

Investigating the Preferred Learning Styles in English Language Courses among Undergraduates in Universiti Malaysia Kelantan

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Abstract

Generally, individuals have different ways and particular preferences when processing new information in learning. It is also believed that their language learning styles are one of the main indicators that contribute to their academic performance. This study aims to identify Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK) learner's learning styles in English language courses. The selected respondents for this study were three hundred and twenty-nine (329) undergraduates at UMK who were taking the English language courses I, II and III. A ninety (90) items of self-administered questionnaire was adapted from established questionnaire on Multiple Intelligences Theory (MIT) whilst, another fifty-five (55) items were on undergraduates' learning styles. The total items in this study were one hundred and forty-five (145). The findings showed that the majority of the respondents prefer Musical Intelligence the most and the Naturalist Intelligence the least. The implication of this study is on the challenges faced by the lecturers in identifying the possible language teaching methods that could accommodate and work for all the learners since there are learners with different MI within one classroom.

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Keywords: Academic performance; English as a Second Language; Learning styles; Multiple Intelligences

INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, English is officially the second language and is taught as the second language among primary and secondary schools. In 2016, in conjunction with the implementation of the second wave of the National Education Development Plan, the English language was proposed as a compulsory passing subject in Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM). SPM is equivalent to the O Levels in which, in Malaysia, the students will sit for SPM at the end of their secondary level. It is believed that it will be an advantage in assisting students to elevate their English language proficiency through this education policy. In addition, the newly appointed Minister of Education, Dr. Maszlee Malik also stressed on the importance of English in our education system as well as "the needs to master multiple languages including English language" (Ibrahim, 2018). This need is in line with Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad's inspiration as English is the language of knowledge (Abu Bakar, 2018). As English is a global language therefore, by mastering the English language as the second language, it could enhance our strength as we are able to converse in our first and second languages fluently.

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In line with this issue, despite its importance, the percentage of students who failed the English language in their public examination is a dire fact, as it was reported that 23.2 percent the SPM candidates failed their English language papers in 2011, followed by 22.9 percent in 2012, 20 percent in 2013 and 22.7 percent in 2014 (Sani, 2015). It was also reported that this failure rate was particularly acute in the states of Sabah, Kelantan, Terengganu and Kedah (Sani, 2015). Another example was the percentage of failures in this language in public examination in Sarawak increased from 19.4 percent in 2013 to 23.16 percent in 2014 (Pilo, 2015). Overall, the percentage of SPM candidates who have passed the English paper slightly decreased from 77.3 percent in 2014 to 76.3 percent in 2015 (The Star, 2016) and based on the above reports, the English language performances among the SPM candidates portrayed their English language incompetency as well as poor grasps of the language.

Besides that, at tertiary level, the students' poor command of the English language could be demonstrated through their Malaysian University English Test (MUET) results. The MUET results in 2017 are presented in the table below:

Table 1. MUET results in 2017

Band	November 2017	July 2017	March 2017
6	0.01	0.02	0.04
5	4.22	3.48	5.59
4	28.94	23.83	29.12
3	40.24	42.59	44.65
2	23.74	26.99	18.88
1	2.85	3.09	1.72

(Source: Majlis Peperiksaan Malaysia, 2018)

As shown in Table 1, by referring to Majlis Peperiksaan Malaysia (MPM) (2018) results, it shows that the majority of the undergraduates scored Band 3 and below which placed them as “Modest User” (Band 3), “Limited user” (Band 2) and “Very limited user” (Band 1) of English. Based on their MUET performances, it indicated their English language incompetency level. In relation to this issue, their poor command of the English language leads them to disadvantage situation as it is a main hindrance in penetrating the local and global job markets. In fact, it was reported that 48 percent of companies or employees have rejected fresh graduates due to their poor command of the English language (Sani, 2015).

Since this educational issue is interrelated to each other, therefore, understanding students' learning styles in English language courses is considered as an important issue because it affects their future prospects. This is because the undergraduates, must focus not only on their major courses, but they also should emphasise on other additional and generic courses. For example, in the case of Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK), the institution stresses on entrepreneurship and enterprise education, and therefore, it is compulsory for undergraduates to learn additional entrepreneurship courses regardless of their faculties or programmes. On top of that, the textbooks for the entrepreneurship courses are in English. Thus, if the undergraduates are able to determine their preferred learning styles, it is most likely that they would be able to cope with their major academic courses as well as their English language courses.

In relation to this, it is important that the undergraduates are able to identify their preferred learning styles in improving their study technique, academic readiness and learning styles which could be indicators to determine their academic performances. Overall, in this study the researcher is intended to identify the preferred learning styles in English language courses among the undergraduates at UMK. Besides that, the researcher is also interested in identifying the most and least preferred learning styles among these undergraduates.

Basically the research questions are:

- 1) What are UMK undergraduates' learning styles in English language courses based on their streams; Science, Social Science and Arts?
- 2) What are the most and least preferred learning styles among UMK undergraduates?

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Multiple Intelligences Theory

The Multiple Intelligences Theory (MIT) by Gardner (1983) is a learning theory which posits that there are seven (7) multiple intelligence profiles that could be applied in understanding an individual diverse intelligences (David, 2014). In this theory, there are seven (7) Multiple Intelligences (MI) Dimension namely verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, musical-rhythmic, interpersonal and intrapersonal. Then, he added another two (2) multiple intelligences which are naturalist and existential. Over the last two (2) decades, this theory has been widely used in education as it could be applied to classify the students' preferred learning styles in English language.

In this study, the undergraduates at UMK might utilise these Multiple Intelligences (MI) Dimension in learning English language courses in order to cater their different learning majors and needs. Thus, by fully understanding their preferred learning styles in learning English language courses, it could assist them to identify their strengths and weaknesses, and learn their second language effectively. The elements of MIT are presented in Figure 1.

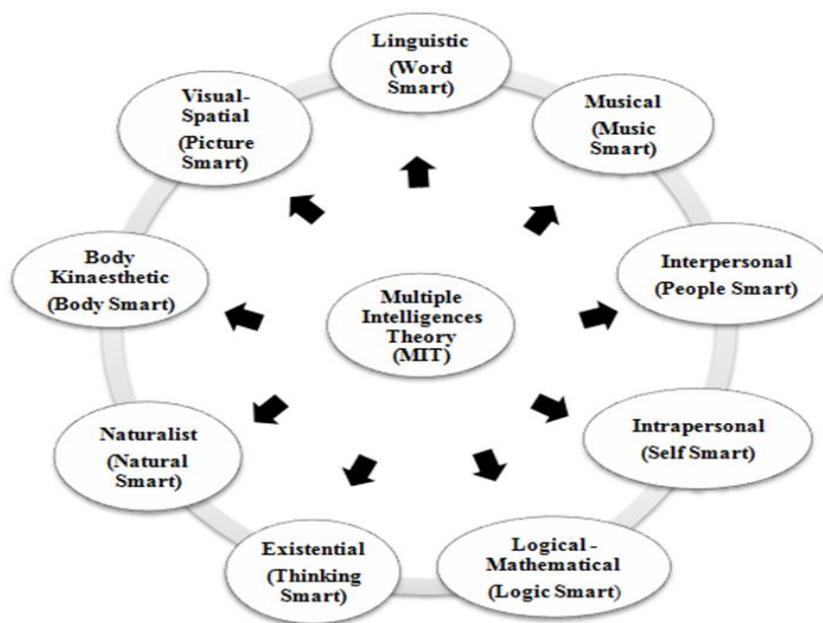


Figure 1. The Multiple Intelligences Theory (Gardner, 1983)

2.2 Related Past Studies on Multiple Intelligences Theory and English Language

The real scenario in Malaysian education system needs to be understood as the students are expected to be able to communicate in English language once they complete their primary and secondary schools, as English language is taught as the second language and is a mandatory subject at both levels. As a consequence, students at tertiary level are expected to become competence communicators or highly proficient in English language due to the earlier exposure in English language education. Unfortunately,

some students at this level might feel that their English language communication skills are not sufficient to reach the tertiary level of education and to tackle the particular academics areas. At this stage, they might experiment a wide range of learning styles in order to find the most applicable approaches in learning English language.

In relation to this, Yeow, Tan, Loh and Blitz (2010) conducted a study among the medical students in Malaysia and it revealed that, visual learners performed lower in the clinical assessments like Conjoint Surgical or Medical long case compared to a balanced visual-verbal learning styles. In fact, the visual learners also rated themselves poorer in English compared to visual-verbal learners who rated themselves good in English.

Next, the study on students' academic majors was also conducted by Wei, Hoo and See (2011) in which the questionnaire was distributed to Finance, Computer Science and English language respondents for data collection. The results showed that Finance students preferred diverging learning style (visualisation), Computer Science students preferred converging learning style (experiment, laboratory assignments and practical applications) and English language students preferred accommodating learning styles (hands-on experience). In this study, the converging learning style students scored higher compared to diverging learning style. The above finding was also similar to Rao and Liu's (2011) study as it revealed that, Science stream students' preferred logical approach while, Social Science stream students' favoured hands-on and practical learning styles. Therefore, these significant findings shown that the students have their own preferred learning styles based on their majors and disciplines.

Besides that, Luu's (2011) reported that, students who majored in Social Science preferred kinaesthetic, tactile and visual learning styles compared to the Science stream students. On the one hand, the management students such as Accounting, Banking and Finance majors selected the kineastatic learning style (hands-on or experimenting activities) as their major preference in learning English as their Foreign Language (EFL). The respondents in this study were one hundred and seventy-two (172) and the data was collected through Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (1987). The above finding was also supported by Maxilom (2016) as in her study among the Science in Business Administration students, it revealed that the students preferred to learn English 2 classes through intrapersonal intelligence, bodily-kineastatic intelligence as well as naturalists intelligence and interpersonal intelligence as they have the similar weighted mean.

Furthermore, Muniandy and Shuib (2016) conducted a study among the Management and Communication students who were taking English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) and the data were analysed based on Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (PLSPQ) (1987) and Strategy Inventory Language Learning (SILL) (1990). Based on this study, most Management and Communication students preferred kineastatic and auditory learning styles in learning English as their Second Language (ESL). Besides that, the Arts stream students learn best through interaction, class discussion and role play. This finding was also similar to Awang, Abdul Samad, Mohammad Faiz, Roddin and Kankia's (2017) study among the Polytechnic students in Malaysia as they indicated that, the highest learning style among them was kineastatic.

In addition, there were also a number of studies on the preferred learning styles among the students that were based on the Multiple Intelligences Theory (MIT) by Gardner (1983). For example, Zabigit's (2013) study revealed that, the students enjoyed writing down their favourite songs (Linguistic Intelligence) and sharing their favourite poem (Musical Intelligence). In this study, these activities met the educational goals because they participated effectively in the classroom learning activities. In fact, they enjoyed learning English as their Foreign Language (EFL) through these Multiple Intelligences (MI) Dimension. The respondents were University of Mediterranean Karpasia students who were learning English as their Foreign Language (EFL). Hence, Zabigit's research indicated that the English educators could plan Musical Intelligence (MI) in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) because they would enjoy learning it, through this learning approach.

The benefit of Musical Intelligence (MI) in learning English as their Foreign Language (EFL) was also supported by Shabani and Torkeh (2014). Their study, elucidated that there was a statistically significant correlation between Musical Intelligence (MI) and learning a foreign language. Apart from that, based on their study, it revealed that Musical Intelligence (MI) could increase the learners' learning motivation and

abilities, help them to concentrate and improve their writing, reading and speaking skills. In fact, they enjoyed learning their foreign language through this Musical Intelligence (MI). This study was conducted among Kish Mehr Institution students (non-native speakers) and the data were collected through English Language Proficiency Test (ELPT) (2005) and a Musical Intelligence Questionnaire by Gardner (1983). Thus, these significant findings could be applied by the English educators in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) as well as among the students who are learning English language.

Based on the prior studies, it shows that, students are different and hence, they have the diverse learning styles in catering their study needs and majors. In Malaysia, the investigation on the interrelationship between Multiple Intelligences Theory (MIT) and English language proficiency need to be studied extensively. In this study, it looks at the connection between the learners' preferred learning styles in English language courses and their academic majors. In relation to this research gap, therefore, the study needs to be conducted on this area in order to investigate how the learners' majors affect their preferred learning styles in English language courses.

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The survey research was applied in this study. Survey research can be denoted as “the collection of information from a sample of individuals through their responses to questions” (Check and Schutt 2012, p. 160). Therefore, in this study, self-administered questionnaire was used in identifying the preferred learning styles in English language courses among the undergraduates at UMK.

3.2 Research Respondents

It is compulsory for all public universities in Malaysia to teach English courses to their undergraduates and likewise, UMK also offers specific English courses to their students. The undergraduates at UMK are required to take English courses based on their MUET achievement. For example, undergraduates who scored Band 1 and Band 2 have to take English I, II and III, and those who scored Band 3 and above only need to enrol in English II and English III. In this study, the samples of respondents were the undergraduates at UMK who enrolled in English I, English II and English III courses. The aims of these courses are to improve the undergraduates' proficiency and design for them to prepare for outside world upon graduation as well as up-skilling their English language proficiency.

The respondents of this study were from the three (3) campuses of UMK namely the Jeli campus, Kota campus and Bachok campus. Three hundred and twenty-nine (329) respondents were selected based on voluntary basis across three (3) campuses regardless of their MUET scores as this was in line with the main purpose of this study that is to identify their preferred learning styles. It is important to note that the faculties in Jeli campus are Science based, the faculties in Kota campus are Social Science based and the ones in Bachok campus are Arts based, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of faculties at UMK and the numbers of respondents from each campus

Jeli Campus (Science based), N=120	Kota Campus (Social Science based), N=103	Bachok Campus (Arts based), N=106
Faculty of Agro-Based Industry Faculty of Earth Sciences Faculty of Bioengineering and Technology	Faculty of Hospitality, Tourism and Wellness Faculty of Entrepreneurship and Business	Faculty of Creative Technology and Heritage Faculty of Architecture and Ekistics

They were given about 15 to 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire which was administered in class, along with the presence of their lecturers and the researcher. Prior to the distribution of the questionnaire, the respondents were informed of their rights to withdraw at any time from this research if they wish to do so.

3.3 Research Instruments

In this study, the Multiple Intelligences Theory (MIT) questionnaire was used to collect the data from the respective respondents and it comprised three (3) parts. Part A, collected the respondents' demographic information. Part B, collected data on respondents' preferred learning styles. The items in Part B, was adapted from Tirri and Nokelainen (2011) and it consisted of ninety (90) items operationalised from Gardner's Theory. The respondents used a 5-point Likert scale to assess their strengths for each of the nine (9) intelligence dimensions (Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neutral (N), Disagree (DA) and Strongly Disagree (SD)). Part C, gathered information on the respondents' learning styles information. This part, consisted of fifty-five (55) items on undergraduates' learning styles which were adapted from Giles, Pitres and Womack (2016) and Zainudin (2012). In Part C, the respondents could choose which Multiple Intelligences (MI) Dimension to represent their learning styles in English language courses. The respondents' answers in Part C were used to triangulate their answers in Part B.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As stated earlier, the purpose of this study was to identify UMK undergraduates' learning styles in English language courses based on their streams; Science, Social Science and Arts. Table 3 depicts the details of the analysis.

Table 3. Preferred Learning Styles in English Language Courses among Science Stream Students at UMK, Jeli

MIT	Mean	Std. Deviation
CMI	2.89	.60
CMLI	2.72	.42
CVSI	2.75	.44
CBKI	2.72	.45
CVLI	2.60	.41
CINTERI	2.46	.46
CINTRAI	2.37	.43
CEI	2.21	.43
CNI	2.15	.44

Table 3, shows that students at Jeli campus ranked themselves higher in Musical Intelligence (MI), Visual / Spatial Intelligence (VSI) and Bodily-Kinaesthetic Intelligence (BKI). This finding differs from the findings of the study by Wei, Hoo and See (2011), which found that Science stream major preferred converging learning style because they were interested in experimenting with new ideas by using practical theories, problems solving and mathematical-logical. On the other hand, this finding is supported by Roa and Liu (2011); they found that Science stream students favoured to apply logical analysis. Besides that, Yeow, Tan, Loh and Blitz (2010) elucidated that the visual learners less performed in the clinical assessments and in English language compared to a balanced visual-verbal learning style learners. In fact, based on the study by Luu (2011), it illustrated that, only students who major in Social Science preferred kinaesthetic, tactile and visual learning styles than the Science stream students. Nevertheless, the UMK

English instructors at Jeli need to insert the undergraduates preferred learning styles in teaching their English language courses.

Table 4. Preferred Learning Styles in English Language Courses among Social Science Stream Students at UMK, Kota

MIT	Mean	Std. Deviation
CMI	2.94	.57
CMLI	2.76	.38
CVSI	2.80	.42
CBKI	2.76	.47
CVLI	2.64	.38
CINTERI	2.49	.46
CINTRAI	2.46	.39
CEI	2.28	.40
CNI	2.26	.39

As shown in Table 4, by referring to its mean values, the undergraduates at UMK, Kota campus reflected themselves as Musical Intelligence (MI), Visual / Spatial Intelligence (VSI) and Bodily-Kinaesthetic Intelligence (BKI) learners. In addition, this result is also supported by Wei, Hoo and See (2011), who revealed that, students who major in Finance, preferred diverging learning style because they learn best through visualisation. On the one hand, this finding is also supported by Maxilom’s (2016) whose study, shown that the students preferred to learn English 2 classes through intrapersonal intelligence, bodily-kineastatic intelligence as well as naturalists intelligence and interpersonal intelligence. Meanwhile, according to the study by Awang, Abdul Samad, Mohammad Faiz, Roddin and Kankia (2017), they indicated that the highest learning style among the students was kineastatic. Apart from that, Muniandy and Shuib (2016), found that, most Management and Communication students preferred kineastatic and auditory learning styles in learning English as their Second Language (ESL). Captivatingly, this result is also aligned with Luu’s (2011) study, as management students such as Accounting and Finance majors selected the kineastatic learning style (hands-on or experimenting activities) as their major preference in learning English as their Foreign Language (EFL). However, the English educators at UMK, Kota campus still need to deliberate the undergraduates preferred learning styles because it could be a yardstick to learn English language effectively as it is a global language in business line and to be connected with the other business players.

Table 5. Preferred Learning Styles in English Language Courses among Arts Stream students at UMK, Bachok

MIT	Mean	Std. Deviation
CMI	2.89	.60
CMLI	2.72	.42
CVSI	2.75	.44
CBKI	2.72	.45
CVLI	2.60	.41
CINTERI	2.46	.46
CINTRAI	2.37	.43
CEI	2.21	.43
CNI	2.15	.44

As shown in Table 5, by referring to its mean values, the undergraduates at UMK, Bachok preferred Musical Intelligence (MI), Mathematical / Logical Intelligence (MLI) and Bodily-Kinaesthetic Intelligence (BKI) in learning their English language courses. This finding is different from those of Rao and Liu (2011), as Social Science or Arts students preferred to learn English as their Foreign Language (EFL) through visual / spatial learning style whereas, the Science stream students preferred to utilise Mathematical / Logical Intelligence. In this study, the finding is contrary to the previous scholars as the Arts and Architecture students preferred to learn English language via Mathematical / Logical Intelligence (MLI). They choose Mathematical / Logical Intelligence (MLI) as this pedagogical tool may assist them to perform well in their second language as well as it could enhance their English language up-skilling. Apart from that, they choose Bodily-Kinaesthetic Intelligence (BKI) as it focuses on hands-on or practical learning styles in which it fits the expectation of the respondents' major courses who are Arts and Architecture students. It would be great if the language lecturers are aware of this situation as it could be a main driven for students to learn their English language courses through this pedagogical mechanism. In fact, this finding is also in line with Luu's (2011) research finding, as the Social Science or Arts students' preferred hands-on and practical approaches in learning English as their Foreign Language (EFL) and likewise Muniandy and Shuib (2016) also mentioned that, the Arts stream students learn best through interaction, class discussion and role play. Besides, Zabitgit's (2013) study also showed that students would enjoy bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence once they are being exposed and be aware of this intelligence, even if they have never heard about it before.

Next, this study also intended to identify the most and least preferred learning styles among the undergraduates across the different streams; Science (Jeli campus), Social Science (Kota campus) and Arts (Bachok campus), and the ranking is as follows:

Table 6. Ranking of the most and least preferred learning styles

Campuses	Learning Styles according to Multiple Intelligences Theory (MIT)								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Jeli	MI	VSI	BKI	MLI	VLI	INTERI	INTRAI	EI	NI
Kota	MI	VSI	BKI	MLI	VLI	INTERI	INTRAI	EI	NI
Bachok	MI	MLI	BKI	VSI	VLI	INTERI	INTRAI	EI	NI

As shown in Table 6, the most preferred approach in learning English language courses among undergraduates at UMK regardless their campuses and disciplines is the Musical Intelligence (MI) whilst, the least preferred mode is Naturalist Intelligence (NI). This finding is also similar to Shabani and Torkeh's (2014) research result that, Musical Intelligence (MI) has a wide range of benefits in learning English as their Foreign Language (EFL) because it could increase the learners' learning motivation and learning abilities and help them to concentrate as well as improve their writing, reading and speaking skills. On top of that, they enjoyed learning the foreign language through this Musical Intelligence (MI). In other words, Musical Intelligence (MI) has a wide range of benefits in learning English as their Foreign Language (EFL). This study on the other hand, exhibited that even Science stream students did not really favour learning English language courses via Naturalist Intelligence (NI) for examples plants, animals or any others that related to natural environment.

It is clearly shown in this study that the undergraduates at UMK have diverse of learning styles. Therefore, the UMK English instructors need to plan their teaching styles as it could serve as the motivational tool for the students to learn the English language in the most applicable approach.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, MIT acts as a stimulus in understanding the learners' learning styles in order to help the learners themselves improve their English language proficiency. Since there are learners with different MI, such situation also challenges the instructors to find the possible language teaching methods that could accommodate and work for all the learners. The constructive aspect of learning styles is that though the learners may have preference for one style, they could be exposed to a secondary style that could compliment the previous one. Besides that, as stated earlier, there are also methods that are associated with the different MI such as playing music and singing are related to Musical Intelligence, solving problems and cross-word puzzles could be related to Mathematical / Logical Intelligence as well as working in groups and group presentation are related to Interpersonal Intelligence. Hence, learners will always have the opportunity to explore other learning styles that could help to facilitate them in the English language learning.

This study concludes that in general, the majority of the undergraduates consider themselves as Musical Intelligence learners and this is mostly suitable for those who enrol in the Arts based faculties and programmes. Thus, it is a bit intriguing to discover that the undergraduates in both Science and Social Science based faculties and programmes also prefer Musical Intelligence MI but taking into consideration that English language could also be learnt through songs and rhymes, they stated that such learning activities are interesting and enjoyable. Therefore, it is recommended that the lecturers include a number of musical based activities that could motivate and facilitate their English language learning.

In addition, this study only identify individual' learning styles through the survey method. As a class may consist of learners with various MI and learning styles, it will be interesting and informative to find out the collective opinions of learners who share similar learning styles and how they perceive these styles in relation to their language proficiency.

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