

“WHO IS MORE SUCCESSFUL IN WRITING-FIELD DEPENDENT OR FIELD INDEPENDENT LEARNER”?

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ABSTRACT

The case study is aimed to explore how EFL learners with field-dependence/field-independence cognitive style succeeded in writing skill. To fulfill the aim of the study 2 pre-intermediate EFL learners were selected. Participants filled questionnaire to identify their learning styles. After that, they participated in 4-day writing lesson. On the last day of the lesson, they were given to write an essay on particular topic to check their learning outcomes. Collected data was observed and conclusion was made.

Keywords: field-independent, field- dependent, writing skill, second language acquisition

INTRODUCTION

Learning language, whether it is native or target language, is the process which includes not only receptive (listening and reading) skills but also perceptive (speaking and writing) skills as well. And four different skills influence and complement each other simultaneously. Among them writing skill is considered as an essential part of foreign language acquisition. It includes itself a practice and comprehension of other key elements of language skills, such as reading and speaking. Moreover, writing is a complex process which activate learners' critical thinking to organize their thoughts toward particular topic.

For most second language learners' writing is challenging and frustrating task. Some acquirers struggle with the task organization while other individuals demonstrate weak vocabulary, incorrect spelling and word order. Teachers' role and guidance is essential in teaching writing. In order to eliminate and increase input process students' learning strategies might be identified by teachers but students' development of writing proficiency differ from each other. Some students mostly tend to rely on teachers' assisting in input process (field-dependent), while other (field-independent) learners acquire new material by doing some extensive research and their learning outcomes may vary. All these aspects have an effect on second language acquisition in general.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the second half of 20th century, researchers have been studying various aspects that influence the acquisition of a second language. (Ellis 1985; Brown 1987Ortega 2009). Among them, the learning styles have gained a wide interest, as they are considered as a facilitator in language acquisition. Witkin (1937) claimed that learning styles are mostly related to the form and not the content of the learning activity. He tried to determine to what extend surrounding

field has an impact on how person perceive an item and established that “some people saw the tree, while others saw the forest”. He stated that field- independent people see the forest while field-dependent people see trees in the forest.

According to Messik (1976) **“the field-independent person tends to articulate figures as discrete from their backgrounds and to easily differentiate objects from embedding contexts, whereas the field-dependent person tends to experience events globally in an undifferentiated fashion”**. Field independent learners tend to be more independent, enjoy studying and thinking on their own way. Moreover, this kind of learners succeed in solving problems and assimilating the knowledge instilled by their teachers. While field dependent learners tend to follow teachers’ instructions, so feedback from educators and peers is vital for them. Moreover, some researchers highlighted that field independents outperform field dependents in grammar and reading in second language acquisition. However, when the learning process takes place in a natural setting field dependent learners have an advantage in communication and interaction. So, field dependent individuals perform well in oral speech, but they are not good at reading or sentence analyzing.

Suerman (1980) examined low and high achieving students according their field independence and field dependence cognitive style. The results showed that learners with the high performance tend to be field independent.

Behavioral profiles of Field-Independent and Field-Dependent learners’

Field-Independents

- Analytic
- Learner-oriented
- Focus is on parts of object
- Ability to perceive abstract features
- Ability to create an organizational structure for processing data
- Long attention span
- Non- social learning

Field-Dependents

- Focus on global characteristics of object
- Perception of clearly stated features
- Low ability to detect changes in monotonous, but constantly changing perceptual field
- Short attention span
- Prefers social learning environment

*Characteristics derived from Cohen (1969) and Witkin (1978)

Witkin and Goodenough (1977) found out that while input processing field independent and field dependent individuals rely on an external or internal references frames. Consequently, it can be expected both learners who possess these cognitive strategies implement strategies that is beneficial in learning process. **In addition, there are scientists who highlighted the role of individuals’ motivation in learning process. For example, researchers as Garger and Guild (1987) noticed that field independents and field dependents have different sources of inspiration influencing their academic achievements directly or indirectly.**

Motivating factors for Field independent and Field dependent learners

Field independent:

- through oral encouragement;
- through external rewards;
- through providing outlines

Cook (2008) indicates that there is no general explanation why field independent individuals should be better or worse at language learning than field independent learners. All in all, despite the claims mentioned above, field dependent learners could reach high results in language learning.

Field dependent:

- through high marks;
- through competition;
- through choice of activities

PARTICIPANT PROFILE

The individuals I chose for this case study learners who are going to take IELTS exam. Elvira is twenty –years-old student who is of Kazakh nationality. She is a student of Technical University and in order to continue her study overseas she started learning English four months ago. She is a self- confident and hard-working learner. Despite the short term, she managed to improve her listening and reading skills. In order to improve listening comprehension and speaking, Elvira watched various films, cartoons and videos online that were interesting to her. Moreover, she spent a lot of time on reading short scientific articles and those helped to enrich her English vocabulary. Her speech is fluent and she tries to express herself by using complex grammar structures. Moreover, Elvira mentioned that in order to improve her writing skills she read and compare various essays and in writing process she tried to follow some learned structures.

Second participant is Aziz who is 26 years old. He is from traditional Uzbek family. He can speak fluently in 2 languages as Russian and German. Aziz mention that he has a great interest in exploring different cultures and traditions. He is taking intensive language course for getting a job in foreign country. Every summer he travels abroad to visit relatives who live in America. These visits helped him to improve his speech and listening comprehension. He can easily understand the conversation, but while speaking he does some grammatical mistakes. He is not afraid of communicating in foreign language and very willing to communicate with foreigners. However, when it comes to writing essays whether it is persuasive, opinion or argumentative he finds it quite challenging. It can be caused by a number of factors as ignorance of some grammar rules, lack of idea and arguments about particular topic or punctuation problems.

RESEARCH DESIGN

At the beginning of the research special questionnaire were designed, which consists of 12 questions, to identify their language learning styles (see Appendix I). The observation lasted 4days and in each lesson they were provided with various materials. Researcher designed three step research: needs analysis and writing an essay, 4-day writing input processing and final writing exam.

Stage 1

On the first day of the research needs analysis were conducted in order to identify subjects' writing problems. (see Appendix2) By asking several questions researcher checked their background knowledge about writing structures, usage of appropriate grammatical forms and vocabulary. After that, subjects were given a task to write a four - sentence introduction to following topic "Fast food is now available in most countries and is becoming increasingly popular. Some feel that this is a positive trend while others do not. What are your opinion on this?" (see Appendix 3)

Stage 2

In this part of the research, researcher started input process. First of all, researcher gave them short definition of writing task 2 in EILTS and about requirements. All materials were taken from IELTS Advantage Writing Skills book (see Appendix 5) .This course book is well suited for this type of language learners. Each lesson was focused on one part of writing essay as introduction, main body, conclusion, determining thesis statement and, it also included vocabulary building and grammar structures as well. Moreover, individuals were provided with the list of necessary academic vocabulary and phrases that they can use while writing opinion essay. This helped them to increase the level of vocabulary. In order to increase their grammar skills, various grammar related exercises were implemented. During the lessons, Aziz actively participated in discussions that were held, while Elvira was good at grammatical task.

Lesson 1: discussion, an explanation of writing introduction with good thesis statement by learning through evaluating each other. Here students wrote their own introduction part and then they compare their works.

Lesson 2: **writing main body part, providing opinion, grammar exercises**

Lesson 3: **practicing writing a conclusion through activity and checking homework**

Step 3

In the last day of research, subjects were given a task to write an opinion essay in 40 minute on theme "It is a common aspiration among many young people to run their own business, rather than work of an employer. Do you think the advantages of working for yourself outweigh the drawbacks?". All materials applied in this research were attached in the Appendix.

DATA COLLECTION AND FINDINGS**Questionnaire and needs analysis**

The questionnaire revealed that Aziz is field dependent learner as he mainly relies only on that materials which are provided by teachers, while Elvira is field independent learner. She strives to do more self-study after classes. The results of findings were used to motivate each subject according their learning styles in acquiring process Need analysis facilitated the input process by revealing subjects' weak point in writing. Subjects' problems which occurred in writing process were provided below:

Subject1 (Elvira)

- linking ideas;
- punctuation;
- organizing main body;

Subject2 (Aziz)

- organizing ideas;
- grammar and punctuation
- organizing main body;

Pre-writing test

The results of pre-writing test revealed that Aziz struggled with grammar structures and used inappropriate words in essay, but he managed to make a good paraphrasing. Regarding to Elvira's work, well-structured sentences without grammatical mistakes occurred in her writing. However, she failed to link ideas coherently.

Stage 2 (teaching process)

In the first lesson subjects discussed several questions and provided examples (see Appendix 4)

1. Would you like to run your own business?
2. What skills do people need to run a successful business?
3. What would be advantages and disadvantages of having your own business?

Despite the fact that Aziz possessed poor communication skill, he tried to express his ideas by using some academic words. Elvira showed a good language usage and provided her opinion with examples. Then subjects were given a task to write only an introduction part on theme ""Fast food is now available in most countries and is becoming increasingly popular. Some feel that this is a positive trend while others do not. What are your opinion on this?"". By doing peer review subjects learn more from each other's mistakes.

In the second lesson subjects were taught how to write a main body paragraph. Here, both subjects showed good critical thinking skills as they managed to support their viewpoint by giving reasons. Grammar rule as relative clauses and the usage of linking words were explained in order to eliminate some grammatical errors in writing. Two grammar related activities were done by individuals (see Appendix). Aziz made several mistakes in these activities, while Elvira coped with the task well. In this part of the research individuals were given a home task to find ideas to formulate sentences which represent their personal view on a given theme.

In the third lesson, writing a conclusion was explained through activity. After that, homework was checked. The results indicated that Aziz wrote down only words which were given in the book, while Elvira wrote more than 15 phrases and words related to the opinion essay. Elvira mentioned that in order to find these words, she used different web sources.

STAGE3

In the last day of observation subjects wrote an opinion essay on theme: "It is a common aspiration among many young people to run their own business, rather than work of an employer. Do you think the advantages of working for yourself outweigh the drawbacks?". Their works were collected and evaluated. After evaluating and comparing essays, it became clear that both participants showed good results. They were assessed according to four writing

criteria as: task achievement, coherence and cohesion, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy.

Elvira could manage to write an excellent piece of writing. The subject gave a strong thesis statement in introduction part and presented a clear position. The ideas and examples were logically organized, but the subject overused the linking words. Moreover, her opinions were well organized and paragraphs set out consequently including precise sort of ideas. Her writing included itself less common vocabulary.

There was a noticeable enhancement in Aziz's writing. The subject managed to address all parts of the task and presented some main ideas with examples. Clear thesis statement was given in introduction part. He used different grammar structures and words that were taught during the lesson, while some spelling errors were noticed.

CONCLUSION

The main conclusion that can be drawn is that both field independent and field dependent learners could succeed not only in writing essay but also in language learning when leaning styles were identified.

The results taken from the research revealed that both learners could improve writing skill in some aspects. Specifically, dependent learners are more focused on teachers' instruction and sometimes cannot think critically because of being highly dependent on teacher influence. In contrast, field independent learners have a high tendency to analyses and think critically to brainstorm ideas. While writing they can include more evidence for ideas taken from authentic materials.

Some researchers tend to claim that field independent learners better than field dependent learners in language learning. For example, Suerman (1980) examined low and high achieving students according their field independence and field dependence cognitive style. The results showed that learners with the high performance tend to be field independent. However, field dependent learners can be good language acquirers if they follow the instructions and do tasks according to criteria set by the teacher.