-1.08	.27
Auditory -----> AinLL	-6.60	2.38	-.14	-2.76	.00

In Table 4 it can be seen that auditory learning style is a meaningful predictor of AinLL but in negative way ($t=-2.76$, $p<.01$).

Discussion

The Pearson correlation analysis showed that there are meaningful relations between impulsive learning style and AinLL, deductive learning style and AinLL, inductive learning style and AinLL, reflective learning style and AinLL, extroverted learning style and AinLL and synthesizing learning style and AinLL. When these styles are considered, it can be said that a successful learner should be a student with extroverted, synthesizing and reflective styles. These characteristics are vital when learning a language. Because a student with extroverted learning style can easily start a conversation and communication which is considered as an inevitable aspect of a good language learner.

In the same way, some researches state that poor language learners follow analytic procedures to learn a foreign language (Oxford, Cho, Leung, & Kim, 2004). On the other hand, native speakers and successful language learners use synthesizing procedures and comprehend the message as a whole. This might also explain the relation between deductive, inductive and synthesizing learning styles and AinLL.

The results of regression analysis showed that LS are not meaningful predictors of AinLL except for the auditory learning style. In other words, it was found that they are not the variables explaining and predicting the achievement in foreign language significantly.

Since LS do not explain achievement in foreign language, teachers should not take the LS as a factor affecting instruction and students' success directly. Some researches show that the LS have got nothing to do with AinLL (Arslan, 2003; Dörnyei, 2005; Kılıç, 2002; Sparks, 2006). In this study also the same result was found. Besides, it means that using LS more frequently does not increase the level of achievement.

In regression analysis, it was also found that auditory learning style explains the achievement in negative way. It can be said that students with auditory style would not do as well as others with different styles in language lessons.

This result is parallel to some research results concluding that styles do not explain achievement in foreign language (Arslan, 2003; Dörnyei, 2005; Kılıç, 2002; Sparks, 2006). Therefore, it is thought that to give more opportunity to the students to participate in tasks and do more practice would be of great benefit to the students with auditory learning style.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In this study, which aims to explain if LS preferences could predict Turkish university prep class students' AinLL, following conclusions have been obtained.

In the study, it was found that auditory learning style directly predicts the achievement in foreign language learning. However, auditory learning style affects the achievement in foreign language learning negatively. It is therefore suggested that while getting prepared for the lesson the teachers should present more repetitions and assignments for the students with auditory learning style and keep an eye on these students during and after classes by checking their language tasks frequently.

For educators and teachers, following recommendation could be made based on the results. Dörnyei (2005) states that LS is a concept which is too general to explain because they cover behaviors, personality, cognitive and environmental aspects. LS definition should be more specific and confined to cognitive styles which describe how students perceive, process and retain information. Also in a study, it was explained that the cognitive and memory strategies in language learning predict university students' AinLL (Cesur, 2008). In the same way cognitive styles could be related to and explain achievement in foreign language learning. For this reason, it is recommended that the relation between cognitive styles and AinLL should also be investigated.

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