MATCHING TEACHING STYLES WITH STUDENTS' LEARNING STYLES (A SURVEY OF INDONESIAN STUDENTS' HABITS OF LEARNING)

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ABSTRACT

There are some studies on traditional East Asian learning styles which found that the most popular East Asian learning styles come from the traditional book-centered and grammar-translation method and the students are seen as analytic, visual, field-independent, concrete-sequential, thinking-oriented and reflective styles. The teachers should match their teaching styles with students' learning styles so that their motivation, performances, and achievements will increase and be enhanced. There are some approaches which can be applied in the classroom, such as diagnosing learning styles and developing self-aware EFL learners, altering the teaching style to create teacher-student style matching, encouraging changes in students' behavior and fostering guided style-stretching and providing activities with different groupings. In this study, there are also some cases happened when teaching and learning process occurred in the classroom, for example first language interference, lack of cognates, culturally inappropriate materials, different learning expectations, no response, and students reluctant to speak and there are of course some ways to help students to relax and overcome those problems.

Keyterms: teaching style and learning style

INTRODUCTION
Some Studies on Traditional East Asian Learning Styles

Traditionally, the teaching of *EFL in* most *East Asian* countries is dominated by a *teacher-centered*, *book-centered*, *grammar-translation method* and an *emphasis on rote memory* (Liu & Littlewood, 1997). These traditional language teaching approaches have resulted in a number of typical learning styles in East Asian countries, with introverted learning being one of them. In East Asia, most students see knowledge as something to be transmitted by the teacher rather than discovered by the learners. They, therefore, find it normal to engage in modes of learning which are teacher-centered and in which they receive knowledge rather than interpret it. According to Harshbarger el al (1986), Japanese and Korean students are often quiet, shy and reticent in language classrooms. They dislike public touch and overt displays of opinions or emotions,

indicating a reserve that is the hallmark of introverts. Chinese students likewise name "listening to teacher "as their most frequent activity in senior school English classes (Liu & Littlewood, 1997). All these claims are confirmed by a study conducted by Sato (1982), in which she compared the participation of Asian students in the classroom interaction with that of non-Asian students. Sato found that the Asians took significant fewer speaking turns than did their non-Asian classmates (36.5% as opposed to 63.5%).

The teacher-centered classroom teaching in East Asia also leads to a closure-oriented style for most East Asian students. These closure-oriented students dislike ambiguity, uncertainty or fuzziness. To avoid these, they will sometimes jump to hasty conclusions about grammar rules or reading themes. Many Asian students, according to Sue and Kirk (1972), are less autonomous, more dependent on authority figures and more obedient and conforming to rules and deadlines. Harshbarger at al (1986) noted that Korean students insist that the teacher be the authority and are disturbed if this does not happen. Japanese students often want rapid and constant correction from the teacher and do not feel comfortable with multiple correct answers. That is why Asian students are reluctant to "stand out" by expressing their views or raising questions, particularly if this might be perceived as expressing public disagreement (Song, 1995).

Perhaps the most popular East Asian learning styles originated from the traditional book-centered and grammar-translation method are analytic and field-independent. In most of reading classes, for instance, the students read new words aloud, imitating the teacher. The teacher explains the entire text sentence by sentence, analyzing many of the more difficult grammar structures, rhetoric, and style for the students, who listen, take notes, and answer questions. Oxford & Burry-Stock (1995) states that the Chinese, along with the Japanese, are often detail-and precision-oriented, showing some features of the analytic and field-independent styles. They have no trouble picking out significant detail from a welter of background items and prefer language learning strategies that involve dissecting and logically analyzing the given material, searching for contrasts, and finding cause-effect relationship.

Another characteristically East Asian learning style is visual learning. In an investigation of sensory learning preferences, Reid (1987) found that Korean, Chinese and Japanese students are all visual learners, with Korean students ranking the strongest. They like to read and obtain a great deal of visual stimulation. For them, lectures, conversations, and oral directions without any visual backup are very confusing and can be anxiety-producing. It is obvious that such visual learning style stems from a traditional classroom teaching in East Asia, where most teachers emphasize learning through reading and tend to pour a great deal of information on the

blackboard. Students, on the other hand, sit in rows facing the blackboard and the teacher. Any production of the target language by students is in choral reading or in closely controlled teacher-students interaction (Song, 1995). Thus, the perceptual channels are strongly visual (text and blackboard), with most auditory input closely tied to the written.

Closely related to visual, concrete-sequential, analytic and field-independent styles are the thinking-oriented and reflective styles. According to Nelson (1995), Asian students are in general more overtly thinking-oriented than feeling oriented. They typically base judgment on logic and analysis rather than on feelings of others, the emotional climate and interpersonal values. Compared with American students, Japanese students, like most Asians, show greater reflection (Condon, 1984), as shown by the concern for precision and for not taking quick risk in conversation (Oxford et al, 1992). Quite typical is "the Japanese student who wants time to arrive at the correct answer and is uncomfortable when making guess" (Nelson, 1995:16). The Chinese students have also been identified to posses the same type of thinking orientation by Anderson (1993).

The final East Asian preferred learning style is concrete-sequential. Students with such a learning style are likely to follow the teacher's guidelines to the letter, to be focused on the present, and demand full information. They prefer language learning materials and techniques that involve combinations of sound, movement, sight, and touch and that can be applied in a concrete, sequential, linear manner. Oxford & Burry-Stock (1995) discovered that Chinese and Japanese are concrete-sequential learners, who use a variety of strategies such as memorization, planning, analysis, sequenced repetition, detailed outlines and lists, structured review and a search for perfection. Many Korean students also like following rules (Harshbarger et al, 1986), and this might be a sign of a concrete-sequential style.

It is worth noting that the generalizations made above about learning styles in East Asia do not apply to every representative of all East Asian countries; many individual exceptions of course exist. Nevertheless, these seemingly stereotypical descriptions do have a basis in scientific observation. Worthley (1987) noted that while diversity with any culture is the norm, research shows that individuals within a culture tend to have a common pattern of learning and perception when members of their culture are compared to members of another culture.

MATCHING TEACHING STYLES WITH LEARNING STYLES

From the descriptions and scientifically observed data reviewed above, it is legitimate to conclude that there exist identifiable learning styles for most East Asian students. We can assume, therefore, that any native English speaker engaged in teaching English to East Asian students is likely to confront a teaching-learning style conflict. This is illustrated by the two examples cited at the very beginning of this paper and further confirmed by Reid's (1987) and Melton's (1990) studies. Such style differences between students and teachers consistently and negatively affect student grades (Wallace and Oxford, 1992). It is when students' learning styles are matched with appropriate approaches in teaching that their motivation, performances, and achievements will increase and be enhanced (Brown, 1994).

In what follows are examples of how teacher's teaching style can be matched with students' learning style in East Asian settings. I obtained these ideas from several sources, including descriptions in books and published articles; responses to a recent questionnaire I sent to selected overseas students from Japan, Korea and China in Australia; and my own teaching experience in China. The approaches are classified in the following categories:

1. Diagnosing learning styles and developing self-aware EFL learners
2. Altering the teaching style to create teacher-student style matching
3. Encouraging changes in students' behavior and fostering guided style-stretching
4. Providing activities with different groupings

Diagnosing Learning Styles and Developing Self-aware EFL Learners
Effective matching between teaching style and learning style can only be achieved when teachers are, first of all, aware of their learners' needs, capacities, potentials and learning style preferences in meeting these needs. To this end, teachers may use assessment instruments such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indications Survey (Myers and McCaulley, 1985), the Keirsey Temperament Sorter (Keirsey & Bates, 1984) and the Classroom Work Style Survey (Kinsella, 1996). These instruments are sensitive to the kinds of style differences that are affected by culture. Although this kind of assessment is not comprehensive, it does indicate students' preferences and provide constructive feedback about advantages and disadvantages of various styles.

Before a survey is administered, the teacher should give a mini-lecture, trying to:

- establish interest: what learning styles are
- define general terms: for example, survey, questionnaire, perceptual, tally
- discuss how learning styles are determined and used by students and teachers
- explain how to tally results of surveys

- persuade students of the benefits of identifying their learning styles

Following the lecture, the teacher can ask students to work in pairs to share notes from the mini-lecture. By doing this, they can expect to further clarify the concept of survey taking and have a more specific idea of what learning styles are. While the pair-work is in process, the teacher should be prepared to answer any questions that may arise. Then, students are ready to complete the questionnaire. If they have questions or need assistance, the teacher can mini-conference with them individually. Finally, students can start summarizing their individual style results in the survey.

The next step is for the teacher to organize a whole-class discussion of the style assessment results. The teacher can write the major learning styles on the blackboard and ask the students to write their names under their major styles in a list. Then, in a full-class discussion, everybody is aware that the class is indeed a mixture of styles and full of similarities and differences in learning style preferences. This discussion helps eliminate some of the potential of a teacher-student "style war" if the teacher talks about his or her own style during this time. I have found students are intensely interested in talking about their own style and the styles of their peers and teachers. When such style discussions are constructive, students' initial interest in self-awareness is rewarded and deepened.

Furthermore, based on these style assessment results, the teacher can build classroom community by asking students to find several other students whose major learning style matches their own, and sit in a group with those students. They follow instructions (written on the blackboard or on a transparence) to share their summarized results and analyze those results. This discussion often starts slowly, but it becomes increasingly animated as students discover similarities and differences. In addition, teachers can use the survey results to identify style patterns among various groups of students in their classes, which they should consider when designing learning tasks.

There are, however, dangers if learning assessment, diagnosis, and prescription are misused. We can, at least, list three shortcomings of existing self-assessment instruments: 1). The instruments are exclusive (i.e. they focus on certain variables); 2). the students may not self-report accurately; and 3). the students have adapted for so long that they may report on adapted preferences. In order to ensure a reliability of such learning style instruments, Doyle and Rutherford (1984) call for taking into account the nature of the learning tasks, the relationship between teacher and student, and other situational variables. Further, Reid (1987:102) warns: "Both teachers and students involved in identifying and using information on learning styles should proceed with

caution and be aware that no single diagnostic instrument can solve all learning problems"

For all of these reasons, I recommend using diaries as a supplemental tool. By reflecting the processes that go on inside the writers' minds, they open up fields that are normally not accessible to researchers, and are thus able to provide an important complement to other research tools. Before students start keeping diaries, they should be issued with a set of guidelines about how to keep their diaries and what to look out for. Each student is asked to keep a journal of their reactions to the course, their teachers, their fellow students and any other factors which they consider are having an effort on their learning. Students are told to describe only those events which they think are of interest. Also to be included in the diary are the problems students have found in their encounter with the foreign language, and what they plan to do about it. The language in which these records have to be kept is not necessarily specified, but it is better for them to use the target language.

The diaries are collected in at regular intervals, photocopied and then returned immediately to the diarists. The students are assured that the material in their diaries will be treated in full confidentiality. For the analysis of these diaries, Bailey (1990) recommends a five-stage procedure, in which the researcher first edits the diary and then looks for recurring patterns and significant events.

Altering the Teaching Style to Create Teacher-student Style Matching
In all academic classrooms, no matter what the subject matter, there will be students with multiple learning styles and students with a variety of major, minor and negative learning styles. An effective means of accommodating these learning styles is for teachers to change their own styles and strategies and provide a variety of activities to meet the needs of different learning styles. Then all students will have at least some activities that appeal to them based on their learning styles, and they are more likely to be successful in these activities. Hinkelman and Pysock (1992), for example, have demonstrated the effectiveness of a multimedia methodology for vocabulary building with Japanese students. This approach is effective in tapping a variety of learning modalities. By consciously accommodating a range of learning styles in the classroom in this way, it is possible to encourage most students to become successful language learners.

In addition, EFL teachers in East Asia should consider culturally related style differences as they plan how to teach. Following is a list of activities for East Asian learners that could be tried for each style:

Visual learning style preference

1. Read resources for new information.
2. Use handouts with activities.
3. Keep journals of class activities to reinforce vocabulary or new information.
4. Watch an action skit. Write narrative of events.
5. Take notes on a lecture. Outline the notes to reinforce ideas and compare with others. (Melton, 1990:43)

Analytic learning style preference

1. Judge whether a sentence is meaningful. If the sentence is not meaningful, the student changes it so that it makes sense.
2. Give students a list of related vocabulary words (such as a list of foods, animals, gifts, etc.) and ask them to rank these words according to their personal preferences.
3. Give students questions to which two or three alternative answers are provided. Students' task is to choose one of the alternatives in answering each question.
4. Ask students to express their opinions as to agree or disagree with a given statement. If they disagree, they reword the statement so that it represents their own ideas.

The prospect of altering language instruction to somehow accommodate different learning styles might seem forbidding to teachers. This reaction is understandable. Teaching styles are made up of methods and approaches with which teachers feel most comfortable; if they try to change to completely different approaches, they would be forced to work entirely with unfamiliar, awkward, and uncomfortable methods. Fortunately, teachers who wish to address a wide variety of learning styles need not make drastic changes in their instructional approach. Regular use of some the instructional techniques given below should suffice to cover some specified learning style categories in most East Asian countries.

- Make liberal use of visuals. Use photographs, drawings, sketches, and cartoons to illustrate and reinforce the meanings of vocabulary words. Show films, videotapes, and live dramatizations to illustrate lessons in text.
- Assign some repetitive drill exercises to provide practice in basic vocabulary and grammar, but don't overdo it.
- Do not fill every minute of class time lecturing and writing on the blackboard. Provide intervals for students to think about what they have been told; assign brief writing exercises.
- Provide explicit instruction in syntax and semantics to facilitate formal language learning and develop skill in written communication and interpretation.

Encouraging Changes in Students' Behavior and Fostering Guided Style-stretching

Learning style is a consistent way of functioning which reflects cultural behavior patterns and, like other behaviors influenced by cultural experiences, may be revised as a result of training or changes in learning experiences. Learning styles are thus "moderately strong habits rather than intractable biological attributes" (Reid, 1987:100). With a moderate training, Sub/unconscious styles can become conscious learning strategies. However, all these should be best done in an intentional way with guidance from the teacher. For example, an important aspect of instructional style for many Korean students might involve weaning them from rote repetition, slowly guiding them into real communication in authentic language situation. An effective instructional style for dealing with many Chinese students might include paying attention to the individual, creating a structured but somewhat informal classroom atmosphere to ease students out of their formality, introducing topics slowly, avoiding embarrassment, and being consistent.

The following are examples of teaching activities that guide East Asian students to alter their learning behaviors, stretch their learning styles and enable them to improve their language performance.

- Groups of four or five learners are given cards, each with a word on it. Each person describes his word in the foreign language to the others in the group without actually using it. When all students have described their word successfully, the students take the first letter of each and see what new word the letters spell out. (Puzzle parts might also depict objects in a room; in this case, when all the words have been guessed, the group decides which room of the house has been described.)
- Class members are placed in pairs or in larger groups. Each student has a blank piece of paper. He listens to his partner or the group leader who has a picture to describe (the teacher can provide the picture or students can choose their own). As his partner describes the picture, the student tries to draw a rough duplicate according to the description he hears.

Providing Activities with Different Groupings

In a class made up of students with various learning styles and strategies, it is always helpful for the teacher to divide the students into groups by learning styles and give them activities based on their learning styles. This should appeal to them because they will enjoy them and be successful. For example, the group made up of the extroverted may need the chance to express some ideas orally in the presence of one or many class members. On the other hand, the group made up of the introverted may need some

encouragement to share ideas aloud and may want the safety of jotting down a few notes first and perhaps sharing with one other person before being invited or expected to participate in a group discussion.

In addition to trying style-alike groups for greatest efficiency, the teacher can also use style-varied groups for generating greatest flexibility of styles and behaviors. Teachers should avoid grouping introverts with each other all the time. It is often helpful to include open students and closure-oriented students in the same group; the former will make learning livelier and more fun, while the latter will ensure that the task is done on time and in good order. But before students are divided into groups, they should be aware of the divisions and understand what they are doing and why they are doing it. Wu (1983) concludes that Chinese students usually respond well to activities when they realize what the purposes behind them are.

Finally, no matter how students are to be grouped, teachers should make a conscious effort to include various learning styles in daily lesson plan. One simple way to do this is to code the lesson plans so that a quick look at the completed plan shows if different learning styles have been included. Putting "A" or "V" beside activities that denote whether they are primarily appealing to the analytic learner or the visual learner will serve as a reminder that there is a need for mixture of both kinds of activities. Meanwhile, simply designating various parts of the lesson plan with letters (I for individual, P for pair, SG for small group, LG for large group) and other symbols reminds the teacher to pay attention to learning styles. The coding is not meant to be extra work for the teacher or to make classes seem artificial or unspontaneous. If the coding system is used on a regular basis, it becomes very natural to think in terms of being inclusive, or providing the setting and the activities by which all learners can find some portion of the class that particularly appeals to them.

PROBLEMS IN EFL CLASSROOM

Some of the problems that Indonesian students have in a typical EFL classroom include problems which are caused by first-language background, namely difference between students' first language and English. Different learning expectations of how they should learn and how they should be taught may also be sources of problems. Other problems are cultural assumptions about what topics are appropriate and inappropriate to talk about in the classroom.

First language interference

One of the main features of Bahasa Indonesia and other Southeast Asian languages is that verbs do not inflect to show tense changes, while English and European grammar

inflect their verbs to show tense change (e.g. the kid *is watching* cartoon now, the kid *watched* cartoon yesterday).

Other features that Bahasa Indonesia and Southeast Asian languages differ from English and other European languages include: article system (*the, a, an*), use of auxiliary verbs in negatives and questions, and singular-plural change. Some typical mistakes Indonesian learners of English include[1]:

You go to school yesterday*
She go to school by bus*

Where is door*
I usually go to the bed at 10 o'clock*

You go to school yesterday?*

She has two sister*

Lack of Cognates
For learners of English whose first language is one of the European languages will likely find a large number of words which are similar between the two languages, for example, Latin-based words such as *condition* and *situation*, and other shorter words like *book* and *good* for common Germanic languages. Bahasa Indonesia and Southeast Asian languages have no such lexical roots common to their first language and English. Fortunately, modern words, such as computer-related terminologies, are in rapid and continuous process of becoming parts of the lexicons of Asian languages.

To help students overcome the fear of unknown words teacher may build on the knowledge they already have, and help them make connections between words they already know in the same or related formation (e.g. if they already know *actor*, shorter words such as actress, action, and acting, or even longer words like interaction and transaction need not be frightening unknown words). Encourage students to make guesses about might mean from the clues they can gather from context. Help them less overwhelmed by unknown vocabulary.

Culturally inappropriate materials
Most English as a Foreign Language (EFL) coursebooks start from the assumption that some kind of British/Australian/American cultural understanding is necessary for

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[1] Adapted from Nuala O'Sullivan (1997)

students learning English. For most of the students topics covered in coursebooks are likely to make them feel very uncomfortable. The prospect of being asked to discuss, offer opinions and disagree with others on subjects such as the environment, nuclear energy, or poverty tends to be avoided by students. One way to overcome this problem is to adapt the topics which they find relevant from the local English newspapers. Sources of relevant, local topics can be found in tourism brochures, advertisement in local newspapers and TV commercials and shows.

Different learning expectations

This difference is especially true in most in madrasahs and pesantrens. Teachers are looked on with respect which can seem almost god-like. Teachers are given total responsibility for the running of the class. This may hinder the application of the communicative approach which builds its main tenets on the belief that students should be involved in communication that is as real as possible, rather than translating endless sentences, or chanting unexplained words or phrases after the teacher. One of the ways to overcome this is by introducing the new ways of learning and teaching gradually, explaining why particular activities are conducted. Adult learners are especially likely to be set in their learning ways, therefore some rationale need to be given.

No response, reluctant to speak.

Nuala O'Sullivan (1997) says that the greatest overall problem is that students find it hard to verbalize their ideas. This is related to a number of factors:
- Many students are not used to the thinking of English as a means of communication, merely a subject to be studied and to be passed.
- English has been traditionally taught in non-communicative way in most schools.
- Silence, or at least a moderate degree of reticence, is often more favorable and desirable than volubility.
- Reluctance to disagree openly with others, especially if within the group there is an older person, or person of higher social status whose views it would be impolite to challenge. This means it is hard to maintain a discussion, and a confrontational exchange of ideas.

HOW TO COPE WITH THE PROBLEMS

Some ways to help students to relax will include the followings:
- Put students into pairs or small groups which can be rearranged from time to time to improve class harmony and mixing. Actually, students are almost as embarrassed at performing and afraid of making mistakes in front a large number of their peers as they are nervous of you. So reduce the size of their audience to a manageable number as often as possible. As well as being more

relaxed about speaking in small groups, students will be more confident about repeating or reporting back to the whole class later.
- Correct as gently as possible – to avoid the word 'No'. Try expressions such as: 'Well…', 'Maybe', or 'Anybody else?' Use student self-correction and peer correction techniques
- Explain that making mistakes is part of the learning process, everyone does it, and there is no penalty for it. Students should know that when they aim for fluency or try out new ways of expressing themselves, they will be praised.
- Be positive and congratulate your students as often as possible. Show that you are pleased in your voice and face. But be sure to vary the actual words you use to praise students, or you could end up sounding like parrot. In other words, do not repeat or use the same expression too often.
- Never ridicule students or belittle their efforts at English, or abuse your power in any way. This is very dude and destructive and can grave repercussions on future lessons with that class and your teaching reputation at your school.

Ways of correcting oral mistakes
Making mistakes is unavoidable when learning a language, but making students feel bad about them can be avoided.

How to correct – It is best to correct as gently as possible. Students can feel vulnerable and exposed when they make mistake when speaking in class because it means a loss of face in front of the group. Teacher can correct effectively without saying the word 'Wrong' or 'No'. Try saying 'Not exactly, well … hmmm…', or looking quizzical. Indonesian students tend to be used to subtlety and it will not be difficult for them to figure out that they have made a mistake.

When and what to correct- Don't correct every mistake. Although a lot of students will tell you that this is precisely what they want you to do, in reality it is disheartening for students to be reminded of every slip that they make. A rule of thumb is to correct most of the mistakes connected with that day's lesson, some mistakes relating to points covered in previous lessons, and hardly any that relates to points yet to be taught.

The students who made the mistake should be given a chance to self-correct. Often the student will do this without any prompting from you, so do not be too eager to jump in. If the student cannot self-correct, other students should (individually or as a class) be asked for the correct answer. Finally, if none of the students can, you should give the right answer.

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