



The Effect of Gender on Language Learning Styles and Learning Strategies among Laotian EFL Adult Learners

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Abstract

The intent of the present study was to investigate the Laotian EFL adult learners' learning styles and learning strategies, especially the effect of gender factors on the preference of learning styles and the choice of learning strategies among Laotian English majors. This research tested the effect of gender factors on Laotian EFL learners' learning style preferences and their use of learning strategies. The participants in this research involved 255 students who are English majors enrolled in two universities in Lao PDR. The instruments of the study were Reid's (1987) Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (PLSPQ) and Oxford's SILL (1990).

The results indicated there is statistical significance between males and females in preference for learning styles and learning strategies; male students learn differently and use different learning strategies from their female peers.

Keywords: Gender factor, university student, learning style, learning strategy

1. Introduction

Over the past 20 years, there has been a noticeable shift in the way that languages are learned and taught, with more focus now being placed on students and learning than on teachers and instruction. Parallel to this new interest, the primary focus of researchers working in the field of foreign language learning has been how learners process new information and what sorts of strategies they use to interpret, learn, or recall the information. As a result, over the past few decades, researchers' primary focus has been on presenting the history of language learning strategies and taxonomies of language learning strategies, emphasizing the significance of language learning strategies for learning foreign languages, and emphasizing the role of teachers in strategy training (Hakan, Aydin & Bulent, 2015). According to research, EFL learners' success in language classes is significantly influenced by their frequent use of learning

strategies, which may also have an impact on other elements of second language acquisition. The exploration of the relationship between language learning strategies and other factors such as gender thought to have an impact on the acquisition process is a special topic of interest for research in the field of EFL (Yilmaz, 2010).

Knowing how students learn is necessary for teachers, as they can understand students' weaknesses and strengths of learning, and then consider using or applying multiple teaching approaches based on students' learning situations (Peacock, 2001). Dreyer and Walt (1996) supported the idea of developing a learner-centered classroom, as these authors put it: "A lecturer who creates a truly "learner-centered" classroom understands and respects the diversity of learning strengths within any group, and offers choices in how information and skills will be acquired" (p. 480). Furthermore, Oxford (2003) recommended that it is useful for language

teachers to consider assessing students' learning styles and learning strategies so that teachers can have a greater understanding of the learning conditions of students. Oxford contends that "the more that teachers know about their students' style preferences, the more effectively they can orient their L2 instruction, as well as the strategy teaching that can be interwoven into language instruction, to those style preferences" (Oxford, 2003, p. 16).

Numerous studies (Akbarzadeh & Fatemipour, 2014; Awla, 2014; Gokalp, 2013; Reid, 1987; Vaseghi et al., 2012) have a similar view on this matter, that paying attention to teachers' knowledge of students' learning styles and consideration of matching teaching approaches with students' learning modes would create a positive learning environment for students. Gender is significantly correlated with students' learning style preferences and learning strategies (Fundu, 2015; Inal et al., 2015; Jhaish, 2010; Karthigeyan & Nirmala, 2013; Radwan, 2011; etc.). Inal, Büyükyavuz, and Tekin (2015) indicated that female learners prefer to study with peers or have more preference for working in groups, whereas their male counterparts have a greater likelihood of learning individually. Accordingly, Radwan (2014) found a similar tendency, that women are more communication-oriented.

In some pieces of research, there are no differences between males and females in learning modes. In Malaysia, Shuib and Azizan (2015) conducted research entitled "Learning Style Preferences among Male and Female ESL Students in Universiti Sains Malaysia." The study indicated that male learners are more likely to prefer any learning style, just as their female counterparts are. Moreover, two case studies from Thailand, Arunreung, and colleagues (2013) and Khmakhien (2012), pointed out that males did not differ significantly from their female counterparts in all learning styles.

Matches in teaching and learning are needed by every educational institution, as the learner's learning effectiveness can reflect the quality of educational settings. In reality, people do not learn the same way. Likewise, it is natural for instructors to encounter a variety of students' learning styles and strategies in a single class. Several researchers pointed out that females have different learning styles from their male peers. For instance, Jhaish (2010) revealed that male students were more in favor of group learning styles than females; female students expressed a greater preference for visual learning styles than the male group.

However, others (Karthigeyan & Nirmala, 2013; Reid, 1987) found an inconsistent result, males were more visual learners. In a study by Naserieh (2009), the findings showed that males are fewer group learners compared to their female counterparts, meaning that male students prefer to learn individually. Khmakhien (2012), on the other hand, discovered that males and females did not differ significantly in all learning styles. There seems to be a conflict between the gender factor and learning styles and strategies in the existing literature. Further research is required to validate the existing knowledge in this area, which is recommended.

This paper examines Laotian EFL learners' learning styles and learning strategies, especially the effect of gender factors on the preference for learning styles and the choice of learning strategies among Laotian English majors. The main goals were to (1) test the effect of gender on learning style preferences in Laotian EFL adult learners and (2) test the effect of gender on learning strategy use in Laotian EFL adult learners.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Research Design

A quantitative correlational design was used in this study to investigate the effect of gender on Laotian EFL adult learners' learning styles preferences and learning strategies in Lao

universities. Creswell (2012) wrote that correlational research is considered a type of quantitative design. Quantitative research requires big data (Dawson, 2002), which means the data to be collected has to be a large-scale survey, as it deals more with statistics. As one of the characteristics of correlational research itself, the investigator has an opportunity to predict and describe the relationship among the studied variables (Creswell, 2012).

2.2 Participants and Sampling Technique

In the present study, there were 255 student participants (120 female) who are English majors from two universities in Laos, with a simple random sampling technique.

2.3 Research Instrument

This research employed a Perceptual Learning Style Preferences Questionnaire (PLSPQ), developed by Reid (1995), as a key instrument for collecting data. This instrument has 30 items across the six dimensions, such as visual learning (5 items), audio learning (5 items), kinesthetic learning (5 items), tactile learning (5 items), individual learning (5 items), and group learning style preferences (5 items). For assessing the participants' learning strategies, the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) of Oxford (1990) was used. The SILL is comprised of 50 items covering six categories of learning strategies such as memory, cognitive, compensatory, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. The SILL is structured by Likert's 5-point rating scale, which ranges from 1 (never or rarely) to 5 (always or almost always), which means participants were invited to rate the frequency of their use of learning strategies.

2.4 Data Collection

Participants were asked to self-report on their preferred styles and their use of learning strategies. According to the literature reviewed, these two instruments have been widely accepted. Dreyer and Walt (1996) recommend that Reid's PLSPQ survey is one of the most

highly reliable and valid instruments. In the field of language learning strategy, the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) of Oxford (1990) has been well-known and employed by English educators and researchers, as it has been translated into more than 20 languages across the globe (Oxford, 2003).

2.5 Data Analysis

Data was coded into the SPSS program and analyzed by employing the T-test to compare the statistical differences between female and male students on language learning styles and learning strategies among Laotian EFL learners. After that, the findings were displayed in the table.

3. Results

3.1 Gender and Learning Styles Preference

The independent t-test results (Table 1) show that male participants preferred these three learning styles more than their female counterparts: visual ($M = 3.50 > M = 3.33$), tactile ($M = 3.89 > M = 3.77$), and individual ($M = 3.32 > M = 3.04$), with $t(427.9) = 4.034$, $p = .000$. However, in the other three styles, it was found that there was no statistically significant difference between groups of males and females in audio ($M = 3.32$, $M = 3.04$), with $t(540) = .144$, $p = .909$; kinesthetic ($M = 4.14$, $M = 4.11$), with $t(540) = .710$, $p = .478$; and group ($M = 3.78$, $M = 3.73$), with $t(540) = .874$, $p = .382$.

Referring to the table above, the results from the independence t-test reveal that there were statistically significant differences between males and females in three learning styles except audio, except audio, Kinesthetic, and group. Looking at the descriptive statistics, males rated higher mean scores for visual, tactile, and individual styles than females. That means male participants were more likely to prefer these three learning styles in their English classes than those who are female.

3.2 Gender and Learning Strategies Use

According to the independent t-test results (Table 2), it is revealed that male participants expressed a higher level of use in these four

learning strategies than their female counterparts: Memory ($M=3.45>M=3.33$), with $t(467.5)=2.320$, $p=.021$; Cognitive ($M=3.62>M=3.44$), with $t(461.9)=3.370$, $p=.001$; Metacognitive ($M=4.11>M=4.20$), with $t(477.9)=2.172$, $p=.036$; and Social strategies ($M=3.72>M=3.45$), with $t(456.4)=3.836$, $p=.000$. However, for the other two strategies, it was found that there was no statistically significant difference between groups of males and females in compensatory ($M=3.59$, $M=3.48$), with $t(540)=1.799$, $p=.073$, and affective strategies ($M=3.51$, $M=3.40$), with $t(540)=1.765$, $p=.078$.

Referring to the table above, the results from the independence t-test reveal that there was statistical significance between males and females in all four learning strategies except compensatory and affective. Looking at the descriptive statistics, males rated higher mean scores for memory, cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies than females. That means male participants were more likely to use these four learning strategies in their English classes than those who are female.

4. Discussion

The results from the independence t-test reveal that there was statistical significance between males and females in English learning style preference. Male participants were more likely to prefer visual, tactile, and individual learning styles than their female counterparts. This tendency was found consistent with several researchers (Barzegar & Tajalli, 2013; Lau & Yuen, 2010; Mulalic, et al., 2009; Naserieh, 2009; Radwan, 2014; Rossi-Le, 1989; Wang, 2012; etc.) who confirmed the differences in learning styles between gender groups. Males learn more individually and tactilely than females; it would be true that males prefer to test concepts and ideas, and they like to follow their thinking more independently (Lau & Yuen, 2010). However, some scholars (Arunreung et al., 2013; Khmakhien, 2012; Shuib & Azizan, 2015) found no difference between males and

females, in terms of their English learning style preferences.

The present study, on the other hand, found a conflict with others. For instance, Wang (2012) and Barzegar & Tajalli (2013) found that females were more kinesthetic learners than males. And females were more group learners (Barzegar & Tajalli, 2013; Inal et al., 2015; Naserieh, 2009; Radwan, 2014), which proved that females were more likely to discuss lessons with peers or learn in groups with peers. Khalil (2005) said that women are naturally more socialized than men, so they tend to communicate and build networks of people better than men (as cited in Radwan, 2014). Accordingly, in Radwan's (2014) work, females are in favor of a communication-oriented style. In turn, the present research proved no difference in group learning mode between gender groups. Regarding the choice of learning strategies, this study indicated that significant differences do exist between gender groups. According to the analysis, male participants were more likely to use these four learning strategies (memory, cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies) in their English classes than those who are female. This finding seems similar to past studies (Jhaish, 2010; Radwan, 2011), which found that males and females differ in their learning strategies. As the present research found, male participants were likely to learn English using memory, cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies. It could be argued that this is a consistent result with Radwan's (2011) work: males were more likely to use social strategies than females. However, a study by Nisbet, Tindall, and Arroyo (2005) presented no significant differences in the use of language learning strategies between males and females. Similarly, Jhaish (2010) found a different tendency, male learners did not differ from the female group in almost all of the strategy categories (memory, cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social), and only one learning strategy category (compensatory) had a

significant difference, males used this strategy category more often than females.

5. Conclusion

This study looks at the preferred learning styles and preferred learning tactics among Laotian English majors. It focuses particularly on the influence of gender characteristics on these choices. The major objectives were to (1) evaluate the impact of gender on adult learners' preferences for learning styles and (2) assess the impact of gender on adult learners' use of learning strategies. The results of this investigation show that significant differences do exist between gender groups. According to the analysis, male participants were more likely to use these four learning strategies (memory, cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies) in their English classes than those participants who are female, as the present research found that male participants were more likely to learn English using memory, cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies. The present study adds to the growing body of research that indicates the effect of gender on language learning styles and learning strategies among Laotian EFL adult learners in international contexts.

6. Conflict of Interest

The manuscript's contents have been seen by all of the co-authors, and they all concur. There are no relevant financial interests. We attest that the submission is unique and is not already being considered by another publisher.

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Table 1. Independence t-test Analysis on Gender and Six Learning Styles

Six Learning Styles	Male (N= 135)		Female (N= 120)		t	df	Sig.
	M	SD	M	SD			
Visual learning	3.50	.569	3.33	.587	3.251	441.3	.000**
Audio learning	3.92	.600	3.92	.518	.114	540	ns.
Kinesthetic learning	4.14	.595	4.11	.631	.710	540	ns.
Tactile learning	3.89	.581	3.77	.621	2.307	453.1	.024*
Individual learning	3.32	.780	3.04	.773	4.034	427.9	.000**
Group learning	3.78	.661	3.73	.646	.874	540	ns.

Notes: **= $p < .01$; *= $p < .05$ ns. (No significance)

Table 2. Independence t-test Analysis on Gender and Six Learning Strategies

Strategies	Male (N= 135)		Female (N= 120)		t	df	Sig.
	M	SD	M	SD			
Memory	3.45	.570	3.33	.637	2.320	467.5	.021*
Cognitive	3.62	.567	3.44	.622	3.370	461.9	.001**
Compensatory	3.59	.614	3.48	.686	1.799	540	ns.
Metacognitive	4.11	.521	4.00	.601	2.172	477.9	.036*
Affective	3.51	.722	3.40	.695	1.765	540	ns.
Social	3.72	.770	3.45	.832	3.836	456.4	.000**

Notes: **= $p < .01$; *= $p < .05$ ns. (No significance)