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The relations between academic achievement in field lessons and learning styles of music teacher candidates

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Abstract

For an effective educational process to know learner's learning styles is significant for the regulation of learning processes and environments. The purpose of this research is to determine the learning styles of music education students and investigate whether is a significant difference between the points of academic achievement of the music branch of courses and their learning styles. The study group was 70 students studying Balıkesir University Necatibey Education Faculty Fine Arts Education Department Music Education Main Branch in 2010-2011 Spring Term. To gather data "Kolb's Learning Style Inventory-III" and transcript of students' achievement points were used. The data were analyzed and evaluated by using one-way ANOVA. Learning styles of study group was determined and put forward suggestions with assessment of results

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Keywords: Music teacher, musical performance, Kolb, learning styles;

Introduction

During the process of musical instrument instruction, it is the duty of musical instrument instructor to enable the student to understand the complex structure of musical performance that stands on different foundations and be equipped and prepared in this regard. Rodriguez states that the most important reason for the researches conducted on music education is to improve teaching and learning music (Rodriguez, 1995). Musical instrument instruction is generally based on intuition, common sense and tradition (Persson, 2000, rep. Triantafyllaki, 2005). Teachers practice what they learned from their previous teachers with the traditionalized master-apprentice understanding; and they intuitively guide their students. It is a necessity for musical instrument instructors to organize regarding what they will instruct (Hoffer, 1993, rep. Oo, 2008).

Learning styles have been drawing attention as a significant field of study in recent years. In spite of the voiced problems of musical instrument instructors, to know the learning styles of their students can provide new opportunities. Recently, researchers "have been pointing out individual learning style differences that exist among students; and they try to examine how each individual can learn more easily and effectively" (Kabadayı, 2004; rep. Mutlu, 2008).

Evaluations observed in many studies with the contribution of learning styles on educators and education processes. Carbo (1980) asserts that determining the learning styles of students and performing the necessary regulations will increase the achievement (Güven, Özbek, 2007). Cassidy states that whilst educators in all fields are becoming increasingly aware of the critical importance of understanding how individuals learn, they consider equally important that any attempts to integrate learning style into educational programs are made from an informed

position (Cassidy, 2004). Evin Gencil stated that determining the learning styles of students and offering an instruction that is suitable for these styles is important for actualizing permanent learning (Evin Gencil, 2007). According to Cano and Garton, learning style is one of the important factors that can affect academic achievement of the students (Cano, Garton, 1994; rep. Tatar, Tüysüz, İlhan, 2008). Similar opinions were offered by Peker and Aydın. They stated that teachers' taking the learning styles of their students into account is a step that will be taken towards eliminating the individual differences among the students. In doing so, it is expected from teachers to form a teaching environment in accordance with these features as they know the features of their students better (Peker, Aydın, 2003). "When we determine the learning styles of students, teaching strategies, teaching methods and techniques, which can be used in the teaching environment and the teaching process, will be able to be determined more easily and suitable teaching materials will be able to be designed more easily" (Merter, 2009).

Models of Gregorc, Dunn and Kolb have been widely accepted regarding the learning styles. Each model is based on different cognitive, affective and psychological approaches (Başibüyük, 2004, rep. Güven, Özbek, 2007). Cassidy's detailed study can be examined in order to familiarize with these models and measuring tools (Cassidy, 2010).

Felder and Eunuç define learning styles as the systematic differentiations that emerge in individuals' approaches for learning and solving problems (Felder, Eunuç, 1995; rep. Merter, 2009). Dunn associates learning styles with each student's using different and unique ways while preparing to learn new and difficult information, learning and remembering this information (Boydak, 2001, rep. Mutlu, 2006). Kolb defines the learning as a process in which knowledge is transformed from experience (Kolb, 1984, rep. Reed, 2000). Thus, Kolb's model has been determined as the theoretical model of the research owing to the nature of musical performance.

Set forth by Kolb, "experiential learning theory is individuals' thinking, analyzing, evaluating and restructuring their actions in order to make sense of their new experiences in the light of their previous experiences. Experiential learning theory defines learning as the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experiences." (Andresen, Boud, Cohen, 2000, rep. Bozaslan, Durdukoca, Kaya, 2011).

"It is argued that there are two dimensions in the learning process, namely as perception and transformation (Kolb, 1994). Although these two dimensions are independent of each other, they support each other (Kaf Hasırcı, 2006). In other words, "in Kolb's Experiential Learning Model, learning styles of individuals are in the form of a cycle, and where individuals stand in this cycle are determined with learning style inventory" (Sezer, 2006).

This study aims to determine the relations between music teacher candidates' achievement in performance lessons and their learning styles.

Method

In this study, data have been collected firstly in order to determine the relation between the learning styles of 70 students, who are studying in Music Teaching Program of Balıkesir University, and their achievement in performance lessons. The scope of the study covers all class levels except for first year.

Performance lessons have been limited to chorus, individual musical instrument, individual voice training and piano training. Academic achievement of students in their musical performances regarding musical instruments and singing has been taken into account. The reason for this limitation is that the sample composing of fourth-year students can be included in common evaluation only with these lessons.

Kolb's Learning Style Inventory-III, which was translated into Turkish by Evin Gencil (2006), has been used as the data collection tool. Students' grades taken in the 2010-2011 Spring Semester have been evaluated as their academic achievement scores.

One-way ANOVA test has been conducted in order to determine the relation between achievement scores belonging to performance lessons and learning styles which constitute the research subject. Data have been tabularized and evaluated in findings and interpretation section.

Findings and Interpretation

Research data have been presented in findings and interpretation section with descriptive values table (Table 1) that shows the distribution of learning styles and tables that show the relation between academic achievement and learning styles (Table 2).

Table 1. Descriptive values

Learning styles	f	%
Diverger	31	44,3
Accommodator	18	25,7
Converger	8	11,4
Assimilator	13	18,6
Total	70	100,0

When Table 1 is examined, it is observed that almost half of (44,3%) music teacher candidates embrace “diverger” learning style. This noteworthy ratio is followed by students who embrace “accommodator” learning style with 25,7% and students who embrace “assimilator” learning style with 18,6% in close ratios. Apart from these distributions, “converger” style is represented with a low ratio, namely as 11,4%.

In view of this, it can be stated that music teacher candidates predominantly embrace “diverger” learning style. “Converger” style stands out as the least embraced style with 11,4% ratio. As two close values, “accommodator” and “assimilator” learning styles reflect learning styles of music teacher candidates with remarkable ratios.

Table 2. Relation between music teacher candidates’ achievement in performance lessons and their learning styles

Learning Styles	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	sd	Mean Square	f	p
Chorus	Intergroup	35,565	3	11,855	,384	,765
	Intragroup	2038,378	66	30,885		
	Total	2073,943	69			
Individual Voice Training	Intergroup	230,015	3	76,672	,849	,472
	Intragroup	5961,356	66	90,324		
	Total	6191,371	69			
Individual Musical Instrument	Intergroup	762,025	3	254,008	,694	,559
	Intragroup	24171,175	66	366,230		
	Total	24933,200	69			
Piano	Intergroup	3804,520	3	1268,173	2,112	,107
	Intragroup	39626,051	66	600,395		
	Total	43430,571	69			

When Table2 is examined, as performance lessons, “Chorus” lesson exhibits [$F(3, 66) = 0,384, p = 0,765$]; “Individual Voice Training” lesson exhibits [$F(3, 66) = 0,849, p = 0,472$]; “Individual Musical instrument” lesson exhibits [$F(3, 66) = 0,694, p = 0,559$]; “Piano” lesson exhibits [$F(3, 66) = 2,112, p = 0,107$];and these values constitute the results of one-way ANOVA results. In view of this, it has been determined that there is no relation between all these lessons and learning styles.

Results and Discussion

Findings regarding the relations between students’ learning styles and their performance lessons, which constitute the purpose of the research, have showed that there is no relation between learning styles and any performance lesson.

When the conducted researches have been examined, the same finding has been encountered in a study performed on music teacher candidates (Deniz, 2011). Additionally, a similar result has been observed in a research conducted on science teacher candidates (Bahar, Sülün, 2011). Consequently, statements, which assert that learning styles can be a variable that has effects on academic achievement in groups composing of teacher candidates, are rejected for now by these studies.

When learning styles of music teacher candidates have been examined, it has been observed that “diverger” learning style is the most represented (44,3%) style. It is seen that “converger” learning style is represented with the lowest ratio(11,4%). “Accommodator” (25,7%)and “assimilator” (18,6%)learning styles have close ratios and they stand out as styles that are embraced almost half of teacher candidates in total.

People, who belong to “diverger” learning style that is the predominantly embraced learning style of teacher candidates, have the following features:

Diverger learning style:

- They are successful at listening and thinking information along with other information in the learning process.
- They analyze their own knowledge and other information.
- They prefer likening and integrating methods while learning concepts.
- They pay attention to the meanings of concepts.
- They spend excessive time in the decision-making process.
- They prefer the orders of authorities in learning environments, and they show patience in this regard.
- The emphasis, to which they attach importance in learning, is ‘formulating the ideas’.
- They usually prefer occupations in social work areas (such as journalism, literature and theater).
- They seek answer to the question ‘what’ while learning.
- They prefer teaching approaches in which information is given in a certain order (Ekici, 2003; Çaycı, 2007 rep. Çaycı, Ünal, 2007).

When the fact that music teacher candidates predominantly represent “diverger” learning style is evaluated with the abovementioned features, the following recommendations can be offered to performance lesson instructors:

1. Examples, which will be performed, must be necessarily given to the students via visual or auditory media formats.
2. Students must be presented with musical performance ideas that they have and previously performed renditions that are in documentary nature. These important presentations must be composed of the records of works played by the students or the performances of works where similar period and style features are exhibited.
3. Musical performance is an entirety that is composed of many elements. It must be kept in mind that these elements are in agreement with the tendencies of “diverger” learners, and applications oriented towards the elements of musical performance must be considerably shared by the instructors.
4. It is important for the instructor to explicitly know educational process regarding performance of music teacher candidates that have “diverger” learning style from all aspects, and to introduce cause-effect relations.

5. Instructors must share the elements of musical performance in a certain order with the music teacher candidates that embrace this style.

“Whilst some people reflect the features of just one learning style, other people may reflect the features of more than one learning style. In view of this, the predominant learning style embraced by each student must be determined, and instruction must be arranged accordingly” (Çaycı, Ünal, 2007). Therefore, performance lessons must be arranged by taking into account the existence of other learning styles, occupational skills and styles of teacher candidates that embrace these learning styles.

We must continue researching the data, which assert that the learning styles that stand out in the research findings have no relation with academic achievement, with different elements; and also continue testing elements, which affect musical performance, with different scales such as performance scales.

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