

# Definitions of styles and learning styles



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## 2. 1. 1. 1 Definitions of Styles and Learning Styles

- Styles
- Before reviewing the literature of learning styles, it is necessary to know the definition of “ styles”. The concept of “ styles” was first put forward by cognitive psychologists. Brown (2002: 104) defines style as “ a term that refers to consistent and rather enduring tendencies or preferences within an individual.” Therefore, styles are those general characteristics of intellectual functioning (and personality type, as well) that especially pertain to one as an individual, that differentiate one from someone else.
- Learning Styles
- Regarding studies of learning styles, the most serious problem is the confusion of its definitions. In the past two decades, the learning styles has been used in various and sometimes confusing ways in the literature. It is very common to hear different opinions on its definitions based on different findings in this comparatively new research field of learning styles, for each study defines it from particular perspectives. However, there is not an agree-upon definition of learning styles.

Learning styles can be defined in the following ways.

Keefe (1979, cited in Brown, 2002: 10) defines learning styles as “ *the characteristic cognitive, affective and physiological behaviors that serve as relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with and respond to the learning environment.*”

Dunn et al. (1978: 11) defines learning styles as “ *the way in which each person absorbs and retains information and/or skills; regardless*

*of how that process is described, it is dramatically different for each person”.*

Sims & Sims (1990, cited in Reid, 2002) put forward that learning styles are typical ways a person behaves, feels, and processes information in learning situations. Therefore, learning style is demonstrated in that pattern of behavior and performance by which an individual approaches educational experience.

Oxford et al. (1991) briefly defines the learning style as the general approaches students used to learn a new subject or tackle a new problem.

Tan Dingliang (1995: 12) defines learning styles as: *“ the way that a learner often adopts in the learning process, which includes the learning strategies that have been stabilized within a learner, the preference of some teaching stimuli and learning tendency.”*

Reid (1995) summarizes definitions of learning styles as internally based characteristics of individuals for the intake or understanding of new information. Essentially learning styles are based upon how a person perceives and processes information to facilitate learning.

### **2. 1. 2 Categories of Learning Styles**

Confusion also exists in the literature on categories of learning styles for many same or similar factors researched under the same name. Reid (1995) divides learning-style research into three major categories: cognitive styles, sensory learning styles, and personality learning styles.

### **2. 1. 2. 1 Cognitive Learning Styles**

Cognitive learning styles which include field-independent/field-dependent, analytic/global, reflective/impulsive learning styles, and Kolb experiential learning model, belong to the aspects of psychology. Among them researches on field-independent/field-dependent (FI/FD) attract the most attention of SLA domain (Ellis, 1994).

According to Reid (1995), field-independent learners learn more effectively step by step, or sequentially, beginning with analyzing facts and proceeding to ideas. They see the trees instead of the forest; whereas field-dependent (field-sensitive) learners learn more effectively in contexts, holistically, intuitively, and are especially sensitive to human relationships and interactions. They see the forest instead of the trees.

Chapelle (1995) explains that FI/FD refers to how people perceive and memorize information.

Reid (1995) defines that analytic learners learn more effectively individually; prefer setting own goals, and respond to a sequential, linear, step-by-step presentation of materials; whereas global (relational) learners learn more effectively through concrete experience, and by interactions with others.

According to Reid (1995), if learners can learn more effectively given time to consider options before responding, they are reflective learners; and they are often more accurate language learners; whereas if learners can learn more effectively being able to respond immediately and to take risks, they are impulsive learners; and they are often more fluent language learners.

### **2. 1. 2. 2 Sensory Learning Styles**

According to Reid (1995), sensory learning styles include two dimensions: perceptual learning styles and environmental learning styles. Perceptual learning styles contain four types of learning styles which are auditory, visual, tactile and kinesthetic styles. Auditory learners learn more effectively through the ears; visual learners learn more effectively through the eyes (seeing); tactile learners learn more effectively through touch (hands-on); kinesthetic learners learn more effectively through concrete complete body experiences (whole-body movement).

Physical and sociological styles belong to the environmental learning styles. Physical learners learn more effectively when such variables as temperature, sound, light, food, mobility, time, and classroom/study arrangement are considered. Sociological learners learn more effectively when such variables as group, individual, pair and team work, or levels of teacher authority are considered.

### **2. 1. 2. 3 Affective/Temperament Learning Styles**

Learning styles of this type are based on affect, personality, tolerance of ambiguity and brain hemisphere.

Myer and Briggs (1987, cited in Reid, 1995) report that affective and personality factors influence learners' learning styles a great deal. Mayer-Briggs team tested four dichotomous styles of functioning in their Mayer and Briggs Temperament Styles (MBTI) which include extraversion-introversion, sensing-perception, thinking-feeling, and judging-perceiving.

According to Reid (1995), extroverted and introverted styles belong to extraversion-introversion. Extroverted learner learns more effectively through concrete experience, contact with the outside world, and relationships with others; whereas introverted learner learns more effectively in individual, independent situations that are more involved with ideas and concepts. Sensing-perception contains sensing and perception styles.

Sensing learner learns more effectively from reports of observable facts and happenings; prefers physical, sense-based input. Conversely, perception learner learns more effectively from meaningful experiences and from relationships with others. In thinking-feeling styles, thinking learner learns more effectively from impersonal circumstances and logical consequence; whereas feeling learner learns more effectively from personalized circumstances and social values. And in judging-perceiving styles, judging learner learns more effectively by reflection, and analysis, and processes that involve closure; conversely, perceiving learner learns more effectively through negotiation, feeling, and inductive processes that postpone closure.

Reid (1995) suggests that tolerance of ambiguity styles also belong to the affective/temperament learning styles. Ambiguity-tolerant learner learns more effectively when opportunities for experiment and risk, as well as interaction, are present; whereas ambiguity-intolerant learners learn more effectively when in less flexible, less risky, more structured situations.

Reid (1995) also claims that whether the learner is left-brained or right-brained will influence learner's learning styles. Left-brained learners tend toward visual, analytic, reflective, self-reliant learning; conversely, right-

brained learners tend toward auditory, global/relational, impulsive, interactive learning.

### **2. 1. 3. 1 Sensory Learning Styles**

- Visual styles
- Visual students enjoy reading and they prefer material in a classroom environment to be presented in a visual format such as books, board work, and handouts.
- Auditory styles
- Auditory students enjoy lectures, conversations and oral directions. They prefer material in a classroom environment that is presented as auditory input such as radio, oral instruction, oral communication and audiotape.
- Hands-on styles
- Hands-on students like lots of movement and enjoy working with collages, flashcards, and tangible objects. They prefer to be physically involved with tasks, tending to prefer activities such as Total physical Response (TPR) and role-play.

### **2. 1. 3. 3 Personality Learning Styles**

- Extroversion/Introversion

The dimension of styles particularly influences classroom management, especially grouping of students. Extroverted students perform most productively in a group environment, enjoying activities that involve other students, such as role-play, conversation and other interaction favoring social goals as opposed to impersonal rewards. Conversely, introverted

students are stimulated most by their own inner world of ideas and feelings. They like working alone or else in a pair with someone they know well. They dislike lots of continuous group work in the ESL/EFL classroom. This contrast is somewhat similar to the categories of group/individual style made by Reid (1987).

In conclusion, according to Reid (1995), the role of learning styles in foreign language learning has some fundamentals of learning styles. She claims that learning styles in the ESL/EFL classrooms is based on six hypotheses:

1. Every person, students and teachers alike, has a learning style and learning strengths and weaknesses;
2. Learning styles are often described as opposite, but actually they exist on wide continuum;
3. Learning styles are value-neutral; that is, no one style is better than others (but it is true that there are students with some learning styles work better than those with some other learning styles);
4. Students must be encouraged to “ stretch” their learning styles so that they will be more empowered in a variety of learning situations;
5. Students’ strategies are often linked to their learning styles; (6) Teachers should allow their students to become aware of their learning strengths and weaknesses.