

Students' Learning Strategies Based on Their VAK Learning Style

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Abstract : Learning styles have huge contributions in developing the efficiency in education. The concept of learning styles has been explored by many experts in various background of study. Fleming (2001) defines learning style as an individual's characteristics and preferred ways of gathering, organizing, and thinking about information. This study aims to identify the students' learning styles according to the classifications of learning styles and how their learning strategies. VAK questionnaire was utilized in this study to know the students' preferred learning styles. Interview was also conducted in collecting some additional information regarding the students' learning. 21 adult EFL learners majoring in English education of postgraduate Program of Universitas Ahmad Dahlan were involved as a research sample. From the interview conducted to three participants as representatives of each learning styles it was discovered that each learning has its own learning strategy which is different from one another. One respondent as a visual learner argued that she felt happy if the lecturer provides visual-demonstration in class such as movies, videos, and PowerPoint presentation. Another respondent as an auditory learner preferred to learn by listening and writing down important information that she have learnt. The other respondent as a kinaesthetic learner would find easy to understand and remember well if she was involved practice.

Keywords: Learning strategies & VAK Learning Style .

Introduction

Learning style is defined as a group of common ways of learning. Every learner may have different learning styles and techniques. There are various learning styles in one classroom, so it becomes inevitable for a teacher to identify the learning style of his/her students. The teacher should be able to use varieties of teaching techniques that are best cover all types of learners' learning style in his/her classroom. By identifying the learning style, hopefully the teacher can bring the teaching and learning process into an effective way.

EFL learners face various ways in receiving the information in teaching and learning process. As state by Alqunayeer (2015), every learner in a classroom receives and processes information in a unique way. It makes one student distinct from the others. A teacher has the main role in the process of achieving the goal of teaching and learning. Students as the object in EFL classroom may face various

learning styles that can influence their achievement in learning English. This theory has significant implication in teaching and learning process. Unfortunately, many teachers/lecturers seem do not understand students' learning styles, so the teachers are unable to evaluate students' learning styles as they do not have a proper learning styles inventory (Almasa, Parilah & Fauziah, 2005). As stated by Almasa et al., (2005), students' learning styles have been disregarded by teachers and have been considered a minor component in the learning process. Thus, teachers may misinterpret students' lack of attention or hyperactivity in class as students' bad attitudes which might appear due to a lack of proper evaluation of students' preferred learning styles. As a consequence, it has become a necessity for educators to assess the learning style of students in order to accommodate different learners (Almasa, 2005).

Furthermore, teachers do not teach according to learning styles preferred by students; instead they are teaching based on either their own learning styles or teaching styles. A study has found out that continuum of mismatch between teachings and learning styles will hugely influence students' attitudes and motivation towards the subject matter (Almasa, Parilah & Fauziah, 2009).

For the past five decades, educational bodies have shown a great interest in exploring learning styles as they do know that people learn and perceive things differently. As a consequence, this issue has captured the researcher's interest as a candidate of educator to know the most preferred learning styles of postgraduate students of English Department in Universitas Ahmad Dahlan Yogyakarta. Therefore, the research questions of this study are to know:

- 1) What are students' preference learning styles?
- 2) What is the most preference learning style?
- 3) How do students learn based on their learning styles?

Learning Style Definition

Learning styles can be defined, classified, and identified in many different ways. Various kinds of learning style affect the learners in gaining the purpose of teaching and learning. Learners as the object need to specify their learning style. Some previous study investigated that there are several kinds of learning style and found that Individual learners have different learning style. According to Jantan and Razali (2002), psychologically, learning style is the way the student concentrate, and their method in processing and obtaining information, knowledge, or experience. When we talk about education the first thing that we have to know what is the relation. Another definition also stated by Nunan (2002) as cited in Fauziati (2015), that learning style is an individual's preferred ways of going about learning.

Learning style is a preference by the student. Preference means that the student needs to analyse by themselves which one the suitable teaching style based on their learning style. After analysing which one is the appropriate learning style, the learners must conduct the teaching learning processes based on their want. Whereas Mok (2003), defines learning style as learning approaches as preferred by student. When it looks from the cognitive aspect, learning style can be referred to various methods in perception creation and information processing to form concepts and principles (Fleming & Baume, 2006). In addition, Lebar and Mansor (2000) state that, learning style refers to the preferred strategy and technique utilized by individuals while studying.

Yaakub and Hashim (2004) gave a different view, stating that learning is a mental, physical, and spiritual activity. Furthermore, Ismail (2008) stated that some students prefer to receive information in text form, whereas, some prefer in image, graphic, or animation form.

Visual, Auditory, Kinaesthetic (VAK) in identifying learning style.

In order to identify students learning styles preferences, there are various approaches can be used. One of the most common and widely used categorization of the various types of learning styles is Joy M Reid's VAK model. VAK is derived from the accelerated learning world and seems to be about the most popular model nowadays due to its simplicity. While the research has shown a connection with modalities and learning styles (University of Pennsylvania, 2009), the research has so far been unable to prove the using one's learning style provides the best means for learning a task or subject. This is probably because it is more of a *preference*, rather than a *style*. Joy M Reid's state that there are three types of learning style. They are visual, auditory and kinesthetic learning styles.

Visual Learning Style.

Visual learners prefer to learn by seeing and watching demonstration (Haggart, 2002). Thus, observations, examinations, and reviews are their favorite learning approaches (Haggart, 2003).

Auditory Learning Style.

Auditory learners prefer to learn by verbal instructions from themselves or others (Haggart, 2002). Thus, discussions, "thinking out loud," and listening are their favorite learning approaches (Haggart, 2003).

Kinesthetic Learning Style.

Kinesthetic learners prefer to learn by doing and direct involvement (Haggart, 2002; Hutton, 2006b). Kinesthetic learners learn best when they incorporate movements using their large or gross motor muscles (Keys Learning, 1993)

According to Clark, learners use all three modalities to receive and learn new information and experiences. Nonetheless, according to the VAK or modality theory, one or two of these receiving styles are normally dominant. This dominant style delineates the best way for a person to acquire new information by sifting what is to be learned. This style may not always be similar for some tasks. The learner may prefer one style of learning for one task, and a combination of others for a different task (Clark, 2008). Clark (2008) also mentioned that classic learning style is enforced via stages. From kindergarten till the third grade (third grade is between the ages of 8 to 9 years old), information is presented kinesthetically, while starting the fourth until the eighth grade (between 9 to 10 years old, while eighth grade is between 13 to 14 years old), information is usually presented visually. While starting from the ninth grade to college and going on into the business environment, information is presented mostly via the auditory channel through

the use of lecturing mode. According to the VAK theorists, educators need to present information by using all the three styles. This allows the learners to become involved, regardless of their preferred learning style (Clark, 2008), thus VAK theorists have come up with three main categories as follows:

Auditory learners often talk to themselves. They may also move their lips and read out loud. They may have difficulty with reading and writing tasks. They often do better in talking to a classmate or a tape recorder and hearing what has been said.

Visual learners have two sub-channels - linguistic and spatial. Learners who are visual-linguistic like to learn through written language, such as reading and writing tasks. They remember what has been written down, even if they do not read it more than once. They like to write down directions and pay better attention to lectures if they watch them. Learners who are visual-spatial usually have difficulty with the written language and do better with charts, demonstrations, videos, and other visual materials.

Kinesthetic learners do best by touching and moving. They also have two sub-channels, which are kinesthetic (movement) and tactile (touch). They tend to lose their focus or attention if there is little or no external stimulation or movement. When listening to lectures, they may want to take notes for the sake of moving their hands. When reading, they like to scan the material first, and then focus on the details to get the big picture. They use colour highlighters and take notes by drawing pictures, diagrams, or doodling.

VAK Learning Strategies

Strategies are specific methods of approaching a problem or task. It is also an action or series of action for achieving an aim. In this study, strategies are the step or action how students dealing with certain information. These strategies used by students to make their learning process more enjoyable. It is important to the teacher/lecturer to know how students' strategies based on their learning style. Individuals have unique learning styles that develop in childhood and remain constant throughout adulthood. Benefits of matching learning styles and using appropriate teaching strategies for each learning style include decreased anxiety and increased staff and student satisfaction (Semin, 1995). There are some strategies that are usually used by students in learning certain subject based on their learning style (Elizabeth Clinton, 2012). The identification as follow:

Visual Learner

Most visual learner have poor auditory skills and weak verbal abilities.

Visual learners difficult to blend sounds and discriminate short vowel sounds.

Most visual learner pool spellers

Visual learners easy to remember information presented in pictures, charts, or diagrams.

Visual learners can make detail information of what they have red.

Visual learners often pay close attention to the body language of others (facial expressions, eyes, stance, etc.)

Use video for teaching and learning process is fun for visual learner

Visual learners may tune out spoken directions.

Visual learner often do not remember information given orally without being able to see it. They memorize using visual clue

1) Auditory Learners

- a. Auditory learners learn best by hearing information. They can usually remember information more accurately when it has been explained to them orally.

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- b. Auditory learners remember quite accurately details of information they hear during conversations or lectures.
 - c. Auditory learners have strong language skills, which include a well- developed vocabulary and appreciation for words.
 - d. Have a good language skills often lead to good oral communication skills. They are usually talented at giving speeches, oral reports and articulating the ideas.
 - e. Auditory learners may have musical talents.
 - f. Auditory learners tend to have poor visual skills, so graphs, maps and charts may present a challenge to the auditory learner.
 - g. Auditory learners often reverse words, for example: from, for, form and was, saw.
 - h. Auditory learners tend to have poor handwriting and small motor skills.
 - i. Story-telling.
 - j. Solving difficult problems.
 - k. Working in groups.
 - l. Participating in class discussions.

Kinesthetic Learners

Kinesthetic learners learn best by moving their bodies, activating their large or small muscles as they learn. They are "hands-on learners" or "doers" who actually concentrate better and learn more easily when movement is involved

- a. Kinesthetic learners often wiggle, tap their feet or move their legs when they sit. Many were called "hyperactive" as children.
- b. Kinesthetic learners work well with their hands. They may be good at art, sculpting, and working with various tools, learning in lab situations or learning by computer.
- c. Kinesthetic learners need to take notes and highlight important information. They are using their small muscles to remember information.

Research Method

This study is conducted by using descriptive qualitative research and used purposive sampling technique to choose the participants. The information stated below is provided with a description of the participants of the study, instruments, and the procedures of the study.

Participants

The participants of this research are the postgraduate students of English Department Faculty at Universitas Ahmad Dahlan Yogyakarta, Indonesia who learn the academic year of 2017/2018. There are about 21 students of third term semester. From the 21 participants, three of them was taken as the representative for each learning style, and they will be interviewed by the the researcher.

Instruments

In collecting the data, the questionnaires and interview are used. The questionnaire consisted of 30 items refer to each group of learning styles preference; visual, auditory and kinesthetic learning styles (Joy M Reid in *Understanding Learning Styles in the Second Language Classroom*). To determine students' learning styles, the response from all respondents was being calculated and the sum of the response score was used to classify

students' learning style. Besides, the students' are also given deep interview in order to know their learning strategies based on their preference learning style.

Data analysis

After collecting the data, the first step in analyzing the data was classifying the category of learning style. Based on the questionnaire, the researcher found that the highest score from three group learning styles was the major of learning styles that students have.

Findings

After the researchers gave the VAK questionnaires to the participants, the researcher got a result that ten students prefer to visual learning style, seven students prefer to auditory learning style and four students prefer to kinaesthetic learning style. In the following table, the researcher shows the result of the questionnaire in details.

No	Learning Style	Amount	Percentage
1	Visual	10	47,62%
2	Auditory	7	33,33%
3	Kinaesthetic	4	19.05%

Interview

Interview are given to the three students as a representative of each learning style to get some additional information and in-depth analysis about their learning styles and how they learned English based on their learning style. In this section, the researchers describe the data analysis one by one in detail by using descriptive qualitative technique.

Respondent 1 (Visual learner)

Respondent 1 considered as a visual learner. She chose demonstrations and models as her preference in learning. She argued that she likes to listen to English music and watch English movies. She told the researcher that she can learn better and faster from listening and watching movies. This technique also improved her English skill especially in speaking and listening. She earned new vocabularies, got familiar with various English accents, and knew how to pronounce words correctly.

In learning experiences, visual students liked to learn from her observation, she learns best by observing or watching. Besides, the researcher also asked about the media used by the teachers in the classroom activities whether she get any difficulties in understanding the way how the teacher teach using the media. She argued that it is not difficult in understanding the lesson through the media given by the teachers because she was quite familiar with technology or media that used in class especially power point.

The researcher also asked respondent 1 to which method that she prefer in teaching and learning process. As there are so many methods of learning English, visual student prefer to use Audio-lingual method because it focuses on accurate pronunciation and grammar, the ability to respond quickly and accurately in speech situations and knowledge of sufficient vocabulary to use with grammar. In adapting new learning situation, visual learner choose to observe the classroom condition or browse as many

information as she can and choose to be silent in the beginning, then when she feels ready she will begin to blend with the new learning situation. Respondent 1 also stated that she learn well by observing and watching.

Respondent 2 (Auditory learner)

After giving VAK questionnaire, respondent 2 is identified as an auditory learner, then the researcher interviewed the respondent to get additional information regarding her learning style. From the interview result, for the auditory learner, after listening the lesson delivered by the teachers she usually write it down directly for reminding her someday. She usually listen to someone talks until she understand what she/he is talking about. Outside the school, she can learn visually but she needs to sit, being silent and being really focus.

The researcher also asked whether she feels better by learning English from listening and writing down what she heard in a paper. She agreed that by doing listening and constantly writing down what she heard did help her. She added if that way is one of her strategy to make her easier to remember the topic than the teacher ask her to read the book.

The researcher asked her related to her difficulties from the media used by the teachers in the classroom activities whether she get any difficulty in understanding the way how the teacher teach using the media. Respondent 2 answered that she got some difficulties whenever the teacher use power point that contain with so many paragraphs. This condition troubled her to focus to the material. Moreover, if the teacher does not add the variations on the presentation, it will make her difficult to digest the topic. Dealing with the new learning situation, aural learner chose listening as her method because she can gain much new information by this method. Respondent 2 as an aural realized that she is better in listening when she was in senior high school. In Haggart's theory (2002), he stated that auditory learners prefer to learn by verbal instructions from themselves or others.

Respondent 3 (kinaesthetic learner)

Third respondent was kinaesthetic learner. In the process of getting understanding with the material, respondent 3 prefers to use games and role play. As kinaesthetic learner, she argued that sometimes she likes to practice English using a mirror. Outside the classroom, she often use a movement to express her thought, idea, and concept. She also often read the text a loud in order to understand the material. She argued that those kinds of activities will help her to remember the materials better.

Respondent 3 totally agree when the researcher asked about her feeling in learning English by practicing and demonstrating. In her opinion, learning by doing is better rather than just earning explanation without practicing or demonstrating. Related to the media that is used by the teacher in the classroom, kinaesthetic learner does not found any difficulties. Sometimes, whenever the teacher explains without giving any examples, she feels uncomfortable. She prefers the explanation that uses practicing or example that given by the teacher.

It can be concluded that the kinaesthetic learner are they who preferred to practice, discuss, and learn something unique. Respondent 3 argued that if the teacher shows her an example or practice the explanation, she will get easier to gain the information given by the teacher.

Discussion

Before discussing on the research findings, the researcher must initially acknowledge some weaknesses of this study. The explorations of the students' learning style relied on the questionnaires and interview only with no means of triangulations through the inclusion of other data sources, like observation. This study was only focused on what student preference learning style and how they learn based on their learning style. It would be better if the researcher also interviews the lecturer to gain some information regarding what kind of teaching style that she/he usually use in order to support the learning preference of the students. Besides, this study was conducted only in one class that cannot represent all the students in postgraduate of English Department. The researcher limits the study on VAK learning styles model which consists of Visual, Auditory and Kinaesthetic concepts rather than all the six basic models introduced by Reid (1987). So, the findings focused only towards the VAK model. The reason why the VAK dimensions were selected for the study is to focus only on the main learning styles that are commonly used in English language classes in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. For instance, teachers usually use visual aids such as flash cards, movies, photos to name a few, to assist students with vocabulary building. As for auditory aids, teachers tend to use songs, sound effects or even lectures to capture students' interest in learning English. As for kinaesthetic style teacher teach through drawing, highlighting important notes or copying notes directly from the board to name a few.

From the final result of questionnaire, the researcher concluded that visual learning style is the first favourite learning style. While, the second favourite is Auditory and the third is kinaesthetic learning style. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the prevalent learning style among postgraduate students at UAD Yogyakarta was visual learning style. Many students tend to have visual learning style in the classroom. The visual/spatial learner is the student who prefers to use pictures, images, and colour to organize information and communicate. They learn best by seeing what is being taught. Imagery or other visual aids can be crucial in helping this student learn and retain information. Furthermore, the student's preference learning style is one variable that influenced by many factors such as, family/home background, learning environment, teacher's factor, and academic performance. These factors impact the learning process and outcomes. It is in line with Fabumi, Brai-Abu and Adenji (2007); Yinusa and Basil (2008) who stated that students' performance in the learning process can be influenced by several factors. The basic issues of students' learning style as explored by group of researchers were home background, learning environment, and government policies.

The interview result of Visual learner has been identified that student who has a visual learning style prefer to use visual aids when he/she learn. Most of visual learner like to watch movies, videos, pictures, and some other visual demonstrations. There are two type of visual learner, linguistic and spatial. Based on the analysis to her answer, the researcher can conclude that the respondent is a visual-spatial. It is in line with the theory that Visual learners have two sub-channels - linguistic and spatial. Learners who are visual-linguistic like to learn through written language, such as reading and writing tasks. They remember what has been written down, even if they do not read it more than once. They prefer to write down the directions and pay better attention to lectures if they watch them. Whereas learners who are visual-spatial usually have difficulty with the written language, but do better with charts, demonstrations, videos, and other visual materials. They easily visualize the faces and places by using their imagination and seldom get lost in new surroundings (Clark, 2008). According to the first respondent, visual learner will be better if the teacher provides a visual demonstration in class such as movies, videos, PPT, etc. they feel better to learn with these kinds of visual demonstration. It also can be considered by the lecturer to use teaching style that match with

visual learner since visual learning style is the most favourite learning style. The result showed that 47, 62% of the students prefer to visual learning style.

The second respondent who identified as auditory learner prefer to learn by listening and writing down important information that she heard from the lecturer. Aural learner prefers to listen to the lecturer or to a tape recorder than to see to the power point. Learners prefer to explain new ideas to others, discuss topics with other students and their teachers, use a tape recorder, attend lectures, and group discussion use jokes prefer to use lists, essays, reports, textbooks, definitions, printed hand-outs, readings, web- pages and taking notes (Fleming, 2001) to learn. By analysing the answer from respondent 1, the researcher can conclude that Aural learner prefer to learn by listening to someone's talk and writing it down to remind her someday. The lecturer can use some fun techniques to teach aural learner who prefer to listen and take notes. This information can lead the lecturer to make his/her teaching technique match with aural learner.

The third respondent who identified as kinaesthetic learner argued that it will be easier for her to understand and remember the material given by the teacher by practicing it. By analysing her answer, the researcher concluded that kinaesthetic learner prefer to learn by moving. According to the respondent, she likes to practice English using a mirror. Kinaesthetic learner also prefers to learn something by doing. It is proven by her answer that she likes it when the lecturer uses a role play technique in the classroom activity. It is in line with the theory which is said that kinaesthetic learners do best by touching and moving. They also have two sub-channels, which are kinaesthetic (movement) and tactile (touch). Students tend to lose their focus or attention easier if there is no external stimulation or movement given by the teacher. When listening to lectures, students might take notes for the sake of moving their hands. When reading, they like to scan the material first, then focus on the details to get the big picture. They use colour highlighters and take notes by drawing pictures, diagrams, or doodling (Clark, 2008). Based on this theory, the third respondent is identified as a kinaesthetic. According to the third respondent, kinaesthetic learner learns best by doing. It will provide information for the lecturer to present the material in the classroom by using appropriate technique to kinaesthetic learner such as role play, reading aloud, presentation, games, and many others technique that support student movement.

Conclusion

Finally, the research finding provides some information dealing with student preference learning style and how they learn based on their learning style. The lecturer should aware to student different learning style in order to achieve a goal of teaching and learning process. The lecturer should realize that teaching is not only what material is being taught but also how the students receive the materials. Teacher must realize that different students learn differently although they accept the same materials. Stewart and Felicetti (1992) elucidated learning styles as those educational conditions under which a student is most likely to learn. As such, learning styles are not really concerned with "what" learners learn, but rather "how" they prefer to learn (Rosalind, 2001). By knowing this information providing by the research result, teacher and lecturer are expected to make a better condition in teaching and learning process in EFL class.

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