

# Learning Style Preferences

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Yum, Hea-Young. 1997. Learning Style Preferences. *Linguistics*, 5-1, 75-84. Some theories can solve the problems of students' failure at school. But the most important teacher's role for those students is to know their learning style. Learning style is the cognitive and interactional patterns which affect the ways in which students perceive, remember and think. Therefore when teachers know their students' learning style preferences, those students learn more with less effort and remember better.

In my paper, I tried to figure out Korean students' learning style in the United States and compare those results with those of native Americans. And also I tried to figure out whether the length of staying in the United States has affected their learning style preferences. (Wonkwang University)

## 1. Introduction

The United States can be described as a 'melting pot'. The proportion of culturally-diverse students in the school population has increased over the past ten years. This diversity within cultural and language groups makes it impossible for educators to "standardize" for all students. From the report of the multicultural education review task force in Florida (1991), we can see that minorities are performing at a lower level of student achievement. There are some explanations of why minority students do poorly in school. One of the explanations is the deficit theory. Supporters the I.Q. deficit theory and the cultural deficit theory place their blame for failure on children and their families. They divert their attention from the entire educational system. Another explanation for the differential achievement of minority students is cultural difference theory. Supporters of the cultural difference theory shift their focus of attention to the schools. In their view, the problem stems from the ways of school and classroom environments which are

incompatible with the students' learning styles. Learning style is described as "the cognitive and interactional patterns which affect the ways in which students perceive, remember, and think. It is the composite of characteristic of cognitive, affective, and physiological behaviors that serve as relatively stable indicators of how a learner perceives, interacts with, and responds to the learning environment." (Bennett, 1990). So, when the teacher focuses on students' learning style preferences, the students learn more with less effort and remember better. Therefore, identifying the learning style preference has benefit to the students as well as the teachers.

The purposes of this paper are 1) to identify the Korean students' learning style preference, 2) to identify the native American students' learning style preferences, and 3) to see if the length of staying in the United States has affected the Korean students' learning style preferences.

## 2. Design, Subjects, and Procedures

### 2.1. Design

A group of self-reporting questionnaire statements were selected from TESOL QUARTERLY(1987). The survey consisted of randomly arranged sets of statements on each of the learning style preferences to be measured : visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile, group learning, and individual learning.

### 2.2. Subjects

The subjects for this research were divided into three groups : Group 1 is composed of the Korean students who have been studying in the United States for less than 1 year; Group 2 is composed of the Korean students who has been studying in the United States for more than five years; and Group 3 is composed of the American students who have never studied in any other countries before. The number of subjects for each group was 20 students.

### 2.3. Procedures

The survey was distributed to the subjects. The directions for this questionnaire are as follows : "Read each statement below very carefully. Decide whether you agree or disagree with each statement. If you agree with this statement, write 'yes', and disagree with this statement, write 'No'. Please respond to the statement with Yes/No without too much thought."

I used very simple statistics for the analysis. I divided the questionnaire into three sets of statements on learning style preferences : Visual/Auditory, Kinesthetic/Tactile, and Group/Individual learning. For each group, I tried to figure out the percentage based on the students' answer of their learning style preferences.

## 3. Results and Discussions

### 3.1. Results

From the results of this research, group 1 students can be described as 'visual learners'. If the students who are in this group had difficulty in understanding what they heard, teachers can write the key words on the chalkboard or acetate on an overhead projector while they are discussing important information. Pictures, slides, drawings, and photos also help visual learners. Koreans have an expression, 'nunchiro haera', meaning that one should play it by eye.

Group 3 students show high percentage of preference on auditory. This group of students can remember much of what is discussed or heard in class. Students who learn easily and well by listening should be introduced to new information by hearing it (Dunn, and Dunn, 1978). This students can benefit from tape-recording in class.

Kinesthetic (moving) and tactile (touching) learning have a similar percentage of preference in all three groups. But group 3 students show a little bit lower than the other groups.

In all three groups, we can see group learning has a low percentage of preferences. Some students who are in group 1 indicated that they preferred individual learning while they were studying in Korea, but they could benefit from group learning in the United States.

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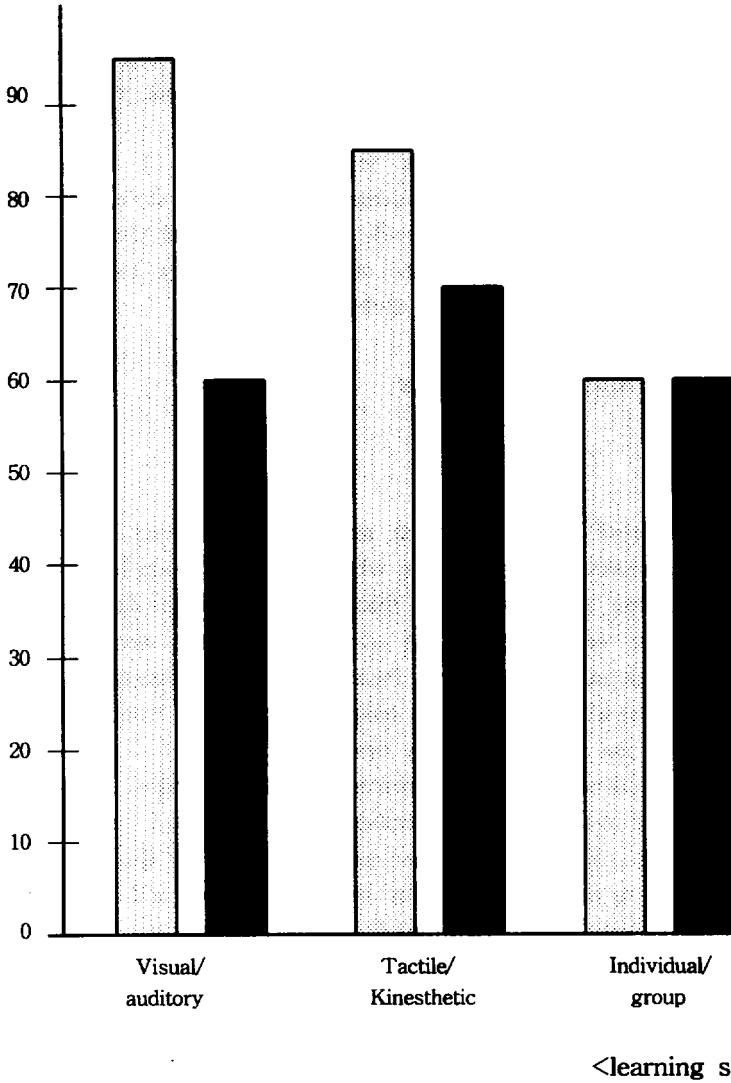


Figure 1 : Group 1

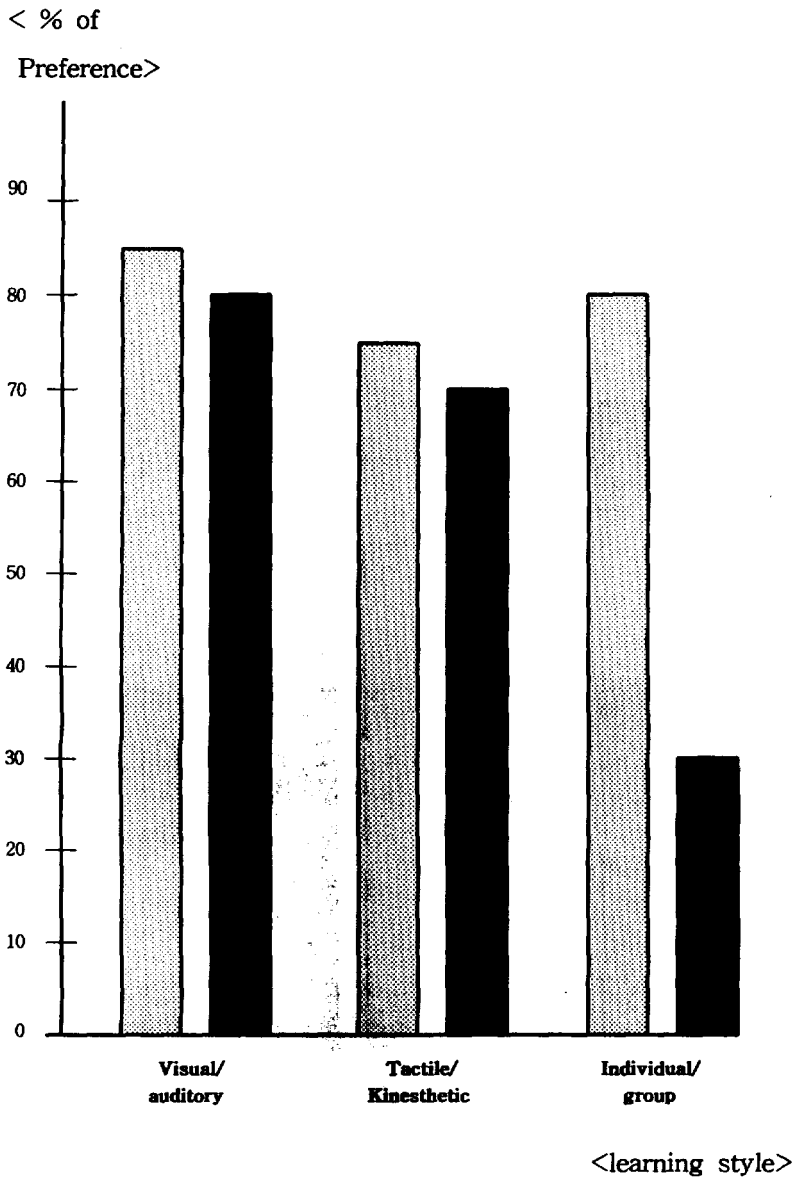


Figure 2 : Group 2

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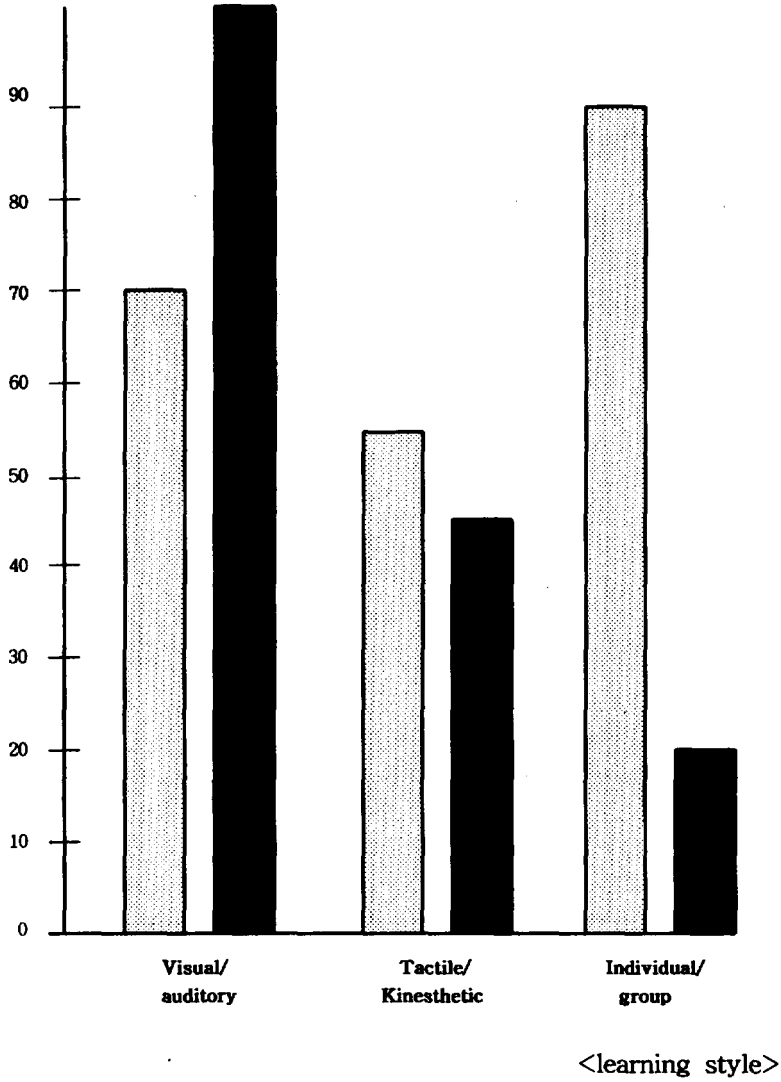


Figure 3 : Group 3

### 3.2. Discussions

The interesting finding from these results is the trend in the auditory learning style. We can see that the longer students lived in the United States, the more auditory their preference become. On the contrary to increasing auditory learning style, visual learning style has been reduced over staying in the United States longer.

Tactile and kinesthetic learning style is the highest in the group 1 among three groups. As foreign students, Koreans can benefit from laboratory experiments and field trips and by manipulating materials. The classroom may be created through simulation and role playing.

All three groups show the low percentage of group learning. Among them group 1 showed the highest percentage of preference in group learning. As I pointed out already, some students within this group wrote down in the questionnaire that they preferred individual learning in Korea but in there they could benefit from other students in the group. Group three showed the lowest percentage of group learning preference. This result appears to parallel with American cultural values which are characterized as 'individualistic' and 'competition'. But from adopting 'cooperative learning style', all of the students may benefit during the class.

## 4. Implications

To develop an effective teaching-learning relationship, teachers should match their teaching style with students' learning style preference. Scarcella (1990) suggested adopting multisensory in the lesson to make an effective learning process. "When lessons are presented visually as well as verbally, and when all the senses are engaged in the learning processes, students are able not only to learn in the way best suited to their style, but also to develop a full and varied repertoire of learning styles (p117)."

Hainer, et al (1990) pointed out that to recognize differing learning styles, teachers need to be observant and responsive to students' preferences and needs and to provide an educational environment which allows all students to learn in their best manner. To do this teachers

should spend their time working with students' parents as well as talking with their students.

## 5. Conclusions

The subjects in this study were selected randomly. So, the results may be changed depending on the subjects. Korean students were trying to adjust themselves in the different classroom settings in the United States.

From this research, I tried to figure out the Korean students' learning style in the United States and compare that result with native Americans. And also I tried to figure out the effects of length of time studying in the United States. From my research I could find the learning style has been changed in response to the contextual demands of the instruction.

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## APPENDIX

### Questionnaire Statements

1. When the teacher tells me the instructions, I understand better.
2. I prefer to learn by doing something in class.
3. I get more work done when I work with a group.
4. I learn more when I study with a group.
5. In class, I learn best when I work with others.
6. I learn better by reading what the teacher writes on the chalkboard.
7. When someone tells me how to do something in class, I learn it better.
8. When I do things in class, I learn better.
9. I remember things I have heard in class better than things I have read.
10. When I read instructions, I remember them better.
11. I learn more when I can make a model of something.
12. I understand better when I read instructions.
13. When I study alone, I remember things better.
14. I learn more when I make something for a class project.
15. I enjoy learning in class by doing experiments.
16. I learn better when I make drawings as I study.
17. I learn better in class when the teacher gives a lecture.
18. When I work alone, I learn better.
19. I understand things better in class when I participate in role playing.
20. I learn better in class when I listen to someone.
21. I enjoy working on an assignment with two or three classmates.
22. When I build something, I remember what I have learned better.
23. I prefer to study with others.
24. I learn better by reading than by listening to someone.
25. I enjoy making something for a class project.
26. I learn best in class when I can participate in related activities.
27. In class, I work better when I work alone.
28. I prefer working on projects by myself.
29. I learn more by reading textbooks than by listening to lectures.
30. I prefer to work by myself.

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