

Arts and Learning Styles: Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Moroccan High School

Hind El Mimouni¹

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Abstract: Teaching through arts is proved to have multiple benefits on students' outcomes. Similarly, it is claimed that learning styles valuation in the teaching/learning context importantly contribute in improving students' learning. In this paper, arts and learning styles are studied together in the context of teaching English as a Foreign Language in the Moroccan high school. The emphasis is put on the teachers' beliefs, attitudes and use of arts as well as their dealing with different learning styles. A questionnaire is dedicated to English high school teachers in order to depict the benefits of both utilizing arts in EFL teaching and taking into consideration learning styles. Moreover, an analysis of official documents related to English teaching is done in order to portray the place of arts and learning styles in the Moroccan education legislations. The findings show that teachers are aware of the benefits of exploiting arts in English language teaching. However, teachers face many obstacles that hinder arts use, creativity and learning styles consideration. Moreover, the official documents evince that arts and learning styles are not focused in the Moroccan English teaching legislations.

Keywords: arts, learning styles, drama, music, cinema.

¹Muhammed V University, hi.elmimouni@gmil.com

ORCID ID:

Introduction

In the Moroccan context, English is getting more used especially after Higher Education minister Mr. Lahssen Daoudi's called upon learning English. As reported by the minister, students who do not master English have no future. Still, EFL teaching is surrounded by many obstacles that hinder students' success, as it does not take into account a number of practices.

On the one hand, Arts-based pedagogies were proven to have a positive and significant impact on various student academic-related outcomes (Lee, 2015). Studies such as Pepler (Pepler, 2014), have shown that arts have an important impact on the students on many levels both as learners at school and as individuals. Therefore, the importance of implementing arts at school is tremendous.

On the other hand, it is obvious that students learn differently. Therefore, the teaching strategies used by the teachers should vary accordingly. This difference in terms of students' learning ways is called, according to a number of researchers such as Denig (2004), Kolb (2005) and Honey (2000), as "learning styles". According to Denig, for instance, learning styles influence the student's outcome. When students learn using their preferred style they tend to have better results. However, there is a debate about the learning styles concept which calls upon further research and investigation.

Since Arts and Learning styles have a positive impact on the student's outcome, a research is needed in order to portray the EFL teaching practices in accordance with these two elements. This paper would allow having a clear image about the deficiencies that the Moroccan EFL teaching suffers from and which concern the teachers' beliefs, practices and the environment created by the official rules that frame EFL teaching.

The Purpose and the Objectives of the study

The overall purpose of the study is to investigate the place of Arts and learning styles and how they affect each other in EFL teaching in the Moroccan school. Furthermore, this research is more concerned by the outcomes of EFL teaching practices in high school. In particular, the study has the following specific objectives:

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- To investigate the impact of Arts on students.
 - To highlight the concept of learning styles and its implication on students.
 - To investigate high school teachers' knowledge, practice and beliefs related to the use of Arts in EFL teaching and consideration of learning styles.
 - To depict the correlation between the use of arts and the consideration of learning styles in EFL teaching.
 - To determine the importance that the Moroccan official documents give to arts and learning styles in English teaching related documents.

Research questions

The following research questions embrace the major facets that the present research paper will be dealing with. They constitute the basic frame through which the data will be collected and analyzed:

- 1)
 - a) In the Moroccan high school, do teachers use art-based activities in EFL teaching
 - b) Do teachers vary activities in order to satisfy different learning styles?
- 2)
 - a) Do Moroccan official documents give importance to Arts and learning styles?
 - b) How is the use of arts depicted in the Moroccan textbooks?

Method

Research tools

In order to achieve the objectives of this research two main methods were used:

- Questionnaire: A questionnaire dedicated to teachers in order to have an image about their beliefs and practices in EFL teaching in accordance with arts and learning styles.

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- Documents analysis: a reading in the Moroccan textbook (Insight into English), the National Curriculum through the white book and the guidelines.

Sampling method

Snowball sampling was used in order to have an important number of EFL teachers from the Moroccan high schools. Generally speaking, Snowball sampling uses a small pool of initial informants to nominate, through their social networks, other participants who meet the eligibility criteria and could potentially contribute to a specific study. Therefore, this method was used to reach teachers who work in farther place in the kingdom.

Fifty-six English language teachers were attained by this method. These teachers work in different high schools and in various cities in the Moroccan kingdom which would help depict a bunch of teaching experiences.

The questionnaire analysis

Google Drive was exploited as to have the teachers' answers. It was also used in order to have descriptive graphs of the results given by the teachers. Google Drive, makes it easy for the respondents to share the questionnaire with the other teachers they know. Furthermore, SPSS software was utilized in order to cross-tabulate the results of some questions as to determine the nature of the relationship that govern them.

Ethical considerations

To guarantee the confidentiality of the questionnaire answers, respondents were not required to give personal information about themselves. This contributed in making the teachers more direct and fair in answering the questions. Moreover, they were given enough time to fill out the questionnaire as it was posted online for more than 20 days. The respondents would also feel more comfortable when filling out a questionnaire when they are as ease, home or any other place they prefer.

Limitations

The research would have been more interesting if more time was allotted to it. Students outcome could have been evaluated when using arts and different instructions in comparison to a

teaching practice where no arts and no learning styles are taken into accounts. However, due to constraint of time, the research was limited to the teachers' beliefs and thoughts and the official documents analysis. Moreover, the sampling rules were not taken into consideration because it was difficult to reach more than the number of the respondents who answer the questionnaire. This fact reduces the degree of the representability of the results.

Results

Questionnaire:

Description of the respondents

Fifty-six teachers filled out the questionnaire. These teachers work in different places in Morocco, different cities and different school systems. 88.2% of the respondents are between 22 and 35 years old while 11.7% are between 36 and 61. 25% of them work in private schools while 75% work in public schools. The majority of the teachers who responded to the questionnaire (70.9%) have less than 6 years of experience in teaching English. Concerning the level of education of these teachers, the big majority holds bachelor degrees (70.9%) while only (27.3%) had a master degree. A very small category (1.8%) have a PhD diploma. Finally, there is no big difference in the gender of the respondents, 46.3% are female and 53.7% are male. These factors are going to be exploited later on in the research.

The reasons behind choosing to be a teacher

The teachers were asked about reasons that led them to choose teaching as a job. Different reasons were provided as answer choices. The respondents were given the possibility of choosing many answers. The answer that was selected by a big number of teachers (61.1%) is the fifth answer that states passion as a reason behind choosing to be a teacher. The paramount mission of teaching was chosen by 35.2% respondents. 18.5% of teachers say that it was the only job they could find, while only 5.6% mentioned that the reason behind is because of the value society gives to teaching. 1.9% of teachers argue that teaching provides a good pay and that is why they wanted to be teachers. 3.7% mention that their choice is due to other reasons.

All in all, the big majority of the respondent's results show positive intentions behind the choice of teaching English as a job.

Artistic vocations of the respondents

The teachers were asked two questions about their artistic vocations. The first question was about whether they had an artistic vocation or not. The answers were as follow: 24.1% of the teachers declare that they have an artistic vocation against 38.9% who give "no" as an answer to this question. 31.5% of the teachers who answered the questionnaire are not sure if they have an artistic vocation or not and 5.6% say they do not know. In order to have a clearer answer, the teachers were asked another question which was about the art activities they practice. Storytelling, taking photos and acting were the options that have been chosen the most, followed by playing music, writing stories, drawing and creating videos/movies. The other remaining choices received a relatively lower rate; namely, painting, composing poetry and others. Note that the teachers had the possibilities of choosing many answers which means that one respondent may have chosen more than one answer.

The use of arts in the classroom

The teachers were again asked two questions about their use of arts in EFL teaching. The first question was about whether they think that using art is helpful or not. The majority of the respondents (81.1%) declare that it is helpful while only 19.9% of the teachers answer by "No". None of the respondents chooses "Somehow" or "I don't know" as an answer.

In the next question, teachers were asked to provide more precision about the same question. They were asked to explain the extent to which art is helpful for their students. 42.6% of the respondent mention that using arts in EFL teaching is very helpful and 37% say that it is helpful. Only 18.5% select "somewhat helpful" and the rest (1.9%) are neutral about it. Overall, the majority (79.6) have a pellucid positive view regarding the usefulness of utilizing arts in EFL teaching.

The importance of arts in EFL teaching

According to the answers of the respondents, arts are important because they create a lovely atmosphere and break away from monotonous classroom tasks. Arts attract the students' attention and understanding becomes easy. Furthermore, the use of arts keeps the learners motivated and

highly engaged. Therefore, learners become more creative, more open-minded and more intellectual. The use of arts enhances authentic speech. Art also makes the production stage fruitful as students try to implement what they have learned in fun ways such as composing pictures, writing songs, acting dialogues and so on. Art is very appealing for the majority of people and especially young learners. Therefore, implementing it in the teaching as a learning process makes it interesting. Singing, for example, builds up students' vocabulary and improves pronunciation and intonation. Moreover, utilizing arts facilitates the process of teaching.

The teachers' use of arts in EFL teaching

The questions moved to another level of investigation. Teachers were asked not only about what they thought about using arts in EFL but also about their teaching practices. To have an idea about the teachers' use of arts, the respondents were asked three questions.

The first question was about whether they used art in teaching or not. 77.8% of the respondents say they do while 18.5% declare that they do not use arts in EFL teaching. The remaining teachers do not know if they use it or not.

The second question was about the frequency of using arts in English classes. Only 11.4% of the teachers who answered the questionnaire say they always use arts in teaching. The answers declare that 72.7% of the respondent use arts from time to time while 15.9% use arts very rarely.

The third question was about the art genre the teachers used. Note that teachers had the possibility to tick more than one answer. According to the results, 84.1% of the respondents use music in EFL teaching, 54.5% use drama and 29.5% use cinema. 22.7% of the respondents declare that they use other art genres.

Obstacles that prevents teachers from using arts

In order to know what prevents teachers from utilizing arts in EFL teaching, the teachers were asked to identify the type of obstacles that do not allow them to use arts. The respondents were given a list of reasons that prevent the use of arts. The respondent had the possibility of choosing more than one reason.

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According to the results given, 90% of the respondents declare that there is a lack of means, 60% of the teachers argue that time is too tight, 50% mention that the use of arts requires a lot of energy, 40% blame the institution for not encouraging the use of arts, 30% of the respondents say that they are not talented enough, 20% declare that they do not know how to use it and that students do not care about arts and 10% of the respondents say that there are other reasons behind not using arts in EFL teaching.

The effects of using arts in EFL teaching

In order to know the effects of utilizing arts in EFL teaching, teachers were asked two questions. The first one was about whether using arts in EFL teaching makes any difference. The majority of the teachers (88.9%) confirmed that it is the case against only 11.1% who do not think so. The second question is an attempt to provide more details about the answers of the first question. The respondents were given a list of effects that arts could have. The list consists of choices that are binary oppositions. In each binary opposition there are two answers. The first answer has a positive connotation while the second has a negative one.

According to the results portrayed in the graph, only the choices with positive connotations were selected, except one choice. The respondents had the possibility of selecting more than one choice. The graph shows that 92.6% of the respondents declare that students show more interest when arts are being used in EFL classes, 85.2% say that students enjoy class where the teacher uses arts, 74.1% of the teachers mention that with the use of arts students understand better, 57.4% of respondents say that they feel loved by their students when they use arts in teaching, 46.3% of the teachers declare that using arts demands less effort in the lesson explanation, 25.9% of the respondents attest that their students grades improve when there is a use of arts in EFL teaching and 11.1% selected “other” as an answer. Finally, only 5.6% of the respondents say that using arts in EFL teaching requires more efforts in explaining. Teachers were then asked whether they had received any initiation to art-based teaching during their training as pre-service teachers. The answers were as follow: The majority (61.1%) of teachers declare that they did not receive any art-based course as pre-service teachers. 24.1% of the respondents say that they have not received art-based courses while 11.1% of the teachers answer by “somewhat”. The other remaining teachers do not remember if they have received any art-based course or not.

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The teachers were asked if they are familiar with the concept of learning styles. 81.5% of the respondents declare that they know the concept while 9.3% select “somewhat” as an answer. The other teachers are not aware about learning styles or do not remember it.

Teachers were then asked if they take into consideration the different learning styles in the classroom. 73.5% of the respondents, which is an important number of teachers say that they do take into accounts the various learning styles of their students. 24.5% mention that they sometimes consider the different styles while only few teachers (2%) declare that they do not take into consideration learning styles.

The different learning styles that the respondents observe in your classrooms

In order to check if the respondents are familiar with learning styles, they were asked about the different learning styles that they observe in their classrooms. Most of the respondents mentioned visual, kinesthetic, and auditory styles. There were few exceptions where the respondents mentioned other styles like reflective, impulsive and naturalistic styles. Another respondent mentioned repetition, imitation, and memorization. Most of the respondents referred to a style related to sensory receivers with some exceptions. Only One respondent mentioned some learning strategies as learning styles. Finally, one teacher out of 46 teachers who answered the questionnaire mentioned that he does not believe in learning styles without giving further explanations.

The effects of the consideration of learning styles

Teachers were asked if taking into consideration learning styles in EFL teaching would affect the students’ outcome. 90.7% of the respondents select “Yes” while only 5.6% answer by “No”. 3.7% of the teachers who answered the questionnaire do not know if taking into consideration students’ learning styles would affect their outcome or not.

The ways teachers take into consideration the different learning styles between their students

Teachers were asked to give examples of the ways they managed the different learning styles in EFL teaching. Most of the respondents referred to varying activities as a way of catering

for students' various needs. Few teachers gave examples; some mentioned bringing realia, videos, pictures, lecturing, using visual aids, audio files and games or role-play activities. One teacher wrote that sometime it is very difficult to apply the concept of learning styles.

In order to discuss the relationship between different variables in the questionnaire it is important to cross-tabulate the results of some questions.

School type and use of arts

As shown in the table, there are 40 teachers who work in public schools and 13 who serve in private schools. 32 out of 40 (80%) teachers in public schools use arts in EFL teaching. Similarly, 10 out of 13 (77%) teachers use arts in teaching English. Therefore, the type of school variable does not affect the results.

Teaching experience and use of arts

- 76% of teachers who have 1->5 teaching years' experience utilize arts in EFL teaching
- 83% of teachers who have 6->10 teaching years' experience utilize arts in EFL teaching
- 80% of teachers who have 10 ->15 teaching years' experience utilize arts in EFL teaching
 - 80% of teachers who have above 15 teaching years' experience utilize arts in EFL teaching

As a conclusion the teachers' years' experience is not a factor that affects the use of arts in teaching English in Moroccan schools.

Artistic vocations and use of arts

A 92.3% of teachers who have artistic vocations use arts in their teaching while 71.4% of teachers who do not have artistic vocations utilize arts in EFL teaching. This means that the teachers' interest in art makes them use it in their teaching practice.

Pre-service teachers training and use of arts

100% of teachers who received training concerning the use of arts in EFL teaching as pre-service teachers do use arts in the classroom. Only 69.7% of teachers who did not receive any notions about arts as teaching strategies use arts in their teaching practice. Consequently, pre-

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service training contributes in making teachers more aware of the benefits of using arts in EFL teaching.

Learning styles and use of arts

84% of teachers who are familiar with learning styles use arts in EFL teaching while only 33% of teachers who do not know about learning styles exploit arts in the classroom. This means that being aware of the existence of different learning styles contributes in the teachers' utilization of arts in EFL teaching.

At the end of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to give general recommendations. Many teachers mentioned that less crowded classes would help a lot in caring more about learners and supplying materials to use in order to involve art as a means to effective teaching. Other teachers referred to the curriculum, saying that it should allow room for the use of arts. Moreover, as reported by some teachers, the ministry should provide teachers with all the material needed so as to enable them to take into account the learning styles. Furthermore, study days or workshops should be organized on this issue in order to sensitize teachers of the importance of teaching through arts.

The fact that teachers mentioned the curriculum and the ministry's responsibility in the use of arts and learning styles puts more emphasis on the importance of giving an analytical reading in the National Curriculum, the guidelines and the textbooks in Morocco.

Textbook Analysis

A Reading in Insights into English (Students' and Teachers' Books)

The books used in English courses are important elements that teachers depend on in order to plan their lessons. There are two types of books: the teachers' book and the students' book. First, according to Oxford University Press¹, the teachers' book is there to complete the following missions: save the teachers' time when it comes to lesson planning, offer ideas for bringing a topic alive and provide a wealth of extra materials in order to give students practice in the areas of

language they find challenging. Second, the student's book is used by students in order to complete the activities and tasks they are asked to do. A student's book is the reference they use in the English class. There are three different books that are used in Teaching English in the Moroccan public school.

These books are: Gateway, Ticket and Insights. The books are somehow unified as they contain the same units. As it is known, students in the second year of baccalaureate have to take a national exam. Therefore, even private schools that usually use different books, are supposed to use the same books as the public schools. The book selected in this research is Insights into English. It was written by El Mostapha El Haddad who is a university teacher and Mohamed Najbi, a trainer teacher. The book was validated by the Ministry of National Education on 31th July, 2007 and was edited by Al-Massar Edition.

Insights Students' book is 170 pages; it contains ten units with a variety of topics. The units follow the same structure: Improve your communication skills, strengthen your vocabulary, use English communicatively, extend your learning experiences and brush up your grammar. The topics of the units are as follows:

- Cultural issues/values
- The gifts of youth
- Advances in science and technology
- Women and power
- Brain drain
- Humor
- Citizenship
- International organizations
- Formal informal and non-formal education
- Sustainable development

In order to follow the purpose of this research, it is necessary to find out the place of learning styles and arts in the Moroccan textbook. To do this, it is important to examine the variety of the instructions in the book in accordance with learning styles and use of arts. Therefore, a reading of the book is needed as to see to what extent the learning styles based on sensory receivers match with the activities and instructions in the book.

The nature of instructions in the book follows the same pattern. The majority of instructions are about reading a passage, looking at a picture or filling a gap. The words read, look at, reread, write and make a list are repeated many times in all the units of the book. As shown in the table, there are 8 instructions in the first unit that involves hearing something. Note that among the 8 instructions, there is only one instruction where the students are going to hear a recording. The other 7 instructions are about pair work or group work where normally student will communicate and listen to each other. Therefore, students do not have the chance to be exposed to hearing a native accent in the classroom. There is almost a total absence of kinesthetic instructions. In the three instructions in the table, students work in groups and present their work to the other students. The book mentions no activities where students are supposed to move and use their bodies in learning.

Conclusion

In order to use arts and take into consideration students' learning styles, different resources and teaching strategies need to be implemented. Moreover, a number of elements should be taken into consideration such as the learner's level, the classroom density and the difference between learners. In this regards, there are a number of assumptions underlying the methodology that this curriculum subscribes to. Among these assumptions, it is stated: Learners learn in different ways (This implies accepting different learning styles). Therefore, the National Curriculum assumes that there are different learning styles that should be taken into account.

The curriculum highlights what learners should be expected to do such as using correct pronunciation, good diction, write text of comparison and contrast. However, it does not show teachers how the learners would be able to this in accordance with their respective learning style. Moreover, the national curriculum states some strategies such as using dictionaries, note-taking and outlining. The difference between the used strategies could be categorized in terms of learning styles. The national curriculum suggests some tasks that can be used throughout the implementation of this curriculum. These tasks include among others, writing film reviews, writing reports about a short story and writing texts evaluating a short story. Therefore, it could be assumed that students

need to watch the film and read the short story in order to be able to complete these tasks. All in all, on the one hand, the national curriculum does not put emphasis on learning styles. The concept is almost absent, it is mentioned only once and between parentheses which does not give it any weight. On the other hand, the curriculum does not give any importance to EFL teaching through arts. Film and story, which are art genres, were used as topics in some writing tasks. Therefore, the national curriculum does not mention any use of arts as strategies of teaching EFL.

The combination of the theoretical and the practical parts gives an idea about arts and learning styles as concepts in general contexts through a number of books and articles, and also in the Moroccan context by the use of a questionnaire and documents analysis. This research has attained the planned objectives that were expected in the beginning of the work. However, this research is also a call upon another research in order to have more reliable results.

This paper permits to have a clear idea about teaching through arts in EFL as well as learning styles concept application. Through the theoretical part of this research, readers will learn much about the importance of using arts and the benefit of some art genres such as music cinema and drama on the students. Furthermore, this work gives a pellucid image of the multiple uses of arts as teaching strategies in Teaching English. The practical part is a depiction of the teachers' beliefs and practices related to arts and learning styles. Moreover, it gives an analytical reading of documents related to teaching English in Morocco; namely, the textbook, the national curriculum and the guidelines for secondary schools.

It is important to say that one of the three art genres discussed in this research could have been, alone, the subject of a research. However, this paper aims to give a general image of the current practices related to arts in the Moroccan high schools. A longitudinal study would have been more useful in order to portray the impact of arts on students. However, due to the constraint of time and lack of tools, this was not possible. Therefore, conclusions related to the benefits of using arts in the Moroccan context were built from what the respondents have given.

Finally, serious work needs to be done on the use of arts in EFL teaching in Morocco. Decision makers should collaborate with researchers in order to take into consideration the implementation of arts in the Moroccan schools so as to provide English learners with all what they need to achieve good outcomes.

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Appendix : Questionnaire

Questionnaire dedicated to teachers of English

Personal information

1. Age:

2. Gender:

Male

Female

3. Place of teaching:

Private school

State school

4. Last qualification obtained:

Bachelor

Master

PhD

5. Teaching experience:

1->5 6 ->

10 10 ->

15

15 and above

6. Why have you chosen to be a teacher?

The only job I could find

Teaching has always been a passion for me

Teaching provides a good pay

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- The value the society gives to teaching
- The paramount mission of teaching
- Others:

Art:

7. Do you have any artistic vocation?

- Yes
- No
- Somehow
- I don't know

7.1- If yes, what kind of art activities do you practice?

- Playing music
- Drawing
- Painting
- Creating videos/movies
- Acting
- Taking photos
- Singing
- Composing poetry
- Story telling
- Writing stories
- Other

8. Do you think that using art in the classroom is helpful?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know
- Others:

9. To what extent?

- Not helpful
- Somewhat helpful

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- Neutral
- Helpful
- Very helpful

9.1- If you think art is helpful in the classroom, what for?

(Blank)

10. Do you use arts in the classroom?

Yes

No

I don't know

10.1- If yes, what genre of art?

Music

Drama

Cinema

Others:

10.2- How often?

Always

Sometimes

Seldom

10.3- If no, what prevents you from doing so? (choose more than one answer)

- Lack of means/media
- Time is too tight
- I don't like art
- Art is not helpful
- Art is a waste of time
- Students don't deserve such activities

- It requires a lot of energy
- I am not talented enough
- Students don't care about art
- The institution does not encourage the use of art
- I just never thought about it
- I don't know how it can be used
- Other

11. Do you think that the use of used art in the classroom would make any difference?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

11.1- If yes, what are the differences that you observe when you used art?

- Students show more interest
- Students show no longer interest
- Students retain the learn lesson
- Students don't retain the learn lesson
- Students understand better
- Students misunderstand the lesson
- Students grades improve
- Students grades drop
- I make less efforts in explaining the lesson
- I make more efforts in explaining the lesson
- Students enjoy the class
- Students do not enjoy the class

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I feel more loved

I feel hated

other:

12. Have you received any art-based course during your training as a pre-service teacher?

Yes

No

somewhat

I don't remember

Learning-styles:

13. Are you familiar with the learning-styles concept?

Yes

No

somewhat

I don't remember

13.1- If yes, list the different learning styles that you observe in your classrooms

-

-

-

-

13.2- If yes, do you take into consideration the different learners' styles in your classroom?

Yes

No

Sometimes

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13.3- If yes, how do you do that?

(Blank)

13.4- If no, what prevents you from doing so?

(Blank)

14. Do you think that taking learning styles into consideration affect the students' outcome?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

Recommendations:

(Blank)