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Learning Style and Its Impact in Higher Education and Human Capital Needs

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Abstract

Creative and critical thinking is one of the soft skill attributes expected of prospective graduates or learners. For one to participate effectively in their working and social environment, studies have indicated that learners' need to be exposed to a variety of learning styles, strategies as well as creative and critical thinking skills. Such exposure maximizes ones' potential to be creative, critical and constructive thinkers deemed necessary for nation building and future human capital needs. As such, these precious future human capital should not be left untapped to their own devices to discover their own learning styles as they step foot in the university. Learning strategies need to be tailored to meet individual learning styles to capitalize on the learner's potential. In this context, the study attempts to uncover possible changes in the learner's learning styles as a result of exposure to various types of learning styles in a Thinking Skills Course conducted during the first semester of the first year of the learners' program in the university. By identifying their learning strategies, an awareness of the best learning styles and strategies can be improvised to best fit each individual. Such awareness will inadvertently create ripples in the teaching learning style of teachers. Rather than applying a one fits all model of teaching, teaching styles can also be adapted at the initial stage of the learners' studies. The lack of such insight results in a tremendous loss to identifying and aligning the learner's potential to meet future human capital needs.

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1. Introduction

Economic growth and development of a country in increasing its competitiveness and enhanced population quality of life, is undoubtedly dependent on the investment in human capital (Kasim Mansur, Mori Kogid & Madals, 2010). The importance of quality training provided to human capital is greatly felt in all nations, particularly developing nations that vie to become industrialized nations, such as Malaysia. In the country's move toward an industrialized nation through economic policies such as that of Vision 2020, trained human capital is indeed crucial. Notwithstanding this, the way in which human capital is trained to become capable manpower crucial for nation-building efforts is another critical issue that must not be overlooked. Thus, relevant training needs to be identified and made available to align required human capital skills that meet the needs of future nation building efforts.

For this aspect to materialize, it is necessary that efforts are aligned between policy makers and educational philosophies to ensure that the investment in human resource and capacity development is not futile but in tandem with national development policies and educational blueprints, such as the National Philosophy of Education (2007) and Education Blueprint (2013-2025).

The National Philosophy of Education (2007) states that "Education in Malaysia is a continuous effort towards enhancing potentials of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner in order to create individuals who are well-equipped intellectually, spiritually and emotionally. This effort aims to produce knowledgeable, ethical and responsible Malaysian citizens who can contribute towards the harmony and prosperity of the community and nation" (National Philosophy of Education, 2007). Based on one of the many aims stipulated in the Philosophy of Education "it is evident that the aim of higher education is to educate individuals for self-development in a holistic approach to serve their community and nation. as learned, responsible and ethical citizens" (National Philosophy of Education, 2007). In addition, the recently launched National Blueprint emphasized the need to create a knowledgeable society to meet nation building efforts National Education Blueprint (2013-2025).

The challenge posed to teachers of the 21st century is to ask ourselves if the current needs and learning styles of students' are maximized to ensure that students' true potentials are fully developed. Are individual learning styles encouraged in higher education classrooms ableit the class size? How are teaching and learning tasks designed to meet the individual learning styles of students in large classrooms at higher education level?

2. Literature Review

In line with the National Philosophy of Education (2007), the recently launched National Education Blueprint (2013-2025), reinforced the importance of skilled human capital as the fundamental criteria to lead a nation forward. Policy makers acknowledge the need for skilled innovative, critical and creative human capital necessary to lead the nation as part of the global community (Malaysia Education Blueprint, 2013-2025). A study by Kasim Mansur, Mori Kogid & Madais (2010) mentioned that "the development of human capital is paramount important for personal development and personal performance namely in terms of productivity and quality of life". This study emphasized the importance of aligning training needs with that of nation human capital needs and policies. Moreover, a recent study conducted by Suriyani Muhamad, Nor Fatimah Che Sulaiman, and Nur Azura Sanusi (2012) suggested that economic development can be achieved by individual or specific human capital that have certain level of innovative capability which will in turn, foster innovation and generate greater economic development. This finding accentuates the need to identify human capital ability as an impetus to nation building efforts. Thus, as the crucial part of developing the human capital is related to the development of an individual, considerable attention is required to cater the learning activities and processes in accordance with the individual learning styles in order to achieve the aims of the National Philosophy of Education.

In relation to individual learning styles, Felder (2001) stated that students possess varied styles in understanding and processing information which can be done in various ways such as seeing and hearing, reflecting and acting, reasoning logically and intuitively, analysing and visualizing, steadily (Felder, 2001). Learning styles deal with the way students' receive and process information within a learning environment (Zywno & Waalen, 2002). As it is

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