An investigation of kindergarten english language teachers' practices in accommodating the learning styles of their students: Selected schools in Hawassa City Administration in focus

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the practices of English language teachers in accommodating learning style differences among kindergartners in Hawassa city. The study involved 128 upper kindergarten teachers selected through simple random sampling. The data-gathering tools were questionnaires, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews. A mixed-method approach was employed, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data The findings from each research tool showed that the majority of the kindergarten English teachers were aware of the learning style differences and techniques for accommodating them, but still others have a blurred understanding of the concept. This poses a significant obstacle in learning style differences accommodation. The study also revealed that learning style difference identification and accommodation is highly ignored (impractical) at this level due to the different challenges the practitioners are experiencing. Some of the challenges are bulky lesson content, absence or lack of teaching materials, large class size, classrooms that are not spacious enough to have different learning corners, and inadequacies of teachers' training. Finally, the researcher recommended that those teachers teaching at this level need intensive on-job training, the class size needs to be reduced to a maximum of 12—18 students, and the contents in the textbook need also be of appropriate size. according to the age level of the students.

Keywords*: learning style, upper kindergarten, headmistress, differentiated instruction, accommodation*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

The role the English language has in technology, education, and other areas of life at the global level is undeniable. The case in Ethiopia is not different from what the world is experiencing. Academic success is highly related to better language competence and performance.

Unless students are equipped with the necessary skills in the language, it is difficult to become successful in their studies (Murray & Christison, 2011; Webber, 2016). As early-age experience has a lot to do with later success or failure in life, much is expected from the early-age learning experience in equipping learners with a strong foundation in their language use. Educational psychologists are suggesting that the critical age to be introduced to a foreign language is between 3 and 5 (Harmer, 2007; Curtain & Dahlberg, 2009). By the same token, Piaget said that the stage of development children are found, has a great role to play in determining what and how they learn. Kindergarten is an educational level where children, aged 3-5, are engaged in learning. To meet the demands of their developmental stages and their learning preferences, teachers need to design teaching materials and methods that best help the children get the best out of their learning (Mclendon, 2011). Kahtz & Kling (1999: 413), cited in (Ellington and Benders, 2012) states, "Developing instructional methods and materials that are appropriate for a wide range of cognitive learning styles, should be a priority of all educators.

What fits one student might not fit another. Just as everyone has a unique fingerprint, every student has an individual difference in ways of taking information and processing it. This individual preference or difference between and among learners is called learning style difference. Learning style is defined as "an individual's mode of gaining knowledge" (Dictionary. com, 2012). For language teaching to be successful, the teacher must recognize the individual differences that possibly exist between and among his/her students. Among the individual differences a teacher can encounter in a classroom like age, sex, aptitude, motivation, learning strategies, and personality, learning style is one variable that needs to be taken into consideration while designing and delivering a lesson to students (Ellis, 2005).

Learning styles are explanations that try to categorize students by their different and most favorable ways of learning. There are several definitions and classifications of learning style theories; like those which categorize learners as best learners through hearing, touching, or seeing, some others categorize learners as more successful in group work, some as individual learners and the classification goes on. Whatsoever the classification and the definition may be, the purpose is the same: trying to figure out why some students receive information at a faster rate than their classmates while some are still struggling to process that same information. Learning style is about varying method of lesson delivery to meet the different learning preferences; it is about scaffolding and reaching the preferred ways for learners to receive information (Wood, 2019).

Educational experts categorized learning styles in several ways. The three most popular learning styles are: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic (Gilakjani, 2012). Understanding children's learning style can aid in their ability to learn and also enhances their future ability. The one size fits all thinking is not taking us anywhere. We are having students who are left behind and struggling much in an education system that does not address them where they are. These

different learning styles and the strategies to address these styles in a classroom are given as follows:

Visual learners learn best when provided with information through their eyes. They have a natural tendency to observe, see and learn with ease. Pictures, diagrams, handouts, displays, demonstrations, flip charts, etc. are their comfort zones. Most of the time, they are heard saying 'show me' or 'let's have a look at that'. They are good at imitating others after watching them, doing things first, and remembering visual details. They are more comfortable when provided with visuals of what they are learning. Seeing is the best way for them to learn (Baker, 2017; Cox, 2020).

Auditory learners prefer information transferred through listening. The spoken words of self or others are more meaningful to them than what is seen or touched. Sounds and noises are their best way of learning. They are saying 'tell me' and 'let's talk it over' and they are good at remembering lyrics or all words of a song they hear. These learners need to have things explained orally and written instructions may cause trouble for them. They talk aloud to remember information and they talk to themselves while learning something new. They enjoy discussion in groups rather than working alone. Their listening skills are more developed than their visual skills.

Kinaesthetic learners are learners that prefer touching, feeling, holding, and doing as the best ways of learning. Information geared towards them should come in a concrete way for them to process it well. Learning happens for them best when they are physically engaged in the process or when it is practical hands-on experience. They are heard saying 'let me try' and 'how do you feel?' They are good at going ahead and trying out new tasks. They are unstable and prefer movement around while listening or talking. These are the types that are not understood at all in the traditional classroom. They are misdiagnosed as troublemakers because of what they are endowed with by nature - a learning style that the traditional classroom does not have room to entertain.

In an attempt to look at studies which are conducted on assessing kindergarten teachers' efficacy in accommodating learning styles of children, the researcher couldn't find any work conducted locally or globally at her disposal which is directly related to the topic she is dealing with. Rather there are works on analyzing the correlation between learning styles and children's academic success or works which tried to see how influential learning styles are in students' academic achievement. Analysis of the relationship between learning styles and basic concept knowledge level of kindergarten children by Balat (2014), students' learning style preferences and teachers' instructional strategies: correlations between method styles and academic achievement by Wilson (2011), and learning behaviors and academic readiness among preschool children in a private school by Johnson (2017) are some of the works. Though these papers have different topics than the one which is dealt with in this study, it is worth mentioning the contribution they have on the current study as they are works on kindergarten. Otherwise, especially for Hawassa town, this study is hoped to be a pioneer.

1.2.   Statement of the Problem

The very fact that learners in one classroom have differences in so many aspects, learning style differences being one aspect, and teaching being treated as a one size fits all approach, does not support addressing every child in the class, is indisputable. It is strongly substantiated

by the fact that children have an innate ability to learn a language, but it is also known that children do not learn properly if they find their lessons boring and unexciting (Ara, 2009). It is with this understanding that the notion of taking individual learners' differences into account while designing lessons and teaching materials instead of sticking to one method of teaching individuals with varying mechanisms of dealing with their environment, becomes an issue of a great concern.

Despite all the efforts made by educational experts to show how important is valuing individual differences in dealing with learners of different dispositions to learning, kindergarten educators are seen to be stuck to the traditional style of teaching which only serves those learners whose nature allows them to be advantageous in listening to long talks and explanations. Starting from the classroom setup to lesson delivery what is practiced in our kindergartens does not seem to consider the learners' ways of learning.

The practice of individual student's learning style differences accommodation is a neglected aspect of teaching in Ethiopia's education at different levels (Melka, 2022; Abate, 2013; Tadesse, 2018, 2020). Even though the researcher couldn't find a study on individual learning style differences accommodation practice in the level under discussion, she can tell from her casual observations the case in kindergarten is not exceptional from what is practiced in other levels of education. The fact on the ground tells us that kindergartens are not considering the important elements in the teaching/learning process -learners- in designing lessons. Starting from the setup of the classroom, mode of delivery, and students' activities, there seems to be ignorance of the possible learning preference differences between and among learners. How is kindergarten as a foundational stage for learning (English language learning in this case) being treated and how is the teachers' understanding and capability of incorporating learning style differences in their teaching, requires further understanding and investigation, and it needs to be substantiated with empirical evidences; this is what initiated this research.

Thus, this study is aimed at assessing kindergarten teachers' self -efficacy belief in accommodating the learning styles of children in teaching English to kindergarten students and getting a better insight into the phenomenon.

1.3.   Significance of the Study

The results of this research would help teachers, especially those who are teaching at the Kindergarten level, to look into their teaching practices and make the necessary adjustments. to them. It would be of great value to English language teachers to give more attention to the consideration of learning style differences in their teaching. In addition, this study is believed to be used as an awakening bell to the concerned bodies, namely curriculum and syllabus designers, textbook writers, and educational experts at different levels to give due attention to this level of education. Curriculum designers can be benefited in such a way that they may design their curriculum so that what they have designed would be of support in accommodating the different learning styles of the beneficiaries and would be motivating to students to learn the new language. Trainers are also one of the beneficiaries of this study. The results of this study can make them focus on preparing effective educators who are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skill of teaching children effectively.   It may also help to display the actual scenario in our kindergartens and it may help as a baseline for initiating other researchers in this field of study.

1.4. Objectives of the Study

1.4.1. General objective

- The general objective of the study was to assess kindergarten teachers' practice in accommodating the learning styles of their students.

1.4.2. *Specific Objectives*

The specific objectives of this study were to examine:

- whether kindergarten teachers are aware of the existence of different learning styles among their students.
- how kindergarten teachers attempt to address the different possible learning styles among their students.
- whether there are conducive learning environments in the kindergartens for accommodating different learning styles.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Description of the Study Area

The geographical setting of this study is Hawassa City, the capital of Sidama Regional State, which is located at a distance of 273 km from Addis Ababa.

2.2. Study Participants

There are 109 private kindergartens in Hawassa city. Among them, 32 kindergartens (30% of the total population) were taken as a sample for the study by using a simple random sampling technique. The target informants were English teachers teaching at the upper kindergarten (UKG) level in the sample schools. Leaders of the selected kindergartens took a part in the questionnaire and in the interview. The target informants were teachers teaching at Upper Kindergarten Level from each selected kindergarten schools. This level of kindergarten is selected for it is a stage of learning where children get prepared for formal education; it is the last stage of kindergarten and academic activities are highly worked to lay a strong academic foundation for the students.

2.3. Study Design

The method of inquiry adopted to assess the phenomenon under discussion is mixed method research (the convergent parallel design) specifically for the advantage it lends to understanding the subject matter in a better way and also to answer the research questions at depth and length. A mixed method is a research type in which both qualitative and quantitative data are collected, analyzed, and integrated into research for it is empirically proved that the merging of the two methods of an inquiry gives a better understanding of the problem at hand than either method used alone (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Creswell, 2014). Creswell (2005: 52) also argues that "combining qualitative and quantitative data is the best design to understand and explain a research problem". In doing so, the researcher attempts to increase the credibility of the data gathered from different sources.

In a convergent, parallel, mixed-research design both qualitative and quantitative data are gathered concurrently and analyzed separately and the results are merged during interpretation. Such a method is believed to yield a complete understanding of a phenomenon under discussion and it is also useful in corroborating results from different methods (Creswell, 2012 ; Creswell & Clark, 2011).

The qualitative data gives a chance to gain a deeper insight into the subject through in-depth talks with teachers and experts about the nature of the phenomenon (Macky & Gass, 2005; Creswell & Clark, 2011). The classroom observation, another qualitative data in this study, gives a live experience of the classroom practice and enhances the reliability of the research. Quantitative data, on the other hand, gives a chance to get measurable evidence, efficient data collection procedures, the possibility of generalization of results to a population and to give insight into a breadth of experiences (Creswell & Clark, 2011). The blending of two (quantitative and qualitative data), provides a better understanding of the research problem than either type by itself (Creswell, 2008).

2.4.   Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The information gained from the Department of Education at Hawasa City Administration revealed that there were 109 private kindergarten schools in Hawassa City. As the total population is small in number (under 500), a large sampling ratio is required to be taken (30%) to get a representative sample of the total population (Neumann, 2014). Based on this, 32 kindergartens were included in this study. By using a simple random sampling method, the lottery method was used to select 32 kindergartens from a total of 109 kindergartens. In the selected kindergartens, there are 4 classrooms on average. Four teachers are taken from each school and this makes the total number of participants 128 English teachers. Among them, 5 teachers were interviewed and questionnaires were dispatched to all of them.

2.5.   Sources of Data

The sources of data for this research were primary sources. The primary sources of data were English teachers who were teaching at the upper kindergarten level as they are the people to whom the problem is addressed. Classroom observation was also conducted to have a look at the actual practices in the selected kindergartens.

2.6.   Instruments of Data Collection

To gather important information from the research participants, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and classroom observation were used.

Semi-structured interview: A semi-structured type of interview was used for it gives the researcher the freedom to modify and add questions as the situation demands (Macky & Gass, 2005). Semi-structured interview questions also do not restrict the views of the respondents by providing predesigned answers to questions as in closed-ended questions (Creswell, 2012).

Questionnaire: The questionnaire as a means of data collection was designed for the teachers working in the sample kindergarten schools. The goal of using a questionnaire was for triangulation purposes. It is believed that the validity and reliability of qualitative research can be increased by using multiple independent methods of data gathering tools in a single

investigation to reach the same research findings (Macky and Gass, 2005). A questionnaire also gives a chance to collect a large number of data in a short period (Debois, 2016).

Classroom Observation: Classroom observation as an instrument that was used in the study gave a chance to the researcher to observe what was happening in the classroom. During observation sessions, valuable insights into the issue under discussion were recorded in a notebook and with a video camera. The researcher developed her observation checklists which helped her achieve the goal of the research in general and the goal of the observation in particular. The researcher assumed a non-participant role in observing the classroom so that she would be advantaged in watching and recording the events without being distracted by other happenings as in a participant or changing observational role (Creswell, 2012). The observation was done in four classrooms two rounds for 30 minutes each to increase the reliability of the result of the observation. The observation was carried out two times in one classroom during the regular teaching-learning time. Together there were 8 observations of classrooms or observations of 240 minutes were conducted. It took 15 days to complete the observation from February 17 - 28, 2020 G.C.

2.7. Data Management and Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using the frequency and percentage that were derived from the responses given to the questionnaire. The qualitative data obtained from the interview and classroom observation were analyzed thematically.

3. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

3.1. Results from Quantitative Data

3.1.1. Background of Participants

One hundred twenty-eight teachers and four headmistresses participated in the study and all of them were females. Their educational background and work experience are depicted below.
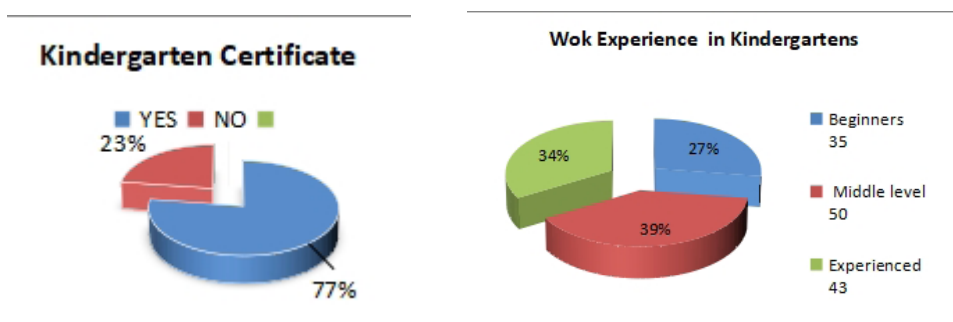

Figure 1: Availability of Relevant Training for the Job   Figure 2: Work Experience in Kindergarten

As it is depicted in the figures above, 99 (77%) of the respondents had the relevant training for the job. The remaining 29 (23%) of the teachers were qualified in a field of study that is not related to the teaching of children. When it comes to the number of years of experience in the work, 35 (27%) of the respondents had work experience ranging from 1-3 years, 50 (39%) of them from 4-7 years and the remaining 43 (34%) of them had experience in working at a kindergarten for 8 and above years. From the above data, we can understand that the

majority of the teachers who were teaching kindergarten children were of appropriate years of experience. to teach the children.

3.1.2. *Classroom Description*

The number of students in one classroom ranged from 25-50 students. When it comes to the size of the classrooms, the physical space of the classrooms was found to be a problem in most of the kindergarten schools. One hundred nine of them had limited space. In terms of teaching materials, 20 of the kindergartens were well-equipped and the remaining classrooms had a shortage or absence of teaching materials.

Table 1: Teachers' Awareness of the Various Learning Styles

No	Items	St.Agree (SA)		Agree (A)		Undecided (UD)		Disagree (DA)	
		fq	%	fq	%	fq	%	fq	%
1	Students need to use different resources related to their learning needs.	116	90.6			7	5.5	5	3.9
2	Using multisensory instruction benefits all types of students (regardless of their learning styles).	96	75.0	19	14.8	7	5.5	6	4.7
3	Spending the first weeks with my students to know them helps me understand the student's interests, learning styles, and needs to create meaningful, highly engaging lessons.	97	75.8	31	24.2				
4	Not all my students learn in the same way.	108	84.4			20	15.6		
5	Students learn best when their learning needs are met.	89	69.5	19	14.8			19	14.8
6	Designing my teaching to suit the learning styles of my students makes my teaching effective.	96	75	13	10.1			19	14.8

The data in the above table depicted that the majority of the respondents (90.6%) believed that students need to use different resources that suit their learning needs. The other 5.5% of the respondents could not express their position; the rest (3.9%) disagreed with the statement. As can be observed from the data given above, to help students learn according to their learning needs, they have to be provided with adequate resources. This is to say that the school management in consultation with other stakeholders needs to examine the materials appropriate to each type of learner and make them available as best as possible. In addition, the English teachers themselves need to be motivated to identify the different needs of their students and set different resources like teaching/learning materials, visual aids, cartoons, etc., that fulfill the needs of heterogeneous learners in their class.

In analyzing the data from item number two which asked the respondents concerning the benefits of using multisensory instruction, 75 % of the teachers strongly agreed, 19(14.8%) of them agreed, 5.5 % of them were not sure whether using multisensory instruction benefits learners of all types or not and 6 (4.7%) of them disagreed. to the statement. The above data reveal that whatsoever the learning style of students when information is presented in such a way that it targets multiple senses of students, there is a high chance for them to be benefited. Teachers need to think of presenting information through different modes of teaching to reach out to the students in different categories of learning. As a result, no child will be left behind and it benefits everyone in the classroom.

In response to item number 3, 97 (75.8%) of the teachers strongly agreed and 31 (24.2%) of them agreed that spending the first weeks with their students to know and understand their students' learning interests, learning styles, and needs enable them to create meaningful and highly engaging lessons. From this data, we can deduce that teachers need to use the first weeks of the academic year to learn about their students so that they can use the information to plan their subsequent lessons based on the information they have. This is to say that collecting information about students needs to be the starting point for teaching them. This statement also supports the maxim that goes as "one size doesn't fit all".

According to the data from item number 4, 108 (84.4%) of the respondents were well aware of the fact that all their students do not learn in similar ways; 20 (15.6%) of them were not sure whether students learn the same way or not. This implies that the very fact of student variances as a reality in the classroom is well understood by the respondent teachers. This understanding is believed to be the starting point for differentiating instruction to accommodate the different learning styles of students; and it shows how fertile the ground is to design teaching in such a way that addresses student differences.

In examining the data obtained from respondents concerning the interface between the fulfillment of the student's needs to increase their level of learning, 89 (69.5%) of the respondents strongly agreed, 19 (14.8%) agreed and the remaining 19 (14.8%) disagreed with it. This finding suggests that when students' needs are fulfilled, their need for learning increases. If this is the reality, all stakeholders need to look for ways in which the students' needs are fulfilled, if not entirely.

In responding to item number 6, 96 (75%) of the respondents strongly agreed that designing teaching materials that suit the learning styles of their students is one of the remedial solutions to make their teaching effective. The other 13 (10.1%) of them agreed with the statement while the remaining 19 (14.8%) of the respondents disagreed with it. This implies that the teachers are well aware of the importance of teaching materials that suit the different learning styles of their students and make their teaching more effective. This, however, does not mean that the materials for teaching at this level have to be different in content. It is up to the teachers (experts) to develop materials that suit at least three different groups of learners and gradually bring them relatively to the same level. From this, we can learn that for the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process, there need to be teaching materials that suit the different learning styles of students, though it is challenging economically for a country that is striving to set itself free from poverty.

Table 2: Teachers' Practice of accommodating Students' Learning Style Differences

No	Items	Always		Often		Sometimes		Rarely		Never	
		fq	%	fq	%	fq	%	fq	%	fq	%
1	I design modified tasks for learners who need extra help.	13	10.1			51	39.8	26	20.3	38	29.7
2	I use formal assessments to group my students based on their learning preferences.					26	20.3	44	34.4	58	45.3
3	I use informal assessment (like observation) to group my students based on their learning preferences.	51	39.8	38	29.7	13	10.1	26	20.3		
4	I establish systems and procedures early in the year, e.g. Sitting (furniture) arrangements, for group work or whole-class teaching.	45	35.1	18	14.0	26	20.3	26	20.3	13	10.1
5	I teach my students group work skills (like turn-taking, noise, meeting expected behavior and appropriate use of materials).	83	64.8	13	10.1	14	10.9			18	14.0
6	I incorporate a variety of teaching methods into my teaching.	70	54.7	18	14.0	14	10.9			26	20.3
7	I meet with small groups to re-teach ideas or skills for struggling learners or extend the skill of advanced learners.	26		45	35.1	18	14.0	21	16.4	18	14.0
8	I provide my students with several hands-on, multisensory activities (like tracing, role play, and dialogue).	25	19.5	18	14.1	28	21.9	39	30.5	18	14.1
9	I use varying time allocations for activity completion according to the pace of my students.	58	45.3			46	35.9			24	20.1
10	I use flexible grouping by the shared interest of learning topic.			20	15.6	16	12.5	75	58.6	17	13.3
11	I check students' mastery of content through written exams.	108	84.4	20	15.6						
12	I check the students' mastery of content through demonstration.					62	45.4	22	17.1	44	34.4
13	I arrange my students in different groups with different activities (reading groups, coloring groups, building block groups)	14	10.9	18	21.9	32	25	22	17.1	32	25

As Table 2 above displays 13 (10.1%) of the teachers always design modified tasks for their students, 51 (39%) of them did the designing often and the remaining 26(20.3%) and 38(29.7%) of them design extra tasks rarely and never, respectively. From this what we can learn is half of the respondents employ task modification according to the need of their students and the other half use it in a limited way. The data described above showed that half of the respondent teachers did not give full attention to set tasks that supplement the formally designed tasks. This by implication shows us that the issue of learning style difference accommodation is not uniformly addressed and this, in turn, affects the academic success of students at the level.

There should be some mechanism to make the experience shared among the teachers working at the level for a fair accommodation of individual differences.

According to data from item 2, 26 (20.3%) of the teachers sometimes used formal assessment to group their students based on their learning preference, 44(34.4%) of them did this rarely and 58 (45.3%) of them never used formal assessment strategies for this purpose. This data reveals that formal assessment as a way of identifying students' learning style preferences is not a common practice among the respondent teachers. From this, we can say that formal assessment, as one element of learner style differences identification is missed and this by implication tells us that learning style is not formally taken care of as one student element to impact their learning success.

Regarding informal assessment to group their students based on their learning preference, 51 (39.8%) responded that they always did it. The other 38 (29.7%) often did this while 13 (10.1%) and 26 (20.3%) did it rarely and never respectively. This indicates that the practice of identifying students' learning style differences is done through informal assessment. By implication, we can see that even if teachers do not stick themselves to formal assessment techniques of learning style identification, they have observations and other forms of informal assessment to know their students' learning style differences.

 In response to item 4, 45 (35.1%) of the respondents said that they always establish systems and procedures early in the academic year, and 18 (14%) of them often establish the systems and procedures early. A few numbers of respondents 26 (20.3%) said they did this sometimes and rarely, respectively whereas 13 (10.1%) the respondents chose never as their response. Considering the age of the students under study (kindergartners) without establishing systems and procedures at the beginning of the academic year, is not a good indicator for the teaching-learning process to be called healthy. It also shows that if the teachers are not managing the physical space of their classrooms in a manner that allows the arrangement of seating chairs for the whole class, and individual and group instruction, the classroom is not welcoming to the different learning preferences of students.

About teaching their students' group work skills, 83 (64.8%) of the respondents said that they always teach their students' group work skills, 13 (10.1%) of them often teach the skill while 14 (10.9%), and 18 (14%) rarely and never do the same, respectively. This shows that the majority of the teachers use group work as a way of organizing their classrooms and it is something that needs to be shared with the other teachers for incorporating group work as a way of organizing classrooms helps students to learn important group work skills; and it also helps to accommodate different learning preferences in the classroom.

For item number 6, 70 (54.7%) of the respondents reported that they always incorporated a variety of teaching methods into their teaching, 18((14%) often did this, the remaining 14 (10.9%) and 26 (20.3%) did sometimes and rarely respectively. As we understand the attention span of students at an early stage is very short. Hence, using a variety of methodologies can motivate students to learn different language skills pleasantly.

Twenty-six (20.3%) of the teacher-respondents met small groups of students for different purposes of instruction, 45(35.1%) of them did this often, 18 (14%) sometimes, and 21 (16.4%) rarely respectively. These data suggest that the English teachers met different groups of students at different frequencies. This again gives us an implication that the English teachers did not

fully ignore meeting different groups and discussing their opinions about the activities that they were asked to do in small groups. This trend needs to be encouraged because students need to develop the habit of working in small groups right from an early age. Twenty-five (19.5%) of the respondents always provide their students with several hands-on multisensory activities. While 18 (14%), do this sometimes and never, the remaining 28 (21.9%) and 39 (30.5%) did this sometimes and rarely. In this regard, as we observe from the data, the English teachers gave multisensory activities to their students though the frequency varies from teacher to teacher. We know that different students have different styles of learning and thus when they are provided with different activities that suit their style of learning, the students benefit a lot in building their language skills.

In connection to varying time allocation according to students' pace, 58 (45%) of the respondents said they always allocate time that they allocate for different activities according to the pace of students to learn and improve their English language skills, 46 (35.9%) did this sometimes, and the reaming 24 (20.1%) never respectively. There is an understanding that all groups of students need to complete a given activity within the time that was allocated for all of them. Nevertheless, when sometimes they are allowed to work on different activities according to their pace of learning, those students who need more time to think and solve a problem will feel comfortable and gradually struggle to do activities at the same time as that of other group mates.

In checking their students' mastery of content 108 (84.4%) of the respondents always used written exams while 20 (15.6%) of them used this assessment tool often. The other 32 (25%) often used demonstration as a means of checking content mastery, 62 (45.4%) sometimes used the same technique to check the content mastery of their students, the remaining 22(17.1%) and 44 (34.4%) rarely and never used this technique respectively. From the data described above, we learn that the written exam was the most frequently used technique to check the content mastery of the students when they learned different skills of the English language. Here, the researcher, as an English teacher, wants to say that students at lower grade levels, especially at the kindergarten level, need different assessment techniques to check the level of their progress in learning different language skills because each of them can best perform in one of the assessment protocols. Concerning the assessments English teachers use, no uniformity among English teachers is exhibited. Hence, the researcher suggests that the leaders of the kindergartens need to bring the teachers together and discuss the most appropriate way of assessing students' English language skills and the assessment procedure has to be similar. Otherwise, the final decision that each teacher passes on each student's final achievement will be unfair and this will affect the quality of the whole instruction.

Using a variety of assessment techniques is a fact not only for students at lower grades level but also for those who are learning English at a higher level as well because not all students have the same attitude towards each assessment technique. At the kindergarten level, especially, since the maturity level of the students is very low, changing the techniques of assessment as frequently as possible is a means to confidently understand the whereabouts of the students.

3.2. Results from the Qualitative Data

3.2.1. *Analysis and Interpretations of Data from the Classroom Observations*

To be ethical in analyzing the data from observation, the researcher coded the names of the English teachers whose classes had been observed as KG-A, B, C, and D.

Reading and re-reading the recorded data from classroom observation, four thematic categories are identified. These are the availability of teaching materials, classroom size, classroom setup, and teacher's and student's roles.

Availability of teaching materials: In 3 of the classrooms observed, the researcher could learn that there was a shortage or unavailability of designed teaching materials. The lack of audio and visual materials was the most serious constraint in teaching language skills more authentically. There is also an absence of curved letters and numbers for the children to touch. It was seen that the absence of these materials made teaching children with a variety of learning preferences cumbersome. Most of the teachers were seen using the traditional method of teaching because of the absence of these materials. Because students were not engaged in the lesson and because of their unmet cognitive level, they were seen to be bored and restless and teachers were also repeatedly threatening students to keep silent and to pay attention.

Class and classroom size: Spacious classrooms and classrooms with a manageable number of students are believed to help the teacher make the best use of his/her instructional effort. Large class sizes and non-spacious classrooms were also observed in classrooms. The number of children in a class ranged from 25-50. Except for one classroom, this was a problem faced by all the observed classrooms. The physical space of the classroom did not allow multiple furniture arrangements that support different types of instructional activities. Because of the large number of students in the classrooms, it was hard for the teachers to implement the activities meant to address students' learning style differences.

Classroom setup: A traditional method of classroom organization is observed in 3 of the observed classrooms, that is, classrooms were organized to provide largely whole-class instruction. The sitting arrangement of students in the observed classroom was the same as traditional classroom sitting arrangements. The unavailability of teaching materials coupled with a sitting which was meant for the lecture method of teaching gives the classroom a look of a classroom setup that was meant for learners other than children. From the observed four classrooms, only one of them was seen to accommodate the needs of children in terms of availability of teaching materials, flexible sitting arrangement, and presence of different learning corners, with their limitations of course. Even if there were the aforementioned facilities in that specific classroom, students were seen as being treated as a whole. In two of the observed classrooms, students' work was neatly displayed throughout the room.

Teacher's and students' roles: In all of the observations done, a teacher-centered classroom was witnessed in that the teacher controlled the whole process of teaching-learning. The classrooms didn't cater to innovation and creativity because their main resources were the teachers. Learners were glued to their seats and were passive recipients of knowledge through listening to the teachers which were against the nature and the cognitive level of children. The children were seen being bored and unstable and a lot of behavior issues were there too. Students were

fighting, pushing, and pulling each other and snatching pencils from each other - unmet needs manifested in disruptive behaviors.

Figure 3: Classroom set up in KG-2

Figure 4: Classroom Set up in KG-1

3.2.2. *Analysis and Interpretations of Data from the Classroom Observations*

The data obtained from a semi-structured interview that was conducted with English teachers and kindergarten leaders are presented and discussed below.

Key: English teacher 1=T1, English teacher 2=T2, English teacher 3=T3, English teacher 4=T4, English teacher 5=T5

In an attempt made to analyze the interview data, four thematic categories were identified and this made it possible to discuss the views of the respondents in-depth. This is the importance of accommodating learning style differences in children's learning, ways of identifying students' learning styles differences and incorporating them, availability of a conducive or preventive environment for addressing learning styles differences, and suggested solutions to tackle the problems related to learning style difference accommodation.

3.2.3. *The Importance of Accommodating Learning Style Differences on Children's learning*

Regarding this issue, all the interviewees unequivocally said that it is important to consider students' learning style differences while teaching them any lesson as a whole and teaching English language skills in particular. In their further elaboration, they said that if all the differences among learners are taken into account while teaching them, the student's performance, love for learning, and confidence will be boosted significantly. One of the respondents, T3, who was certified in kindergarten teaching and had 8 years of teaching at the level example mentioned, "The very challenge I always encounter within my teaching profession is some students lack interest for learning and their inability to cope with their classmates' pace of learning and I sometimes think that this is a challenge that always tests the patience and skills of a successful English teacher".

From the data given above, we see that the teacher was of the view that understanding individual differences and helping students to learn according to their pace is one of the challenges that all English teachers need to work hard and accommodate the problem continuously.

3.2.4. *Ways of Identifying Students' Learning Styles and Incorporating Activities that Suit each of them*

Among the five respondents, none of them had the practice of using a formal method of assessment to identify and incorporate activities that suit their students' learning style differences. The most commonly used way of identifying the student's learning style was having an informal discussion with the student's previous level teacher. They even did this not at the beginning of their contact with the child, rather they did it when they encountered a problem in dealing with that specific child's behavior or his/her way of catching up with the class. As an example of this, T2 said, "Whenever I have a challenge with a given child, I consult the previous teacher of the child to talk about his/her behavior and way of learning and I found it to be most effective to know the child and help him/her accordingly". T4, on the other hand, said, "I arrange a meeting with the parents of the child if I face anything challenging regarding the child".

The teachers use the same method of teaching and evaluating students in their respective classes. T5 confirmed this idea by saying, "To be honest with you, I have the same lesson and the same method of teaching for all my students. Even if I come to know there are learner differences among my students; I don't have the time and the necessary resources to address that differences." All the teachers responded that they had used their observations and personal judgment to identify their students' learning preferences.

3.2.5. *Challenges of Addressing Students' Learning Style Differences*

A large number of students in one classroom, shortage or absence of teaching materials that are meant to make learning style difference accommodation possible, the physical classroom size which is not suitable for multiple furniture arrangements, bulky course contents that are meant to be covered within the academic year that take all the teaching hours and lack of competence, creativity and time management skill among teachers, were the existing challenges mentioned. As an illustration, we can take T2's words. She said, "I know my students are different in many aspects, but I cannot address that with the number of students I have in one class. I have time and other resource constraints".

3.2.6. *Suggested Solutions to Tackle the Problems Related to Learning Style Accommodation*

Making the number of students in one classroom manageable is one of the remedial actions forwarded by the respondents. The bulky content of the textbooks needs to be revised so that teaching children will not be rushing to cover it. In this regard, T4 says that "look, I have a very vast volume of textbooks to cover within a given period. So all I do is rush to cover it because if I lag behind the set time framework, I will be blamed so the volume of the book needs to be revised for me to design my teaching flexibly". On-job training needs to be arranged so that it will boost teachers' competence and creativity power. If they have space in the classroom which makes the sitting arrangement flexible; the teachers said that it will make the practice of learner difference accommodation possible. They also mentioned kindergartens should avail teaching materials which are important for making their teaching inclusive of their students.

4. DISCUSSIONS OF RESULTS

In this section of the paper, an attempt is made to discuss the results of the study which are obtained from the different data-gathering tools, namely, classroom observations, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. The discussion is presented under the following three themes which are in line with the three research questions of this study. These are:

- Kindergarten English language teachers' awareness of the existence of different learning styles among their students.
- Kindergarten English language teachers practice addressing the different possible learning styles of their students.
- Conduciveness of learning environment in the kindergartens for accommodating different possible learning styles.

4.1. Awareness of EFL Teachers on Different Learning Styles of Students

The analyzed data indicated that more than half of the teachers who participated in this study have a good understanding of students' learning style differences and the impact these learning style differences have on the success of students' English language learning. Most teachers are aware that the students in their classrooms do not learn in the same way and their responsibility as teachers is to cater to these different preferences of learning. This indicates that there is a conducive ground for addressing learning style differences of students from the teachers' side. When teachers are aware of learner differences and the role these differences have on the academic achievement of students then, research supports that, there is a better chance for implementing strategies that address the different needs of learners. This statement is supported by researchers like Moosa & Shareefa (2019) ; Dixon et al. (2014) and Burkett (2013).

4.2. Practice of Addressing Learning Style Differences

The analyzed data disclosed that learning style accommodation is not prevalent in the kindergartens the case is investigated. What is identified from the analyzed data is that there is the practice of teaching all the students in the classroom by using a similar approach to language teaching without considering the preferences of students. This can affect the quality of English education for it disregards the differences among learners which are an important aspect of their academic success. Students let in the information that suits their learning preferences and the individual differences among them play a pivotal role in their success (Jonassen & Grabowski, 1993). The very fact of the absence of learning style accommodation in classrooms hampering the quality of students' learning and academic achievement is supported by research findings of Bas & Beyhan (2013) and Searson & Dunn (2001).

4.2.1. *Conduciveness of the Learning Environment in Kindergartens to Accommodate Students' Different Learning Styles*

Data gained from the data sources have indicated that the learning environment is not conducive to accommodating individual learning style differences. Large class sizes, limited physical spaces of classrooms, bulky lesson contents, time constraints, classrooms devoid of teaching materials, absence of on-job training on regular basis, and lack of teachers with relevant training for the level are some of the hindering factors identified for not accommodating learning style

differences among students. This finding goes in line with the findings of Roiha (2012) and Shareefa et al. (2019)

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusions

From the analyzed data and the findings presented above, it can be concluded that the English teachers and the headmistresses at the research site have a good understanding of the concept of learning style differences and some ways of accommodating them, except for some teachers' confusion. Learning style difference accommodation, is not that much implemented due to the different challenges the kindergarten schools have. There is no formal procedure identified as a means of identifying and accommodating the differences among the students at kindergarten. Large class sizes, limited physical spaces of classrooms, bulky lesson contents, classrooms devoid of teaching materials, absence of on-job training on regular basis, and lack of teachers with relevant training for the level, are some of the challenges the level is experiencing.

5.2. Recommendations:

Based on the conclusions, the following recommendations are drawn:

- The content size and difficulty level in the English language textbook need to be proportional to the age and experience level of the students so that students learn them according to their paces.
- On-job training should be part and parcel of the teaching-learning process; as a result, English teachers would have the skill and knowledge of learning style difference accommodation.
- Kindergarten owners should work hard in equipping their kindergartens with the necessary supplementary teaching materials and aids.
- The concerned educational bureau heads need to make a close follow-up with kindergartens so that how children are learning will have guidance and control from an external body.
- As there is a lack of empirical studies at the level under discussion, concerned bodies need to support this level of education by producing relevant and problem-solving research works in the field.

6. CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

No conflict of interest was reported.

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