Choice Of Learning Style Of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia Senior TESL Students And Perceptions Towards Effective Teaching

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Abstract : This study was an attempt to investigate the association between students' learning style and academic performance Universiti Teknologi Malaysia TESL senior undergraduates. It also investigated the most popular language learning style of UTM TESL students. Another purpose was to investigate the most preferred teaching preferences of UTM TESL students. The descriptive study was carried out in form of questionnaires as the tool of assessment. Interviews were also conducted to validate the findings from the questionnaires. The study focused on the third and fourth year students of TESL Bachelor Programme in UTM. Data was analysed using SPSS version 11.5. The findings from the study are presented in charts and tables in order to answer the three research questions. The findings reveal visual learning style is the most popular among UTM TESL students. This study also shows that different types of learners had different teaching preferences. Also from the findings there was no significant relationship between students' learning styles and their academic performance. Despite that, the students felt that it was important for the lecturers or language instructors to try to cater for the different needs of students learning styles for language learning to be more interesting and give positive impact to their academic result. As for that, several recommendations to overcome the mismatch between learners' learning styles and lecturers' teaching style are suggested.

Keywords : learning style, TESL students, effective teaching

Introduction
The researcher begins this chapter by describing the background of the study. This is followed by purpose of the study, objectives, significance of the study and the definition of terms used in this study.

Statement of Problem
Student performance may be related to learning preferences, or styles as learners. Students may also self-select into or away from language learning classes based on their learning preferences. As a result, students' success in language learning classes may ultimately depend on understanding the learning style characteristics of the students who enroll in the course. Reid (1987) in his research stated that ESL students with their variety of language and cultural backgrounds and differences in age and previous education, often come together in intensive English language programs in which they are taught homogeneously by teachers who have little knowledge of learning styles. In many cases, neither students nor lecturers are aware that difficulty in learning class materials, high frustration levels and even failure may not rest solely in the material itself. Meanwhile Domino (1979) found out that college students taught in their preferred learning styles scored higher on tests, fact knowledge, attitude and efficiency than those taught in instructional styles different from their preferred styles.

Mismatch of teaching styles and learning styles could give negative impact to students. Students tend to be bored and inattentive in class, do poorly on tests, get discouraged about the course and may conclude that they are not good in the subject and give up (Felder & Silverman

1988; Godelski 1984; Oxford et al. 1991; Smith & Renzulli 1984). On the other hand, instructors who are confronted by low grades, unresponsive or hostile classes, poor attendance and dropouts, may become overly critical of their students (making things even worse) or begin to question their own competence as teachers (Felder, 1995). Lecturers have to vary the language teaching methods to increase the students' understanding as this point is supported by a research study carried out several decades ago, which concluded that students retain 10 percent of what they read, 26 percent of what they hear, 30 percent of what they see, 50 percent of what they see and hear, 70 percent of what they say, and 90 percent of what they say as they do something (Stice, 1987).

Given the situation above, it is time for language instructors as well as learners to put an effort in studying the correlations of the possible effects of the mismatch to the learning and teaching process. TESL students are those who will become English teachers and this is very important for them to master English as a second language in order to teach others. Therefore, it is important for the language instructors to use teaching methods and techniques that can help the TESL students to acquire the language.

Objective of the Study
The objectives of this study are:
    a) to investigate the most popular learning styles among TESL students.
    b) to investigate different learners perception on effective teaching.
    c) to identify the association between TESL students' learning styles and academic performance.

Significance of the Study
The findings of this research will help TESL students to understand more about teaching styles and learning styles. This research will help them to be aware of the learning styles that suit their interest and ability. The findings will help TESL students and other ESL learners to identify their language learning styles that will help them to utilize the learning environment to the fullest and use their preferred strategies to help them learn a second language. The findings will also help second language instructors (lecturers and teachers) to design teaching method and approaches that suit the students' language learning styles. This study will also help UTM 3rd and 4th year TESL students and also other ESL learners and teachers to be aware of the effects of mismatch between language learning styles and teaching method as this will effects their academic performance. ESL instructors can use the findings and information gathered in this study to understand the ESL students' learning preferences and improve their teaching approaches and preferences in order to improve the students' understanding and helping them in acquiring the second language effectively as well as improve their academic achievement in language learning.

Research Instruments
This research utilized both the quantitative and qualitative research methodology. The instruments used to collect the data are questionnaire and interview.
Questionnaire
A set of questionnaire containing 24 questions divided into 3 sections were used. Different question-types, such as yes-no, open-ended and listing were employed in the questionnaire. The different sections of the questionnaire are:
                      Section A: Background information

Section B: Learning styles preferences
Section C: Teaching preferences

The questions in the questionnaires were set to identify the participants' learning styles and teaching preferences.

In section A, there are 5 questions on the participants' personal background. The questions are very important for the data analysis to find the relationships of participants' background and their learning and teaching preferences.

In Section B, the participants have to tick only one box. Each box represents a certain learning styles. Students will choose boxes that indicate learning activities that they usually do and like. Each box will represent a learning style for example:

1. When learning something new, you……..

(a)	like to have the aid of diagrams, posters, or demonstrations.	
(b)	like to have verbal instructions.	
(c)	just go for it and try it out.	

The statement in (a) will represent the visual learning style while (b) represents the audio learning style and (c) represents the kinesthetic leaning style. The tick in each box will be counted. The students can be classified into respective learning styles group by looking at the most boxes ticked.

Section C, identified the participants teaching preferences. In other words, what do they like their language instructors to do in class.

The questionnaire was piloted to 8 students from 3rd and 4th year undergraduates from TESL course to assess its validity before the actual questionnaire distributed. These respondents are approximately 10% of total population and they were randomly selected for the pilot study.

Interview Session

The qualitative data for the research came from interview sessions. The interviews were conducted to confirm the findings from the questionnaire as well as to triangulate the data collection method. The interviews took the form of structured interviews. The respondents answered questions that have been prepared earlier by the interviewer. The interviews explored more about the learning and teaching preferences as well as their academic performance.

Participants

The participants of this study were UTM TESL senior undergraduates. A total of 80 sets of questionnaire were distributed to 3rd and 4th year at Faculty of Education, UTM. The choices of the respondents were 3rd and 4th year students because they have completed many of TESL core subjects. The 1st and 2nd year TESL students are considered freshmen as they would only have completed some of the TESL subjects. There are 80 students; 37 from the 3rd year and 43 from the 4th year. 8 of the students (4 from each year) were used for pilot study so there will be 72 participants. The questionnaires were distributed in the second week of the second semester of 2007/2008 session. This was because at that time the students will not be very busy so it would not be disturbing them to answer the questionnaire as well as for the interview sessions. There are many categories of participants in this study that we could divide them by:

a) Age: 21 years old to 24 years old and above

b) Gender: Male and Female
　　　　c) Background study: SPM, STPM, MATRIC and DIPLOMA
　　　　d) CGPA

　　　　For the qualitative data of the research, six students will be the respondents for the interview sessions in order to provide in-depth information about the topic. They will be asked some questions on language learning and teaching styles. They will be randomly chosen after they have answered the questionnaire. Their personal background information is very important for the researcher to have a variation of participants in this interview session.

Research Procedures
This research was carried out according to different stages as described in Figure 1 below.
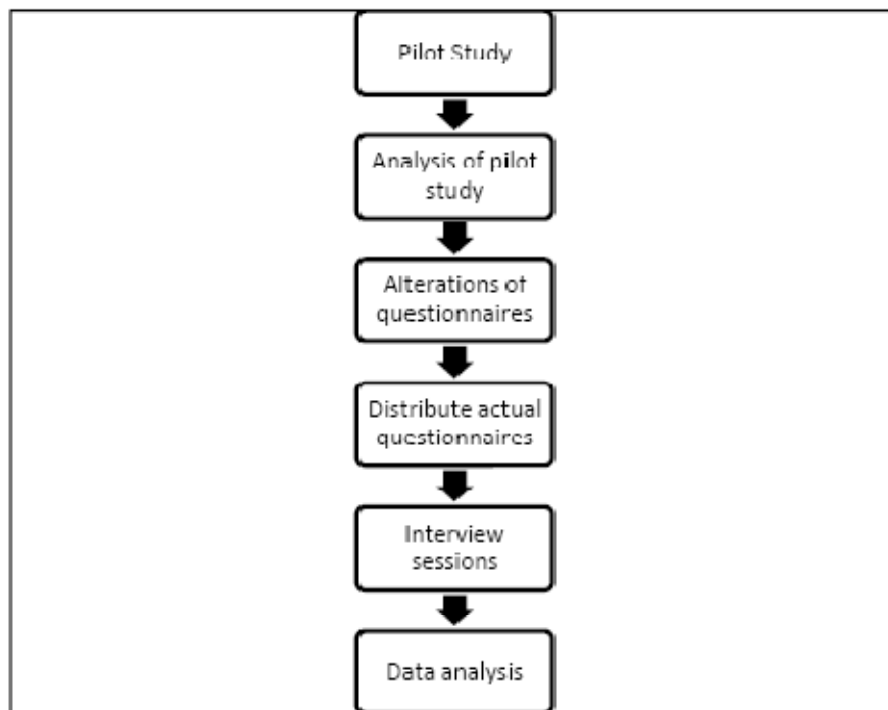

Figure 1: Flowchart of the research methodology

Data Analysis
This section is to answer RQ2; **to investigate different learners' perception on effective teaching**. The data (Item no. 5 in section C) was analysed using SPSS and presented in tables and charts. Figure below shows item number 5. The items were marked with alphabet A to I for easy analysis.

5. What do you think make an effective teaching? You may tick more than one box.

| Lecturer gives notes on the lesson.		A
Lecturer makes some humour in class.		B
Lecturer criticizes students.		C
Lecturer gives opportunity for students to give opinion.		D
Lecturer uses various methods to convey lesson.		E
Lecturer gives real life examples to make students understand.		F
Lecturer uses the whiteboard effectively.		G
Lecturer corrects students' mistakes.		H
Lecturer always criticizes students' idea without telling ways to improve.		I

Figure 2: Item No. 5
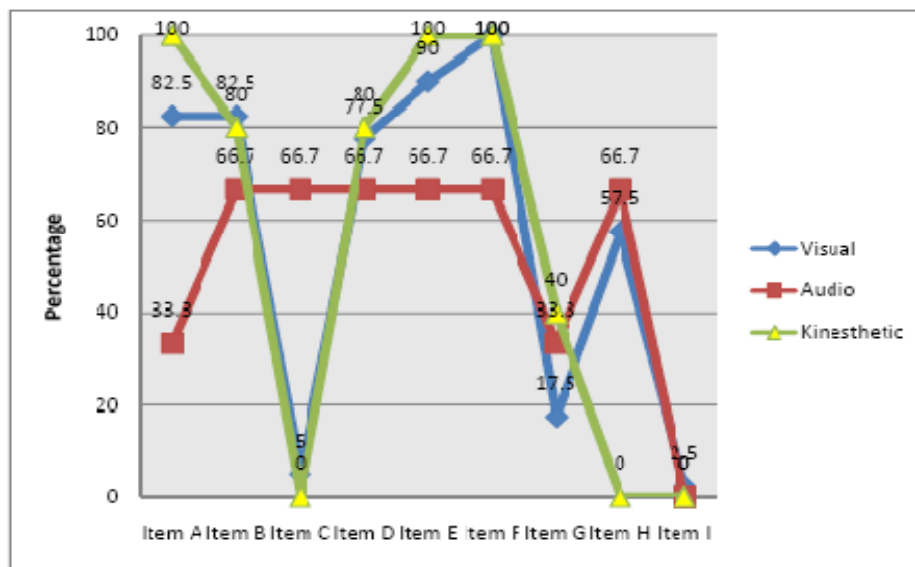
Figure 3: The differences between different learners' perceptions on effective teaching

Figure 3 shows the comparison of each type of learners' perception on effective teaching. The findings of this graph will be discussed in the next sections by looking at each type of learners separately.

Based on Figure 3, we could see that each type of learners have different perceptions on effective teaching. This is because they have different needs of teaching styles to suit their learning styles. This is because at different age, people learn more, do so more easily, and retain it better when they use their learning styles, their styles are actually their strengths (Dunn, 1998).

Summary of the Study

This research investigated the learning styles and teaching preferences among UTM Senior TESL students. Primary data were collected by randomly distributing questionnaires to 72 third and fourth year TESL students. Series of interview sessions also were carried out in order to validate the findings. As mentioned earlier in the introduction, the purpose of this study was to investigate the most popular language learning styles of UTM TESL undergraduates. Another purpose is to investigate the most preferred teaching preferences of UTM TESL students. This research also was to investigate the association of students' CGPA and their learning styles.

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