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Learning Styles of Students and Teaching Styles of Teachers in Business Education: A Case Study of Pakistan

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Abstract

The purpose of the research was to find the association between learning styles and teaching styles at undergraduate level in a business school. Canfield Learning Styles Inventory (CLSI, 1992) and Staffordshire Evaluation of Teaching Styles (SETS, 2007) were used. 262 students and 12 teachers were taken through random sampling from four disciplines: Marketing, Management, Human Resource Management, and Finance. There was a positive correlation between student learning style and teacher teaching style, which was statistically significant ($r = .77$, $n = 262$, $P < .0005$). The results clearly indicate that awareness raising sessions should be arranged for students and teachers to realize the importance and implications of knowing their learning and teaching styles in business education environment.

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1. Introduction

The concept of teaching and learning style is not unknown in education and research on it has flourished in the past two decades. Educational research has also proved that all students are unique individuals merged in a common classroom coming from varied socio-economic and cultural background, possessing different learning styles that rarely comply with their teachers' teaching styles. This was verified by Collins (2004) and Winn and Grantham (2005) in their research studies as well. Cassidy and Eachus (2000) support this stance and point to the evidence that indicate learning styles change with the type of environments and circumstances. Markham (2004) confirms that no other papers have been found on this topic. Smith and Dalton (2005) opine that learning style is a distinctive and habitual manner of acquiring knowledge, skills or attitudes through study or experience, and an individual learner's style tends to be more stable across different learning tasks and contexts. Learning style is consistent across a variety of tasks, has a wide influence on how information is processed and problems are solved, and it usually remains stable over a certain period of time. In the same vein, the characteristics of the teachers are just as diverse as their students and the teaching styles fluctuate not only to suit the discipline they teach, but also the objectives of the course, the way they learnt and were themselves taught (Clark & Latshaw, 2012), and their own temperament. Teaching style by definition is the approach teachers put into practice to carry out teaching and learning activities. Teaching styles influence the character of the learners, learning environment, and overall execution of learning in a classroom.

Tucker, Stewart and Schmidt (2003) suggest that research to address the match between the learning styles of the students and teaching styles of the teachers in the field of business education needs more attention. Of what research that has been done and shared with the educationists in print, almost all contribution has been from the developed countries and almost negligible reports are obtainable from the developing countries, especially Pakistan where business schools are emerging ever so fast. Therefore, it is imperative to carry out research to help teachers understand and realize the importance and implications of teaching and learning styles to help them determine the learning styles of their students. Furthermore, the outcome of the study will assist the teachers in planning teaching methodologies, approaches, and strategies that cater to the individual learning styles of the students. As a result, it will facilitate the teachers to mould their teaching styles, practice alternatives, and transform their strategies to meet varied learning situations.

2. Purpose and Objectives

The present study was an initiative taken in a well reputed business school situated in a metropolitan city of Pakistan to investigate the association between learning styles of students and teaching styles of teachers at an undergraduate level. From this emerged the hypothesis that:

There would be an association between learning styles of students and teaching styles of teachers at undergraduate level in a business school.

The target participants consisted of 262 final year students at undergraduate level and 12 faculty members teaching different business subjects to the same cohort of students.

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample and Sampling Procedure

The participants consisted of 262 undergraduate students (139 males; 123 females) from four business disciplines, that is, Marketing (26.7%), Management (26.7%), Human Resource Management (26.8%), and Finance (19.8%). Age ranges of the respondents were from 17 to 25 years. Academic levels of the participants were Intermediate (56.4%), A Levels (36.2%), and Bachelors (7.4 %). Academic years were freshman (44.6 %), sophomore (29.7 %), juniors (15.7 %), and seniors (10 %). The GPA (Grade Point Average) ranged from 1.5 to 3.78

A total of 12 faculty members (6 male and 7 female) from the same courses teaching the same group of students were selected to find out their instructional style. Demographic details were: Gender distribution was (male 41.7%), (female 58%), age range was from 25 to above 50 years, academic qualification was (MBA 100%), area of specialization (Marketing 25%, Management 25%, Human resource Management 25%, Finance 25%), Academic ranks were (Instructor 8.3%, Lecturer 41.7%, Assistant Professor 41.7%, Associate Professor 8.3%), teaching experience for less than one year was (25%), one to two years (16.7%), three to four years (16.7%), five years (16.6%), more than five years (25%)

3.2 Measurements

Canfield's Learning Style Inventory has 30 items scale and has four major types: a) Mode of Learning (listening, reading, iconic, direct experience), b) Conditions for Learning (peer, organization, goal setting, competition, instructor, detail, independence, authority), c) Expectation for Course Grade (A, B, C, D, and total expectation), and d) Area of Interest (numeric, qualitative, inanimate, people). The CLSI has an internal consistency coefficient of = .75.

The Staffordshire Evaluation of Teaching Styles which was administered to the 12 faculty participants is a 24-item questionnaire ranging from 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (strongly agree). The SETS questionnaire assesses six styles of teaching: a) all-round flexible and adaptable teacher, b) student-centered and sensitive teacher, c) official curriculum teacher, d) straight facts no nonsense teacher, e) big conference teacher; and f) one-off teacher. The SETS has an internal consistency coefficient of = .84.

3.3 Procedure

The tool was distributed and explained by the researchers to the students from marketing, management, Human Resource Management, and finance classes at the coordinated convenience of the class teachers and researchers. The filled in CLSIs were later collected by the teachers. Once CLSI was administered, a learning profile and typology was determined for the students. Three teachers from each business subject area were selected and SETS inventory was explained and distributed to them personally and later collected. In addition, students and teachers both had to fill in demographic data sheets

4. Results

4.1 Learning and Teaching Style Instruments

The Canfield's Learning Style Inventory and Staffordshire Evaluation of Teaching Styles were scored and the data were tabulated on Microsoft Excel sheet. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16.0 was used for all statistical analyses. Descriptive statistics for demographic information of students and teachers and Pearson Product Moment was performed in order to find the relationship between students learning style and teachers teaching style.

To analyze the hypothesis that there would be an association between learning styles of students and teaching styles of teachers at undergraduate level in a business school, Pearson Product Moment correlation was calculated (see Table 1). According to the results, a strong positive correlation between student learning style and teaching style was found, which was statistically significant ($r = .77$, $n = 262$, $P < .0005$).

Table 1: Correlations (Pearson Product Moment) of Students Learning Style and Teachers Teaching Style

	Teaching Style
Students Learning Style	0.77

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

5. Discussion & Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to find out the relationship between the learning styles of students and teaching styles of teachers at undergraduate level in a business school. The overall result of the study suggests a positive correlation between student learning style and teaching. These findings are consistent with previous studies such as Stitt-Gohdes (2001), Tucker, Stewart and Schmidt (2003). As the findings indicate, the teachers are untrained and teach the way they had been taught not realizing that an effective teacher has to consider the what and how of teaching, that is, the environment, context, course, and learning styles of the students in order to accommodate her/his flexi-styles of teaching; therefore, it is adamant for teachers to understand the varied needs of the students coming from different majors and adjust their teaching styles to reach to all students in the class. Marzano, Pickering and Pollock (2001) also suggest multi-methodology and varying pace in the classroom to accommodate students' learning styles. The hit and run attitude of the teachers may yield positive outcomes at times, but the credit for this should go to the students, not the teachers.

The findings of this paper may not be new to many and may perhaps not show unlikely phenomena; however, it has serious implications in Pakistan, the region and other developing countries of Asia. When students join at undergraduate level, especially in business schools, the students and teachers have almost negligible understanding of learning and teaching styles. In certain conditions the teachers have an implicit understanding that the students have worked out the best way to study. Of course, this is not a correct assumption. The thrust of responsibility to introduce the concept of identifying the importance of learning and teaching styles should fall on the education institutions by supporting teachers, especially those who teach at college level. Moreover, all students should be given a test to identify their preferred learning style at the time of admission and proper guidance and counseling sessions should be held on regular basis to help and support them in their learning process. Simultaneously, the institutions should make it compulsory for the teachers to sit for learning style test and on-going workshops and courses should be conducted to make the teachers understand the nature and importance of teaching learning styles to enable them to create a healthy learning environment, especially for those who join the teaching profession without undergoing any teacher training.

Since the study was done in one business college situated in a cosmopolitan city of Pakistan, it may not be possible to generalize the findings internationally; however, considering the common factors prevalent in almost all business colleges situated in Pakistan and probably in the region, the results can be safely applied in other environments for improved learning.

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