

Learning styles and language learning

(1)

Research in the field of Second Language Acquisition shows that students learn in different ways, so what works well for one learner may not be useful for another. Since learning styles seem to be a relatively stable learner characteristic, teachers may not be able to exert as much influence over this learner variable as, perhaps, over motivation. However, it has been recommended that teachers should adapt classroom tasks in order to maximize the potential of individual learners with particular learning styles. It has also been found that it is also possible that learners over time can be encouraged to incorporate approaches to learning they were resisting in the past. The challenge is to successfully design and deliver language instruction relevant to a multiplicity of learning styles.

It is possible that learning style may vary according to individuals, but also there may be stylistic variation according to gender, age, or nationality. This may mean, for instance, that classes with a majority of male students may have a different dominant style from a mainly female class, and may require different types of activities which cater for their needs. The key for teachers in planning instruction is to be aware of the multiple ways students learn best.

During the planning and preparation stage, teachers should include a variety of language learning tasks so as to allow learners with different styles to do well and achieve success. Materials should be selected from a variety of scholarly books, refereed journals, the Internet, magazines and newspapers, videos, documents, and so on, since different students will have different interests, and will respond more or less favorably to different stimuli. Teachers should also remember that one of the most important contributions of the learning styles concept to language teaching is the understanding that there is no one "best" method for every student.

(2)

In order to successfully teach language to children and adults of different cultures, ethnicities, and/or nationalities, teachers need to become familiar with various methods for teaching diverse populations and develop a strong knowledge of and empathy for the learners. This knowledge includes the learners' cultures and languages, their personality structures, their learning styles, their identities, and their inner selves.

Only then can adequate and appropriate learning and teaching decisions be made. Therefore, this implies that good methods and good textbooks cannot be simply imported and good language teachers cannot be simply transferred from one cultural context into the next and be expected to be just as successful in the new environment.

It is clear that learning is very influenced by culture. In settings where the teacher–student relationship is characterized by a high index in power distance (Hofstede, 1980), classroom communication, for example, might look very different compared to settings where the power distance index is low. This will influence the special characteristics of what good communication looks like. We must also be aware that this index may change over time. There are many factors that need to be considered in relation to good language learning. These factors include learning attitudes, learning motivation, and values attributed to learning as well as values associated with learning and education in society.

Today we know that culture as well as other learner variables determine whether a language learner has a strong drive to communicate and to learn from communication or not. Culture influences whether learners are inhibited or not, whether and how much they practice and so on.

(GRIFFITHS, Carol (ed.) *Lessons from Good Language Learners*. Cambridge University Press, 2008. p. 137).

**ALL THE QUESTIONS IN THIS EXAM
MUST BE ANSWERED IN ENGLISH**

1ª QUESTÃO

IN YOUR OWN WORDS, answer the questions below, according to the text, in complete sentences. DO NOT COPY FROM THE TEXT! Answers which are transcribed from the text will NOT be considered.

1. Explain the important learner variable discussed in the first part of the text.

2. Why should teachers be aware of the concept of learning styles?

3. A predominance of either male or female students in a class may require special attention on the part of the teacher. Why?

4. Why is it a mistake to think that there is a "best method" that supposedly meets all the students' needs?

5. List two ways in which culture influences language learning.

2ª QUESTÃO

Express your views on education by completing the sentences below.

1. Learning a foreign language can be a pleasant experience. However, _____
_____.
2. Teachers need to be well informed about research so as to _____
_____.
3. Since each teacher-learner(s) situation is distinct, the teacher _____
_____.
4. A foreign language usually exhibits the cultural traits of its community of speakers. Therefore,
_____.
5. My success as a language student depends on whether _____
_____.

3ª QUESTÃO

Decide which gap(s) below need(s) to be completed with a word and which one(s) must be left blank. For those requiring a word, write it in the gap. For those requiring nothing, mark a cross (X).

1. Researchers failed to understand ____ nature of ____ problem, he argued.
2. As my friend from ____ school said, ____ life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans.
3. ____ Brazilians are often regarded as friendly and free-spirited, with ____ incredible zest for life.
4. What has been ____ longest war-free period in ____ History?
5. It is now well-known that ____ exercising and ____ sleep are supposed to be very good for your health.

4ª QUESTÃO

Complete the gaps in the sentences below with a form derived from the underlined words.

1. Don't be so anxious. Control your _____!
2. I refused the new position, and my _____ is final.
3. I warned you more than once. I think I gave you enough _____.
4. He was tried by court martial, convicted, and sentenced to death. I was at the _____.
5. Who discovered this? Who made this amazing _____?

5ª QUESTÃO

In the short texts below, people describe situations involving cultural misunderstandings in foreign countries. Fill in the gaps using the cues in parentheses. Write your answers in the numbered blanks at the bottom of the page.

A British colleague invited me to join his friends after work. We 1 (GO) to a pub where he bought me a drink and he suggested a meal in a restaurant. At the end of the meal, I was very surprised to see everyone 2 (TAKE OUT) their wallets to pay the waiter. My friend expected me to pay as well, but I feel it was very mean of him not to pay for me as he invited me. **(Kenji, Japan)**

I 3 (VISIT) Germany for the first time and I decided to pay my most important customer a visit. She 4 (INVITE) me for quite some time. I decided to take her a beautiful bunch of twelve red roses and her husband a bottle of wine. I gave her the flowers, but she just looked embarrassed. **(Douglas, Scotland)**

When I was at university in England, my English tutor invited a group of us to her home. I didn't want to make any mistakes, such as 5 (STAY) too late. So when she brought us a drink before we began the meal, I said, 'Thank you for inviting us to your home and for inviting us to dinner. Could you tell me when we can leave?' She laughed and said, 'So, you can't wait 6 (LEAVE)?'. **(Lu, China)**

I 7 (RECENTLY/ARRIVE) in the USA and don't have many friends yet, so, I was pleased to meet a really nice American in the college cafeteria the other week. We had a long conversation, she told me the story of her life, she showed me photos of her family, and left me her address. The following week I saw her, but although she smiled and said 'Hi!' in a friendly way, she went and sat with other friends. I feel very hurt. 8 (SHE/EXPECT) me to call on her? I feel I need an invitation. **(Hana, Lebanon)**

I was sitting in a bus in Bristol when an elderly lady got on the bus. It 9 (BE) crowded and there weren't any seats. A middle-aged man said very loudly, '10 (YOU/OFFER) the lady your seat, please?' Why didn't he give her his seat? **(Carlos, Spain)**

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____