

## THE IMPACT OF LEARNING STYLES ON STUDENT'S ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

---

**Nafiseh Zarei<sup>\*1</sup>**

Faculty of Education and Humanities  
Unitar International University, Malaysia

**Koasalyiah Vijayan<sup>2</sup>**

Faculty of Education and Humanities  
Unitar International University, Malaysia

---

### Abstract:

This study explores the impact of identified learning styles on the student's performance in Business Communication Course. A qualitative approach was used to collect data for the purpose of this study. The sample of the study involved fifteen lecturers from Masa College in Malaysia. For the purpose of data collection, the researchers used semi-structured interview questions which included 25 questions regarding the impact of the learning styles on the student's academic performances in Business Communication Course. The findings of the study revealed that assimilating learning styles make the students more self-dependent because they can improve their learning through notes taking. In addition, the results of the study proved that visual assimilating leaning style helps the students to easily recollect information via scanning pictures and watching videos. In contrast, the students experienced difficulties in terms of learning by referring to text-based learning materials.

Keywords: Learning style, Academic performances, Business communication course

---

### Introduction:

In Malaysia, English language instructions have focused generally in teaching and learning of four major English language skills, named reading, writing, listening, and speaking. In fact, Hamachek (1995) believed that individuals differ in height, weight, metabolism, personal interests, and other characteristics, and students differ in how they learn and the cognitive styles they prefer for learning new materials. He further stated that lecturers realize that in order to assist pupils and capitalize on their natural inclination to understand, one must only diagnose their learning style. The importance of English has always been recognized in the South East Asia (ASEAN) region. "Students can assimilate and process a several types of information in different ways" (Dalmolin, 2018)

The results of this study help lecturers to develop more efficient and effective instructional methods regarding students' learning styles. Moreover, the findings of this study alert lecturers to be aware of each student's leaning style and plan their lessons to cater different types of students in the classrooms. Greitzer (2002) mentioned that most lecturers today apply the students-centered approach to promote interest, analytical research, critical thinking, and enjoyment among students. Daniel et al. (2002) studied the effects of learning styles on students' success in web-based learning environments where students were placed into two learning style groups (diverging and assimilating). The results of their study showed that diverging students received high scores in web-based learning environments while the assimilator students received low scores. Daniel et al. (2002) concluded that the type of learning style had no significant effects on the student's achievement in different learning environments for both diverging and assimilating students. What matters the most is the way students learn but not necessarily the environments in which they are. In addition, mismatches in teaching instruction and preferred learning style of students often leads them towards lower academic grades (Jamali, 2018).

### Literature Review:

The results of a study by Abidin et al. (2011) at University of Hamburg in German, showed that motivation, learning strategies, and learning style affect academic performance. Abidin et al. (2011) further indicated that learning in partially matched conditions is significantly superior to learning in mismatched conditions. In fact, it is significant to encourage the students to be confident by using their individual strengths and learning styles in order to achieve their learning desires and be successful in academic achievements. Smoak (2007) espouses the belief that accommodating students learning styles increases achievement. She further stated that prior to incorporating learning styles, this school was ranked 61st out of 65 elementary schools in the district, but after incorporating the learning styles in classroom instructions for two years, the students' performance was positively affected, and the school rose to 9th place in the district. Smoak (2007) cited various studies that yielded significant

---

gains in academic performance, such as a study by Carbo (2000) in an elementary school in Bloomington in the urban area. According to Carbo (2000), the school had incorporated the learning styles in classroom instructions and this had changed the students' academic performance dramatically from weak to good.

Warren (2001) sought to qualify the effects of matching learners' learning style on teachers' learning style. The sample of her study involved 57 ninth grade students and 16 ninth grade teachers in an urban South Eastern high school in Columbia. She found that nearly 75% of the students performed better academically when paired with teachers processing the same global or analytical style. De Smeldt et al. (2009) have questioned why and how an awareness of one's learning style should be thought to have positive effects on the quality of one's learning. They concluded that learning style awareness is only a 'cognitive in wheel of the learning process' and that 'it is not very likely that the self- concept of a learner, once he/she reached a certain age, will drastically develop by learning about his/her personal style'. Greater awareness of the student's dominant learning styles can help teachers to provide learning activities that are more inclusive of the other styles and which reach all students.

Another study by Stahl (2010) investigated the efficacy of using learning style theories in classroom, particularly in the teaching English. He carried out the study on the students' learning styles because of the teachers' failure to determine and consider students' learning styles and matching them to instructional methods in their classrooms. Furthermore, he also questioned the validity of learning style concept and cautioned the characterizing students with resulting changes in teaching methodology could harm students' achievement. That is considering students' learning style in teaching may have negative effects on the students' performance. He further noted that learning is a fluid process that changes over time as new skills are developed and recommended that teachers should accommodate those differences as they become evident. "Learning style affects the teaching of many courses and learning achievement (Lu & Yang, 2018)".

#### Method:

This study adapted qualitative approach. According to Gay et al. (2009) qualitative research is the collection and the analysis of numerical data to describe, explain predict, or control phenomena of interest. They define qualitative research as the collection, analysis, and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual (non- numerical) data to gain insight into a particular phenomenon of interest. Mack et al. (2005) view the qualitative methodology as seeking to understand a research question from the perspective of those being studied and not from the researchers' perspective. The sample of this study included 15 English lecturers from Masa College in Malaysia. The researchers used semi-structured interview questions to collect in-depth data from the lecturers. Lichtman (2012) stated that interviews are useful in the situations where the researcher is unable to observe the participants' behavior, feelings,

---

past events, and future expectations. As such, the semi-structured interview was seen to be ideal for collecting information from the English lecturers to find out the extent in which they planned their lessons based in the students' learning styles. The semi-structured interview consisted of 25 questions in terms of the impact of identified learning styles in the students' performances in learning Business Communication. The trustworthiness of the research instrument was approved by three scholars in the same field. The researchers conducted the interview sessions with 5 English language students individually and the obtained data were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed qualitatively using content analysis.

However, these students had experienced the difficulties of not being able to learn easily where the only medium of instruction was visual or audio or where they were not access to writing materials were because classroom atmosphere and teaching materials were always dictating the classroom presentation.”

Lecturer 11: Accommodating and converging learning style students had exposed to practice and evidence because these students practiced and practiced what they learnt and saw the evidence of what they had digested with difficulty from texts or discussions. However, this kind of students were therefore not comfortable sitting in a place for particularly if they were no practical work in that particular day.”

Lecturer 15: “Teaching the converging students was a challenge to them because there were no enough classes at the college for every lecturer to own a fixed classroom in order to allow students to rotate from one classroom to another. Apart from that, there were no enough teaching aids to keep these students busy all the times.”

According to the report by the University of Pennsylvania (2009) in the United States of America, kinesthetic (converging) students learn best through a hands-on approach. Actively exploring the physical world around them and they prefer to apply course material in new situations to do their assignments. In this study, the researchers used the different teaching aids that helped the students to be actively involved in the learning process, and this have contributed to a better academic performance of the converging students. The lecturers were also asked to elaborate on the positive impacts of the students' learning styles on teaching Business Communication Course. Some of the lecturers' feedback are stated below:

The above findings are in line with the findings of a study by Onwuegbuzie et al. (2011) who stated that learning styles assisted students to understand their own learning preference to learn the subjects and promote logical thinking skill. The researchers asked the lecturers to share their opinions on the necessity of having awareness about the students' learning styles. One of the lecturers stated that:

The obtained data from the lecturers, help the students to improve their sense of belonging, self-esteem, as well as their study skills. Having enough knowledge on the students' learning styles provides the lecturers the opportunity to help the learners with learning difficulties and prepare additional works for low achiever students (Murray, 2002). The results of this study

---

is in line with the results of a study by Meriwether (2016) which proved learning styles help some lecturers to understand their students' learning needs and help remove barriers to their students' learning potentials. Furthermore, the Business Communication lecturers were able to identify the needs of 'slow', 'average' and 'gifted' students and find a suitable method of accommodating the mixed abilities students in the same class. As a result, I had covered less content within a given time frame and we were working with curriculum driven system."

Lecturer 8: "Some students weren't cozy with some learning styles notably the students United Nations agency preferred to examine alone had felt that they weren't making the most of cluster work activities. Some of the students, who had known their own learning styles, had stopped from trying and experiencing other learning styles. These students had resisted to change and only continued to utilize the learning style that they believed was best for learning Business Communication."

According to the lecturers' feedback, incorporating students' learning styles in their teaching requires ample time and attention because it restricts some of the students from getting to know other students' learning styles and experiences on how they learn. The researchers asked the lecturers to elaborate on the methods that they use in the classroom in order to teach Business Communication Course. Two lecturers mentioned that:

Sometimes I asked the students to solve practical problems or real life-based problem. I provided them with examples of real life-based problems due to lack of teaching aids and hence because not all topics were able to be related to real life situations in Business Communication. Giving the students real-life based assignments to be done helped students to contextualize the content taught in the classroom. I did not only teach students how to accumulate facts, skills and knowledge but also taught them how to become the responsible and democratic adults in future through Business Communications' real-life based problems."

According to Geonnotti (2008), students' organization schemas become less egocentric and begin to incorporate knowledge gained from experience into their thought processes. The batch 30 and 33 students who participated in this study were between 18 to 22 years old, and according to Geonnote (2008), these students were able to use the pre-knowledge for new learning. Some of the students were also in the adolescence stage and there is a need for them to be prepared well for adult stage. In addition, Jacobs et al. (2011) stated that little time if any, needs to be given to the students to experiment with a variety of activities in order to achieve what they are expected to understand. The use of different teaching methods leads to the productive interaction between the lecturer and the students and among students.

**Conclusion:**The findings of the study revealed that it is very important for a lecturer to have some information about their students' learning styles. This is an obvious indication that learning styles make an impact on the students' overall academic achievements. Such

findings highlight the importance of recognizing students' varying learning styles. The understanding of students' learning styles is important for all lecturers to enable them to tailor their lesson plans, teaching strategies, and teaching methods based on the students' learning styles in order to meet the learning needs of all students in their classrooms. The lecturers should experiment various teaching strategies in classroom in order to help them determine which strategy best meets the students' learning styles. It can be concluded that knowing the students' learning styles provided lecturers with the opportunity to deal with the students of different levels (slow, average, and fast students) during the interaction in the classroom.

#### References:

- Abidin, M. J. Z., Rezaee, A. A., Abdullah, H. N., & Singh, K. K. B. (2011). Learning styles and overall academic achievement in a specific educational system. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 1(10), 143-152.
- Carbo, M., & Hodges, H. (2000). Learning styles strategies can help students at risk. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 20(4), 55-58.
- Dalmolin, A. C., Mackeivicz, G. A. O., Pochapski, M. T., Pilatti, G. L., & Santos, F. A. (2018). Learning styles preferences and e-learning experience of undergraduate dental students. *Revista de Odontologia da UNESP*, 47(3), 175-182.
- Daniel, J. A., Price, R. V., & Merrifield, H. H. (2002). Effects of learning styles and learning environment on Achievement of physical therapy Graduate learners on distance Education, (Abstract). *Physical Therapy Conference*.
- De Smedt, B., Swillen, A., Verschaffel, L., & Ghesquiere, P. (2009). Mathematical learning disabilities in children with 22q11. 2 deletion syndromes: a review. *Development Disabilities Res Rev*, 15(1), 4-10.
- Dunn, R., & Dunn, K. (2006). Learning style inventory (modified). Hand out in EDU745, *Master's in divergent learning program, Columbia College, Columbia, SC*.
- Gay, L.R., Mills, G. E., & Airasian, P. (2009). Educational research: competencies for analysis and applications. Upper Saddle River: *Pearson Education International*.
- Geonnotti, K.M (2008). Educational theory of Lev Vygotsky: An analysis.
- Greitzer, F. L. (2002, September). A cognitive approach to student-centered e-learning. In proceedings of the human factors and ergonomics society annual meeting (Vol. 46, No. 25, pp. 2064-2068). Sage CA: Los Angeles, CA: *SAGE Publications*.
- Hamachek, D. (1995). Psychology in teaching and learning growth. *New York: Allyn & Bacon*.
- Jacobs, M., Vakalisa, N. C. G., & Gawe, N. (Eds.). (2011). Teaching-learning dynamics. *Pearson Education South Africa*.
- Jamali, A. R., & Mohamad, M. M. (2018, July). Dimensions of learning styles among engineering students. *In Journal of physics: Conference Series* (Vol. 1049, No. 1, p. 012055). IOP Publishing.

- Kolb, A. Y., & Kolb, D. A. (2005). Learning styles and learning spaces: Enhancing experiential learning in higher education. *Academy of management learning & education*, 4(2), 193-212.
- Lichtman, M. (2012). *Qualitative research in education: A User's Guide: A User's Guide*. Sage.
- Lu, T., & Yang, X. (2018). Effects of the visual/verbal learning style on concentration and achievement in mobile learning. *EURASIA Journal of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education*, 14(5), 1719-1729.
- Mack, N., Woodson, C., MacQueen, K. M., Guest, G., & Namey, E. (2005). *Qualitative research methods: a data collectors field guide*.
- Meriwether, J. L. (2016). My unexpected learning about adult learners: Engaging adult learners through intentional advocacy. *About Campus*, 21(2), 17-22.
- Murray, M. D. (2002). Learning style modalities and attributes of an effective classroom environment: An analysis of adult learners in an adult basic education classroom. Unpublished master's thesis. *New York*.
- Onwuegbuzie, A. J., Johnson, R. B., & Collins, K. M. (2011). Assessing legitimation in mixed research: a new Framework. *Quality & Quantity*, 45(6), 1253-1271.
- Smoak, A. B. (2007). The effects of incorporating learning styles and multiple intelligences in a language arts/mathematics classroom for returning dropouts (Doctoral dissertation, Columbia College).
- Stahl, G. K., Maznevski, M. L., Voigt, A., & Jonsen, K. (2010). Unraveling the effects of cultural diversity in teams: A meta-analysis of research on multicultural work groups. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 41(4), 690-709.
- Warren, P. E. (2001). The effect of matched learning styles and instructional 81 methods on student achievement. Unpublished master's thesis, Columbia College, Columbia, SC.