

LEARNING STYLES IDENTIFICATION AS A KEY PRINCIPLE OF DIFFERENTIATION AND INDIVIDUALIZATION IN FLT



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Abstract

The article deals with the problem of learning styles and the emphasis is specifically placed on the importance of learning style identification and consideration in teaching different learner population in terms of the way they learn in the EFL classrooms. In this article, some ways of differentiating and individualizing instruction to different learning styles are discussed and suggested.

Keywords and phrases: learning styles; differentiation; individualization; learning style identification; foreign language teaching and learning.

ЧЕТ ТИЛИНИ ЎҚИТИШДА ЎРГАНИШ УСУЛИНИ ЭЪТИБОРГА ОЛИШ ТАБАҚАЛАШТИРИШ ВА ИНДИВИДУАЛАШТИРИШНИНГ АСОСИЙ ТАМОЙИЛИ СИФАТИДА

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Аннотация

Мақолада ўқитиш усуллари муаммоси ўрганилади. Ўқитиш усули идентификацияси ва EFL гуруҳларида ўқийдиган турли даражадаги ўқувчиларни ўқитишда улардан воз кечишнинг муҳимлигига эътибор қаратилади. Шунингдек, ўқитишнинг турли услублари учун дифференциациялаш ва индивидуаллаштириш бўйича баъзи йўл-йўриқлар тавсия этилади.

Калит сўзлар: ўрганиш усуллари; табақалаштириш; индивидуаллаштириш; ўрганиш усулини аниқлаш; чет тил ўқитиш ва ўрганиш.

ИДЕНТИФИКАЦИЯ ОБУЧЕНИЯ СТИЛЕЙ КАК ОСНОВНОЙ ПРИНЦИП ДИФФЕРЕНЦИАЦИИ И ИНДИВИДУАЛИЗАЦИИ В ОБУЧЕНИИ ИНОСТРАННОМУ ЯЗЫКУ

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Аннотация

В статье рассматривается проблема стилей обучения, и особое внимание уделяется важности идентификации стиля обучения и отклонения от него при обучении различных учащихся с точки зрения того, как они учатся в классах EFL. В этой статье обсуждаются и

предлагаются некоторые способы дифференциации и индивидуализации инструкций для разных стилей обучения.

Ключевые слова и фразы: стили обучения; дифференциация; индивидуализация; идентификация стиля обучения; преподавание и обучение иностранному языку.

The study of relationships between individual differences of learners and language acquisition development is of great importance in modern language teaching methodology. More precisely, learners in one classroom can be different and individual in terms of language acquisition success due to the differences in their learning needs such as language proficiency level, interest, and learning style. Therefore, the article places an emphasis on the importance of learning style recognition in differentiating and individualizing instruction to meet the needs of diverse learner population in language classrooms.

In my view, firstly it is essential to deal with the interpretation of the differentiation and individualization instruction prior to the investigation of the question further as the notion of learning style is a key concept within differentiation and individualization of instruction. The US Department of Education (2010) defines the terms “differentiation” and “individualization” in the following way: “***Differentiation** refers to instruction that is tailored to the learning preferences of different learners. Learning goals are the same for all students, but the method or approach of instruction varies according to the preferences of each student or what research has found works best for students like them. The term “individualization” is defined as an instruction that is paced to the learning needs of different learners. Learning goals are the same for all students, but students can progress through the material at different speeds according to their learning needs. For example, students may take longer to progress through a given topic, skip topics that cover information they already know or repeat topics they need more help on*”. Based on these definitions Barbara Bray and Kathleen McClaskey suggest their explanation of the term “differentiation and individualization” mentioning that differentiation meets the learning needs of specific groups of learners whereas individualization addresses the needs of an individual learner. A widely spread definition of the term is proposed by Carol Ann Tomlinson (2005), a leading expert in this field, she defines differentiated instruction as a philosophy of teaching that is based on the premise that students learn best when their teachers accommodate the differences in their readiness levels, interests and learning profiles.

It is an irrefutable fact that the way students learn is different, therefore English language teachers should have the necessary skills for dealing with different learning styles in the classroom so as to differentiate or individualize instruction to meet the needs of all learners according to their learning style

preferences. According to David Nunan (2003), as cited in Kinsella's book (1995, p.171), learning styles refer to “...an individual's natural, habitual, and preferred ways of absorbing, processing and retaining new information and skills.” (2, 268). It is clear from this definition that every learner has their own way of learning something new and they apply them in the process of learning. These learning styles seem to be the root of the effectiveness and success of students' learning and therefore, really worth exploring.

Analysis of scientific literature related directly to the study of learning style theory showed that learning styles are classified into three categories: cognitive, sensory and personality styles. As David Nunan (2003) states that “cognitive styles are composed of field dependent and field independent, analytic and global, reflective and impulsive style learners” (2, 270). Sensory styles are constituted by visual, auditory, tactile and kinesthetic learners while personality styles consist of tolerance of ambiguity, left-brain dominant and right-brain dominant learners. As can be noticed from the content of learning style classification, learners vary in their way of learning and grow at their preferred style and learners.

Taking into special consideration claims noted in previous paragraphs, it is argued in this work that instruction should be differentiated according to learning styles of learners. Since different learners can approach the same learning task in quite different ways. Teachers can group learners according to their learning profile and assign tasks based on this criterion. Taking into consideration individual's preferred and habitual modes of perceiving, remembering, organizing, processing, and representing information, teachers assign learning tasks to students and they apply learning styles as tool of differentiating instruction. It is clear from the previously studied works related to learning style research that learning styles particularly cognitive styles refer to the manner or mode of cognition which means that students learn effectively according to the manner their cognition works and therefore instruction is differentiated according to the mode of cognition of learners. This principle is widely applied in differentiation of instruction.

In this research it is suggested that there are some tools of identifying learning styles which can be applied to reveal learning style characteristics of learners. As it is stated in related literature, surveys and questionnaires are considered to be as main methods of identifying learning style of learners. Acceptable measurement or tool is not available to identify various style characteristics fully. However, surveys and questionnaires are best applied to identify learning style of learners. According to Zolton Dornyei (2005), two ways of assessing learning styles of individuals are employed: by relying on the learners' own self-reports on how they perceive their cognitive functioning or by asking

learners to perform mini-information-processing tasks and then making inferences from their performances (3, 132).

It should be particularly noted that Carol Ann Tomlinson, a prominent expert in the field of differentiated teaching, reports in her works (2000, 2001, 2003) that each student learns according to his/her needs, interests, learning style, proficiency level and at his/her own pace. She suggests that instruction should be differentiated to meet students' learning preferences, abilities, styles and interests. According to Tomlinson's views on differentiated teaching, content, process and product should be differentiated or individualized in response to learners learning profile such as learning styles. As cited in her works, *content* refers to materials that students need to learn, *process* describes activities, techniques or instructional strategies while *product* refers to means of representing students' acquired knowledge and skills. She (1999) claims that “*students vary in readiness, interest and learning profile. Learning profile has to do with how we learn. It may be shaped by intelligence preferences, gender, culture, or learning style; Teachers may adapt one or more of the curricular elements (content, process, and products) based on one or more of the student characteristics (readiness, interest, learning profile) at any point in a lesson or unit*” (1, 18). On the basis of this principle, I also claim that teachers should recognize learning specifications of their learners such as styles and adapt their teaching elements such as content, process and product to the learner characteristics including readiness, interest, learning profile of different learners.

In my view, it is important to represent the ways of modification of content, process and product according to the learning style preferences of students as outlined below:

This investigation revealed that teachers can differentiate content in accordance with student's learning styles by using a variety of resource materials, grouping strategies, learning centers and independent learning. More specifically, it can be stated that the use of different materials can provide suitable access to content attainment of learners with different learning styles. And all learners can take the advantage of their learning when they are strategically grouped into the same learning style learners. Through applying learning centers in the classroom teachers can address differences in learning styles of students as learning centers are designed for the need of specific group of learners. Independent work or self-study can also be regarded as a means of content modification because learners can work at their own learning style.

Process can be differentiated to the learning style preferences of students through using multiple tasks, activities, independent learning and flexible grouping. The variety of tasks and activities can facilitate opportunities for

students to learn best at their preferred learning styles. As a result, students are encouraged to actively participate in the learning process at the way they tend to learn.

Product differentiation in response to learning style specifications of learners can be achieved by providing opportunities for students with different ways to demonstrate their learning. Providing that they are conditioned with such an opportunity, they can perform best at their preferred learning style.

To sum up, the following recommendation and reflections can be outlined as a result of this study:

- Learning styles identification is viewed as a key parameter of differentiated and individualized teaching and plays a significant role in language acquisition success;
- Learning styles can be identified by using some methods such as conducting surveys, questionnaires and interviews;
- The curricular elements such as content, process and product can be modified in accordance with learning style preferences of learners.

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