

Teaching and Learning Styles in Social Science: The Samar State University Experience

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Abstract— This study examined the learning and teaching styles in Social Science subjects at Samar State University. The descriptive method of research was utilized and a semi-structured interview was used for gathering data. Findings revealed that the learning styles of the high performing students were the following: Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic Style, Progressivist Inspired Style, Reward Motivated Style, Teacher Personality Dependent Style, Subject Dependent Style, Pedagogy Based Style and Classroom Environment Inspired Style. Moreover, the learning styles of the average performing respondents were the following: Auditory Learning Style, Teacher Personality Dependent Style, Subject Dependent Style, and Pedagogy Based Style. Furthermore, the identified learning styles of low performing students were the following: Auditory Learning Style, Teacher Personality Dependent Style and Subject Dependent Style. Students perceived teachers instructional strategies and personality to be factors that contributed to their learning. Faculty who are non-education graduates are perceived to use the lecture approach while majority of the faculty who are education graduates are engaging students to more activities. Thus, students learn better in Social Science subjects if they are actively involved in the classroom and they learn from teachers who are open and friendly even though their boundaries are clearly established. The results suggest that teachers should continuously discover the learning styles of the students so that they can adjust and modify their teaching styles to accommodate and address students learning styles. Hence, it can result to improved attitudes towards learning and increased number of students who will be performing better in Social Sciences subjects.

Keywords— Instructional Strategies, Learning Styles, Social Science, Teaching Styles.

I. INTRODUCTION

Educators traditionally look for ways to make their instruction more relevant and meaningful for students. Few can deny that every student learns and responds to information uniquely. Anderson and Bruce (2009) asserted that attempts to maximize educational effectiveness and provide for the individual needs and abilities of students, the consideration for a student's personal learning style, is emerging as one of the promising approaches to solving the problem of improving learning. Students should not be locked into any one particular learning style. By making students aware of preferred learning styles, students can modify the different styles on their own. Consequently, instructors who teach to learning style differences will reinforce this sense of control. For teachers to change their teaching styles, they must come to recognize, respect, and support the learning differences of students. If students do not learn the way teachers teach them, then teachers must teach them the way they learn.

Teacher accountability on the learning success of students increased when learning patterns of the students were considered in planning instruction. Data collected at research centers such as the University of Chicago and the University of Wisconsin Research and Development Center for Cognitive Learning suggested that individual learners have their own preferred learning styles and that teachers have some responsibility for gearing up their teaching styles to 'fit' the preferred learning style of each learner (Henson and Borthwick, 2004). Instead of relying on their preferred teaching style, teachers should understand that one style of instruction may not meet the needs of all students. One good way to have teachers consider individual learning differences and recognize the need to modify their own teaching style is to have them learn from the students' perspective.

Zeeb's (2004) research indicated that aligning learning styles of students with teaching styles of instructors could lead to an improvement in academic performance. A compatible learning style with the teaching style of a course instructor enables the students to retain the information much longer, apply it more efficiently and effectively, and have more positive attitude toward the subject that their counterparts who experience teaching/learning styles mismatches (Felder, 1993).

Students often consider social studies to be dull and boring (Chiodo & Byford, 2006). Not only do students perceive social studies to be dull, but they also fail to see the relevance of social studies to their everyday lives. Why is this? Is it because the content is truly dull and boring; or is it because the methods utilized by the teachers do not engage and inspire students to learn social studies? (Schug, Todd and Berry, 1982). Social Science covers diverse concerns of society and includes a wide range of content drawn from disciplines of history, geography, psychology, political science, economics and sociology. The selection and organization of material into a meaningful Social Science curriculum, and enabling students to develop a critical understanding of society, are therefore challenging tasks. Thus, Social Science teaching needs to be revitalized towards helping the learner acquire knowledge and skills in an interactive environment. The teaching of Social Sciences must adopt methods that promote creativity, aesthetics, and critical perspectives, and enable children to draw relationships between past and present, and to understand changes taking place in society (Rajakumar, 2006).

The foregoing concepts on learning styles and teaching styles affecting academic performance will provide inputs to the Social Science faculty in augmenting their method of presentation in class to complement with the learning styles of their students.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

This study examined the learning styles of the fourth year college students and perceived teaching styles of their respective Social Science teachers. Specifically, this study sought to determine the teaching styles that made the students learn better in Social Science subjects.

II. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This study involved the utilization of qualitative design. The method involved semi-structured interview in the examination of the learning styles and teaching styles in Social Science subjects. Semi-structured interviews provide the opportunity to regulate the order of the questions and the respondents have the possibility to expand their ideas and speak in great detail about diverse subjects rather than relying only on concepts and questions defined in advance of the interview (Darmer, 1995).

2.2.1 Respondents of the Study

All fourth year students of the College of Arts and Sciences were the respondents of this study. Eighty (80) respondents came from the Bachelor of Science in Information Technology; Twenty-nine (29) from Bachelor of Science in Information System; Eighteen (18) from Bachelor of Science in Applied Statistics and Twenty-four (24) from Bachelor of Science in Psychology. A total of 151 served as student-respondents. The respondents were grouped into high performing, average performing and low performing. The respondents' general average in all Social Science subjects they have taken up in the last three years was the basis for grouping the respondents. The high performing student has a general average of 1.75 and above, average performing student has a general average of 2.4-1.8 and a low performing student has a general average of 2.5 and below.

All Social Science faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences were considered as faculty-respondents of this study.

2.2.2 Measures

Determining the faculty respondents' profile, the study utilized a survey questionnaire on the demographic profile which includes age, gender, academic rank, number of years of teaching and educational qualification. A semi-structured interview was used to ask the respondents how they learn in their Social Sciences subjects and were asked on how they perceived the teaching styles of their Social Science Instructor. The Interview guide was composed of two open-ended statements, 1.) I learn in my Social Science classes because... and 2.) I learn in my Social Science classes when the teacher... The open-ended statement allowed students to share their different learning styles and at the same time figure out the different teaching styles of their Social Science Instructors.

2.4 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics such as frequencies were obtained for quantitative data. For the qualitative method, this study employed what is generally referred to as theme-centered or category-based analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe a specific theme-centered analysis as thematic analysis. One of

the advantages of this type of analysis is its theoretical freedom (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is done by coding the data. Coding is done by combining the data for themes, ideas and categories and making similar passages of text with a code label so it can be retrieved at a later stage for further comparison and analysis. Coding the data makes it easier to search, compare, and identify any patterns that require further investigations (Gibbs & Taylor, 2010).

The researcher coded the data to find answers to the research questions. Then, the researcher developed a conceptual schema from the data. This aims to do something with those themes to make them into a meaningful concept (Foss & Waters, 2003).

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Student-Respondents' Academic Performance

The data gathered revealed that out of 151 respondents, 21 or 13.91 percent are high performing students. Majority of the respondents are average performing students with a total of 116 students or 76.82 percent and 14 or 9.27 percent are low performing students. It can be gleaned that most of the high performing students came from Bachelor of Science in Psychology while majority of the average performing students came from Bachelor of Science in Information Technology and most of the low performing students came from Bachelor of Science in Information System.

B. Student-Respondents' Learning Style

B.1 High Performing Students

Visual, Auditory and Kinesthetic Style (VAK Style). High Performing students prefer to learn in three ways: visual, auditory and kinesthetic. However, almost all of the high performing students mix and match these three styles. High performers are visual learners, they absorb and retain information better when the discussion is presented in pictures, charts, etc. They are also auditory learners. They prefer to listen to what is being presented and responds best in a lecture or group discussion. Furthermore, some high performing students are kinesthetic learners, they prefer physical experience. They like "hands-on" approach and responds well to being able to experience, feel, and touch a learning prop. The following are sample statements of the students that manifest the Visual, Auditory and Kinesthetic Learning styles (1) "I learn if our teacher is presenting the discussion with pictures or using visual presentation." (2) "I always read. I read books and magazines related to our topic and discussions. I do take note while listening to the discussion or report and go over with my notes every night before I sleep. I learn in my social science classes if we have activity like group discussion and brainstorming, in which we are able to learn from one another"

Progressivist Inspired Style. High Performing students learn best not by relying on normative standards and passively consuming knowledge, rather they learn best by actively constructing their own understanding based on their knowledge, skills, and experience. Progressivist students allot time in reviewing, researching and studying in advance his/her

lessons. High performing students have the strict practice of self-study habits. Learning from school is not enough for them to fully learn. They have their own time where they can concentrate and reflect in a conducive learning environment. The following are sample statements of the students that manifest the Progressivist Inspired Style (1) *"I always study our lessons every night. I study in advance so that I can participate in our discussion."*(2) *"I study our lessons every day. I study and read in advance our lessons. I am not confident to enter our class if I was not able to study in advance."*

Reward Motivated Style. Reward is a powerful tool that encourages students to increase their performance at school. High performing students learn in their Social Science classes because of reinforcements. They are motivated to learn and do well in school because they want to get high grades to uphold their status as top achievers in class and some of them need to maintain high grades to maintain their scholarships. The following are sample statements that manifest the Reward Motivated learning styles (1) *"I learn in my social science classes because I am motivated to learn. I study hard. I need to maintain my scholarship because I only rely on this to finish my studies. My parents cannot send me to school because of poverty."*(2) *"I do everything to get high grades. I study hard, listen, participate in the discussion, do projects and researches and attend our classes regularly. It feels good to get high grades."*

Teacher Personality Dependent Style. The teachers' personality and style of interaction with the students have been reported to be a very crucial variable in a student's performance. High performing students can deal with both authoritarian and nonauthoritarian teachers. They are encouraged and challenged to study more if their teachers are strict and controlling. They also enjoy a warm, supportive, and approachable teachers because they are free in expressing their thoughts, ideas, concerns, and difficulties with them. The following are sample statements that manifest the Teacher Personality Dependent Learning Styles.(1)*"I learn in my social science class because our teacher is strict. We always have recitations every meetings. I am driven to study well so that I can answer during recitations."*(2) *"I learn in my social science class because our teacher is warmth and approachable. She welcomes our opinions, ideas and answers. I learn a lot of things because we share differing opinions in the classroom and we are learning from each other."*

Subject Dependent Style. High performing students consider Social Sciences subject as a significant subject. They are interested in studying Social Sciences subjects because it is informative, enlightening and relevant to what is happening in our society. High performing students can easily apply concepts learned in Social Sciences in actual setting. The following are sample statements that manifest the Subject Dependent Learning Style. (1) *"I learn in my social science class because the subject is very interesting. It is easy to learn if one is interested in the subject. I am enjoying our discussions particularly our discussions on politics."* (2) *"I learn a lot in Social Sciences subjects because it is informative."*

Pedagogy Based Style. Instructional approach is the technique or method that a teacher can adopt to meet the various learning objectives. This approach help students to walk on the path of independent learning and become strategic learners. Instructional approach enable students to focus their attention and organize their learning material for better understanding. High performing students learn from teachers who deliver and discuss well the lesson, conduct activities, evaluations, and assessments. They also learn from teachers who make use of instructional materials such as supplemental reading materials, video clippings, and powerpoint presentations. The following sample statements that manifest the Pedagogy Based Learning Styles. (1)*"I learn in my social science class because our teacher discusses well the lesson"* (2)*"I learn in my Social Science class because our teacher conducts classroom activities such as role plays and group activities"*

Classroom Environment Inspired Style. The physical environment of the classroom concerns how the classroom is set up. High performing students consider having a conducive learning environment as an important factor in their success. They can study well in a quiet and well ventilated rooms. They are distracted if their classmates are noisy. The following sample statements that manifest the Classroom Environment Inspired Learning Style. (1) *"I can study well if the classroom is well ventilated."*(2) *"I can easily remember and understand our lessons in quiet classroom environment."*

B.2 Average Performing Students

Auditory Learning Style. Average performing respondents obtain knowledge in their social sciences subjects by listening to the discussion and note-taking. They learn and understand their Social Sciences subjects if the teacher gives a very good discussion of the topic. Their attention is caught if teachers deliver and present well the lesson. The following statements manifest the Auditory Learning Styles. (1) *"I learn in my Social Sciences classes when our instructor discusses well the lesson. I listen attentively to the discussion, however, I sometimes got bored in my other Social Sciences."*(2) *"I take down notes. I memorize keywords during discussion. I listen carefully during discussion."*

Teacher Personality Dependent Style. Average performing students consider teacher's personality a factor in learning Social Sciences subjects. They are interested to learn and participate in the discussion if the teacher is accommodating, approachable, understanding, friendly and enthusiastic. They are anxious and not interested in the subject if the teacher is strict and controlling. The following statements manifest the Teacher Personality Dependent Learning Style. (1) *"I learn in my social science class because our teacher has enthusiasm and passion in teaching."*(2) *"I can easily learn in the discussion if our teacher is friendly and accommodating. If our teacher is strict, I can hardly learn because I am always afraid."*(3) *"One of my Social Science teacher is strict and harsh. He is very demanding and controlling. I am not interested in his subject because of his attitude."*

Subject Dependent Style. Social Sciences subjects are very interesting according to the average performing respondents. They enjoy learning Social Sciences subjects because they can apply the different concepts on real life situations. They also appreciate the relevance of the subjects in our society. The following statements manifest the Subject Dependent Learning Style. (1) *“I learn in my social science class because the subject is very interesting.”* (2) *“Social Sciences subjects are very important. It gives us knowledge about working with individuals and families. These subjects, I think, has a positive impact on our society.”*

Pedagogy Based Style. Average performing students learn from the lecture approach of their Social Science teachers. They also learn because their teachers are conducting evaluation after discussions. They give quizzes, recitations and activities to assess their learning. The following statements manifest the Pedagogy Based Learning Style. (1) *“I learn in my social science class because our teacher discusses well the lesson”*(2) *“I learn in my Social Science class because I study during recitations, quizzes and exams.”*

B.3 Low Performing Students

Auditory Learning Style. Low performing students’ gain information in their Social Sciences subjects by listening attentively to the discussion and copying notes from their classmates. The following statements manifest the Auditory Learning Style.(1) *“I learn in my Social Science class because I listen to the discussion.”*(2) *“I copy notes from my classmates.”*

Teacher Personality Dependent Style. Low performing students learn from a teacher who is friendly and considerate. It is easy for them to understand the lesson if their teachers have wit and humor. They are afraid of authoritarian teachers and sometimes do not attend classes because they think of the consequences if they will not be able to answer during recitations. The following statements manifest the Teacher Personality Dependent Learning Style. (1) *“Ma’am is very strict. Honestly, I cannot understand our discussions. She is always fond of giving recitations. Sometimes, I do not attend our class because I am afraid I might be called during our recitation. She is very intimidating.”*(2) *“I learn in my social science class because our teacher is considerate.”*

Subject Dependent Style. Some of the low performing students find Social Science subjects uninteresting. They are bored listening to the discussion of the teachers and the reporters. However, few respondents noted that their interest in Social Science subjects depends on the approach of the teacher. If the teacher is not boring and gives activities, they enjoy learning. The following statements manifest the Subject Dependent Learning Style.(1) *“Some Social Sciences subjects are boring....especially if the teacher is boring...”*(2) *“I am not interested in my Social Science subjects because I have so many things to memorize and I am not into memorization. I am also bored because some teachers are fond of assigning reports. They sometimes do not give thorough discussion.”*

C. Teaching Styles of the Faculty-Respondents as Perceived by the Students

Pedagogy Based Style

Instructional strategies are methods one used in teaching to help activate students’ curiosity about a topic, to keep them on task, and to engage them in learning and classroom interaction. This style can be best explained by two themes which includes Direct Instruction/ Lecture Approach and Indirect Instruction.

Direct Instruction/Lecture Approach. Faculty who are non-education graduates are perceived to use the lecture approach by majority of the student-respondents. Non-education faculty discuss and explain topics to their students. They pass their information and knowledge into their student. Students passively receive information from their teachers who use lectures and direct instruction. (1) *“She discusses the lesson well and she gives us a quiz after every discussion.”*(2) *“He assigned topics to be reported and let the reporters give the quiz after their report.”* Conversely, only few of the responses showed that faculty who are education graduates are using the lecture approach. They are perceived by few as lecturer. They discuss and share their knowledge to their students. The following statements manifest the teaching styles of Education graduates. (1) *“Ma’am delivers well her discussion. She explains well and we are learning from her.”*(2) *“Most of the time, Sir do the talking, he talks fast but he is a very good teacher.”*

Indirect Instruction. Few of the responses showed that faculty who are non-education graduates are using indirect instruction. Indirect Instruction seeks a high level of student involvement in activities and encourages them to generate ideas and solve problems. The role of the teacher is not a lecturer but a facilitator. The teacher arranges the learning environment and provides feedback after the conduct of the activity. The following statements manifest the teaching styles of Non-education graduates.(1) *“I enjoyed the way she taught because she gives us activities that are fun and at the same time we can gain knowledge.”*(2) *“I appreciate her because aside from being good in instruction, she sees to it that we apply what we have learn from our discussion by giving us activities.”* On the contrary, majority of the faculty who are education graduates expose students to more activities. Students are actively involved in the classroom. They are able to construct knowledge through gathering and synthesizing information and integrating it with the general skills of inquiry, communication, critical thinking, and problem solving. They let the students explore and learn at their own pace. Nevertheless, they are there to facilitate and guide the students while they are learning. (1) *“She let us have a debate about certain topics in our current issues subjects”*(2) *“Sir let us do research on certain topics and let us present/discuss it to the class”*(3) *“Before she discuss, an activity will be given first to us that will be related to our discussion”*

Teacher Personality Style

Teaching Personality Style can be best explained by two themes which include Authoritarian Teacher and Democratic Teacher.

Authoritarian Teacher. Authoritarian teachers place control on the students. They are strict and they have rules to be

strictly followed in the classroom. Sixty percent (60%) of the student-respondents described faculty who are non-education graduates as authoritarian. They made mention that the classroom environment was quiet and they are afraid to express their ideas. These teachers believe that students need only listen to their lecture to gain knowledge on the subject. Students feel that they are powerless, thus, reluctant to initiate activities in the classroom. All decisions in the classroom are dictated by the teacher. The following statements manifest the teaching styles of Non-education graduates.(1) *"I don't really learn from this teacher. He is really strict and doesn't seem to want to give his students a fair chance. He seems unfair, although that's just his way of getting his point across."*(2) *"He is very strict. If we don't follow what he wants we will have a consequence."*

Democratic Teacher. A democratic teacher gives freedom to students to express their thinking and to question every aspect of learning. It encourages students to have an inquisitive mind. They do not create boundary of learning, instead, leave options for students to maximize their learning. In short, it encourages independence among students. Student-respondents responses showed that twenty percent (40%) of the faculty who are non-education graduates are democratic teachers. However, all of the faculty who are education graduates are perceived as democratic teachers.(1) *"With Ma'am, we are able to express our opinions..."*(2) *"Our teacher is very approachable...we have a friendly environment in the classroom... I am learning if the teacher is friendly and supportive"*

The teaching styles that made the students learn better in Social Sciences subjects were the following: Indirect Instruction Style and Authoritative Teaching Styles. High performing students learn better if they are actively involved in the classroom and they learn from teachers who manages the best of both worlds with regards to control and student involvement. These teachers are open and friendly even though their boundaries are clearly established.

IV. CONCLUSION

Samar State University students learn Social Sciences subjects in different ways. They have different ways of acquiring knowledge. They take in and process information in different ways: by listening and seeing, analyzing and note-taking, reasoning and asking questions. Teaching methods also vary accordingly. They differ in their instructional strategies and personality which was pointed out by the students to be factors that contributed to their learning in Social Sciences subjects.

How much a student can learn is determined by the compatibility of the student's learning styles and the teacher's teaching styles. The more compatible the learning styles of the student and the teaching styles of the teacher in the instructional process, the better the information will be cemented into the student's mind. Students will not only absorb new knowledge faster but will also be able to better retain it.

The results suggest that to make learning in Social Sciences effective, teachers should continuously discover the learning styles of the students so that they can adjust and modify their

teaching styles to accommodate and address students learning styles. Hence, faculty who are informed and oriented about the learning styles of a college student can be in position to adopt teaching strategies that could match their students learning styles and devise techniques that will coincide with the learning needs of their students. If teachers are aware of their students' learning styles it will be easier to approach the problem of students in school and adjust their teaching styles devising more attractive ways to support students who are undergoing difficulty in their studies. Thus, it can result in improved attitudes toward learning and increase number of students who will be performing better in Social Sciences subjects.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Student-respondents perform better using learner-centered pedagogy. Social Science faculty should make sure that students are actively participating in the discussion making them the center of classroom interaction and evaluation.
2. Attendance to in-service trainings and seminar-workshop on differentiated instruction will enhance the teaching pedagogy of Social Science teachers particularly those teachers who are non-education graduates.
3. Professional education courses should be taken up by faculty handling Social Sciences who are non-education graduates. This is a big help in improving their teaching abilities.
4. Further research on investigating specific aspects of learning and teaching styles that could also benefit the field by adding greater understanding of the various aspects involved is recommended.

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