

**UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR
SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
FOREIGN LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT**



GRADUATION WORK

**BENEFITS OF USING COGNITIVE STYLES IN THE CLASSROOM
TO LEARN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

PRESENTED BY:

LLANES GUZMÁN, JORGE HOMERO	LG97030
LÓPEZ EDWIN ALEXANDER	LL03016
MOREIRA CISNEROS, NADIA CORINA	MC97080

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ADVISOR:

RHINA FRANCO RAMOS, M.A.T.

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AUTHORITIES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR

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RHINA FRANCO RAMOS M.A.T.
COORDINATOR OF THE GRADUATION PROCESS

RHINA FRANCO RAMOS, M.A.T.
ADVISOR

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I. INTRODUCTION

The following bibliographical research is about Cognitive Styles. It contains objectives that are focused on the benefits that learning styles can bring to students and tutors. Also, there is a justification that show the importance of this research and who are benefited with this to have a better performance inside as well as outside the foreign language classroom. Moreover, there are arguments on how teachers can improve their techniques when teach a foreign language. Besides that, the conclusions were written to advice the readers to take advantages of theories in learning styles. The recommendations are suggested to be applied in every foreign language classroom. The methodology is included to show the readers how the steps were done to do this research. The bibliography shows the consulted resources that support the arguments presented in this bibliographical work. Finally, the appendices include the outline of this research and the questionnaire to measure the one's learning styles.

II. OBJECTIVES

GENERAL OBJECTIVE

- To carry out a bibliographic research on the benefits learning styles can bring to learners and teachers of a foreign language to succeed in the teaching learning process.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- To find out the different cognitive styles learners have in order to learn a foreign language.
- To find out how applying knowledge on learning styles can benefit teachers and students in this way of teaching and learning to create appropriate learning conditions in the classroom.
- To do a deep research in depth about a topic that will be helpful in our real life job in order to put into practice the theories studied through our different courses.

III. JUSTIFICATION

Students of any Foreign Language use different techniques to learn the target language. These techniques are known by experts as cognitive styles. Students should know to be aware of this fact so that they can get the best out of it.

When we were students at the Foreign Language Department we did not realize that there are different ways of learning that help us to learn easily. We did not realize that we had our own learning styles. Now, in the Graduation Seminar we have had the opportunity to do a deeper research about learning styles, and have a better understanding of what we were doing as learners in a Foreign Language classroom.

Unfortunately, we did not know this before to have had the chance to take much more advantage of these tools. Many experts have done research of this topic and apply these theories to help teachers have a better performance and help students a conscious and easy learning process, but not all teachers use them to help their students.

The purpose of this research is to benefit teachers and students as well as these readers who want to teach or learn a language in an effective way.

IV. BENEFITS OF USING COGNITIVE STYLES TO LEARN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

A successful English teaching in a foreign language classroom has to deal with different aspects like how teachers prepare themselves for the class and how they prepare students for the new language. Foreign language teachers must apply theories about cognitive learning styles and base their plans on student's previous knowledge capabilities, attitudes and needs. Both teachers and students will get involved in the teaching learning process which will make the teachers' and students' tasks easier and more effective. When teachers of a foreign language know the benefits of cognitive styles, create a good environment in the classroom and involve students in their own learning process, they will be ready to help their students in the learning process of that foreign language.

By motivating their students the knowledge that teachers have about students' learning styles is necessary to take into account in planning. Some teachers do not pay attention to their students learning styles; they only teach a class and do not care about students' attitudes, interests or needs. If teachers do not pay attention to this, what can be done in order to help students? Some teachers are only interested in finishing a subject syllabus and do not care about students learning process or how students assimilate the new knowledge. They simply pay attention to making a good job by finishing what they have planned to teach, and do not get interested in students' doubts and needs. Students sometimes get frustrated and give up their studies because they feel they are wasting their time.

Some teachers do not care about how students feel about the class, or their learning. There are teachers who rarely think about students needs, attitudes and capabilities; they only think about teaching their 50 minutes - class and the rest of the day they probably forget about students, whatever their levels, they are more than that, but some teachers do not realize that.

It seems that some teachers prepare their classes and plans in order to fulfill and administrative role but not thinking on students needs. These teachers may feel they are doing a good job because they have prepared the class but that is not enough.

The way human beings learn a language has many aspects involved. Among others it is necessary to take into account how people can be motivated to learn a language, how the teacher can be prepared to help students in a better way, and also the environment and the psycho- social aspects of human beings and the individual and unique characteristics learners have.

The previous ideas should bring up the question on how the learning process should be carried out at the school or institution where the new language is taught. As Douglas Brown (2000) says *“The way we learn things in general and the way we attack a problem seem to hinge on a rather amorphous link between personality and cognition; this link is referred to as cognitive style. When cognitive styles are specifically related to an educational context, where affective and affective and physiological factors are intermingled, they are usually more generally referred to as learning styles”*

There are some teachers who do not have vocation for teaching. This makes them limit their capabilities. These kinds of teachers do what time tells them and nothing else; that affects the students' learning process. Teachers must have a vocation to work with people; human beings are not objects. People sometimes react based on how others treat them and some people do not understand this, and that makes people get frustrated in their learning process.

Some teachers have the theories about learning styles but they do not put them into practice and they "teach" very monotonous classes. Students get bored and do not pay attention to what the teacher is saying and they fail. Teachers have to take into account that "learning styles might be thought of as "cognitive, affective and physiological traits that are relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment" (Keefe, 1979:4)

Teachers of a foreign language have to promote a good environment in the classroom according to every need that students have. Learners need to be understood when they have difficulty to learn a foreign language. For example, in the Foreign Language Department when learners start a basic course some of them do not have a previous knowledge about a foreign language. Therefore, this is a disadvantage for them because there are other ones that have knowledge about this; the teachers sometimes do not pay attention to this issue, and think that students do not have any difficulty to learn a foreign language. Consequently, students quit their classes. For this reason, teachers should promote a good environment in the classroom and analyse their learners to make the learning of a new language something easy, interesting and attractive for them.

Teachers have to “create” a nice environment for the students that learn a foreign language. When teachers decorate their classroom, students feel attracted to do well in their classes. But in some foreign language courses it is not put into practice by the teachers at all. For example, using pictures, maps, and objects that have relationship with the topic carried out. It helps to understand the class in an easy way.

Teachers should use visual aids in the classroom to increase their vocabulary. It also promotes a good environment for students to practice the second language outside the classroom. It is essential in the learning process, although it is not done in some foreign language classrooms. Dulay and Burt (1974) emphasize that the linguistic environment to learn a second language is necessary and of great help. The classrooms decorations must be done according to every topic studied in it.

Students always observe the environment in the classrooms to get familiar with the subject or topic to be studied. Therefore, it is important that teachers use pictures and other kinds of materials that show the grammar focus or different vocabulary items to remember new words. Moreover, looking at the pictures helps students to understand what they are asked such as questions about any topic. There are many students that learn better when teachers use visual things. Kagan, Moss and Sigel (1963) explain that people organize the perception and classify the external environment in a better way with the help of visual aids.

Teachers must know how students react to different questions about the new language. The opportunity that teachers give to their pupils to answer a

question is vital to specify how the environment of students is. Some teachers do not wait for students to answer their questions and if they delay more than expected teachers forget about them, teachers should know about cognitive styles of students. There are students who are reflexive and delay their answers, but it does not mean they do not know about any topic. Students are always prone to have these inconveniences when teachers do not know about cognitive styles.

Cognitive styles are very important to be taken into account to prepare different activities in the class. Teachers have to focus on the many differences students have. For example, a student might prefer learning by listening and singing, whereas others might prefer working in groups. Not all teachers have a balance in the activities they prepare, some teachers work with the same activities all the time. This needs to be changed because in that way learners are not going to develop their knowledge and they will not learn the foreign language easily. A balance in activities is to encourage a good environment in the classroom and students will learn and enjoy the English class.

Students enjoy a class when teachers use different activities to explain the topic to be studied. Among the activities that can be carried out, some games can be mentioned like hot potato, Simon says, guessing numbers, answer questions among others just to mention some; this can promote a good environment in the classroom. Students feel comfortable and ready to participate in the class. This is another way how students learn, and it has to be put into practice not all the time in every class, but in every unit or content when appropriate or necessary. When teachers use games in their English class, they create a good environment and the learning process takes place in a nice environment. Snow (1977) and Wells (1981)

say that students develop the second language taken from their environment.

Teachers should involve their students in their own learning process by applying activities according to their students' learning styles. Teachers should research about cognitive styles theories even about theories that they do not agree with. When teachers know about strengths and weaknesses of a specific topic, they are ready to make their own conclusions and work with their students and their materials based on that and use those materials in a more efficient way. It is necessary for the teachers to do research about cognitive styles theories to make their own conclusions and modify the way they work with their students.

Teachers should interview their students about how they like to learn. Teachers of the foreign languages need to have resources to evaluate their students to know their cognitive styles. For example, when people go to job interviews, each candidate for a job position in a company has to know the quality, standards to select the most appropriate candidate. Moreover, the interviewer will be able to give them recommendations to overcome their weaknesses. Teachers should do the same. If they evaluate their students and they can identify strengths and weaknesses, they will be able to give recommendations to them to overcome such weaknesses.

But applying cognitive styles theories in the classroom should be accompanied by a good "portion" of motivation to make this work. A motivation environment should be promoted by the teacher. Some teachers think that it is not necessary to motivate students to learn. They argue that the students' motivation is internal and they do not need to be motivated by teachers. For example, In the Foreign Language Department, there are teachers who do not favor motivation

when teaching their students. They laugh at their students' comments and mistakes. They talk to them using sarcasm. Some students are afraid of them because they think the teachers will affect their grades and they will fail the subject. This brings students failure as a consequence.

When students are motivated to learn, they will understand teachers' directions and get involved in the class. In the Foreign Language Department, students usually want to know which teacher will be in charge of a specific subject. They want to continue learning in the same way that they did in the previous semester. "When students are motivated to 'see' that their competences are increasing, they satisfy their own needs, manifest feelings of success progress and they feel they have grown as persons" (Kohonen, 1992).

One Basic level student said: "I realized speaking English is not difficult. I'll be an English teacher soon. We will be co-workers!". One student who works in a restaurant says that she has to speak English as soon as possible. Her boss almost always demands her about it. She works as a waitress. She deals with people who are Americans and she says that she feels happy because she introduces herself to the costumers in English. She applies the vocabulary and some expressions that the teacher suggested to students. Her boss has praised her effort and last time he told her that she could continue to take the course. As the examples there are many that could be mentioned that can prove that motivation can also make the difference in students' learning.

Teachers must keep their students motivated if they want their students to apply cognitive styles efficiently and effectively. They should praise their students'

efforts. For example, when students give their opinions, they speak spontaneously. Even though they do not pronounce some words correctly or their sentences have some structure problems, teachers should praise them for their efforts and not just correct their errors.

Teachers should promote students' active participation. It is important for teachers to provide opportunities to develop responsibilities for all of them. So that students can be a part of their own learning. Teachers can assign different roles to students to prepare and develop the activities assigned. For example, the teachers can give every student somebody else's workbook. The teacher gives the answers and they grade each other. Students like to do it because they like to be taken into account in the evaluation process. They know they have a responsibility toward their classmates who will demand them to work in a fair way.

Teachers of a foreign language classroom need to apply different activities and games to generate a good environment in order for students to use their cognitive styles appropriately. Consequently, teachers must know their students' previous knowledge, capabilities, attitudes and needs and they should plan their lessons based on students' needs, not on a subject syllabus. That is more than an administrative requirement. Besides, teachers have to evaluate their students' cognitive style in a formal way using appropriate resources. The methodology will be according to students' cognitive styles and teachers will motivate their students by giving them understandable directions, praising students' efforts and promoting active participation.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Teachers of a foreign language classroom need to apply different techniques to generate a good environment in order for students to learn in an easier way and to use cognitive styles appropriately.

Teachers should know their students' previous knowledge, capabilities, attitudes and needs to plan their lessons based on students' needs not on a subject syllabus.

Besides, teachers should help their students to take advantage of their cognitive learning style by using appropriate resources to help them become aware of them.

Besides, teachers should use a methodology that can be according to students' different cognitive styles to motivate their students to make a better effort and promote active participation.

VI. METHODOLOGY

To carry out this bibliographical research the next steps were followed:

First, the topic was selected from a wide list of topics related to the learning of a foreign language. Then, it needed to be narrowed according to the bibliographical research objectives.

After that, the literature was selected taking into account important resources like: books, internet sources, and researchers' experiences. To choose the appropriate resource some techniques were used for that purpose. Among them skimming, scanning, mappings were used. Next, claims and thesis statement were created to prepare the outline.

After that, the literature was analyzed to create logical and supportable ideas. It was criticized to support the arguments and answer the research question. First, second and third drafts were written. Finally, the final report of the bibliographical research was written in order to be understandable by the readers.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the work carried out, we recommend the following:

- The teachers of English of a foreign language should provide their students cognitive styles tests in order to know preferences related to their way of learning.
- Tests of these types should be done the first day of class, so that they can use the data gathered to prepare classes based on students' needs.
- Student's suggestions have to be taken into account by teachers to select and prepare appropriate activities according to their students' specific needs in the classroom.
- The teachers in charge of the Graduation Seminar should motivate their students to choose a topic that can help them in their real life as professionals.
- The students that are taking the Graduation Seminar should be encouraged in the use of visual aids in the classroom to facilitate the learning process.

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ANNEXES

OUTLINE

Topic: Benefits of using cognitive styles to learn a second language

Introduction

Thesis Statement: When teachers of a foreign language know the benefits of cognitive styles, create a good environment in the classroom and involve students in their own learning process, they will be ready to help their students in the learning process of that foreign language.

1. By motivating their students the knowledge that teachers have about students' learning styles is necessary to take into account in planning.

- Some teachers do not pay attention to their students learning styles; they only teach a class and do not care about students' attitudes, interests or needs.
- Some teachers do not care about how students feel about the class, or their learning.

2. Teachers of a foreign language have to promote a good environment in the classroom according to every need that students have.

- Learners need to be understood when they have difficulty to learn a foreign language.
- Teachers should use visual aids in the classroom to increase their vocabulary

3. Teachers should interview their students about how they like to learn. Teachers of the foreign languages need to have resources to evaluate their students to know their cognitive styles.

- Teachers should research about cognitive styles theories even about theories that they do not agree with.
- When students are motivated to learn, they will understand teachers' directions and get involved in the class.

Conclusion