ABSTRACT

THE FIELD DEPENDENCE/INDEPENDENCE COGNITIVE CONSTRUCT: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ASSESSMENT AND PERFORMANCE IN THE ESL CLASSROOM

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This research investigated the relationship between the main effects of school, cognitive style (field dependence/independence), as well as school by cognitive style interaction and the level of achievement in second language learning, using traditional as well as alternative (performance-based assessment) modes of assessment.

Data for this study were obtained from students enrolled in ESL programmes in Trinidad and Canada. A sample of one hundred and two (102) students completed a two hundred and forty (240) hour course of classroom instruction. The following standardised tests were used to determine the students' level of performance: cloze procedure, dictation, listening comprehension and oral production. The performance-based assessment (PBA) tasks included: learning diaries, group discussions, and individual presentations. An ANOVA (General Linear Model) as well as Two-Sample T-Tests were employed to evaluate the

quantitative data. The ANOVA was used to test for differences in the level of performance in these language tasks between the two language institutions, and among the different cognitive styles. The ANOVA also tested for school by cognitive style interaction with respect to the level of achievement in the above-mentioned language tasks. The students' perceptions of the overall effectiveness of the ESL programme were analysed through the use of Chi-Square and Two-Sample Proportion tests (tested at a 5% level of significance). For the greater part, the students' opinions did not differ significantly between the two language schools.

Based on the findings of the study, when traditional standardised tests were used, there was no significant relationship between cognitive style and performance in dictation and oral production. For the cloze procedure and listening comprehension, significant differences in the level of achievement among the cognitive styles and between the schools were recorded. The field dependence/independence paradigm, however, did not relate significantly to the students' level of achievement when P.B.A. was used. The findings suggested that different cognitive styles performed better in different learning environments. Factors such as the teaching methodology, the course materials used, the types of teaching and learning strategies implemented, as well as the teachers and students' attitudes towards alternative forms of assessment had a significant effect on the overall performance of the language learners.

There is the implication that teachers need to be sensitive not only to their preferred ways of teaching and learning, but also towards the different types of learners in their programme.

KEYWORDS: KEISHA EVANS; FIELD DEPENDENCE/ INDEPENDENCE; ACHIEVEMENT; TRADITIONAL STANDARDISED TESTS; PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENT; SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING.