

# AN INVESTIGATION OF THE LEARNING STYLES USED AND ENGLISH PROFICIENCY OF THE STUDENTS OF ENGLISH EDUCATION STUDY PROGRAM FACULTY OF TEACHER TRAINING AND EDUCATION SRIWIJAYA UNIVERSITY

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**Abstract:** This study aimed to find out the general description of learning styles, types of learning styles, and English proficiency of students of English Language Education Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (FKIP), Sriwijaya University and to find out whether there was a correlation between their learning styles and their English proficiency in general. The population of this study was the 3rd, 5th and 7th semester students of Palembang and Inderalaya campuses. The results show that in general the learning style of the students was dominated by verbal learning style with the percentage of 46.3% followed by social, logical, auditory, solitary, visual, and physical learning styles with the percentage of 18%, 9.8%, 9.4%, 9%, 5.7%, and 1.6% respectively. In general, the students' English proficiency was still at the elementary level (59%), low intermediate level (30.7%), intermediate level (7%), and advanced level (3.3%). There was no positive and significant correlation between students' learning styles and their English proficiency.

**Keywords:** *Correlation, Learning Styles, English Proficiency*

PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) of OECD (Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development) ranked Indonesia as the 57<sup>th</sup> country of 65 participating countries in reading ability in 2009. Moreover, The Jakarta Post (2017) reported that Indonesia fell seven spots in English Proficiency Index from the previous year, when it was ranked 32<sup>nd</sup> out of 72 countries. The average score in Asian countries is 53.60. With a score of 52.15, Indonesia is below the regional average and part of the Low Proficiency Band category among ASEAN countries. Singapore was ranked first in English proficiency with a score of 66.03, followed by Malaysia and the Philippines. This shows that Indonesia is still lack of quality education compared to countries that used to make Indonesia as one of the learning destinations in the world.

Many factors can cause our educational success to be far behind neighboring countries. Some experts mention that the main factor is caused by educators (learning managers) and students themselves. With their positions, educators have a vital role in the smooth learning process of students. While whatever educators do will always be in vain if students cannot receive what is taught by educators because they are the subject of learning. In other words, students' success in learning a foreign language is determined by two factors. The first factor is the external factor such as the school, teachers, location, curriculum, facility, etc. The other one is the internal factor such as language aptitude (Ehman: 1995), personality and attitude (Skehan: 1989), and learning styles (Oxford and Anderson: 1995). Oxford and Anderson (1995) found that students' learning styles could influence the students' success in learning a language. Similarly, Brumfit (1995) claimed that students will achieve excellent linguistic competencies if they can have good understanding of the learning processes they are following and suit them to their needs. To sum up, in the teaching and learning process there is a teaching methodology or technique applied by educators and there is a systematic learning or learning style used by students.

A learning style is the students' continuously used strategies in responding to and processing stimuli in the context of learning. Keefe (1979) states that learning styles is the composite of characteristic cognitive, affective, and physiological factors that serve as relatively stable indicators of how a learner perceives, interacts with, and responds to the learning environment. In addition, Stewart and Felicetti (1992) explain that learning styles are educational conditions under which a student is most likely to learn. So., learning styles do not really have direct relationships with everything the students usually learn but more on the strategies used in learning or learning styles.

Students of English Language Education Program, FKIP, Sriwijaya University surely tend to use certain learning styles in the teaching and learning process. There is no general description of the dominant learning style owned by the students. There is also no information about whether certain learning styles affect their English proficiency. That is one of the reasons which has given encouragement in conducting and reporting the finding of the research.

### **Method**

This study used descriptive method since there was no research treatment to change the dependent variable in the sample to find out a scientific answer to the research questions in the previous chapter. Sugiyono (2012) defines research method as a scientific way to obtain valid data aiming to find out, prove, and develop a particular knowledge so that in turn it can be used to understand, solve and anticipate problems". In other words, this study did not use experimental design but a survey. This was a correlational study.

Thus, this study used a quantitative approach. The results of measurements or observations were in the form of numbers. Quantitative approach is a method aiming at testing certain theories / assumptions by examining inter-variable correlation (Creswell, 2010: 5).

Data about student learning styles were obtained by means of questionnaires. Students were also given an English Proficiency Test in the form of TOEFL-Like tests to get information about their English proficiency.

### **Results and Discussions**

Among the seven learning styles, verbal learning style was dominated by the students with the percentage of 46.3% followed by social, logical, auditory, solitary, visual, and physical learning styles with the percentage of 18%, 9.8%, 9.4%, 9%, 5.7%, and 1.6% respectively.

Based on English proficiency factor, 18 students were categorized as Advanced level learner, 17 students as Intermediate level learners, 75 students as Low Intermediate level learners, and 144 students as Elementary level learners. 9 students with visual learning style were at Elementary level, 3 students at Low Intermediate level, and 2 students at Intermediate level; 70 students with verbal learning style were at Elementary level, 32 students at Low Intermediate level, 2 students at Intermediate level, and 3 students at Advanced level; 11 students with auditory learning style were at Elementary level, 7 students at Low Intermediate level, 3 students at Intermediate level, and 2 students at Advanced level; 3 students with physical learning style were at Elementary and 1 student at Low Intermediate level; 11 students with logical learning style were at Elementary level, 7 students at Low Intermediate level, 3 students at Intermediate level, and 2 students at Advanced level; 23 students with social learning style were at Elementary level, 18 students at Low Intermediate level, 1 student at Intermediate level, and 2 students at Advanced level; 15 students with solitary learning style were at Elementary level, 5 students at Low Intermediate level, and 2 students at Intermediate level.

Cros-tabulation results show that the English proficiency of 9 students with visual learning style were at Elementary level, 3 at Low Intermediate level, and 2 at Intermediate level. The English proficiency of 70 students with verbal learning style were at Elementary level, 32 at Low Intermediate level, 2 at Intermediate level, and 3 at Advanced level. The English proficiency of 11 students with auditory learning style were at Elementary level, 7 at Low Intermediate level, 3 at Intermediate level, and 2 at Advanced level. The English proficiency of 3 students with physical learning style were at Elementary level and 1 at Low Intermediate level. The English proficiency of 11 students with logical learning style were at Elementary level, 7 at Low Intermediate level, 3 at Intermediate level, and 2 at Advanced level. The English proficiency of 23 students with social learning style were at Elementary level, 18 at Low Intermediate level, 1 at Intermediate level, and 2 at Advanced level. The English proficiency of 15 students with solitary learning style was at Elementary level, 5 at Low Intermediate level, and 2 at Intermediate level.

Based on the comparison of p value with sig. value = 0.05, it was found out that p value > 0.05. It was concluded that there was no significant correlation between learning styles and English proficiency of students of English Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Sriwijaya University.

Two (auditory and physical) out of seven aspects of Learning Styles correlated significantly but negatively due to minus sign (-) meaning that the higher the two aspects the smaller the value of the English proficiency of the students. Other aspects were correlated but insignificant. Furthermore, the basis for deciding whether it is significant or insignificant correlation is by comparing the  $r$ -table and  $r$ -obtained. If  $r$ -obtained  $>$   $r$ -table, it is significant, on the contrary if the  $r$ -obtained  $<$   $r$ -table, it is insignificant. Since the number of  $N$  (samples) was 244,  $r$  table was 0.126. Significance can also be seen from the  $p$ -value (sig value). If  $p$ -value  $<$  0.05, it is significant, if  $p$ -value  $>$  0.05, it is insignificant.

In general, the learning styles of students of the English Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Sriwijaya University were dominated by verbal learning style, 113 out of 244 respondents or 46.3%. Verbal learning style is characterized by the preferences of using words, both in reading and writing. Students with this learning style feel comfortable with reading, speaking, writing, word play, poetry, poem and finding meaning. In other words, almost all students have learning style appropriate to the development of language proficiency. However, 62% or 70 out of 113 students with verbal learning style is still at elementary level of English proficiency. This occurred due to several factors. First, the level of familiarity of the students towards how to answer questions in the TOEFL-Like test was still lacking. Second, in Section 1 (Listening Comprehension), students experienced problems in following the dialogue. Students who had a low level of exposure to variety of spoken English and the pronunciation of native speakers had difficulty understanding conversations by native speakers. Students with verbal learning style are more likely to like speaking skills where in Indonesia interlocutors are not native speakers. Third, in the Section 2 TOEFL-Like test, the students were tested for the error analysis skills contained in the Written Expressions sentence with only 25 minutes. Error Analysis requires carefulness and a good understanding of English grammar in an attempt to find errors in sentences. Short time combinations, foresight and lack of multi-faceted understanding of English grammar make this part also difficult. Fourth, in Section 3 (Reading Comprehension), almost 90% of questions require students to have mastery and good understanding of vocabulary in context. The tendency to translate the meaning of words with a bilingual dictionary causes errors in choosing answers.

The number of students with social learning style was 44 students or 18%. This interpersonal learning style was characterized by the ability to socialize where they were able to communicate well, both verbally and in writing so that they could consult and discuss for all things both with lecturers and classmates by expressing ideas and asking for other people's opinions. Of 44 students, 23 of them were still at Elementary level and 18 at Low Intermediate level. The focus of this learning style is the student speaking skills. In TOEFL-Like test, there is no oral test so that their speaking ability cannot be known.

The number of students with logical learning style was 24 students or 9.8%. This type is characterized by excellent abilities in mathematics, logic, and reasoning. Of the 24 students, 13 of them were at Elementary level, 9 at Low Intermediate level, 1 at Intermediate level and 1 at Advanced level.

The number of students with auditory learning style was 23 students or 9.4%. This type is characterized by the ease of processing information well from various sound sources, such as lectures, speeches, voice recordings, etc. Of the 23 students, 11 of them were at Elementary level, 7 at Low Intermediate level, 3 at Intermediate level and 2 at Advanced level.

The number of students with solitary learning style was 22 or 9%. This type is characterized by a tendency to be alone, private, independent, and more able to concentrate, and use reasoning and be able to solve problems on its own. Of the 22 students, 15 of them were at Elementary level, 5 at Low Intermediate level, and 2 at Intermediate level.

The number of students with solitary learning style was 14 or 9%. This type is characterized by preferences for learning using images, graphics, colors, visual and spatial imagination. Of the 14 students, 9 of them were at Elementary level, 3 at Low Intermediate level, and 2 at Intermediate level.

The number of students with the last learning style, solitary learning style, was 4 or 1.6%. This type is characterized by quickly receiving and processing information from physical things such as touch, presence, and participation in a learning. Students need to experience something

directly to truly understand something. Of the 4 students, 3 of them were at Elementary level and 1 at Low Intermediate level.

The results of the data analysis show that there was no correlation between the Learning Style of students of English Education Study Program, FKIP, Sriwijaya University with their English proficiency. This happens (must be re-examined) because they have not yet realized the tendency of their learning style preferences so that they do not maximize their potential with the type of learning style that suits them best. If the awareness of learning style preferences is known by the students, they can adjust their learning needs with their learning style. Each aspect of the learning style also does not correlate positively and significantly with their English proficiency.

### Conclusions

In general, the learning style of students of English Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Sriwijaya University was dominated by verbal learning style with the percentage of 46.3% followed by social, logical, auditory, solitary, visual, and physical learning styles with the percentage of 18%, 9.8%, 9.4%, 9%, 5.7%, and 1.6% respectively.

In general, the English fluency of students of English Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Sriwijaya University was at Elementary level with the percentage of 59%, Low Intermediate level 30.7%, Intermediate level (7%), and Advanced level (3.3%).

There was no positive and significant correlation between the learning style of students of the English Education Study Program, FKIP, Sriwijaya University with their English proficiency.

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