

A Survey on Junior High School Students' Learning Styles¹

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Abstract

Doing university social responsibility is compulsory for the lecturers as part of their responsibility for the society. This study was aimed at finding the general perception of junior high school students' learning styles preferences. Basically, it was to find out what is the most dominant learning style the students may have. The respondents were administered a questionnaire which was modified and adapted from Cohen, Oxford, and Chi's (2001) Learning Style Survey (LSS). Due to its time constraint, the study was only to seek the general perception. The result of data showed first and second learning styles of the students' preferences were visual and auditory. Whereas kinesthetic was the last learning style preference found in the study.

Keywords: learning style, EFL, secondary school, visual, auditory, kinesthetic

INTRODUCTION

Current studies (e.g. Peacock, 2001; Sprenger, 2003; Joy, & Kolb, 2007).have revealed that one of the reasons behind language learners' individual differences is learning styles because learning is basically "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience"(Kolb, 1984: 38). Students with the ability to employ multiple learning styles acquire a greater learning outcome (Claxton & Murell 1987; Elison & Moore, 1979; Felder 1995). Learning styles, therefore, play a critical role in the learning process, In relation to that, teachers should guide his/her students to recognize the most suitable learning style they have and choose the appropriate teaching method.

Teaching students of Junior High School might not be easy whenever there is not much information or resources. In a discussion, the principle of SMP Kerasulan Pusaka stated it is more challenging to teach students in the countryside in comparison to teaching the students in big cities. They are different from the students in big cities who

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have a lot of books and quick access to the internet. Besides, the teachers in the countryside must prepare well and equip with much knowledge so that they can transfer it to the students.

In addition, based on the aforementioned description, it is obvious that teaching English to junior high school students may not be very easy since there are ample obstacles and problems the teachers may face. It is said that one of the indication the students might not reach their target well is that the lack of knowledge. In order to reach or solve the problems, the writer attempted to seek the students' learning style. The result of the survey may become one of the solutions for the teachers' knowledge or learning strategies to determine what material that suit their students.

LEARNING STYLES

A number of scholars have defined learning styles as the easiest way they perceive the knowledge. Brown (2000) learning styles are as the way in which every learner perceives and processes information in learning circumstances. He argues that learning style preference is one aspect of learning style, and refers to the choice of one learning situation or condition over another. Reid (1987) developed a learning style model based on how students learn best using their perceptions: visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile preferences and also two social aspects of learning: group and individual preferences. Given (2002) constructed a broad approach to learning styles by including five learning systems based on the brain's natural learning systems, i.e., emotional, social, cognitive, physical and reflective. Cohen, Oxford, and Chi (2001) designed a Learning Style Survey (LSS) in which among the number of main aspects, it includes these three aspects, i.e., visual, auditory and kinesthetic. The aim of the LSS is to assess the students' general approach to learning and to see their overall learning style preferences.

In addition, Grasha (1996, p. 41) has defined learning style as personal qualities that influence a student's ability to acquire information, to interact with peers and the teachers, and otherwise participate in learning experiences. There are four commonly preferred learning styles, i.e. independent, dependent, collaborative, and participant. Independent – learners prefer to work alone on tasks given than with other students. (2) Dependent – learners tend to look at their teachers and friends in which they are as the source of information. (3) Collaborative – learners acquire information by sharing and working together with their teacher and friends. (4) Participant – learners actively engage in class activities and discussion. Csapo and Hayen (2006, p. 129) said that “understanding learning styles and the role of learning styles in the teaching/learning process is a key component in effective teaching.”

However, there can be many factors that may contribute to the failure of the students' achievement such as lack of knowledge of learning. Oxford (1990) who stated that “many factors affect the choice of language learning strategies among which we can name: degree of awareness, stage of learning, task requirements, teacher expectations, age, sex, nationality, general learning styles, personality traits, motivation level, and purpose for learning the language.” Based on the experts' explanation, the writer concludes that every learner has their own learning style preferences and they

also have their best way to acquire the knowledge. Therefore, teachers should develop their learning strategies or understand their students' learning style so that the students can achieve their academics goal as well as building their self-confidence. This is in line with Matthew (1996) who stated that students who learn with their preferred learning styles tend to gain more knowledge and skills as well as actively engage when taught and presented with new materials

METHOD

This study was carried out in SMP Kerasulan Pusaka, Rawaselang- Cianjur, Jawa Barat on the program of university social responsibility hosted by Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Kristen Indonesia in March 2018. The aim was to find out the junior high school students' perception of their learning style preferences. The participants were 54 students. The participants were administered a questionnaire which was adapted from Cohen, Oxford, and Chi's (2001) Learning Style Survey and consisted of 30 items (5-point Likert scale: never, rarely, sometimes, often, and always) was used. The questionnaire was also divided into three main categories – the first category is focusing on Visual Learning Style, the second is for Auditory Learning Style, and the last is for Kinesthetic Learning Style. The time taking for the questionnaire lasted for 20 minutes. Due to the time limitation, the interview was not done. Therefore, this study is merely done to find out the general perception of the students' learning styles. It is not done an in-depth interview.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the participants' demographic data. Although there are female students in each class, they are dominated by male students. Their age varied from 11-16 years old. The total number of participants is 54.

Table 1

Participants Demographic Data (N-54)

No	Grade	Gender		Age (in years)			Total
		male	female	11-12	13-14	15-16	
1	VII	10	9	17	2		19
2	VIII	12	9		21		21
3	IX	8	6			14	14

FINDINGS

The following are the results and findings of the research in which the researcher classified based on the most dominant order of occurrences namely from the highest rank to the lowest one. The findings showed that the most dominant learning styles preference is visual, followed by auditory and the last is kinesthetic.

Since the discussion covers the most preference of the respondents' learning style i.e., the visual, auditory and kinesthetic, it is then presented based on the most dominant one (see Table 2). The table illustrates that the majority of the respondents prefer visual learning style in their study. Among the 54 respondents' learning style preference, it is found that 188 occurrences in sometimes, 140 found in often, and 107 found in always.

Table 1 also indicates that junior high school students prefer to have a visual learning style in their learning activities. Therefore, teachers are recommended to pay attention to the needs of their students so that they may provide good teaching and create more various activities related to visual style.

It is clear that the most of the respondents prefer the visual learning style during the lecture and they seem to work best when they write down something and also when it is visually provided with videos or other media to assist them in learning the material. The visual learning style preference found in the study also confirms the study carried out by Reid (1987)

Table 2
Respondents' Visual Learning Style Preference

No	Statement	Frequency				
		never	rarely	sometime	often	always
1.	I remember something better if I write it down.	0	1	25	16	12
2.	I take detailed notes during a lesson.	0	5	20	17	12
3.	When I listen, I visualize pictures, numbers, or words in my head.	1	7	17	18	11
4.	I prefer to learn with TV or video rather than other media.	3	11	25	8	7
5.	I use color-coding to help me as I learn or work.	16	19	12	4	3
6.	I need written directions for tasks.	1	5	15	17	16
7.	I have to look at people to understand what they say.	2	6	22	16	8
8.	I understand lessons better when the teachers write on the board.	3	2	21	14	14
9.	Charts, diagrams, and maps help me understand what someone says.	8	10	21	14	1
10.	I remember peoples' faces but not their names.	3	2	10	16	23
Total		37	68	188	140	107

Next, the study shows that the second preference of respondents learning style is auditory. As Table 3 showed, 175 occurrences found in sometimes, 138 found in often, and 97 found in always. Table 2 also indicates that junior high school students also prefer to have auditory learning style in their learning activities. Almost half of the students prefer to learn by listening to a lecturer rather than reading. This may indicate that a number of students also prefer auditory learning style. Therefore, teachers are also suggested to notice their students' learning style.

Table 3
Respondents' Auditory Learning Style Preference

No	Statement	Frequency				
		never	rarely	Sometimes	often	always
1.	I remember things better if I discuss them with someone.	1	2	17	21	13
2.	I prefer to learn by listening to a lecture rather than reading	3	3	23	18	7
3.	I need oral directions for a task.	1	2	22	18	11
4.	Background sound helps me think.	4	10	20	12	8
5.	I like to listen to music when I study or work.	9	8	9	8	20
6.	I can understand what people say even when I cannot see them.	4	17	19	10	4
7.	I remember peoples' names but not their faces.	10	14	17	8	5
8.	I easily remember jokes that I hear.	2	8	15	13	16
9.	I can identify people by their voices (e.g., on the phone).	4	12	18	14	6
10.	When I turn on the TV, I listen to the sound more than I watch the screen.	10	6	15	16	7
Total		48	82	175	138	97

Table 4 indicated that the last learning style preference of the respondents is Kinesthetic. Among the 54 respondents' learning style preference, 143 occurrences found in sometimes, 76 found in often, and 54 found in always for this learning style. More than half of the respondents agreed that they never play with or bite on their pens during their study. They also stated that they get nervous if they sit too long.

Although Kinesthetic was found to be the last learning style the learners favored more in this study, the result of the study also confirms the study by Peacock (2001) which was the first learning style preference of the learners above others.

In summary, it is obvious that the majority of the respondents in learning style preferences vary from one another. Therefore, as teachers, they need to provide good strategies and understand their learners' needs of learning style involving the learners' participation so that they may find their own learning style preferences to solve the problem encountered during the study. This way can also help the students know their individual learning style preferences and build their self-confidence. Moreover, by understanding the students' learning style preferences, the teachers or faculties can also help the students to be aware of their various strengths as well as improving their weaknesses during the studying.

Table 4
Respondents' Kinesthetic Learning Style Preference

No	Statement	Frequency				
		never	rarely	sometimes	often	always
1.	I prefer to start doing things rather than checking the directions first.	8	14	21	5	6
2.	I need frequent breaks when I work or study.	5	9	20	15	5
3.	I need to eat something when I read or study.	6	12	17	12	7
4.	If I have a choice between sitting and standing, I'd rather stand.	16	18	12	5	3
5.	I get nervous when I sit still too long.	26	18	9	0	1
6.	I think better when I move around (e.g., pacing or tapping my feet).	17	18	10	6	3
7.	I play with or bite on my pens during study.	31	15	4	3	1
8.	Manipulating objects helps me to remember what someone says.	8	12	18	10	6
9.	I move my hands when I speak.	8	15	17	7	7
10.	I draw lots of pictures (doodles) in my notebook during study.	7	4	15	13	15
Total		132	135	143	76	54

Eventually, combining the learning style in teaching can also become one of the considerations for the teachers as the solution to the learners who belong to a single learning style preference so that they can see the differences in learning styles among students and improve the students' learning strategies for their successful learning. In so doing, it can also help the students to understand their learning style better that may result in the improvement of the students' academic achievement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The result of the study may not be implemented in other institution, a further investigation is then highly recommended. For the future research, the result of the study should deliver an important message to the teachers especially by conducting a depth interview to the students regarding their learning style preferences so that the qualitative data can support the survey result.

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