

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background

Education is the most important mechanism of improvement of the human mind. Teachers need to have great awareness of peaceful living and have high responsibility for developing economics, society, public policy and the environment. This will be helpful for country development and the quality of human life (Ministry of Education, 1998).

Education has different objectives and goals at different levels. According to the 1992 Country Education Plan, primary education provides people with writing, reading and arithmetic skills. Medium education provides students with more skills than the elementary level. This education level emphasizes the development of morality, and capability and skill in academic and professional areas, and the capability of work suitable to the student's age. High school education encourages students to study according to their interest and capability the basic knowledge for further study in the university, and encourages students to develop their morals and important skills for peaceful living in their society (Tubpraseat, 1999).

In teaching, a significant task for every school is transferring knowledge to the student. It is necessary to develop methods for effective teaching. There are many factors affecting teaching including the teacher, the students, the curriculum and the environment. All of these factors should work together to achieve an efficient result. In particular, the students are the most important factor because learning can only be undertaken efficiently if teacher really knows and understands the nature of the student.

One of the most important problems that obstruct teaching is lack of understanding of the students. Most teachers do not understand their students' interests and difficulties, leading to gaps in development between teachers and students. Furthermore, teachers often consider the content of the subject rather than the needs of their students.

Tanseewong (1995) reported that the difference between individuals is an importance

factor in the teaching plan. If the teacher does not consider this, the teaching will not be accomplished to the established objectives. From the evaluation of the implementation according to the education, religion, and cultural art development plan in the 6th period (1987-1991) by the Education, Department, Education Ministry, it was found that teaching process put emphasis on teacher and curriculum subjects without considering students and the education quality was not good (Education Ministry 1990).

Students usually have their own learning style according to their characteristics and interest as they have different perceptions of what they have learned from their teachers (Cecco 1968, Hongladarom 1981). Similarly Kolb and Fry (quoted in Srisuo 1984) have reported that each student has a different capability and style for learning. Some students may learn well by listening to lectures or explanations by teachers. Some students may learn well with a variety of activities and teaching aids. Others like learning by reading and reviewing by themselves or by exchanging their experiences among their classmates (Hunt, 1981). Therefore, the learning style of students is an important factor that has to be taken into account to obtain an appropriate and effective teaching pattern.

Canfield (1992) studied the learning style of students in California in the United States, and analyzed their teaching plan to find what learning activity is the best way to accommodate the student's needs. It was found that for the students who like to learn by listening and who like to learn independently, the teacher should assign them to study by themselves, by listening to the lecture from the radio program, or tape recorder. Furthermore, Grout (1991) studied the relation between the teacher's teaching style and the student's learning style and found that if teaching style is related to students learning, achievement will increase.

Knowing the learning style of the students has a direct benefit to the students, rather than the teacher's teaching and learning management. Knowing the learning style whereby individual students learn effectively in proper conditions will encourage good learning development.

It is of interest to know the learning style of the students in Songkhla province high school and how each style relates to population characteristics and social economic

status. Such findings could be a useful guideline for adjusting and developing teaching and learning styles in schools, corresponding to what the students need. As a consequence, this will be of great benefit to elementary education for improving the quality of learning system in Songkhla and other provinces having similar population characteristics and social economic status.

1.2 Research Objectives, Scope and Benefit of Study

The objectives of a research are as follows:

1. To study the learning style of the high school students in Songkhla Province.
2. To study the relationship between the learning style of high school students in Songkhla Province and demographic and socio-economic factors.
3. To study the relationships among various learning styles.

Specifically, we will investigate the relationship between learning style and population characteristics and socio-economic conditions for Ms4-Ms6 students in the academic year 2000 in high schools in Songkhla Province

The benefits are as follows:

1. The research results can be used as a guideline to select an appropriate learning style for different students.
2. These results will be of benefit to teachers in high school in Songkhla and other provinces.
3. Research results will provide data for the educational directors to use in planning and developing educational policy and improving the quality of the learning system.

1.3 Review of Literature

Canfield (1992: 30) stated that the appropriate learning style is the learning experience that the student likes most. It is an emotional factor that influences what students choose to learn, intend to learn and learn well in the chosen subject.

Hunt (1981: 647) also said that the learning style is a condition that each of the students likes most. Learning style can be explored. And after exploring the learning style of the students, it will be a guide to the efficient career choice for the student.

Gibson (1976: 260) said that learning style is an individual method to learn and accept data for new concepts.

From the meaning given by psychologists and academic experts it can be assumed that learning style is the characteristic or method that the students like most and can use to learn most effectively.

Grasha and Reichman (1975: 13-15) have divided the learning style into six types, that are used in this study as follows:

1. **Independence:** The students are likely to think by themselves, and work with high confidence.
2. **Avoidance:** The students are not interested in content of a subject or an activity in the classroom and pay no attention to their surroundings.
3. **Collaboration:** The students are interested in cooperation with other students and try to join with any learning activity. They think that the classroom is a good place for meeting and learning.
4. **Dependence:** The students study only subjects assigned. They need to be shown an order and pointed out what they have to do.
5. **Competition:** The students compete with each other to learn and do everything in the classroom.
6. **Participation:** The students have willing to learn and like to study in the classroom. They mostly join activities in the class but if those activities are not included in the curriculum, they will have less participation.

We can see that in teaching management a teacher should consider the students, differences in the students' personalities, the students' characteristics and learning style as most important factors. As Thammaporn (1988: 31-36) mentioned, the importance of learning style that the teacher should analyze the learning styles that the students prefer.

There are various factors that have been considered as determinants of learning attitude. These include the student's gender, the size of the school, the student's program of study, the year of study, the level of achievement of the student, and the parents' occupation and family income. We now discuss these factors in turn.

Gender

Chanem (quoted in Chinakul: 1979) reported that males and females have differences in life target social behaviour, conceptualisation ability, and point of view. Kulprasit (1989) studied learning styles of medical students at the Technique Physician Faculty of Khonkhan University, and found that male and female students were different in independent and competitive learning style. Suchart (1989) studied the learning style of the students in Education Faculty, when comparing students majoring in Thai language, English, Social Science, Mathematics, and Science for many universities of the Department of University Affairs. This author found that female students had the learning style with respect to dependent style and participation style greater than male students. The latter was found to higher Independence style of learning pattern. However, Sanguanas and McNeil (2000) found no gender difference in any learning style among medical students at Prince of Songkhla University.

School size

Chaipum (1994) studied the modification of exploring form of learning style to be used for Ms 3 students in Songkhla Province. It was found that the learning styles of the students at extra large schools were different than from those in medium-large, average and small schools. However the study of Suchart for the students in the Education Faculty reported that the learning style of students in each institution was different.

Program

Srisuy (1984) studied the relationship between learning style and gender, learning achievement, class level, and major subject for students in a teaching college in Bangkok. It was found that the students majoring in Thai language showed less percentage of avoided style than those for other major subjects. Similarly the study of Suchart also reported that the students majoring in Thai language had less avoided

style than those in Social Science. And the students majoring in Science had higher cooperation learning style than those in English language.

Class year

Srisuy (1994) reported that the difference of mathematics medium of "dependence" style and "competition" style for the students who had different major subjects were not the same for all four class year levels. Similarly, Siriwat (1989) found that every class year of the students at the political Philosophy Faculty, Ramkhamhang University liked different competition style. And Kulprasit (1989) found that students in 2nd year class had higher competition learning style than the 4th and the 1st year class.

GPA (Grade Point Average)

Siriwat (1989) and Kulprasit (1989) found that the students who had high or low GPA value were not different in learning style. But Suchart's study (1989) found that students who had low GPA were higher in avoidance style than those who had high learning achievement, and the students who had high GPA had higher participation style than the students having low GPA.

Parent's Occupation

Srisarn (quoted in Chinakul, 1997) reported that people's professions can make them see things from different perspectives. Most people are interested in circumstances that benefit their job. People having different jobs have different living status, vision, circumstance, and behaviour.

When teaching children, the background of each family is different and may affect their ability to learn. As Jersild (quoted in Chinakul, 1997) said, people who have different jobs have different characteristics. When people have belief, vision, and a strong point of view, these characteristics will transfer to family members. Thus children who grow up in different family occupations will absorb different living styles. Sukrungruang (1990) studied the cognitive style of high school students who had different occupation characteristics. The example groups were high school students who were studying at Kalasinpittayasan School and at Kannakorn Wittalai School. The author found that the students who had different occupational

characteristics had different models of thinking at a level of statistical significance of 0.01. The students who liked art had higher scores than the students who liked social meetings, and the more intelligent group had a model of thinking higher than the students who liked social meetings.

Family income

ChuChuen (1994) studied factors related to adaptation of students in the period of waiting for a better grade. She found that the students whose parent had average incomes of 1,000-3,000 and 10,000-100,000 per month had a high level of self-confidence and encouraged achievement.