

**UPPER SECONDARY STUDENTS' PERCEPTION TOWARDS KINESTHETIC
LEARNING ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED IN AN ENGLISH CLASSROOM:
AN INSIGHT**

NORIDAH BINTI SAIN

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on upper secondary students' perceptions of kinesthetic learning activities conducted in secondary level English classroom. It also investigates the types of kinesthetic learning activities that are beneficial to upper secondary students and the challenges that the students encounter while taking part in kinesthetic learning activities. This research which is mainly qualitative and descriptive in nature employs the use of several research strategies utilizing written Style Analysis Survey, written journal responses, direct observation and interviews. The sample of six subjects comprised of four students of Mara Junior Science College Batu Pahat, Johor. These subjects were identified through purposive sampling after they have taken the Style Analysis Survey. This study reveals several important findings, one of which is that kinesthetic learning activities benefited learners in a number of ways: movement to prevent boredom, movement to eliminate stress and movement to encourage social interaction. Subjects mainly agreed that they do rely on teacher guidance to be catalyst for the kinesthetic learning activities and realized that there were negative factors about kinesthetic activities. The research also discovered that subjects equated kinesthetic learning activities with learning which would encourage fun learning experiences.

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini menyelidik persepsi pelajar-pelajar menengah atas terhadap aktiviti-aktiviti pembelajaran secara kinestetik yang dijalankan dalam kelas Bahasa Inggeris tahap menengah . Kajian ini juga menyelidiki jenis-jenis aktiviti pembelajaran secara kinestetik yang bermanfaat kepada para pelajar menengah atas dan cabaran-cabaran yang terpaksa mereka hadapi semasa mengambil bahagian dalam aktiviti-aktiviti tersebut. Kajian yang secara keseluruhannya bersifat kualitatif dan deskriptif ini mengaplikasikan beberapa strategi kajian menggunakan laporan ‘Style Analysis Survey’, respons-respons jurnal, pemerhatian terus dan temubual. Enam sampel subjek terdiri daripada pelajar-pelajar tingkatan empat di MRSM Batu Pahat, Johor. Subjek-subjek ini dikenal pasti melalui sample bertujuan selepas mereka mengambil ‘Style Analysis Survey’. Kajian ini mendedahkan beberapa penemuan penting seperti aktiviti-aktiviti pembelajaran secara kinestetik memanfaatkan pelajar melalui pelbagai cara: pergerakan mengelakkan perasaan bosan, menghilangkan tekanan dan menggalakkan interaksi sosial. Subjek-subjek secara keseluruhannya bersetuju bahawa mereka perlu bergantung kepada bimbingan guru sebagai pemangkin dalam aktiviti-aktiviti pembelajaran secara kinestetik dan sedar bahawa aktiviti-aktiviti tersebut turut mempunyai kesan-kesan negatif. Kajian ini juga mendapati subjek menyamakan aktiviti pembelajaran kinestetik dengan pembelajaran yang dapat menggalakkan pengalaman pembelajaran yang menyeronokkan.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Educational researchers postulate that every individual has a different learning style and we learn through several ways. Some ways allow us to breeze through smoothly while some others do not seem to enable us to reach our intended target. There are certain learning styles with which we feel very comfortable because the learning process seems to take place best when we employ such styles. Hence, teachers should be aware of the fact that their students have different learning styles. Their learning styles may vary according to their personal and cultural backgrounds. Therefore it is crucial for a teacher to plan the teaching process in such a manner that he or she can cater to the students' learning style preferences, which would then result in effective learning. On the contrary, looking at our traditional secondary classroom practice as teachers insist on rigid rules of instruction, students would suffer physically, mentally and emotionally. The irony of this situation is that students who are active by nature are forced into passive roles in the classroom setting. Cohen (1987) contended that teachers traditionally are seen as truth tellers who inculcate knowledge in students. Students play a relatively passive role; they accumulate material, listen, read and perform prescribed exercises.

In view of this, it is often claimed that educators do not believe that all learners are the same. Learners whose styles are accommodated more frequently in school achieve more immediate success. Students who struggle to adapt to an uncomfortable way of learning often underachieve. These students, the under achievers, most visibly reflect the idea that some vital part is missing in the secondary classroom setting.

1.2 Background of the problem

Despite acknowledgment of important differences among learners, uniformity continues to dominate school practices. Too often, teachers continue to treat all students alike while paying lip service to the principle of diversity. More than 50 years ago, Nathaniel Canter observed that "the public elementary and high schools, and colleges, generally project what they consider to be the proper way of learning which is uniform for all students" (1972). In 50 years, too little has changed. Most schools still function as if all students were the same. Students use the same textbooks and the same materials for learning. They work at the same pace on the same quantity of material. They study the same content and work through the same curriculum on the same schedule. Teachers talk with whole groups of students, delivering the same information at the same time to everyone. And, of course, schools use the same tests for all to measure the success of the learning.

As mentioned earlier, currently not all learning styles are equally valued in schools. Most schools do a more effective job with learners who are reflective, linear, or analytic than those who are active, holistic, personal, or practical. Nevertheless, it is crucial for teachers to be aware of his or her learner's learning style in order to accommodate to his or her students' needs. O'Brien (1989) posited that "like fingerprints and voices," each person's learning style varies. It determines how students approach a task and remember information. Traditionally, schools have taught students in a left-brained way. For example, only in the past 15 years have educators come to understand that the left side of the brain is primarily responsible for verbal behaviour, analysis, and logic. O'Brien postulated that since 75% to 80% of curriculum is oriented towards left-hemisphere processing, the right hemisphere strengths remain undervalued and underutilized. O'Brien explained that the left and right hemisphere of the brain have many different functions. We all use our whole brain, yet many students seem to show a preference for using one side. This situation can be a cause for concern due to a growing number of individuals who seem to learn best via their right hemisphere.

O'Brien concluded that perhaps it is time for us to take a closer look at how we are educating our students.

Bearing this in mind, teachers who understand learning differences will strive for intentional variety in instruction, curriculum, classroom management, and assessment. Seldom is there only one way to learn. While the schooling process can help to strengthen other avenues, students' individual styles remain dominant for the most efficient learning, and the most effective teachers will cater these individual learning styles. It is this understanding that should encourage us to value students' differences. Teachers who comprehend these concepts consciously attempt to respond to the diversity they regularly encounter in schools. Consequently, educators should be able to recognize that each student has a dominant style consisting of a particular combination of analytic or global, and auditory, visual, tactile or kinesthetic component. It is because of these differences in style that the classroom lecture, appropriate on occasions, should be rare. Most secondary classrooms rely on the traditional lecture-based format for instruction. Even when supplemented with visual slides, this format is primarily a passive form of education. As such, this format often "suffers from student engagement, frequent student inattention, and the exclusion of nonverbal learning modalities" (Bonwell, 1996).

Kinesthetic learning activities serve to offset these shortcomings. A kinesthetic learning activity (KLA) is a pedagogical tool involving physical movement by students. They can be used in the middle of a long lecture to re-energize that class by creating a new perspective from which to consider the topic. Pedagogical research indicates that kinesthetic learning is a "fundamental, powerful, and ubiquitous learning style" (Sivilotti and Pike, 2007). Hence, teachers must become aware of students' views towards kinesthetic learning activities so as to provide a classroom environment which is hoped to meet the demands of learners in a given teaching situation.

1.3 Statement of the problem

This study investigates upper secondary students' perceptions towards kinesthetic learning activities conducted in an English classroom. It also attempts to gain insight on kinesthetic learning activities that are beneficial to secondary students. In addition to this, the study also seeks to find out the challenges that the students face while participating in kinesthetic learning activities.

1.4 Purpose of the study

The main purpose of the study is to apprehend upper secondary students' perceptions towards kinesthetic learning activities regardless of their dominant learning styles while discussing useful kinesthetic activities along side with its benefits and also the challenges in incorporating these kinesthetic activities in an English classroom.

1.5 Research objectives

The objectives of this study are:

- i. to gain insights into upper secondary students' perceptions towards kinesthetic learning activities in an English classroom,
- ii. to investigate beneficial kinesthetic learning activities to upper secondary students and
- iii. to investigate the challenges that the students face in participating in kinesthetic learning activities.

1.6 Research questions

The main questions that this research will attempt to answer are:

- 1.6.1 What are students' perceptions of kinesthetic learning activities conducted in an English classroom?
- 1.6.2 What kinds of kinesthetic learning activities are beneficial to upper secondary students?
- 1.6.3 What are the challenges that the students face while taking part in kinesthetic learning activities?

1.7 Significance of the study

First of all, this study is significant because it explores students' perceptions towards kinesthetic learning activities and determines whether or not they reveal important insights that are supported by the existing research. Since traditional lectures appeal primarily to a single learning style, research in pedagogy indicates that multiple modalities are more effective, so incorporating kinesthetic learning activities will broaden the scope for students to achieve positive learning outcomes. It is also claimed that kinesthetic learning activities employ underutilized learning styles. Kinesthetic activities tap into what Piaget termed "sensorimotor learning," in which physical participation transfers into mental symbols representing that experience (Hergenhahn and Olson, 1997). Kinesthetic learning activities can also engage other important learning styles, such as Felder and Silverman's active, sensing, intuitive, visual, or global learners (Felder and Silverman, 1988). These benefits are said to raise the level of students' engagement during the learning periods instead of having to endure long series of lectures.

Hence, this research needs to be carried out to investigate whether or not kinesthetic learning activities have a positive impact in the upper secondary level

English classroom as the findings from this study may offer valuable insight into engaging learners in learning English as a second language. Knowing our students' preference learning mode will help teachers develop appropriate learning approaches and explore opportunities so that they will be able to make educational experience more productive. This is highlighted by Loper (1989) who implied that if a teacher instructs and evaluates in only one cognitive mode, he or she is adequately serving only those students who prefer to learn in that mode. To give every learner the opportunity to succeed, teachers can expand their repertoires to include a variety of cognitive modes.

Last but not least, it is also hoped that this study will help teachers to adopt approaches that will aid to orchestrate active student-centered activities in our teaching and learning process that has been one of our goals since the key characteristic of kinesthetic learning activities is that “students are actively, physically engaged in the exposition and assimilation of classroom material” (Sivilotti and Pike, 2007).

In the next chapter, a review of existing literature on learning styles, cognitive styles, and multiple intelligences is provided in order to portray that differences do exist in the way people learn. Examples of kinesthetic activities that were carried out previously by educators and researchers who have had success with transforming their classrooms into places where students' needs were met is also explained.