

A Study of Learning Preferences of University Students in Pakistan

Muhammad Ilyas Aslam

Ph. D Scholar IER University of the Punjab, Lahore

Abstract: *The purpose of the study was to explore the learning choices of university students in Pakistan. Main objectives of the study were to explore the learning choices and favorite type of learning of university students. Make gender wise comparisons between the learning preferences of the university students as well as study the effects of the demographic variables on the learning preferences of the students. The recommendations of the study might be helpful for HEC, university authorities, teachers and policy-making agencies to arrange learner centered education to their students to get better employment after completing their education. A 49 items five points agree-disagree type questionnaire was administered to randomly selected 1400 master level students of the seven public sector universities from Punjab and KPK Provinces of Pakistan. One thousand three hundred and eighty three participants returned the completed questionnaires. The responses on each item were weighted according to the position in which they occurred (e.g., the responses in strongly agree direction was treated as 5 and on disagree side was marked as 1). The percentage of responses was worked out for the items falling in each group and then overall percentage of responses for each of the group of items was calculated. Demographic effects were measured by calculating t and ANOVA statistics. It was noted that majority of the students prefer job oriented courses; more inclined towards self study and learn to use the application of IT in learning. Moreover, they like to learn problem solving skills through active learning. However, assessment system is mainly the test of memory. Some suggestions for policy and practice were made.*

Key Words: *Learning preferences, University students, Gender wise comparison, Demographic effects.*

Introduction

Learning is a basic need of human beings. It is a fact that everybody wants to learn something. His/her learning desire is either similar or different from the others. Therefore, there is a great variety in learning. Education plays a vital role in making the learning possible. Education institutions all over the world are doing their best to facilitate the

learning of students. What a person wishes to learn and how he/she wants to learn is a matter of great concern for everybody. According to Folk (2004) learning preferences are individual based and depend on particular learning modes and environments.

Universities are the powerhouses of learning. Every department of university is meant to promote some particular type of learning. These units provide learning facilities according to the contemporary requirements (Gower, 2006). Traditionally university teachers play a key role in making decisions about the nature and types of learning for the students. They mainly depend on teaching for promoting learning among their students.

In general, at university level in Pakistan there is more emphasis on teaching as compared to learning. Lecturing is the general way of teaching in the universities. In this way students learn a lot of facts but develop less thinking skills. It is general perception that examinations encourage rote learning among the students. The prevailing labor market situation of the country reflects that some of the facts and figures you learn today may not apply to the world of tomorrow, but ability to think will be useful always, in everything one do (Carter, 1998).

Now the things are going to be learner centered. The modern sophisticated technologies have also liberated the learners with learning choices. The learner-centered system gives more autonomy to the students in making choices about their learning. What the learners at Pakistani universities prefer is matter of great concern for the researcher.

Literature review

To Folk (2004) the particular modes and environments in which students feel comfort for learning are commonly termed as learning preferences. Learning is the lifelong process of transforming information and experience of knowledge, skills, behaviors, and attitudes (Waitzkin, 2006). Generally, it involves some desirable changes in the behavior of individuals on the basis of these experiences. This change is viable if the learning situations are in accordance with the preferred method of understanding, organizing, and making sense of information of the learner.

A large number of experts contributed in developing the theory of learning. The major contributions are as follows: Gagne, (1985) describes learning as a permanent change in human behavior through experience. Therefore, the learning characterizes change in the way you think and behave through training. Gagne places learning into the following five main groups: vocal information, rational skills, cognitive strategies, motor skills and attitudes (Illeris, 2007).

Each type has its own requirements. For example, in cognitive learning it is necessary to identify novel solutions of problems. The arrangement of the learning tasks directly depends on their ease for learning. Learner's attention is basic requirement for any type of learning. A teacher can get students' attention by asking thought provoking questions in the beginning of the lesson (Illeris, 2007). This stimulates the curiosity of the learner. Every lesson has a set of objectives, which indicate the expected learning outcomes.

A simple way to stimulate recall is to ask questions about previous experiences, an understanding of previous concepts and then give some information to make a link for creating effective learning environment. Portion wise, meaningfully organized, typically explained with suitable demonstration is an effective way to present new content to the learner (Folk, 2006). It seems the learner shows internal involvement in learning if he/she is aware, with these expectations. This can also provide base for assessment. Associating new information with prior knowledge can facilitate the learning process. It is easier for learners to encode and store information in long-term memory when

there are links to personal experience and knowledge.

Hence, effective instructional strategies include the use of examples, case studies, graphical representations, and analogies. Here the learner is required to practice the new skill or behavior. This provides an opportunity to the learner to confirm their correct understanding, and increases the possibility of preservation of knowledge (Carter, 2004). It is evident that to provide specific and immediate feedback by the teacher on the performance of the learner when he/she practices a new behavior. The smart work like short answer questions and exercises are useful for assessing comprehension, diagnosing learning problems and providing feedback to the learners. To Folk, (2006) effective training programs generally focus market-based performance. The repetition of learned skills brings mastery to the learning. Appropriate learning aids such as electronic or online job-aids, references, templates, and wizards are the ways of aiding performance.

Objectives of the study

The study focused the following objectives:

1. To explore learning preferences of university students
2. To identify the most popular type of learning among the students
3. To study the effects of demographic variables on the learning preferences.
4. To recommend appropriate measures for changing current practices of education into market based learner centered education.

Data Analysis

Table 1: Students' Preferences on ways of Learning

Item #	Items	Agree F	Agree %	Disagree F	Disagree %	Total F
1	Lectures are the most convenient way of learning for me	5536	97.58%	137	2.41%	5673
2	I enjoy group work in class	5298	94.15	329	5.84	5627
3	I prefer self study	4214	90.06	465	9.93	4679
4	I learn more through reading than by listening lectures	3274	79.38	850	20.61	4124
5	Students feel difficulty in doing research projects	4612	93.78	308	6.26	4920
6	I like students' Presentations	4595	93.50	319	6.49	4914
7	I would like to learn how to work independently	4794	95.61	220	4.38	5014
Total		32323	92.00%	2628	7.99%	34951
Paired Sample t test	Agree Mean	4612.00		Disagree Mean	375.42	t 11.734
	Agree Standard Deviation	736.48		Disagree Standard Deviation	232.42	df 6 sig .000

Regarding table 1, more than 90% students illustrated that lecture is the most convenient way of learning. They like group work, self-study and working independently. They prefer reading materials to lectures. Ninety-three percent students feel difficulty in doing research projects. Overall

92% students chose self-study, group work and to work independently. In this regard there is a significant difference between agree and disagree groups of responses in favor of agree side as shown by paired sample t-test.

Table 2: Learning Preferences regarding application of Information Technologies

Item #	Items	Agree F	Agree %	Disagree F	Disagree %	Total F
8	I appreciate the application of information technologies in every day life	5253	97.85%	115	2.14%	5368
9	Students prefer to learn through internet	4236	90.10	465	9.89	4701
11	Students want to learn how to use digital library	4372	93.21	318	6.78	4690
26	Majority of the students can't use electronic way of communication (email)	1583	53.26	1389	46.73	2972
38	I do not know how to use modern banking system	1835	59.50	1249	40.49	
Total		17279	78.78%	3536	21.21%	17731
Paired Sample t test	Agree Mean	3455		Disagree Mean	707	t 2.772
	Agree Standard Deviation	1644.11		Disagree Standard Deviation	574.29	df 4 sig .050

Concerning table 2 more than 97%, students appreciate the application of information technologies in every day life. They want to learn through internet and use of digital library, and 53.26% admitted the majority of the students cannot use electronic ways of communication (E-

mail). In the same way 59.50% students said that, they do not know how to use modern banking system. In this regard there is a significant difference between agree and disagree groups of responses in favor of agree side as shown by paired sample t-test.

Table 3: Learning styles

Item #	Items	Agree F	Agree %	Disagree F	Disagree %	Total F
10	Cooperative learning is widely practiced at university.	4410	92.60%	352	7.39%	4762
12	Students are habitual of practicing shortcuts in learning.	4412	93.77	293	6.22	4705
28	I want to be a leader in group work.	3841	86.93	577	13.06	4418
29	University offers activity based learning.	4211	91.50	391	8.49	4602
33	University focuses leadership abilities of the students.	3922	88.37	516	11.62	4438
39	University did not Develop marketable skills among the students.	2131	69.68	927	30.31	3058
Total		22927	87.14%	3056	12.85%	25983
Paired Sample t test	Agree Mean	3821.16		Disagree Mean	509.3	t 7.455
	Agree Standard Deviation	861.97		Disagree Standard Deviation	230.05	df 5 sig.001

Regarding table 3 more than 90% students illustrated that cooperative learning is widely practiced at university level and university offers

activity based learning. Ninety-three percent students are habitual of practicing shortcuts in learning. 88% students considerably said that

universities focuses leadership abilities of the students and 69% believed that universities did not develop marketable skills among the students. In

this regard there is a significant difference between agree and disagree groups of responses in favor of agree side as shown by paired sample t-test.

Table 4: Academic choices of university students

Item #	Items	Agree F	Agree %	Disagree F	Disagree %	Total F
14	I do not enjoy class discussions	4102	89.09%	502	10.90%	4604
16	I develop understanding of the learnt concepts	4630	96.05	190	3.94	4820
17	I feel bored in class.	1825	62.75	1083	37.24	2908
18	I am good in memorization	4023	91.70	364	8.29	4327
19	Students like rote learning	3139	88.69	400	11.30	3539
20	I am interested in learning the application of knowledge	5038	96.51	182	3.48	5220
34	I enjoy active type of learning	5608	98.68	75	1.31	5683
35	I prefer life long learning	4724	94.00	301	5.99	5025
36	I believe more in visual mode of learning	4524	95.00	238	4.99	4762
	Total	37613	90.27%	3335	9.72%	40888
Paired Sample t test	Agree Mean 4179.22 Agree Standard Deviation 1120.96			Disagree Mean 370.55 Disagree Standard Deviation 296.58		t 8.159 df 8 sig.000

Regarding table 4 more than 94% students responded that they believe more in visual mode of learning. They prefer life long learning. They enjoy active type of learning. Students interested in learning ‘the application of knowledge and develop the understanding of the learnt concepts, 94% students prefer life-long learning, 91% percent

considered that they are good in memorization 81% believed students do not enjoy class discussion, 88% like rote learning and 62% students feel bored in class. In this regard there is a significant difference between agree and disagree groups of responses in favor of agree side as shown by paired sample t-test.

Table 5: Interpersonal skills

Item #	Items	Agree F	Agree %	Disagree F	Disagree %	Total F
21	Students prefer to learn problem solving skills	4476	93.42%	315	6.57%	4791
22	I can not solve daily life problems	2857	72.71	1072	27.28	3929
23	I want to be skillful in creative abilities.	5479	97.64	132	2.35	5611
24	I am interested to learn effective communication Skills	5420	96.54	194	3.45	5614
25	I would like to develop mastery of English Language	4875	94.75	270	5.24	5145
27	Students are generally not motivated to learn critical thinking	1306	48.82	1369	51.17	2675

30	I am interested to learn the time management strategies	4821	95.97	202	4.02	5023
31	I want to learn about personnel management.	4999	96.54	179	3.45	5178
32	I am interested to learn how to manage resources	5378	97.85	118	2.14	5496
Total		39611	88.24%	3851	11.74%	43462
Paired Sample t test	Agree Mean	4401.22		Disagree Mean	427.88	t 6.399
	Agree Standard Deviation	1408.99		Disagree Standard Deviation	459.55	df 8 sig .000

Regarding table 5, 93% students articulated that they prefer learn problem solving skills, 97% students want to be skillful in creative abilities and 96% interested to learn effective communication skills. I would like to develop mastery of English language, this is the statement of 94% students, 95% students interested to learn time management skills, 96% want to learn about personal

management skills as well as how to manage resources. Only 48% students are generally motivated to learn critical thinking, 72% university students can not solve daily life problems. In this regard there is a significant difference between agree and disagree groups of responses in favor of agree side as shown by paired sample t test.

Table 6: Students Preferences regarding social practices

Item #	Items	Agree F	Agree %	Disagree F	Disagree %	Total F
37	I am good in social networking	3628	88.59%	467	11.40%	4095
40	I am interested in national politics	1940	68.64	886	31.35	2826
41	Students feel Pleasure to violate traffic rules Violation is	2556	73.15	338	26.84	2894
42	common behaviour among university students	2735	76.84	824	23.15	3559
43	Students do not care for national interests	2687	73.89	949	26.10	3636
45	Fundamental Islamic values are not generally practiced at university	1505	52.80	1354	47.50	2859
Total		15051	72.31%	4818	27.72%	19869
Paired Sample t test	Agree Mean	2508.50		Disagree Mean	803.0	t 4.071
	Agree Standard Deviation	730.60		Disagree Standard Deviation	363.69	df 5 sig .010

Regarding table 6, the majority 88% students are good in social networking, 68% interested in national politics, 73% feel pleasure to violate the traffic rules. The articulation of 76% student's violation is common behavior among university students, 73% students are in favor with this

statement students do not care for national interests. In this regard there is a significant difference between agree and disagree groups of responses in favor of agree side as shown by paired sample t-test.

Table 7: Assessment

Item #	Items	Agree F	Agree %	Disagree F	Disagree %	Total F
13	Evaluation system is comprehensive to assess all types of learning outcomes	3196	88.33%	422	11.16%	3618
15	Examinations are normally tests of memory.	4534	92.83	350	7.16	4884
44	Majority of the students want just to pass the examination.	4651	92.72	365	7.27	5016
Total		12381	91.29%	1137	8.53%	13518
Paired Sample t test	Agree Mean 4127.00 Agree Standard Deviation 808.38			Disagree Mean 379.00 Disagree Standard Deviation 37.98	t 7.682 df 2 sig .017	

Regarding table 7, a greater number of 88% students are agreed with the statement on Evaluation system is comprehensive to assess all types of learning outcomes, more than 90% students illustrated that examinations are normally tests of memory and majority of the students want just to pass the examination. In this regard there is a significant difference between agree and disagree groups of responses in favor of agree side as shown by paired sample t test.

Conclusions

According to the parameters of questionnaire, in the case of “Students’ Preferences on ways of Learning” more than 90% students believed that lecture is the most convenient way of learning, they like group work, self study and to work independently. They prefer reading materials over lectures. Ninety three percent students feel difficulty in doing research projects. All the students appreciate the application of information technologies in everyday life. They want to learn through internet and use of digital library and admitted that the majority of the students cannot use electronic way of communication (E mail). In the ways of learning styles the majority believed, that cooperative learning is widely practiced at university level and university offers activity based learning. More students are habitual of practicing shortcuts in learning. The students considerably said that universities focus leadership abilities in the students. The prominent number of the students claimed that universities did not develop marketable skills among the students. In case of academic choices, eighty nine percent students do not enjoy class discussion. The majority 98% university students enjoy active type of learning. By calculation results students are interested in learning the application of knowledge to develop the understanding of the learnt concepts. In the

same way ninety one percent considered that they are good in memorization, 88% like rote learning and 62% students feel bored in class.

In case of interpersonal skills, more than 90% students want to learn problem solving skills, to develop creative abilities and are interested to learn effective communication skills. Same as the majority likes to develop mastery of English language, and to learn time management skills. A mainstream wish for learn about personal management skills as well as how to manage resources and less ratio of the students are generally motivated to learn critical thinking. In the same way 72% university students cannot solve daily life problems. In the case of students’ preference regarding national interest eighty percent students are good in social networking, 68% interested in national politics, 73% feel pleasure to violate the traffic rules. The articulation of 76% student’s believed, violation is common behavior among university students, 73% students are in favor the statement students do not care for national interests. In the case of assessment, the results show that 88% students agree that evaluation system is comprehensive to assess all types of learning outcomes. More than 90% students agreed that examinations normally test the memory and majority of the students want just to pass the examination.

Generally students do not know how to use modern banking system, students of both genders like to learn. In the case of communication skills and its learning the students belonging to safe background are more confident and desire to learn more. University is a place for research work so in this field of knowledge students feel financial problem. The students prefer self-study belonging from the poor family background. In the case of learning preferences, students prefer to take the courses that are job oriented. In the case of learning and using

IT, the students of poor family do not know the usage of IT for learning purposes and are not eager to learn to use it. With respect to area variable, the students belonging to rural areas are not competent in oral communication skills and are hesitant to communicate as compare to the students belonging to urban areas. In the case of income, level of the parent's income has a great impact on students. They are unwilling in-group discussion, it can be said that they are introvert.

However, in contrary to this the students belonging to prosperous families are social and like gathering and being social. In the case of violation of laws, the education has not a great impact on the habits of these students. They are adventurous in violation of traffic and other rules. The students of middle class families take it better to learn by rotting not to become skilled in the knowledge. Most of the students are acquiring education for the sake of getting jobs.

Recommendations

- 1) It is recommended to apply useful learning techniques keeping in view the students preferences.
- 2) The students should be given learners centered learning.
- 3) It is recommended to apply it in the universities market based skills for proper adjustment in practical life after education.
- 4) More specializations should be introduced at university level.
- 5) Students should be given ethical education to maintain moral values and preservation of national interests.
- 6) Students should be educated according to their learning preferences and styles.

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