

Different Backgrounds and English Learning Styles of Bangkok University Student

Nuttanuch Munsakorn

Assistant Professor, Language Institute
Bangkok University, Thailand
E-mail: nuttanuch.m@bu.ac.th

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Abstract: *The purpose of this research was to investigate the influence demographics, gender, faculty, and level of general English has on students' learning styles. Subjects were 410 students representing Accounting, Business Administration, and Economics faculties and studying Business English courses at Bangkok University. A Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire: PLSPQ (Reid, 1987) was used for collecting data via a five point Likert scale. Data were analyzed and calculated in percentage, mean, standard deviation and Chi-squared test at the level of 0.05. The results show that Bangkok University students do not have a specific style of learning English. The three main forms of learning English are; study in a group, learning and practicing in different situations, and listening respectively. Some results varied based on gender, faculty and levels of academic performance in general English variables. However, the styles of learning English did not.*

Keywords: *different backgrounds, learning styles, PLSPQ,*

1. Introduction

The growth of business and advancement of communication technology have made the role of English an increasingly important tool for expanding international competitiveness. Approximately 80 percent of the information available via Electronic Media is in the English language (Kluver, 2000). This information shows the importance of the English language in today's world. Therefore, Thailand should accelerate students' development and preparation of the English language skills to a level where they can communicate, collaborate, negotiate and build international business relationships effectively.

Developing and preparing students to communicate using their English language skills has a direct impact on the development and evolution of design styles for learning and teaching English in higher education institutions in Thailand. This paper argues that the development of teaching General English alone is not sufficient for development and preparation of personnel for international business. Therefore, the educators should on English skills that emphasis English language communication skills for the workplace in order to respond to the needs of learners more effectively.

Teaching English for the workplace should aid learners' achieve important career goals by preparing the learner to use English for communication in workplace situations such as significant vocabulary terms (Robinson, 1980).

Therefore, it is important to prepare lessons, teaching activities and teaching materials that correspond to the instructional model of learning in order to develop skills in English language learners effectively. Currently the development of teaching English for careers is focused on several issues such as development in curriculum and content, education environment and using technology media to assist in teaching. However, this overlooks the several key issues in the process of learning English, for example developing the students' ability to have a direct role in communication and building the students' confidence in their use of English for the workplace.

The key point that has been ignored is learning English in a practical way, therefore the author believes the development of learning and teaching English needs to change and become more learner focused. This concept idea is consistent with Cohen's (1990) studies of the process of teaching a foreign language is that

attention must be redirected from the instructors to the students and not aim to improve the teaching method alone.

So English for business purposes is an important subject for people in broadly diversified employment situations, ranging from employee to executive. Businesses are staffed by accountants, management, marketing, public relations, research and development so each employee and each position may be required to use English in performing their job. Each student will use a different style of learning to gain the most benefit from a course in English for the workplace, the success of each student comes from the ability to provide for a variety of learning styles. The learning style does not mean the direct abilities but it is the way that each person uses their abilities for thinking and learning. This suggests that there not a best or worst form of learning but that the method of providing knowledge must be flexible enough to accommodate a range of learning styles. The success of learning thus relies on the nature and style of learning of the learner themselves, and providing for the most suitable style to allow the learner develop that style of learning and allow the best performance.

Learning styles and the effectiveness of teaching and learning in the classroom have become the focus of a considerable number of studies by educators and psychologists. According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, the word "style" refers to the a particular manner or technique by which something is done, created, or performed, so 'learning style' may be defined as the physical characteristics, idea and feeling that person use in recognition and response interacted with the learning environment as relatively constant (Keefe, 1979, Hong & Suh, 1995).

Learners need a learning style that builds confidence in using English, therefore encouraging students to participate and develop the ability to communicate in English corresponds with the philosophy of teaching and learning. An important issue is that teacher needs to understand the learning styles of students because currently most of the management of learning and teaching English in universities focuses on demographic points such as gender, age and ability level in learning the instructional documents, variety and styles of activities, and interests of students. However, the instructor may be negligent by not focusing on other student related issues, because instructors have different teaching styles. Thus, if the instructor knows the learning style of the learner it will be very helpful because the instructor can manage the learning environment. Instructors can understand the behavior and problems of individual learners, there by assisting students to gain the confidence to use English in the real work situation without the need for further English language study. This, in turn, offers students a competitive advantage in achieving suitable employment opportunities after graduation.

Bangkok University wants to develop a program that produces graduates that have the abilities to use English communication skills that offer a clear response to the labor market demand.

The purpose of the research

1. To study Bangkok University student' English language learning styles.
2. To investigate Bangkok University student' English language learning styles according to demographics, gender and levels of academic performance of general English.

2. Scope of research

1. The population is Bangkok University undergraduate enrolled in Business English in the first semester of the academic year 2010. All data were collected in English classes during the month of August 2010.
2. The variables of the study
 - 2.1) Variables such as different backgrounds of students include:
 - Gender divided into Male and Female
 - Faculty divided into Accounting, Business Administration and Economics.

- Levels of academic performance in general English are divided into four levels: very good, good, moderate and not satisfactory.

2.2) Dependent variables are styles of Learning English divided into 6 types; using visual (VLS - Visual Learning Style), listening (ALS - Auditory Learning Style), practices in different situation (KLS - Kinesthetic Learning Style), performance (TLS - Tactile Learning Style), learning alone (ILS - Individual Learning Style) and study in group (GLS - Group Learning Style)

3. Theory and Related Research

3.1 Conceptual studies of learning by PLSPQ

PLSPQ is a tool to survey patterns of English language specific to those learning English as a second language (ESL) or foreign languages (EFL). It is a questionnaire that surveys a pattern of learning from channel of perception data that can be divided into the following six types; using visuals (VLS - Visual Learning Style), listening (ALS - Auditory Learning Style), practices in different situation (KLS - Kinesthetic Learning Style), performance (TLS - Tactile Learning Style), learning alone (ILS - Individual Learning Style) and study in a group (GLS - Group Learning Style) (Reid, 1984)

1. Learning through visual (Visual Major Learning Style Preference) includes visual reading and studying charts and media composed of other images such as image, signboard, video and movies. This type of learner has the ability to view information from text books, on the (white) board or via exercises and be able to memorize the information more effectively than if memorizing via the teaching of the instructor. This type of learner does not need to listen to the explanation of others but rather rely on reading and self understanding of messages to aid in recognition. This type of learner prefers to study alone with books rather than interacting with the others.

2. Listening (Auditory Learning Style Preference) means learners learn from listening activities such as listening to a lecture, conversation, or cassette. These learners learn and remember from the explanations of other people and they may like to read aloud for recognition of the content of courses.

3. Learning by practicing in different situations (Kinesthetic Learning Style Preference) means learning from practicing scenarios that require motion in the learning situation such as role play like drama, interviews and learning from real experiences. Learning by participating in activities (Total physical involvement in learning) the learner is able to remember the knowledge obtained by participating in class, having outdoor activities, role play or learning by mixing auditory and kinesthetic methods.

4. Learning through performing (Tactile Learning Style Preference) means learning by doing (hands-on) for example, creating a model, experimentation in a laboratory and learning from tangible objects such as photo book or card. This type of learner likes learning by doing things by themselves, reading, listening to other people or observation.

5. Learning individually (Individual Learning Style Preference) means the way that the learner does self study both in and out of the classroom in order to achieve the goal of learning. This type of learner prefers learning by them self and will be able to solve various problems as well as understanding more about the facts when they perform self study.

6. Studying in a group (Group Learning Style Preference) means the situation where learners work together with friends or classmates either in pairs or groups. They prefer solving the new problems as part of a group rather than by themselves. Motivation in learning new things comes from the support and help of the group. Learners can be further segmented into 3 types being; Major (main), Minor (secondary) and Negative (do not have). Each learner will have either a major, minor or negative style of learning, learners with major style tend to have a very good study characteristics, while learners that have minor style can receive and remember the information at a good level. Those who do not have a style of learning will have difficulties in learning

cognitive information during the learning process. Reid's (1987) construct of perceptual sensory learning styles comprise six major preferences: Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic, Tactile, Group, and Individual.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Population and samples

1. Bangkok University undergraduate students enrolled in Business English courses in the first semester of the academic year 2010 made up the population (1,347 people).
2. Subjects were 410 students representing Accounting, Business Administration, and Economics faculties and studying Business English courses at Bangkok University. This is from a stratified random sampling. The size of the sample is calculated from the formula of Yamane that the movement equal 0.05 (Yamane, 1973) that got a sample of at least 309 people. However, the researcher consider using the sample of 410 people that mostly are women with 277 people and the remaining are 67.6 percent are male. The number of 133 people where 32.4 percent study in the faculty of Accounting and faculty of Business administration with 43.9 percent per 180 people and faculty of Economics with 50 people were 12.2 percent having results of levels of academic performance of general English in average and at the highest level were with 152 people by 37.1 percent, moderate level were 32.0 percent, not at a satisfactory level were 25.4 per cent and 5.6 percent were at very good level.

4.2 Data Collection

Data were collected in class during the month of August 2010.

4.3 Research Tool

Tool used in this research can be divided into 2 parts.

Part 1: Data base of respondents gender, faculty and level of academic English skills.

Part 2: Perceptual Style Preference Questionnaire (PLSPQ) (Reid, 1987), designed to explore the patterns of learning English language as a second language (ESL) and foreign language (EFL) in higher education. PLSPQ was used to assess participants' Perceptual Learning Styles, which took 25 minutes to complete and score. The PLSPQ required students to write down a numerical value at the end of each of 30 questions. A Likert rating scale was used to assess the level of performances and the scoring criteria (strongly agree = 5 marks, agree = 4 marks, no decision = 3 marks, disagree = 2 marks, strongly Disagree = 1 mark). They were instructed to complete all the values, to add the numbers, and finally, multiply the answer by two. Their major, minor, and negligible styles were determined by analyzing the separate scores on the six perceptual categories. Major learning style preference scores ranged from 38 to 50 minor ranged from 25 to 37, and negligible ranged from 0 to 24.

Scoring and interpretation are as follows.

Scoring: Score format = Total score of the question in each model x 2

Interpretation: The learning model is divided into three groups.

Scaling score model	Meaning
38-50 marks	Major Learning Style Preference
25-37 marks	Minor Learning Style Preference
0-24 marks	Negligible Learning Style Preference

Statistical data analysis

1. Basic statistics are percentage frequency, mean and standard deviation.
2. The statistic used to test assumptions is Chi-square test.

5. Results

The participants have a main learning style as follows; VLS at 22.1 percent (93 students); TLS at 26.6 percent (109 students); ALS at 29.8 percent (122 students); GLS is 42.9 percent (176 students); KLS at 39.0 percent (160 students) and ILS at 13.7 percent (56 students). Learning English in the Minor style results are as follows; VLS at 64.4 percent (264 students); TLS at 63.7 percent (261 students); ALS at 62.0 percent (254 students); GLS at (48.8 percent) (200 students); KLS at 52.0 percent (213 students); ILS at 57.1 percent (234 students). Learning English in the negligible style results are as follows; VLS at 12.9 percent (53 students); TLS at 9.8 percent (40 students); ALS at 8.3 percent (34 students); GLS at (9.0percent) (37 students); KLS at 29.3 percent (120 students); ILS at 57.1 percent (234 students).

Figure 1

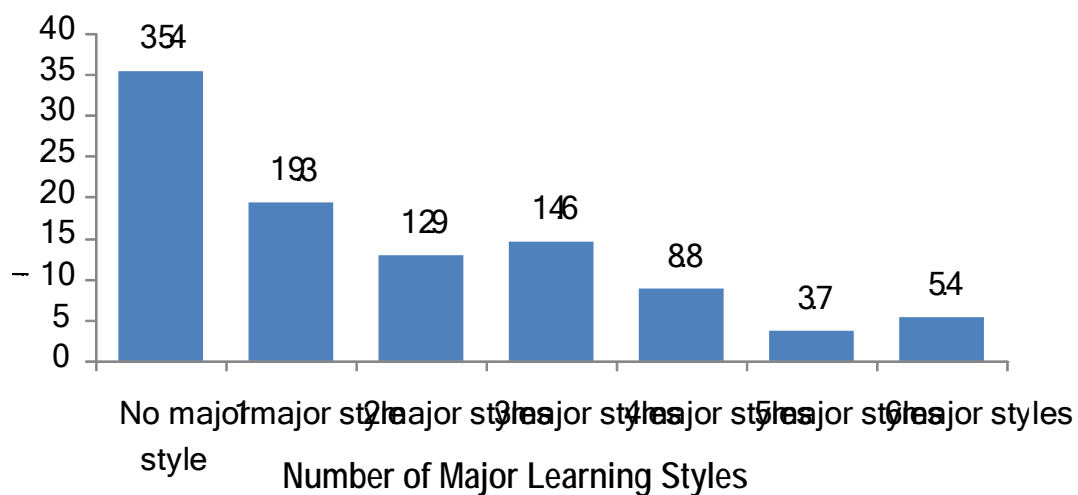


Figure 1 shows that the most of Bangkok university students do not have major learning styles at the 35.4 percent followed by 1 major style is at 19.3 percent, 3 major styles is at 14.6 percent, 2 major styles is at 12.9 percent, 4 major styles is at 8.8 percent and 6 major styles is at 5.4 percent respectively and the lowest is 3.7 percent for 5 major styles.

Figure 2

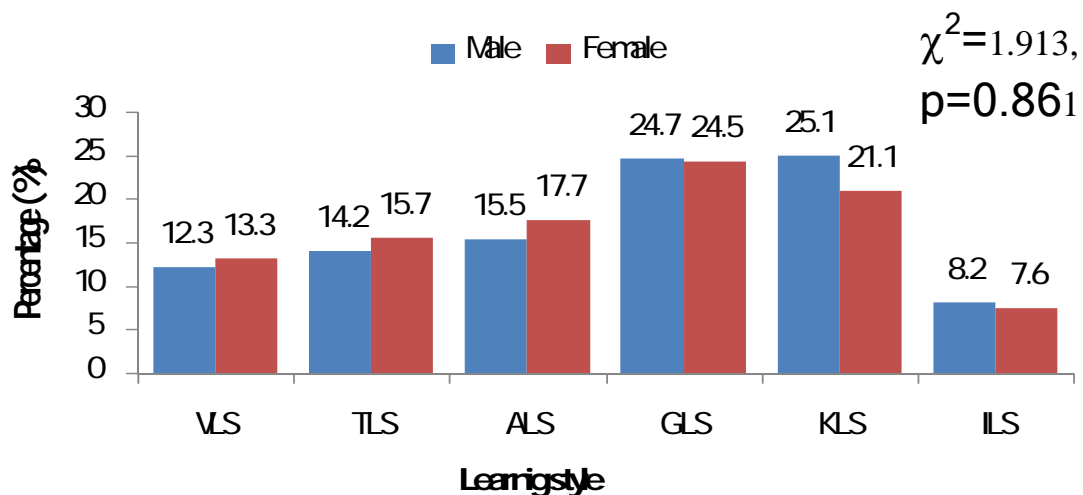


Figure 2 shows the English learning styles of Bangkok University's student. GLS is at 24.5 percent of female students and 24.7 percent of male students, KLS is at 25.1 percent of male students and 21.1 percent of female students, ALS is at 17.7 percent of female and 15.5 percent of male students, TLS 15.7 percent of female and 14.2 percent of male students, VLS of male students is at 12.3 percent and 13.3 percent of female students, ILS is at 7.6 percent of female student and 8.2 percent of male students.

When testing the relationship between English learning styles of BU student by gender, results were statistically significant at 0.05. Where the learning styles of BU student do not have relationship with gender of the student ($\chi^2=1.913$, $p=0.861$).

Figure 3

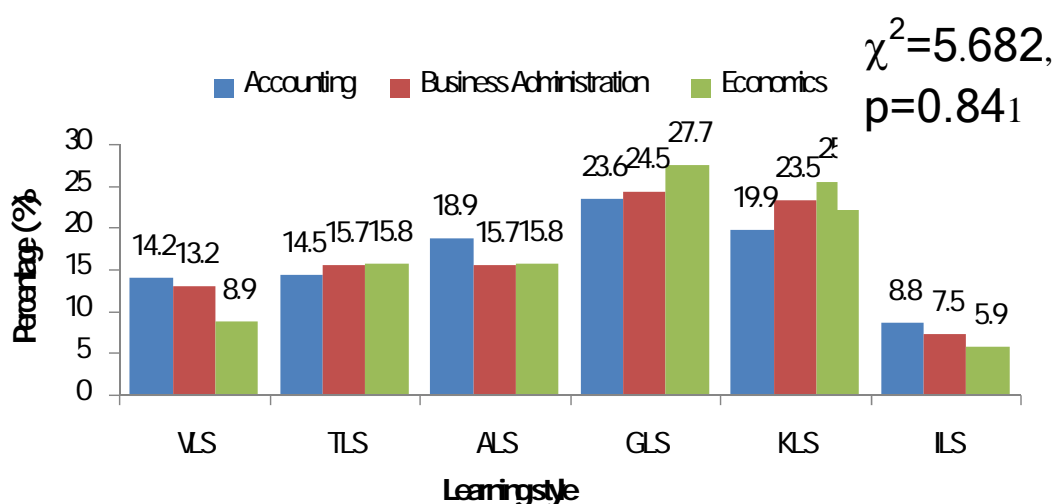
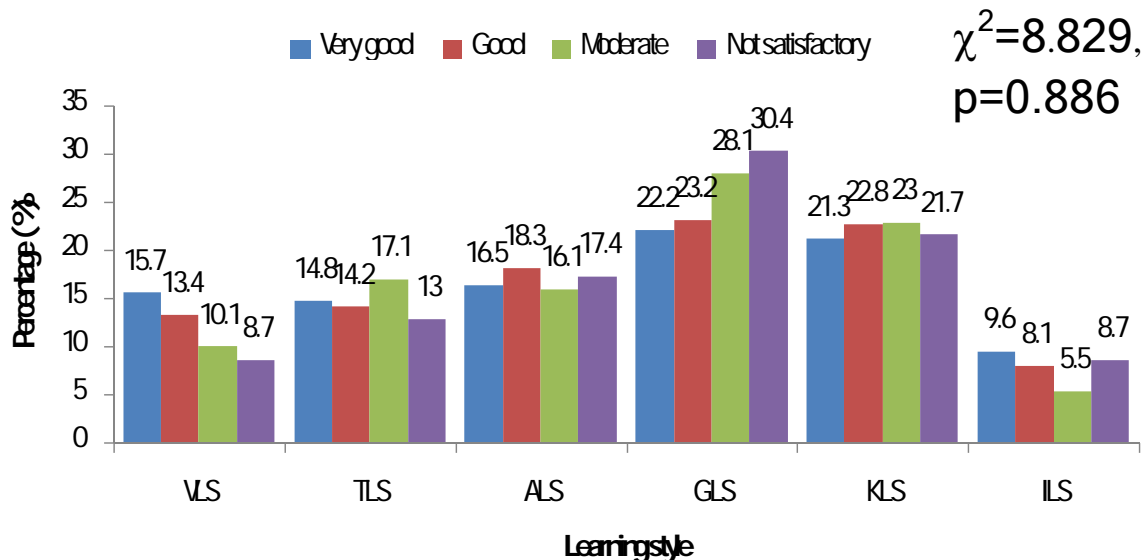


Figure 3 shows that 24.5 percent of students in the Business Administration faculty, 27.7 percent of students in Economics faculty and 23.6 percent of students in the Accounting faculty. KLS students in the faculty of Accounting 19.9 percent, students in the faculty of Business Administration 23.5 percent and 25.7 percent of students in the Economics faculty. ALS students in the faculty of Business Administration 15.7 percent, students in the faculty of Economics 15.8 percent and 18.9 percent of students in the faculty of Accounting. TLS students in the faculty of Business 15.7 percent, students in the faculty of Economics 15.8 percent and 14.5 percent of students in the faculty of Accounting. VLS students in the faculty of Accounting 14.2 percent, students in the faculty of Business Administration 13.2 percent and 8.9 percent of students in the faculty of

Economics. ILS students in the faculty of Accounting 8.8 percent, students in the faculty of Business Administration 7.5 percent and 5.9 percent of students in the faculty of Economics.

When testing the relationship between learning styles of Bangkok University students classified by faculty of the students, results were statistically significant at 0.05. Where the learning styles of Bangkok University students do not have relationship with student faculties ($\chi^2=5.682$, $p=0.841$).

Figure 4



Bangkok University students at each level of academic performance of general English have common styles of learning English, these are GLS, where students have very good academic performance is at 22.2 percent, level of good performance is at 23.2 percent, moderate level of academic performance is at 28.1 and not satisfactory level is at 30.4 percent. KLS, where students have very good at academic performance is at 21.3 percent, good performance is at 22.8 percent, moderate level is at 23.0 and not satisfactory academic performance is at 21.7 percent. VSL, students with very good academic performance is at 15.7 percent, level of good performance is at 13.4 percent, moderate level of academic performance is at 10.1 and not satisfactory in academic performance is at 8.7 percent. TLS, students with very good at academic performance is at 14.8 percent, good performance is at 14.2 percent, moderate level is at 17.1 percent and not satisfactory academic performance is at 13.0 percent. ALS, students with very good at academic performance is at 16.5 percent, good performance is at 18.3 percent, moderate level is at 16.1 and not satisfactory academic performance is at 17.4 percent. ILS, students with very good at academic performance is at 9.6 percent, good performance is at 8.1 percent, moderate is at 5.5 and not satisfactory academic performance is at 8.7 percent.

When testing the relationship between learning styles of Bangkok University students according to their level of general English, the results were statistically significant at 0.05, ($\chi^2=8.829$, $p=0.886$).

6. Summary and discussion of the results

The results show that most of the Bangkok University students who participated in this study do not have a main style for learning English, this suggests that these students may have difficulties in the recognition of English language information. This may be due to the time allocated to English as a foreign language for Thai students to practice the four skills, (listening, speaking, reading and writing) is relatively limited which requires the learners to use a variety learning styles at the same time. For example students like to study with friends

in a group but do not like to help each other to answer questions because they want their own individual score.

When considering students who have a main learning style, we found that the style preferred by most of the Bangkok University students who participated in this study is learning in a group. Students like to learn with a group rather than thinking and solving problems by themselves when learning new things, thus they learn by interacting as a member of a group. Motivation to learn new things comes from the help of a group (Reid, 1987) because the habit of Thai students is to rely on each other, helping each other, which is one of the outstanding characteristics of Asian students and this is consistent with studies of Wintergerst et al. (2002).

When considering the main style used by students, the top three styles are, learning as a group (GLS), learning by practicing in the different situations (KLS) and listening (ALS), respectively. This corresponds with Wasanasomsithi (2542) research which studied the styles of learning of Chulalongkorn University students in Thailand. That study found that the top three styles were learning as a group (GLS), learning by practicing in different situations (KLS) and listening (ALS), respectively. While according to Nimmansut (1994) study of the styles of learning English language in a vocational education department in Thailand, students used listening style (ALS) and learning with a group (GLS) as the second and third preference respectively.

These results support research undertaken in a range of countries, for example Mulalic, et al. (2009) studied the style of learning English of Malaysian university students and found that students prefer learning through practice in the different situations (KLS), while Peacock (2001) found that Chinese students who learn English as a foreign language at The City University of Hong Kong like to learn by practicing in different situations (KLS) and the listening style (ALS). Wintergerst, et al. (2003) found that Russian university students who study English as a second language like to learn by practicing in different situations (KLS), followed with the listening style (ALS). Jones (1997) found that Chinese university students in Taiwan prefer the learning through practicing in the different situations (KLS). Chu, Kitchen and Chew (1997) found that Singaporean university students prefer practicing in the different situations (KLS) and the research of Melton (1990) that studied Chinese university students' style of learning English as a foreign language prefer to learn by practicing in the different situation (KLS) as the second style.

However, Bangkok University student' learning styles are different from international students who prefer not to learn in a group (GLS) (Reid1987, Melton 1990, Hyland 1993, Mulalic, et al. 2009), this might be due to culture differences because Thai's are Asian and have characteristics different from Westerners (Hofstede 2001). Hofstede describes general characteristics of Asians as shy, lacking of confidence, fear of losing face, and do not like confrontation which consistent with studies of Wintergerst, et al. (2003) which concluded that Asian students have group-oriented style characteristics which is different from Russian students.

Furthermore this research's results are not consistent with studies regarding university students studying in the business field's style of learning English, for example marketing students have a style of learning by improving and like to learn from direct experience (Jaju, et al. 2000). While accounting, marketing management and general business students have an absorption style of learning, they prefer not to learn by action or practicing but rather they have the ability to summarize the principles or rules and prefer to work with objects more than people (Novin A. and Jordan 2003, Nijoroge and Senteza, 2006).

Although the three majors (Economics, Accounting and Business Administration) of Bangkok University students are Business for Professionals, they do not have a main style of learning but each student used a variety of learning styles. This is consistent with the research of many studies about the style of learning English for the university students, Reid (1987) said students have a different style of learning (Mulalic, et al., 2009; Wintergerst, et al., 2003; Jones, 1997; Hyland, 1993; Melton, 1990).

The relationship of pattern of learning English by Bangkok University students comparing their different backgrounds including gender, faculty and levels of academic performance in general English. For both male and female students of Bangkok University at all levels of general English and in each faculty and the styles of learning English is not different from each other. This means that students will learn in a group followed by

practice in different situations and listening respectively in accordance with Mulalic, et al (2009), who studied the styles of learning English by Malaysian University students and found that male students prefer learning styles by practicing in different situation (KLS) and learning by listening (ALS). This is because learning with others creates confidence while doing activities to practice the language skills. Learning as part of a group allows brainstorming with others, to express one's opinion as some comments may be consistent with majority. This is necessary because learners have people to help in supporting the ideas of the learner rather than making them lose confidence and not participate in activities for fear of losing face (as observed in class by the researcher). In addition, learning with others creates opportunities to support the interdependent learning such as when the learner cannot answer nor do exercises. Other learners in the group may be able to find the answer on behalf of the learner. The learner will have the confidence to learn and develop more of their English skills (as observed in class by the researcher). Learning as a member of a group also reduces the pressure and stress in competitive situations because learning in groups emphasizes the unity of collaboration between the members of the group. Therefore, this can lead to competitive situations to rarely occur (Wintergert, et al., 2003).

In addition to this, learning in groups is a driving force for the learner to have enthusiasm for learning and practicing their language skills better. So participating and creating group activities can make the learner perceive their level of abilities and other members in the group all the time. If the learner is the weakness of the group, the learner must find the way to develop their abilities. At the same time, the learners who are the strength of the group have to maintain and increase their abilities in order to be a refuge of the group (as observed in class by the researcher). Although, Wintergert has said that the pattern of learning in group has a less competitive situation involved.

The result of this study is not consistent with the studies of Milgram (2007) which found that female students prefer learning by cooperating and not competition. While the male student prefer, learning by doing. Apart from this, male student has skills to use equipment and solve problems during learning by doing or action more than by female students in learning STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics).

Where the learning pattern does not focus on doing experiments in accordance with the nature of boys that have a basic characteristic of learning and playing (Play and Learn) which is different from girls. Students in the faculties of Accounting, Business Administration and Economics have a pattern of learning English which is not different from each other. Probably because from the faculties of Accounting, Business Administration, and Economics are liberal art faculties that have to focus on the participation of the student and learning from direct experience in real situations regarding actual occupations. This is consistent with research of Jaju and Knak (2000), which found that the marketing subject has a learning pattern where the learner prefers to learn from experience and performing a real experiment.

Students with academic performance at level of very good, good, moderate and not satisfactory use learning styles that are not different, perhaps because the university student are not yet aware with the learning styles of learning English. Therefore, Bangkok University students may be have random characteristics of learning patterns and other ways of instinct learning learned from when they born and as a learner may use the various patterns of learning one thing also according to the study of Mackeracher (2004) that summarizes a brief fact about the learning pattern with nine questions and one of the facts said that there is no best pattern of learning.

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