

In the Name of God

**The Role of Learning Styles in Vocabulary
Recall of Male and Female EFL Learners**

(A research proposal)

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Introduction

Language learning in a setting such as EFL is a complicated process in which a plethora of affective, cognitive, and social factors are influential and important. One of these considerable factors is learning style preferences among different learners. *Learning style* refers to how a language learner tries to take input in language learning situations. According to Brown (2000), there are some preferences toward *visual* or *auditory* input among learners. While visual learners prefer reading and graphic information, learners with auditory style prefer listening and aural information; therefore, both groups have their personal preference which distinguishes them from each other. Being aware of EFL learners' learning style is an important factor in classroom instruction because it shows the way learners learn things or attack a problem, although some scholars like Brown (2000) believe that successful learners utilize both visual and auditory input.

Vocabulary is one of the most important components in learning each language because of its great influence on successful communication. For example, Fu (2009) stated that since words play an important role in expressing feelings, emotions, and ideas, vocabulary difficulties could lead to comprehension problems; therefore, many students feel frustrated with English vocabulary learning. Also, Nation (1996) believed that tests of vocabulary knowledge show any learning, and fluency development depends on vocabulary knowledge extension.

Most students complain about unfamiliar words when reading a text for the first time. Since language learning style for vocabulary learning is one of the important factors determining how the students recall a second or foreign language vocabulary better, it can help language teachers choose more effective methods and types of instruction with a close relation to these learning style preferences. For example, Peacock (2001) investigated the relationship between learning and teaching styles in EFL. He concluded that more match between these two lead to more success and motivation, and any mismatch can lead to failure and frustration among EFL learners. Therefore, investigating the relationship between different learning styles and vocabulary recall in an EFL situation can be worthy of further consideration. There are different learning styles such as visual, auditory, kinesthetic, etc. However,

because of the importance and significance of visual and auditory types among others, these two types' will be explored as major learning styles among participating students. This study would be an investigation of relationship between these two learning styles and L2 vocabulary recall; in other words, the role of these two learning styles in vocabulary recall in EFL contexts will be investigated.

Statement of the Problem

Vocabulary is an important element in communication that often seems to be a source of problem for many language learners. Fu (2009) believed that words are the sole vehicle in expressing something; therefore, difficulty in vocabulary learning and recall lead to major problems in language use. Nation (1996) knew vocabulary knowledge a proof of learning. He argued that vocabulary growth is an important part of language acquisition, and any problem in this area leads to language learning failure and frustration. Generally, any communication needs a number of words from different categories or parts of speech with various semantic relations to happen in a meaningful way; in other words, it can happen without mastery of grammar and pronunciation but not without vocabulary. Since vocabulary is a vital element of language learning and communication, it must receive a great attention as well.

As it was noted above, one of the most important factors in language learning specially vocabulary domain is awareness of students' learning styles. Learning style shows how a language learner approaches the task of vocabulary learning in various situations, and discovering students' learning styles will help the teacher flourish their maximum potential; therefore, the results of determining language learners' styles can be possibly improved and enhanced learning because of the close relation between learners' needs and the instructional programs. Learning style preferences of language learners are the ways they can learn and recall anything like vocabulary easily and quickly; therefore, if language teachers are aware of these learning styles, they can help students learn more successfully and effectively. Thus, vocabulary recall in EFL setting is the problem under investigation in the present study, and determining language learners' style preferences is a potential solution for this problem. If

language learners learn vocabulary as they want, they can recall them more successfully in the future.

Theoretical Framework

This study will hopefully find an applicable solution to the problem of vocabulary recall in EFL contexts. It will be tried to investigate how awareness of students' learning styles in EFL contexts can be a potential solution for teaching vocabulary. Some scholars like Peacock (2001) believe that any language teacher should be aware of his/her students' learning style preferences and match teaching styles with them to flourish their maximum potential. Gordon (1998) is another researcher who argued that there are different methods of gathering, organizing, and evaluating information that all of them should be taken into consideration for successful results in any learning context. Roark (1998) believed in visual learners' supremacy in the area of vocabulary recall and comprehension according to the results of different tests and questionnaires administered.

Chu and Nakamura (2010) stated that

Since learning styles seem to be characteristics of learning, teachers may not be able to have as much influence over this learner variable as over motivation. However, teachers should adjust classroom tasks to maximize the potential of individual learner with particular learning style(s). If teachers can respond appropriately to individual learning needs, and successfully design and deliver language instruction relevant to a multiplicity of learning style, they may assume that every student can learn. (p.35)

Their conclusion shows the great role of learning styles in learning to maximize learners' potential. Therefore, EFL learners' learning styles should be taken into consideration as an important criterion in learning in order to enhance learning outcomes.

Literature Review

In this section, major studies on learning styles and their role in language learning process will be reviewed. Kassaian (2007) investigated the relationship between visual

and auditory learning styles and lexical presentation mode. She measured the retention of vocabulary items by using some tests immediately after visual or aural teaching methods. Her results showed that visual learners retained vocabulary items better with visual teaching method, but the auditory learners did not show better retention for aural teaching method. Also, her subjects retained visually presented items better than aurally presented ones. Finally, they performed better in recognition than recall test for both presented items, and memory loss was greater for visually learned items compared to aurally learned items. She conclusively stated that visually presented items retained better for short term recall, while aurally encoded items help language learners retain better for a longer period of time.

Gordon (1998) also studied learning style as a factor influencing student educational program. He stated that "the idea of learning styles is based on the theory that there are different methods of gathering, organizing, and evaluating information"(p. 1). He argued that many environmental factors can affect a person's ability in learning situation to determine how information is best perceived, organized, and processed for understanding. He also indicated that an understanding of the relationship between learning modalities such as auditory, visual, etc. and individual learning styles can help language teachers develop alternative instructional methods and a variety of learning sources. It was concluded that discovering individual learning style contributes to motivation for learning that can lead to a structured learning and study.

Roark (1998) sought to show in his study that visual learners will score higher on standardized tests than non-visual learners as two different learning styles. First, he determined the learning style of each student through administering questionnaires, then he administered a standardized test to compare groups' mean in the area of vocabulary and comprehension. The results showed a higher mean score for visual learners group in all areas assessed. It was concluded that the highest mean score was for visual learners in the area of reading comprehension because of its learner traits, and the sample of this study was among adult learners that might not be representative of the general population.

Hardigan and Sisco (2001) studied the effect of year of enrollment, college, ethnicity, and gender on learning style differences among college students. Their results showed significant differences for gender, ethnicity, and year of enrollment. They stated that these differences in learning style demonstrate that students with specific learning styles tend to choose particular professions. They also emphasized the relationship between academic performance and teaching students in their preferred learning styles; in other words, learning style assessment for its strengths and weaknesses can have a positive effect on learning because of developing instructional techniques according to these different learning styles in the classroom.

Peacock (2001) investigated the results of match or mismatch between learning styles and teaching styles in Hong Kong context. His study was based on Reid's (1987) hypothesis that a mismatch between teaching and learning styles causes learning failure, frustration, and demotivation. He concluded that EFL teachers should teach in a balanced style to accommodate different learning styles. He found that all students have their own learning styles and the teacher also had identifiable and contrasting teaching styles; but the important point was that the mismatch between these two elements caused learning failure in his study. He finally recommended that EFL teachers should identify their own teaching styles and their students' learning styles, and try to match them for learning improvement in their situations.

Hlawati (2002) identified and compared the preferred learning style of German adolescents, and investigated the similarities and differences by age, gender, and academic achievement in different educational settings. The results supported the effect of all presented factors on learning style preferences that a teacher should be aware of, and they should be incorporated into classroom instruction for better achievement in their environment. She finally argued that a unified understanding of how students learn and how to teach them is within the power to utilize the knowledge of students' learning styles which assist them to maximize their potential in learning situations.

Lotfi (2007) stated that "vocabulary learning is one of the major challenges foreign language learners face during the process of learning a language"(p.85). She argued that becoming independent learners in L2 vocabulary learning is a potential solution to

this problem. She also suggested that one way to enhance the knowledge of L2 vocabulary is through equipping learners with a variety of vocabulary learning strategies based on cognitive styles. It was also recommended that language teachers make students aware of the need to become independent learners by directing their attention toward the strategies that can help them to be successful. It was concluded that "...teachers should consider the learners' willingness and readiness to receive trainings and think of the most appropriate way to introduce the strategies"(p.85).

Lopez and Schroeder (2008) conducted an action research on designing strategies that meet a variety of students' learning styles. They administered a student survey to determine their preferred learning styles, and the researchers used observation checklist, formal and informal assessment. The major aim of this study was to maximize learning for all students by addressing different learning styles. They stated that "once the students identified their preferred learning style, they were able to transfer their learning style to other situations"(p.34). Also, when the students achieved higher grade as a result of applying the appropriate learning strategies to their needs, self-esteem increased and the classroom atmosphere was positive.

Nassaji (2008) studied the role of input modality in remembering name-referent associations in learning non-sense words. He made an attempt to investigate name-referent associations in auditory, visual, and dual modality (audiovisual) conditions. The results showed an improved recall and recognition in dual modality, but no significant differences between the visual and auditory conditions. His findings provided support for the dual modality hypothesis in vocabulary learning and the benefit of semantic-representations of words in both auditory and visually-based processing.

As it was noted, several studies were carried out in the area of learning styles. However, there is a need for further research. This study is investigating the role of learning styles in EFL vocabulary recall that seems to be a disregarded area and needs to be investigated further. The major question is that" Is there any relationship between different learning styles (visual & auditory) and EFL vocabulary recall?" As a result, the outcomes of this study will show the existence and amount of this relation that can lead to flourishing maximum potential of learners in EFL contexts.

Significance of the Study

The major aim of this study is to investigate the role of learning styles in vocabulary recall in EFL contexts. As it was noted above, vocabulary is an important and vital element in any language learning context. Also, learning style preferences can be an important issue in vocabulary learning and recall. Therefore, investigating the role of learning styles in vocabulary recall can be a good topic for research and study; In other words, if students learn vocabulary according to their learning style preferences, they can recall more permanently.

The outcomes of this study can benefit researchers, teachers, and students to apply them in instructional settings. Teachers can be aware of their students' learning style preferences; as a result, they can harmonize their teaching instructions with their students' style preferences for vocabulary learning and recall. This leads to flourishing maximum potential of learners in learning contexts for future use.

Objectives of the study

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the role of learning styles in vocabulary recall in an EFL setting. Because of its great role in successful communication, lexical knowledge has always been an area worthy of empirical investigations. Also, as learning style preference is an important issue in vocabulary learning and recall, it can be another significant area for further investigation and consideration.

The ultimate goal of this study is finding some outcomes related to different learning styles to help language learners use their maximum potential in L2 vocabulary recall; in other words, it is to be determined whether discovering students' learning style preferences and applying harmonious teaching styles can enhance learners' vocabulary recall or not. The results of this study can help us conduct learning style preferences in order to reach more successful vocabulary recall in EFL contexts.

Research Questions & Hypotheses

This study aims at investigating the role of *visual* and *auditory* learning styles in EFL vocabulary recall. As such, there are three major research questions to be answered in this study:

1. What are the EFL learners' dominant learning styles?
2. Is there any relationship between different learning styles (visual & auditory) and EFL learners' vocabulary recall?
3. Is there any relationship between EFL learners' gender and different learning styles (visual & auditory)?

Concerning these questions, the following hypotheses will drive the present study:

1. There is not a significant difference among EFL learners in terms of their learning style.
2. There is no difference between visual and auditory learning style in EFL learners' vocabulary recall.
3. There is no difference between male and female EFL learners in terms of their learning style.

Method

In what follows, the participants of the study, the materials used to collect data and data collection and analysis procedures will be explained.

Participants

The participants of this study will be two groups of 30 Iranian male EFL learners studying in 3 language institutes at pre-intermediate level. They are selected to determine their learning style and check its influence on L2 vocabulary learning; in other word, they are checked for visual or auditory learning styles, and the tests determine which one can be more suitable and successful in L2 vocabulary learning.

Instruments/Materials

Three different materials will be used for the experiments and tests needed in this study. An adapted and translated version of VAK test of learning styles (Chislet &

Chapman, 2005; cited in Kassaian, 2007) will be used to determine the participants' learning styles. The participants complete 30 statements in this survey to show their visual or auditory learning styles. According to their answers the participants are marked as visual or auditory language learners. Also, the reliability of the test will be ensured through test-retest.

A list of 40 vocabulary items is to be taught to the participants of both groups (visual and auditory learners) in the classroom. The vocabulary items which are divided into two groups of 20 vocabulary items (visual & auditory words) are taught to the students in two different situations: *visual style* and *aural style*. These words are selected from English concrete vocabulary items to investigate which teaching situation can be more successful in recalling the words later.

A test of recall the reliability of which will be ensured through test-retest procedure is used immediately after two different teaching situations to examine the number of words that students can remember with their meanings. The test gives a score to visual and auditory learners for recalling words in visual and aural teaching styles; therefore, each group will have two sets of scores for two different teaching situations.

Data Collection Procedure

A particular instructional procedure is to be implemented in the classroom for visual and auditory language learners. First, the learning styles of participating students will be determined through administering the adapted VAK test by which language learners are divided into two groups: *visual* and *auditory*. After determining the students' preferred learning styles, the students are taught the intended vocabulary items in their preferred learning styles to investigate the role of these different learning styles in the participants' vocabulary recall.

In the instructional phase, the vocabulary items and their meanings will be presented to the participants in two different situations. All participants will be exposed to 20 words with their meanings visually and to 20 words with their meanings orally (Each of them will be read loudly twice). This procedure will be conducted for both visual and auditory language learners during three sessions. For this purpose each group of participants will be taught two groups of vocabulary items

(visual & auditory words) through visual and aural style with an interval of two weeks. The subjects will be taught in half an hour and tested immediately after it. It will show the role of different learning styles in EFL vocabulary recall for further investigation. All of these procedures will be carried out at the middle of one semester.

As it was noted, the participants will be tested immediately after each instructional method to determine the number of words they can recall with their meanings. After visual instruction, a paper test with 20 pictures will be given to the students in which they should write the correct words and their associated meanings. After oral instruction, all students will be asked about 20 vocabulary items and their meanings orally; in other words, the examiner will read the words, and the students will be required to recall their meanings. There would be two sets of score for each group of participants.

Data Analysis

After collecting the data, descriptive statistics will be utilized to specify the dominant learning styles (visual or auditory) among males and females in the present study. After determining learning styles, there will be two sets of score for each group of participants (scores of visual and auditory words for visual and auditory learners). First, the means of these four sets of score were calculated. Then, the means of each group for visual and auditory words will be compared through running t-test to investigate the role of different type of instruction; meanwhile, the possible differences between the performance of two groups in visual and aural instruction will be compared through running t-test to find out which learning style is more dominant and which group is more successful in EFL vocabulary recall.

Also, the relationship between gender and learning styles will be calculated through Phi and Cramer's V statistical analysis; a level of .01 will be used as the criterion of significance. To analyze the data, the SPSS software (version 17) which is commonly used for analyzing the results of the studies in social sciences will be utilized.

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Appendices

[INSERT COMPLETE APPENDICES HERE]

Appendix 1: *VAK Learning Styles Self-Assessment Questionnaire*

Appendix 2: *Visual Words*

Appendix 3: *Visual Test of Vocabulary Items*

Appendix 4: *Aural Test of Vocabulary Items*