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Learning styles regarding gender and self-efficacy in English pre-service teachers

Estilos de aprendizaje con relación al género y autoeficacia en maestros de inglés en entrenamiento

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ABSTRACT

In learning, it is necessary to consider the different student learning styles of students because this action can promote motivation and interest in other subjects. The literature shows that, in several cases, teachers do not adjust teaching styles to learning styles, which can be a barrier to achieving student interest. Research shows that motivation and scaffolding language practice when caring for student learning styles impact academic achievement and self-efficacy. This research aimed to identify the relationship between learning styles, gender, and self-efficacy among English teachers in training; a quantitative descriptive method, correlational design, and transversal scope were followed. The participants of this study were 86 students enrolled in the Faculty of Languages in the Language Teaching class, 60.5% female and 39.5% male, with an average age of 21.7 years (SD = 4.9). The instruments used to obtain the participant data were the Honey-Alonso Learning Styles Questionnaire (HALSQ) and the Academic Volitional Strategies Inventory (AVSI). The results indicate that students are mainly theoretical and use self-efficacy strategies related to the future and the possible consequences they will face if they do not complete their tasks. Moreover, the statistical analysis demonstrates no relationship among learning styles, self-efficacy, and genre. Nevertheless, it is necessary to continue exploring LS, self-efficacy, and genre since they have been pointed out to influence language learning, reaching goals, and motivation in the learning and teaching areas.

Keywords: learning styles; self-efficacy; academic achievement; genre.

RESUMEN

En el aprendizaje es necesario considerar a los diferentes estilos de aprendizaje en el estudiantado porque esta acción puede promover la motivación y el interés hacia las diferentes asignaturas. La literatura muestra que, en varios casos, los docentes no ajustan los estilos de enseñanza a los de aprendizaje, lo cual puede ser una barrera para lograr el interés del estudiantado. Por el contrario, algunas investigaciones muestran que la motivación en el aprendizaje del lenguaje cuando se toman en cuenta los estilos de aprendizaje en los estudiantes tiene un impacto en el rendimiento académico y la autoeficacia. El objetivo de esta investigación fue identificar la relación entre estilos de aprendizaje, género y autoeficacia entre profesores de inglés en formación, se siguió un método cuantitativo de diseño descriptivo, correlacional y de alcance transversal. Participaron 86 estudiantes matriculados en la Facultad de Lenguas, 60.5% mujeres y 39.5% hombres con edad promedio de 21.7 años (SD=4.9). Los instrumentos utilizados fueron el cuestionario de estilos de aprendizaje de Honey-Alonso (CHAEA) y el inventario de estrategias volitivas académicas (IEVA). Los resultados Los resultados indican que los estudiantes son principalmente teóricos; Utilizar estrategias de autoeficacia relacionadas con el futuro y las posibles consecuencias que enfrentarán si no completan sus tareas. Además, el análisis estadístico demuestra que no existe relación entre estilos de aprendizaje, autoeficacia y género. Sin embargo, es necesario continuar explorando sobre LS, autoeficacia y género ya que se ha señalado que influyen en el aprendizaje del idioma, el logro de metas y la motivación en las áreas de aprendizaje y enseñanza.

Palabras clave: estilos de aprendizaje; autoeficacia; rendimiento académico; género.

INTRODUCTION

Learning styles (LS) denote how learners prefer to learn or work to carry out learning activities. Despite that, teachers do not always provide learning experiences that harmonize with different LS, which is detrimental to student performance and achievement (Chetty et al., 2019; Juárez & Hinojosa, 2021). On the contrary, matching the teaching styles with the LS positively affects student language learning (Hamed & Almabruk, 2021). In the same vein, some researchers have presented advantages in language outcomes when considering LS, such as Biabani and Izadpanah (2019), who determined a correlation between LS and language learning (slang learning); Valencia-Vallejo et al. (2018) also presented in their results that motivation and scaffolding language practice when caring for student LS have a positive impact on academic achievement and self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy implies how capable learners feel about accomplishing activities and reaching goals. According to Cabrera-Solano et al. (2019), self-efficacy is fundamental to accomplishing tasks and developing skills and knowledge. Besides, when learners have a high sense of self-efficacy, they can efficiently and correctly complete classroom activities that promote different language skills. Leach et al. (2022) pointed out the need to research self-efficacy with preservice teacher samples since it predicts dropping teacher practice. Along the same line, Qusay (2020) asserts that self-efficacy influences student learning since it determines their beliefs in what they can do, what they can accomplish, how they can overcome problems, and how they can control their environment to achieve their learning goals. Hence, students with a high sense of self-efficacy perform better academically than those with a low sense of it. Besides, students can become more competent and employ more learning strategies, explicitly reading ones (Balcı, 2017; Okyar, 2021) or control strategies (Schweder, 2021), which help students manage their learning performances.

Their relevance to student academic performance and achievement has interested researchers in investigating self-efficacy and LS; therefore, they are exploring them with different language skills and other variables such as gender. Evidence suggests that LS correlates with self-efficacy but not with gender; for example, Balcı (2017) could observe that self-efficacy correlates with academic achievement, as well as a positive effect on the reading comprehension efficiency with the implementation of reading activities based on the LS and a

sense of self-efficacy; Güven and Baltaoğlu (2017) found that LS correlate with self-efficacy; however, they are not linked to gender.

Similarly, Biabani and Izadpanah's study (2019) distinguished a correlation between LS and slang learning in English but found no difference between males and females when learning them. In contrast, Hoesny (2023) identified that female participants obtained higher proficiency in language and self-efficacy than male participants; based on that difference, it is suggested to promote activities considering student genre since they learn non-identically. Recognizing the importance of S-E and LS in language development raised interest in continuing to dig into them; hence, this study aimed to identify the relationship among student LS, gender, and self-efficacy in preservice language teachers.

LITERATURE FRAMEWORK

Learning styles

Some teachers usually teach similarly to how they like learning; hence, in the classrooms, only some students are favored—the ones with a learning style like their teachers. Based on that situation, it is advisable to take diversity and heterogeneity in terms of LS as the basis in the teaching and learning process to suit students' needs and exploit their strengths when exposed to new information (Alonso et al., 1997). Among the researchers who have been defining the term LS is Escanero (2008); he conceives LS as the ways or strategies learners use when learning, acquiring knowledge, or working with new information; the ways to approach learning depend on what they need or want to learn. The LS can be identified through student performance or behavior while learning or through instruments. The instrument called the Honey-Alonso learning style questionnaire is widely used in university investigations.

According to Alonso et al. (1997), students can work on new activities for short periods in teams, and spontaneously, boredom appears with long-lasting tasks; these students are classified as having an active learning style (LS). Another LS is reflective, which characterizes learners who take the time to analyze information profoundly and look for details before concluding. A third type of LS is the theorist; this LS portrays learners who like objectivity and a clear class structure; they need to know the learning objectives, conceptualize, and synthesize. The fourth type is pragmatic LS, which describes learners who utilize theory whenever possible in their daily tasks. It is worth mentioning that Kolb's LS model is the theoretical basis of the Honey-Mumford LS proposal; the classification of the LS is different and is measured on different scales, but some characteristics that represent each LS are alike.

Based on student ways of learning, Alonso et al. (1997) bespeak that a single type of activity does not suit all learners; for some students, an activity can promote learning, but for others, the very same activity can hamper it (Juárez Díaz, 2020). In the same order of ideas, it was observed that facilitating activities that match different LS benefit students, where the participants picked some reading strategies: answering open-ended questions, fill-in-the-blanks, multiple-choice, and matching exercises; conversely, identifying supporting ideas and taking notes are not activities at the top of their list. Regarding writing skill activities, students are fond of brainstorming, multiple-choice, open-ended questions, matching activities, and filling in the blanks; on the contrary, they have a lower taste for making concept maps and T-charts (Benitez-Correa et al., 2022).

In consonance with Benitez-Correa et al. (2022), Roohani et al. (2020) found a preference for accuracy-oriented, fluency-oriented, interactive strategies, solving problems, and negotiating meaning strategies over less active listening strategies. These findings illustrate that students can accept the same activity or strategy well. While exploring the relationship among LS, communication strategies, emotional levels, and artificial intelligence in learning

English with Iranian students, they observed that students with high emotional control, like visual and kinesthetic styles, and the group style portrayed a low emotional level. Additionally, there were positive correlations between emotional intelligence and communication strategies for dealing with public speaking problems.

Additionally, Gulnaz et al. (2018) points out that learners approach information differently due to their different LS and natural dispositions and indicate that what is taught is less important than how it is taught. Therefore, to provide suitable conditions for learning, teachers adapted their teaching techniques to the students' LS. Their findings manifest significant differences in the LS of male and female EFL students at Taif University due to the physical and biological differences of the students as well as their diverse social and cultural norms.

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy originates in Bandura's social cognitive theory (1987), which explains that human achievements depend on the triadic relationship between personal, behavioral, and environmental or contextual factors. Self-efficacy influences the decision to carry out activities, goal setting, persistence, and effort to complete a job. The ability to believe it can be achieved is essential, especially if the task is complicated. Thus, self-efficacy is a motivational process of vital significance for students to feel competent and fully trusted in their abilities, generating high expectations about themselves. In addition, they can better direct their processes and learning strategies and effectively manage their emotions in the face of adversity (Klassen et al., 2008).

Implicitly, self-efficacy refers to specific personal beliefs about the ability to carry out certain actions, obtain the expected results in a context, or exercise control over oneself (Bandura, 1986). Along these lines, self-efficacy beliefs influence academic motivation; therefore, different studies have delved into its relationship with different aspects, namely, academic performance, learning in different areas of knowledge, and in different contexts. In this sense, concerning online courses, Ozaydin and Ibili (2021) studied LS, self-efficacy, and attitudes; their results communicate that LS in e-learning varies according to gender, age, type of education, and context. However, specifically, the predominant LS in the female gender were verbal, intuitive, and active. Self-efficacy is correlated with attitude.

In addition to the above, the study by Hawa and Tilfarlioğlu (2019) investigated the levels of self-efficacy and preferred LS of students in learning English, revealing the relationship between these two variables and students' social interaction. The results showed that students use various LSs and do not depend on one. However, the logical LS received the highest score, while the reading and writing learning styles received the lowest. The participants showed a high level of self-efficacy, especially the male participants, where the results evidenced a statistically significant difference in favor of men. The authors concluded that there is a positive relationship between students' preferred LS, their self-efficacy, and their social interaction.

Many EFL students feel frustrated because their teachers' teaching styles do not appeal to them. One of the most significant findings in LS education displays that students in language classrooms have different profiles (Gulnaz et al., 2018). Thus, the study by Al-Khaza'leh and Mohammed (2020), when analyzing the learning preferences for English among Malaysian students, found that it is relevant for the teacher to consider them to achieve the necessary motivation for learning. The authors reveal how a teacher, through her practice, promotes motivation and self-efficacy. The teacher used strategies to improve student communication skills, promote their thinking and decision-making, and share information. On the strategies used to improve and encourage students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, she explained that she motivates them by praising them with motivational words: "You are good students; you

can easily pass the course" and encourages them by saying that they have to study and believe in their abilities. Regarding extrinsic motivation, she emphasized the importance of learning English and that students would benefit from it.

METHODOLOGY

Objectives, research questions and hypothesis

To meet the objective of this research, which was to identify the relationship between learning styles, gender, and self-efficacy among English teachers in training, a quantitative method of descriptive, correlational design, and transversal scope was followed. Three specific objectives were set:

1) To characterize the learning styles of the participants.

2) To identify self-efficacy strategy use.

3) To describe the relationship between learning styles, gender and self-efficacy.

Two hypotheses were established:

1) Learning styles has a significant positive correlation with EA and gender.

2) Self-efficacy shows a significant positive correlation with gender.

Participants

The participants of this study were 86 students enrolled in the Faculty of Languages in the Language Teaching class, 60.5% female (n = 52) and 39.5% male (n = 34), with an average age of 21.7 years (SD = 4.9). 18.6% of students have an excellent average (10 to 9.5), 34.9% are in the range of 9.4 to 9.0, followed by 40.5% with a good average (8.9 to 8), and only 6% present grades below eight. The language faculty mainly prepares learners to become foreign language teachers. Consequently, they compulsorily take ten teaching subjects and have the chance to take 3 out of 6 additional teaching classes.

Instruments

The instruments used to obtain the information were two that were integrated into one.

Learning Styles Questionnaire

To begin the data collection started when the Honey-Alonso Learning Styles Questionnaire (HALSQ) was applied to this study. It was used since it is widely employed in Spanish-speaking countries, and its reliability was high (Juárez-Lugo, 2014). Additionally, it is suggested to identify LS in Mexican university students by León-Sánchez and Barrera-García (2022) who consider the questionnaire valid. The total number of items that have the instrument is 80. It is a dichotomous one that distinguishes the active, reflective, theoretical, and pragmatic levels of predominance, which go from very low to very high levels of preponderance (Alonso et al., 1997).

Self-efficacy questionnaire

The Academic Volitional Strategies Inventory (AVSI) proposed by McCann and García (1999) was used to investigate participant self-efficacy, which measures people's tendencies toward controlling actions to persist in the face of difficulties. It focuses on determining the management of emotion and motivation with three factors (self-efficacy, stress reduction, and negative base incentives). The Spanish version of Gaeta (2009) was used because the participants were Mexican, allowing a better understanding of each item. The instrument consists of 20 items measured on a Likert scale (1=never; 5=always). Self-efficacy comprises nine items with reliability values of 0.82 (McCann & Turner, 2004).

Procedure

Students from the Faculty of Languages enrolled in the English course were invited to participate and voluntarily answered the questionnaire in Google Forms. They were informed of the objective of the research, and informed consent was obtained. The participants' data were protected at all times, under strict confidentiality, following the Declaration of Helsinki. For data analysis, descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, standard deviation) and inferential statistics (reliability, normality, correlation, Mann Whitney & Kruskal Wallis test) were carried out to fulfill the specific objectives of the research. SPSS v. 23 statistical software was used.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

After determining the internal consistency and stability of the self-efficacy subscale, a value of 0.801 was obtained. Analyses were carried out to identify the students' LS frequency. Table 1 portrays that the predominant style is theoretical (39.5%), followed by active (17.4%), pragmatic (9.3%), and reflective (4.7). Combined styles were also presented, and one student showed all LS. Regarding genre, the most favored LS is similar in female and male students, which is theoretical. However, the second most selected LS varies: males picked the pragmatic one while females opted for the active style.

Table 1. Student learning styles

Learning styles	Frecuency	Percentage	Female	Male
Theorical	34	39.5	22	12
Reflective	4	4.7	3	1
Pragmatic	8	9.3	3	5
Active	15	17.4	11	4
Active-Reflective	1	1.2	1	0
Theoretical-Pragmatic	6	7	2	4
Active-Pragmatic	2	2.3	2	0
Reflective-Theoretical	4	4.7	3	1
Active-Theoretical	2	2.3	0	2
Active-Theoretical-Pragmatic	5	5.8	2	3
Active-Reflective-Theoretical	3	3.5	1	2
Reflective-Theoretical-Pragmatic	1	1.2	1	0
All styles	1	1.2	1	0
Total	86	100	52	34

The analysis of each of the items of the self-efficacy scale (Figure 1) reveals that the highest mean value was presented by "I think about how good I will feel or how satisfied I will be when I finish" (M 4.31), followed by the item "I think that if I do not start or continue studying, I will fall behind in my other subjects" (M=4.29) and "I think about the goals I have set for myself; How what I do now will affect my future" (M=4.05). The lowest value was "I remind myself that I usually do well on exams and other assignments when I follow a study schedule" (M=3.31). These results represent students' perspectives toward the future and the possible consequences they will face if they do not complete their tasks. The lowest value suggests they consider planning relevant to meet their goals.

Figure 1. Self-efficacy averages
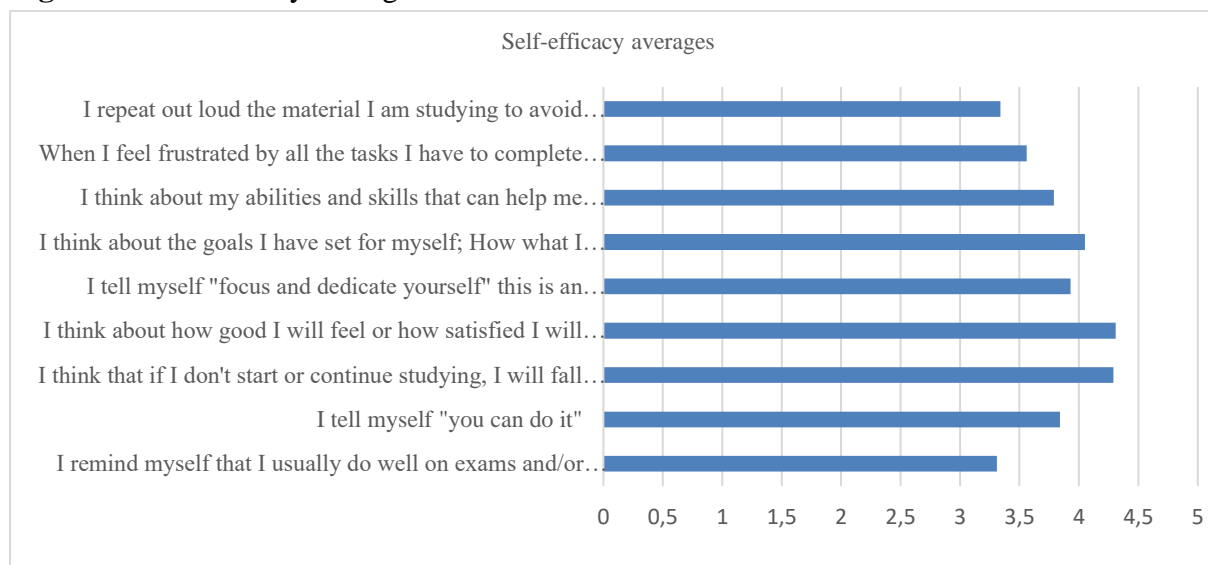
To investigate the relationship between self-efficacy, gender, and LS, a Spearman correlation was carried out; it was observed that there is no significant association. A Kruskall-Wallis test was carried out between LS and self-efficacy, and a Mann-Whitney test for gender and self-efficacy was used to deepen the analysis. The results (Table 2 and Table 3) portray no significant differences, unlike other research in which these differences have been found (cite studies). For this reason, the null hypothesis proposed in this research is rejected.

Table 2. Test Test Kruskall Wallis Self-Efficacy and Learning Style

	Learning styles	N	Average range
Self-Efficacy	Theorical	34	42.24
	Reflective	4	49.38
	Pragmatic	8	43.88
	Active	15	34.67
	Active-Reflective	1	15
	Theoretical-Pragmatic	6	62.17
	Active-Pragmatic	2	25.25
	Reflective-Theoretical	4	46
	Active-Theoretical	2	51.75
	Active-Theoretical-Pragmatic	5	45
	Active-Reflective-Theoretical	3	46.83
	Reflective-Theoretical-Pragmatic	1	72.5
	All styles	1	72.5
	Chi	10.988	
	sig	0.53	

Table 3. Test Mann Whitney and Gender

	Gender	N	Average range
Self-Efficacy	Female	52	44.47
	Male	34	42.01
	U de Mann-Whitney		833.5
	W de Wilcoxon		1428.5
	Z		-0.447
	sig.		0.655

The participants opted for the following LS: theoretical (39.5%), active (17.4%), pragmatic (9.3%), and reflective (4.7). The prevalence indicates that learners are theoretical, which suggests they are willing to work with theory, analyze, and synthesize it in an organized and well-planned learning environment. Regarding the pragmatic style, only 9.3 % prefer to practice what they learned in real contexts, which implies that professors may encourage preservice teachers to use the language learning theory in the different situations and contexts in which they are involved as language teachers. This result aligns with the one obtained by Salas et al. (2021), where the researchers identified that preservice teachers based their teaching practice more on how they have learned rather than on a theoretical basis. They study at least ten subjects about language learning theory, but they tend to set their classes on their own language learning experiences.

Another LS pointed out as a favorite is the active one; this result coincides with Ozaydin and Ibili (2021), who fingers that students may find it challenging to be involved in time-consuming activities, so teachers should use strategies that can increase learner interest and engagement to learn such as varied and new activities, work in group activities, propose ideas, dramatize, participate in debates, or are exposed to short discourses (Alonso et al., 1997). The findings above helped reach the study first objective, which was to characterize the LS of the participants.

Additionally, participant LS preference is similar regarding genre, unlike the one obtained by Gulnaz et al. (2018); their results mean significant differences in the LS of male and female EFL students. Also, Ozaydin and Ibili (2021) found that LS in e-learning varies according to gender, age, type of education, and context. These results implicate a need to continue exploring how female and male preservice teachers learn to achieve more beyond-doubt results since their LS profile can influence how they teach the language, and the language learning results their students can get.

The second objective was to distinguish self-efficacy strategies used by preservice teachers. The results revealed that students mainly employ self-efficacy strategies that may have an effect or potential consequences on their future if they do not complete the school tasks instead of using self-efficacy strategies to plan and manage time for immediate tasks such as exams. This evidence must be considered to promote study schedules so that the learning goals and tasks can be done well and on time. This finding indicates the significance of encouraging preservice teachers to employ self-efficacy strategies to perform well academically. Moreover, Qusay (2020) asserts that self-efficacy assists the learner in standing academically since they can control their learning environment. Also, self-efficacy can help preservice teachers remain in the teaching practice (Leach et al., 2022). So, self-efficacy is necessary to succeed as a learner and professional because it allows learners to acknowledge their potential to reach objectives.

The third objective was to describe the relationship between LS, gender, and self-efficacy. It can be said that they do not correspond to each other; based on that result, the study hypothesis, LS has a significant positive correlation with EA and gender, and self-efficacy shows a significant positive correlation with gender, cannot be accepted. However, it was noticed that this outcome is not similar to the ones seen in (Baltaoğlu, 2017), Balcı (2017), Hawa, and Tilfarlioğlu (2019), where they found a relationship between LS and self-efficacy. Although the hypothesis was not accepted, it can be worth emphasizing the noteworthiness of LS, self-efficacy, and genre since they have been pointed out to influence language learning, reaching goals, and motivation in the learning and teaching areas. Therefore, through qualitative designs, it could be convenient to continue inquiring about these relevant constructs in language learning in other contexts, different academic programs, teaching modalities, and profound teacher and student perspectives. Finally, the limitations encountered in this study was to find literature about self-efficacy, LS, and genre with preservice teachers in the same study.

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