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A STUDY ON VISUAL THINKING STRATEGY AND LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT:

Students' preferred style of learning - seeking, absorbing, analyzing, grasping and retaining information range from verbal and written instructions to experience based practical learning and so on. These varied preferences are a challenge to the teachers as to what strategy is to be adopted to drive home the subject matter the teacher desires to teach. The learning preferences of students depend on the experience of the learners and emotional and cognitive factors. A learner's characteristic patterns of preferences, strengths and weaknesses in taking in and retrieving information is evidently visible from the effectiveness of performance of the learners. A skilled educator explores the learning preferences of the learners in order to better understand the strategies and approaches that could be employed to transact the content effectively. The role played by the language teacher in fostering effective and fruitful participation in the teaching-learning process is crucial to the development of the language. The interest generated by the modes adopted for the dissemination of knowledge is crucial to the transfer of knowledge and retention in the mind of the students. The retention becomes possible if the strategies used are in tune with the learning style of the learners. The dominant learning preferences were identified by the researcher after administering a questionnaire to the students, holding focussed group discussions and interviews were- visual, auditory, tactile, verbal and logical. The traits exhibited by the learners for the above said preferences were documented. Further it was observed that there was high preference for visual and verbal. The study indicated that the concepts constructed by students in the form of concept maps, helped in understanding and organizing concepts and building connections between personal experiences and concepts. Providing comprehensible inputs by way of pictures, charts, diagrams, timelines, etc. makes acquisition and learning more meaningful. Hence employing a visual thinking strategy which is facile and interactive gets the students to acquire and learn the language with ease.



KEYWORDS: Learning preference, language acquisition and learning, visual thinking, comprehensible input.

INTRODUCTION

The act of comprehending a language is an automatic task that humans perform on receiving comprehensible

inputs. The comprehensible inputs are best assimilated when one has knowledge about the alphabets and its corresponding sounds, word meaning, spelling

and grammar, etc. along with the ability to integrate this information most appropriately. For grasping of information, the overall cognitive abilities and its

constituent skills are of paramount importance. Comprehending a language in a natural way demands a sound knowledge and understanding of a mix of various elements like knowledge and familiarity of letters, good repertoire of vocabulary, understanding of the grammatical elements, semantics and syntax, etc. Moreover, intellectual capacity of the learners, ability to infer, retrieval from memory, and the like are also important factors that are much needed in language comprehension. The general cognitive abilities like inferencing, attention monitoring, memory retrieval, etc. form a meaningful representation of thoughts which in turn helps in comprehending the language.

Language comprehension appears to be a very simple and natural process for speakers, listeners or readers. However, there are many stages the thought goes through before one is able to construct an interpretation of an intended message. There are many cognitive functions that help in comprehending the spoken language. Some of them are:

Attention: This is the ability to focus one's thoughts to verbal and nonverbal behavior of the speaker simultaneously which would help in maintaining focus over time, and flexibly shift focus based on the change in topics, etc.

Organization: This involves comprehending the language by the listener. The spoken language is comprehended with the listener's comments, background information, etc. This demands organizational skill.

Working Memory: This deals with the ability of the listener to comprehend pieces of information, hold on to the references made, the context, the turns in conversation, and the like.

Reasoning: Reasoning process in comprehension involves understanding the intended meaning of what is being heard.

Perspective Taking: A person's perspective helps in critically comprehending the intent underlying a speaker's message.

Difficulties in the ability to process words, phrases and their meanings, text structure, grammar of sentences, etc., causes problems in comprehension. Language comprehension needs to accommodate the comprehensible inputs by way of linguistic inputs.

Objectives of the Study:

The following were the objectives of the study:

1. To identify the learning preferences among primary school learners
2. To compare the learning preferences based on gender.
3. To determine the factors associated with the learning preferences.
4. To explore the various aspects of Visual Thinking Strategy and language comprehension.

METHODOLOGY:

The present study employed Survey method to collect the data. A questionnaire was administered to a sample of primary school learners. Focus group discussion and interviews were also conducted. The questionnaire consisted of a series of written statements to find out the learning preferences among the selected primary school learners. Focussed group discussions and interviews were also conducted on the stake holders to find out the preferred learning styles of the learners. Teachers were interviewed to understand the strategies and methods being adopted in the classrooms to cater to the learning preferences of the students. A total of 120 primary school learners were selected randomly from the government and private schools of Delhi/NCR. The sample of 120 primary school learners was selected by way of random sampling by giving equal weightage to government and private institutions.

The dominant Learning preferences of primary school learners identified by the researcher after administering a questionnaire, conducting focus group discussion and interview were Tactile, Auditory, Visual, Verbal and Logical. The traits exhibited by the learners for the above said preferences were documented.

Pictorial representation of Learning Preferences of the sample indicating high preference for Visual and Verbal

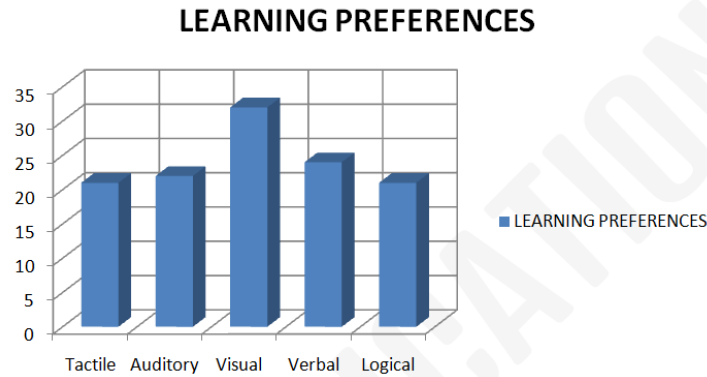


Fig.1: Learning Preferences of Primary School Learners.

The above pictorial representation indicated that the sample had high preference for Visual, followed by Verbal.

VISUAL THINKING STRATEGY AND LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION.

The comparison of learning preference between boys and girls revealed that both boys and girls had high preference for Visual with number of girls who preferred Visual being higher.

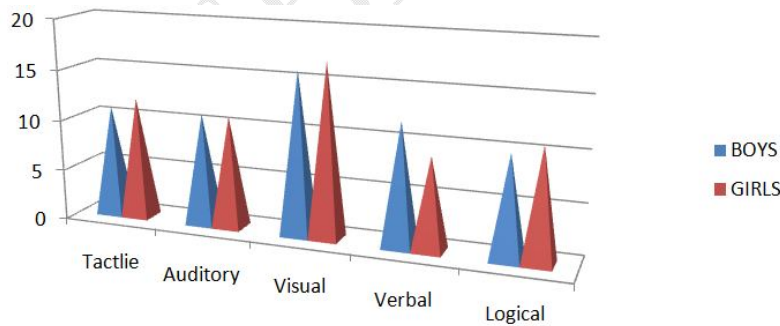


Fig1 - Difference in the Learning Preferences of Boys and Girls

The research conducted on Primary School Learners revealed that in a classroom every child has a preferential way of absorbing, processing, comprehending and retaining the information. In other words, every student learns differently as they have different learning styles. Some learn better with verbal instructions or written instructions while others might prefer practical experience. Students learning preferences depend on the cognitive, emotional and environmental factors, as well as one’s prior experience. It was observed that students’ preferred learning modes have significant influence on their behaviour and learning and that students’ preferred learning modes should be matched with appropriate learning strategies. From pedagogical point of view an individual’s habitual pattern of processing and acquiring information is a central goal of every level of educational system.

The considerable individual differences in language learning such as motivation, aptitude, attitude, gender, age, social status, culture, etc. and factors that work well with one, may not work in the same manner for another. As a result none of the strategies, methods, techniques can work in all classes, with all students at all the time. Having focused enough on the various methodologies of teaching language, it has become imperative to choose alternative strategies to language teaching which would bring about an effective transaction of the subject matter being discussed.

A skilled educator explores the learning preferences of the learners in order to better understand the strategies and approaches that could be employed to transact the content effectively. The role played by the language teacher in fostering effective and fruitful participation in the teaching learning process is crucial to the development of the language. The interest generated by the modes adopted for the dissemination of knowledge is crucial to the transfer of knowledge and retention in the mind of the students. The retention becomes possible if the strategies used are in tune with the learning style of the learners. The role played by the language teacher in fostering effective and fruitful participation in the teaching learning process is crucial to the development and comprehension of the language.

The study revealed that the primary school learners who had predominantly Visual learning preference had a preference for observed things like diagrams, charts, pictures, videos, etc. The learners were found to retain information once they were able to visualize the concept being taught to them. Associating what is being taught with images and techniques, encouraging the learners to adopt note taking using graphs, symbols and diagrams, using meaningful visual aids like demonstrations, video clips to support verbal instructions could be some of the strategies the teachers can adopt to maximize learning. Some of the learning strategies that the learners with preference for Visual could adopt to enhance learning experiences are visualizing the words in mind, visualizing information using diagrams, charts, pictures and other graphic organisers, recopying notes while studying, using colours, replacing important words with initials or symbols, etc. could easily be pursued to enhance effective learning.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

- Contemporary society is overwhelmingly visual in character.
- Students engage in viewing a multitude of images. A paradigm shift has occurred in the screen time of the students confirming the shift from pure text to multiple modes dominated by visuals.
- Students were found to become more engaged and interested while using material spliced with visuals.
- Language comprehension is not solely the understanding of individual text but about comprehension aided by the use of a full range of modalities by the young learners.
- There is a felt need for integrating Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) to support students of primary classes.
- Visual Thinking Strategy is interactive, interpretative and student centred method that enlists participation.
- The carefully sequenced questioning protocol develops close observation skill and fundamental thinking.
- Visual thinking helps in developing a deeper understanding of the subject as the learner is able to create a graphic memory.
- Learners were found to be engaged in accountable talk with constructive classroom discussions, this furthermore enhanced language comprehension.

CONCLUSION

Multimodal text especially visual text should be leveraged in classrooms to support literacy goals.

Teachers need to consider the accessibility, complexity and academic discipline of the chosen images.

Visual Thinking Strategy (VTS) scaffolds curriculum to help students attain academic goals.

VTS helps to meet specific lesson objectives in the different pedagogies and is a great tool to launch lesson and build background for specific learning outcomes Visual based experiences can be used to reinforce the varied communication systems and enhance language abilities and comprehension.

Imparting core curriculum through visuals promotes equity for all learners in the class room. This requires teachers to have additional professional development.

VTS can be well employed as a pre-reading activity to bolster better language comprehension and aid in faster cognition.

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