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I. Introduction

In language teaching and learning, learning style is concerned with learners' preferred ways of processing or internalizing data/information of a language with a view to learning it. Claxton and Ralston (1978, 1 cited in Hyland 1993, 72) define it as ".....a student's constant way of responding and using stimuli in the context of learning." Hyland (1993, 73) refers it as a person's natural, habitual and preferred way of learning. A more recent definition given by Vester (2005) explains it as the way a person perceives, conceptualizes, organizes and recalls information. All these definitions indicate that learning style is a broad concept, which includes a learner's cognitive, psychological and affective variables.

Learners' learning style preferences have very close relationship with the culture of the society of which they are members. During socialization, psychological and cognitive characteristics of learners get shaped by their cultures. Through their interactions with the members of their society, they develop certain traits of their personalities which ultimately go into the making of their learning style preferences. It is found that the people who live within the same cultural patterns of a society obtain certain basic and common traits of that culture. That is why, the learners of one society differ from the learners of another society in their learning style preferences. Oxford et al (1992, 441 cited in Hyland 1993, 75) recognize culture as a significant factor in the learning style preferences of the learners. Expressing similar views, Guild and Garger (1985, 18 cited in Melton 1990, 30) state, "Socialization plays a role in the development of the style preferences of the people of various cultures and in both sexes." As to differences in the learning style preferences of the learners of different societies, Young (1987) also thinks that culture plays a vital role in this respect. Referring to the role of culture, he (1987, 18) claims, "Children from identifiably different cultural groups overwhelmingly exhibit certain learning styles." He (1987, 24) asserts that it is due to culture that ways of teaching and ways of learning differ from one community to another. It is, therefore, necessary to identify the learning style preferences of the learners of Bangladesh, the country that has her own peculiarities in respect of her society, culture, history, geography and language.

Knowledge about learners' learning style preferences has wider implications for language teaching methodology or classroom practices. If teaching methodology is in tune with the preferred learning styles of students, teaching can take place in the satisfaction of students and better results can be achieved. According to Domino (1979 cited in Melton 1990), Dunn (1984 cited in Melton 1090) and Young (1987), if students are taught according to their preferred learning styles, they achieve greater academic success and get more motivated to learn. Echoing similar views, Reid (1987, 1995) says, "All students have their own learning styles and learning strengths and weaknesses, and a mismatch between teaching and learning styles causes learning failure, frustration, and demotivation." Pointing out the importance of the knowledge about learners' learning styles, Alfonseca et al. (2006) state that an awareness of students' learning styles enables teachers to adopt appropriate techniques and methods so that they suit the students' preferences. Knowledge about students' preferences can also provide proper guidelines to the curriculum designers

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and materials developers. In this regard, Reid (1987, p. 788) opines that identifying the learning style preferences of non-native speakers (NNSs) may have wide-ranging implications in the areas of curriculum design, materials development, student orientation, and teacher training.

However, along with knowledge of learners' learning style preferences, it is also important to know the teachers' perceptions or preferences about these preferences of learners. Teachers have their own experiences and preferences about good teaching and are the key players to make the learners' learning practices successful. Therefore, if the teachers do not endorse the learners' preferences, effective learning will not take place. For effective learning there should be a compromise between teachers' perceptions or their teaching style preferences and learners' preferences. Putting emphasis on the matching between learners' and teachers' preferences, Spolsky (1987, 110) says, "...learning is best when the teaching style matches the learner's learning style preference."

II. A Review of Different Models of Learning Styles

The researchers and experts have proposed a number of models of learning styles over the past few decades. Taking learning mainly as cognitive factor, Witkin et al. (1978) have considered learning styles in terms of *field-dependence and field-independence*. To explain these two categories of learning styles, they have identified three types of differences between them such as *'global vs. analytical', 'external vs. internal'*, and *'passive vs. active'*. By 'global vs. analytical' they explain that field-dependent students have global perception and try to perceive something holistically whereas field-independent students are good at analytical thought and pay attention to separate parts of an object. Regarding 'external vs. internal' they state that field-dependent students tend to rely on external environment and referents to process information, but field-independent ones tend to be autonomous by relying on internal capability and referents. As to 'passive vs. active' Witkin et al. maintain that field-dependent students are passive to use cognitive strategies, but field-independent ones are active to use cognitive strategies.

According to keefs (1979, 4 cited in Melton 1990, 33), learning styles are the cognitive, affective and physiological traits/ behaviours that serve as relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to, the learning environment That is, he has categorized learning styles into three dimensions—cognitive, affective and physiological. He argues that learning style does not depend only on cognitive factor, but also on physiological and affective factors.

Discussing learning styles, Felder and Silverman (1988) have categorized them into five dimensions, with each dimension having two opposite variables. The categorization of their model is like this: (i) *perception* (sensitive vs. intuitive), (ii) *input* (visual vs. verbal), (iii) *processing* (active vs. reflective), (iv) *understanding* (sequential vs. global) and (v) *organization* (inductive vs. deductive). To explain each variable of these dimensions, Felder and Silverman state that (i) sensitive learners are patient with details and like facts and data, but dislike complexities. Contrarily, intuitive learners like complexities, but get bored by details. (ii) Visual learners remember something better if they can see it in the form of picture, diagram, line, etc., whereas verbal learners remember better when they hear and talk about something. (iii) Active learners like to work in groups and remain active in any learning environment, but reflective learners like to learn in the situations where they get opportunities for thinking. (iv) Sequential learners like to learn something by following linear reasoning process while global learners like to learn something holistically, instead of following linear reasoning process. (v) Lastly, inductive learners like to move from particulars to generalities in reasoning while deductive learners do just the opposite.

After analyzing and duly considering the views of some other researchers on different kinds of learning styles, Willing (1988) has presented his own model of learning styles. He has categorized learners into four types and described them as *analytical learners, authority-oriented learners, communicative learners and concrete learners*. According to Willing, analytical learners like to learn something by analyzing it carefully and autonomously. He interprets authority-oriented learners as persons who like to learn under teacher's direction, instead of learning autonomously. Regarding communicative learners, he says that they like to follow a communicative and social learning approach in relation to language learning. With respect to concrete learners, he maintains that they are the people who like to use very direct means to take in and process information.

Among the popular learning style models that have so far been forwarded by the researchers, one has been proposed by Reid (1987). Reid's model has two major dimensions: *perceptual and sociological*, and under these two dimensions there are six categories of learning styles in total. He has split the *perceptual dimension* into four categories-- auditory, visual, tactile and kinesthetic. Similarly, she has divided the *sociological dimension* into two categories-individual preferring and group preferring. However, later on Reid (1995) modifies her model a little bit on his attempt to accommodate all the available proposed models. This time she presents it through three major dimensions and they are: i) *cognitive*

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learning styles, ii) sensory learning styles, and iii) personality learning styles. Obviously, she has divided each of these dimensions into some sub-categories. She has categorized *the cognitive learning styles* as field-dependent vs. field-independent, analytic vs. global and reflective vs. impulsive, *the sensory learning styles* as auditory, visual, haptic and physical vs. sociological, and lastly *the personality learning styles* as extroversion vs. introversion, sensing vs. perception and thinking vs. feeling.

III. Major Types of Learning Styles Found from Different Models

An analysis of the above mentioned models of learning styles shows that there are remarkable similarities among these models with respect to their variables/dimensions. Though in some cases of these variables separate terminologies have been used, they indicate more or less similar kind of learning style. However, variations are also found in respect of the number of these variables. Some model or models include larger number of variables than the others. Therefore, on any attempt to make a list of the major types of learning styles on the basis of the above mentioned models avoiding the repetitions of their variables/dimensions, the following list is found. Obviously, this selection includes the major aspects of cognitive, psychological and affective learning styles.

a) Field-Independent Vs. Field-Dependent

Field- independent learners learn more efficiently step by step, from the beginning with analyzing facts and proceeding to ideas. They also like to learn individually. On the contrary, field-dependent learners prefer to learn something as a whole by depending on the total field and on the context.

b) Reflective Vs. Impulsive

Reflective learners learn more effectively if they get some time to consider options before the response is made. Impulsive learners, in contrast, are able to respond immediately, and they take risks.

c) Auditory Vs. Visual

Auditory learners learn more effectively through the ears (hearing) such as listening to lectures, oral explanation, audio tapes, discussions in class, etc. On the other hand, visual learners learn more effectively through the eyes (seeing) such as reading texts, studying books, etc.

d) Kinesthetic and Tactile

A kinesthetic learner learns better through experiential learning, that is, through total physical involvement with a learning situation such as role-play, holding dialogues, moving around, etc. whereas a tactile learner likes to learn through 'hands-on' experiences such as taking notes, building models or doing laboratory experiments.

e) Group-Preferring Vs. Individual-Preferring

Group-preferring learners are extrovert and interested to learn in group and communicate with others to maintain a good relation with them. On the contrary, individual-preferring learners are introvert and try to learn something individually and independently.

f) Inductive Vs. Deductive

Inductive learners like to induce a rule or draw a conclusion from a number of instances, thereby moving from instances to rules or generalizations. On the other hand, Deductive learners like to articulate a rule first and then proceed to its instances. That is, their reasoning progression moves from rules or generalizations to specific instances.

g) Authority-Oriented Vs. Communicative

Authority-Oriented learners like to learn under the authority or the directions of teachers, but Communicative learners like to learn in a free environment by following a communicative and social learning approach.

IV. Objectives of This Study

English language teaching (ELT) in Bangladesh is not based on appropriate mode of classroom practices. The replacement of the Grammar-Translation Method by the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the last nineties was not based on proper empirical investigation into the suitability of the principles of CLT in the context of the country. In the classroom practices neither the contextual realities nor the preferred strategies or styles of learners have been duly taken into consideration. The teachers here are little aware of the ways their students prefer to learn the language. But the reality is that both the teachers and the learners have their own preferences in respect of English language teaching and learning styles as they have their own cultural profiles which they have derived from the culture of their society. According to Islam (2011), teachers in Bangladesh need to discover their students' preferred ways of learning English, by which they can make their teaching effective and appealing to the students to the optimum level. Therefore, considering the importance of knowing learners' preferred ways of learning in order to make ELT in Bangladesh effective and appealing, the present article has dealt with the following questions:

1. What are the preferred learning styles of the learners of Bangladesh?
2. What are the teachers' perceptions about these preferred styles?
3. What should be the appropriate mode of classroom teaching-learning practices on the basis of the learners' preferred learning styles and the teachers' perceptions?

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V. Methodology

The study has made a questionnaire survey based on existing learning style instruments in order to determine the learning style preferences of Bangladeshi learners at the secondary level. For this purpose 100 students of twelfth class from three colleges of main stream education situated in the district of Mymensingh were taken as respondents. Of these three colleges, one was a government college and two were non-government ones. Since the number of the non-government colleges is larger than that of the government colleges in Bangladesh, two non-government colleges were taken against one government college. The study also interviewed 8 English teachers from the same institutions in order to know their perceptions regarding their students' learning style preferences.

The questionnaire that was used in this survey consisted of 16 questions written in English. In order to capture the responses of the respondents, a Likert scale with five options (**strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, strongly disagree**) indicating the extent of their agreement or disagreement with the statements of the questionnaire was used.

VI. Presentation of the Results

Table 1 : Statements of the questionnaire, and Percentages and Means of Responses

Statements	Strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean score
1. I prefer to learn by role-playing, holding dialogues with others for conversational skills, etc., in the class.	30%	42%	10%	6%	12%	3.72
2. I like to learn with others or in group in the class	38%	34%	4%	12%	12%	3.74
3. I like to learn by doing problem-solving activities or exercises and thereby involving my -self in writing.	24%	30%	14%	20%	12%	3.34
4. I prefer to learn in a free environment, by talking and sharing with others in the class.	24%	48%	2%	14%	14%	3.6
5. I learn better when I listen to teachers' lectures, someone's utterances, audio tapes, etc.	48%	32%	10%	4%	4%	4.1
6. I like to learn individually rather than in group..	16%	32%	10%	28%	12%	3.06
7. While learning, I like to guess anything quickly, without bothering about right or wrong.	28%	6%	16%	40%	30%	3.22
8. I learn better when I read something or when teachers write on the whiteboard in the class.	22%	48%	14%	14%	2%	3.74
9. I like to read some text and then discover the grammatical rules that have been used in it.	34%	34%	4%	16%	12%	3.62
10. I like my teacher to guide me, correct my errors and explain my lessons.	74%	22%	0%	2%	0%	4.62
11. I like to learn by watching TV, films, etc.	24%	36%	6%	6%	24%	3.18
12. When I learn a lesson, I like to learn it step by step, concentrating on its parts.	60%	26%	0%	2%	12%	4.2
13. While reading something, or hearing teacher's lecture or any discussion, I like to take notes.	70%	16%	10%	4%	0%	4.52
14. While learning, I like to guess anything cautiously and think critically, without making any hurry.	58%	24%	14%	4%	0%	4.36
15. I like to learn the grammatical rules before I see their uses in texts or in examples.	21%	11%	7%	6%	3%	3.7
16. When I learn a lesson, I like to learn it as a whole, without bothering about its parts.	15%	10%	5%	10%	11%	3.22

To indicate the result of each statement of the questionnaire, the **Mean** score of the respondents' responses on the statement has been worked out. In this respect, strongly agree = 5, agree =4, undecided =3, disagree =2 and strongly disagree =1 point or points have been counted as the values of the responses. The **Mean** scores above 4 are regarded as 'very high', above 3 but below 4 as 'high', above 2 but below 3 as 'low' and below 2 as 'very low' preferences.

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VII. Analysis of the Results

Though in the questionnaire the statements representing different learning styles have been presented randomly to avoid any bias from the respondents, the results of these statements have been analyzed and discussed in pair or in their dichotomous relationships as per the requirement of this study.

a) Field-Dependent Vs. Field-Independent

The results show that the EFL learners of Bangladesh at the higher secondary level are more filed-independent than field-dependent. They are more inclined to learn something part by part or step by step, that is, concentrating on the individual parts of it (Statement no. 12, Mean 4.2) rather than as a whole (Statement no. 16, Mean 3.22). The result does not go with the popular belief that the learners of Bangladesh (as Asian learners) happen to be mostly field-dependent. However, the Mean score 3.22 in favour of field-dependent style of learning indicates that their preference for this style is also significant. The results actually signify that both kind of learning styles are preferred by the Bangladeshi learners.

b) Reflective Vs. Impulsive

The statement nos. 14 and 7 are concerned with the reflective and the impulsive styles of learning. The Mean score 4.36 of the statement no. 14 indicates that the respondents are highly reflective learners as they have very high preference for the style of thinking something critically or guessing something cautiously while learning English. However, the Mean score 3.22 of the statement no. 7 indicates that they are also to some extent impulsive learners as they remarkably prefer to make swift response to any query or guess anything quickly while they are engaged in learning.

c) Auditory Vs. Visual

The statement nos. 5, 8 and 11 represent the auditory and the visual styles of learning. The results of these statements show that the EFL learners of the country are highly auditory ones. They have very high preference for learning English through their sense of hearing, that is, by hearing teacher's lecture, or by listening to others or audio tapes, etc. (Statement no. 5, Mean score 4.1). As to visual learning or learning through the sense of sight, the result indicates that when they have high preference for reading texts or teachers' writings on the whiteboards (statement no. 8, Mean 3.74), their preference for watching TV is not so high (statement no. 11, Mean 3.18).

d) Kinesthetic and Tactile

The statements which are concerned with the kinesthetic and the tactile learning styles are nos. 1, 2 and 13. The results of these statements project that the learners under the study have high preferences for both the kinesthetic and the tactile learning styles. As to the kinesthetic style, it is seen that they very much like to learn through role-playing or holding dialogues for conversation skills, all of which are the examples of experiential learning (statement no.1, Mean score 3.72). Regarding the tactile leaning style, it is seen that the learners highly like to learn by taking notes or by doing problem-solving activities through writing, which can be treated as hands-on experience (statement nos. 13 and 3, Mean scores 4.52 and 3.34).

e) Group-Preferring vs. Individual-Preferring

To compare the group-preferring style with the individual-preferring one, it is found that the learners of the country have a greater degree of choice for the group-preferring style than for the individual-preferring one. The Mean score of the statement no. 2 representing their choice for learning in groups is 3.74 whereas the Mean score of the statement no. 6 representing individual learning is only 3.06. Their greater choice for group learning also indicates that they are more extrovert than introvert.

f) Inductive Vs. Deductive

To consider the learners' preferences between inductive and deductive processes of learning, it is found that their preference for deductive process is a little higher than their preference for inductive process with respect to learning grammar. The Mean score of the statement no, 15 representing the deductive process is 3.7 and the Mean score of the statement no. 9 representing the inductive process is 3.62. That is, the learners of Bangladesh have a little bit greater tendency to move from generalizations to instances rather than to move from instances to generalizations.

g) Authority-Oriented Vs. Communicative

Lastly, it is found that the learners under this study prefer the authority-oriented learning style over the communicative learning style. Their preference for learning under the control of their teachers and also for having things explained or getting errors corrected by them is very high (Statement no. 10, Mean 4.62) though their preference for learning through talking and sharing with one another, being free from teacher's control, is also remarkable (Statement no. 4, Mean 3.6).

VIII. Teachers' Perceptions about Learners' Preferences

It has already been mentioned that 10 English language teachers of the same educational institutes where learners' questionnaire survey was done were interviewed to know their perceptions about learners' preferences. The teachers were very cordial and co-operative about their interviews, and expressed their views and opinions freely. Though they ratified some

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of the preferences of their learners, they were found critical about some others of them.

About learners' greater degree of preference for field-independent learning style over field-dependent learning style, they opined that this very preference of learners was useful and effective for their context. In a context like theirs where learners did not have sufficient exposure to English inside and outside the classroom, the global approach, that is, the field-dependent learning would not happen to be as effective as the field-independent learning would be. In such a context an analytical approach where learners would go step by step coming to grip with the meanings of every small part of a text would be more effective for language learning.

With respect to their high preference for authority-oriented style over communicative style, all the teachers passed positive comments. They opined that the learners of their country were culturally dependent on their teachers, and, therefore, they would be at a loss if teachers withdrew their guidance. "Besides," some of them commented, "teachers have better knowledge and experience, and, therefore, when they guide their learners and correct their errors, they learn better." With respect to their learners' high preference for communicative style, most of them remarked, "They have claimed this preference as a fashion. Practically, they are not found eager to talk in the class. Very often we need to compel them to talk."

Teachers also expressed positive views on learners' higher preference for the deductive process of learning of grammatical rules. Justifying the deductive process, they argued that in a context like Bangladesh where English was taught as a foreign language, learners badly needed to learn the discrete grammatical rules through deductive process so that they could make sentences by using those rules.

However, most of the teachers were found critical of the greater degree of learners' preferences for kinesthetic and group-preferring styles of learning. They opined that their preferences for kinesthetic or for group-preferring styles were not practical in their context. They asserted that they had many sorts of limitations in terms of class size, class duration, teaching-learning aids, compulsion to complete the syllabus, etc., which happened to create barriers to the practice of the activities relating to these styles. "It is not possible to arrange role-plays, dialogues, group work, etc. everyday. It not only consumes the valuable time fixed for the class but also creates a hazardous situation in the class", four teachers commented. Besides, their learners would lose, some of them claimed, their interest in these activities within a few days if they were allowed to continue doing them for some consecutive days.

However, two teachers out of eight appreciated the learners' high preference for activities like role-play, group work, pair work, etc. "We have contextual limitations for thee activities, but we must appreciate our students for their choices. After all, these activities help students enhance their fluency", they opined.

IX. Comments and Suggestions for Pedagogical Practices

One of the significant points of the results is that the learners under the study aggregately do not show any negative tendency towards any particular style. They show positive tendency towards almost all categories of learning styles. The differences are found only in respect of the degree of their preferences. That is, the degree of learners' preference for one style is found higher than that for another style when the results of two styles are compared with each other. Obviously, the highest priority should be given to those styles for which they have the highest degree of preferences.

Another significant point is the conflicts between learners' preferences and teachers' perceptions in some cases. These conflicts between them have to be traced into the cultural change of their society as well as into the differences of their practical experiences. The culture of a society does not stand still, and, therefore, the culture of Bangladeshi society is getting changed from generation to generation. Over the last few decades the unprecedented explosion of science and technology has turned the whole world into a global village, facilitating the intercultural and international communications among the people of the world. As a result, like many other countries of the world the cultural change of Bangladesh has also taken place very rapidly. Very distinctive marks of this change are noticed in the cultural behaviour and patterns of the people of two generations of the country over the last twenty years. That is why, the learners who are the representatives of the new generations differ from their teachers who are the representatives of the old generation in many respects including some aspects of learning styles.

However, when teachers are practical in some cases because of their long teaching experiences, learners happen to be impractical and fanciful owing to the lack of their experiences. They know better than their learners about what type of classroom practices would be practical and effective under the hard realities of a context. Obviously, in case of any conflict between learners' preferences and teachers' perceptions or preferences, it is teachers' perceptions or preferences that deserve priority.

It is needless to say that the overall results of the present study have significant implications for the

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pedagogical decisions about ELT in Bangladesh. In this regard, the following suggestions are made:

1. Teacher-fronted classroom would be appropriate for teaching English in Bangladesh as learners here like to learn under the guidance of teachers, hearing their lectures.
2. Teachers need to explain the learning items as much as possible and correct learners' errors then and there.
3. Learners' higher preferences for the field-independent and reflective styles of learning over the field-dependent and impulsive styles signify that any approach facilitating rote-learning should be avoided. Instead, analytical, discovery-oriented and meaning-searching approach should be emphasized. A reflective learner requires patience from the teacher, and, therefore, he must allow his student sufficient time to come up with his/her responses.
4. The textbooks here should provide sufficient amount of reading texts to cater to learners' preference for reading. Besides, the textbooks should be so designed as to accommodate both the inductive and the deductive processes of learning, with emphasis on the deductive one.
5. Taking learners' preferences for the auditory and the visual styles into account, modern teaching-learning aids like audio tape, television, multi-media, etc. can be pragmatically utilized. This will bring variety, excitement and entertainment in the class.
6. Considering various kinds of contextual constraints and practical problems with respect to the activities such as role-play, group work, pair work, etc., belonging to kinesthetic style, these activities can be kept limited though learners have high preferences for them. However, in respect of learners' preference for tactile learning style, modern technology like computer can prove as a very vital teaching-learning aid in Bangladeshi context. Learners can have hands-on experience by using computer for the purpose of learning English. Referring to the importance of computer, Moharrer (2012) states that through technology like computer learners can transform abstract materials into visual or auditory content and can get authentic and real experiences.
7. Teachers need to diversify their teaching styles and techniques to meet learners' varied needs and preferences. Ur (1996, 216) argues that activities in class should be varied, and a varied lesson plan is more likely to cater to a wide range of learning styles and strategies.
8. Training programmes should be arranged for teachers to make them aware of the different kinds of learning style preferences of learners so that they can take proper measures to address them. Besides, any wrong perception of them regarding learning styles or strategies has to be dispelled through these programmes.
9. Counseling should be provided to students to make them aware of their individual preferences of styles so that they can properly enjoy the act of learning and make better achievements. If any preference of them conflicts with that of their teachers' preference or perception, they need to be motivated to adjust themselves with the preference of the teachers.
10. Programmes like seminars, workshops or social classes should be arranged to build up good rapports between teachers and learners.

X. Conclusion

The EFL learners of Bangladesh have their own learning style preferences based on their own cultural orientation as well as on their cognitive and psychological make-up. Though in some exceptional cases these preferences of them conflict with the perceptions of their teachers owing to their generation-gap, in all other cases they are found harmonious with teachers' perceptions. Teachers are found critical especially of their learners' preferences regarding kinesthetic and communicative styles as they do not consider these styles practical in the contextual realities of the country. With these exceptions, they express their positive views regarding the state of their learners' preferences for other kinds of learning styles.

Among the highly preferred styles of the learners, the most remarkable are the field-independent, reflective, auditory and authority-oriented styles of learning. However, for effective teaching and learning this harmony between learners' preferences and teachers' perceptions is not enough unless the teachers become aware of these preferences of their learners and take necessary measures accordingly. Similarly, learners also need to be aware of all of these of their own preferences so that they can learn in accordance with their preferred learning styles and make their learning effective and joyful.

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