LEARNING STYLE PREFERENCES IN THE COMPREHENSION OF LITERARY TEXTS

By

ABDUL GHANI HAJI ABU

Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

July 2006
Dedication

... to n, f, m & a ...
Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

LEARNING STYLE PREFERENCES IN THE COMPREHENSION OF LITERARY TEXTS

By

ABDUL GHANI HAJI ABU

July 2006

Chairman: Associate Professor Hj. Rosli Talif, PhD

Faculty: Modern Languages and Communication

The objective of the study was to identify learning styles preferred by learners in a higher learning institution in comprehending literary texts - short stories - in English. It also examined the relationship between several learner factors such as learners’ attitude and motivation in reading short stories and learners’ learning styles preferences. In addition, this study also examined the effects of specially designed reading lessons (based on Kolb’s learning model) on the learners’ ability to comprehend literary texts.

The focus of this study was on the improved reading performance demonstrated by a higher score in short stories reading comprehension quizzes. For the purpose of this study, a selection of short stories for upper secondary level selected by a special committee set up by the Ministry of Education, which were suitable for young adults, had been chosen. The decision to use short stories used by the
upper secondary students was deemed appropriate and acceptable since the subjects in the study were in the 16 to 24 years old age group, who share certain similarities as young adults. The short stories used in the study were “Looking for a Rain God” by Bessie Head and “The Drover’s Wife” by Henry Lawson. “The Necklace” by Guy de Maupassant was used as the pre- and post-test reading instruments.

The study employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches to research. This study had two phases of investigations. The first phase involved a survey with questionnaires. The second phase involved conducting a quasi-experiment and interview. After the quasi-experiment had been carried out, there were interviews with selected subjects chosen at random to provide additional information of their experience. The subjects for the survey questionnaires were chosen from students, who were majoring in English literature offered by the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia. The subjects were not selected randomly as all of them were already in their predetermined classes. These students were categorised as convenience and purposive sampling.

The results of the experiment indicated that the performance of the students who were inclined towards divergent/convergent learning styles in the experimental group was much better in the comprehension quizzes than the students who preferred assimilative/accommodative learning styles. However, the findings of
the study can be applied only to a similar population and setting. The study has to be replicated with a bigger sample population and the experiment has to be carried out with other genres of literature before the findings can be truly generalised to the general population.
Abstrak tesis yang dikesukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

KECENDERUNGAN GAYA BELAJAR DI DALAM PEMAHAMAN TEKS SASTERA

Oleh

ABDUL GHANI HAJI ABU

Julai 2006

Pengerusi: Profesor Madya Hj. Rosli Talif, PhD
Fakulti: Bahasa Moden dan Komunikasi

Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk mengenal pasti gaya pembelajaran yang diminati oleh mahasiswa di pusat pengajian tinggi dalam memahami teks kesusteraan - cerpen - Bahasa Inggeris. Kajian ini juga mengkaji hubung kait antara beberapa faktor pelajar seperti sikap dan motivasi pelajar ketika membaca cerpen dan gaya pembelajaran yang diminati pelajar. Di samping itu, kajian ini juga mengkaji kesan rancangan pengajaran membaca yang dibina khusus (berdasarkan model pembelajaran Kolb) untuk menilai keupayaan mereka memahami cerpen.

Tumpuan kajian ini untuk melihat perubahan terhadap keupayaan membaca melalui peningkatan markah yang lebih tinggi di dalam ujian-ujian pemahaman cerpen. Beberapa cerpen pilihan pengkaji yang sesuai untuk kajian ini adalah merupakan cerpen-cerpen yang telah dipilih oleh jawatankuasa khas Kementerian Pelajaran. Keputusan untuk menggunakan cerpen-cerpen yang diguna pakai oleh pelajar Sekolah Menengah adalah bersesuaian dan wajar kerana subjek kajian terdiri daripada golongan yang berumur di antara 16 dan 24 tahun yang berkongsi


Keputusan eksperimen menunjukkan bahawa prestasi mahasiswa yang meminati gaya pembelajaran divergent/convergent adalah lebih baik dari mahasiswa di dalam kumpulan yang meminati gaya pembelajaran assimilative/accommodative. Bagaimanapun, dapatan kajian ini hanya boleh diaplikasikan kepada populasi yang mempunyai latar belakang yang sama. Kajian ini perlu dijalankan pada
skala yang lebih besar dan menggunakan pelbagai genre sebelum boleh diguna
pakai secara menyeluruh.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It would not be possible for me to go through the whole process if not for these individuals who have helped me directly or indirectly, spiritually or through their moral support:

- my family: Nor, Along, Angah and Adik for their understanding and love;
- my three respected supervisors: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hj. Rosli Talif, Dean of the FBMK; Assoc. Prof. Dr. Shameem Rafik-Galea, Head, Department of Foreign Languages and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mohd Faiz Abdullah, Head of English Department – for their time and expertise;
- members in my discussion group: Yunus, Hair, Asmayati, and special thanks to Dr. Rosma and Dr. Hajar for their dedication in organizing discussion sessions;
- my friends and colleagues, members of the staff at UPSI especially at The Department of English Language including: Halim, Azman, Azhar, Norhaniza, Fairus, the P.A discussion group - Zain, Intan, Mazura and Raha, who have continuously given their encouragement;
- academic and non-academic members of the staff at The Faculty of the Modern Languages and Communication at UPM especially Aziz, Rafil, and Zack for their encouragement, and special thanks to Rohimmi and Latif for their continuous moral and material supports and Ain for her special ‘motivational’ sessions;
- and other individuals who have given their assistance including Aziz at Maktab Perguruan Perlis, Adnan at JPN, Ipoh; and Dr. Mohamed at CDC
I certify that an Examination Committee has met on 11th July 2006 to conduct the final examination of Abdul Ghani Haji Abu on his Doctor of Philosophy thesis entitled “Learning Style Preferences in the Comprehension of Literary Texts” in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulations 1981. The Committee recommends that the candidate be awarded the relevant degree. Members of the Examination Committee are as follows:

**Wong Bee Eng, PhD**  
Associate Professor  
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication  
Universiti Putra Malaysia  
(Chairman)

**Wan Roselezam Wan Yahya, PhD**  
Senior Lecturer  
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication  
Universiti Putra Malaysia  
(Internal Examiner)

**Washima Che Dan, PhD**  
Lecturer  
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication  
Universiti Putra Malaysia  
(Internal Examiner)

**Richard Corballis, PhD**  
Professor  
School of English and Media Studies  
Massey University  
(External Examiner)

---

**HASANAH MOHD GHAZALI, PhD**  
Professor/Deputy Dean  
School of Graduate Studies  
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date:
This thesis submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee are as follows:

Rosli Talif, PhD
Associate Professor
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Chairman)

Shameem Mohd Rafik Khan @ Rafik-Galea, PhD
Associate Professor
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)

Mohd Faiz S. Abdullah, PhD
Associate Professor
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)

AINI IDERIS, PhD
Professor/Dean
School of Graduate Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date:
DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at UPM or other institutions.

_______________________
ABDUL GHANI HAJI ABU

Date: 3 March 2006
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRAK</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPROVAL</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DECLARATION</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>xvi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>xix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</td>
<td>xx</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER

### 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study  
1.2 Statement of the Problem  
1.3 Research Questions  
1.4 Purpose of the Study  
1.5 Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks  
1.6 Significance of the Study  
1.7 Definitions of Terms
   1.7.1 Learning Styles Preferences  
   1.7.2 Literary Texts  
   1.7.3 Literary Competence  
   1.7.4 Reading Comprehension  
   1.7.5 Learner Differences  
   1.7.6 Attitude  
1.8 Limitations of the Study  
1.9 Outline of the Dissertation  

### 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction  
2.2 Theoretical Perspective  
   2.2.1 Theoretical Framework  
   2.2.2 Conceptual Framework  
2.3 Learning Styles
   2.3.1 Theories About Learning/Learning Styles  
   2.3.2 Learning Style Models  
   2.3.3 Learning Styles and Gender  
   2.3.4 Learning Styles and Strategies  
2.4 Literature and Language Learning  
   2.4.1 Short Stories  

xiii
| 2.4.2 Literature and Second Language Learning | 78 |
| 2.4.3 Literature and Culture | 81 |
| 2.4.4 Approaches in Literature Learning | 84 |
| 2.4.5 Learner Variables in Literature Learning | 87 |
| 2.5 Summary | 97 |

### 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

| 3.1 Introduction | 99 |
| 3.2 Research Design | 99 |
| 3.3 Subjects and Sampling | 100 |
| 3.4 Instrumentation | 103 |
| 3.4.1 Survey Questionnaire | 103 |
| 3.4.2 Quasi-Experiment | 108 |
| 3.4.3 Interviews | 111 |
| 3.5 Data Collection Procedures | 112 |
| 3.6 Data Analysis Procedures | 117 |
| 3.6.1 Validity and Reliability | 117 |
| 3.6.2 Exploratory Data Analysis | 122 |
| 3.7 Quasi-Experimental Study | 123 |
| 3.7.1 Design of the Experiment | 124 |
| 3.7.2 Reading Lessons’ Structure & Materials | 125 |
| 3.8 Pilot Tests | 138 |
| 3.8.1 The Objectives | 138 |
| 3.8.2 Pilot Experimental Study | 139 |
| 3.8.3 The Findings of the Pilot Test | 141 |

### 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

<p>| 4.1 Introduction | 146 |
| 4.2 Questionnaire Analysis | 146 |
| 4.2.1 The Learner Factors | 147 |
| 4.2.2 Learning Style Preferences | 154 |
| 4.2.3 Attitude | 156 |
| 4.3 Quasi-Experiment Analysis | 158 |
| 4.3.1 Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores | 158 |
| 4.3.2 Reading Comprehension Quizzes | 162 |
| 4.4 Interview Analysis | 169 |
| 4.4.1 Role of Experience | 169 |
| 4.4.2 Learning Activities/Experience | 172 |
| 4.4.3 Reading Habits | 174 |
| 4.5 General Comments | 179 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Introduction</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Conclusions</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Implications</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 Suggestions for Further Research</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5 Closing</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**BIBLIOGRAPHY** 197
**APPENDICES** 238
**BIODATA OF THE AUTHOR** 354