

PERCEPTUALS LEARNING STYLES PREFERENCES OF INTERNATIONAL MASTER'S STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

It has been a consensus that learning styles have been a predominant factor of success in master's degree program. Since the preferences of learning styles are affected by students' cultural background, this study was carried out to explore the perceptual learning style preferences of international master's students studying in Malaysian universities. Sixty students consisting of Indonesian, Iranian, and Libyan were involved in the present study. The findings reveal that Indonesian and Libyan students tended to be more kinesthetic/tactile learners while Iranian tended to be more visual learners. This study suggested practitioners use various learning strategies to cater the learning style preferences of the students.

Keywords: *learning styles, master's students, Indonesia, Iran, Libya*

INTRODUCTION

As mobility increases in the academic world, 21st century university lecture events have been characterized not only by linguistic but also cultural diversity and unfamiliarity between lecturers and students (Rido, 2017). In Malaysian universities master's programs, students come from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds,

therefore, these international students have different preferences in the ways they take in and process information. Given that Malaysia has embarked as the center of higher education in Asia, universities and lecturers demand high standard of academic achievement. Master's students are required to attend lectures and accomplish various independent projects, reports, and journals, therefore, it is essential for universities and

lecturers to understand learning styles of students and to make them aware of their learning styles. Students are different based on their ability in learning and how they response the instructional practice. Having knowledge of their learning styles preferences is salient in order to help find the most effective strategies/methods/approaches for successful learning. In addition, the more the students understand their own characteristics, the better the chance of meeting their learning needs (Rido & Fatimah, 2018).

Many studies on exploring learning styles have been conducted the relationship on cultural differences and second language acquisition (Joy and Kolb, 2009; Naserieh & Sarab, 2013), particularly, in the context of language learning (Montemayor, Aplatén, Mendoza, & Perey, 2009; Naserieh, 2009; Obralic and Akbarov, 2012). Some studies have also focused on

learning styles of Asian students in institutions of higher learning (Rhouma, 2016). It has been identified that Asian students prefer a more student-centered style and Korean, Chinese, Thailand and Japanese Students tend to be visual learners (Khmakien, 2012). Furthermore, it was noted that the students may get benefits by learning from online visual platform such as Facebook, Whatsapp and Instagram (Wahyudin, 2018; Mandasari, 2018; Sari & Wahyudin, 2019a; Sari & Wahyudin, 2019b). These studies have led researchers to explore the students' perceptual learning styles that may help practitioners and teachers significantly to design appropriate teaching strategies especially in the 21st century for tertiary education.

Given that Malaysian education institution was open to international communities, the students' characteristics are diverse and need to be taken into account. More studies need to be conducted

in order to explore a direct relationship between learning styles, teaching styles and student performance. Thus, the research question as follows: "What are the perceptuals learning styles preferences of international Master's students from Indonesia, Iran, and Libya in Malaysian universities?"

LITERATURE REVIEWS

Individual Differences in SLA

In second language acquisition (SLA) theory, individual differences have been one of the main aspects that might determine the success of learning (Saville-Troike, Muriel, 2016). Some language learners might progress rapidly while others might progress slowly in learning the second language (L2). It is believed that personal characteristics of the learners differ from each other in terms of biological and conditioned factors. On the educational scope, there are several characteristics such

as motivation, attitude, and anxiety level.

On the other hands, the factors that may affect the success of learning a language are language learning strategies and languagen learning styles. In order to comple a task, students may use one learning style than others since every individual has their own ways of achieving and processing message or information. The preferences of students' learning styles can be a valuable information for some teachers to design an appropriate teaching strategies. Some learning styles preferences can be suitable for face-to-face classroom, while others might be more effective in online environment. Therefore, if students' learning style can be identified, practitioners might get benefits and develop a more effective classroom practice.

Learning Styles

Learning styles are regarded as one of keys of students achieving their academic goals. Styles in general refers

to consistent rather and rather enduring tendencies or preferences within an individual, in addition, it connects to general characteristics of intellectual functioning (and personality type, as well) that pertain to someone as an individual, and that differentiate someone from someone else (Brown, 2010).

Learning style can also mean certain pattern of behaviour and or performance in which the individual approaches a learning experience, a way in which the individual takes in new information and develop new skills (Renou, 2009), and the process by which the individual retain new information or skills; it can also be the preferences of an individual to perceive and process information in particular way or combination of ways. Meanwhile, learning style was mentioned as the ways in which

individual characteristically acquires, retains, retrieves information. Learning style was also defined as cognitive, affective, and psychological traits that are relatively stable indicators of how students perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment. From those several literatures, in this article learning style is defined a pervasive quality in the learning strategies of the learning behaviour of an individual which its instruments development distinguish one kind of learner from another. She then concludes if all students learned in the same manner, learning style inventories would be unnecessary.

Learning styles in this article are divided into some categories: auditory (A), visual (V), and kinesthetic (K)/tactile (T). Students with auditory style do learning best by hearing (Cook, 2009). They need information to be

presented orally, prefer information as individual fact in order to first understand those facts thoroughly and then eventually understand the whole concept, can think abstractly, and are reflective, sequential, analytical, and cognitive by nature.

Whereas, learners with visual style learn best by visual aids in order to make sense of new Information. These visuals can be drawing, charts, diagrams, or outlines. In addition, they very often form mental images as a strategy to cope with learning situations that do not meet their learning styles needs; have characteristics that are random, holistic, global, perceptual, concrete, and imaginative; and prefer to learn about a concept completely before trying to understand its part, and they use their senses throughout the learning process.

In addition, learners with

kinesthetic/tactile style concern learning by doing. They rely on physical interaction during the learning process; need to be active and dynamic participants in order to fully understand something new; are behavioural by nature and need to do something in order to understand the nuances or truly master a concept; are concrete by nature and prefer manipulative. This type of learners are engaged in active learning, they will master the concept and be able to apply the concept to other situations.

METHOD

The respondents of this present study were sixty international master's students, comprising Indonesian, Iranian, and Libyan. A set of questionnaires about perceptual learning style preference (Naserieh & Sarab, 2013; Rhouma, 2016) was

administered to the respondents to see their preferences of learning styles. The questionnaire consists of 5-likert scale in which (5) indicates *strongly agree*, (4) indicates *agree*, (3) indicates *neutral*, (2) indicates *disagree* and (1) indicates *strongly disagree*. While they were filling the questionnaire, they were given the opportunity to ask if they did not understand some parts of the questionnaires. The data from the questionnaires were checked and verified to see the consistency and accuracy of questionnaire items (Perakyla & Ruusuvuori, 2013). The reliability of questionnaire is indicated by the value of Cronbach's Alpha. Member checks were also conducted with the respondents whenever possible. In addition, the data were first analyzed to explore the students' use of learning styles namely (A) *auditory*, (V)

visual, (K) *kinesthetic*, and (T) *tactile*.

The category of learning styles is then analysed based on the preferences of the students and it is coded into P1. Afterwards, each category of learning styles is reported based on the origin of the International masters' students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This section gives comprehensive findings based on the results of questionnaires administered to 60 respondents consisted of Indonesian, Iranian, and Libyan master's students studying in Malaysian universities. The result of reliability test of questionnaire items is seen based on Cronbach's Alpha. It can be seen on the table 1 that the reliability analysis results in the value of .694 for Cronbach's Alpha.

Table 1. Result of Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha based on Standardized item	N of items
.694	.686	24

The value of Cronbach's Alpha suggested that the questionnaire items are reliably medium. Therefore the questionnaire form consisted of 24 items were distributed to 60 master's students. The preference of learning style perceived by the students is categorized based on their origin.

Learning styles of Indonesian students

The preference of learning styles of Indonesian students is dominated by kinesthetic style as major preference (10), and second preference (7). Meanwhile, kinesthetic learning style is regarded by the two students as third preference, and one as the fourth preference.

Table 2. Indonesian Students' Preferences of Learning Styles

No	Learning Style	Frequency			
		P1	P2	P3	P4
1	A	1	4	7	5
2	V	1	3	7	8
3	K	10	7	2	1
4	T	8	6	3	0

Figure 1 suggested that the dominant preference (in percentage) of

the Indonesian students is kinesthetic learning style (50%). 40% respondents

prefer tactile as their major preference of learning style and 5% respondents prefer audio as their major preference of learning style and 5% respondents

prefer visual as their major preference of learning style (kinesthetic learners) (See figure 1).

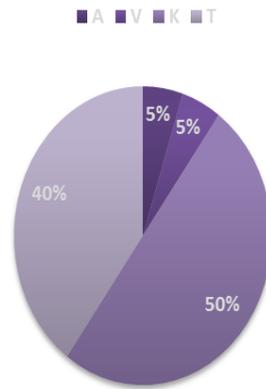


Figure 1. Indonesian Students' Major Preferences of Learning Style

This result indicates that from those four major preferences of learning style, respondents are likely to use more kinesthetic than any other learning styles, followed by tactiles, auditory, and the last one is visual styles.

Learning styles of Iranian students

The most dominant preference of learning style of Iranian students is visual learning styles (8). Then it is followed by audio learning style (7), kinesthetic (3), and tactile learning style (2). Further description of Iranian Students' preferences of learning style can be seen on Table 3.

Table 3. Iranian Students' Preferences of Learning Styles

No	Learning Style	Frequency			
		P1	P2	P3	P4
1	A	7	0	4	9
2	V	8	3	2	7
3	K	3	6	10	1
4	T	2	11	3	0

Table 3 points out that the major preferences of learning style of the Iranian students are audio and visual. Meanwhile there is no student who prefers audio learning style as the second preference while only three students who prefer visual learning style as the second preference. Figure 2 suggested that the dominant

preference (in percentage) of the Iranian students is kinesthetic visual learning style (40%). 30% respondents prefer auditory as their major preference of learning style and 15% respondents prefer kinesthetic as their major preference of learning style and 10% respondents prefer visual as their major preference of learning style.

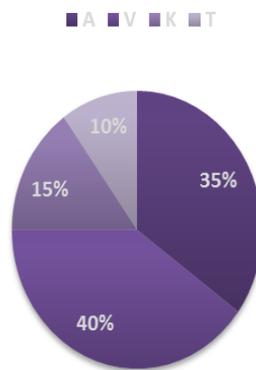


Figure 2. Iranian Students' Major Preferences of Learning Style

This result indicates that from those 4 major preferences of learning styles, Iranian respondents prefer visual and auditory, and followed by tactile and kinesthetic styles.

Learning styles of Libyan students

This table below shows the data from taken from questionnaires administered to 20 Libyan (Arabic) respondents.

Table 4. Libyan Students Preferences of Learning Styles

No	Learning Style	Frequency			
		P1	P2	P3	P4
1	A	3	6	4	2
2	V	3	4	10	1
3	K	6	6	0	1
4	T	8	4	3	1

Similar to Indonesian and Iranian students major preferences of learning styles data, table 4 shows the major preference of learning style (P1) of the

Libyan students are tactile (8), kinesthetic (6), auditory (3), and visual (3).

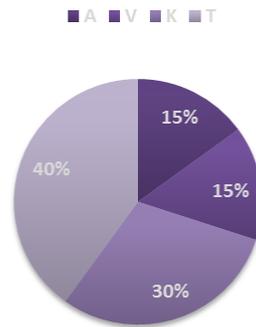


Figure 3. Libyan Students' Major Preferences of Learning Style

Moreover, the dominance preference (in percentage) of the

Libyan (Arabic) students on their major learning styles based on the figure

above are calculated based on $n=20$ (the number of respondents prefer certain learning style). It is clearly stated that 40% respondents prefer tactile learning style. 30% of students prefer kinesthetic as their major preference of learning style. Finally, 15% of the students prefer auditory and visual learning style. This result indicates that from those 4 major preferences of learning styles, Libyan respondents prefer both kinesthetic and tactile, and followed by auditory and visual styles.

Discussion

Master's students in Malaysia appear to have different learning styles preferences. Based on the results of the major learning style preference, it can be seen that Indonesian and Libyan students tended to be kinesthetic and tactile while Iranian students tended to be visual and auditory learners. It can

be said that Indonesian and Libyan students learn by doing something such as simulating how to produce an oral presentation, reciting drama script, and writing multidraft paper. It is evident that the Malaysian teachers tend to teach by project that make the students by doing multiple tasks. The result of this study is somehow in line with Naserieh & Sarab (2013) who conducted a research with respect to the learning style preferences of graduate students. The overall results of the research indicated that ESL learners strongly preferred kinesthetic and tactile learning styles when compared to audio and visual.

Empirically, the Iranian students prefer visual and auditory learning style. They may have benefits from the teachers' explanation on the whiteboard as well as their presentation slide. The Iranian students also tend to have a note and make a summary of lesson by

incorporating symbols, shapes, and highlighting color. These make the Iranian students remember and understands the instructions given by the teachers. In some extent, the Iranian students also benefit from listening from video tape, class discussion, and lecture taken from Youtube or other siurces. This evident is somehow inline with the study conducted by Khmakhien (2012) who suggested that Thai learners who prefer auditory learning styles get benefits from listening to native speakers, audiotapes and lectures.

However, since learning styles have a wide range of dimensions and a lot of variables influence them, there might have several points need to taken into considerations. The first point is that learning styles are complex in nature and it might be difficult to analyze the overall learning profile of a

learner. Another consideration is that learners might tend to use different learning styles in various learning contexts. The third point is that the instruments used to analyze the perceptual learning style preferences might not be reliable to another context.

Finally, the present study bear some notable limitations. It is noted that the study is not concerned with some variables such as gender, age, and culture in order to explore the complete profile of the students' learning styles. The result of this study is also not transferrable to another context. It seems that the perceptuals learning style preference of Malaysian master's students are not universals, but context bound.

CONCLUSION

The present study highlights the students perceptual learning style

preferences at graduate level. The results of this study delineates that Indonesian and Libyan students are more kinesthetic while Iranian students are more visual and auditory. Given that the students have various preferences of learning style, universities and lecturers are encouraged to be creative in designing the teaching learning strategy to serve the students' needs. In other words, combining various methods/approaches/activities is obliged in order to achieve learning objectives. The findings of this present study could also possibly impact on the development teaching/learning methods and approaches in order to cope with cross-cultural class. Therefore, the writers suggest practitioners and teachers to (1) apply experimental works to the students; (2) ask the students to note and write important

ideas as well as drawing diagrams, charts, time lines; (3) involve the students a project that require problem-solving skill; and (4) stimulate the students to be creative by making reinterpreting teachers' explanation by their own words.

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