

# Preferred Ways of Study based on Korean Cultural Background

Myeong-Hee Shin\*

Department of General English, Hannam University, South Korea; scindy@hnu.kr

## Abstract

**Objectives:** The objective of this research aims to tell the effective English ways of study based on Korean cultural background. There is an intimate and inevitable relationship between language and thought in a certain culture. **Methods/Statistical Analysis:** Data were collected from the questionnaires, interviews and peer evaluations. **Findings:** The research focuses on effect of having noticed cultural different cultural backgrounds, especially a Korean cultural background and how these differences are revealed in the classroom. Results showed that students' preferred ways of study were teacher-centered and individualized self-study. The results of the data analysis indicated that students with Korean cultural backgrounds are not active, but tend to be reflective. **Improvements/Applications:** Understanding and acquiring more knowledge about different learning style theories and Korean cultural background is wide spread. It is very important for teachers and students to recognize different learning environments based on the different cultural backgrounds where students have been.

**Keywords:** Cultural Background, Korean Culture, Learning Environment, Preferred Ways of Study, Teacher-Centered

## 1. Introduction

Since language is inseparable from culture and essentially contained within culture, studying language means to study culture and those who use a new language should understand how to communicate with others who have been living in different cultural backgrounds. In teaching and learning of a foreign language, cultural aspects or backgrounds on which the language has its root do not seem to be regarded as significantly as language itself by either instructors or learners. Language and culture are strongly and closely involved with each other. A cultural context is necessary to help desirable English communication as there might be encoding in one context and decoding in another. In the present research, the importance of culture in language acquisition is to be elaborated and reflected on in order to give a theoretical framework for effective ways of study. Accordingly, the current article aims to investigate why culture has such a meaningful role in foreign language acquisition and how it is incorporated into it. In terms of students differences<sup>1</sup> has

made known statistically differences in students' ways of study with diverse cultural backgrounds. Ways of study and strategies are thematically related in that both variables represent how students respond to study input and study environments<sup>2</sup>. It has been suggesting that culture has a substantial impact on students' preferred ways of study and their strategies. The definitions of culture, as it relates to the processes of teaching and learning of foreign languages in school circumstances, according to in<sup>3</sup>, include knowledge of a country's people and the routines, understanding their habits and social conduct and larger institutional operations. Therefore, there is a focus on the habitual lives of the citizens of the target country and grammar and vocabulary which describes their way of life, with a specific orientation towards traditional behaviors and routine and, to a lesser extent, the institutional operations of that country<sup>4</sup>. Most people are individually very different. These differences mean that students from different backgrounds may engage with tasks using a diverse range of strategies given preferred ways of study<sup>5</sup>. However, preferred ways of study refer to the personal dif-

\*Author for correspondence

ferences or personal priorities<sup>6</sup>. Each student is hardwired for social, cognitive and experiential studying styles<sup>7</sup>. In order to maximize the effectiveness of classroom interaction, these diverse ways of study should be incorporated into the lessons. There are four different models for the ways of study. The first is 'perception' which is a sensory manner and intuitive, the second is 'input' which is verbal and visual, the third is processing which is 'active and reflective' and the fourth is understanding which is 'formal and global'<sup>8</sup>. How can we define a way of study? Keefe defines them as "cognitive, affective and physiological traits that are relatively stable indicators of how students perceive, interact with and respond to studying environments"<sup>9</sup>. The concept of preferred ways of study can be thought of in a much broader way called 'an umbrellas concepts'<sup>10</sup>, however, to include how students connect with information and interact in a way in which they feel most relaxed<sup>11</sup>. What about ways of study and culture by in<sup>12</sup> carried out research with a group of tertiary level students studying English as a second or foreign language? This study reported significant different ways of study between speakers of Korea, Chinese, Japanese, Malay, Arabic and Spanish in terms of their visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile and social learning strategies. In this study, the research focuses especially on Korean students' preferred way of study and their cultural background. In<sup>13</sup> suggest that generally Korean students are apt to be quiet in class and not to speak much, appear reserved or shy, seldom ask questions and prefer not to express opinions. In Researchers such as<sup>14,15</sup> and<sup>16</sup> claim that the Korean society is still strongly influenced by Confucian philosophy which has determined the behavior in the classroom for centuries. Given this influence, students value quietness and believe that they can learn better from older and wiser people (represented by a teacher in class) without asking too many questions. The objective of this research is to examine the effectiveness of Korean students' preferred ways of study based on Korean cultural background to improve students' communication skills effectively. The following research questions were investigated:

- What are Korean students' preferred ways of study?
- Is there any relationship between the cultural background and students' preferred ways of study?
- Is there a correlation between students' preferred ways of study and understanding cultural background?

## 2. Methods

### 2.1 Subjects

During spring semester of 2015, a survey sample of 60 students was chosen for this study. These 60 students successfully answered the questionnaire and took a 3 hour elective course of English.

### 2.2 Methods and Instrument

A student questionnaire was employed to survey the students' current ideas and notions using a standardized self-administered questionnaire. In Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (PLSPQ) was applied to students' preferred ways of study. Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)<sup>17</sup> was applied to find out students' preferred ways of English learning strategies. Also observations and interviews were conducted. For the research analysis, 60 students answered pre- and post-questionnaires.

### 2.3 Instrument

To analyze the effectiveness, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used. Also ANOVA was applied to analyze the impact of cultural backgrounds on students' preferred ways of study.

## 3. Results

The result of the research was shown in the table from the data of the survey. In terms of preferred ways of English study, Korean students preferred mostly, 1. Teacher-centered, and 2. Individualized self-study. Also Korean students like reflective, sensory manner and formal way of study.

### 3.1 Korean Students' Preferred Ways of Study

Table 1 shows the two preferred ways of study among categories. The scores ranged from 0 to 50. Based on the scoring of PLSPQ provided three scores shown in the following table for 'most preferred ways of study', 'second most preferred ways of study' and 'least preferred ways of study' to analyze from the PLSPQ. Table 1 shows that individual learning and auditory are the highest scores at 47 and 39. It means that the majority of the students prefer

the way of individualized self-study. Table 2 shows summary of the degree of preference for each study method of students from 9 ethnic backgrounds by in<sup>18</sup>. According to Table 2, among all students surveyed, Korean students chose visual ways of study in their preferred ways of English study. Also Korean students chose teacher-centered ways of study as the most preferred way of study. In the case of kinesthetic learning style, Korean students were not very statistically significant than any others. Interestingly, no groups showed a significant predilection for individualized ways of self-study; however, students with a Korean cultural background in Table 1, shows the highest scores as 47.

**Table 1.** Korean students' preferred ways of study

| Preferred ways of study   | Lower limit | Upper limit | Average | SD    |
|---------------------------|-------------|-------------|---------|-------|
| Visual                    | 22.00       | 38.00       | 18      | 2.58  |
| Teacher-centered          | 34.00       | 44.00       | 39*     | 4.30  |
| Group study               | 32.00       | 38.00       | 22      | 5.02  |
| Individualized Self-study | 36.00       | 44.00       | 47*     | 24.09 |

**Table 2.** The degree of preference for each study method

| Preferred ways / language | Ara-bic | Eng-lish | Spa-nish | Chi-nese | Kor-ean | Indon-esian |
|---------------------------|---------|----------|----------|----------|---------|-------------|
| Visual                    | 13.75   | 12.12    | 13.39    | 13.55    | 13.40   | 13.41       |
| Auditory                  | 14.06   | 13.82    | 13.29    | 14.09    | 12.83   | 13.78       |
| Kines-thetic              | 15.09   | 13.64    | 15.11    | 14.62    | 14.63   | 13.90       |
| Tactile                   | 14.53   | 12.69    | 14.18    | 14.52    | 14.09   | 13.47       |
| Group                     | 11.51   | 10.08    | 10.79    | 11.15    | 11.49   | 11.15       |
| Individual                | 12.84   | 13.13    | 12.79    | 12.41    | 12.94   | 13.07       |

Note: Most preferred means a score of 13.50 and above means a score of 11.50–13.49 = Second most preferred; means a score of 11.49 or less = least preferred.

**Table 3.** The cultural backgrounds and preferred ways of study

| Preferred ways of study    | Perception<br>Sensory(+)<br>Intuition(-) | Input<br>Visual(+)<br>Verbal(-) | Processing<br>Active(+)<br>Passive(-) | Understanding<br>Gradual(+)<br>Global(-) |
|----------------------------|--|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
|                            | M SD                                     | M SD                            | M SD                                  | M SD                                     |
| Korean Cultural background | -1.4 1.09                                | .49 .69                         | -.58 .60                              | .34 .41                                  |

## 3.2 The Cultural Background and Preferred Ways of Study

Table 3 shows students with a Korean cultural background and their preferred ways of study. It shows the surveyed synopsis of general preferred ways of study and standard deviation with regards to preferred ways of study among Korean students. As shown in Table 3, Students with Korean cultural backgrounds are not active, but passive in their preferred ways of study ( $M = -1.4$  and  $SD = 1.09$ ). The result indicates that Korean students prefer to study in a sensory manner, which contrasts with the intuitional way of study. Also Korean students preferred the visual and the gradual way of study with statistical significance.

## 3.2 Correlation between Preferred Ways of Study and Understanding Cultural Background

Table 4 presents the correlation between preferred ways of study and understanding cultural background. The result shows that the correlation is highly significant at  $* p < .05$ . The result means that there is an interrelationship between students' preferred ways of study and understanding their cultural background. As shown in Table 4, the culture has a great influence on the preferred ways of study.

**Table 4.** The correlation between ways of study and understanding cultural background

|              | Understanding Culture | Preferred ways of study |
|--------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Correlation  | .270*                 | .257*                   |
| Significance | .029                  | .038                    |
| N            | 60                    | 60                      |

\*  $p < .05$

## 4. Discussion

It is very important that teachers provide classroom activities and procedures for study that are matched to the ways through students' preferences whether relat-

ing to language or any other academic subject<sup>19,20</sup>. As a result, comparing the preferred ways of study from different language-cultures, there was a significant difference in the ways of study. Students from a Korean cultural background preferred teacher-centered and individualized self-study. Through these results, a conclusion was made that under the current Korean cultural background, teachers should consider students' ways of study related to personal backgrounds and develops study materials as teaching methods according to students' preferred ways of study. In Korea, the grammar translation teaching method has been widely used in the class for a long time. Students are familiar with taking classes without active participation. Studies done with students<sup>21</sup> have shown that the vast majority of traditional teaching techniques cater to those who liked teacher-centered environments. In Korean society, people are very conscious of their place in society and relationship boundaries are clearly defined<sup>22</sup>. Therefore, the teacher occupies a prestigious position in the class. This may explain the result that students preferred teacher-centered and visual ways of study. Also, they preferred not an active, but a passive way of study ( $M = -1.4$  and  $SD = 1.09$ ). The result indicates that Korean students use the sensory manner of study as opposed to the intuitional way of study. Also the result shows that there is an interrelationship between students preferred ways of study and understanding their cultural background. According to the student interviews, students preferred customized learning or matching of student and teacher's preferred methods. For teachers, they should understand students and their environment including their cultural background while they are designing instructional materials. The objective of this research was to pinpoint the different ways of study based on the different cultural background and the interrelation between them. The results showed that students tendency to choose one study mode over another was influenced by their ethnic backgrounds. In addition, students should be shown how to manage their ways of study effectively to learn English. Also teachers should understand the cultural background to which their students belong. The current study is somewhat limited in its generalization. First and foremost, it is important to discuss the sample size of 60 students surveyed. There might be many kinds of research methods applicable to preferred ways of study and cultural background, but it relies partly on the given environment such as the students, the teacher and the classroom. Therefore,

further research could include more varied and a bigger sample size of students and research environments.

## 5. Acknowledgment

This paper has been supported by the 2016 Hannam University Research Fund.

## 6. References

1. Park CC. Learning style preferences of Asian American (Chinese, Filipino, Korean and Vietnamese) students in secondary schools. *Equity and Excellence in Education*. 1997; 30(2):68–77.
2. Dornyei Z. *The psychology of the language learner: Individual differences in second language acquisition*. Routledge; 2006 Jan.
3. Byram M. Cultural studies in foreign language education. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*. 1998; 1(1):15–31.
4. Reid JM. *Learning style in the ESL/EFL Classroom*. New York: Heinle and Heinle; 1995.
5. Sabery K, Balswin L. Web based learning interaction and learning styles. *British Journal of Educational Technology*. 2003 Sep; 34(4):443–54.
6. Joy S, Kolb DA. Are there cultural differences in learning style? *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*. 2009 Jan; 33(1):69–85.
7. Vita GD. Learning styles, culture and inclusive instruction in the multicultural classroom: A business and management perspective. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*. 2001; 38(2):165–74.
8. Felder RM, Silverman LK. Learning and teaching styles in engineering education. *Engineering Education*; 1998. p. 1–8.
9. Keefe JW. *Learning style: An overview. Student learning styles diagnosing and prescribing programs*. Reston, VA: National; 1979. p. 1–17.
10. Butler KA. *Learning and teaching style in theory and practice*. Melbourne: Hawker Brownlow Education; 1986.
11. Palloff RM, Pratt K. *The virtual student: A profile and guide to working with online learners*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass; 2003 Feb.
12. Reid JM. *Learning styles in the ESL/EFL classroom*. New York: Heinle and Heinle; 1995.
13. Successful classroom discussions with adult Korean ESL/EFL learners. 2005. Available from: <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Lim-AdultKoreanshtml>
14. Considering the cultural context in teaching and learning for Korean tertiary students by western teachers. 2002 Available from: <http://clt.curtin.edu.au/events/conferences/tlf/tlf1995/cronin.html>

15. Lee KS, Carrasquillo A. Korean college students in the United States: Perceptions of professors and students. *College Students Journal*. 2006 Jun; 40(2):442–56.
16. The pervading influence of neo-Confucianism on the Korean education system. 2002. Available from: <http://asian-efl-journal.com/1506/quarterly-journal/2002/06/the-pervading-influence-of-neo-confucianism-on-the-korean-education-system/>
17. Oxford RL. The role of styles and strategies in second language learning. 2015. Available from: <http://www.indjst.org/index.php/indjst/issue/view/6048>
18. Reid JM. The learning style preferences of ESL students. *Tesol Quarterly*. 1987 Mar; 21(1):1–24.
19. Ellis R. Classroom learning styles and their effect on second language acquisition: A study of two learners. *System*. 1989; 17(2):249–62.
20. Dunn R, Griggs S. *Multiculturalism and learning style: Teaching and counseling adolescents*. Westport, CT: Praeger; 1995.
21. Zhang LF, Sternberg RJ. *The nature of intellectual styles*. 1st ed. *Routledge*; 2006 Mar.
22. Shin MH. Effects of cooperative learning in English. 2015. Available from: <http://www.indjst.org/index.php/indjst/issue/view/6048>