

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Factors in English Language Learning

There are many factors affecting English language learning, resulting in different levels of success. These include sociocultural factors, program characteristics, teacher and learner factors (Richards, 1985). Each of them has different impacts on language learning and teaching.

Sociocultural factors: English plays a different role in each society. In some societies, English is a medium of communication. People use English in their everyday life and they need to learn it. Thus, knowing English in these societies is a must for most members. On the other hand, in the societies where English is only a **foreign language**, people will have their own choice whether they want to learn English or not. In these societies people learn English for different purposes. They may use English to conduct business around the world, to further their studies, or to take on jobs like tour guides, hotel receptionists, or flight attendants. Thus, learners in such societies may have different motivation in learning English. Learners with high motivation tend to succeed in their learning while those who do not like English and learn it because they are required to, tend to have low achievement.

Program characteristics: A successful language program depends upon many factors. These include degree of teachers' preparation, characteristics of the student population, software and materials, and testing and evaluation procedures.

Teacher factors: Learners' success in English language learning also depends on the teachers because they are the ones who plan what to teach, how to teach it, and

how to evaluate what has been taught. Thus, teachers should possess not only knowledge in the language itself but also the knowledge of how to teach it. If the teachers do not possess teaching ability and have little teaching experience, or have not been properly trained to teach, this may result in unsuccessful teaching and learning. Besides the teachers' knowledge and experience, their teaching styles may also affect language teaching and learning. The teachers' teaching styles depend on their beliefs in language learning, their attitudes to the language itself and their personality. Most teachers may teach in the way they like to or believe it to be an effective language teaching. However, learning may not be effective if the teachers do not teach in the way the learners would like to be taught, which will lead to a lack in the matching between learning and teaching styles.

Learner factors: Students come to a language program with different profiles of talents, interests, learning habits, and purposes that may crucially affect their performance in a language course. In general, learners differ in the ability they bring to the task. For example, some students have a good ear and pick up languages quickly; others require much greater effort to achieve the same results. If the students have learned in their preferred ways, that is, if their learning styles match with their teachers' teaching styles, their achievement will probably improve. Students may also differ in their personal goals and motivation. Some may learn a language because they see its relevance to their future occupational or educational goals. Learners who have goals in learning English will be more likely to succeed in learning than those who do not.

Learning and Teaching Styles

The factors mentioned above—sociocultural factors, program characteristics, teacher and learner factors—greatly affect language learning. However, this study will focus only on teaching and learning styles which are “relatively stable indicators

of how learners and teachers perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning and teaching environment” (cited in Brown, 2000). Since teaching and learning styles are prominent factors and they are inherent in classroom situations, they need to be focused on in depth.

1. Learning Styles

In one learner, there are many styles combined to differentiate one person from another. Those styles form types of learners or learning style profiles. Learning styles are internally based on characteristics of individuals for the intake or understanding of new information (Reid, 1995). All learners have their own ways of learning. So, individual learners approach a task with a different set of skills and preferred strategies because of their different learning styles (Lightbown and Spada, 1999). Learning styles are defined in various ways. Kinsella (in Reid, 1995) defines learning styles as

an individual’s natural, habitual, and preferred ways of absorbing, processing, and retaining new information and skills which persist regardless of teaching methods or content area. Everyone has a learning style, but each person’s is as unique as a signature. Each signature appears to be influenced by both nature and nurture; it is a biological and developmental set of characteristics (1995:171).

For Brown (2000), learning style is

a term that refers to consistent and rather enduring tendencies or preference *within* an individual. Styles are those general characteristics of intellectual functioning (and personality type, as well) that especially pertain to you as an individual, and that differentiate you from someone else. For example, you might be more visually oriented, more tolerant of ambiguity, or more reflective than someone else—these would be styles that characterize a general pattern in your thinking or feeling (2000:113).

For Nunan (1991), learning styles are

any individual's preferred ways of going about learning. It is generally considered that one's learning styles will result from personality variables, including psychological and cognitive make up, socio-cultural background, and educational experience (1991:168).

Though these researchers view learning styles differently, all the three definitions emphasize learning styles as learners' unique ways of learning. However, their beliefs about learning styles are different. Kinsella (in Reid, 1995) believes that learning styles are influenced by both nature and nurture so it is a biological and developmental set of characteristics. Brown (2000) points out that learning styles are those general characteristics of intellectual functioning and personality type. Nunan (1991) states that one's learning styles will result from personality variables, including psychological and cognitive make up, socio-cultural background, and educational experience.

Obviously, researchers define learning styles from different aspects. In some cases, terminology and categories overlap. Below are different types of learners as proposed by Reid (1995), Willing (in Nunan, 1991), and Lightbown and Spada (1999).

1.1 Reid's Categories

According to Reid, (1995), learning styles are generally divided into three major types: cognitive, sensory, and personality learning styles.

1.1.1 Cognitive learning styles are defined as internal characteristics that individuals use to take in and understand new information (Reid, 1995). These styles are divided into three bipolar modes: field-independent/field-dependent, analytic/global, and reflective/impulsive learning styles. Learners who prefer a step by step presentation and like to analyze facts or ideas from specific to general (i.e. see the 'trees' instead of the forest) are field-independent learners. Learners who prefer to

learn in a context or holistically and intuitively and who are especially sensitive to human relationships and interactions (i.e. see the “forest” instead of the trees) are field-dependent learners. Learners who prefer to learn individually, to set their own goals, and to respond to sequential linear, step by step presentation of materials, are analytic learners. In contrast, learners who prefer to learn through concrete experience and interactions with other people are global learners. Learners who need more time to think or consider options before responding are reflective learners. In contrast to the reflective learners, learners who prefer reacting or responding immediately and taking risks are impulsive learners. Reflective learners are believed to be more accurate than the impulsive learners because they are analytic and critical, and they have to always be sure of what to say before speaking it out loud.

1.1.2 Sensory learning styles refer to individuals’ external behaviors used when they are absorbing, processing, and retaining new information (Reid, 1995). These learning styles are a combination of perceptual, environmental, and sociological styles. Perceptual learners learn more effectively through seeing (visual), hearing (auditory), hands-on (tactile), and whole-body movement (kinesthetic). Environmental learners learn more effectively when such variables as temperature, sound, light, food, mobility, time, and classroom/study arrangement are satisfactory. Sociological learners learn more effectively when variables such as group, individual, pair and team work, or level of teacher authority are taken into account.

1.1.3 Personality learning styles: Learners are classified according to their personality into three sub-categories: Myers-Briggs temperament styles, tolerance of ambiguity styles, and right-and left-brain hemisphere learners.

1.1.3.1 Myers-Briggs temperament styles are ways to differentiate learners by using a self-report inventory (MBTI), based on Jung’s theory of psychological types and his views on perception and judgment expanded by the work of Isobel Briggs Myers (1962, 1987; Myers and Myers, 1980 cited in Reid, 1995). From the self-report, the MBTI attempts to identify an individual’s basic preferences

in terms of his or her habitual use of perception and judgment. Learners are divided into four bipolar modes: extroversion-introversion, sensing-perception, thinking-feeling, and judging-perceiving. Learners who prefer to learn through concrete experience, to be in contact with the outside world, and to establish relationships with their peers are *extroverted* learners. On the other hand, learners who prefer to learn individually, and like to be in independent situations are *introverted* learners. Learners who prefer to learn from reports of observable facts and happenings and physical and sense-based input are *sensing* learners. Those who prefer to learn from meaningful experiences and from relationships with others are *perception* learners. Learners who prefer to learn from impersonal circumstances and logical consequences are *thinking* learners. Learners who prefer to learn from personalized circumstances and social values are *feeling* learners. Those who prefer to learn by reflection, analysis, and processes that involve closure are *judging* learners and those who prefer to learn through negotiation, feeling, and inductive processes, are *perceiving* learners.

1.1.3.2 Tolerance of ambiguity concerns the degree to which learners are cognitively willing to tolerate ideas and accept information that counter their own belief system or structure of knowledge. Learners can either be ambiguity-tolerant or ambiguity-intolerant. Learners who prefer to learn with opportunities for experiment and risk, as well as interaction, are *ambiguity-tolerant* learners whereas those who prefer less flexible, less risky, and more structured situations are *ambiguity-intolerant* learners.

1.1.3.3 Brain hemisphere type differentiates learners on the fact that two halves of the humans' brain function separately (Reid, 1995). Learners who prefer logical, analytical thought, with mathematical and linear processing of information and enjoy learning in reflective and self-reliant situations are termed the *left hemisphere* learners. Those learners who perceive and remember visual, tactile, and auditory images when they are learning and they learn better in global/relational, impulsive, interactive situations, are referred to as the *right hemisphere* learners.

1.2 Willing's Categories

According to Willing (quoted in Nunan, 1991:170), learners can be identified as concrete, analytical, communicative, and authority-oriented learners.

1.2.1 Concrete learners are those who enjoy learning from direct experience and are interested in language use and language as communication (Skehan, 1998). Concrete learners are sub-divided into three types: visual, auditory, and hands-on. *Visual* learners like to obtain visual stimulation. For them, lectures and/or conversation without any visual aids like pictures, films, videos and cassettes can be very uncomfortable. Next, *auditory* learners enjoy learning by listening and talking without visual input such as lectures. They are delighted when doing role-plays, talking in pairs or practicing English outside class. Last, *hands-on* learners enjoy movement and working with flashcards. Games would suit their learning styles.

1.2.2 Analytical learners are those learners who enjoy studying grammar and focusing on rule-learning. Analytical thinkers not only see the parts making up the whole, but also tend to be task-oriented. They prefer working independently, too. Besides, they do not like to guess, to use synonyms or to paraphrase but would rather look up the right information because they are concerned with accurate details. These learners would be happy to work with problems set by the teachers.

1.2.3 Communicative learners are those learners who like to learn in socially interactive and communicative events. They like to learn by speaking and listening to native speakers, watching television in English and using English outside the class. These learners see the whole context; they avoid analysis of words, sentences or rules when possible. They not only prefer guessing the meaning of words, using synonyms or paraphrases, but also prefer working with others. This group of learners are happy when they work in pair or in group and learn new words by hearing them.

1.2.4 Authority-oriented learners are learners who not only have a strong need for clarity in all aspects of language learning, but they also like to have control on their learning. They are serious, hardworking learners who prefer their teachers to explain everything to them. They learn by reading. They do not enjoy games in a large classroom situation unless they have time to prepare and understand the rules.

1.3 Lightbown and Spada's Categories

According to Lightbown and Spada (1999) and Reid (1995), some learners learn a language best when the language is presented through visual aids; such learners would fall into the group called '*visual*' learners. Some learn best when they hear the language only once or twice; such learners may be called '*auditory*' learners. Some learn best when they have a chance to write, to draw, or to do a class project; these may be called '*tactile*' learners. Some learn best when they can add physical action to the learning process; they may be called '*kinesthetic*' learners. In addition, some learners learn best when they work alone; such learners may be called '*individual*' learners and some learn best when they work in a group; they may be called '*group*' learners. Possibly, one learner has mixed learning styles.

As can be seen, Lightbown and Spada's categories are the listing of single type of styles while Reid's and Willing's are learning style correlates consisting of a few styles and dividing learners into groups. In this study, the twelve learning styles which are common in the learning and teaching English in Thailand will be covered. They are combination of Reid's, Willing's, and Lightbown and Spada's categories. These styles are *analytic/global*, *reflective/impulsive*, *visual/auditory*, *tactile*, *kinesthetic*, *individual/group*, and *tolerant of ambiguity/intolerant of ambiguity*. The

twelve styles are then grouped into four correlates of learning styles according to Willing' types of learners: *concrete, analytic, communicative, and authority-oriented*.

2. Teaching Styles

Swarbrick (1994:68) proposes that like the students, teachers have a basic set of factors lying behind their teaching styles. They include, for example,

attitudes towards knowledge and learning; preferred means of maintaining control over learners; preferred ways of organizing class activities; positive or negative feelings about teaching itself; beliefs about the purpose of education in general; influences from within the teacher's role set; tendencies towards behaviour which favours the taking of risks or towards conformist behaviours; beliefs about the best ways of learning a language; attitudes towards learners (1994:68).

Thus, the teachers' teaching styles may reflect their attitudes, personality, and beliefs in what constitutes successful language learning. Some teachers may like to present the language through visual aids while some like to present it orally. Some may like writing what is being taught or explained on the board while some may like to add on some physical actions when teaching. Others may like to provide learners with opportunities for individual or group work. So, teaching styles are very important in a language class as they represent who the teachers are and what style they will employ in the class. Some teachers may vary their teaching styles according to their belief, teaching experience or learners' proficiency while others may not.

In parallel with the students' learning styles, teaching styles in this study include *analytic/global, reflective/impulsive, visual/auditory, tactile, kinesthetic, individual/group, and tolerant of ambiguity/intolerant of ambiguity*. The styles are also grouped into four correlates of teaching styles: *concrete, analytic, communicative, and authority-oriented*.

3. Match and Mismatch between Learning and Teaching Styles

Both teachers and learners bring their own teaching and learning styles into the classrooms. Oxford et al (1991:10) proposes that a good match between these styles may result in successful English learning:

academic success in a particular course is also likely to be linked to the style match or mismatch: students whose learning styles match the teacher's style are more likely to achieve good grades than those whose styles are in opposition to the instructor's (1991:10).

However, in the classroom context where there are usually one teacher and many students, it is not realistic to expect a perfect match between teaching and learning styles of the whole class. For instance, in a class of thirty students, there may be only a few students whose learning styles match with their teacher's teaching styles. The rest of the class may have different learning styles and thus, have to cope with the teaching styles that do not match their learning styles.

Teachers who mirror their own attitudes, preferred methods, preferred ways of teaching, feelings and beliefs in the teaching approaches that they bring to the classroom may not realize the importance of learning and teaching styles match or mismatch on English language learning (Oxford et al, 1991). Teachers may use the styles they like, which may match only few of the students' learning styles, leaving the majority of the class to study in the way they may not be happy with. What is more, they are likely to give higher grades to students whose learning styles correspond to most of their own teaching styles and lower grades to students whose learning styles do not match with their teaching styles (Reid, 1995). For instance, a kinesthetic teacher may appreciate active students participating with body movement when he or she is teaching them and tends to give extra points to these students. In contrast, he or she may not be satisfied with students who are not physically active in class activities and may have negative attitudes towards them.

The lack of awareness of the effects of learning and teaching styles match on language achievement may lead to the failure to recognize the importance of consolidating teachers' teaching styles with learning styles of the majority of the classes. This, in turn, may result in unsuccessful language learning and teaching. Hence, a study to establish learners' and teachers' profiles as well as the congruence with each other will certainly provide some clues as to what can be done to make teaching and learning more successful.

Related Studies

Among studies on learning styles and how they relate to language achievement are those conducted by Reid (1987) and Carrell et al (1996).

Reid's study aimed at identifying the learning style preferences of 1,388 ESL students in the US. She used a self-report questionnaire designed to determine the perceptual learning styles. She found that non-native speakers' learning styles preferences often differed significantly from those of native speakers; and that ESL students from different language backgrounds differed from one another in their learning styles preferences. She also found that in a traditional classroom, instruction was mostly geared to the auditory. Teachers talked to their students, asked questions, and discussed facts. Taught by this kind of style, only 20 to 30% of a class could remember 75 % of what was presented. Her study also suggested that students' learning styles preferences should correspond to teachers' teaching styles for a better result. This finding is in line with the suggestions of other theorists such as Barbe et al, Dunn, Dunn and Price, Gregore, and Hunt (cited in Reid, 1987), who all suggested that the level of matching between teachers' teaching styles and students' learning styles should be investigated so the findings may be used to enhance the level of matching between them. Reid (1987) also suggested that the relationships between learning and teaching styles need to be further studied.

Carrell et al's research (1996) was conducted to investigate the relationships between personality types and language performance of a group of EFL students in Indonesia. The students were given an intensive course and tested monthly on reading comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, and writing. They also had to respond to a self-report inventory, the Myers-Briggs Types Indicator (MBTI) which include personality types as *extroversion-introversion*, *sensing perception-intuitive perception*, *thinking judgment-feeling judgment*, and *judging-perceiving*. They found that their EFL subjects were almost evenly divided between *extroverts* and *introverts*. *Extroverts* tended to focus their perception and judgment on people and objects. *Introverts* tended to focus their perception and judgment on concepts and ideas. However, the overall results did not show a significant correlation between learners' personality types and their language performance as a whole, except in the grammar and vocabulary tests. The stronger the students' preference for perceiving, the better their performance on the grammar test; and the stronger their preference for judging, the worse their performance on the grammar test. Also, there was a significant positive correlation between the vocabulary test performance and the *introverts* and a significant negative correlation between the performance on vocabulary with the *extroverts*. To be specific, the stronger the students' preference for *introversion*, the better the performance on the vocabulary test; the stronger the students' preference for *extroversion*, the worse their performance on the vocabulary test.

In Thailand, there is quite a number of studies investigating students' learning styles in a variety of disciplines. However, there are only a few surveying students' learning styles in English classes. The more recent studies were conducted by Chantana Promsiri (1992), Supat Sattacomkul (1992), and Damrong Nimmanpisut (1993).

Both Chantana Promsiri (1992) and Supat Sattacomkul (1992) did a similar study investigating students' learning styles. Chantana's subjects were 1,000 Kasetsart University students and Supat's were 794 students at seven private

universities. They compared learning styles of students classified by class level, fields of study, and academic achievement. The subjects were randomly selected to respond to the student learning styles questionnaire developed by Grasha and Reichman (1975) which focused on six styles of learning: competitive, collaborative, avoidance, participant, dependent, and independent. *Competitive* learners like to compete with other for better scores/grades or teachers' compliments. They view the classroom as a race, in which there will be winners and losers and they have to be the winners. *Collaborative* learners prefer to work in group and share ideas among group members and like seminars and group assignments or projects. They view the classroom as a place to learn and to meet others like in a society. *Avoidance* learners are not interested in what they are studying. They do not participate and share any ideas with other students or teachers. They do not take part in what is going on in the classroom. *Participant* learners mostly prefer to learn all courses they attend, like to work, to share ideas with others, like to ask and answer questions in the classrooms. In addition, *participant* learners like to do activities with others both inside and outside class. *Dependent* learners prefer not to learn other content except what is specified to be learned. They view their friends and teachers as their source of knowledge. They need others to tell them what they have to learn and what they have to do. *Independent* learners, like to think by themselves and to work on their own but they will accept others' ideas. They will be interested in input necessary to them and they are confident that they can learn by themselves.

The results of Chantana's and Supat's studies were quite different. Chantana found that Kasetsart university students favored the *collaborative* learning style at a high level, *participant* learning style at a middle level, and the *independent* learning styles at a low level. In contrast, Supat found that these private university students most favored the *participant* learning style most, moderately favored *collaborative* learning style and least favored the *avoidance* learning style. In both studies, comparisons of students' learning styles, class level, fields of study, and academic

achievement indicated that the students' learning styles were not significantly related to class level and field of study. In Chantana's study, however, academic achievement of the students was highly and significantly associated with students' learning styles ($p < .01$) but in Supat's, no significant difference in learning styles was found among learners with different academic achievement. Besides, in terms of students' achievement, Chantana found that students who were ranked as high achievers, middle achievers, and low achievers mostly favored the *collaborative* learning style and moderately favored the *participant* learning style. High achievers and middle achievers rarely favored the *independent* learning style. Low achievers rarely favored the *competitive* and *independent* learning styles. In contrast, Supat found that students with high academic achievement and with lower academic achievement favored *participant* learning style most while students with medium academic achievement favored the *collaborative* learning style most. In addition, by class-level, Supat found that students in lower class level favored *participant* learning style most while students in upper class level favored *collaborative* learning style most. In terms of fields of study, it was found that social sciences students and applied sciences students favored *participant* learning style most while humanities students favored the *collaborative* learning style most.

Chantana's explanation about why Kasetsart University students favored *collaborative* and *participant* learning styles most was that the high achievers mostly were proficient, well-concentrated, ready, and purposeful in their learning, and their maturity facilitated them to learn by *collaborative* and *participant* learning styles. They might be selected to be the leaders of the groups when they did group work. They helped other learners in learning both inside and outside a classroom. This finding seems to fit the mission for university education to cultivate students who can work with others, help the societies and other people. It seems that the students' characteristics are related to the mission. The middle achievers also preferred the *collaborative* and *participant* learning styles and they could work with both the high

and the low achievers. When the middle achievers worked with the high achievers, they would be the followers but when they worked with the low achievers, they would be the leaders. For the low achievers, they did not like the *competitive* learning styles because they might not have enough proficiency. In the class they preferred *collaborative* learning styles due to their rather low proficiency in learning. Working in a group, they might be able to get help from other members who were more competent.

Supat's finding was that private university students mostly favored the *participant* and *collaborative* learning styles. He explained that this was related to the educational policy at university level, which encouraged this type of learning styles. There were also a small number of learners who preferred *competitive*, *independent*, and *avoidance* learning styles. This group of learners may have different background, personality and previous learning experience or environment. *Competitive* learners are those who usually want to do things better than others. They are usually selected to be the group leaders and they preferred learner-centered classes, would like to compete to get compliments from their teachers or to be accepted by their classmates or to get better scores.

Chantana suggested that there should be further study on teachers' teaching styles and students' learning styles to improve the learning and teaching at university level and Supat also suggested investigating style match between students' learning and teachers' teaching styles.

Damrong Nimmanpisut (1993) surveyed the learning styles of students in English classes at the certificate level in 69 vocational colleges. The colleges were under the jurisdiction of the Department of Vocational Education (Agricultural Colleges, Technical Colleges, and Vocational Colleges) in five different majors: Agriculture, Home Economics, Industry, Commerce, and Handicraft. In his study, he focused on Reid's (1987) six learning styles: *visual*, *auditory*, *kinesthetic*, *tactile*, *group* and *individual*. He found that these students moderately used *visual*, *auditory*,

group, and *individual* learning styles and rarely used *kinesthetic* and *tactile* learning styles.

Damrong proposed that the reason why most subjects rarely used *kinesthetic* and *tactile* styles might concern the subjects' cultural background. He stated that Thai learners tend to be reserved when they are learning while Western learners are more outgoing. In addition, the subjects in this study preferred to work in a group, which might make them feel more confident when learning. Moreover, the Agriculture students used less *visual* learning style than the Commerce students did because the Agriculture students usually had to work in the farms but the Commerce students always did sedentary work. Damrong also suggested that further research should be conducted on students' learning styles in English classes of the High Vocational students taking different majors to see what learning styles they have and whether their learning styles are the same. He also sees the need for studying the relationship between learning styles and English achievement of the students in vocational education and in other levels to find out what learning styles give better results in learning English.

It should be noted that none of the studies above dealt with the level of congruence between learning and teaching styles and its relationship to the English language achievement. Such findings can be useful in attempts to match teaching styles with the learning styles which are most common among learners for the best possible achievement in learning and teaching. Hence, studies need to be conducted in search of such information. Thus, this present study was carried out in order to investigate students' learning and teachers' teaching styles in English classrooms, the level of congruence between learning and teaching styles, and the relationship of the congruence between learning and teaching styles to the English language achievement. Hopefully, its findings will contribute to the understanding of what teaching and learning styles are being used, and the congruence between learning and

teaching styles and its relationship to English learning and teaching which may eventually offer implications for the learning and teaching in Thailand.