ISSN 2348-3156 (Print)
International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research ISSN 2348-3164 (online)
Vol. 13, Issue 1, pp: (88-97), Month: January - March 2025, Available at: www.researchpublish.com

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES AND LEARNING STYLES OF EDUCATION COLLEGE STUDENTS IN MYANMAR

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14770426

Published Date: 30-January-2025

Abstract: **In Myanmar, our new basic education system is shifting towards child-entered approach and new English curriculum focus on four skills. To implement new education system well, the qualified teachers who were interested and satisfied with their English learning process in their respective education colleges are vitally needed. To be successful in teaching learning process, the urgent need is to know about the learning strategies and learning styles of students. This study was focusing on it. In this study, a total of 320 participants from Sagaing Education College and Mandalay Education College were included. A quantitative research method, one of the descriptive methods, was used. As instruments, the Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (PLSPQ) developed by Reid (1987) was used to identify learning style preferences of the participants and the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) developed by Oxford (1990) was used to identify the English language learning strategy preferences of the participants. Descriptive statistics, independent samples *t*-test and Pearson Correlation was used to examine the learning style preferences, the English language learning strategies and the relationship between English language learning strategies and learning styles of participants according to research objectives. The results of this study clearly showed that participants used kinaesthetic or tactile learning style at most and individual learning style at least in their learning process. For English language learning strategies, according to the results, participants learned English with the most use of metacognitive strategies and with the least use of memory strategies. It was found that there was a significant positive correlation between visual learning style and metacognitive learning strategies. The analysis showed a significant positive correlation between kinaesthetic or tactile learning styles and the use of metacognitive learning strategies. Therefore, it was concluded that there was statistically significant correlation coefficient between visual learning styles and metacognitive learning strategies (*r* (318) = .116, *p* = .039) and kinaesthetic or tactile learning styles and metacognitive learning strategies (*r* (318) = .125, *p* = .025).**

Keywords: **English Language, Language Learning, Learning Styles, Language Learning Strategies and College Students.**

1. INTRODUCTION

Learning is not about cramming in information. It is about learning by doing. That is why our goal is to teach students to learn how to learn rather than merely passing information to them. Language learning is one of the most important needs and it has become an essential component in people's lives. Most of people all over the world are trying to learn a second,

even a third language in order to cope with cultural, social, political and technological changes (Hsu & Chen, 2016). They also stated that individual learners have different backgrounds, strengths, weaknesses, needs, levels of attitudes, motivations and approaches to learning. They approach to learning which they are most comfortable with and leave behind the ones with which they are less comfortable. Language learning styles and strategies are among the key factors in determining the quality of student learning in foreign language (Oxford, 2001). The language learning process, naturally, depends on the learning methods and styles for each individual. It is very important to understand and explore each individual's learning style. Learning style preferences refer to an individual's natural, habitual and preferred way of absorbing, processing, and retaining new information and skills (Dornyei, 2005).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) refers to learning a language in a context where it is not used for daily communication, restricting learners' exposure and practice opportunities outside the classroom (Oxford, 2003; Boyce, 2009). Conversely, English as a Second Language (ESL) is acquired in environments where English is the dominant language, allowing learners to immerse themselves in both the language and culture (Ellis, 1994; Nayar, Boyce, 2009). Individual learning styles, defined as preferences in how learners perceive, process, and respond to educational experiences, significantly influence language learning outcomes (Brown, 2000; Celcia-Murcia, 2001; Reid, 1995). These styles may include global or analytic approaches and auditory or visual preferences (MacKeracher, 2004). Adapting teaching strategies to accommodate diverse learning styles is essential for educational success (Drago & Wagner, 2004; Fleming & Baume, 2006). Researchers such as Dunn and Dunn (1978) and Kolb (1984) emphasize the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of learning, advocating for tailored instructional approaches that address learners' varied preferences.Language learning strategies are defined as actions, techniques, or behaviors learners use to enhance language acquisition and manage the information they encounter (Oxford et al., 1989, cited in Fazeli, 2011; Rubin, 1987). These strategies encompass cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects, including seeking conversational partners, maintaining motivation, or using memory techniques (Wenden, 1987; Green & Oxford, 1995). Scholars such as O'Malley and Chamot (1990) emphasize that these strategies can be taught and refined, aiding learners in adapting to new learning contexts (Griffiths, 2013). While language skills represent proficiency in speaking, writing, listening, and reading, strategies focus on intentional actions to develop these skills (Oxford, 1990; Griffiths, 2013). Teachers play a crucial role in helping students identify and adopt effective strategies, facilitating better learning outcomes (Rubin, 1987; Griffiths, 2013). The relationship between learning styles and language learning strategies is crucial for effective language acquisition, as individual differences influence how students learn and adopt strategies (Littlewood, 1995; Reid, 1995). Research highlights that when learners understand their learning styles, they can adapt strategies to suit different tasks, improving language outcomes (Oxford, 1993; Wong & Nunan, 2011). Studies, including those by Ehrman and Oxford (1990) and Li and Qin (2006), confirm that learning styles significantly impact strategy choice, influencing learning outcomes. Findings from Carson and Longhini (2002) and Wang (1992) further demonstrate how styles affect strategy use, showing preferences for kinesthetic and visual learning styles among Chinese students and their correlation with English proficiency. Therefore, guiding learners to recognize their strengths and weaknesses and aligning strategies with suitable learning styles can enhance both language learning and overall academic performance (Ehrman & Oxford, 1989; Rossi-Le, 1989).

Learning Styles

Dunn and Dunn (1979, cited in Reid 1987) defined learning styles as a term that describes the variations among learners in using one or more senses to understand, organize, and retain experience.

Reid (1987) originated the theoretical framework for learning styles based on learners' perception and social aspects. It is called "Perceptual Learning Style Model". This model intends to express the ways of the learners who are learning foreign language. This model highlights that learners can learn their best by means of perceptions: visual, auditory, kinaesthetic or tactile, and two social aspects of learning: group and individual preferences.

- **Visual Learners**: They receive information more beneficially when they see the information.
- **Auditory Learners**: They receive and process information more effectively when they speak or hear.
- **Kinaesthetic**: They learn best by doing. This means that they participate in learning, get experiences actively and involve in physical activities. They get information well by doing projects, assignments and participating in learning activities.

- **Tactile**: They prefer hands on activities and works. They learn new information and materials by doing experiments.
- **Group**: Group learners learn the best by studying with others and acquire information or knowledge best by means of interactions with peer groups and classmates.
- **Individual**: Those learners learn the best by studying alone and independently. They do not like to participate in group work or group activities in the learning process.

This present study is based on this model to identify students' learning style preferences.

Language Learning Strategies

Language learning strategies are specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations (Oxford, 1990).

Oxford (1990) introduces strategies inventory for language learning strategies (SILL). Students employ language learning strategies that help them in learning a new language. In this inventory, there are various types of language learning strategies that learners use. These language learning strategies can be classified six categories: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. A detailed demonstration of them is below.

- **Memory strategies:** Helping learners to remember more effectively, retrieve and transfer information that is needed in learning new language
- **Cognitive strategies:** Helping learners to be in commands of target language or task correctly through their process of learning
- **Compensation strategies:** Helping learners to guess the meaning of unknown words or to compensate the unknown knowledge in the target language due to lack of vocabulary
- **Metacognitive strategies:** Helping learners to participate or learn effectively and actively in the learning process by centering, planning, arranging, and evaluating their learning
- **Affective strategies:** Helping learners to control their emotions, attitudes, motivations, and values
- **Social strategies:** Helping learners to be exposed to the learning society where practice is provided

This inventory is very useful in testing the language learning strategies of learners and it was used to identify students' language learning strategies in this study.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are:

i. To find out the learning styles preferences of EC students

ii. To describe the language learning strategies that EC students use

iii. To explore the difference in the perceptual learning style preferences of the students based on gender and subject combinations

iv. To search for the difference in the language learning strategy preferences of the students based on gender and subject combinations

v. To observe the relationship between language learning strategies and learning styles

vi. To give suggestions and recommendations for further research based on the results of the research

4. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The following hypotheses will highlight this research:

H_{01}: Learning style preferences of EC students differ significantly in gender.

H_{02}: Learning style preferences of EC students differ significantly in subject combinations.

H_{03}: English language learning strategies of EC students differ significantly in gender.

H_{04}: English language learning strategies of EC students differ significantly in subject combinations.

H_{05}: There is a significant relationship between English language learning strategies and learning styles of Education College students.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Population and Sample Size

Participants in this study were all EC students who are studying in Sagaing Education College (SEC) and Mandalay Education College (MEC) in (2019-2020) academic year. There are two EC courses in both ECs. They are first year course and second year course. The students from second year course in both ECs were selected for this study by using simple random sampling method. Second-year students were chosen for this study because they have completed at least one full academic year of coursework and are more familiar with the English language curriculum in Myanmar's Education Colleges. Compared to first-year students, they have more practical exposure to English language learning and teaching practices. In the Myanmar context, second-year students are also preparing for national assessments that emphasize English proficiency, making them better positioned to provide insights into the challenges they face in learning English as a foreign language. Their experiences offer a clearer understanding of the effectiveness of teaching methods and highlight specific difficulties in speaking, listening, and other language skills crucial for future teaching roles. Additionally, focusing on second-year students allows for a more comprehensive evaluation of the current educational practices and resource limitations in Myanmar's education system. A sample of 160 students was selected from a population of 160 Second Year Students of Sagaing Education College. A sample of 160 Second Year Students was selected from a population of 400 of Mandalay Education College. The total number of participants in this study was 320 students. The number of population and sample size are presented in table 1.

Table 1: Population and Sample Size

Name of Education College	No. of Population	No. of Sample
Sagaing Education College	160	160
Mandalay Education College	400	160
Total	560	320

Research Design

In this research study, "An Investigation into the Relationship between the English Language Learning Strategies and Learning Styles of Education College Students", questionnaire survey method, one of the descriptive designs, was used.

Instrument

In this study, two instruments were used with the purpose of collecting quantitative data. The Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (PLSPQ) was used to identify the learning style preferences of the students. The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), on the other hand, was used to identify the language learning strategy preferences of the participants.

Pilot Study and Collecting Data

The purpose of the pilot study was to pre-test the reliability of questionnaires on a small scale before conducting the main study. This study was carried out with 30 second year students who were studying in Meikhtila Education College. Demographic variables and background information were collected on the questionnaires. Based on the findings of the pilot test, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated to determine the reliability of the questionnaires. The results showed that the values of the Cronbach's alpha coefficient were above .65 (LS) and .90 (LLS). Thus, the total Cronbach's alpha coefficient for both scales was reasonably reliable. And then, the main study was started.

Analysis of the Data

The data analysis concerned with three aspects: the participants' language learning style preferences, the use of participants' language learning strategies, and the relationship between

learning styles and learning strategies. Regarding the analysis of the results obtained from the PLSPQ, the descriptive statistics were used to group the students according to their genders and subject combinations. Independent samples *t*-test was used to identify whether there is a significant difference in the learning style preference between gender and subject combinations or not. Similar statistical procedures were used to analyze the data obtained from the SILL. The descriptive statistics were used to rank order the strategy categories from the most preferred to the least preferred category. Independent samples *t*-test was also used to find whether there is difference in the preference of learning strategies between gender and subject combinations or not. In order to reveal whether there is a significant relationship between the learning styles and the language learning strategies or not, the Pearson correlation was used.

6. FINDINGS

Descriptive Statistics for Five Categories of Learning Styles and Overall Styles Use

Firstly, descriptive statistics for five categories of learning styles: visual, auditory, kinaesthetic or tactile, group and individual learning styles and overall styles used are mentioned in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Five Categories of Learning Styles and Overall Styles Use

Learning Styles	N	Min	Max	Sum	M	SD
VLS	320	36	100	24732	77.29	11.50
ALS	320	25	100	25096	78.43	11.44
KLS or TLS	320	26.64	99.9	25877.43	80.87	11.16
GLS	320	32	100	25369	79.28	10.80
ILS	320	8	100	24380	76.19	12.49

Note. VLS = Visual learning styles, ALS = Auditory learning styles, KLS or TLS = Kinaesthetic or Tactile learning styles, GLS = Group learning styles, ILS = Individual learning styles

According to the Table 2, the descending order of learning styles used by EC students is individual learning style, visual learning style, auditory learning style, group learning style and kinaesthetic or tactile learning style.

t-Test for Differences in Learning Styles Used by EC Students according to Gender

Table 3: The Result of t-Test for Learning Styles Used by EC Students according to Gender

Learning Styles	Gender	N	M	MD	SD	*t*	*df*	Sig. (2-tailed)
Visual learning styles	Male Female	150 170	19.17 19.48	.31	3.517 2.099	.959	318	.339
Auditory learning styles	Male Female	150 170	15.37 15.95	.58	2.801 1.676	2.187	318	.030*
Kinaesthetic or Tactile learning styles	Male Female	150 170	23.64 24.85	1.21	4.116 2.358	3.178	318	.002**
Group learning styles	Male Female	150 170	19.44 20.13	.69	3.304 2.037	2.211	318	.028*
Individual learning styles	Male Female	150 170	19.26 20.13	.87	3.306 2.648	.857	318	.392

*Note. *p < .05, **p < .01*

From Table 3, it can be seen that there are statistically significant differences between male and female in auditory, kinaesthetic or tactile and group learning styles towards female, and in visual and individual learning styles, there are no statistically significant differences between males and females.

t-Test for Differences in Learning Styles Used by EC Students according to Subject Combinations

ISSN 2348-3156 (Print)
International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research ISSN 2348-3164 (online)
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Table 4: The Result of t-Test for Learning Styles Used by EC Students according to Subject Combinations

Learning Styles	Subject Combinations	N	M	MD	SD	*t*	*df*	Sig. (2-tailed)
Visual learning styles	Arts Science	151 169	19.15 19.50	.35	2.981 2.730	1.119	318	.264
Auditory learning styles	Arts Science	151 169	15.65 15.70	.05	2.659 1.904	.211	318	.830
Kinaesthetic or Tactile learning styles	Arts Science	151 169	24.11 24.44	.33	3.701 3.006	.867	318	.387
Group learning styles	Arts Science	151 169	19.70 19.91	.21	3.004 2.877	.688	318	.492
Individual learning styles	Arts Science	151 169	19.11 19.11	.00	3.088 2.877	.002	318	.999

From Table 4, it can be seen that there is no statistically significant difference between Arts and Science in all learning styles.

Descriptive Statistics for Six Categories of Language Learning Strategies and Overall Strategies Use

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics for Six Categories of Language Learning Strategies and Overall Strategies Use

Learning Strategies	N	Sum	Min	Max	M	SD
MEM	320	5369	5	25	16.78	4.293
COG	320	5753	8	25	17.98	3.688
COM	320	5569	7	25	17.40	4.018
MET	320	6083	9	25	19.01	3.903
AFF	320	5812	6	25	18.16	4.115
SOC	320	5973	7	25	18.67	3.974

Note. MEM = Memory Strategies, COG = Cognitive Strategies, COM = Compensation Strategies, MET = Metacognitive Strategies, AFF = Affective Strategies, SOC = Social Strategies

In the above table, the sum, maximum, minimum, means, and standard deviations for six categories of language learning strategies and overall strategies use are described. According to the results in Table 4.15, the descending order of language learning strategies used by EC students is memory, compensation, cognitive, affective, social, and metacognitive strategies.

t-Test for Differences in Language Learning Strategies Used by EC Students according to Gender

Table 6: The Result of t-Test for Language Learning Strategies Used by EC Students according to Gender

Learning Strategies	Gender	N	M	MD	SD	*t*	*df*	Sig. (2-tailed)
Memory Strategies	Male Female	150 170	16.61 16.92	.31	4.353 4.247	.644	318	.520
Cognitive Strategies	Male Female	150 170	17.53 18.38	.85	4.001 3.349	2.045	318	.042*
Compensation Strategies	Male Female	150 170	17.21 17.58	.37	4.314 3.743	.814	317	.416
Metacognitive Strategies	Male Female	150 170	18.31 19.63	1.32	4.310 3.398	3.021	318	.003**
Metacognitive Strategies	Male Female	150 170	18.31 19.63	1.32	4.310 3.398	3.021	318	.003**
Affective Strategies	Male Female	150 170	17.87 18.42	.55	4.574 3.656	1.192	318	.234
Social Strategies	Male Female	150 170	18.5 18.78	.28	4.267 3.704	.554	317	.580

*Note. *p < .05, **p < .01*

ISSN 2348-3156 (Print)
International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research ISSN 2348-3164 (online)
Vol. 13, Issue 1, pp: (88-97), Month: January - March 2025, Available at: www.researchpublish.com

From Table 6, it can be interpreted that there were statistically significant differences in cognitive and metacognitive strategies towards females, and in the rest of strategies, there were no statistically significant differences between males and females.

t-Test for Differences in Language Learning Strategies Used by EC Students according to Subject Combinations

Table 7: The Result of t-Test for Language Learning Strategies Used by EC Students according to Subject Combinations

Learning Strategies	Subject Combination	N	M	MD	SD	*t*	*df*	Sig. (2-tailed)
Memory Strategies	Arts	151	17.65	1.65	4.109	3.499	316	.001***
	Science	169	16.00		4.316			
Cognitive Strategies	Arts	151	18.61	1.20	3.666	2.928	318	.004**
	Science	169	17.41		3.626			
Compensation Strategies	Arts	151	17.95	1.03	3.773	2.304	318	.022*
	Science	169	16.92		4.177			
Metacognitive Strategies	Arts	151	19.42	.78	3.867	1.802	318	.072
	Science	169	18.64		3.909			
Affective Strategies	Arts	151	18.81	1.23	4.009	2.706	318	.007
	Science	169	17.58		4.133			
Social Strategies	Arts	151	19.21	1.03	4.106	2.341	318	.020*
	Science	169	18.18		3.767			

*Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001*

From Table 7, it shows that there were statistically significant differences in memory, cognitive, compensation and social strategies towards arts and no statistically significant differences in metacognitive and affective strategies.

Correlation between Language Learning Strategies and Learning Styles Preferences of EC Students

Table 8: Descriptive Statistics of Pearson Correlation for the Correlation between Language Learning Strategies and Learning Styles Preferences of EC Students

LLS / LS	MEM	COG	COM	MET	AFF	SOC
VLS	.064	.090	.017	.116	.086	.062
ALS	-.040	-.013	-.056	.020	-.066	-.043
KLS or TLS	.041	.090	.011	.125	.022	.066
GLS	.036	.066	-.061	-.034	-.020	.079
ILS	.037	.000	.000	.051	.020	.045

Note. *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

LS = Learning Styles,VLS = Visual learning styles, ALS = Auditory learning styles, KLS or TLS = Kinaesthetic or Tactile learning styles, GLS = Group learning styles, ILS = Individual learning styles, LLS = Language Learning Strategies, MEM = Memory Strategies, COG = Cognitive Strategies, COM = Compensation Strategies, MET = Metacognitive Strategies, AFF = Affective Strategies, SOC = Social Strategies

According to Table 8, it can be supposed that there is no statistically significant correlation coefficient between language learning strategies and learning styles except visual, kinaesthetic learning styles and metacognitive learning strategies. There is a significant positive small correlation between visual learning style and metacognitive learning strategies (r (318) = .116, p = .039). This means that EC students who prefer to see graphs, books, charts, and symbols in their learning process can plan their study time, manage their study plan and control their learning. They can even evaluate what they have learned. The analysis shows a significant positive small correlation between kinaesthetic or tactile learning styles and the use of metacognitive learning strategies (r (318) = .125, p = .025). It can be interpreted that students who like doing projects, assignments and participating in learning activities are proficient in adjusting their learning strategies and styles and capable of writing and speaking in the target language even when their vocabulary is limited.

7. DISCUSSION

In this study, findings revealed that Education College (EC) students predominantly adopt kinaesthetic or tactile learning styles, preferring practical engagement, hands-on experiences, and physical activities during their educational endeavors. They thrive in environments where movement and direct interaction with materials are encouraged, reflecting a preference for field trips, projects, and experiential learning tasks. This aligns with Wang's (1992) research, which highlighted the preference for kinesthetic learning among Chinese students and its positive correlation with improved English proficiency. Such findings support the assertion by Reid (1995) that cultural and social contexts significantly shape learning preferences, often making group or tactile learning styles more prevalent in collectivist educational systems like those found in Myanmar and China. Conversely, EC students exhibited the least preference for individual learning styles, indicating that independent study and solitary learning tasks are less favored, likely due to cultural norms that emphasize collaborative and social learning environments. Regarding language learning strategies, the study indicated that EC students frequently employ metacognitive strategies, which involve planning, monitoring, and evaluating their learning processes. These strategies enable learners to manage their study plans, set goals, and self-assess their progress, aligning with Oxford's (1993) assertion that metacognitive strategies are essential for effective language learning. In contrast, memory strategies, such as rote memorization and recalling information through repetition, were the least used by EC students. This preference diverges from more traditional methods of language acquisition that emphasize memorization and is consistent with Ehrman and Oxford's (1990) findings that cultural and contextual factors influence strategy adoption and effectiveness. Significant differences in learning styles and strategies were also observed between male and female students and across subject combinations, supporting findings by Li and Qin (2006) that individual differences such as gender and academic specialization significantly influence learners' strategy choices. Furthermore, the study highlighted a strong positive correlation between visual learning styles and the use of metacognitive strategies. This suggests that students who prefer visual aids, such as charts, graphs, and symbols, are adept at organizing and controlling their learning processes, similar to observations made by Carson and Longhini (2002) regarding strategic adaptation among visual learners. Additionally, a notable correlation between kinaesthetic learning styles and metacognitive strategies emerged, reinforcing Griffiths' (2013) claim that learners who actively engage in projects and hands-on tasks tend to adopt adaptable and strategic approaches to language learning. These findings emphasize the importance of understanding and incorporating individual learning preferences into teaching practices in EFL contexts like Myanmar, where exposure to English outside the classroom is limited (Oxford, 2003; Boyce, 2009). Teachers who recognize and adapt to students' diverse learning styles can foster more effective language acquisition by encouraging strategy awareness and helping students align learning approaches with their personal strengths (Littlewood, 1995; Wong & Nunan, 2011). Guiding learners to identify suitable strategies and promoting flexible learning styles not only enhances English proficiency but also contributes to better academic performance and learner autonomy (Ehrman & Oxford, 1989; Rossi-Le, 1989). This comprehensive approach can ultimately transform language learning experiences in contexts constrained by limited practice opportunities and resource availability.

8. SUGGESTIONS

Our education system is transitioning toward a student-centered approach, emphasizing the importance of tailoring education to individual needs. Further research is essential to explore the relationship between learning styles and strategies, both at the basic education level and in higher education. Additionally, it is crucial to investigate the underlying reasons why no significant correlation has been found between learning styles and language learning strategies among students. In this study, the participants were prospective teachers who will eventually shape future generations as educators. Therefore, the role of those who teach these prospective teachers is equally critical. Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed for curriculum developers, English language teachers, and students. For curriculum developers, collaboration with both teachers and students is indispensable. They should work together to identify which aspects of learning styles are most relevant and determine the most effective instruments for assessing students' language learning strategies. This cooperative effort ensures that the curriculum aligns with the needs of both learners and educators. For English language teachers, it is imperative to develop a deep understanding of individual learning style preferences and the corresponding strategies students use. This understanding will enable teachers to create more effective, personalized teaching approaches. For students, recognizing and understanding their own learning styles and strategies is emphasized as a key factor for improving learning outcomes. By becoming more self-aware, students can adopt methods that align with their strengths, ultimately enhancing their language learning experiences.

9. CONCLUSION

The research findings underscore the critical importance of English language teachers adapting their instructional methods to align with students' diverse learning styles and strategies. These insights serve as a foundational guide for improving teaching practices and fostering more effective learning experiences. In the context of reforming the education system for Education Colleges in Myanmar, the facts and findings from this study represent essential considerations. They provide a valuable basis for evaluating current practices and aligning them with desired educational outcomes. Furthermore, these findings hold significant implications for curriculum developers, serving as a key reference for assessing the current educational landscape and shaping reforms to achieve the expected outcomes. This aligns closely with the principles of outcome-based education, ensuring that reforms are both evidence-driven and goal-oriented.

10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, we would like to describe our deep gratitude to Dr. Saw Pyone Naing, Rector of Sagaing University of Education. Secondly, our grateful thanks are also extended to Dr. Soe Than, Retired Professor and Head of Department of Methodology, Sagaing University of Education, for his guidance, enthusiastic encouragement and useful critiques of this research work. Next, we would like to express our honourable thanks to Dr. Wai Wai Oo, Professor and Head of Department of Methodology, Sagaing University of Education, for her instruction and expert guidance in conducting our research.

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