LEARNING PREFERENCES OF LEARNERS OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE AND TEACHERS' AWARENESS OF THESE PREFERENCES

İngilizceyi Yabancı Dil Olarak Öğrenen Öğrencilerin Öğrenme Tercihleri ve Öğretmenlerin Bunlar Konusundaki Farkındalıkları

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Abtsract

Following attempts to place the learner in the center of the instructional process, the question of how learners learn the language has become a focal point of interest. Further, teachers' knowledge of who their learners are and how their learners handle learning issues and cope with the learning problems have assumed great importance. This study examines students' learning preferences and the extent to which teachers are aware of these preferences in an attempt to reveal possible discrepancies. Two survey questionnaires designed to reveal both learner and teacher views were administered separately to both students and teachers at School of Foreign Languages at Selçuk University. The results of this study show that both the students and the teachers are aware of students' dissatisfaction with their achievement. Students report learning preferences that are not predictable by teachers. Teachers generally are aware of the students' preferences of learning and appear to be sensitive to the needs of them.
Keywords: *learning preferences, teachers' awareness of preferences*

Özet

Öğrencilerin öğrenim sürecinin merkezine yerleştirme çabalarının peşinden, öğrencilerin nasıl öğrendikleri meselesi ilgi odağı haline gelmiştir. Dahası, öğretmenlerin öğrencileri ne kadar tanıdıkları ve bu çerçevede öğrencilerin öğrenme konularına ve ortaya çıkan sorunlara nasıl yaklaşıp üstesinden geldiklerini ne kadar bildikleri konusu önem kazanmıştır. Bu çalışma, öğrencilerin öğrenme tercihlerini ve öğretmenlerin bu tercihleri ne kadar bildikleri konusunu işlemekte olup, öğrenci tercihleri ile öğretmen bilgisi arasındaki muhtemel farklılıkları ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlar. Öğrenci ve öğretmen görüşlerini belirleyecek anketler Selçuk Üniversitesi Yabancı Diller Yüksek Okulunda okuyan ve çalışan iki öbeğe uygulanmıştır. Çalışmanın sonuçları göstermiştir ki her iki öbek te öğrenim çıktıları konusunda memnun değillerdir. Yine sonuçlar ortaya koymuştur ki öğrenciler, daha önceden tahmin edilmeyen tercihlerini açıkça belirtmişlerdir. Genellikle öğretmenlerin, öğrencilerin öğrenme tercih ve tarzlarının farkında oldukları bulgular arasındadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: öğrenme tercihleri, öğretmenlerin öğrenci tercihlerinden farkındalıkları

Introduction

From the early 1970s on some researchers in the field have been trying to find out teaching methods, classroom techniques, instructional materials that will promote better language instruction and learning. However, in spite of all these efforts there has been a growing concern that learners have not progressed as much as it was anticipated, given the fact that there are considerable individual differences in language learning such as gender, age, social status, motivation, attitude, aptitude, culture and so forth, what works for one learner might not work for another. Therefore, none of the methods and techniques has proved to be effective all the time, in all classes, with all students.

Consequently, it has been concluded with disappointment that methods as well as sophisticated materials on their own cannot be a solution to the problems observed in language learning. So they can be thought as aids and suggestions.

Having reached this surprising conclusion some researchers in the field changed the focus from the language teaching methodology to the language learner and the variables that affect language learning. One of the most important variables affecting language learning is learners' preferences in the way they approach learning tasks. Students learn in different ways and inevitably they bring their own learning styles and preferences with them into the classroom. How much they learn depends on their specific approaches to learning as well as teachers' approaches to teaching. In what follows, a review of literature is done on the learning styles and preferences of learners, in reference to the possible gaps between learners' practices and teachers' understanding of them. After identifying the questionnaire items, the two questionnaires were administered to students and teachers. Later, findings are discussed in regards to how teaching can be approved in the light of the discussion.

Literature Review

There is a great diversity among learners' learning preferences, as learning preferences are based on different personal characteristics. Such preferences are not consciously learned or used during the learning process. When this crucial point is taken into consideration, it can be said that teachers' awareness of their students' learning preferences are bound to affect the amount of achievement in learning. Reid (1987) states that in order to provide effective language learning in language classrooms, steps

followed by the teacher should be arranged in view of students' learning preferences. Therefore, both teachers and students should exchange their thoughts to create a successful learning atmosphere. This information exchange plays an important role to make teachers and students aware of each others' expectations. This may help to implement more effective learning and teaching procedures in class.

A noticeable gap exists between what teachers do in the name of language teaching (i.e. input) and what their learners take away from the pedagogical opportunities provided in the classroom (i.e. intake). Put differently, the most important issue here is that students do not learn what teachers teach.

The principal mismatch between teachers and learner gives rise to a disparity between what is taught and what is learned. This is only natural in that teachers come to class with a pre-determined set of methods, techniques and materials. One answer to the question why learners do not learn what teachers teach is that they come into classroom with different mindsets, different points of focus, or different agendas. Another answer, perhaps more important than the former, to the question can be found in a mismatch at the level of learning process.

A comparative study into the learning preferences of teachers and learners in the Australian Adult Migrant Education Service program was conducted by Nunan (1989, cited Nunan, 1995) in order to determine the mismatches between learners and teachers in relation to selected learning tasks and activities (see Table 1). The results revealed that there were some mismatches in the reporting between teachers and learners on all but one of the items (Students and teachers agreed that conversation practice was a very high priority.)

In all other cases, there were extensive mismatches between the teaching preferences of the teachers and learning preferences of the students. For example, students gave a low rating for pair work, whereas teachers gave this item a very high rating. The same was the case with students' self-discovery of errors. When the results of Nunan's study are taken into consideration, the mismatches between students' and teachers' preferences can easily be seen. One lesson to take from the findings is that, in order to reduce the strength of mismatches, teachers need to find out what their students think and feel about what and how they want to learn.

Table 1: Student and teacher preferences (adapted from Nunan, 1989)

ACTIVITY	STUDENT	TEACHER
Explanation to class	Very high	High
Conversation practice	Very high	Very high
Error correction	Very high	Low
Vocabulary development	Very high	High
Using cassettes	Low	Medium high
Student self-discovery of errors	Low	Very high
Using pictures, film, and video	Low	Low medium
Pair work	Low	Very high
Language games	Very low	Low

Another study about determining the relation between biographical variables and learning preferences was carried by Willing (1987). Willing got a substantial database from 517 immigrant learners of English as a second language in Australia. Using a questionnaire and interview techniques he investigated possible learning preferences which could be attributed to a range of biographical variables such as learners' ethnic backgrounds, ages, and levels of education, time spent in the host country, and speaking proficiency levels. The most surprising finding of the study was that none of the biographical variables correlated significantly with any of the learning preferences.

In making decisions regarding the procedures that are implemented in the classrooms the teachers should take into account the different learning preferences of the learners. As Corder states:

> For a successful language teaching, "teaching-learning should be dependent upon the willing co-operation of teachers and learners in the interaction and agreement between them as to the goals of their interaction. Co- operation cannot be imposed but must be negotiated (1977:13).

With the help of this co-operation, raising students' awareness regarding their learning preferences might make them not only more prepared for learning but also more analytic about their learning preferences they make use of. So teachers should go far beyond the instructional modifications. They should pursue and co-operate with not only their students but also their colleagues in order to provide practices that will aid learners to locate obstacles, for the presence of which may limit their potential. Therefore, they should equip all of the students in their classes with the knowledge to take the appropriate actions against the things which restrict them.

In an effort to further explain, Reid (1998) asserts that learning preferences have some fundamental characteristics on which they are based. These are:

> every person, student and teacher alike, has a learning preferences and learning strengths and weaknesses, students must be encouraged to '"stretch" their learning preferences so that they will be more empowered in a variety of learning situations, teachers should allow their students to become aware of their learning strengths and weaknesses (Reid, 1998: 13).

The results of this study show that both the teachers and the students are aware of students' dissatisfaction with their achievement.

This study is significant in that it might raise teachers' awareness concerning their students' learning preferences. It is known that most teachers generally tend to teach in the way they were taught or in the way they preferred to learn. Sometimes conflicts might arise because of a mismatch between the teachers' teaching and learner's learning preferences which might have negative consequences both on the part of learner and teacher. For this reason, teachers should know the general learning preferences of the whole class which will enable them to organize and employ instructional materials accordingly. Further, it will enable students to take control of their own learning and thus maximize their potential for learning.

This study might also be useful for the curriculum developers and material producers. As teachers need to have enough time in the curriculum dedicated to both the identification of students' learning preferences and learner training activities, curriculum developers will allocate sufficient time for the training sessions. Similarly, knowledge of students' general learning tendencies might enable material developers to produce materials that both match students' learning preferences and help them to manipulate beneficial strategies. In other words, teachers may have enough time not only to identify their students' learning preferences, they might also be capable of integrating appropriate materials and activities that match the students' learning preferences and they can have better opportunities to assess and guide the learners.

The purpose of this study is two-fold: a) to reveal patterns of learning preferences, and b) to find out whether there are significant differences between students' learning preferences and teachers' views regarding the extent of their awareness of their students' learning preferences at School of Foreign Languages at Selçuk University. With the data to be

obtained, some suggestions for teachers are to be put forward on choosing the appropriate teaching procedures in the learning process. Research questions of this study are therefore two:

1. What are the learning preferences used by students at School of Foreign Languages at Selçuk University?

2. To what extent teachers at School of Foreign Languages at Selçuk University are aware their students' learning preferences?

Method

This is a descriptive study based on a survey research conducted for the purpose of making descriptive assertions about some population. The present study aims at finding out students' learning preferences and their teachers' awareness of these learning preferences. Quantitative data were collected through two versions of a questionnaire one of which aimed to identify students' learning preferences and the other aimed to find out to what extent teachers were aware their students' learning preferences.

For the first version the questionnaire, the data sources in this study were the intermediate learners studying at the School of Foreign Languages at Selçuk University. Their ages ranged between 17 and 29. The proportion of male and female students in the classes was almost equal. Students had different educational backgrounds. Not all of the intermediate level students took part in the study. A convenient random sampling technique was used to choose 76 participants for this study from four classes. Since gender was one of the independent variables that were taken into consideration, it is worth mentioning the number of male and female participants. Of all the 76 participants 28 of them were female and 38 were male. The students have been studying English for the last seven months at this university.

For the second version of the questionnaire, the subjects consisted of a sample of 21 instructors selected randomly from 120 instructors. Their ages ranged between 26 and 44 with a mean of 25. Of all the 21 participants 15 of them were female and 6 were male. All the instructors participated in the survey have been teaching intermediate level students.

The data for this study were collected through a 13-item questionnaire, adapted from Brindley (1984, 1989). The questionnaire had two versions; Version 1 was designed for students and Version 2 for teachers. Each item in the questionnaire explores a particular L2 topic. However, they can be categorized into three major classes: Learning, Error Correction, and Assessment and/or Evaluation. The Learning class is divided into two subcategories: Course Content, and Non-course Content. While Course Content includes strategies for learning through the basic four skills,

learning and expanding vocabulary, making use of audio-visual aids, and general L2 improvement, the Non-content subcategory looks to individual preferences in actualising the Course Content subcategory.

The first version of the questionnaire for students was completed during class time in five classes with 76 participants. The students were required to respond to the questions in 40 minutes. To increase the credibility of the responses the language instructors were informed to remind students that they should be sincere in their answers. The students were also asked to give an immediate response and they should not hesitate and change their answers. The second version of the questionnaire for teachers was given to the instructors at different times.

Findings

Results for each item in the questionnaire are presented in tabular form. In the columns, "Item" stands for the numeric values of the questionnaire items, and options for each item; *Yes*, positive responses elicited from either students or teachers; *No*, negative responses elicited from either students or teachers; and %, responses expressed as a percentage.

In the first table, the results of the first item of both student and teacher questionnaire is presented. In the students' questionnaire, the first item asked students if they were satisfied with their overall achievement in English, and in the teachers' questionnaire, the same question asked teachers whether they were pleased with their students' achievement in English.

Table 2. Satisfaction with achievement

Item 1	Students				Teachers			
Options	Yes	%	No	%	Yes	%	No	%
1) Are you satisfied with your achievement in English?	22	28.94	54	71.05	6	28.57	15	71.42

As seen, 71.05% of the students replied negatively, and a similar result, 71.42%, was reported by the instructors. Thus, both students and teachers were aware of students' dissatisfaction with their achievement in English.

Item 2, as one of the Non-course Content items, was asked to find out students to express whether they preferred working individually, or in any other way, and whether their instructors were in fact aware of that. Results for this item are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Working Style

Item 2	Students				Teachers			
Options	Yes	%	No	%	Yes	%	No	%
1) individually	46	60.52	30	39.47	16	76.19	5	23.80
2) in pairs	40	52.63	36	47.36	12	57.14	9	42.85
3) in small groups	33	43.42	43	56.57	9	42.85	12	57.14
4) in one large group	8	10.52	68	89.47	3	14.28	18	85.71
5) other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

The results for this item suggest that students generally prefer to work either individually, 60.52%, or in pairs, 52.63%. Similarly, 76.19% of teachers believe that students prefer working individually, and 57.14% in pairs. This indicates that teacher awareness of students' preference regarding in-class learning. It is obvious that students do not like working in large groups (89.47%), and their teachers are aware of that (85.71%). Students feel more comfortable, productive and relaxed by working individually or in pairs.

Item 3 was asked to see if learners wanted to do homework as an outside classroom activity. The results can be observed in Table 4 below: As can be seen, only 32.89% of the learners believed that some sort of outside classroom activity would be helpful to their learning, while 62.10% did not hold this belief.

Table 4: Preference for homework

Item 3	Students			
Options	Yes	%	No	%
1) Do you want homework?	25	32.89	51	67.10

Item 4 was asked to see how students would like to utilize the time they allocate for homework. Their options are (1) preparing for the next class, (2) reviewing the day's work, and (3) other. The results received for this item are illustrated in Table 5:

Table 5: Time allocation for homework

Item 4	Students			
Options	Yes	%	No	%
1) preparing for the next class	44	57.89	32	42.10
2) reviewing the day's work	42	55.26	34	44.73
3) other	0	0	0	0

By 57.89 %, students give priority to option (1), that is, preparing for the next class session. 55.26 % would like to utilize this time reviewing the day's work. Learners may usually be inclined to finish a task in the classroom, and spend their outside-classroom time working on new topics.

A rather wide-spread belief among learners is that outside-classroom

interaction and communication with other (i.e. native) speakers contribute greatly to their L2 competence and performance.

Table 6: Learning inside/outside classroom

Item 5	Students				Teachers			
Options	Yes	%	No	%	Yes	%	No	%
1) spend all your learning time in the classroom	14	18.42	62	81.57	7	33.33	14	66.66
2) spend some time in the classroom and some time practising your English with people outside	65	85.52	11	14.47	14	66.66	7	33.33
3) other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Students, by 85.52%, expressed their attitude towards a non-classroom-centred learning. The results obtained from by teachers (66.66%) showed that teachers also have the same ideas with the students. However both teachers and learners do not prefer spending all their time in the classroom.

Item 6 was asked to see whether students liked learning by 1) listening, 2) reading, 3) repeating what they hear, 4) listening and taking notes, 5) copying from the board, and 6) making summaries. The results for this item are presented in Table 7 below:

Table 7: Ways of learning

Item 6	Students				Teachers			
Options	Yes	%	No	%	Yes	%	No	%
1) listening	42	55.26	34	44.73	14	66.66	7	33.33
2) reading	44	57.89	32	42.10	6	28.57	15	71.42
3) copying from the board	25	32.89	51	67.10	11	52.38	10	47.61
4) listening and taking notes	58	76.31	18	23.68	11	52.38	10	47.61
5) reading and making notes	43	56.57	33	43.42	8	38.09	13	61.90
6) repeating what you hear	26	34.21	40	52.63	5	23.80	16	76.19
7) making summaries	33	43.42	43	56.57	2	9.52	19	90.47
8) other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

76.31% of students prefer learning by listening and taking notes. This preference is known by 52.38% of their teachers. The result shows that

learners do not want to adopt a totally passive role in the learning process, since they could have otherwise focused on the first two options, 'listening' or 'reading'.

Low percentages received for two other activities, 'copying from the board' (34.21%) and 'repeating what they hear' (32.89%) support students' reluctance to be viewed as passive learners. Making summaries was preferred by 43.42% of students. Teachers' responses to this were only 9.52%, however. One-directional instruction, i.e., from teacher to student is not the preferred mode for students.

Item 7 was asked to find out as to how learners would like to learn new vocabulary. The options are: "by using the word in a sentence," "thinking of relationship between known and new," "saying or writing the word several times," "guessing the unknown," and "reading with no dictionary help." Results received for this item can be observed below:

Table 8: Vocabulary learning

Item 7	Students				Teachers			
Options	Yes	%	No	%	Yes	%	No	%
1) using new words in a sentence	34	44.73	42	55.26	12	57.14	9	42.85
2) thinking of relationships between known and new	50	65.78	26	34.21	12	57.14	9	42.85
3) saying or writing words several times	19	25.00	57	75.00	3	14.28	18	85.71
4) avoiding verbatim translation	21	27.63	55	72.36	5	23.80	16	76.19
5) guessing the unknown	47	61.84	29	38.15	13	61.90	8	38.09
6) reading without looking up words	25	32.89	51	67.10	5	23.80	16	76.19
7) other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Establishing a semantic relation with other words received the highest percentage, 65.78%. Teachers' responses for this option, 57.14% are similar to those of students'. "Guessing the unknown" is another option which received rather high percentages from both students (61.84%) and teachers (61.90%). For students, after establishing semantic relation with other words, guessing the unknown comes next.

Item 8 was asked learners to find out how they would prefer to be corrected by their instructors. Results concerning this item are cited in Table 9.

Table 9: Error Correction

Items 8	Students				Teachers			
Options	Yes	%	No	%	Yes	%	No	%
1) immeaditely, in front of everyone	23	30.26	53	69.73	3	14.28	18	85.71
2) later, at the end of the activity, in front of everyone	22	28.94	54	71.05	5	23.80	16	76.19
3) later, in private	37	48.68	39	51.31	11	52.38	10	47.61
4) other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

As it is shown in Table 9, 48.68% of students would like to be corrected by their instructors in private. And teachers, by 52.38%, are aware of this preference. However, 71.05% of students do not want to be corrected by their instructors publicly. According to these results, error correction, made immediately, or later in front of other students is not preferable by both students and teachers.

Item 9 is also related to error correction. Here, students and teachers were asked whether the students would mind if corrected by other students or by the teacher. The results are presented in the table below:

Table 10: Peer correction

Item 9	Students				Teachers			
Options	Yes	%	No	%	Yes	%	No	%
1) do you (they) mind if the other students sometimes correct your (their) written work?	26	34.21	50	65.78	7	33.33	14	66.66
2) do you (they) mind if the teacher (you) sometimes ask(s) them (you) to correct your (their) own work?	34	44.73	52	68.42	1	4.76	20	95.23

As can be observed here, a significant number of students would not mind having their written work corrected by other students (65.78%). Teachers also have the similar views with students (66.66%). Regarding correcting their own work, students, by 68.42%, indicated that they would correct themselves with no external intervention, and teachers, by a rather high percentage (95.23%), shared this view with their students.

Item 10 was asked to find out whether students like learning from (1) television/video/films, (2) radio, (3) tapes/cassettes, (4) written material, (5) the blackboard, or (6) pictures/posters. The results received for this item

are given in Table 11 below:

Table 11: Media Preference

Item 10	Students				Teachers			
Options	Yes	%	No	%	Yes	%	No	%
1) television/video/films	63	82.89	13	17.10	17	80.95	4	19.04
2) radio	35	46.05	41	53.94	8	38.09	13	61.90
3) tapes and casettes	39	51.31	37	48.68	13	61.90	8	38.09
4) written material	58	76.31	18	23.68	14	66.66	7	33.33
5) the blackboard	41	53.94	35	46.05	14	66.66	7	33.33
6) pictures/posters	35	46.05	41	53.94	6	28.57	15	71.42

Television and video, being powerful media, receive a high percentage of preference (82.89%) from students, and from teachers (80.95%). Option 4, 'learning from written material', also received relatively similar percentage of preference; 76.31% from students, and 66.66% from teachers.

Item 11 aims at finding what learners find very useful in the classroom: (1) role play (2) language games, (3) songs, (4) talking with and listening to other students, (5) memorising conversations/dialogues, (6) getting information from guest speakers, (7) getting information from planned visits, (8) writing a learning diary, and (9) learning about culture. The results are illustrated in the table below:

Table 12: Learning Activities

Item 11	Students				Teachers			
Options	Yes	%	No	%	Yes	%	No	%
1) role play	31	40.78	45	59.21	11	52.38	10	47.61
2) language games	15	19.73	61	80.26	11	52.38	10	47.61
3) songs	23	30.26	43	56.57	9	42.85	12	57.14
4) talking with and listening to other students	62	81.57	14	18.42	16	76.19	5	23.80
5)memorising conversations /dialogues	13	17.10	63	82.89	3	14.28	18	85.71
6) getting information from guest speakers	19	25.00	57	75.00	5	23.80	16	76.19
7) getting information from planned visits	14	18.42	62	81.57	2	9.52	19	90.47
8) writing a learning diary	14	18.42	62	81.57	7	33.33	14	66.66
9) learning about culture	39	51.31	37	48.68	16	76.19	5	23.80

The striking point about these results is that students believe that

...dent-to-student interaction is most beneficial among the options cited here. Students express this belief by 81.57%. Teachers, by 76.19%, are aware of such a preference, and provide situations which lead to student-student activities. 'Learning about culture' also received high percentages from both students and teachers (51.31% and 76.19% respectively). The results for option 5 show that both students (82.89%) and teachers (85.71%) do not prefer rote learning activities

Item 12 was asked about assessments: how would learners like to develop an idea about their language competence and performance. Their choices were: (1) through written tasks set by the teacher, or (2) ability to use the language they have learnt in real-life situations. Results are presented in the table below.

Table 13: Assessment of language performance

Item 12	Students				Teachers			
Options	Yes	%	No	%	Yes	%	No	%
1) written tasks set by the teacher	32	42.10	44	57.89	11	52.38	10	47.61
2) using the language you have learned in real-life situations	70	92.10	6	7.89	18	85.71	3	14.28
3) other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

An overwhelming majority (92.10%) state that they are capable of telling whether they are doing well or badly in authentic communications and a significant number of teachers 85.71% believe that their students usually assess themselves based on their L2 performance in such situations.

Item 13 was asked if students get a sense of satisfaction from 1) having their work graded, 2) being told that they have made progress or 3) feeling more confident in situations which they found difficult before. The results received are given in the table below:

Table 14: Expression of satisfaction in progress

Item 13	Students				Teachers			
Options	Yes	%	No	%	Yes	%	No	%
1) having your work graded	42	55.26	34	44.73	12	57.14	9	42.85
2) being told that you have made progress	48	63.15	28	36.84	19	90.47	2	9.52
3) feeling more confident in situations that you found difficult before	63	82.89	13	17.10	18	85.71	3	14.28
4) other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Students feel satisfied in seeing themselves performing confidently in situations where they would feel less confident before at a ratio of 82.89%. 85.71% of teachers share this view with their students. The discrepancy between students and teachers is greatest at the second option. 90.47% of the teachers feel that learners would like to be told they have made good progress, whereas students think likewise at a lower percentage: 63.15%.

Discussion

Recall that the research questions were as follows:

1. What are the learning preferences used by students at School of Foreign Languages at Selçuk University?

2. To what extent teachers at School of Foreign Languages at Selçuk University are aware their students' learning preferences?

When students' working styles are examined, it is seen that they tend to prefer to study individually or work in pairs, as opposed to in groups of more than two. This can be taken to send a clear message to the teachers that students feel more comfortable, productive and relaxed by working individually or in pairs, where their voices would be heard, and views listened to and valued. Contrary to the findings, one would have expected to see more preference on behalf of the students for collaborative activities involving groups of three or more, as Turkish society tends to more value group membership rather individual acts or preferences. On the issue of doing homework outside the classroom, nearly half of the students are in favor of doing homework. In addition, students may usually be inclined to finish a task in the classroom, and spend their outside-classroom time working on new topics. Assignments concerning future topics, with new insights and views added seem to appeal more to students. So, most of the students are in favor of more outside-classroom activities and teachers' responses are similar to the students'.

Students prefer to learn by receptive skills and teachers share the same views with the students. According to the teachers, students do not like learning by repetition drills and making summaries for no good reason. However, the results show that there is a big difference between students' and teachers' views regarding this item, for nearly half of the students prefer to use these techniques.

As for the modes and ways of learning, interesting results are obtained. The most foregrounded learning style turned out to be taking notes while listening by a wide margin (76.31%). This preference appears to be known by 52.38% of the teachers. Copying from the board and audio-lingual

activities are not preferred by students. On this, teachers' prediction of what their students prefer was generally right. The next item was on the issue of learning vocabulary. Descriptive statistics revealed that establishing semantic relationships between the existing and the newly learnt words in the form of synonymy, antonymy and hyponymy was the most preferred one. Further, guessing the meaning of newly introduced words is the next one on the line. Data reveal that teachers know that students infer meaning from context rather than heavy reliance on dictionary use. These findings give us good reason to be hopeful of students' learning preferences, as these techniques are some of the most influential in the retention of vocabulary in the long run.

The issue of error correction by teachers has been a hotly debated issue recently. The literature (e.g. Lee, 2004) documents the strong preference of learners to be corrected on the spot in the classroom. The findings in this study however reveal the opposite. Students would like to be corrected by their teachers at a later time and in private. Teachers report that they are aware of this preference. On another front, a significant number of students would not mind having their written work corrected by other students, which is a positive sign in that they do not see their classmates' efforts non-threatening. Regarding correcting their own work, students' responses indicate that they would correct themselves with no external intervention, and teachers share this view with their students. However, students' working styles preferences indicate a contrasting view to their preferences during error correction process.

The materials they prefer to study by are unconventional. A great majority are of the opinion that they would love to have access to media products such as television, films, and videos. Predictably though, they prefer written materials such as books and leaflets. The former indicates that students are open to multi-media products in their leaning endeavor, which is good sign for their motivation of and awareness of new developments.

When asked to indicate their choices on the type of activities in the classroom, an overwhelming majority tell of the importance of talking with and listening to other students. This is important in that one prerequisite of effective learning lies in the dialogic interactions between learners of equal competence. Further, the importance of interaction hypothesis and output hypothesis appears to be appreciated by learners, as they provide an avenue whereby they can put to use their knowledge and thus negotiate language through language.

Testing student knowledge and performance is a crucial aspect of language teaching and learning process. Assessment of language

performance, in their opinion, can best be done through contexts in which they can use the language they have learned in real-life situations. This is positive development on behalf of students. Formerly, students are known to have preferred to be evaluated on pen and paper type of assessment tools. This shift is promising as it can not only influence the type of assessment but also, through the wash-back effect, the teaching methods of teachers. Gladly, teachers are aware of the preference of students on the issue of assessment.

As for the final item, students expressed views that they would only feel satisfied with their language proficiency level if they see themselves involved and actively functioning in English. External judgment regarding their competence and performance does not seem to be realistic nor appealing to them. The feeling of satisfaction in seeing themselves performing confidently in difficult situations received the highest response from students. One striking finding is that a great majority of the teachers feel that learners would like to be told they have made good progress, whereas only one-third of the students think likewise.

Conclusion

The present study set out to explore how students prefer learn and cope with learning problems as well as teachers' knowledge of these preferences. Such a study is important given the current emphasis that learners' various styles, preferences, backgrounds and various other features need to be known by teachers as well as other parties to the education process. Against this background, language learners need to be sensitized on the nature of learning and their own learning so that they could have more choices in learning skills. The results have shown that both students and teachers that took part in the study are aware of students' dissatisfaction with their achievement. Students, reportedly, prefer to work in groups of more than two, which is a promising sign, as it is known that interaction in real-life like groups are significant determiners of the retention of the input in the classroom.

Teachers appear to have known their students' learning preferences relatively well, a finding that even surprised the researchers. In other words, teachers have the potential and interest to observe the way their students approach the problem of learning. Thus, reflective and effective teachers can adopt the most appropriate teaching procedures, techniques and styles that suit the characteristics of learners (Richards and Lockhart, 1994). In addition to the learning benefits, such teachers will create a lively and cheerful atmosphere conducive to learning and interaction.

Further studies can utilize questionnaires that include more items in

order to explore the various characteristics, tendencies and preferences of the students and teachers. To complement the quantitative reporting, researchers can utilize interviews, case studies, and classroom observations. This will not only guide the researchers in coming up with questionnaires that have construct validity but also more sound results. It is hoped this and similar research will narrow the gap between how students learn and how teachers teach.

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