

Learning styles for an inclusive education in the apprehension of the english language

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ABSTRACT

Learning styles and inclusive education are known to be influential factors in the development of learning in the educational environment. In fact, they provide the necessary tools to enhance the learning process, considering individual differences, allowing the inclusion of all students in the classroom. Recent studies on learning styles and inclusive education in English teaching have highlighted the need to determine how these can help to promote learning and foster an equitable educational environment. The research reports that both learning styles and inclusive education are correlated since both are necessary to generate equitable and inclusive educational environments. The results show that learning styles are distinctive ways in which students learn more effectively. The styles most used by the students when learning English are visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. Visual students learn better through visual stimulation, auditory students learn through listening and kinesthetic students learn by touching. Also, learning styles and inclusive education play an essential role in the students' inclusion, favoring environments that are more equitable. This shows within the classroom, it must be recognized that not all students learn in the same way. In addition, activities, strategies, and methodologies must be adapted according to individual differences and the educational needs of all students, to promote inclusion. However, it must also be realized that the term "inclusion" not only relates to students with disabilities but also to the equitable inclusion of all students involved in the educational activity. Thus, learning styles, as well as inclusive education, are necessary within the classroom since both are focused on improving the teaching-learning process.

KEYWORDS: learning styles; inclusive education; English teaching.

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Los estilos de aprendizaje para una educación inclusiva en la aprehensión del idioma inglés

RESUMEN

Los estilos de aprendizaje y la educación inclusiva son conocidos por ser factores influyentes en el desarrollo del aprendizaje en el ambiente educativo. De hecho, estos proveen las herramientas necesarias para mejorar el proceso de aprendizaje, tomando en cuenta las diferencias individuales, permitiendo la inclusión de todos los estudiantes en el salón de clase. Estudios recientes sobre estilos de aprendizaje y educación inclusiva en la enseñanza de inglés han resaltado la necesidad de determinar cómo estos pueden ayudar a promover el aprendizaje y fomentar ambientes educativos equitativos. La investigación reporta que tanto los estilos de aprendizaje y la educación inclusiva están correlacionados ya que ambos son necesarios para generar ambientes educativos equitativos e inclusivos. Los resultados muestran que los estilos de aprendizaje son las distintas maneras en que los estudiantes aprenden más efectivamente. Los estilos más usados por los estudiantes cuando aprenden inglés son visual, auditivo y kinestésico. Los estudiantes visuales aprenden mejor por medio de estimulación visual, los auditivos aprender por medio de la escucha y los kinestésicos aprenden usando el tacto. También, los estilos de aprendizaje y la educación inclusiva juegan un rol esencial en la inclusión de los estudiantes, favoreciendo ambientes más equitativos. Esto muestra que dentro del salón de clases, se debe reconocer que no todos los estudiantes aprenden de la misma forma. Además, las actividades, estrategias y metodologías deben ser adaptadas de acuerdo a las diferencias individuales y las necesidades educativas de todos los estudiantes para promover la inclusión. Sin embargo, también se debe notar que el término “inclusión” no solo está relacionado con los estudiantes con discapacidades sino también con la inclusión equitativa de todos los estudiantes envueltos en la actividad educativa. Por lo tanto, los estilos de aprendizaje, así como la educación inclusiva, son necesarios dentro del salón de clases ya que ambos están enfocados en mejorar el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje.

PALABRAS CLAVE: estilos de aprendizaje; educación inclusiva; enseñanza de inglés.

INTRODUCTION

Learning styles are the different ways in which students can learn, either visual, auditory, or kinesthetic, and this theory is based on understanding the individual differences of all students. While inclusive education is focused on identifying the educational needs of students to ensure their inclusion in the classroom environment. It is important to emphasize that both learning styles and inclusive education recognize individual students' differences and that putting both into practice within the classroom the learning process can be improved. Therefore, all educational actors must recognize that learning styles

exist, to take advantage of this, to create equitable educational environments and in turn empower learning in the classroom.

As we know, humans learn in many forms and they pick the best way in which they can learn something easily, and learning styles help to make this happen (Prystiananta, 2018). Starting from this point of view, and to make the argument simplest, the research was divided into three main parts: learning styles, inclusive education and the Neuro-Linguistic Programming Model (NLP), all of these topics focused on the English language teaching. Many authors have written about the importance of recognizing students' learning styles (Moo & Eamoraphan, 2017; Ajideh & Gholami, 2015; Ghasemi, 2018). On the other hand, several authors are investigated about the necessity of fostering the students' inclusion in the classroom (Ainscow, 2016; Robayo Acuña & Cárdenas, 2017). However, learning styles and inclusive education are issues that are constantly evolving, especially in the field of English teaching, which brings us to wonder, how do learning styles help to promote the students' inclusion in the English classrooms?

To answer this question, the literature of renowned authors who have investigated about learning styles and inclusive education was reviewed in several recognized databases such as Scielo, ERIC for Education, with the aim of knowing the role that learning styles have in learning and the inclusion of all students in the educational environment. In addition, this research also includes some personal experiences teaching the English language. The main goal was to give a more detailed insight into how learning styles influence the learning process and how they help the inclusion of all students in the classroom.

METHODOLOGY

Thorough research was made to find out how learning styles contribute to the English language learners' inclusion in the learning environment. Although the theory of learning styles appeared in the '70s, throughout the years various models/theories that talk about learning styles have appeared as Experience-based Learning (Kolb, 1984), the Brain Quadrants Model (Herrmann, 1976), the Bipolar Categories (Felder & Silverman, 1988), the Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) (Bandler & Grinder, 1988). However, for this investigation, the VAK (visual, auditory, kinesthetic) styles were taken into account, since they are the most used by students when they learn English. To make the research for information easier, the search was divided into three parts: learning styles, inclusive education, and the NLP or VAK, which were focused on English language learning.

A descriptive methodology was used throughout the research, beginning the research on various scientific journals and recognized databases such as ERIC for Education, Scielo, and Google Academic, looking for research related to the topics. It should be noted that most of the research in this paper is of the last 5 years; however, it was also necessary to include investigations of the last 10

years to contrast investigations of other authors. These journals and databases redirected us to distinctive sites with valuable information regarding renowned authors that spoke about learning styles and inclusive education, who included their points of view in their literature. All the information collected was analyzed and summarized in the results of this article. Besides, previous research results made by renowned authors were used to support the general conclusions. However, some statements are the result of point of views and personal appreciation, so they should not be confused with the information cited.

RESULTS

1. Learning Styles in English Language Learning

Learning styles are essential when they come to learning, and nowadays these methods are increasingly becoming more relevant with the evolution of education. The 21st century has taken into account the students' individual preferences (Gülçin & Cihad, 2020) and lecturers have adapted their ways of teaching according to the preferences of their students (Chetty, Handayani, Sahabudin, *et al.*, 2019). Learning styles are personal qualities that influence students' performance in the learning environment (Mašić, Polz & Bećirović, 2020) and teachers understanding the students' individual differences demonstrate the usefulness of them (Li, *et al.*, 2016). Every person has a personal way of obtaining and processing new information (Sudarat & Yupares, 2020; Gülçin & Cihad, 2020), for this reason, students acquire a foreign language in many ways (Faisal, 2019).

Language students have different levels of learning (Khodabakhshzadeh, Hosseinnia & Rahimian, 2017), and when it comes to native or foreign languages, every individual develops the language with different abilities or different ways (Ünsal, 2018). For instance, some students perform better when it comes to role-plays while on the other hand, other students prefer to improve throughout reading and listening (Sudarat & Yupares, 2020). Likewise, Alqunayeer & Zamir (2015) define the learning styles as a group of common ways to learn whose theory is based on the comprehension of the students' differences and their processing capabilities, which lead us to deal with these differences in a specific way. A learning style is a component that scholars habitually use mechanically, which relates to the point that students are aware of the methods that can be applied to increase learning (Muniandy & Shuib, 2016), in addition, they allow teachers to understand the manners in which students process the information better, acquire knowledge and learn more easily (Moayyeri, 2015).

In fact, the teachers' role is to implant these teaching styles to improve the students' learning results and raise their motivation (Khodabakhshzadeh, Hosseinnia & Rahimian, 2017). Teachers have to recognize that learning styles exist to bargain with them properly. Students learn individually in different ways, and thus the methodology ought to be diverse, but respecting their

students' diversity (Gargallo-Camarillas & Girón-García, 2016; Dewi, *et al.*, 2019). In the same way, Alqadi (2015) and Hsu & Chen (2016) mention that teachers ought to be cognizant of the manners their students obtain, recall and recover information to develop specific teaching strategies to give the students the opportunity to use their preferred way of learning and at the same time, they have fun learning. On the other hand, learning styles can provide enough tools to EFL teachers to adapt and accommodate the instruction inside/outside the classroom (Suherman, 2018).

Lastly, it is essential to comprehend that students are individually different in their way of learning, and for this reason, every student ought to be heartened to learn in all reasonable forms (Moo & Eamoraphan, 2017). Besides, every learning style that each student applies has an influence on their performance in class (Bećirović, Mašić & Polz, 2020), hence, students can adapt their ways of learning to make them suitable for achieving different assignments (Ajideh & Gholami, 2015). Furthermore, Silitonga, *et al.* (2020) raises that learning styles are determinant agents that define the students' progress in foreign language classrooms and it is important to match the learning activities with the student's learning style to enhance the learning. Besides, students point to implement and modify the information collected into a style that allows them to improve their language skills. In conclusion, EFL students must be aware of the learning styles they could apply to obtain favorable outcomes in their SL/FL learning exposure and thus approach a more natural presentation (Ajideh & Gholami, 2015).

2. Inclusive Education in English Language Learning

Currently, inclusive education is a field in continuous evolution, since every day new researches are carried out and new methodologies/strategies are created to improve the teaching-learning process. Moreover, the field of teaching languages is not exempt, because through the creation of inclusive environments in the language classrooms, it can favor the equitable learning of all students. As Slee (2018) refers, inclusive education is focused on ensuring the inclusion of all students within an educational environment, respecting individual differences so that they can learn successfully and effectively. Likewise, Lewis & Doorlag (1999), cited by Şimşek & Kilcan (2019) state that inclusive education is targeted to disabled students for involving them in classroom activities alongside their peers with the same privileges as any other student. In addition, the goal of inclusive education is to balance the needs of each student and member that conforms the educational community to provide quality education to students for a better learning process (Mardesich Perez, Torres Salvador & Uriarte Sanchez, 2019).

As time progresses, so have the terms “inclusion” and “inclusive education”, to a sense where these not only focus on individuals with disabilities, but to anyone who is being or feels deprived of an equal education (Meijer & Watkins, 2016). This is the reason why many countries have taken numerous steps to promote the rights of inclusion for every student (Altan, 2020). Students need

support not only from the educational institution but also from their environment; parents, peers and family who greatly influence the lives of students, to achieve positive changes (Robinson-Pant, 2020). On the other hand, inclusion has made it one of top priorities to consider the democratic values and the needs of all learners for a better environment (Meijer & Watkins, 2016). So, educational psychologists have helped to determine why inclusive education is the best approach to create equitable learning environments to English Language Learners (Eun, 2016), since there must be a balance between the educational needs and the necessary resources (Meijer & Watkins, 2019).

Regarding Robayo Acuña & Cárdenas (2017), the classrooms should be places where diversity converges, interacts, and permits successful learning for the students. Therefore, schools should be directed on a path in which they feel encouraged to be more inclusive (Ainscow, 2016) and, it is necessary to maintain a balance between all school actors to ensure the inclusion of all students, especially students with special educational needs (Meijer & Watkins, 2019). In the same way, Tahir, Doelger & Hynes (2019) consider that inclusive learning approach consists of pairing students that have special needs with ordinary students in the classroom environment to achieve successful learning and build equality along the way. In consequence, inclusive educational systems should promote the learners' active participation to facilitate the learning process (Ramberg & Watkins, 2020). Focusing on the role of the teacher in an inclusive classroom, Premier & Parr (2019) and Abbas & Tayyaba Naz (2016) state that teachers must recognize the individual differences of their students, creating an inclusive methodology to foster collaboration among students allowing the practice to be successful. While Vintan & Gallagher (2019) argue that teachers must work together in order to provide adequate support for their English Language Learners. Thus, teachers must include and accept students with special abilities and make them feel comfortable, since teachers' attitudes have a great influence during this process since they will be the guiders of the children (Mata, Clipa & Lazar, 2020).

3. Neuro-Linguistic Programming Model (NLP)

Over the years, theories/models have been created based on learning styles such as the Brain Quadrants Model (Herrmann, 1976), Experience-based Learning (Kolb, 1984), the Bipolar Categories (Felder & Silverman, 1988), the Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) elaborated by Bandler & Grinder (1988), which have sought to find the best way to make learning not so complex for students. According to Sudarat & Yupares (2020), the VARK tries to determine the preference of students when processing knowledge. Furthermore, from the point of view of NLP effective strategies, skills and support are of great importance for a "genius" person to develop innate talents and creative abilities (Rosemarin, 2016). Likewise, according to studies the behavior and strategic thinking in the learning process are developed through NLP, involves the use of language (Farahani, 2018), and contributes to educational development (Kudliskis, 2014). Besides, when it comes to strengthening learning, the NLP is

an excellent method, helping students to improve their learning skills according to their learning preferences (Farahani, 2018).

The first learning style contemplated by the NLP is visual (V), in which students acquire information in a better way through visual stimulation. For instance, visual learning style will be successful in teaching through images, graphics, films and using body language (Mašić, Polz & Bećirović, 2020; Dörnyei, 2005, cited by Ghasemi, 2018). In addition, in accordance with Mulyanti (2017) teachers in their lessons teach by means of diagrams, projections, things that students can observe. On the other hand, according to a study made by Chen (2014) English learners with higher verbal ability and higher visual ability, obtain better results.

The second learning style of the NLP is the auditory (A) style, in which students learn better using their hearing sense. Mašić, Polz, & Bećirović (2020) and Brown (2000), cited by Çokçalışkan & Şener (2018) argue that auditory students acquire the information through listening, so teachers must create content, activities and learning environments where students can develop their abilities better. In fact, auditory learners can use their hearing sense better than other senses to acquire information and learn successfully (Ünsal, 2018), and students learn more effectively when they listen instead of reading (Rogowsky, Calhoun & Tallal, 2015). Also, according to a study carried out by Natividad & Batang (2018), the auditory learning style is more common with older students and the tendency of the students to be auditory increases as the age group augments. They demonstrate that the age of students plays an important role in their learning and in the development of their ability to listen. However, Almasri & Yassin (2015) emphasize that teachers should not assume that students are always auditory; they need to be aware of students' learning differences and teach using resources that complement the students' learning styles.

The third learning style of NLP is the kinesthetic (K) style, in which students acquire learning in a very practical way. Referring to Fisher & Mobley (2014), students have the opportunity to interact directly through kinesthetic learning. Likewise, Mašić, Polz & Bećirović (2020) mentioned that students enjoy what they create with their hands, interpreting the information through touching. In addition, kinesthetic students prefer using the experience and practice either simulated or real (Moayyeri, 2015) and they like the physical interaction with objects like simulation and games during the learning process (Chang-Tik, 2017). Lastly, it should be noted that kinesthetic learning style can be an excellent resource to foster students developing their social and communicative skills, and at the same time, promoting collaborative learning between them.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Both learning styles and inclusive education are intended to encourage learning and students' inclusion by understanding students' differences when they learn. These are essential within a classroom, especially in English classrooms,

since both are centered to improve the learning process so that students learn better. Hence, learning styles focus on recognizing individual student differences, using them as an advantage to make learning easier for students. While, on the other hand, inclusive education focuses on identifying the educational needs of students, respecting diversity to create educational environments where the inclusion of all students are favored. However, it should be noted that the term “inclusive education” not only refers to students with disabilities, rather it refers to all students involved in an educational process.

Despite the fact that there are several models on learning styles, the NLP or VAK Model stands out amongst the other models, since the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic styles are the ones that students tend to develop mostly in English classrooms. As supported by various studies, NLP is an excellent model to strengthen learning, as it helps students improve their learning skills in accordance with their preferred way of learning. However, the relationship between teachers and students is reciprocal, so both must accept the existence of learning styles so that the learning process occurs in the best possible way. On the other hand, it should be highlighted that the way in which students learn is not static and that they cannot only learn in one way. Therefore, it is not possible to assume that a student learns only in an auditory way, for instance. His/her style of learning can change as he/she grows up or he/she can even adopt more than one way of learning like visual-kinesthetic, auditory-kinesthetic, auditory-visual.

Although the term inclusive education initially only referred to students with disabilities, this term has evolved to the present day. It has focused on the inclusion of all students taking into account their educational needs to favor an inclusive educational environment. However, the cultural gap continues to exist, which does not allow the inclusion of all students in classrooms. Nowadays, schools are looking to change this issue by promoting an inclusive and tolerant culture towards individual differences. One of the best ways to achieve an inclusive culture in the classroom is to involve students with disabilities in the same activities as their peers without giving them any privileges for their condition. Therefore, educational systems in the world ought to adopt a methodology that allows the inclusion of all students, respecting the diversity and individual differences, so that there is an equitable teaching-learning process.

It is important that teachers be aware of learning styles, since many times they fall into the mistake of assuming that all students learn in the same way. The reality is that students are different in their ways of learning and teachers must teach respecting those differences. In addition, once teachers and students recognize the existence of learning styles, they have to use them as an advantage to achieve effective learning, which will also allow the inclusion of all students. Nevertheless, teachers not only should encourage the inclusion of all students in the classroom, making them feel comfortable and motivated. They

also must maintain a good attitude during classes, fostering an inclusive environment, and guiding students along the learning process.

The activities, strategies, and methodologies that focus on learning styles and the inclusion of students have been improving largely with the emergence of "the digital age" (Internet, Applications, Programs, etc.) and educational reforms. In addition, research will probably increase to determine their utility in classrooms and the role they have in learning in general. In the future, methodologies that are more elaborate can be expected to develop more inclusive learning environments by respecting the individual differences of all students. Also, these methodologies are likely to include technological support (videos, innovative applications, virtual platforms) that will allow better development of students in the educational environment. These innovations will inevitably require further research.

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