

Multimodal Learning Preference and Styles in Acquiring a Second Language in HyFlex Class

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Abstract: *The COVID-19 Pandemic had tremendously affected education although teachers adapted their best methods to maintain the quality of teaching and learning specifically for Filipino college students in the learning of English as second language. The researcher herself had a dilemma brought about by the global illness when there was an existing greater demand of improving students' skills in learning the second language. Were online classes effective for to enhance skills necessary to their acquisition of a second language? This study provided readers on the multimodality scope and the learning preference of the English language learners through blended learning after the COVID-19 pandemic. Discussions on the metafunctions derived from systemic-functional linguistics would be the starting point for this study in multimodality which results hope to provide a basis of reflection on the positive impact of teaching and the learning modalities in higher education for teacher's rethinking of the best strategies and practices to continue education objectives in learning English as a second language depending on the context, situation and students' needs. The research would investigate how modality would affect the acquisition of English language by examining the effect of modality in hyflex class. To achieve its goals, (2) questionnaires were utilized; Kolb's (2017) Learning Styles and VARK Learning Styles to identify students' preferred learning styles in learning a second language. Multimodal Approaches of Firmansyah (2021) was used to explain the results of the study.*

Keywords: multimodal learning, modalities, learning preference, learning styles, ESL

INTRODUCTION

Multimodality is not a new idea in teaching a second language. However, recently before the global plague, there has been an overwhelming preference for monomodality, focused on one of the macro skills in teaching and learning English; speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and presenting in learning a language. It was quite an easy task for teachers to teach and focus only on one mode for mastery of a specific skill with the belief that no one approach could account for multimodality as a discipline in itself since “interrelation exist between speech, sound, image, text and media, as the five components for multimodality” (Si, 2022). Engaging the learners to multimode learning has immensely impacted the teaching, more so the learning, during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ganapathy and Seetharam, 2016).

Systemic functional linguistics describes meaning in language from three views that relate to fundamental functional properties of human language. These three perspectives are strands of meaning or metafunctions (parallel to ‘text’), implicitly reflect the way we experience and interact with the world (Herman, 2023). They reflect the fact that all meaning is generally simultaneously concerned with experience, relationships and structure which in systemic functional grammar are metafunctions described as: the ideational (which deals with the way the world is represented through language); the interpersonal (which recognizes that textual language works well with users’ identities or relationships within communicative discourse); and the textual (which goes to structure of a text or to indicate structural relationships with other texts (Bakuuro , 2017; Zhao, Kormos and Rebuschat, 2021).

Learners experience the world in unique ways and with that derived variation in the ways best for them. Although teacher plays an important role in choosing strategies to use in the class, students' uniqueness should be considered since they have diverse learning preferences. Some were into visual learning while others go for reading and writing to achieve better performance specifically in an English class. Understanding these different types of learning styles could drastically impact how a teacher chooses strategies, how she manages a class, how she deals with students and how she would set up group activities adaptive to individual learning needs. Without understanding and acknowledging these different ways of learning, teachers might end up with a handful of students lagging behind their classmates. She has the significant job to activate students' learning styles, not apart from her responsibility to adjust lessons to cater to students' abilities and let them work on their individual weaknesses (Heilporn and Bélisle, 2021).

Especially when learning a second language, students differ from each other based on learner's inner characteristics such as personality, aptitude, language, cognitive style, motivation, worldview, and learning styles (Kolb, 2017). Although there exist a problem between the teaching methods and learning styles, multimodality in learning a second language seems could be a gateway to investigate how the process would go to achieve academic success between the teacher and students and students themselves not just through writing but also through speaking, gesture, gaze, and visual forms, i.e. through different modes (Said, 2021). This does not mean that students should perform only their preferred types of tasks but such process would make education participants adaptive and flexible. Multimodal approach in teaching foreign languages therefore would be effective to all channels of information perception to meet the needs of representatives of different learning styles (Kress, 2019, Ho, 2017).

When pandemic in 2019 occurred, health was not just the concern worldwide. The illness put the Philippine educational system, both the basic education students as well as those in the tertiary level, in an edifying situation since most classes were face-to-face and were into monomodal teaching. The conventional teachers were forcibly hurdled into online learning, where the learners were geographically distant from the teacher, and the entire educational process was conducted across the Internet and communication networks (Alammery, Alshaikh and Alhogail, 2021). Despite the advantages of online learning, there were still numerous challenges for students, administration, and faculty. There was suddenly a need for an integrated infrastructure and qualified and trained human staff to support this type of learning. More so, computers supported by communication networks and a fast internet connection became a necessity. Thus, this kind of learning system may be challenging to implement in developing countries owing to a lack of technology and auxiliary tools (Pokhrel, 2021). Other challenges involved in the implementation of online learning including the lack of focus among some students which restricted learning opportunities (Fathelrahman, 2019).

In terms of faculty and staff, online learning became challenging with the successive and rapid technological developments that teachers must learn and master as part of the system so they could use these as teaching tools (Bao, 2020) to ensure faculty in acquiring the appropriate skills. In addition, other factors include lack of possible interaction between the teacher and the learners, problems related to the access of some students to the virtual classroom (Aldiab et al., 2019). During the pandemic, both classroom engagement and interaction played an essential role for online faculty like learner-teacher interaction, learner-content interaction, learner-learner interaction, and independent learning were highly dependent classroom modalities (Mojib, 2022) and among the mentioned, only student-teacher interaction was prioritized. But, with online classes, college facilitators, faculty, and instructors found targets learners who lacked not only skills due to insufficient opportunities for participation, and promoted only scientific innovation with its full implementation. In higher education, universities had replaced face-to-face classes with atypical hybrid approach, in response to the call of the time which until at present has been the best options on offer for university learners (Andrade et al., 2020).

The Setting/The HyFlex Class

The typical educational system in the Philippines at present is the so called “New Normal”, “Distance Education” (Nuruzzaman, 2016), “Online Class” and a mixture of other modes, “Blended or Hybrid or HyFlex Learning” (Anderton, Vitali, Conner and Bakeberg, 2021). This is the type of education using technology developed during and after the pandemic (Heitz, Laboissiere, Sanghvi, and Sarakatsannis, 2020). Teachers are forced to quickly adapt their pedagogical activity to a virtual environment. Such model was considerably a challenge in the academe since the pandemic came in no time. There are no unanimity of criteria, since the meaning was ambiguous in itself, causing confusion, and gave rise to a certain lack of rigor between its different names and types.

Online education was found to be more beneficial to different learning styles for an individual as well as academic growth compared to traditional teaching methods (Simpson, 2018). Learning in online classes had encouraged students to become independent and innovative in thinking, had improved their senses, and promoted their overall attitude development but utilizing virtual real-life contents. Online learning was found of high potential for not only for independent but also for collaborative learning. Therefore, teachers should make use of this avenue by designing and finding strategic implementation of the course to improve students’ learning experiences.

Distance education, on the other hand, was implemented to achieve educational objectives characterized by having existing technological tools without focusing so much on physical organizational infrastructure. Similarly after the pandemic, ‘hybrid learning’ came (Hwang, 2018; Raes, Windey and Depaepe, 2020). Mumford, and Dikilitaş, 2020). This mode assumed that half of the students in a class attend the classroom and the other half would follow the class from home, partially online and partially face-to-face. This new normal modality was relatively the instructional methodologies in higher education at present. To Beatty (2019), hybrid-flexible (HyFlex) became the new normal learning mode but had impacted students’ learning qualifications, retention, pass rate, and time to graduation. The use of this classroom infrastructure was challenging not only to students and teachers more so to the administration.

METHODOLOGY

This study investigated how modality affected the acquisition of English as a second language by examining the effect of modality on incidental learning in online class. the exposure and testing phases. In this paper, we first define key concepts and then. Then she described the procedures and presented the findings.

To achieve the research goal, the study utilized Multimodal Approaches of Ho (2017 q.td in Firmansyah, 2021), Kolb’s (2017) four (4) Learning Styles (Diverging, Assimilating, Converging and Accommodating); in hand with VARK Learning Styles (Visual, Auditory, Reading/writing and Kinesthetic). Using the descriptive multimodal approach asynchronous to the two (2) instruments, the researcher was able to test the multimodal learning preference and styles underpinning learning modalities such as language, images, music, sound, and movement in acquiring a second language in online class.

The Multimodal Approach

As to the multimodal approach, it is an analytical method used to study the social semiotics toward underpinning learning modalities; language, images, music, sound, and movement (Betthäuser, Bach-Mortensen and Engzell, 2023). Text and discourse were intertwined for social signal associated with human experience and social interaction where the construction of meaning and interpretation could take place (Bouchey, Castek, and Thygeson, 2021) dependent on the twofold semiotics and the series of information aspects contained in language. First was the aspect of discourse or the implicit and explicit goals of the actors or communication participants. Second was the aspect of design or the outset of expression or action to and from in the process. The third was the aspect of production and organization by paying attention to the semiotic resources deployed in various modalities (Firmansyah, 2021). To him, design and production were difficult to separate because they were synergistic contexts presented in a

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 certain semiotic mode. The fourth was the aspect of distribution. The modality factor in the distribution aspect was not very visible because it was independent of the design and production aspects in the discourse's presentation (Hardini and Gustiawan, 2020)

The Kolb Learning Styles

Diverging Learning Style. This ‘feeling and watching’ style enables learners to look at things from different perspectives. They are sensitive who prefer to watch to generate ideas through brainstorming rather than gather information necessary to solve problems. They have broad cultural interests and resort to viewing concrete situations from several different viewpoints. They are interested in people, tend to be imaginative and emotional, and tend to be strong in the arts. They tend to work in groups, listen to ideas and receive feedbacks with an open mind (McLeod, 2024).

Assimilating Learning Style. This ‘watching and thinking’ technique is preferred by students who are direct and logical in thinking. To them, concepts are more important than

people who could give them good and clear explanations. They understand better wide-range abstract ideas when they are organized effectively for science careers. In formal learning situations, assimilators prefer readings, lectures, exploring analytical models, and having time to think things through on their own (Kolb, Rubin and McIntyre, 1984).

Converging Learning Style. Using this ‘doing and thinking’ style, students prefer in using their own learning to find solution to practical issues. They are into doing technical tasks on their own without bothering others in decision-making. They are risk-takers and are into experimenting new ideas through stimulations and practical applications (Pashler, McDaniel, Rohrer and Bjork, 2008).

Accommodating Learning Style. This ‘doing and feeling’ style seems the prevalent style within the general population. Learners using this practice allow own intuition to work rather than logic but would welcome others analysis. They prefer to take a practical, experiential approach and are ready to act on ‘gut feeling’ but would also rely on others information than carry out their sole scrutiny (Kolb, 1981).

The VARK Learning Styles

In Fleming’s model or VARK learning styles (VARK stands for **V**isual, **A**ural, **R**ead/write, and **K**inesthetic), students were assessed with their tendency to visual learning; auditory learning; reading and writing; or kinesthetic learning (Peterson & Kolb, 2017).

The Visual Learning Style.

This style empowers a learner to retain information through visual information (e.g. diagrams and infographics) presented in videos. Visual learners best comprehend ideas when they are adept at recognizing patterns and interpreting visual data. Visual or Graphic (G) preference includes the depiction of information in maps, diagrams, charts, graphs, flow charts, and all the symbolic arrows, circles, hierarchies, and other devices use to represent ideas in words (Verde, 2022). This predilection does not include still pictures or photographs of reality, movies, videos, or PowerPoint. It does include designs, white space, patterns, shapes, and the different formats used to highlight and convey information more than mere words in boxes helpful to those who have a Read/write preference.

Auditory Learning Style.

Students using this technique recollect heard information through audiobooks, recordings or conversations about a topic, or their own notes read out loud. Learners assimilate information while they thrive in lecture-based environments, absorbing spoken content with dexterity. The Auditory or Aural (A) mode describes a preference for heard or spoken information learn best from lectures, group discussions, radio, email, using mobile phones, speaking and talking things through. Email is included here because; although it is text and could be included in the

Read/write category, it is often chat-style with abbreviations, colloquial terms, slang, and non-formal language.

This Aural preference includes talking out loud as well as talking to oneself. Often people with this preference want to sort things out by speaking first, rather than sorting out their ideas and then speaking. They may say again what has already been said or ask an obvious and previously answered question. They have a need to say it themselves and they learn by saying it their way.

Reading/writing Learning Style.

These learners usually enjoy taking comprehensive notes while learning about information best retained through reading and note-taking. Learners prefer information in textual format as they engage deeply themselves with written content, extracting knowledge from books, articles, and essays.

The Read/write (R) preference is for information displayed as words. Not surprisingly, many teachers and students have a strong preference for this mode. Being able to write well and read widely are attributes sought by employers of graduates. This preference emphasizes text-based input and output – reading and writing in all its forms but especially manuals, reports, essays, and assignments. People who prefer this modality are often addicted to PowerPoint, the Internet, lists, diaries, dictionaries, thesauri, quotations and words, words, words. Note that most PowerPoint presentations and a lot of information on the Internet on sites such as Wikipedia are suited to those with this preference as there is seldom an auditory channel or a presentation that uses Visual symbols (Fleming, 2006).

Kinesthetic Learning Style.

Learners using this style take information when presented to them in a physical way while getting involved with chemistry experiments or mixing in physical activity. For students to learn, they grasp concepts best when physically engaged with the learning process, from hands-on experiences, demonstrations, and practical applications of knowledge (Dearmer, 2023). Such modality refers to the “perceptual preference related to the use of experience and practice (simulated or real).” Although such an experience may invoke other modalities, the key is that people who prefer this mode are connected to reality, “either through concrete personal experiences, examples, practice or simulation.”

The Kinesthetic (K) modality includes demonstrations, simulations, and videos of “real” things, as well as case studies, practice, and applications (Verde and Valero, 2021). The key is the reality or concrete nature of the example. If it can be grasped, held, tasted, or felt it will probably be included. People with this preference learn from the experience of doing something and they value their own experiences and less so, the experiences of others. It is possible to write or speak Kinesethetically if the topic is strongly based on reality. An assignment that requires the details of who will do what and when, is suited to those with this preference, as is a case study or a working example of what is intended or proposed.

Participant Sample

The study utilized descriptive study across colleges undertaken at Bulacan State University Main Campus (Malolos) aimed at exploring the learning preferences and styles of the college students in online classes. About six (6); College of Engineering (COE), College of Nursing (CON), College of Industrial Technology (CIT), College of Business Administration (CBA), College of Hospitality and Tourism Management (CHTM), and College of Sports, Exercise and Recreation (CSER); among the 13 colleges in the institution with randomly selected students were willingly participated in the survey. Accordingly, a convenience sampling of 180 students (30 students in a representative section per college) were asked for this study, and the survey was administered online. After exploring the data, the results were deemed complete and ready for statistical analysis.

The Instruments

Kolb's Learning Styles Questionnaire of Peter Honey and Alan Mumford is a four-way classification inquiry comprised 80 items used to identify preferred learning style(s). Examples of items were; (1) "I have strong beliefs about what is right and wrong, good and bad"; (11) "When I hear about a new idea or approach I immediately start working out how to apply it in practice"; and (75) "I am keen on exploring the basic assumptions, principles and theories underpinning things and events". The investigation used the scoreboard as suggested by the classification specialists.

As to the VARK Questionnaire, there were 16 categories with four (4) items each, a total of 64 items. Examples of categories were; Category 1, "I want to learn how to play a new board game or card game" with items under; "I would read the instructions" and "I would listen to somebody explaining it and ask questions"; and Category 3, "I want to learn about a new project" with items under, "I would ask for diagrams to show the project stages with charts of benefits and costs" and "I would ask for an opportunity to discuss the project". The VARK Questionnaire used the Likert Scale of 1 to 5, which frequency means 5-Every time, 4-Almost every time, 3-Sometimes, 2-Almost never and 1-Never. Modalities were analyzed and presented through diagrams. Multimodal Approaches of Firmansyah (2021) was utilized to explain the results of the study.

DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The study revealed the following:

- (1) There was a Mixture of Modality (MM) as shown in the use of two sets of learning styles in communication. Those who did not have standout technique to send message across had shifted if not overlapped one method to and with another since it was not sufficient for students to use a single mode of learning. They felt they could switch if the need would arise.
- (2) To classify the respondents, 122 out of 180 participants or 67.78 percent fell under Type 1, as the researcher would name them, the 'Activists'. They were those flexible in their communication preferences and could immediately switch from one mode to another depending on their working group's style. They were 'free' individuals who easily adapt to the environment. When the situational need for visual learners would arise, for example, they could easily shift to reading or writing, or to auditory, or even to kinesthetic preference.
- (3) The 58 respondents or 32.22 percent were considered for Type 2 or the 'Vigilant'. They were the ones keeping careful watch for possible danger or difficulties. They were on guard of the messages they send and were satisfied only when they reach their communication goal in one specific (standout mode) if not in all the modes of learning. They could be mistaken slow deliverers although they could hide this impression and claim they were just 'cautious' who would first gather necessary information and understand them before making decision.
- (4) Almost all or 89 percent were into considered Type 3 or the 'Movers' who fell somewhere between Types 1 and 2 categories. They were the 'teachable' ones in motion. They prefer to communicate when they move around or while doing something. They were constantly busy and active and rarely would slow down. They were so much engaged into a lot of things to do (meet people or go somewhere, to places).
- (5) To make meanings in communication, especially in the second language learning, classroom would require differentiated approach in teaching. Although education's aim has always been to teach students equally, but the fact remains that learning seemed dependent on how students perceive information and communicate these ideas using varied modalities.
- (6) Not surprisingly, this study revealed that about 52 respondents or 28.89% were visual learners, that they learned best when graphics were displayed, when they assembled something guided with a video instruction, or when advised using a 3D model.

(7) About 48 respondents or 26.67% were into Auditory or aural learning. With this category, respondents communicated when listening to experts through podcasts and videos, listening to answers to the questions, or listening to advice.

(8) As for reading and writing, about 31 students or 17.22% of the participants showed interest in reading although it was noticeable that even some students in college looked for images while reading as evident in items; “I would read a print brochure” and “I would instruction from GPS”.

(9) Finally, about 49 participants or 27.22% were into Kinesthetic learning style. Results exposed the respondents’ interest in performing tasks that involved directly manipulating objects and materials to include computer works or gamified activities. They were good at applied activities and have to practice doing something in order to learn. Using multimodal texts entertained the learners not focusing so much on the mental processes like thinking, memory and emotions. A wide variety of kinesthetic educational activities would arouse interest in students to learn foreign languages.

CONCLUSION

When learning a second language, teaching through communication modes is necessary since students differ from one another depending on their attributes such as personality, aptitude, language learning strategies, cognitive style, motivation, and worldview. Learning multimodal text can be done through the use of varied channels. However, multimodal texts do not have to be necessary digital, whether a text is created on a computer or paper. Teachers should realize that for students to communicate a message, they should not consider them robots for switch on and off. They are humans that could think, act and deliver. What teachers can best do is understand students’ individual uniqueness.

The use of multimodal approach in teaching, especially in a second language should give students the opportunity to receive information through their best perception channel. To do this, the teacher needs to bring all educational information to the maximum extent, so that all perception channels are involved. They should carefully plan and design ways to engage their students in a manner that suits each one of them. Learning to apply modalities in teaching increases students’ foreign language learning efficiency.

Today’s students are creative, cause-driven, tech-savvy, pragmatic and flexible. Most of them spend long hours online more than the teachers do. Mentors therefore should bring out the best in every student by improving their personality in general, and in particular, their cognitive and creative abilities as well as their view of the world and become a better version of each one of them.

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