

they are going to experience, and it is worthwhile to set aside some time for a follow-up discussion (in the learners' mother tongue, if necessary) about what they discovered with the help of the activity. We usually suggest some questions to get your students to talk.

Some of the activities may surprise your students: that is all right as long as the surprise comes at least partly from the realisation you wanted to bring about. If, however, the unusual organisation or nature of the exercise attracts much more attention than the awareness component, it has missed the target. You may put to use what you have learnt about the expectations and previous experience of your students and choose activities in which their attention would not be too much occupied by the novelty of the task.

2.1.1 Finding out about your students

It is important to know what experiences your students have had and as a consequence what expectations they may have of you as a teacher. Also, information on your students' existing attitudes to learning and to the foreign language is the starting point for developing responsible attitudes. There are several ways to collect such information, and it is best if you vary these ways, otherwise the students get bored and may not take their answers seriously.

The questions in the activities below can be easily converted into another form, though in some cases the form we chose seemed to fit the given topic best. For example, you may turn the interview activity on teaching styles into a questionnaire, but you may find it difficult to include all possible variations, and thus lose some useful data.

Ready made questionnaires

answering questions on learning styles and activities

Main goal	collecting information
Language focus	reading comprehension
Preparation	handouts

You may ask students to fill in the questionnaires in the lesson, or, to save classroom time, you may assign them for homework. If you find any of them too difficult for your students to do in the foreign language, you may use a translated version, as the emphasis here is on the collection of information rather than on language practice.

1. Questionnaire to survey past experience

Please read the questions carefully and answer as many as you can.

Did your last language teacher always explain every point to you? YES/NO/DON'T KNOW

Did you have to guess rules/meanings yourself? YES/NO/DON'T KNOW

Did your last language teacher ever ask you to work in pairs or groups? YES/NO/DON'T KNOW

Did your last language teacher usually stand at the front of the class when he/she was teaching? YES/NO/DON'T KNOW

Did your last language teacher speak the foreign language most of the time in a lesson? YES/NO/DON'T KNOW

Did you ever have to speak/write about yourself in the English lesson or as homework? YES/NO/DON'T KNOW

Did you get an extra task or a bad mark if you did not do your homework? YES/NO/DON'T KNOW

Did you ever have to correct/mark the work of another pupil? YES/NO/DON'T KNOW

Did your teacher ever ask for your opinion about what to do in the lesson or how you would like to learn? YES/NO/DON'T KNOW

Did you often use other materials in the lesson (or only the textbook)? YES/NO/DON'T KNOW

What did you especially like or dislike about the way you were taught?

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(Based on Wright, 1987 p. 134.)

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Learning styles include perception preferences, which can be grouped into three categories: auditory (hearing), visual (seeing), and kinaesthetic (sensing bodily movement). The last one is sometimes divided into haptic (touching) and emotive (feeling, which is often connected to body reactions). You may also consider other dimensions in learning styles, like someone's attitude to other people (extraversion or introversion) and preferred routines of logic (deductive or inductive). The questionnaire overleaf is based on a mixture of these dimensions.

2. Questionnaire on learning styles

Please read the sentences carefully, and tick the ones that apply to you.

a)

In class, I like to learn by games.

In class, I like to learn by pictures, films, video.

I like to learn the foreign language by talking in pairs.

I like to go out with the class and practise the foreign language.

At home, I like to learn by using cassettes.

In class, I like to listen and use cassettes.

b)

I like to study grammar.

At home, I like to learn by studying foreign language books.

I like to study the foreign language by myself (alone).

I like the teacher to let me find my mistakes.

I like the teacher to give us problems to work on.

At home, I like to learn by reading newspapers.

c)

I like to learn by watching, listening to foreign language speakers.

I like to learn by talking to friends in the foreign language.

At home, I like to learn by watching TV in the foreign language.

I like to learn by using the foreign language in shops, on the phone, . . .

I like to learn the foreign language words by hearing them.

In class, I like to learn by conversations.

d)

I like the teacher to explain everything to us.

I want to write everything in my notebook.

I like to have my own textbook.

In the foreign language class, I like to learn by reading.

I like to study grammar.

I like to learn new words by seeing them.

(Adapted from Willing, 1989.)

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2.1.1 Finding out about your students

Key:

Each group of sentences corresponds to a learning style, as follows:

a) Concrete b) Analytical c) Communicative d) Authority oriented. Most students are characterised by a mixture of two or three styles, with a dominant one among them.

3. Questionnaire on responsible attitudes

This questionnaire has two parts: the first one asking about the learner and the second one about the group in general. Some students may tend to overrate themselves, trying to please the teacher: take this into account when you evaluate the first part. Use the second part as a description of the general mood or norms of behaviour in the classroom. Work out the result by adding up the numbers for questions 2, 3, and 5, and deducting the numbers for 1, 4, and 6. The maximum score is 15, indicating a very responsible student, and the minimum score is -15, indicating an alarmingly irresponsible one.

Explain to students that you would like to learn about their attitudes towards learning the foreign language, and you would like them to fill in a questionnaire as honestly as they can. Make it clear that it will not affect their marks in any way. Give each of them a copy of the questionnaire. If necessary, explain the first sentence. (They should first decide how they rate their own knowledge – good or bad – and then decide how much that can be explained by having had good or bad teachers.) The second part may also need some explaining: students shouldn't worry about describing individual classmates, but the general atmosphere in the class.

3. Questionnaire on responsible attitudes

Read the sentences carefully. If you completely agree, circle 6. If you do not agree at all, circle 1.

As for me . . .

the reason why I am good (bad) at the foreign language, is because I have had good (bad) teachers. 1 2 3 4 5 6

I know what I should practise more in the foreign language. 1 2 3 4 5 6

I pay more attention to the lesson if we are practising something I am not so good at. 1 2 3 4 5 6

I want only to survive the language lesson. 1 2 3 4 5 6

sometimes I learn/read things that the teacher did not give as a task. 1 2 3 4 5 6

Raising awareness

I do as little as possible for my homework.	1 2 3 4 5 6
it is important for <i>me</i> to learn the foreign language (not only for my parents' sake or for the marks).	1 2 3 4 5 6
As for most of the others in the class . . .	
the reason why they are good (bad) at the foreign language, is because they have had good (bad) teachers.	1 2 3 4 5 6
they know what they should practise more in the foreign language.	1 2 3 4 5 6
they pay more attention to the lesson if we are practising something they are not so good at.	1 2 3 4 5 6
they want only to survive the language lesson.	1 2 3 4 5 6
sometimes they learn/read things that the teacher did not give as a task.	1 2 3 4 5 6
they do as little as possible for their homework.	1 2 3 4 5 6
it is important for them to learn the foreign language (not only for their parents' sake or for the marks).	1 2 3 4 5 6
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4. Questionnaire on attitudes towards learning the foreign language

Please read the sentences carefully and finish them with the adverb that best applies to you.

I enjoy learning the foreign language	very much / quite a lot / not much / not at all
In my language learning this year I expect to do	very well / quite well / not badly / poorly
We waste a lot of time in the foreign language class	very often / sometimes / never
In five years' time my command of the foreign language will be	much better / a little better / the same / worse
I like the people in my language class	very much / quite a lot / not much / not at all
I would like to visit / have friends from a country where the foreign language is spoken	very much / quite a lot / not much / not at all
I would like to live in a country where the foreign language is spoken	very much / quite a lot / not much / not at all

Is there anything else you find important about your feelings towards the target language, or the people who speak the target language?

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5. Strengths and weaknesses analysis

This questionnaire can give you important information on your students' perception of their command of the foreign language, and it can also be a first step to get your students to think about their learning.

5. Questionnaire on strengths and weaknesses

Think about what you can do or cannot do in the foreign language. (For example: talking with another student, filling in grammar tests, speaking without grammar mistakes, writing without grammar mistakes or spelling mistakes, understanding tape recorded speech, speaking in front of the whole class, speaking with correct pronunciation.) Finish the sentences below giving more than one example if you can.

In the foreign language, I am quite good at

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.....

In the foreign language, I am fairly good at

.....

.....

In the foreign language, I am not so good at

.....

.....

In the foreign language, I find it difficult to

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.....

Is there anything that you are good at, but still keen to improve, or anything that you find difficult, but you don't mind that much? Would you like to add any other comments?

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