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LEARNING-STYLE PREFERENCE OF ESL STUDENTS

Almasa Mulalic
Parilah Mohd Shah
Fauziah Ahmad

Abstract

Students' learning styles have been ignored and have been considered as an insignificant component in the learning process (Rita Dunn, 1993). Dunn said that lecturers cannot identify student's styles without using a multidimensional instrument. Lecturers are not aware of their own learning styles and their learning style preferences may differ from that of their students. As such, they are unable to assess students' learning styles without administering proper learning styles inventory. Since little attention has been paid to how learners learn and how teachers teach in many institutions, this research attempts to determine the learning styles of the students, and the differences in their learning styles according to gender and ethnicity. This research also aims to determine the Perceptual Learning Style (PLS) of ESL students and to analyse differences in learning styles regarding student's demographic factors such as gender and race. In this research, the PLS preferences of ESL students was assessed using the PLSPQ research instrument, which Peacock (2001) reported to be of high reliability. In order to familiarise the readers with the larger picture in determining learning styles, some other relevant research instruments are summarised. One hundred and sixty (N=160) students from UNITEN were selected as respondents using the stratified random sampling techniques. Seventy-four female students (46.3%) and eighty-six male students (53.8%) participated in the research. The racial composition of the samples was 56 Malays (35.0%), 52 Chinese (32.5%) and 52 Indian (32.5%). Results revealed that the dominant learning styles of ESL students yielded the following results. In general, students preferred the Kinesthetic learning style and expressed minor preference for Visual, Auditory, and Group Learning.

Keyword: Learning style, Learning Preferences, Students, Lecturers, Learning Styles Inventory, ESL

Introduction

Learning is "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience", (Kolb, 1984: 38). Learning is determined by learning styles (LS) where students who are able to employ multiple learning styles acquire a greater learning outcome. (Claxton and Murrell 1985; Elison 1995; Felder 1995; Reid 1987). Since learning styles play a crucial role in the learning process, lecturers should not neglect the importance of choosing the appropriate teaching method. Once lecturers become aware that students learn differently they will determine students' LS and try to accommodate for them. According to Felder (1996), the amount students learn in the class is partially determined by the students' ability and prior preparation, the capability of his or her learning style, and

the lecturers teaching style. Many researchers have stated that effective teaching is the main predictor of student success. In the past, most educators advocated that students, not teachers, were the central factor in academic success, and many argued that teachers played a great role in students' academic performances.

Learning a language is among the most challenging lifelong pursuits to undertake. Such a lifelong learning process involves professional and educational guidance and mindful engagements in any language and specifically the English language. Consequently, this study is driven by the curiosity of the researchers to identify students' perceptual learning styles (PLS) and find out the extent to



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