

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Business educators traditionally look for ways to make their instruction more relevant and meaningful for students. Among business educators, numerous teaching styles are used; and in some cases, the teaching style of the instructor does not match teaching styles preferred by all students. Henson and Borthwick (1984) asserted that instructors may teach using the same methods such as lectures and discussion groups, but their teaching styles can still be different. For example, in using the discussion group method, one instructor's teaching style might be "child centered--a task structure is provided by the instructor with the students given options according to their interests" (p. 6). Another instructor's teaching style might be "task oriented--specifically planned tasks associated with some appropriate materials" (p. 6). Conti (1985) suggested that one teaching style might not be appropriate for all students and situations. He found that the teacher-centered style produced the most student learning when preparing students to take the General Educational Development test. This is in contrast to the learner-centered mode of instruction as proposed by the adult education literature as being the most effective mode of instruction with adult learners.

An extensive amount of literature is available pertaining to learning styles and teaching styles. Interest in how people learn, as well as how they prefer to learn, has increased over the years. Anderson and Bruce (1979) asserted that:

In attempts to maximize educational effectiveness and provide for the individual needs and abilities of students, the consideration for a student's personal learning style is emerging as one of the promising approaches to solving the problem of improving learning...research on the information processing habits of learners has produced instrumentation that is useful in identifying specific learning styles. Identification of styles has led, in turn, to a new look at classroom activities in the light of students' learning characteristics (p. 81).

Marshall (1991) asserted that students' learning is dependent upon their degree of interest in what is being taught as well as the educational conditions under which they learn best. This idea confirmed Dewey's philosophy that effort goes where interest is.

Sullivan's (1993) research supported the position that learning style preference could conceivably be learning style strength. Students should not be locked into any one particular learning style. By making students aware of preferred learning styles, students can modify the different styles on their own (Renzulli, 1992). The advantages of students becoming aware of their own learning preferences are that (a) their ability to develop additional learning styles and (b) their ability to modify their existing learning patterns will be increased (Henson & Borthwick, 1984). Furthermore, according to Carbo and Hodges (1988), "students who understand and then are provided opportunities to make use of their learning styles tend to feel valued, respected, and empowered" (p. 7). Jenkins (1988, in Canfield, 1992) stressed that students will have a measure of control

over classroom events if they are aware of their learning styles. Consequently, instructors who teach to learning style differences will reinforce this sense of control. Marshall (1991) stated:

. . .for instructors to change their teaching styles, to understand and risk planning instruction on the basis of learning style patterns of students--and, therefore, to teach successfully a wider range of learners--they must come to recognize, respect, and support the learning differences of students. If students do not learn the way we teach them, then we must teach them the way they learn!" (p. 226).

Instructor accountability for the learning success of students increased when learning patterns of the students were considered in planning instruction. Henson and Borthwick (1984) asserted that instructors should have various styles as opposed to being adept in one particular style deemed to be good. Instructors should be trained in several different styles in order to match the different learning styles of students (Turner, 1979). The ability to naturally and instantaneously adapt to students' styles delineates good instructors (Cornett, 1983).

Campbell (1989) suggested that students' learning styles may influence the majors they select in college. She cites the study conducted by Vogt and Holder (1988-89) which "demonstrated that business education majors had a significantly greater proportion of extroverted, sensing types than other education majors or than the general population" (pp. 24-25). Implications are that business education majors are likely to be linear learners. They prefer structure and need help in organizing. As opposed to lectures, harmonious group projects, and well-defined goals, business education majors prefer direct experiences.

Identifying teaching style only is not enough. In addition, this style should be matched with an appropriate learning style (Henson & Borthwick, 1984). To help learners "stretch" themselves, a match between learning and teaching styles at various times along with an intentional mismatch at other times should prove useful (Witkin, 1975; Gregorc, 1979).

Doyle and Rutherford (1984) found that the popularity of proposals and programs for matching learning and teaching styles have two sources. First, a wide variety of differences exist among learners. These differences are apt to influence how learners respond to and benefit from an instructional method. In comparison to standard teaching situations, more students would reach higher levels of achievement if instruction were adapted to specific intellectual or emotional "aptitudes." Second, an intelligent, practical framework for dealing with diversity would be provided.

According to Henson and Borthwick (1984), the popularity of matching learning and teaching styles will continue to be an important issue among educators. Thus, "Future instructor education programs will be shortchanging students if they fail to prepare them with a repertoire of teaching styles" (p. 7). These authors recommended that instructor education programs familiarize prospective as well as inservice instructors with instruments that measure different teaching styles and learning styles.

Theoretical Framework

According to Marshall (1991), learning style research revealed that students identified as being slow or poor achievers by their instructors “had learning preferences (that is, strengths) that were not supported within the structure of traditional schooling” (p. 225). If learning preferences were supported through altering educational conditions to meet learning style preferences, statistically significant improvements in behaviors, grades, and attitudes would be observed (Dunn, Beaudry, & Klavas, 1989). This philosophy can be referred to as “the match of critical learning style factors to environment and instruction” (Marshall, 1991, p. 226).

Naturally, one tends to teach the way one learns. Instructors subconsciously assume that the way they learned is also the most effective way for others to learn. However, instructors can, by expanding their teaching styles, support opportunities for students with different learning styles to increase their learning (Friedman & Alley, 1984). By assessing learning styles, instructors can be provided with new direction toward developing more personalized instruction. This assessment, along with the appropriate teaching style repertoire, will provide the basis for improved student learning. (Kaplan & Kies, 1993; Henson & Borthwick, 1984). Instructors should identify the learning styles of the students, identify their teaching styles, and then vary their teaching methods to meet the range of learner preferences. For example, one or more alternatives might be used to bring about a desired learning outcome (Gregorc & Ward, 1977).

Recommendations reported in the education literature today often promote matching learning style with teaching style to augment achievement (Hyman & Rosoff, 1985; Sullivan, 1993). Katz (1983) reported that occupational therapy students required less study time yet scored higher on problem-solving when their learning styles were matched to their instructors’ teaching styles as opposed to students in mismatched conditions. This match demonstrated an increase in achievement as well as an increase in problem-solving. Research conducted by Domino (1971) demonstrated that a match between students’ preferred learning style and the instructor’s preferred teaching style produced significantly higher grades as well as higher scores on teacher effectiveness and course evaluations.

Data collected at research centers such as the University of Chicago and the University of Wisconsin Research and Development Center for Cognitive Learning suggested that one important step in maximizing learning is individualization (Henson & Borthwick, 1984). They suggested that “individual learners have their own preferred learning styles and that instructors have some responsibility for gearing up their teaching styles to ‘fit’ the preferred learning style of each learner. This recognition has introduced a new thrust in educational research--matching teaching styles with learner styles” (p. 4).

Statement of Purpose

Instructors should know the learning styles of students, and they should know their own teaching styles to increase the match between the two. Identifying a teaching style is useless unless an attempt is made to match it with the appropriate learning style (Henson & Borthwick, 1984).

Simon (1987) recommended further research to match students' learning styles with faculty teaching styles to determine if there is a relationship between student success and teaching-learning style match. In the field of business education, research has not been reported that addresses the match between the teaching styles of business instructors and the learning styles of their students. This match is of concern for improving learning in specific business education content areas such as keyboarding, word processing, and office technology.

The purposes of this study were to identify the teaching styles of business instructors and the learning styles of their students in specific content areas, to determine if a match existed between the two, and to determine if relationships existed between student success and style match and between student evaluations of instructors and style match. The Canfield Learning Styles Inventory and the Canfield Instructional Styles Inventory were used in this study.

Business instructors and students in selected business courses at two community colleges located in Southwest Virginia will participate in this study. Research questions as follows will be answered:

1. What are the teaching style profiles, including typologies, of the business instructors as measured by the Canfield Instructional Styles Inventory?
2. What are the learning style profiles, including typologies, of students in specified business classes as measured by the Canfield Learning Styles Inventory?
3. What is the percentage of match of teaching styles and learning styles across classes of business instructors?
4. What is the relationship between students' success as indicated by course grades and a match between their learning styles and the instructors' teaching style?
5. What is the relationship between students' success as indicated by final exam scores and a match between their learning styles and the instructors' teaching style?
6. What is the relationship between student evaluations of their instructors and a match between teaching style and learning style?

Significance of the Study

Business educators can use the outcomes of this study to assess the importance that their teaching styles may have to the learning of their students. Student learning will be improved when the instructor's teaching style and the students learning style match (Ladd, 1993; Smith & Renzulli, 1984; Henson & Borthwick, 1984). Henson and Borthwick contended that "assessing learning styles provides today's instructors with a new direction to take toward developing a more personalized form of instruction. This assessment, coupled with an appropriate teaching style, provides the basis for greater improvement in student learning" (p. 5).

Individual learning styles can be matched with instructional techniques to promote academic achievement (Keefe & Ferrell, 1990; Jenkins, 1988, in Canfield, 1992; Brown, 1978). Brown contended that the greater the congruency (the lower the discrepancy score between learning styles and teaching styles), the higher the achievement.

Teaching toward learning style preference is a means for dealing with student diversity in colleges today (Kaplan & Kies, 1993). Higher student performance as well as positive evaluations of both instructors and students regarding their educational experiences are noted when instructional style and learning style preferences are matched (Canfield & Canfield, 1988). Further, when completing instructor evaluation forms, students generally report their perceptions honestly (Machina, 1987, in Miller, 1990). “Students and instructors communicate better and feel more satisfaction with educational plans and experiences when they have the chance to see and discuss their learning and instructional preferences” (Canfield & Canfield, 1988, p. 28). If indeed there is an increase in academic achievement and a positive attitude toward learning when students’ learning styles and instructors’ teaching styles match, then recommendations can be made regarding the application of learning style research (Campbell, 1989).

Business educators would benefit from this study by determining how teaching styles may affect the learning of students. As indicated by Campbell (1989), “instructors can design instruction and materials that respond directly to individual learning needs and learning preferences” (p. 6) if predictions can be made about student achievement based on their learning styles. Campbell suggested that further research was necessary to help instructors understand the implications of learning style research, to help them determine the learning styles of their students, and finally to assist them in planning teaching strategies accordingly. Instructors would then be able to “determine specific ways their styles can be extended or changed to meet appropriate situations in the classroom” (p.25).

This study will help to determine if students receive higher grades and have more positive perceptions of their instructors when their learning style matches the instructors’ teaching style. This study will contribute to the growing body of research on matching teaching and learning styles.

Delimitation

This study was limited to two community colleges located in Southwestern Virginia. Subjects were teachers and their students in the Administrative Support Technology programs. There is a potential homogeneity of teachers and students because they are all in the same subject area. The types of classes are similar and may have been taught using a similar hands-on approach. The Canfield inventories are self-report instruments, not measurement instruments.

Limitations

The generalizability of this study will be limited due to the lack of a random sample. The results are generalizable to the participants and to other groups to the extent they are similar to the participants. Five different instructors participated leading to five different final exams. Further, the study is limited by the assumption that the responses to the items of the Canfield Learning Styles Inventory and the Canfield Instructional Styles Inventory reflect an honest description of teaching and learning styles.

Definitions

Learning style is “The affective component of educational experience, which motivates a student to choose, attend to, and perform well in a course or training exercise” (Canfield, 1992, p. 1).

Teaching style is “An identifiable set of classroom behaviors associated with and carried out by the instructor” (Galbraith & Sanders, 1987, p. 169).

Typology is “A combination of individual learning and instructional style scales used to identify learners and instructors by type” (Ladd, 1993, p. 6).

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 presents an introduction to the study, the statement of purpose, the problem statement, research questions, significance of the study, delimitations, limitations, and definitions of the terms. Chapter 2 is the overview of related literature. Chapter 3 is the methodological approach that includes the research design, subject selection, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, and summary. Chapter 4 presents the report of the research findings. Chapter 5 includes the summary, conclusions, and recommendations.