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British Journal of  
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PublishedStatus: Current

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- Serials Solutions
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Journal Email:[editor.bje@ea-journals.org](mailto:editor.bje@ea-journals.org)

APS Impact Factor:7.89

Print ISSN:ISSN 2054-6351 (print)

Online ISSN:ISSN 2054-636X (online)

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## Vol 6, issue 9, September 2018

### List of Articles

<b>Effect of Multi-Media Instructional Strategies on Academic Performance of Students in Radio and Television Electronic Work Trade in Technical Colleges in Kano State</b>  HalliruShuaibu and Muhyideen Muhammad	1-24
<b>The Effect of Surveillance and Evaluation Expectation on the Creativity of Primary School Pupils</b>  Ntamu Blessing Agbo	25-36
<b>Outcome of Prayer: A Study of Children in Selected Denominations in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria</b>  FolukeBosede Ola	37-51
<b>Spiritual Transformation: A Focus on Strategic Approach to Discipleship</b>  Francisca WavinyaNgala	52-69
<b>Research on Micro-Lecture Construction System Based On “Do It” Concept in College Teaching</b>  Shuang Wang, Yangkai Sun and Qian Wang	70-75
<b>Is There Any Match Between Students’learning Style, Strategies, And Lecturers’ Teaching Techniques ? A Case Study of Benin EFL Students at the University Level</b>  Arlette J. Viviane Hounhanou	76-89
<b>The Level of Inclusion of the Sustainable Development Concept in Postgraduate Students’ Arabic Researches: Saudi Arabia as a Model</b>  WafaOwaydhahAlharbi	90-103

**IS THERE ANY MATCH BETWEEN STUDENTS' LEARNING STYLE, STRATEGIES, AND LECTURERS' TEACHING TECHNIQUES ? A CASE STUDY OF BENIN EFL STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL.**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Educational research has identified a number of factors for some of the differences in how students learn (Reid, 1987). One of these factors, learning styles, is of widespread interest in the education area. In fact, each of us has an individual learning style, which means that we learn and process information in different ways. Also, there has been a prominent shift within the field of learning strategies, and teaching techniques over the last twenty years. How students process new information and what kinds of strategies they employ to understand, learn or remember the information has been the primary concern of number of researchers. Furthermore, the way courses are delivered by lecturers, the teaching techniques used has a great impact on students' achievement. The objective of this current study aims at establishing a comparison between two groups of students at the university level. (A Training College and a Public University) in order to determine their learning preference, strategies, and the teaching techniques that they would best select. The researcher collected data from a sample of approximately 225 students. From the data, there is a significant difference between the two types of students in terms of the appropriate teaching, techniques used by lecturers and their match with students' learning style and strategies.*

**KEYWORDS :** Learning Style, Strategies, Students, Teaching Techniques.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Many scholars have been thinking about approaches to improve the teaching process in the classroom. The role of the teacher is crucial especially in the acquisition of a foreign language. In Benin educational system, curricula specialists and program designers are still re-considering the trilogy of teaching-learning and evaluation and its impact on students' achievement.

In fact, each of us has an individual learning style, which means that we learn and process information in different manners. Students as well as EFL language learners do not interpret new information in the same way. Just as we are different in the way we behave, and feel, we are also different in the way we acquire and learn. For example, according to Tobias, (1994): *'Each of us perceives the world differently, in a unique way, according to our own style shaped by multiple factors, and that leads us to have our own preferences and skills, as well as our own weaknesses and deficiencies'*.

A number of EFL lecturers experience student reluctance when they tackle an instructional activity in the classroom. Some students would prefer to take part in free conversation, expressing their wishes towards a more communicatively oriented approach. On the other hand, there are those who would prefer more emphasis on grammar teaching. Some students may rely heavily on visual presentation; others may prefer spoken language; still others may respond

better to movement activities. It is obvious that students learn differently and at different paces because of their biological and psychological differences. Therefore, EFL lecturers need to recognize the conflict and difference between teaching and learning to enhance the learning process. It is then thought that the lecturer, in making decisions regarding the type of activities to conduct in a language classroom, should take into account such learner diversities.

Findings of this research paper revealed that there is a significant difference between the two categories of students selected in terms of the learning style displayed, their preferences, and the strategies and techniques used by all lecturers. Little attention was paid to students style.

After viewing the literature review on learning style, strategies, teaching techniques, the methodology section will explore in detail the method of choosing the participants. Later, the researcher will elaborate on the different methods of data collection and the ways the data was analyzed. The results will be analyzed in the light of students 'attitude and lecturers' way of teaching. From this analysis of results, a discussion section will link the findings with the literature review showing similarities and differences between the current study and previous ones.

Finally, a short conclusion will be provided. It is hoped that this study will contribute to the understanding of the effectiveness of students' preferences, and their learning style. It would be especially useful to practical programs in higher education in educational institutes worldwide.

### **Objectives of the study**

The main objective of this study is to identify students' individual preference in learning.

The second objective is to analyse the teaching techniques used by EFL lecturers if they correspond to students learning style.

### **Research questions**

- 1- What are students' learning style and strategies ?
- 2- How do EFL lecturers teach at the university level ?
- 3- What type of relation exist between students learning style, strategies, and lecturers' teaching techniques ?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In the field of education, the learning style concept has been recognized since the mid-1970s (Griffiths 2012). The term learning style refers to the particular ways in which individuals engage in learning. We all organize our thoughts, our responsibilities, and our lives in general according to the methods and processes with which we are comfortable (L. C. Sarasin, 1999).

A learning style can best be defined as the most consistent way in which a student prefers to learn new concepts. A student's style is determined by genetic factors, previous learning experiences, her culture, and her society. Few individuals use one style exclusively ; most of us have one dominant style, however students learn faster and more effectively when

instruction is matched to their individual preferred styles according to education researchers. Sue Davidoff and Owen Vanden Berg). They believe that good student-teacher relationships result from teaching to different learning styles.

Stevenson and Dunn(2001) suggest that many students can master easy information in the “wrong” learning preference. For them, but they can learn more efficiently and rapidly when they use their own learning preference. Understanding a student’s learning style puts the focus on that student’s strengths, rather than on his or her weaknesses (O’Neil, 1990). Students must feel free to take risks without fear of negative consequences. If they feel safe they are more likely to open up to new experiences, information, concepts and activities (L.C. Sarasin, 1999).

Strategy on the other hand involved a general’s plan to win a war (Oxford 2000). In broad modern usage, a strategy is a plan that is consciously aimed at meeting a goal. Learning strategies are actions chosen by students that are intended to facilitate learning(Bailey, Onwuegbuzie, and Daley 2000 : 118). Brown pointed out that learning strategies do not operate by themselves, but rather are directly linked to the learner’s innate learning styles and other personality-related factors

Learning strategies are of two main types. The first one is concerned with the cognitive learning strategies. They refer to the steps or operations used in learning or problem-solving that require direct analysis, transformation, or synthesis of learning materials. The second one is known as the metacognitive strategies. These strategies are used to oversee, regulate or self-direct language learning. They involve various processes as planning, prioritizing, setting goals, and self-management.

The other strategies are concerned with communication and social strategies. Communication strategies are used by speakers when faced with some difficulties due to the fact that their communication ends outrun their communication means or when confronted with misunderstanding by a co-speaker. Social strategies are those activities learners engage in which afford them opportunities to be exposed to and practice their knowledge.

### **Teaching Techniques**

They refer to the structure, system, methods, strategies, procedures, and processes that a teacher uses during instruction. Every teacher has his or her own style of teaching.

The Authority style for example is the model where the teacher is centered and frequently entails lengthy lecture sessions or one-way presentations. Students are expected to take notes or absorb information. The demonstrator include media, using different activities. The facilitator promotes self-learning and help students develop critical thinking skills.

Yelon (1996 : 154) strongly advised that teachers vary their teaching techniques in the classroom when he said :

To gain and keep students’attention, vary your instructional procedures. One simple thing to do within a lesson is to break up explanations with examples, demonstrations, practice, and feedback. Vary your program format accross lessons. Sometimes explain the idea to students. Sometimes have students discuss the meaning of a study ; sometimes run a simulation. Have students work individually and in groups. Use varied techniques within a lecture. Use a series of short lectures followed by exercises,

intersperse short readings or videos in the lecture, and ask students to briefly discuss a point with a partner or write a reaction to an issue during a lecture.

A number of scholars have indicated the relationship between learning style, teaching, and learning strategies. Though there have been a few studies that examine the effect of a match between students' learning style, Strategies (Ehrman, 1996; Felder, 1996; Peacock, 2001; Reid, 1987; Stebbins, 1995;), no studies have been conducted in Benin regarding students learning style, strategies, and Lecturers' teaching Techniques. Reid (1995 : 43) noted for example that *"matching teaching style and learning style gives all students an equal chance in the classroom and builds student self-awareness"*

Distinct as they are, learning styles and learning strategies have close relationship to each other. Brown pointed out that learning strategies do not operate by themselves, but rather are directly linked to the learner's innate learning styles and other personality-related factors (Li, 2006 : 68).

Ehrman and Oxford (Oxford, 1990, 74, pp. 311-327) had tried to explore the relationship between learning styles and learning strategies through semi-structured interviews. Findings of this research revealed that *"learners' learning styles may significantly influence their choices of language learning strategies"* (321).

However, another set of studies revealed that the matches between students' learning styles and instructional strategies did not affect the students' learning performance (Akdemir & Koszalka, 2008; Massa & Mayer, 2006). The correlation between academic achievement and learning styles is often explained based on the predominance of traditional teaching methods in higher education (González- Clavero, 2011). Matching or mismatching students' learning styles with instructional techniques affects learning significantly (the 'matching hypothesis') (Bedford, 2004).

A considerable amount of research has confirmed that congruence between teaching strategies and learning styles has have a positive impact on the academic achievement. Stebbins (1995) suggests that a mismatch between the teaching and learning styles could have a negative impact on the students' attitude and thus learning process.

### **Types of learning style**

According to the primary sense involved: visual, auditory, and tactile or kinesthetic.

**Auditory Learners :** For this category of learners, messages are taken in through the ears. They also prefer to learn by listening. They are more likely to follow verbal instructions rather than written ones. They benefit from listening to lecture. Another characteristic is they enjoy discussing information with others. When trying to remember something, they can often "hear" the way someone told them the information.

### **Visual Learners**

They prefer seeing ideas in writing, that is reading handouts. Messages are taken in through the eyes. They prefer to learn using their eyes. They also enjoy reading books for knowledge.

They can easily follow written directions and prefer maps to verbal directions when trying to find a place. They learn best when information is presented visually and in a picture. When trying to remember something, they can often visualize a picture of it in their mind.

## **Kinesthetic Learners**

They prefer active participation that is role play, and simulation. Messages are taken in by the muscles through body movement. They prefer to learn by doing. Writing things down helps to clarify thoughts. They work well with their hands. They learn best when they can be physically active in the learning environment. They benefit from a lab setting where they can manipulate materials to learn new information.

Behaviorists have proposed theories on the approach of the concept of extroversion and introversion.

Extroverted learners possess a social learning style. In addition, they have a verbal learning style as well, often communicating through stories or being the first to volunteer for assignments and projects. Moreover, they are outgoing, quite comfortable at working and they prefer large crowds. They feel sapped when spending too much time alone. They have a wide base of friends.

Introverted generally have a shy nature, and have a solitary learning style. They prefer to solve problems on their own. They like to brainstorm and seek theoretical exploration. They like to think out a problem and weigh options before moving forward. They are slow to take action, too slow, have a very small but close group of friends. They often like the idea of things better than the actual thing.

## **Types of teaching techniques**

Among the methods, the instructor/teacher centered methods and the learner-centered methods are the main fundamentals teaching techniques that exist. In the case of the instructor centered method, the teacher is looked upon by the learners as an expert or an authority. Learners are presumed to be passive. Lecture methods and expository methods are typical examples of such techniques.

Dealing with the learner-centered methods, the teacher is both a teacher and the learner at the same time. The teacher becomes a resource rather than an authority, the teacher plays a dual role as a learner as well. Discussions and the inquiry based approach illustrate *more the learner-center method*.

## **INSTRUMENT AND PROCEDURES OF DATA COLLECTION**

The researcher used the learning style survey designed by Andrew D. Cohen, Rebecca L. Oxford, and Julie C. Chi (2006). The content was adapted by the researcher. The completion of the questionnaire was in two steps. For each item, participants circle the response that represents their approach. First of all, participants read the statement and then rated the degree to which it best described their skills and typical academic habits. There are three main categories activities representing different aspects of their learning style. When they read the statements, they are allowed to think about what they usually do while learning. The questionnaire took about 30 minutes to complete. Later on, a copy of the statement on how they are going to understand their score was provided. Participants were instructed not to spend too much time on the different items. Interview was also used as an instrument. It was directed to lecturers regarding their teaching techniques

**Table 1 : Number of Participants**

<i>Institutions</i>	<i>Number of Students involved</i>	<i>Number of lecturers</i>
<i>Training school</i>	21	03
<i>Public University</i>	204	07
<i>Total</i>	225	10

## DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

### For part I : HOW I USE MY PHYSICAL SENSES

For the training school college, students preference was different. Most of the students were visual, that is 13%, 1.85% are kinesthetic, and 05% are auditory. At the Public University, a great majority of students were more likely to be visual and kinesthetic. 62% of students were kinesthetic. 27% were definitely visual learners and only 10% were auditory learners.

Students at the training college had preference for visual. This was probably due to the teaching materials used by lecturers as they confessed in the interview section. As opposed to the training school college, students' choice in selecting kinesthetic type of learning style was comprehensible at the public University. Those students strong desire was probably to live in an environment where the practice of the foreign language will be easier for them. The low frequency for auditory choice in the two setting was mainly due to the fact that listening skills was not often taught with the adequate material. This could also be explained by the context of the language. All the students were in the dynamic of learning English as a foreign language. They might be having difficulties in catching sounds and intonation, the right pronunciation.

### For part II : HOW I EXPOSE MYSELF TO LEARNING SITUATIONS

The training college presented 74% of extroverted students and an overall of 26% of introverted.

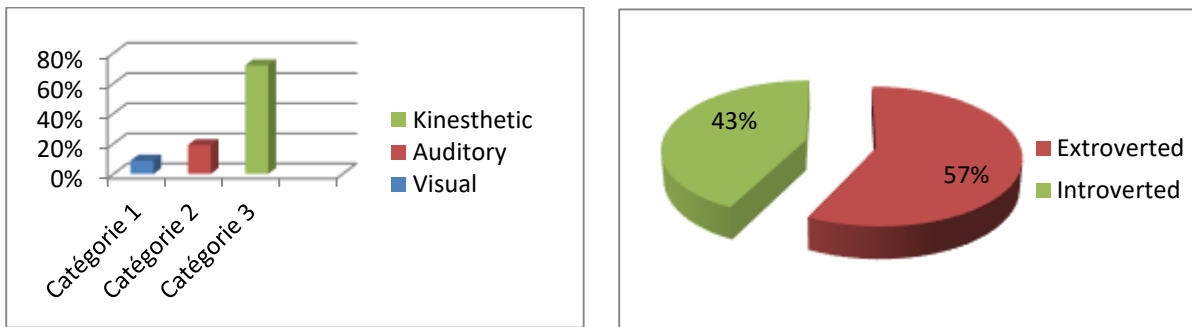
Extroverted at the Public University were about 42 %, and Introverted students were approximately about 57%. The results indicated a high percentage of introverted students at the Public university just because of the system of registration. After their bachelor degree, a number of students have the ambition to attend universities courses, but they are not all qualified to be enrolled in an English program at the department. A great majority did not possess the pre-requisite, the required level to participate in all activities. Contrary to the public university, the training school proceed in selecting the best students. It is obvious that students be extroverted.

### For part III : HOW I DEAL WITH LANGUAGE RULES

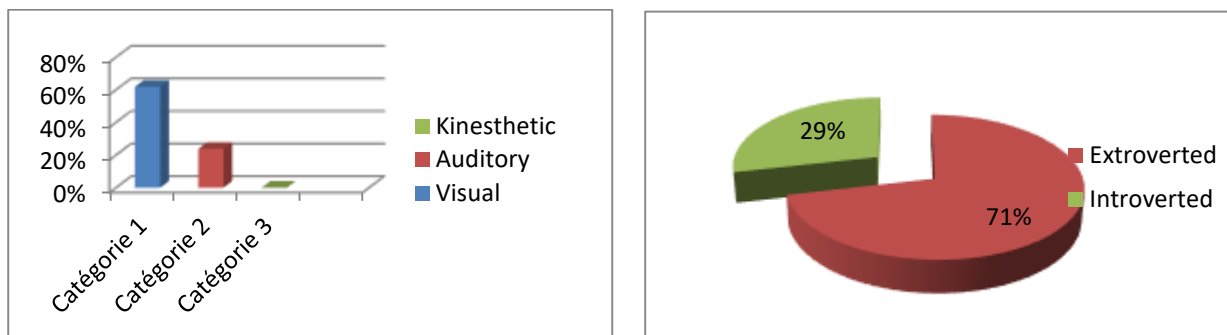
The training school college and the public university showed great interest for deduction. The training school displayed a total of 87% for deduction and 13% for induction. Similarly the

Public Unthe Public University presented 92% students to be deductive and 7.77% indicated that they were inductive. Due to the training most of the students received from high school, it was not surprising to notice that a large number of them had a great score for deduction. Note taking, and teachers' way of releasing information from general to specific were among the best teaching techniques for years.

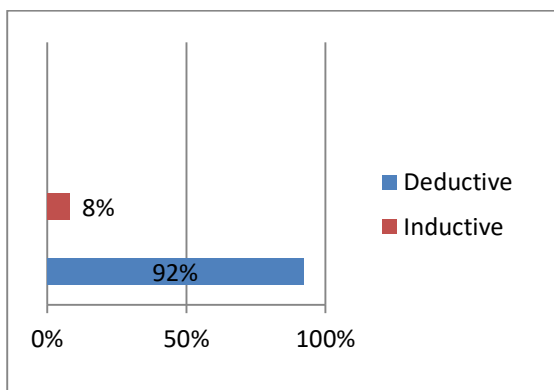
**Illustration of the Questionnaire Results**



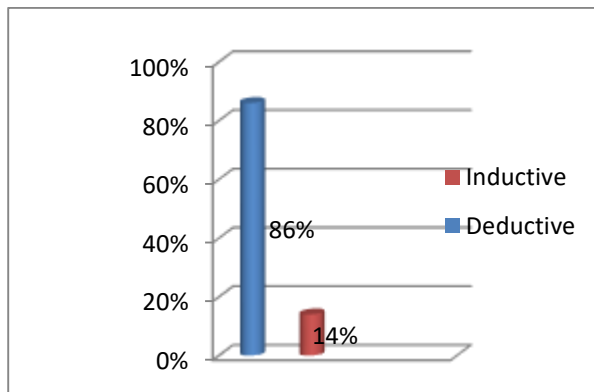
**Figure 1 : Frequency of preferred learning style among students at the Public University**



**Figure 2 : Frequency of preferred learning style among students at the Training College.**



**Figure 3 : Illustration of Deduction and Induction at the Public University Adjarra**



**Figure 4 : Illustration of Deduction and Induction at the Training College**

### Interview Answers

1-For the teaching methods, answers varied from the first university to the second one. At the training college, lecturers most of the time use the interactive method. Students work individually, in pairs, and in group. Discussion is prioritized. But lectures is not common since students are expected to be involved into the daily teaching practice. Theories are somehow minimized.

At the public university, attention is more focused on lectures. The majority of lecturers are confronted to the size of the amphitheater. It is then difficult quite impossible to organize students in groups. Oral presentation occurs from time to time.

2-For question 2, lecturers often use varieties of instructional materials. Lecturers at the training college use power point, and duplicated lecture note. At the public university, lecturers never use visual and Audio. Those materials are not available. The unique material is the duplicated lecture note with some handouts.

3- When it comes to reflect on their own teaching technique, lecturers at the public University confessed that it does not always depend on them. A great majority would like to use appropriate instructional teaching material. Unfortunately they complained on the fact that the department does not hold even one video projector for course presentation. Lecture is used up to 94%. Lecturers demonstrate a lot and an opportunity is not often given to students to practice the language. For the new comers (first year), they prefer note-taking and the grammar translation method is highly used. For literature course, students organize themselves in groups for chapters presentation. Unfortunately only two or three students are actually fluent. Due to the great number of students, they depend heavily on handouts. In the third year, when the number is reduced (150-200), lecturers feel comfortable in assigning students, above all in the use of free conversational activity. Regarding the private lecturers, their teaching goals and methods address a variety of student learning styles. They tend to explain in different ways until they understand. They use big circle methods and students are more likely to achieve well.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study can be helpful in a number of respects. It could contribute to the understanding of the relationship between learning style, strategies, and teaching strategies. The results show that the training college ENS's lecturers adapt their teaching strategies to the students learning style preference. The researcher consider this to the fact of the setting, and the limited number of the students.

Students who are at the end of their study, degree for graduation were pleased with the lecturers' teaching strategies. The choice of their selection on the questions, the score on the different rubric shown that there is a correlation between the size of the classroom and the teaching strategies of the lecturers. The more the size is reduced, the more feel comfortable in selecting their preference regarding the learning style. As a result, students enjoy the teaching techniques.

The present study has shown implications for lecturers. They should reduce note taking practice and involve students in research domain. The percentage of students is high especially those who rely heavily on the deductive approach. More and more, lecturers should consider students' learning preference. This is possible with the reduce number of students at the training school college. However, on campus, lecturers may use varieties of techniques and take into account or cover all the types of learning styles.

Lecturing students is not that bad. It may be oriented differently. Lecturers can make it more interactive and participative. The lecture itself is an oral presentation by the instructor. It is most of the time recommended for trainees with very little knowledge or limited background knowledge on the topic. It is useful for presenting an organized body of new information to the learner. Thus to be effective, the lecture must involve discussion, questions, and answers period so that the trainees or the students be active. The lecture should for example address a single theme, technical terms should be provided and explained. In addition, the lecture should build on existing knowledge, establish fluency, and finally employ a variety of approaches with illustrations.

With regard to the relationship between learning style and teaching strategies, findings are in agreement with those of Peacock (2001) who investigated EFL teachers' teaching styles and EFL learners' learning styles at a Hong Kong University. He found a mismatch and suggested that EFL teachers should teach in a balanced style in order to accommodate different learning styles.

If teachers have insight into their students' learning styles, they will have a better understanding of each student's individual needs and increased understanding of the areas in which that student is likely to require additional support and, importantly, those areas in which they are likely to shine.

If we consider the deductive aspect, in part III, the majority of students reported being taught with deductive methods. However, there is no matching regarding learners' style and the different strategies used by lecturers especially at the public university. After analysis of the results, the percentage shown that learners personal style contradicts lecturers' teaching methods. It is arguable there is not necessarily a connection between teaching and learning. Some students can and will learn in spite of bad teaching, some students will not learn even with the best teaching

## CONCLUSION

The present research study explores if there is any match between Students' learning style, Strategies, and Lecturers' teaching techniques in Benin Universities. The results of data collected helped us to formulate suggestions in terms of the teaching techniques and strategies lecturers may consider while teaching at the university level. The findings showed that there is definitely a mismatch between students' learning style, strategies, and lecturers' teaching techniques. A follow-up study may focus more on learners' individual differences by using other research methods instruments. It is urgent that students value the fact that their teacher is interested in their learning style and will gain insight into the ways in which they can learn most effectively. This will help them in the organisation of their learning and will guide them towards becoming more independent learners. As Peacock (2001) noted, when there is match between teacher style and learner style, students were likely to work harder and benefit much more from their EFL classes.

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**APPENDIX****Learning Style Survey:****Assessing Your Own Learning Styles**

Designed by Andrew D. Cohen, Rebecca L. Oxford, and Julie C. Chi.

Adapted by Arlette J. Viviane Hounhanou

The present Learning Style Survey is designed to assess your general approach to learning. It does not predict your behavior in every instance, but it is a clear indication of your overall style preferences. For each item, circle the response that represents your approach. Complete all items. There are three main categories activities representing different aspects of your learning style. When you read the statements, try to think about what you usually do when learning. It typically takes about 20 minutes to complete the survey. Do not spend too much time on any item—indicate your immediate feeling and move on to the next item.

For each item, circle your response:

**0 = Never**

**1 = Rarely**

**2 = Sometimes**

**3 = Often**

**4 = Always**

**Part 1: HOW I USE MY PHYSICAL SENSES**

1. I remember something better if I write it down.	0 1 2 3 4
2. I take detailed notes during lectures.	0 1 2 3 4
3. When I listen, I visualize pictures, numbers, or words in my head.	0 1 2 3 4
4. I prefer to learn with TV or video rather than other media.	0 1 2 3 4
5. I use color-coding to help me as I learn or work.	0 1 2 3 4
6. I need written directions for tasks.	0 1 2 3 4
7. I have to look at people to understand what they say.	0 1 2 3 4
8. I understand lectures better when professors write on the board.	0 1 2 3 4
9. Charts, diagrams, and maps help me understand what someone says.	0 1 2 3 4
10. I remember peoples' faces but not their names.	0 1 2 3 4

A-Total

11. I remember things better if I discuss them with someone.	0 1 2 3 4
12. I prefer to learn by listening to a lecture rather than reading.	0 1 2 3 4
13. I need oral directions for a task.	0 1 2 3 4
14. Background sound helps me think.	0 1 2 3 4
15. I like to listen to music when I study or work.	0 1 2 3 4
16. I can understand what people say even when I cannot see them.	0 1 2 3 4

17. I remember peoples' names but not their faces.	0 1 2 3 4
18. I easily remember jokes that I hear.	0 1 2 3 4
19. I can identify people by their voices (e.g., on the phone).	0 1 2 3 4
20. When I turn on the TV, I listen to the sound more than I watch the screen.	0 1 2 3 4

### Part 2: HOW I EXPOSE MYSELF TO LEARNING SITUATIONS

1. I learn better when I work or study with others than by myself.	0 1 2 3 4
2. I meet new people easily by jumping into the conversation.	0 1 2 3 4
3. I learn better in the classroom than with a private tutor.	0 1 2 3 4
4. It is easy for me to approach strangers.	0 1 2 3 4
5. Interacting with lots of people gives me energy.	0 1 2 3 4
6. I experience things first and then try to understand them.	0 1 2 3 4
7. I am energized by the inner world (what I'm thinking inside).	0 1 2 3 4
8. I prefer individual or one-on-one games and activities.	0 1 2 3 4
9. I have a few interests, and I concentrate deeply on them.	0 1 2 3 4
10. After working in a large group, I am exhausted.	0 1 2 3 4
11. When I am in a large group, I tend to keep silent and listen.	0 1 2 3 4
12. I want to understand something well before I try it.	0 1 2 3 4

B - Total

### Part 3: HOW I DEAL WITH LANGUAGE RULES

1. I like to go from general patterns to the specific examples in learning a TL	0 1 2 3 4
2. I like to start with rules and theories rather than specific examples.	0 1 2 3 4
3. I like to begin with generalizations and then find experiences that relate to those Generalizations	0 1 2 3 4

A - Total

4. I like to learn rules of language indirectly by being exposed to examples of grammatical structures and other language features.	0 1 2 3 4
5. I don't really care if I hear a rule stated since I don't remember rules very well anyway.	0 1 2 3 4
6. I figure out rules based on the way I see language forms behaving over time.	0 1 2 3 4

B - Total

### *Understanding your totals*

Once you have totaled your points, write the results in the blanks below. Circle the higher number in each part (if they are close, circle both). Read about your learning styles on the next page.

**Part 1 :**

A \_\_\_\_ Visual

B \_\_\_\_ Auditory

C \_\_\_\_ Tactile/Kinesthetic

**Part 2:**

A \_\_\_\_ Extroverted

B \_\_\_\_ Introverted

**Part 3 :**

A \_\_\_\_ Deductive

B \_\_\_\_ Inductive

**Part 1: HOW I USE MY PHYSICAL SENSES**

If you came out as more visual than auditory, you rely more on the sense of sight, and you learn best through visual means (books, video, charts, pictures). If you are more auditory, you prefer listening and speaking activities (discussions, lectures, audiotapes, role-plays). If you have a tactile/kinesthetic style preference, you benefit from doing projects, working with objects, and moving around (playing games, building models, conducting experiments).

**Part 2: HOW I EXPOSE MYSELF TO LEARNING SITUATIONS**

If you came out more extroverted on this survey, you probably enjoy a wide range of social, interactive learning tasks (games, conversations, discussions, debates, role-plays, simulations). If you came out more introverted, you probably like to do more independent work (studying or reading by yourself or learning with a computer) or enjoy working with one other person you know well.

**Part 3: HOW I DEAL WITH LANGUAGE RULES**

If you are a more deductive learner, you like to go from the general to the specific, to apply generalizations to experience, and to start with rules and theories rather than with specific examples. If you are a more inductive learner, you like to go from specific to general and prefer to begin with examples rather than rules or theories.

**Interview**

- 1- What are the teaching methods/strategies you often use ?
- 2- What types of teaching materials do you often use ?
- 3- What is your Personal comment on your own teaching techniques ?