BORANG PENGESAHAN STATUS TESIS

JUDUL: Learning Style Preferences Among UTM Students In Learning English: A Look Into Gender, Proficiency, Similarities And Differences With Teaching Style.

SESIPENGAJIAN: 2003-2004

Saya WONG SING YING

(HURUF BESAR)

mengaku membenarkan tesis (PSM/Sarjana/Doktor Falsafah)* ini disimpan di Perpustakaan Universiti Teknologi Malaysia dengan syarat-syarat kegunaan seperti berikut:

1. Tesis adalah hak milik Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.
2. Perpustakaan Universiti Teknologi Malaysia dibenarkan membuat salinan untuk tujuan pengajian sahaja.
3. Perpustakaan dibenarkan membuat salinan tesis ini sebagai bahan pertukaran antara institusi pengajian tinggi.
4. ** Sila tandaskan (✓)

☐ SULIT

☐ TERHAD

✓ TIDAK TERHAD

(Mengandungi maklumat yang berdampak kepada kepentingan Malaysia seperti yang termakub di dalam AKTA RAHSAI RASMI 1972)

☐ TERHAD

(Mengandungi maklumat TERHAD yang telah ditentukan oleh organisasi/bahasa di mana penyelidikan dijalankan)

Disahkan oleh

(TANDATANGAN PENULIS)

Alamat Tetap:
56, Lorong Lampa,
Seberang Jaya,
Perey, 13700,
Pulau Pinang

Tarikh: 703/04

(TANDATANGAN PENYELIA)

NAMA PENYELIA

P.T. DR. NOHAIMAH BINTI YUSOP

(TANDATANGAN PENYELIA)

NAMA PENYELIA

Tarikh: 703/04

CATATAN:

* Potong yang tidak berkemaun.
** Jika tesis ini SULIT atau TERHAD, sila lampirkan surat daripada pihak kuasa/organisasi berkemaun dengan menyatakan sekali sebab dan tempoh tesis ini diperlukan sebagai SULIT atau TERHAD.

- Tesis dimaksudkan sebagai tesis bagi Ijazah Doktor Falsafah dan Sarjana secara penyelidikan, atau disertasi bagi pengajian secara kerja kursus dan penyelidikan, atau Laporan Projek Sarjana Muda (PSM).
“Saya akui bahawa saya telah membaca karya ini dan pada pandangan saya karya ini adalah memadai dari segi skop dan kualiti untuk tujuan penganugerahan ijazah Sarjana Muda Sains Serta Pendidikan (TESL)”.

Tandatangan : [Signature]
Nama Penyelia : DR. MOHAMAD HASSAN BIN ZAKARIA
Tarikh : 7.03.04
LEARNING STYLE PREFERENCES AMONG UTM STUDENTS IN LEARNING ENGLISH: A LOOK INTO GENDER, PROFICIENCY, SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES WITH TEACHING STYLE

WONG SING YING

AN ACADEMIC EXERCISE IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT FOR
THE DEGREE OF
B. Sc. Ed. (TESL)

FACULTY OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MALAYSIA
SKUDAI

MARCH, 2004
“Saya akui karya ini adalah hasil kerja saya sendiri kecuali nukilan dan ringkasan yang tiap-tiap satunya telah saya jelaskan sumbernya”.

Tandatangan : 
Nama Penulis : WONG SING YING
Tarikh : 7-03-04
Dedicated to my beloved mother and Richard who were always there for me in the bad and in the good times, to my dearest coursemates (Daniel, Chiau Ching, Sook Mun, Gina, Salome) as well as all the churchmates who have been giving me endless encouragements and motivations throughout the process of completing my theses, to Lord Jesus who comforts and uphold me whenever I feel despair.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Mohamad Hassan Zakaria for providing his professional guidance, inspiration and encouragement throughout the writing process.

In addition, I would also like to thank my fellow friends such as Daniel, Ameiruel and Salome who have been helping me in the process of searching for samples and offering constructive comments and suggestions for the study.

Special thanks to all the people, who willingly spent their time assisting in this research. Kudos to all of you!
ABSTRACT

Researches have shown that the curricula of ESL programs are still linear and do not allow much room for individualizing instruction. Individual learning needs such as learning styles are still not fully explored and exploited in the bigger educational contexts. This study attempted to investigate the learning style preferences of UTM undergraduates according to their gender and proficiency level as well as the teaching styles of language instructors in second language context. In addition, it also sought to investigate the control degree of style employed by students and language instructors. Lastly, comparisons were made to identify the similarities and differences of style employed by both students and language instructors in language teaching and learning process. The findings showed that male and female students shared the same preferences of learning styles whereas high and low proficiency students exhibited different learning styles in language learning. On the other hand, the teaching styles of language instructors varied and were influenced by instructional program. Nevertheless, the teaching styles of language instructors were more similar to the learning styles employed by high proficiency students.
ABSTRAK

TABLE OF CONTENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>SUBJECT</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BORANG PENGESAHAN STATUS TESIS</td>
<td>PAGE TITLE</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PENGESAHAN PENYELIA</td>
<td>HALAMAN PENGAKUAN TESIS</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ABSTRAK</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENT</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>xiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</td>
<td>xv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LIST OF APPENDICES</td>
<td>xvi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction 1
1.2 Background of the Study 2
1.3 Statement of the Problem 4
1.4 Research Objectives 6
1.5 Research Questions 7
CHAPTER IV FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Introduction 35

4.2 Findings 36

4.2.1 Analysis of Students’ Questionnaire 36

4.2.1.1 Students’ Learning Style Preference According to Gender 38

4.2.1.2 Students’ Learning Style Preference According to Proficiency Level 40

4.2.1.3 High Proficiency Students’ Learning Style Preference According to Gender 42

4.2.1.4 Low Proficiency Students’ Learning Style According to Gender 44

4.2.2 Analysis of Language Instructors’ Questionnaire 47

4.2.3 Similarities and Differences Between Students’ Learning Styles and Language Instructors’ Teaching Styles 49

4.2.4 Analysis of Interview 51

4.2.4.1 Findings from Students’ Interview 51

4.2.4.2 Findings from Language Instructors’ Interview 54

4.3 Discussions 56

4.3.1 Discussions on student’s questionnaire findings 56

4.3.1.1 Students’ learning style preferences according to gender 56

4.3.1.2 Students’ learning style preferences according to proficiency level 58

4.3.1.3 High proficiency students’ learning style preferences according to gender 59
CHAPTER V SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

5.1 Introduction 70
5.2 Summary of Finding 71
5.3 Conclusion and Implications 71
5.4 Suggestions for Future Research 75
5.5 Summary 76

REFERENCES 77-80
APPENDICES

Student’s Questionnaire  81
Language Instructor’s Questionnaire  85
Analysis Sheet  89
Interview Questions  91
**LIST OF TABLES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NO. TABLES</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Distribution of respondents according to gender</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Distribution of respondents according to proficiency Level</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Learning style preference means according to gender</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Distribution of learning style preferences according to gender range</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Learning style preference means according to proficiency level</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Distribution of learning style preferences according to proficiency level and range</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>High proficiency students’ learning style preference means according to gender</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>Distribution of high proficiency students’ learning style preferences according to gender and range</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>Low proficiency students’ learning style preference means according to gender</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>Distribution of low proficiency students’ learning style preferences according to gender and range</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>Teaching style preference means of language instructors</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>Distribution of teaching style preferences according to range</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>Comparison of students’ learning style preferences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
with language instructors’ teaching style preferences
LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NO. FIGURES</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Distribution of male and female respondents according to proficiency level</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1. ESL - English as Second Language
2. EFL - English as Foreign Language
3. SPM - Malaysian Certificate of Education
4. MUET - Malaysian University Entrance Exam
5. LP - Low Proficiency
6. HP - High Proficiency
7. KBSM - Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah
8. KBSR - Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah
# LIST OF APPENDICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student’s questionnaire</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language instructor’s questionnaire</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis sheet</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview questions</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Students learn in many ways. Some prefer to learn by seeing and hearing; reflective and acting; analytical and global; grouping and individual and other learning dimensions. What is very clear however, is that all students display characteristics of both ends at each dimension, and may move from one extreme to the other depending on the topic, its context, and the particular task demands made on the students (Kyriacou et al, 1996). On the other hand, teaching methods also vary. Some educators prefer to lecture, others demonstrate or discuss, some focus on rules and others on examples. In this situation, how much a student learns in class is not only governed in part by that student’s native ability or prior preparation but also by the compatibility of his or her characteristic approach to learning and the educator’s characteristic approach to teaching.

The ways in which an individual characteristically acquires, retains and retrieves information are collectively termed as the individual’s learning style. These learning styles enable students to manipulate their learning process in their most desirable ways to achieve optimum learning. Unfortunately, current language
teaching often relegates the importance of individual’s learning style in teaching process. Many experienced educators or teachers-in-training have spent or are spending a disproportionate amount of time focusing on the content of the discipline rather than the learners in the classroom. In addition, educators endeavor to empower their students academically through particular teaching styles that are appealing to them rather than the students’. As a result, serious mismatches may occur between the learning styles of students in class and the teaching styles of the teacher (Felder and Henriques, 1995) with unfortunate potential consequences. Students tend to be bored and inattentive in class, do poorly on tests, get discouraged about the course and may conclude that they are no good at the subject and give up. On the other hand, educators confronted by low-test grades, unresponsive classes and poor attendance will become overly critical of their students and begin to question their own competence as teachers.

Consequently, there is a need for all educators to be aware of their teaching styles and address the learners’ learning style needs in any educational program. The purpose of this study was to provide a systematic analysis of data on the learning and teaching styles that were employed by UTM undergraduates and lecturers in English language teaching and learning process. By providing such an account of data analysis, it is hoped that the information will satisfy the interest of those attempting to explain the Malaysian adults learning styles in ESL contexts.

1.2 Background of Study

Teaching English as a second language (ESL) has changed tremendously over the past two decades. Curricula, teaching methods, and teaching materials have been developed to meet the changing needs of the ESL population. However, the curricula of many ESL programs are still linear or systematic and do not allow much room for individualizing instruction (Kang, 1999). Individual learning needs
particularly learning styles are still not fully explored and exploited in educational contexts. These are due to the current many educators who still hold on the traditional belief that language teaching is a kind of knowledge or content transmission rather than teaching or developing learning skills. In addition, educators tend to present the lesson through their own favourite teaching styles with minimum considerations to the students’ learning style.

However, while learning is the goal of teaching, it is not necessarily the mirror image of teaching. Learners brings along their own attitudes and learning style characteristics which in turn influence how they approach the learning process. Some students excel in learning because they possess certain styles while others do not. Similarly, educators also hold on certain values and teaching styles that may differ from the learners’ learning styles. It is evident that insensitivity of educators toward learners’ different learning styles in teaching and learning process may conjure teaching-learning styles conflicts which consistently and negatively affect the student grade (Wallace and Oxford, 1992 cited in Rao ZhenHui, 2001).

Asmah Haji Omar (2000) cites that most Malaysian students attending the local universities find it difficult to comprehend spoken and written English. One of the factors that cause low language proficiency may be due to the learning style deficiency or teaching-learning style conflicts that commonly occur in language learning process. However, this situation can be improved if the educators know their teaching styles and learners’ learning styles because these will help educators to know their classroom limitations and adopt methods which suit both parties (Heimlich and Norland, 1994). Though research into the learning styles of second or foreign language adult learners has been undertaken abundantly in the foreign contexts on Asian immigrants or Asian learners who study oversea, very little research in this area has been carried out in the context of Malaysia with a few exceptions such as on distance education learners’ learning styles and TESL students’ learning styles in higher education. Nevertheless, these researches do not thoroughly reveal the language learning styles of Malaysian undergraduates specifically. Thus, it is crucial to identify the English language learning styles
employed by Malaysian undergraduates, as it will help them to optimize their learning across other disciplines, which widely involve English instruction and English language based materials.

To understand the Malaysian undergraduates’ second language learning styles may indeed prove to be a difficult task for many teachers, be they new or experienced, to accomplish. This task is made more difficult when English educators are left unguided in looking for the appropriate approaches in meeting their learners’ learning needs. As such, educators often fail to cater to their learners’ diverse learning styles. Unsurprisingly, many undergraduates fail to achieve a satisfactory result in learning English.

Language educators in Malaysia need to be aware of their students’ learning style preferences and attempt to adapt and match them with the appropriate teaching styles. Sufficient attention should be given to discover the teachers’ teaching style deficiency and learning skills such as how the students learn, strategies that are used by them in learning as well as the ways in helping the students to improve those skills. As such, this study attempted to uncover the learning styles employed by UTM undergraduates and the learning styles favoured by the teaching styles of most lecturers in learning English.

1.3 Statement of Problem

Every second language educators who have been charged with the responsibility of teaching English to a heterogeneous group of undergraduates, who originate from various educational or cultural backgrounds across the country, will be faced with the challenge of dealing with learners as individuals. As educators seek to refine the language teaching methods, it is realized that learners learn in
idiosyncratic ways, which often differ from the educators’ approaches. Individuals possess unique patterns of styles in learning. Those learning styles are so diverse that without any systematic study, it is difficult to predict accurately how to teach students whose abilities in language learning process vary tremendously. According to Dunn and Dunn (1978 cited in Dunn and Dunn, 1999), many instruments such as achievement scores, I.Q. tests and personality assessments have been used to understand the learners. Unfortunately, achievement scores reveal only where a student is academically. I.Q. tests suggests a student’s potential, not why he or she has not progressed further whereas personality instruments serve to explain student behavior but they provide little insights into how to help the students achieve. It is possible however to help each student learn more efficiently by diagnosing the learning and teaching style. Educators who are able to identify their teaching style and understand their students’ preferred learning styles will be able to expand their teaching repertoire which directly cater to more individual’s needs. Thus, both teacher and students will be more successful in achieving educational goals.

In general, it is agreed that the use of learning style is positively related to language proficiency. Research has indicated that more proficient learners seem to employ certain learning styles in many situations than do less proficient learners (Melton, 1990). Good learners seem to possess abilities of employing particular learning styles to succeed in learning while others lack those abilities. On the other hand, Pritchard and Loulidi (1994 cited in Kyriacou et al, 1996) highlights that any link between learning styles and learning outcomes is subjected to the influence of moderator variable such as gender. While gender influences the choice of learning styles which simultaneously affect language proficiency, it is important for educators to look into it seriously.

Study indicates that Malaysian undergraduates are low in their English language proficiency (Asmah Haji Omar, 2000). This may be due to the inappropriate employment of learning and teaching style in learning process. To date, several studies on learning styles have focused on understanding the profile of Malaysian undergraduates taking course in distance education or TESL context.
However, none has been carried out to seek the learning styles of ESL learners in higher education specifically. Similarly, a limited amount of research has been done to identify teaching styles, the teacher’s preferred patterns of providing learning opportunities for students of any age (Heimlich and Norland, 1994). Hence, this study was motivated toward spelling out the English language learning styles of undergraduates according to their proficiency and gender as well as teaching style of language lecturers in UTM.

1.4 Research Objectives

The purpose of this study was to:
1. investigate the learning styles that were favoured by students according to their gender.
2. investigate the learning styles that were favoured by students according to their English language proficiency level.
3. investigate the teaching styles that were favoured by the language instructors in UTM.
4. compare the similarities and differences of learning and teaching styles that were favoured by both students and language instructors in UTM.
1.5 Research Questions

In fulfilling the purpose of this study, the following research questions were posited:

1. Which learning styles were favoured by the students in learning English according to:
   i. gender
   ii. proficiency levels
2. Which teaching styles were favoured by most language instructors in UTM?
3. What were the similarities and differences of learning styles favoured by both students and language instructors?

1.6 Rationale of the Study

This study will give an insight into the different learning styles that are employed by ESL adult learners in Malaysia. The data analysis derived from this research will provide input for educators, who have little knowledge on learner-centered instruction to explain the preferable learning styles of Malaysian students in learning English. Through identification of students’ learning style preferences according to different variables (gender, proficiency level), consequently, language educators will be able to employ the appropriate strategies and approaches in classroom teaching. An awareness of both teachers and learners’ individual differences in teaching and learning process will make ESL educators and program designers more sensitive to their roles in teaching and learning and will permit them to match teaching and learning styles, so as to develop students’ potentials in second and foreign language learning. By wedding students’ learning styles with suitable materials and methods, teachers may foster efficient, lasting achievement within a