

USING STUDENT LEARNING STYLE PREFERENCES TO EXPLAIN ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN THE BASIC MARKETING COURSE

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ABSTRACT

To gain some insight regarding the learning styles of students in a basic marketing course two questions were addressed: (1) Can a student's learning style preference explain his/her overall course grade? (2) Can a student's learning style preference explain his/her performance on exams? The paper describes the: principles of marketing course, research methodology, composition of the sample, empirical results of multiple regression analysis, and the conclusions drawn.

The purpose of the sophomore-level Principles of Marketing course is to give students an overview of marketing as a discipline and also serve as a prerequisite for upper-level marketing courses. The course is primarily lecture-based with many opportunities for students to participate in class discussion. Throughout the term guest speakers from the local business community are used to reinforce marketing topics. Students are graded on the basis of total points for the term. There are 500 total points possible divided between: three exams each worth 100 points, a team paper (group grade worth 50 points and individual grade worth 50 points), an oral presentation to the class worth 50 points and peer evaluations worth 50 points. Two hundred points are associated with a team project. Students are grouped in teams of four and are asked to develop a new product – one that is not currently in the marketplace. Their job is to thoroughly analyze the product in terms of the marketing mix. At the end of the term students submit a final group paper and present their work orally using PowerPoint and other visual aids such as product prototypes.

In this study the Felder-Solomon Index of Learning Styles (2006) was chosen for various reasons: the questionnaire is available on-line, free, simple to use and interpret, easily applicable, and the instrument has good validation results. The ILS was administered the first week of class to 75 Principles of Marketing students during the 2005-2006 academic year. Students were given a printed version of the ILS questionnaire that consisted of 44 incomplete sentences to which an "a" or "b" response could be selected to finish the statement. The questionnaire took approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. The responses of students

were submitted on-line and a profile for each student was returned with scores on scores on four learning dimensions: active-reflective, sensing-intuitive, visual-verbal, and sequential-global.

Multiple regressions were used to investigate whether or not learning styles could explain a student's overall course grade or performance on exams in the Principles of Marketing class. From the multiple regression output it can be concluded that there is not enough evidence to suggest that a student's learning style preference can explain his/her overall course grade. Likewise there is not enough evidence to suggest that a student's learning style preference can explain his/her performance on course exams. None of the learning style indices were statistically significant at the .01, .05, or .10 levels. This suggests that learning styles indices did little to explain either total course grade or total exam score.

A major limitation to the study is the small sample size. In addition various statistical tests could have been performed on the data but were not based on the scope of this particular study. For example a regression quantile analysis that was first proposed by Koenker and Bassett and later refined by Portnoy and Koenker may give a more complete picture of the effect of learning styles on students' performance.

Although there is conceptual and empirical complexity and controversy that characterizes the array of research in the field of learning styles there is an importance of continuing to add to this literature. How can we effectively teach students if we do not know how they learn? Is it possible that students, who we urge to be lifelong learners, will be more motivated to learn by knowing more about their own strengths and weaknesses as learners? If teachers can respond to individual strengths and weakness in the classroom, is it possible that retention and academic achievement in degree programs will rise? These and other questions need to be addressed in future research endeavors.

References Available on Request