

Comparative study of learning English in co-ed and single gender middle schools

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Abstract — There is general acceptance the manner in which individuals choose to or are inclined to approach a learning situation has an impact on performance and achievement of learning outcomes. Enthused with the conviction that utilizing awareness of learning style within the educational background promotes more effective learning and hence improved academic achievement this study addresses the validity and significance of the students' language learning style preferences in precisely influencing their language performance in English.

This research is aimed at investigating and comparing learning styles of co-ed and single gender middle school students along with examining the impact of learning styles on language learning achievement of the students in different middle schools situated in Vidisha District of Madyapradesh. It also examines performance on assessments and how this relates to the two types of schooling and what, if any, differences there are to place and gender. Strengths and weaknesses of the current literature available about this topic are explored as well as the possible differences between boys and girls, related to teaching and learning environment.

The sample of the study consisted of 720 students who were divided into groups both for learning styles and Language achievement separately based on gender and locality i.e. urban and rural co-ed and single gender groups, single gender males and single gender female middle school student of Vidisha district. Purposive sampling technique was employed for selecting the sample.

In this quantitative and qualitative study, a mixed-method was utilized for collecting data. One was Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (PLSPQ) Reid (1987). The questionnaire assesses preferred learning styles of the students based on how they learn best using their perceptions: visual, auditory, kinaesthetic preferences. And the other was a semi-structured interview administered to thirty students in each category to confirm the findings of the questionnaire. To examine the relationship between students' learning styles and their achievement in learning English, students' English scores from mid-term and final exams were obtained.

The data were analyzed by the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to test for significance. Reliability analysis is adopted and the retrieved Cronbach's alpha for the present study is 0.818. The survey results indicated significant relationships between the different learning styles and the performance in an English test, and the performance resulted differently in four groups with different preferred learning styles.

The data analysis of the first questionnaire revealed that students' major learning style preferences were visual learning and individual learning. With regard to the patterns of students' language learning style preferences in terms of gender the study indicated that there are no significant differences in the relationship between learning styles and academic achievement between

boys and girls. Although both males and females preferred visual learning to a similar degree, non-significant variations between the genders were revealed upon further classification based on the language achievement analysis.

The study findings on the relationship between learning styles and language achievement of the middle school students showed that there is a positive relationship between the two variables. Visual learners tend to achieve more and score better than learners with other learning styles. The findings of the present study are important not only in shaping teaching practices but also in highlighting issues that help policy makers, administrators, curriculum framers, stakeholders, parents and faculty members to think more deeply about their role in facilitating student learning.

These results lead us to conclude that learning styles do make an impact on the students' language achievement. Analyzing one's own particular learning style can be very helpful and beneficial to the student by aiding them in becoming more focused on an attentive learner, which ultimately will increase educational success. Discovering and prioritizing this need of students and teachers in both co-ed and single gender set up learning style will allow the student to determine his or her own personal strengths and weaknesses and learn from each other. Teachers can incorporate learning styles into their classroom by identifying the learning styles of each of their students, matching teaching style to learning style for difficult tasks, strengthening weaker learning styles through easier tasks and drill, and teaching students, learning-style selection strategies.

Keywords: Language learning and achievement, Learning differences, Learning Style Preference, English Language Learners, Student Achievement, Coeducational, Gender issues, Single gender school, Perceptual Learning Style Preferences, academic performance.

Introduction

English is treated as Universal Language which is used in all over the world to communicate with any country citizen on the earth. The ever increasing importance of English language has given it a unique status as compared to other languages. Therefore, teaching of English has been incorporated into curriculum in many countries and English Language Teaching (ELT) has become a dynamic field of study and research.

There is general acceptance that the manner in which individuals choose to or are inclined to approach a learning situation has an impact on performance and achievement of learning outcomes. Enthused with the conviction that utilizing awareness of learning style within the educational background promotes more effective learning and hence improved academic achievement this study addresses the validity and significance of the students' language learning style preferences in precisely influencing their language performance in English. It is the fact that students take in and comprehend information in

different manners. Some prefer to learn individually, whereas others prefer to interact with their peers. Some enjoy listening to lectures, while others like to do more experiments. It is widely believed by numerous researchers (for example, Kolb, 1984; Reid, 1987; & Celce-Murcia, 2001) that the different ways of how a learner takes in and processes information are collectively referred to as learning styles or learning preferences. To improve learning English as a second language we need more information about the learning styles that students prefer in second language classes.

In the process of learning a language particularly a second language, there are many factors including age, gender, motivation, intelligence, anxiety level, learning strategies and language learning styles that determine the academic success of learners (Sharp, 2004).

Learners' knowledge of their learning style preference can help them optimally develop their meta-cognition and learning skills and abilities thus maximizing learning (Sternberg, 1997). In

summary, Sternberg (1997) believed that greater awareness of learning preferences and styles helps teachers to be more flexible in their teaching and to utilize a wide range of classroom methodologies. The aim is not to match teaching style to learner preferences, but to help the learner build their skills and capacities to learn well in both preferred and less preferred modes of learning (meta-learning), thus developing effective and life-long learners who can monitor their learning strategies and evaluate their outcomes or achievement.

This research is aimed at investigating and comparing learning styles of co-ed and single gender middle school students along with examining the impact of learning styles on language learning achievement of the students indifferent middle schools situated in Vidisha District of Madhya Pradesh. It also examines performance on assessments and how this relates to the two types of schooling and what, if any, differences there are to place and gender. Strengths and weaknesses of the current literature available about this topic are explored as well as the possible differences between boys and girls, related to teaching and learning environment. The sample of the study consisted of 720 students who were divided into groups both for learning styles and Language achievement separately based on gender and locality i.e. urban and rural co-ed and single gender groups, single gender males and single gender female middle school student of Vidisha district. Purposive sampling technique was employed for selecting the sample.

In this quantitative and qualitative study, a mixed-method was utilized for collecting data. One was Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (PLSPQ) Reid (1987). The questionnaire assesses preferred learning styles of the students based on how they learn best using their perceptions: visual, auditory, kinaesthetic preferences. And the other was a semi-structured interview administered to thirty students in each category to confirm the findings of the questionnaire. To examine the relationship between students' learning styles and their achievement in learning English, students' English scores from mid-term and final exams were obtained. The data were analyzed by the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to test for significance. Reliability analysis is adopted and the

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Objectives

To find out the level of learning English by the students of different school of Vidisha district

To distinguish the level of learning English by the students in different school in various dimensions like Psychological level, Academic level and Utility level.

To identify the barriers faced by students in learning English in co-educational and single gender set up.

To perceive the difference in learning capabilities, if any, between the students of co-ed and single gender school students.

To explore the factors that influence and contribute to learning in both the set ups male and female psychological, academic and utility level.

To evaluate the significant difference, if any, between rural and urban students in their attitude towards learning English.

Research Questions

RQ 1. What are the learning style preferences of middle school students of Vidisha District?

RQ 2. Is there any difference between learning style preferences of students in co-ed and single gender middle schools?

RQ 3. What is the level of language achievement of boys and girls in co-ed and single gender middle schools?

RQ 4. Is there any impact of learning style preferences on students' level of language learning achievement?

Hypothesis

H01: There is no significant mean difference in different methods on learning style in Single group. Accepted

H02: There is no significant mean difference in different methods on learning style in Co-ed group. Accepted

H03: There is no significant mean difference in different methods on Achievement in Single group. Accepted

H04: There is no significant mean difference in different methods on Achievement in Co-ed group. Rejected

H05: There is no significant mean difference in single group and Co-ed group in learning style of English. Rejected

H06: There is no significant mean difference in single group and Co-ed group in Achievement. Accepted

H07: There is no significance significant mean difference in single group and Co-ed group in learning style in each method separately. Accepted

H08: There is no significance significant mean difference in single group and Co-ed group in Achievement in each method separately. Accepted

H09: There is no significance significant mean difference in male and female in learning style in single group and Co-ed group each method separately. Accepted

H010: There is no significance significant mean difference in male and female in Achievement in single group and Co-ed group each method separately. Accepted

H011: There is no significance significant mean difference in Rural and Urban in learning style in single group and Co-ed group each method separately. Accepted

H012: There is no significance significant mean difference in Rural and Urban in Achievement in single group and Co-ed group each method separately. Rejected

H013: Learning Styles have no influence on Language achievement among the Students. Rejected.

Findings

This comparative study of learning styles and language achievement among middle school students has shown the following key findings:

Majority of the middle school students are visual learners (47%)(who need the visual stimulation of bulletin boards, videos and movies prefer to learn via the visual channel), followed by the auditory learners who prefer to engage in discussions, conversations, and group work with (36.3%) and individual learners who learns more effectively through working alone. The least preferred learning style is the tactile learning style dimension (which involves a learning environment such as taking a field trip, dramatizing etc) which had a preference of 0.6% among the middle school students.

Students, particularly of boys those who belong to rural are and studying in Govt. schools Preferred visual learning style while comparing with their female counterpart in private schools and in urban area. Related studies (Lee, 1976; Reid, 1987) have supported the results of the present investigation that English as Second Language (ESL) students varied significantly in their sensory preferences. Students from Asian cultures were often highly visual.

PLSPQ test administration indicated that about

50% of the students' preferred visual learning style, 35% of the students' preferred auditory learning style, 15% of the students' preferred kinesthetic style for their learning.

Some of the studies described the differences between the perceptions of boys and girls toward same-sex classes. The majority of girls had positive reactions to same-sex classes, whereas the majority of boys had negative reactions to same-sex classes. Same-sex classes did not seem to be as helpful for boys as they were for girls. Girls' gender identity was affected by coeducational schooling because they were more likely to have a more stereotypical feminine identity. However, girls also described themselves with "masculine" traits which could be related to academic success and teachers' expectations of students' behavior in co-educational schools. Girls' compliance with traditional female roles in co-educational schools seemed to be related to acceptance from peers. Boys' gender identity did not seem to be affected by school type.

Generally, in the articles studied, the language achievement of boys and girls showed no significant difference between same-sex and co-educational schools. The significant differences were students' perception of their successes well as teacher's and parent's perceptions. The differences in the environment, peer relationships and confidence of boys and girls appeared to be significant. Several of the studies had confusing data in which the total number of subjects studied was unclear.

This comparative study of learning styles and language achievement among middle school students has further shown that:

1. There were not any statistically significant differences between the learning style preferences of male and female students so far as there learning style is concerned .when pattern of learning styles was observed in middle school students in relation to their gender and locality it was found in coordination with the results obtained in table I i.e. the most preferred learning style among male and female students was visual followed by other styles of learning. However, percentage of male students (44.6%) was higher than female students (42.2%) in favor of visual style of learning. Moreover the similar results were obtained for rural (34.4%), urban (65.5%). This is also presented by the bar diagram in figure.

2. When compared the frequency of single gender and co-ed students' learning styles according to this table, the dominance of Visual

learning style (53.3%) is higher in co-ed students than in single gender students. The findings also indicate that the dominance of Auditory learning style (26%) is higher in single gender students than in co-ed students (17.9%).

3. The girls achieved significantly higher results than the boys in English. The percentage of students that received high standards was somewhat greater in single gender schools as compared to co-educational, particularly for boys as compared to girls. The scores of standard deviation of male group were greater than the female group which means that the male students were better performance in the test as compared to the female students.

The majority of girls had positive reactions to single gender classes, whereas the majority of boys had negative reactions to single sex classes. Overall, it seemed that the majority of results stated same-sex classrooms had more advantages for girls' achievement than boys'.

4. Co-ed students' mean score with a standard deviation of 2.23 is 16.98 and single gender students' mean score with a standard deviation of 2.64, is 16.14. The co-ed students' mean score is greater than single gender students'. It can be said that there is no significant difference between single gender and co-ed students' language learning achievement in favor of co-ed students. But, co-ed students' language learning achievement is higher in comparison with single gender students'.

According to the findings of the current study, single gender and co-ed students' learning styles impacted their English language learning achievement. It was revealed that co-ed students were superior in language learning in comparison with single gender female students.

In terms of language achievement, the data was disaggregated by both gender and achievement levels of the students groups. Among the male students, a mean achievement score of 60.79 was lower than the females' 62.48.

Data were gathered from twelve schools in headquarters of Vidisha district, bringing about seven hundred and twenty (720) middle school students and thirty (30) students from each category of student from co-ed and single gender schools for interview. Results were completed through PLSPQ administration and obtaining midterm and annual exam English scores. The data collected were analyzed using simple statistics. Descriptive and percentage statistics such as rank, range, mean were carried out to identify

students' learning style preferences. Furthermore, frequency percentage was used to identify the significant difference between students' language learning style preferences and their level of language achievement in English. Finally, multiple regressions were utilized to determine language learning style preferences that significantly influence the level of students' language performance in English.

The results of analysis showed that the most preferred learning style among middle school students is Visual style of learning (47%) followed by auditory (30%), tactile (10%) and kinesthetic (13%) learning styles. Majority (39.6%) of the middle school students are visual learners (who need the visual stimulation of bulletin boards, videos and movies prefer to learn via the visual channel), followed by the auditory learners who prefer to engage in discussions, conversations, and group work with (36.3%) and individual learners who learn more effectively through working alone. The least preferred learning style is the kinesthetic learning style dimension (which involves a learning environment such as taking a field trip, dramatizing etc) which had a preference of 0.6% among the middle school students.

In terms of language achievement, the data was disaggregated by both gender and achievement levels of the students groups. Among the male students, a mean achievement score of 60.79 was lower than the females' 62.48.

With regard to the patterns of students' language learning style preferences in terms of gender the study indicated that there are no significant differences in the relationship between learning styles and academic achievement between boys and girls. Although both males and females preferred visual learning to a similar degree, non-significant variations between the genders were revealed upon further classification based on the language achievement analysis.

The study findings on the relationship between learning styles and language achievement of the middle school students showed that there is a positive relationship between the two variables. Visual learners tend to achieve more and score better than learners with other learning styles. As such, it is believed that learning styles do make an impact on the students' language achievement. Such finding highlights the importance of recognizing students' varying learning styles.

Teachers need to be aware of the usefulness of

learning styles for effective learning to take place. It is the responsibility of the teacher and the student to be aware of learning style preferences to improve their teaching and learning. As teachers, we need to assess and understand how to reach all students by understanding how to present information in multiple modes. We can help students more effectively both in and out of the classroom, if we are aware of their learning styles and can assist them in determining their preferences. As a student, it is vital to be self-aware of preferences to adjust study techniques to best fit each individual, even when the information and instruction provided does not match the preferred style.

All in all, since individuals' learning styles are different and they influence learning achievement according to many studies, and given that the ultimate goal of learning is achievement, identification of learning styles and individual diversities is of paramount necessity and importance. In fact it is the first step in ensuring students' achievement. Studies have also illustrated that learning styles are influenced by gender, age, culture, ethnicity background. So all of these factors should be taken into consideration when planning lessons and designing curricula. Therefore, by allowing students to learn in accordance with their own preferred learning styles, students' motivation and interest toward learning will be promoted, learning will be facilitated, and optimum outcome will be achieved.

Implications for single gender and co-ed middle schools

For educational implications, teachers and educators should recognize student's different learning style preferences which can assist the teachers in organizing the classroom setting, developing suitable educational program and adopting the suitable teaching strategies. Matching the teachers learning styles and strategies with students' varied learning style will surely increase the students' academic performance. Students should know their learning styles in order to plan and make better use of their study time and learning strategies which can improve the academic performance and lead academic success.

1. Though this is a very limited study it may be relevant to selective middle schools regarding raising achievement for the most in English language learning and overall performance.

2. Schools need to enable their students to

develop a greater understanding of themselves as learners and how they learn which may be different in different subject areas, concentrates on the 'how' rather than the 'what' of learning. This self-knowledge should extend across the pupil's entire school career as they mature and so, by appreciation of learning styles preferences, pupils will be better equipped in each subject they study and see for themselves progression of learning as they mature and will allow the development of high self-esteem.

3. Schools need to promote time for shared conversations between teacher and learner regarding how students are learning language and what they can do to improve. This is the basis of the national Assessment for learning strategy and has been an effective means of raising achievement irrespective of gender.

4. Schools also need to appreciate that for a small minority of pupils they will exhibit extremes of learning styles which will need extra support and nurturing and for them a single-sex school could be ideal for their entire school career in terms of maximizing achievement.

So all of these factors should be taken into consideration when planning lessons and designing curricula. Therefore, by allowing students to learn in accordance with their own preferred learning styles, students' motivation and interest toward learning will be promoted, learning will be facilitated, and optimum outcome will be achieved.

Learning Styles and language achievement by Gender

The study findings on the relationship between learning styles and language achievement of the middle school students showed that there is a positive relationship between the two variables. According to Dunn and Dunn (1986), visual learners tend to achieve more and score better than learners with other learning styles. As such, it is inferred that learning styles do make an impact on the students' language achievement. Such finding highlights the importance of recognizing students' varying learning styles. Teachers should be aware of the usefulness of learning styles for effective learning to take place.

Most educational psychologists would agree that learning styles can significantly enhance academic achievement (Felder, 1995). Dunn and Dunn (1986) state that in most cases, a successful learner learns in several different ways. However,

students with naturally one or two learning styles can improve significantly when taught through other learning styles. This is particularly imperative in the present study as it indicated a positive relationship between the two variables, but the relationship was not statistically significant. To this end therefore, it is essential for teachers to know the effective way of teaching. By this way, teachers can come close to providing most favorable learning environment for most students in their classrooms (Felder, 1995). These facts reveal that each learning style has its own strengths and weaknesses. Some students learn in many ways, while others might only favor one or two.

According to Peacock (2001), when instruction in an education setting is matched with the students' learning style preferences, students seem to achieve higher scores than when mismatched (Peacock, 2001). Miller (2008) found that both student examination scores and student's attitude toward learning scores were significantly higher when presentation was matched with student learning styles. Insight into the specific preferences of individual classes would help instructors tailor both their presentations and methods of assessment for each individual class. In addition, the present study suggests that females may have a broader range of learning preferences than males. Instructors need to be cognizant of these differences and broaden their range of presentation accordingly.

In most cases, a very successful learner learns in several different ways. On the whole, every student has certain degree of preferences in each type of learning style, and the majority of them have dominance in one or more styles of learning. Within the learning style dimension, the findings revealed that the subjects strongly preferred the physiology type which includes the visual, auditory and kinesthetic elements. In terms of learning style element, out of six selected learning styles, students selected three learning styles as major learning styles, beginning with the Visual learners followed by auditory learning styles. Moreover, it can be understood from the results that there is a similar preference for individual and group learning styles among the students. As a result, we can understand that most students possessed visual learning styles or a combination of different learning styles. As such, they are able to learn effectively.

Based on the findings of this study, it is clear

that the identification of learning styles can most appropriately used as a catalyst for reflection and discussion and students should use the information to adjust study habits to correspond to their individual learning strengths. Data suggests that merely being knowledgeable about learning styles can improve student learning outcomes. To that end, instructors could administer the questionnaire to students to raise students' awareness level of their preferred learning type, to give students and instructors a common language for discussing learning, and to help empower students to adjust their learning behaviors to take advantage of their strengths and preferences. This type of knowledge may increase students' ability to actively cope with the rigorous academic demands of middle school education in India.

Teachers can also use PLSPQ results from each individual class to become aware of the distribution of information intake preferences among each class and to adjust their method of information delivery to correspond with these preferences. These adjustments would benefit both male and female learners. For example, the visual learners can be targeted by the presence of models and demonstrations (Kadir, 2013). Auditory learners can be reached through discussion during peer instruction, collaborative testing, debate, games, and answering questions (Gardner, 1999). Manipulating models and role playing can satisfy the kinesthetic learners (Felder, 1995). Furthermore, researchers have reported an increase in students' achievement with the use of simulations and games, and students usually expressed positive feelings about the experiences (Bandura, 1987). Awareness of an individual class' learning preferences allows for effective and reflective teaching that will reach students learning via different modalities.

Areas of advance study

Further, research need to be conducted in India to examine the relationship between teaching and learning styles and how both contribute and relate to academic performance of students in schools at all levels as well as colleges.

Learning styles are a minor factor determining how learners react to stimuli and that the effects of contextual, cultural and relational factors play a much larger role. More studies need to be conducted to examine the claim particularly in the Indian context.

Recommendations

The present study yielded some important

insights into learning style preferences among middle school students and the following recommendations are made:

a. Teachers/instructors need to take into account their students' diverse learning styles, design instructional methods that take care of those diversities and remain sensitive of such during the instruction process;

b. Teachers should also help their students to understand their learning style preferences and make use of such to develop life-long learners;

c. School administrators need to provide various learning materials which can bring diversity in the classroom by employing visual, auditory and kinesthetic materials such as use of technology and student's project writing and presentation among other methods.

Many school districts welcomed single-sex schools and single-sex instruction as a means to improve student performance believed that single-sex schools would actually benefit boys from minority groups and boys from poor families who may need more direct guidance. Proponents to single-sex schools and single-sex instruction feel that boys and girls learn differently and should be educated in instructional settings that support gender differences (Brizendine, 2010; Gurian, 2001; Sax, 2007). Opponents, such as women organizations, believe that separate but equal policies rarely treat girls equally and often rely on outdated sex stereotypes about girls' and boys' interest and abilities.

Possible explanations for the various levels of student achievement in both sample.

1. Middle Schools in Vidisha have succeeded in creating a congenial learning environment that is conducive for female students. The decline enrollment of male students due to feeding of their families by doing labor work over the years may also be a factor for the increased performances of female students.

2. Sample group varied each school with the number of total strength of the school. The adjustment to the environment as well as to instructors might have resulted in possible decreases in student achievement.

3. Teachers in both sample and cohort groups may possibly teach a new group of students each year, therefore the learning curve is greater in terms of teachers knowing their students learning style.

4. Teachers may not have differentiated their instruction based on students' readiness level.

This study may suggest that students, who

attend single-sex schools for a period of three years, tend to excel academically in English, as well as transient female students enrolled in a single-sex setting. This study may also suggest that students, who are transient during their middle school years, tend to show increased gains in English achievement in coeducational environments over three years; however, the data also indicates that coeducational settings showed lower performance levels of students by grade, group, and gender. These findings are unique to this study and do not suggest that similar empirical research should be discounted.

Education department must to provide adequate funding for single-sex instruction. Funding that will provide teachers with training and professional development opportunities to become proficient in understanding how to create conducive learning environments for both genders, and understanding how each gender learns. Sufficient funding should also be available for internal and external resources in support of single-sex instruction and instructional strategies for urban students. Funding may be the determining factor in hiring the highly qualified staff. It is important for teachers to change their pedagogy to accommodate the learning environment and not transfer "old" skills in new settings.

Limitations and Delimitations

The study is delimited to middle schools in Vidisha District. Hence, the findings may not be generalized to all schools.

Data will be limited based on the material available and the number of single-sex schools in Vidisha district.

The researcher is limited to the schools' ability to identify accurately the learning styles of students in single gender schools and the co-ed set up.

As a final limitation, the researcher had no control over the educational setting of the students or the quality of the instruction received.

Though in themselves the interviews and conversations were of immense interest, it is difficult to share anything but the most tentative of conclusions, observations or findings. Specific limitations of the data collected and the methodology used are listed below.

Selection of schools was somewhat random and did not account for the nature of schools, board and media of instruction.

Conclusion

The findings of the present study are important not only in shaping teaching practices but also in highlighting issues that help policy makers, administrators, curriculum framers, stakeholders, parents and faculty members to think more deeply about their role in facilitating student learning.

While research in this area continues to grow, teachers should make concentrated efforts to teach in a multi-style fashion that both reaches the greatest extent of students in a given class and challenges all students to grow as learners. It is very important to understand and explore each individual's learning style to enhance their language achievement. Analyzing one's own particular learning style can be very helpful and beneficial to the student by aiding them in becoming more focused on an attentive learner, which ultimately will increase educational success. Discovering and prioritizing this need of students and teachers in both co-ed and single gender set up learning style will allow the student to determine his or her own personal strengths and weaknesses and learn from each other. Teachers can incorporate learning styles into their classroom by identifying the learning styles of each of their students, matching teaching style to learning style for difficult tasks, strengthening weaker learning styles through easier tasks and drill, and teaching students, learning-style selection strategies.

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