

Relationship between learning styles and academic performance among Grade 11 students of Jaffna Educational Zone

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Background: It has been observed that the academic performance of G.C.E O/L students in Jaffna district is on the decline. Though academic performance is multifactorial, one of the factors influencing performance is the learning styles of students. Three of the most common learning styles are visual, auditory and kinesthetic (VAK) by which students gain information. In Sri Lanka, academic performance may be considered one of the main tangible learning outcomes and is measured by examinations in schools. This study aimed to describe the pattern of learning styles and assess its influence on academic performance among Grade 11 students of Jaffna Educational Zone.

Methods: A total of 701 students from 29 classes of schools in the Jaffna Educational Zone participated in this study. The questionnaire, developed from the VAK Learning Style Brain Box and VAK Learning Style Inventory, was used to assess the learning style of students. The marks obtained by students at three term examinations for six compulsory subjects (mathematics, science, English, Tamil, religion, history) in the previous year (Grade 10) were used to assess academic performance. One-way ANOVA and t-test were used to assess the relationship between learning styles and academic performance.

Results: Majority of learners were unimodal (85.2%) and among them the majority were kinesthetic learners (57.1%), followed by visual learners (14.4%), and auditory learners (13.7%). The mean marks scored for the six compulsory subjects ranged between 48 to 68. Kinesthetic learners obtained the highest mean marks for all compulsory subjects except English. There was no statistically significant relationship between learning styles and academic performance ($p \leq 0.201$).

Conclusion: There may be a mismatch between the traditional auditory teaching strategy and the preferred learning style of students. Learning styles of students need to be considered in curriculum.

Keywords: Learning style, academic performance, adolescents, Jaffna