MAPPING TEACHING STYLES OF ENGLISH LECTURERS WITH THE PREFERRED LEARNING STYLES OF UTM UNDERGRADUATES

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This thesis is submitted as a requirement for the awarding of Bachelor of Science in Education (TESL)

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ABSTRACT

Every individual’s learning style is unique as we have our own ways in retaining knowledge and acquiring the language. Diversity not only exists in learning styles, it exists in teaching styles as well. However, the mismatch of teaching styles and learning styles has always been an issue in the educational contexts. Therefore, this study was set out to investigate this issue and to examine the preferred learning styles for learning English among UTM undergraduates. Other than that, this study seeks to identify the common teaching styles used by the lecturers in English language classroom, as well as to investigate on to what extent the teaching styles match the learning styles of the learners. 86 first year UTM undergraduates taking UHB1412 English for Academic Communication were randomly selected from around the campus of UTM to become the respondents of the survey. The questionnaires were adapted from Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (PLSPQ) developed by Reid (1987) and Index of Learning Styles (ILS) developed by Felder & Solomon (1997). Out of 86 respondents, 14 of them were randomly selected to be interviewed on their common styles in learning English and their perspectives’ towards the teaching styles of their English lecturers. The results of this study revealed that the most preferred learning style of the learners is auditory style, however, the most common teaching style used by the lecturers is kinesthetic style. The results have shown matches between visual and auditory learning and teaching styles and a mismatch between the kinesthetic learning and teaching style. Therefore, it is recommended that lecturers should teach in the way which matches the students’ learning styles.
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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS
ESL – English as Second Language
FSLSM – Felder-Silverman learning Style Model
LSA – Learning Style Analysis
LSI – Learning Style Index
MBTI – Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)
NLP – Neuro-Linguistic Programming
PLSPQ – Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire
UTM – Universiti Teknologi Malaysia
SPSS – Statistical Analysis Software
VAK model – Visual – Audio – Kinesthetic model

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the background of the study, statement of the problem, and the purpose of the study. Besides, the objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study, and definition of the terms will also be presented.

1.2 Background of study

Every individual’s learning style is as unique as their fingerprints. According to Prashing (2008), every one of us has a learning, thinking and working style as
unique as our fingerprints. Therefore, all of us have our own unique way of retaining knowledge and acquiring the language. Despite all the researches done on learning styles over the few decades, there is no clear evidence on which style is better than the another because some of us might learn better in certain ways. On the contrary, others might not learn effectively in the ways that we prefer.

According to Rita & Dunn, as cited in (Prashnig, 2008: 7), learning style is the way in which human beings begin to concentrate, absorb, process and retain new and difficult information. This means that learners adopt a wide variety of abilities, tactics, strategies and styles while acquiring a language.

Besides diversity of learning styles, the teaching styles vary as well. Some instructors lecture, others demonstrate or discuss; some focus on rules and others on examples; some emphasize memory and others understand (Felder & Henriques, 1995:21).

Learners are capable of having consistent performance when the teaching styles suit their learning styles. Research over the past 25 years, mainly coming from St John’s University in New York, has shown that human beings can learn any subject matter successfully when the instructional methods used match their individual learning preferences. (Prashnig, 2008:5). Thus, it is important for teachers to ensure that classroom activities and teaching materials are sufficient to meet a range of learning styles.

Learning acquisition can only be successful when diversity on learning is taken into account and their needs are fulfilled in the learning process. When learners are encouraged to learn in their own way, utilizing their unique style preferences, they usually get very excited about learning tasks and can actually become lifelong learners, (Prashing, 2008:9).
1.3 Statement of problem

When teachers are given a class with approximately 30 students, it becomes difficult or impossible for the teachers to pay attention to every individual student. Nowadays, many teachers still expressed preferences for traditional role of teaching and lecturing while most of the students preferred tactile and kinesthetic learning. (Mulalic, Shah & Ahmad, 2009:103)

The teaching styles adopted by teachers have a great impact on the learners’ learning process. Barbe & Milone, as cited in Friedman & Alley (1984:77) stated that teachers are more likely to develop teaching styles which are congruent with their own learning styles rather than those of their students if they are unaware of the learning/teaching styles literature. This is because teachers are often subconsciously practising that the way they learn and assumed that is the most effective way for everyone to learn. Many teachers expressed preferences for traditional role teaching, and lecturing while most of the students preferred tactile and kinesthetic learning (Mulalic, Shah & Ahmad, 2009:103). When teachers are not aware that they have the tendency to teach based on their own learning styles preference, it can lead to students’ learning problems, frustration and low self-esteem (Prashing, 2008:23). Therefore, teachers need to diversify their teaching styles in order to provide opportunities for learners to broaden their learning styles.

Nowadays, although the curricula, teaching methods and teaching materials of ESL program have been adapted and developed continuously over the past two decades to meet the changing needs of learners, many educators still hold on to their traditional beliefs that language teaching is a kind of knowledge or content
transmission rather than teaching or developing of language skills. Besides that, the curricular of many ESL programs are still linear or systematic and do not allow much room for individualized instruction. (Kang, as cited in Wong, 2004:2). There is minimum consideration of learners’ learning styles whereby their individual learning needs are not fully explored and exploited in educational contexts. Most language classes are conducted verbally which is only compatible to the learning styles of auditory learners, thus putting visual and kinesthetic learners a disadvantage. Therefore, there is a need for all educators to be aware of their own teaching styles and address the learners’ needs in any educational program.

In a learning conference called “What Learning Means” organized at The Institute of Education, University of London from 15-18 July 2003, Dr. Padmani, an Assoc. Professor at the School of Educational Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia had presented on the topic “Learning English in Malaysian Rural Secondary Schools: Difficulties, Learning Styles & Strategies and Motivation”. This presentation reports on a study carried out to examine on the language learning strategies, preferred learning styles and motivation of rural Malay students in learning English. The study found that the rural Malay students faced difficulties using the English language either in writing, speaking, reading or understanding spoken English. Besides, they also faced problems in both accuracy and fluency while trying to use the language in the classroom. The findings revealed that rural Malay learners of English have limited preferences for the learning styles. This may due to the lack of awareness of the learners of the different styles of learning. Besides, he also stressed on the poor performance of rural Malay students in learning English which has become a concern to both politicians and educationists and will cause serious long term socio-political and economic effects for the country.

1.4 Purpose of the study
Every learner possesses different characteristics and attitudes in language learning. However, we noticed that educators usually do not pay much attention to the different learning styles of the learners because they adopt the same teaching styles throughout the time. Consequently, it will bring negative impact to students’ interest and motivation towards learning English, which further affects their performances and grades. Therefore, teachers need to be more sensitive of the learners’ need through exploring on their learning styles so that they could maximize their abilities and potentials in acquiring the language.

In response to this situation, further research is set up to investigate the issue as mentioned above. The purpose of this study is to find out the preferred learning styles of UTM undergraduates by classifying their specific preference into three learning styles – visual, auditory and kinesthetic. Besides, this study also aims to investigate on what types of teaching styles are commonly practiced by UTM English lecturers and to what extent the teaching styles such as visual, auditory and kinesthetic accommodate the different language learning styles of second language learners.

1.5 Research objectives

This research aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine on the preferred learning styles of UTM undergraduates in learning English.

2. To identify the common teaching styles used by lecturers in the language classroom.

3. To investigate the extent of how teaching styles match with the learning styles of the learners.
1.6 Research questions

Three general questions have been developed to guide this research:

1. What are the preferred learning styles of UTM undergraduates in learning English?
2. What are the common teaching styles used by lecturers in the language classroom?
3. To what extend do the teaching styles match with the learning styles of the learners?