

**ALIGNMENT BETWEEN TEACHING AND LEARNING STYLES IN KISWAHILI
LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS IN KENYA**

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ABSTRACT

Traditional teaching methods are predominant in many African classrooms. These methods are always teacher dominated ignoring the diversity of learners. Research indicates that when students are instructed in a way that closely matches their learning style, they become more successful academically. This notion therefore leads to the debate ‘what teachers for what learners?’ The current study sought to establish the alignment between teaching and learning styles in Kiswahili language. The study established a weak alignment $\chi^2(1, N = 383) = 3.60, p = .06$ between teaching and learning styles which was non significant. Teaching styles therefore did not match students’ learning styles which could be the main cause of low academic achievement in Kiswahili language. The study recommends prior establishment of learning styles of students by teachers in order to tailor instruction to learners’ needs.

Key words: Alignment, teaching style, learning style, Kiswahili language

1.0 Introduction

In contextualizing teaching and learning styles, research advocates for the need for teachers to know how to respond to the burgeoning diversity of contemporary classrooms (Fischer & Rose, 2001; McCoy & Ketterlin-Geller, 2004; Tomlinson, 2004). Besides, the use of the one-size-fits-all strategy no longer meets the needs of the majority of learners (Forsten, Grant & Hollas, 2002; Tomlinson, 2002; McBride, 2004; McCoy & Ketterlin-Geller, 2004). Moreover, the use of single-paced lessons delivered through a singular instructional approach disregards the different learning styles and interests present in all classrooms (Fischer & Rose, 2001; Guild, 2001). In addition, addressing student differences and interest appears to enhance their motivation to learn while encouraging them to remain committed and stay positive (Stronge, 2004; Tomlinson, 2004). Ignoring these fundamental differences may result in some students falling behind, losing motivation and failing to succeed (Tomlinson, 2004). The need to establish the alignment between teaching and learning styles in contemporary classrooms is thus of prime importance.

1.1 Literature Review

There is a specific version of the learning styles hypothesis that evidently looms largest both within the educational literature and within the minds of most researchers dealing with learning styles: the idea that instruction should be provided in the mode that matches the learner’s style. For example, in the case of a visual learner, information should be, as much as possible, presented visually. This specific instance of the learning styles hypothesis is referred to as the meshing hypothesis: the claim that presentation should mesh with the learner’s own proclivities (Pashler, McDaniel, Rohrer & Bjork, 2009). In this regard, Njagi (2014) notes that there is an increase in the academic diversity of students in contemporary classrooms in that no two students learn in the same manner or at the same rate. Each student is unique and has different learning styles and preferences. Teachers are

therefore expected to meet the needs of all learners in these diverse classrooms (Njagi, 2014). This presents daily challenges for the teachers in addressing the learning needs of the students (Villegas & Lucas, 2007).

According to Gilakjani (2012), one of the weaknesses of the research in learning style is the lack of a thorough scrutiny of the matching of teaching and learning styles. Gilakjani further notes that teaching and learning styles are under researched in language and science education. Moreover, Bostrom and Hallin (2013) argue that there is a great need of research on learning styles in teacher education partly because of the diversity of students that teachers face in the classroom, but also due to their own professional development in didactics and leadership.

Beecher and Sweeney (2008) assert that the focus of education should be about helping students experience significant progress in fulfilling their learning potential. Such learning potential can be realized through differentiated instruction for it allows teacher to tailor the curriculum to meet the needs of individual students. On this ground, the current study focused on teaching and learning styles which provide basis for differentiated instruction. Muthomi and Mbugua (2014) argue that differentiated instruction is an approach that assumes the existence of diversity of learners in every classroom and that all learners can be reached when a variety of methods and activities are used.

In the African context, teachers mostly focus on the auditory style of learning, rendering learners passive (Ali & Muhammad, 2012). The lecture method does not, in most cases, meet students' learning needs. Liu and He (2014) note that the teacher-talk dominated classrooms emphasize a unidirectional relationship construction and the students' individual differences are neglected. They further note that this approach contradicts the principle of language acquisition and cannot encourage student participation. Since students passively receive knowledge, or are mechanically drilled under the teacher's control, they cannot effectively understand their own learning styles or improve their learning abilities based on their learning styles. Normally, students are never satisfied with the classroom teaching or enthusiastic for the classroom learning (Liu & He, 2014).

While making a presentation in an Educational Conference, Kapadia (2008) stated that teaching methods vary according to professors: some lecture while others demonstrate; some focus on principles while others deal with applications; some emphasize memory and recalling facts while others work on understanding. He noted that each of these pairs of teaching styles takes up contradictory positions yet each is valuable and essential in its own right. Kapadia (2008) finally noted that since there are so many different teaching and learning styles, mismatches in teaching and learning can and do occur. When there is a mismatch both the student and the professor suffer. Kapadia's research focused on the teaching and learning styles in Engineering Education, and so the question is whether similar teaching and learning patterns apply in other education programs. Also there is need to establish how teachers and students cope when mismatches occur in their teaching and learning styles.

Sabeh, Bahous, Bacha and Nabhani (2011) found that teachers preferred kinesthetic and individual learning styles whereas the individual learning style was disfavored by 45% of the students.

Moreover, only 60% of the teachers showed a preference for auditory learning style whereas 87.4% of the students exhibited that it was their main preferred learning style. This showed a mismatch between teachers' preferred teaching styles and students' preferred learning styles. Olaniran (2009) suggests an increasing need to consider the adaptation of instructional strategies to learners' different needs, especially when learning in emerging, dynamic educational settings such as web-based learning environments. Nevertheless, Olaniran's study focused majorly on online learning hence teaching and learning styles alignment in the face to face learning environment needs to be established.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Research highlights the importance of matching the instructor's teaching style to students' learning styles which can systematically influence academic achievement. However, in many classroom settings, this linkage is hardly appreciated. Teachers seem not to understand learners' needs instead employing a 'one style fits all' technique which leads to poor academic achievements.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To establish the alignment between teaching and learning styles in Kiswahili language classrooms.
2. To establish the adjustment to mismatch between teaching and learning style in Kiswahili language classrooms.

1.4 Hypotheses

H_0 :- there is no alignment between teaching styles and learning styles in Kiswahili language classrooms.

H_1 :- there are no adjustments made by teachers and students to address mismatch between teaching and learning styles.

2.0 Methodology

This section presents the research design, study area, study population and sample size, research instrument and data analysis procedures.

2.1 Research Design

The study was based on descriptive survey design. Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) observe that the major purpose of survey is to describe the characteristics of a population. It also enables a researcher to gather data at a particular point in time and use it to describe the nature of the existing conditions (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000).

2.2 Study Area

The study was carried out in Kakamega North Sub-County which is located in Kakamega County, Kenya. Kakamega North Sub-County lies between latitude $0^{\circ} 4' N$ and $0^{\circ} 5' N$ and longitude $34^{\circ} 47' E$ and $35^{\circ} 20' E$.

2.3 Study Population and Sample Size

The study population was 2,520 Form 4 students of the year 2014 and 42 Form 4 teachers of Kiswahili language in 42 secondary schools in Kakamega North Sub-County, Kenya. The sample size for the study was 38 Form 4 Kiswahili teachers and 345 Form 4 students calculated by Yamane (1967) formula for calculating sample size.

2.4 Research Instrument

Data was collected by the use of a questionnaire. Teachers and students were asked whether their styles matched and what happened in cases of mismatches between teaching and learning styles.

2.5 Data Analysis

Pearson's chi-square was used to establish the alignment between teaching and learning styles in Kiswahili language. According to Pallant (2002), chi-square test is used when a researcher wishes to explore the relationship between two categorical variables.

3.0 Results and Discussion

The results based on the level of the match and what happens in cases of mismatches between teaching and learning styles are discussed in this section.

3.1 Match between Teaching and Learning Styles in Kiswahili Language Classrooms

Pearson Chi-square results on the alignment between teaching and learning styles are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Cross Tabulation of the Match between Teaching and Learning style

Statement		Count		
		Match between teaching and learning style		
		Teacher F(%)	Student F(%)	Total F(%)
Is there a match between teaching and learning style	Yes	9(23.7)	136(39.4)	145(37.9)
	No	29(76.3)	209(60.6)	238(62.1)
Total		38(100)	345(100)	383(100)

Pearson Chi-square value, ($\chi^2=3.60, p=.06$)

Two thirds of teachers and students (62.1%) felt that there was a mismatch between teaching and learning styles. A total number of 76.3% of teachers and 60.6% of students disagreed to the statement that asked if there was a match between teaching and learning styles. However, one third of teachers and students (37.9%) agreed that there was a match between teaching and learning styles in Kiswahili language. Evidently a total number of 23.7% of teachers and 39.4% of students agreed on a match between teaching and learning styles. Pearson chi-square value $\chi^2(1, N = 383) = 3.60$, $p = .06$ revealed a non significant relationship between teaching and learning styles. The findings imply that teaching styles did not match learning styles in Kiswahili language classrooms. The null hypothesis was thus retained. Mismatch between teaching and learning styles could be the reason for the consistent low academic achievement in Kiswahili language.

In support of the results, Felder, Felder and Dietz (2002) argue that a mismatch between teaching and learning styles is one of the causes of low performance and student de-motivation. The results are consistent with the findings by Damrongpanit (2014) who studied the interaction between teaching and learning styles and achievement in Mathematics. Damrongpanit found 33.77% of the interaction matching while 69.23% was mismatching. Similarly, Farzard (2012) found that teaching styles in the faculties of Agriculture and Natural Resources at Kurdistan University, Iran did not match students' learning styles. Felder and Spurlin (2005) observe that when mismatching occurs, students become bored and inattentive: do poorly on test and get discouraged by the course and the curriculum. In the same way, Pin, Pinto and Williams (2008) remark that students whose learning styles are compatible with the teaching style of a course instructor tend to retain information longer, apply it more effectively, and have more positive post-course attitudes toward the subject than do their counterparts who experience learning and teaching style mismatches. Thus, they conclude that it is important to design a course that is not advantageous or disadvantageous to any learning style.

Based on the findings, it is imperative for learners to understand how they learn best. Likewise teachers should be knowledgeable in their preferred teaching styles in order to have classrooms that are accommodative to a variety of pedagogical style preferences hence a greater match.

3.2 Adjustment to Mismatch between Teaching and Learning Styles in Kiswahili Language Classrooms

Teachers' and students' responses on what happens when there is a mismatch between teaching and learning styles are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Cross Tabulation of Adjustment to Mismatch between Teaching and Learning style

Statement		Count		
		Match between teaching and learning style		Total
		Teacher F(%)	Student F(%)	
If there is a mismatch what do you do	Remain to your own style	32(84.2)	48(13.9)	80(20.9)
	Adjust to another style	6(15.8)	297(86.1)	303(79.1)
Total		38(100)	345(100)	383(100)

Pearson Chi-square value, ($\chi^2=102.4, p=.00$)

The findings indicate that a greater number of teachers (84.2%) hang on to their teaching styles in case of a mismatch between their teaching and learners' learning styles. Contrarily, a majority of students (86.1%) adjust to their teachers' teaching styles in case of a mismatch. Consequently, Pearson chi-square value $\chi^2 (1, N = 383) = 102.4, p < .00$ was significant. Learners are therefore faced with the burden of adjusting to the learning situations they find themselves in which might be quite challenging for slow learners. Teachers mentioned early completion of the syllabus and easy teaching as reasons for not adjusting to learners' preferred learning styles. Similarly, the need to avoid monotony, motivation and sustenance of learner interest in content and different abilities of learners have been cited as reasons for adjusting to learners' preferred learning styles. The students, on the other hand, had the following remarks:

Student 203: It is hard for my teacher to adjust to my learning style and if I stick to my own style I may lose a lot and fail in exams.

Student 9: I adjust to my teacher's teaching style because he knows more in Kiswahili language than I do; he also knows the best ways for learning and passing exams.

The excerpts denote why most students adjust to their teachers' teaching styles. This could be because students see their teachers as forms of authority and have to follow the standards set by them when teaching and learning. As a result learners may not explore better ways of learning and this may have a bearing on the dismal academic achievement in Kiswahili language. In view of the findings, Tomlinson (2004) notes that ignoring learner differences may result in some students falling behind, losing motivation or failing.

4. Conclusions and Implications

The optimal method of instruction is that which matches students' learning style. It is hypothesized that students whose learning styles are congruent with teaching style have higher levels of achievement compared to those whose learning styles are incongruent with teaching styles. Teachers therefore need to vary teaching strategies by differentiating instruction in order to cater for individual differences of students in Kiswahili language. Consequently, teachers need to conduct a learning style survey in their classrooms in order to understand their students. This may help them adopt a varied approach during their preparation for instruction. Such an approach may be able to fulfill the needs of most learners.

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