

P.KHIDMAT MAKLUMAT AKADEMIK
UNIMAS



1000144043

LEARNING STYLES OF PKPG ESL AND TESL STUDENTS IN UNIMAS

by

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Graduation Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Science with Honours (TESL)
Faculty of Human Resource Development
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

NOVEMBER 2005

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A project entitled **Learning Styles of PKPG ESL and TESL students in UNIMAS** was written by Fatimah Gani and submitted to the Faculty of Human Resource Development in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Science with Honours (Teaching English as a Second Language).

It is hereby confirmed that the student has done all the necessary amendments of the project for acceptance.



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Date: 28/2/06

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JUDUL: Learning styles of PKPG ESL and TESL students in UNIMAS

SESI PENGAJIAN: 2005/2006

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To finish this final project, there have been many people helped me to make it happened and it is not fair to bear only my name without acknowledged their names.

First of all, I would like to forward my thanks to God for giving me strength to carry on and completed the project and also this course. Great thanks and appreciation especially goes to my supervisor and also my mentor, Mr. Jayapragas Gnaniah, who is always there when I needed his support, assistance and understanding to complete my project. Without his guidance, advises and contributions, I will never be able to complete my project. Not forgetting other lecturers who helping me to get through this course.

My deepest gratitude goes to my beloved family especially my loving mom and late dad, and also my brothers and sisters, who have been giving me their endless supports and encouragements throughout this course. Their supports and encouragements give me strength to move on and finish this course. Without them, I will be lost.

Last but not least, I would like to express my special thanks to my coursemates, housemates and friends for their cooperations, supports and motivation all this while. To my special friend, you are always being there when I need you the most.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ESL	=	English as a Second Language
PKPG	=	Program Khas Pensiswazahan Guru
TESL	=	Teaching of English as Second Language
UNIMAS	=	Unimversiti Malaysia Sarawak

ABSTRACT

Learning Styles of PKPG ESL and TESL students in UNIMAS

Fatimah Gani

This study aimed to identify the learning styles preferences of students based on Kolb's Learning Style Model. It was also to find out differences in term of academic achievement in CGPA results for every semester for PKPG ESL and TESL students. There were 120 PKPG ESL and TESL students from 2nd, 3rd and 4th involved in the study. All the students were from University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). The data was obtained through self-reporting questionnaire. The findings revealed that there were not much differences in term of learning styles for both group of students; PKPG ESL and TESL. The results also indicated the higher achievers were from Assimilators while average achievers are from accommodators and convergers. In contrast, the lower achievers are from divergers. The results also revealed the Assimilators' results in CGPA are in 3.00 – 4.00. As for future self-development, the students needed to discover what is their learning style and they could improve on how they learn or study.

ABSTRAK

Gaya Pembelajaran di kalangan pelajar-pelajar PKPG ESL dan TESL di UNIMAS

Fatimah Gani

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengesan preferensi gaya pembelajaran pelajar-pelajar yang sedang belajar di institusi pengajian tinggi. Kajian ini juga meninjau sejauh mana gaya pembelajaran mempengaruhi keputusan pada setiap semester. Kajian ini juga bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti perbezaan gaya pembelajaran di kalangan pelajar-pelajar PKPG ESL dan TESL. Kajian ini dijalankan terhadap 120 orang pelajar dari pelbagai tahun pengajian seperti pengajian tahun 2, 3 dan 4 di Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). Data-data yang telah diperolehi melalui soal selidik pelaporan sendiri. Hasil kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa pada keseluruhannya, gaya pembelajaran bagi pelajar-pelajar PKPG ESL dan juga TESL tidak mempunyai banyak perbezaan. Pelajar-pelajar yang mendapat keputusan yang baik seperti berada di kategori 3.00-4.00 dalam CGPA adalah pelajar-pelajar 'Assimilators'. Bagi pelajar-pelajar yang memperolehi keputusan CGPA; 2.00-2.99, adalah pelajar-pelajar dari 'Accommodators' dan 'Convergers'. Tetapi bagi pelajar-pelajar yang mendapat keputusan yang kurang baik seperti 0-1.99 dalam CGPA, mereka dikategorikan sebagai pelajar-pelajar 'Divergers'. Walaupun begitu, hasil kajian juga mendapati bahawa hampir kesemua pelajar PKPG ESL dan juga TESL dapat memperbaiki keputusan peperiksaan pada setiap semester. Hanya sebilangan kecil pelajar-pelajar yang berada dalam kategori keputusan peperiksaan mereka tidak ada kemajuan atau menurun. Diharap melalui kajian ini, para pelajar akan mengenal pasti gaya pembelajaran mereka supaya dapat mempertingkatkan lagi mutu keputusan yang akan dicapai pada masa yang akan datang.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the overall purpose of the proposed study. It includes background of the study, statement of problem, research objectives, and research questions, significance of the study and definitions of key terms used.

1.1 Background of the study

Everybody has different ways to learn or acquire something in their daily lives. Learners use different ways to learn or acquire what they learnt for different purposes of learning. According to Cano & Hughes. (1991), he mentioned that not all students learn the same (cited in Raven, Cano, Carton & Van Shelhamer, 1993). Due to this, the educators should recognise students' learning styles differences and their teaching should involve different teaching methods.

There are several learning styles that have been identified by the researchers such as Honey and Mumford's Learning Styles, Kolb's Learning Style, Vermunt's Inventory of Learning Styles and Gregorc Model of learning styles. In Cano & Hughes (2000) study, the researchers examined whether college

students' learning styles and thinking styles were interrelated and at the same time could it predict their academic achievement. The researchers use the Learning Styles Inventory based on normative-semantic version (Learning Styles Questionnaire) and also MSG Thinking Styles Inventory. The result of the study has shown that there is a relationship between thinking and learning styles and also the students' academic achievement was influenced by their styles. According to Lynch, Woelfl, Steele and Hanssen (1998), there is a relationship between 'performances on the objective measures of academic achievement' with the learning style. This study has been conducted to two consecutive classes of third-year medical students between 1994-95 and 1995-96 academic classes by using Kolb LSI (1985).

Based on the research above, the researcher sees learning styles are essential part of the learning process which could enhance students in their academic achievements. The researcher needs to do a research on how the learning styles play important part in the learning process especially for university students in UNIMAS (Universiti Malaysia Sarawak). By carrying this research, the researcher could actually find out how the learning styles influenced the students' academic achievements. The researcher also wants to find out learning styles differences between PKPG ESL and TESL students. The learning styles that the researcher used in this study is Kolb's learning styles. The researcher uses Kolb's learning styles inventory (1985) to gather information on learners' differences in their learning styles. Based on this study, it is hoped that the study

done in Malaysian context could help educators and learners develop a platform to improve their teaching and learning process in future.

1.2 Statements of the problem

In university, the learners tend to vary their ways of learning in achieving good grades. Using their way of learning, the learners have to evaluate their learning process so that it can meet the goal i.e. good grades.

There are several group of learners enter the university to pursue their education level i.e. diploma, degree, master or doctorate. In these groups, there are two groups of learners; PKPG ESL and TESL students that are studying under education program. In order to achieve good grades, how these learners acquire their learning so that they could maintain their grades in GPA and also CGPA every semester.

In this study, the researcher wants to identify types of learning styles among PKPG ESL and TESL students and also investigate whether these groups have differences in term of their learning styles while studying in UNIMAS. By doing this study, the researcher is able to find out whether learning styles could influence GPA and CGPA of PKPG ESL and TESL students.

1.3 Research Question

The research question for this study is to find out 'is there a mismatch of learning preferences among PKPG ESL students and students of TESL that affected their CGPA results in UNIMAS?

1.4 Research Objectives

The objectives of the study are to:

1. Identify types of learning styles among PKPG ESL and TESL students in UNIMAS.
2. Compare the different learning styles between PKPG ESL and TESL students.
3. Compare the different learning styles between TESL (Pre-service) and TESL (In-service).
4. Find out how learning styles influence GPA and CGPA of the students.
5. Compare the Pre-service and In-service teachers have different achievement and if relate to learning styles.

1.5 Significance of the study

It is hoped that this research will provide a greater insight on students' learning styles which contributes to their academic achievement as measured in CGPA scores. This information is useful to the students as it will encourage them to evaluate their learning in English language with the purpose to enhance their learning. The research will also reveal whether the educators are aware of their students' differences learning styles in the learning process.

As for educators, the findings discussed in this study could help them provide instructional alternatives to address their differences in learning English language. This will encourage the students to diversify their learning styles in their learning. By using this model and inventory, it is also hope that the educators could aware of differences in students' learning styles and using the information to employ a variety of instructional activities in their teaching learning process.

In education system, it should encourage the curriculum designers to overlook different methods of teaching based on the students' needs in term of their learning styles in learning process. By doing this, the educators and the students could develop their teaching and learning strategies to accommodate the learning process.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms used

a) Learning Styles

Hartley (1998) describes learning styles are the ways in which individuals characteristically approach different learning styles (Cassidy, 2004). According to Garger and Guild (1984), learning styles defines as “...stable and pervasive characteristics of an individual, expressed through the interaction of one’s behaviour and personality as one approaches a learning task” (Raven, Cano, Carton & Van Shelhamer, 1993). Based on the definition illustrated above, how the learners acquire information or knowledge, they unconsciously use different ways of learning to accomplish their goals i.e. able to apply what they learn or acquire.

b) Kolb’s Learning Styles Model

Kolb (1976, 1984) proposes a four-stage hypothetical learning cycle. The four stages of Kolb’s Learning Style Model are Concrete Experience (CE; experiencing), Abstract Conceptualisation (AC; thinking), Active Experimentation (AE; doing) and Reflective Observation (RO; reflecting). Based on the four stages of Kolb’s Learning Style Model, there are four learning styles described to illustrate the respondent’s learning style; Convergence, Divergence, Assimilation and Accommodation. By identifying the respondent’s learning style, the respondents could strengthen or improve how they learn or acquire information and knowledge in a better way.

c) Kolb's Learning Styles Inventory

In Kolb's Learning Styles Inventory, 12-items will be given to the respondents. It is a self-reported questionnaire and each of the items begins with "When I learn ...," "I learn best when ...," "When I am learning...," "I learn by...," or "I learn best from...," and 4 options for completing the sentence are supplied. The purpose of this inventory is to categorise respondents as convergers, divergers, assimilators and accommodators based on the respondents' answers. Using this inventory in the study, it is hoped that the results could be used as a platform for lecturers and students to explore more on their learning styles in learning process.

In the next chapters, the researcher describes more on learning styles especially Kolb's Learning Style Model and also literature review from past researches done by other researchers. Then, the researcher provides a great detail on research design, sample population, instruments used, data collection and how to analyse data collected of the study. The researcher also provides the limitation of the study. After that, the researcher presents analysis and discussion of the findings, and lastly, the researcher sum up the information gathered in the last chapter. In this chapter, the researcher also illustrates the implications and recommendations for future studies based on the study researched.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This section presents those literatures related to learning styles. This includes the dimension of learning styles, Kolb's Learning Style Model and the characteristics of the learners related to the styles. It also includes some relevant researches carried out in various fields.

2.1 Learning Styles

People use their learning styles to learn or acquire knowledge from various sources. Students also learn things through various learning styles. What does learning style actually mean? There were various definitions on learning style. In Ken Willing (1993), he mentioned that 'learning style' refers to any individual learner's natural, habitual, and preferred ways of learning in term of the individual's innate psychological and cognitive make-up, particular upbringing and socio-cultural background, and schooling in general. Sternberg (1977) also defines learning style as how people prefer to learn (Cano & Hughes, 2000). In Keefe (1979), 'learning style' refers to 'the composite of characteristic cognitive, affective and physiological factors that serve as relatively stable indicators of how

a learner perceives, interacts with, and responds to the learning environment' (Dangwal & Mitra, 2000). Many researches have been carried out in various fields on the learning style which interpreted differently for various purposes. It is important for the educators to know their students' learning styles differences so that they could fulfil their students' needs through different approaches in teaching. From the researches done above, the researcher can reflect that learning style is ways of different learning which involved cognitive process. By doing this process, the learners are able to strengthen and improve their abilities in learning process.

2.2 Dimensions of Learning Styles

For the past 30 or 40 years, researchers have been tremendously developed new theories, models and measures in learning styles. In learning styles, James and Garner (1995) discover three dimensions of learning styles; cognitive, affective (personality), and perceptual (sensory) learning styles (Brown, 1998).

2.2.1 Cognitive Learning Styles

Allport (1937) describes Cognitive Learning Styles as "an individual's typical or habitual mode of problem solving, thinking, perceiving and remembering". Riding and Cheema (1991) further describe cognitive style as a 'wholist-analytic' where information gathered will process either as an overall view (wholist) or dividing into part by part components (analytic) (Cassidy,

2004). Messick's (1984) defines cognitive styles as "consistent individual differences in preferred ways of organising and processing information and experience" (Sadler-Smith, 2001). It describes the individuals use this ability to organise and process information gathered and experience using their choice of ways through problem solving, thinking, perceiving and remembering. Based on the description above, Kolb's Learning Style Model can be categorised as one of the Cognitive Learning Styles components.

2.2.2 Affective (Personality) Learning Styles

Steve Hunt (n.d) describes Affective dimension include emotional and personality traits like motivation, attention, interests, willingness to take challenge, responsibility and sociability. This information is useful to educators in helping the learners to understand positive and negative effect in giving the learners praise and external or internal reinforcement. It can be categorised as positive effect to some learners while the other learners might think oppositely. Some learners may need extrinsic rewards while the others find intrinsic reinforcement may suitable for them. Another research done by Swanson (1995), describes this dimension is influenced by one's personality traits whereby the personality sets the stage for how one acquires and integrate information. Personality can be described as motivation, attention, interests, willingness to take risks, persistence, responsibility, and sociability. The students know how to use this dimension while acquiring information in their learning process. This also includes genetic influences, culture, environment, and experience (Brown, 1998).

2.2.3 Perceptual (Sensory) Learning Styles

Conner, Marcia, & Wayne (2000) defines Perceptual (Sensory) Learning Styles as “the preferred sensory channel or “modality strength” through which an individual receive process information efficiently in their environment”. This is through reaction of our physical environment and how we adopt data. According to Dunn (1984, cited in Reid, 1987), Perceptual (Sensory) Learning Styles can be divided into four components; visual, auditory, tactile, and kinaesthetic which used to understand, organize and retain experiences. As for visual learners, they learn well from seeing words in the printed materials such as academic books, journals, slides and lectures notes. They remember and understand information and instructions better if they read them. There are two types of visual learners; the first type, learners absorbs information most effectively by silent reading; and the second type may be overwhelmed by extensive printed materials which require more visual presentation of information through pictures, graphs, charts and diagram. Auditory learners learn from hearing words spoken and oral explanation. The learners use reading aloud as one of the method or moving their lips as they read, especially when they are learning new information. The learners should take opportunity from their surrounding to learn or acquire information. By hearing audio-tapes, lectures, and class discussion, the learners also benefit from making tapes to listen to, by teaching other students and by conversing with their teachers. Kinaesthetic learners learn best by experience things i.e. involve physical activities in the classroom environment. The learners learn better when they actively participate in activities such as field trips and role-playing in the

classroom. By combining of stimuli i.e. an audio-tape with an activity will help the learners understand new materials better. As for Tactile learners, they usually learn best when they have the opportunity to do 'hands-on' experiences with materials. The most conducive learning environment is when the learners involve working on experiments in laboratory, handling and building modes, and touching and working with materials. Taking notes or instructions help learners remember information better and physical environment information better and physical involvement in class may help learners understand new information gathered.

Based on these studies, the student uses a particular sensory channel like visual to generate and process information he or she gathered from lectures. This will help the student in his or her learning process. Some students use more than one sensory channel in their studies.

Dunn & Dunn (1992) argue that the educators often ignore tactile and kinaesthetic sensory channel in their teaching and focus more on visual and auditory sensory channel. Instead many learning styles researches indicate that students prefer learn by 'experiencing, touching, moving and doing' in their learning process (Brown, 1998). This indicates that the educators need to consider the four components in perceptual learning styles so that they could diversify their teaching method in future.