

Teachers' Personality Styles, Objectives and Material Design

Singhasiri, W. and Kongchan. C.

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Abstract

There are several aspects that teachers have to consider when they design materials for their students, such as objectives, student needs, activity or task types, language skills and learning processes. However, few studies have considered how teachers' personality styles affect the way that they design materials. This paper aims to investigate the interaction between teachers' personality styles and the materials they produce, focusing on Thai teachers who were assigned to design materials for a Remedial English Course for low proficiency students majoring in science and engineering. Three issues were examined: the teachers' personality styles manifested in the finished materials identified following the procedure of Cohen (2003), the teachers' personality styles identified using a learning styles questionnaire (Cohen et al., 2002), and the objectives of the materials. These were compared to see the relative influence of teachers' personality styles and materials' objectives on personality styles of materials. The findings from this research provide interesting implications for material design.

I. Introduction

This section concerns the background of the study and the literature review.

A. Background of the Study

At the Department of Language Studies, School of Liberal Arts, KMUTT, the teachers normally produce their own materials to be used in several English courses. In 2008, the department implements a policy to arrange a Remedial English Course for low proficiency students whose English subject scores in the National Admission Examination were lower than 30 out of 100. The objective of the course was to prepare them so they could take Fundamental English in Semester 1. The materials were composed of four main parts: listening, reading, grammar and vocabulary. The aims of this course were to expand the students' vocabulary, train them in basic reading and listening strategies and revise the grammar that they have studied in secondary school.

To produce materials, there are many aspects that teachers need to take into consideration. Grave (1996) proposes that to design a curriculum, one might have to consider the students' needs, goals and objectives in terms of the course, content, activities and evaluation. Nunan (1989) states that the components of task design are goal, input, activities, teacher role, learner role, and setting. Apart from the aspects mentioned earlier, Cohen (2003) suggests factors that play some roles in learning task design i.e. authenticity of the text, relevance, motivation, level of difficulty, familiarity, usefulness, etc. However, few studies have considered how teachers' personality styles or teachers' learning styles affect the way that they design materials. It strikes

the researchers as being worthwhile to investigate the interaction between teachers' personality styles and the materials they produce.

B. Literature Review

Leaver et al. (2005) states that "learning styles are convenient shortcuts for talking about patterns of what an individual is likely to prefer as a learner." Similarly, Chang (2005) says that learning styles are general approaches that one tends to use for learning. Leaver et al. (2005) have divided learning styles into three main types. Firstly, sensory preferences refer to the channels through which we perceive information which consists of visual, auditory, and motor modalities. The second type is cognitive styles which refer to individualized ways of processing information. The third type is personality types which involve affective factors. These three terminologies have been used interchangeably. For this study, even though in the title we use the term 'teachers' personality styles', it is noted here that the researchers aim to investigate 'teachers' learning style preferences'.

Many studies show how learning styles are important to language learning. It is believed that if learning styles are matched with the instructional styles, students' motivation, performance and attainment will be enhanced (Brown, 1994, cited in Chang, 2005). Cohen (2002) supports that teachers can modify the learning tasks they use in their class in a way that may bring the best out of particular learners with particular learning style preferences. It can be seen that students' learning styles is viewed as an important aspect that teachers have to consider when they do material design. However, at the same time it is interesting to ask the question whether or not teachers' learning styles influence the materials that they have designed for students.

To assess learning styles, there are several learning styles instruments which have been used. The ones which are widely used are Kolb's Learning Style Inventory (LSI) and Riding's Cognitive Styles Analysis (CSA) (Dörnyei, 2005). Later, there is the development of learning style research in the L2 field such as Reid (1995, 1998), and Ehrman and Leaver (2003). For this study, the researchers used the learning style questionnaire created by Cohen et al. (2002) which covers both sensory preferences and cognitive styles. The questions in this questionnaire are quite appropriate for language learners.

II. Purpose of Study

This study aims to investigate the interaction between teachers' learning styles and the materials they produce. The results obtained may provide interesting implications for material design.

III. Methodology

A. Subjects

The subjects were five Thai teachers who have worked at the Department of Language Studies, School of Liberal Arts, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi. They were assigned to design the materials for the Remedial English Course. Each teacher was responsible for one section except for the reading sections which were designed by two teachers who worked together collaboratively.

B. Research Instruments

In order to access the learning styles of the teachers, a learning styles questionnaire by Cohen et al. (2002) was modified. Part 1 tests 3 learning style dimensions. Each of the other 10 parts tests 2 learning style dimensions.

1. Using physical senses: visual versus auditory versus tactile
2. Opening himself to learning situations: extraverted versus introverted
3. Handling possibilities: random-intuitive versus concrete-sequential
4. Dealing with ambiguities and deadlines: closed-oriented versus open-oriented
5. Receiving information: global versus particular
6. Processing information: synthesis versus analytical
7. Committing materials to memory: sharpener versus leveler
8. Dealing with language rules: deductive and inductive

9. Dealing with response time: impulsive versus reflective
10. Dealing with multiple inputs: field-independent versus field-dependent
11. Taking literally reality: metaphoric versus literal

Semi-structured interviews were also used to confirm teachers' learning styles and find out their perceptions towards material design.

C. Data Analysis

For learning style questionnaires, subjects' responses were analysed descriptively by adding the scores of each learning style in order to determine which learning style dominates in each part. However, since the number of questions in each part was not equal, the scores were converted into percentage. For material analysis, the researchers designed the form to examine the learning styles which were manifested in the lessons. The frequency of learning style occurrence in the units was changed into percentage as the number of units in each material was not equal. The teacher's learning style where the percentage is 70% or higher would be regarded as the dominant and the learning style shown in the materials where the percentage is 50% or higher would be counted as obviously manifested in the materials. Correlation was also used to test if there was a significance relationship between the two variables. Semi-structured interviews were transcribed and the relevant parts were selected and used as supporting data.

IV. Data Presentation

A. Data from Learning Styles Questionnaires and Material Analysis

Table 1. Teachers' Learning Styles and Learning Styles Manifested in the Materials

Part	Learning Styles	Listening		Reading			Grammar		Vocabulary	
		T1	M	T2	T3	M	T4	M	T5	M
1. Using my physical sense	Visual	84	100	76	88	100	60	100	72	100
	Auditory	80	100	72	56	71.42	40	-	60	40
	Tactile	80	90	32	40	85.71	36	-	36	80
2. Opening himself to learning situation	Extraverted	65	70	25	60	71.42	70	-	55	50
	Introverted	100	80	90	75	100	80	100	60	70
3. Handling possibilities	Random-intuitive	95	50	60	85	57.14	85	-	70	-
	Concrete-sequential	55	-	75	90	42.85	65	-	65	10
4. Dealing with ambiguity and deadlines	Closure-oriented	60	-	70	70	-	65	-	70	-
	Open-oriented	75	-	60	60	-	55	-	60	-
5 Receiving information	Global	85	-	75	80	71.42	90	6.25	60	-
	Particular	55	40	70	55	100	45	37.50	60	20
6. Processing information	Synthesizing	100	20	65	85	42.85	75	6.25	60	-
	Analytical	40	10	25	60	42.85	55	93.75	60	10
7. Committing materials to memory	Sharpener	67	70	60	80	71.42	67	93.75	60	70
	Leveler	60	10	60	67	-	73	12.50	73	10
8. Dealing with language rules	Deductive	87	-	40	60	-	60	12.50	60	-
	Inductive	80	-	80	73	-	53	18.75	67	-
9. Dealing with response time	Impulsive	47	10	60	67	57.14	80	-	73	30
	Reflective	100	-	80	80	-	67	-	60	-
10. Dealing with	Field-	100	10	73	87	28.57	80	-	53	-

multiple inputs	independent									
	Field-dependent	93	-	67	74	-	47	-	60	-
11. Taking literally reality	Metaphoric	70	-	90	80	-	80	-	70	-
	Literal	50	-	50	40	-	40	-	60	-

Notes: T = teachers, M = Materials

There was no significance relationship between teachers' learning style and learning styles manifested in the materials when the results were tested by using correlation. However, the descriptive data as shown in Table 1 is examined; it suggests that there is some relationship between the two variables. For listening materials, the teachers' learning styles which were dominant and also obviously manifested in the materials were visual (84%/100%), auditory (80%/100%), tactile (80%/90%), introverted (100%/80%), and random-intuitive (95%/50%). In reading materials, visual (76%,88%/100%), auditory (72%/71.42), introverted (90%,75%/100%), random-intuitive (85%/57.14%), global (75%,80%/71.42%), particular (75%,100%), and sharpener (80%/71.42%) were dominant and shown obviously in the materials. For grammar materials, there was only one learning style which was dominant and obviously manifested in the materials, namely introverted (80%/100%). Similarly, introverted (72%/100%) was the only learning style in vocabulary materials which was dominant and manifestly shown.

It can be seen that there were some learning styles obviously manifested in the materials but they were not dominant teachers' learning styles. Or there were dominant learning styles but they were not manifested in the materials. All these can be explained by semi-structured interviews.

B. Data from Semi-structured Interview

The data from the semi-structured interviews can be presented according to these following aspects.

(a) Factors to be concerned when designing materials

Five teachers reported that there were several factors that they had to consider when designing materials such as objectives of lessons, students' needs and interests, students' problems, varieties of the activities, group or pair work, level of difficulty, authenticity, learning strategies, accuracy and fluency, types of input, and illustrations.

(b) Teachers' learning styles

The data from the interviews was more or less similar to the data obtained from the questionnaires. Every teacher seemed to know his/her own learning style preferences. For example, T2 and T3 preferred to learn English by reading books. Sometimes they analysed language patterns from reading passages. This suggests that they were visual learners.

(c) The effects of learning styles towards material design

Every teacher reported that his/her learning style preferences might affect the ways he/she designed materials to some extent. Some of them mentioned that if their experiences in some preferred approaches were good, then it was normal for them to suggest those approaches to their students through materials that they had written.

V. Discussion and Conclusion

It can be concluded that teachers' learning styles affected how the teachers designed the materials to some extent. For example, if teachers were visual learners, pictures, movies and reading passages were used as the input in the materials. Manifesting learning styles in the materials would occur intentionally if the teachers viewed those learning styles as helpful approaches that they used themselves when learning English. However, some other important factors such as the objectives of lessons, students' needs, and learning strategies also controlled the ways that they designed the materials. Even, for example, if their learning style preferences were introverted when designing the materials they might provide activities where students could work in groups so that they could learn and work together collaboratively. Setting the objectives of each unit might be another aspect that influenced material design. For example, teachers might plan to teach particular

strategies to students such as scanning for specific information. For this reason, 'particular' was found manifestly in reading materials, though the teachers who designed the materials were global learners. Another important factor is the language skill. It was observed that inductive and deductive styles were found only in grammar materials but not in other skills because these two learning styles deal with learning grammar rules only. To conclude, although the results are not shown to be statistically significant in this study, in the descriptive data there was some relationship between teachers' learning styles and learning styles manifested in the materials. Not only students' learning styles but also teachers' should now be viewed as another important aspect that we should take into consideration when designing tasks or materials.

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The authors

Wareesiri Singhasiri, PhD, is now teaching at Department of Language Studies, School of Liberal Arts, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi, Bangkok, Thailand. Her interests are learning strategies, learning styles and research methodology. Email: wareesiri@yahoo.com.

Chada Kongchan is assistant professor at the Department of Language Studies, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT), Thailand. She teaches fundamental English courses for the undergraduates and also takes responsibility as a supervisor for a teacher training course of the MA in Applied Linguistics Programme. Her interests are self-access learning, motivation, and teacher development. Email: chada.kon@kmutt.ac.th.