

## Study on Postgraduate Student Preferred / Dislike Teaching/Learning Techniques: A Case Study of a Private University in Malaysia

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### Abstract

This paper examine preferred / dislike teaching/learning techniques among postgraduate student at a Malaysian university. Past studies had indicated the promotion of students' "graduateness", responsibility lies in the hand of teachers who need to know what are in the mind of student with regards to their most preferred or non preferred learning and teaching style. 57 returned questionnaires were accepted and coded, and subject to further analysis with a response rate of 73 percent from the private university. The result revealed that the highest ranked technique most preferred by the students was "interactive lecture by instructor and the most dislike technique was formal lecture by instructor. Significant finding was that though there were some differences within the different disciplines, some commonalities seem to be present. Future study should consider alternative modes of enquires such as employing the longitudinal method of data collection design and a nationwide survey covering samples from the whole population of the higher institutions of learning in Malaysia that would be more significant in making generalizations .

**Keywords:** Preferred teaching, Preferred learning, Education, Malaysia

### Introduction

Existing literature on education indicates a proposition towards "educational excellence" which is about world class branding, marketable academic programmes, research activities and facilities in attracting and retaining foreign and local students (Isahak, 2007), but how does one compete to be different? According to Sander (2005) for universities to be in distinctive besides providing better services ( Hashim & Mahmood, 2011) being more efficient and effectiveness will be in their teaching and learning besides, "graduateness" of their student. Accordingly, one of "graduateness" properties is encouraging student to be an independent learner. To ensure student of that quality to be realized, most universities with support from the Malaysian Qualifying Agency (MQA) are encouraging student centered learning. Thus, in order to further support this promotion of "graduateness", one of the ways is that teachers need to know what are in the mind of student with regards to their most preferred or non preferred learning and teaching style. Rodrigues (2003) favor teaching/ learning techniques that he classified as "Active- Like" and "Passive- Like" teaching/ learning techniques. Not being able to identify what is most appropriate may cause stress and frustration among the student.

In higher education, as mentioned by McCarthy and Anderson (2000) and Astin (1984), lecture is the focal point of instruction whereby students will passively absorb information and then apply the knowledge into their final examinations to achieve certain achievement measures. However, in today's education system there is significant change in the teaching style by which students are more inclined to active learning techniques (McCarthy and Anderson (2000); Michael (2006); Zhao and Kuh (2004)

An active learning technique requires learners to be actively engaged in the academic learning process that involves students in many forms. Students of today are in need of teaching transformation that aids better in their learning environment (Michael, 2006 and Davies, 2006). In Astin (1984) the engagement of students involves the absorption in academic work, participation in curricular activities

and interaction with faculty and other institutional personnel. Zhao and Kuh (2004) indicated that participation in a form of learning community adds value to the learning environment and enhances academic performances and in general elevates student's progress.

There are other widespread benefits of active learning techniques in the academia. First, according to McCarthy and Anderson (2000) certain active learning techniques such as role playing in history class enables learners to perform better in class and this notion is also well supported by Michael (2006) stating that the effectiveness of the student engagement i.e. the active learning pedagogy is well supported by evidences in various disciplines which includes learning sciences, cognitive psychology and educational psychology.

The nature of knowledge construction and the development of problem-solving skills in a class setting provide students with opportunities to analytical and critically think on how to come up with solution for complex issue (Hmelo-Silver, 2004). In Healy and Jenkins's (2000), the use of experiential learning adapted from Kolb's (1975, 1980) model; students are more aware of their roles as a learner, which they will experience the different types of learning in different settings through a series of fieldwork.

Additionally, active learning requires the instructors to be experienced, as mentioned in Martyn (2007) and training could increase the skills amongst educators and provide as a form of support for teachers to give better feedback, better attitudes and teaching (Gibbs and Coffey, 2004). Educators are therefore challenged to offer an environment that not only cultivate competence but also create sustainable abilities which is deemed appropriate for a continuously evolving demand of the industry (Fraser and Greenhaigh, 2001).

Active like teaching/ learning techniques relate to full responsibility of learning were on the students whereas the reverse in passive- like teaching/ learning techniques environment. Unfortunately, not much attention has been given to the issue of preferred teaching/learning among graduates student at the higher education sector in Malaysia. Past researches have suggested that some universities in Malaysia were losing students were related more to the standard of service quality of the respective universities was not up to the expectation of the students (Jain et al., 2004; Latif et al., 2009; Hashim & Mahmood, 2011) and the implication of these students' withdrawals may not only be costly to the students' potential success in their career but also to the universities' reputation, operational and manpower costs (Curry, 2001). But the greatest loss of all will be in terms of potential knowledge workers to the nation. Therefore, the objective of this research was to examine preferred / dislike teaching/learning techniques at a Malaysian university. Based on the findings of this research, it is hope that it would also provide some information and understanding that will assist the leaders and policy makers of the Malaysian Universities as employers to realize the contributions of their academic staff in securing profitability and wealth through the most preferred learning among graduate student

## **Methodology and Research Design**

This study was designed to investigate the preferred / dislike teaching/learning techniques at a private Malaysian university. The relevant units of analysis in this study focused on postgraduate student at the selected university.

A quantitative cross sectional survey research was employed in this study. The survey was conducted on a private university offering various postgraduate programmes in Malaysia and has been in existence for more than 12 years. The target population for this study was the total population of postgraduate students in semester 2 to 9. Survey method was conducted at individual level. The questionnaires were distributed personally to the respondents at various classes by the graduate school executives. About 77 questionnaires were distributed. Data was collected within a period of one month. After eliminating unusable response, a total of 57 returned questionnaires were accepted and coded, and subject to further analysis. The response rate was 74.03 percent. Overall the response rate was 36 percent which was slightly better than what was reported generally in the Malaysian context (Othman et al., 2001).

The survey instrument was adapted from studies by Rodrigues (2003) and Sander et. al (2000). Twelve (12) categories of active and passive teaching/learning techniques were recognized as follows: Active –like teaching/learning techniques (A-Like):

- (1) **Interactive Lecture by Instructor** (lecturer deliver set of presentation and student listen and takes notes. Questions will be invited & responded to )
- (2) **Case Studies** ( application of theory on to real case problem)
- (3) **Teaching session based on group work** (lecturer gives a series of exercises /activities to facilitate student achieving learning objectives in group)
- (4) **Student centered teaching** ( lecturer has presentation prepared but prefers to led by the student responses to questions)
- (5) **Problem based learning** ( student given a set of problem to analyzed and resolved in small group settings)
- (6) **Student Role Play** (student asked to act out a situation or encounter)
- (7) **Project based learning** (mainly working on a specific project throughout the study)

Passive-Like teaching/learning techniques (P-Like):

- (1) **Formal Lecture by Instructor** (lecturer deliver set of presentation and student listen and takes notes)
- (2) **Individual research projects** (lecturer gives individual exercises /activities to facilitate student achieving learning objectives)
- (3) **Classroom presentations by student** (student prepare a set of topic each and deliver it to their peers under guidance of lecturer)
- (4) **Video shown in class**
- (5) **Private Study** (student given list of reading, exercises & activities to get on with it)

The student were requested to identify and rank their top three (3) teaching / learning style (from 1 to 3) they preferred and also identified their three (3) most dislike (from 1 to 3) teaching/learning style. Each of the terms used for the teaching / learning style were explained as above to evade ambiguity.

The instrument was then tested for internal reliability and the following Table 1.1 demonstrates the scales generated.

**Table 1.1:** Overall Internal Reliability

Variables	No of Items	Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha)
Preferred Learning	12	0.974
Not Preferred Learning	12	0.924

The reliability tests indicate excellent reliability for all its components with a coefficient alpha of above 0.7 which exceeds the minimum acceptable level, as suggested by Nunnally and Berstein (1994).

## Findings

Tables 1.2 below summarize the demographic profiles of the respondents. The sample indicates that male respondents represented a slightly higher percentage of total samples (60%) when compared to the female respondents (40%). A majority of the respondents were young between 21 to 35 years of age (68 %) followed by those between 36 to 45 years old (20%). About 12 percent of the student were

older than 45. With reference to sponsorship, the sample showed 84% were sponsored student and the rest were self sponsored. About 35% were from education course, computer (23%), business and management (11%) and Information Technology (32%). 49% of the student were in semester 2 and the rest in semester 3 to 9. The student in the semester 1 was not taken into account as they have just entered the university.

**Table 1.2:** Profile of Respondents

Particulars	Variables	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	34	60
	Female	23	40
Age	21<35	39	68
	36<45	11	20
	45>	7	12
Ethnicity	Bumiputra	16	28
	Indian	2	4
	Chinese	10	18
	Others (foreigners)	29	51
Status Study	Full Time	44	77
	Part Time	9	16
	Distance Learning	4	7
Sponsorship	Self Sponsor	48	84
	Sponsor	9	16
Course	Education	20	35
	Computer	13	23
	Business Admin and Management	6	11
	Information Tech	18	32
Current Semester	Semester 2	28	49
	Semester 3	11	19
	Semester 4	8	14
	Semester 5	7	12
	Semester 8	2	3
	Semester 9	2	3

### a. Preferred Teaching /Learning

Table 1.3 below shows the overall findings of the three (3) highest ranked techniques most preferred by the students are “interactive lecture by instructor” (72 %), followed by “case studies” (54%) and “problem based learning. All the techniques commonly used were in the active-like teaching/learning techniques (A-Like).

**Table 1.3:** Preferred Teaching /Learning (Percentage)

Variable	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Total
<b>A-Like</b>				
Interactive lecture by instructor	17.54	31.58	22.81	71.93
Case studies	15.79	21.05	17.54	54.39



Problem based learning	12.28	15.79	22.81	50.88
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### b. Dislike Teaching/ Learning

Overall the three (3) highest ranked on the dislike teaching/learning techniques were “formal lecture by instructor”, followed by “private study” and “group teaching based”. The study (shown in Table 1.4) indicates the two highest ranked on dislike teaching/learning techniques were more in the passive-like teaching/learning techniques (P-Like) area.

**Table 1.4:** Dislike Teaching/ Learning (Percentage)

Variable	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Total
<b>A-Like</b>				
Group teaching based	10.53	21.05	8.77	40.35
<b>P-Like</b>				
Formal lecture by instructor	35.09	5.26	8.77	49.12
Private study	7.02	10.53	24.56	42.11

### c. Comparison on Preferred Teaching/ Learning by discipline

Comparison between the different disciplines was found to be some slight differences in their preferences in the teaching/learning techniques. The top three (3) most preferred teaching/learning styles by discipline is (shown in Table 1.5 below) as follows:

- **Education discipline** student prefer a combination of A-Like and P-Like teaching/learning techniques of “interactive lecture by instructor”, “student centered teaching” and “formal lecture by instructor”.
- **Computer discipline** student indicate the preference for also a combination of A-Like and P-Like teaching/learning techniques of “interactive lecture by instructor”, “problem based learning” and “case studies”.
- **Business Administration/ Management discipline:** similarly to Computer discipline student, the business & management discipline student favor more of the A-Like teaching/learning techniques such as “interactive lecture by instructor”, “case studies” and “problem based learning”.
- **Information Technology discipline** student were more inclined to also a combination of A-Like and P-Like teaching/learning techniques of “interactive lecture by instructor”, place equally on “group teaching based” and “formal lecture by instructor”.

**Table 1.5:** Preferred Teaching/ Learning by Discipline (Percentage)

Variable	Education	Computer	Business Admin/ Management	Information Technology
<b>A-Like</b>				
Interactive lecture by instructor	50.00	73.80	66.60	76.50
Case studies	45.00	54.60	66.60	54.80
Group teaching based	40.00	45.50	50.00	64.70
Student centered teaching	50.00	45.50	49.00	53.00
Problem based learning	45.00	63.70	50.10	52.90
<b>P-Like</b>				
Formal lecture by instructor	50.00	36.40	33.40	64.70

#### d. Comparison on Dislike Teaching/ Learning by discipline

Comparison between the different disciplines was found to be some slight differences in their dislike on the teaching/learning techniques as shown in Table 1.6 below. The top three (3) most dislike teaching/learning style by discipline is as follows:

- **Education discipline** student do not prefer P-Like teaching/learning techniques of “private study” and “individual research project”. With regards to A-Like teaching/learning techniques they dislike “role play” and “group teaching based”.
- **Computer discipline** student indicated dislike for P-Like teaching/learning techniques of “private study,” formal lecture by instructor “and “individual research project.”
- **Business Administration/ Management discipline** student do not favor on A-Like teaching/learning technique of “group teaching based”. They place equal weightage on dislike for “role play”, “project based learning”, “ private study”, “formal lecture by instructor” and “ class presentation” .
- **Information Technology discipline** student are not inclined to a combination of A-Like and P-Like teaching/learning techniques of “case studies”, place equally on “private study” and “individual research project”.

**Table 1.6:** Dislike Teaching /Learning by Discipline (Percentage)

Variable	Education	Computer	Business Admin/ Management	Information Technology
<b>A-Like</b>				
Case studies	20.00	27.30	16.70	63.00
Role play	35.00	27.30	33.30	47.10
Group teaching based	35.00	36.40	50.00	47.00
Project based learning	15.00	18.50	33.30	35.30
<b>P-Like</b>				
Private study	40.00	55.50	33.30	41.20
Formal lecture by instructor	34.00	65.50	33.30	53.00
Individual research project	35.00	44.50	16.70	68.60
Class presentation	10.00	36.40	33.30	47.10

#### Discussion/ Conclusion

This research has its theoretical implications on education management in education in Malaysia. The significant finding was that though there were some differences within the different disciplines, some commonalities seem to be present. The data seems to suggest that the student from all disciplines preference and also dislike were a combination for A-Like as well as P-Like teaching/learning technique. The possibility explanation could be the component of behavioral and quantitative subjects found in the courses seems to perpetually dominate in the disciplines. Cultural differences may have an impact on differing pedagogy preferences/dislike that could also be a factor in the result of the study.

This study also has its share of limitation in the sampling frame which only considers a particular institution of higher education (selected university only) and therefore the results cannot be generalized to the whole education industry. Future studies should also consider alternative modes of enquires such as employing the longitudinal method of data collection design (e.g. experiments, archival data, observations or interviews) and a nationwide survey covering samples from the whole population of the higher institutions of learning in Malaysia. This study could also be replicated to

other level of education such as undergraduates' student and higher secondary school level. It will also be interesting to investigate what would be the preferred teaching techniques by teachers instead.

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