EFL LEARNERS’ LEARNING STYLE PREFERENCES IN RELATION TO THEIR ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

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Abstract
The aim of this study was to find out students’ learning style preference and its correlation with their English Proficiency. The research questions were as follows (1) what are the most preferred learning styles of EFL Learner at English Department? (2) Is there any significant correlation between students’ learning style preferences and their English Proficiency? The study used Correlation design. The number of sample in this study was 35 students from English department of Halu Oleo University in the academic year who had followed TOEFL test. The data were collected using questionnaire which adopted Perceptual Learning-Style Preference Questionnaire (PLSPQ), developed by John Reid (1987) consisting of 30 statements and student’s TOEFL score. The data of this study were analyzed through descriptive statistic and Linear Regression Analysis. The results showed that (1) major learning style were tactile learning style and kinesthetic learning style (2) The coefficient correlation was 0.070 which was greater than 0.05 (level of significance). It means that there was no correlation between students’ learning style and their English proficiency.

Keywords: Student’s Learning Style, English Proficiency.

Introduction
In Learning, there are some factors that might affect the learning process. One of the factors is learning style. Keefe (1979:4) defines Learning style as “cognitive, affective, and physiological traits that are relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with, respond the learning environment”. It means that Learning style refer to the way how the learners gain the information. Each learner may have different styles of learning in term of how they the retrieve the information. There are some learners who learn by seeing. Other one is auditory which they prefer by listening for example there are learners who prefer visual, some student who prefer spoken explanation called auditory learning style, other one group learning, while others prefer learn individually. Several studies have discussed about learning
style. Dunn and Griggs (1998) defines learning style as the attitude, favorites, and conduct that student apply in learning. It is believed that when learning styles apply in learning may probably influence their learning outcome. Similarly, Gordon (1998) describes learning style have influence on language learning and how the learners perform.

In addition, there have been considerable researches shows that learning style can affect the successful of learning. Learning style plays important role in educational process. The identification of learning style can help the learner understanding how they gain and process information in different way. According to Ellis (1989), knowing the student’s learning style preferences can help both teachers and students in learning process. Teacher can apply the student’s learning style as a tool to develop their students’ learning. Besides, teacher can also create learning opportunities through a variety of teaching strategies and techniques. The identification of learning style can help educational planner especially teacher to provide appropriate material (Anderson, & Elloumi, 2004). A study by Kara (2009) revealed that mismatch between learning style and teacher style could lead to failure, frustration and demotivation. Moreover, the results confirmed Reid’s hypothesis that the students claimed that they feel unhappy and stressed when their teachers do not teach in accordance with their favored style. Moreover, learning styles play important role in educational process where the teachers should be aware of the differences of learners. It means that when the teachers have identified learners’ learning style, they can provide the appropriate material in order to successful learning. The teachers could suit their teaching strategy with students’ learning style.

Identification of learning style can help teachers to give proper consideration in term of managing the difference of student. Therefore, this study tries to indentify the students’ learning style and their relation with English Proficiency.

Literature Review
Students’ Learning Style Preference
Learning style is defined as “the characteristic cognitive, affective, social, and physiological behavior that serve as relatively stable indicators of how learner perceive, interact with, and respond to take learning environment” (Mackeracher, 2004, p. 71). Learning style as a conceptual structure which refers to individual’s learning characteristics that the learners have in learning. Moreover, Fielder and Hendriques (1995) state that student learns in many ways; by seeing, by hearing; reflecting and acting; reasoning logically and intuitively, memorizing and visualizing. Additionally, Brown (2000) said that learning style as a way how the learner perceives, and processes the information in learning environment.

The topic about learning style is becoming the focus of many researchers. Gordon (1998) argues that learning styles have effects on educational process. Each student has their own way how to study the language.

Reid (1995) developed learning style model and instruments called Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (PLSPQ). Reid (1987) identifies six learning styles namely:

a. Visual
Visual learners prefer to learn by using their vision. They prefer seeing ideas in writing, e.g.: reading handouts, diagram, picture, maps, or chart.

b. Auditory
Auditory learners prefer listening, e.g. oral explanations, discussions.

c. Kinesthetic
Kinesthetic learners prefer active participation, e.g.: drama, role play. They use a lots of hand movements; talks about action and feelings, speaks more slowly; memorizes by doing something repeatedly.

d. Tactile
Tactile learners prefer hands-on work, e.g.: handling materials or taking notes. Students, who have tactile learning style learn best by making model of something, make class project, make a drawing or build something.

e. Group Learner
Learners who have group learning style prefer to work with others than alone. They prefer work with their friends, discussing with teacher in order to share idea.

f. Individual learner

Learners with individual learning style prefer to work alone than work with others. They can remember things by studying alone.

The Role and Effect of Learning Style on Language Learning

The role of learning style especially in English foreign context could provide help for students in order to improve their language, their learning flexibility, and their performance (Bailey et al., 2000). The important thing is that learning style can make teacher as educational planner aware of how student learn language. Based on Berquist (1975), students have their own preference and also have different tools for learning. As a result, students produce different quality level in learning. For instance, some process information by audio but others need visual. Some students prefer to work alone while others prefer to work in groups. Some process information by reflecting on the situations. Teachers should be aware of these kinds of differences. Therefore, it is important to provide learning activities that are suitable for different learning styles. Providing the suitable material can help both students and teachers in term of successful in educational process. In teaching context, if teacher is aware of their learners’ preference, she/he can know what the student needs. It will affect the learning process became more effective learning. Ellis (1989) explain that when the teacher became aware of the student, it will give teacher kinds of help so it will help both teachers and student became more effectively. According to Hiland (2006), each educational planner has different ideas about what is worth communicating, how it can be communicated, what learner or student are likely to know (and) how they might be persuaded. Making student participate effectively in the discourse of a specific discipline, students need this insider knowledge and those best placed to teach discipline specific practices and conventions are discipline specialists. Also, Baynham (2000) said that educational planer or teacher should identify the kinds of language use with which students need to become familiar in order to write successfully in higher education, also make these
uses available to students in ways enhance their learning and teacher as educational planner find ways of building on students’ existing knowledge of and uses of language. Similar to Reid (1995), when the teacher can match their teaching style with student’s learning style it can provide equal opportunities in classroom. As mention before, matching the learning style and student’s learning style can give a good result that absolutely is a higher rate of successful in learning. Besides, increasing the awareness of learners that related to student’s learning style effect positively to their knowledge of how to learn (Smith and associates, 1990). As a result, it is challenging for teacher in order to match with learners preference to get a better performance and to encourage the development of a balanced learning so learning process more effectively.

Research Method

This study used correlation design. It involved 35 students in the academic year 2016 who had followed TOEFL Test.

The data were gathered using TOEFL score and questionnaire used to find out the student’s learning style preference. The researcher adopted Perceptual Learning-Style Preference Questionnaire (PLSPQ) which was developed by Reid (1987). There were 30 items which were divided into six learning styles namely visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile, individual and group learning style. The questionnaire used to identify student’s major, minor, or negligible perceptual learning style preference. Major is the preferred leaning style, minor is one in which learners can still function well, and negligible is the least preferred. The items of the questionnaire were in the five-point Likert- scale ranging from strongly agree (5), agree (4), undecided (3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1). The questionnaire was piloted to 50 students. The validity test showed that there were 25 of 30 statements that were confirmed to be valid. The result of reliability test by using cronbach alpha was almost 0.834 which was categorized as high reliability based on Sugiyonos’ reliability scale (2010). So, the questionnaire was valid and reliable to be used.

While TOEFL score transcript was obtained from UPT Bahasa at Halu Oleo University who managed the TOEFL test in Halu Oleo University.
In calculating the data, the researcher used the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 16.0 by calculating linear regression analysis, and descriptive statistic. Descriptive statistic was used to determine the students’ learning style preference. Linear regression analysis was used to analyze the correlation between students’ learning style and their English proficiency.

**Findings**

The findings are divided into two sections, namely students’ learning style preference and the correlation between students’ learning style preference and their English Proficiency.

**Students’ Learning Style Preference**

The descriptive analysis of the perceptual learning style preference:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>31.23</td>
<td>3.482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auditory</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>32.29</td>
<td>3.793</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinesthetic</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>40.74</td>
<td>5.762</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactile</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>41.77</td>
<td>4.596</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>37.89</td>
<td>5.940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16.34</td>
<td>3.235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid (listwise)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16.34</td>
<td>3.235</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen above, the results of this study showed that the most preferred learning style was tactile learning style (41.77) followed by kinesthetic learning style (40.74). Minor learning style was visual (31.23), auditory (32.29), and group (37.89). While individual learning style (16.34) can be categorized as negligible learning style because it was the least preferred style.

**The Correlation between Students’ Learning Style Preference and Their English Proficiency**
Before conducting regression test, the classical assumptions of the regression test must be followed, namely the normality test and homogeneity test.

After analyzing the normality test using Kolmogorov-Smirnov, it was found that the Asymp value. Sig (2-tailed) was .915 and .758 which were greater than .05. Therefore, the data were normally distributed. While, the result of homogeneity test revealed that the score was .000. It means that the data were homogeneous.

### Linear Regression Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R Square</th>
<th>Adjusted R Square</th>
<th>Std. Error of the Estimate</th>
<th>Durbin-Watson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>.070a</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>-.025</td>
<td>7.593</td>
<td>1.665</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen above, R value was coefficient correlation. It was 0.070 which can be interpreted the correlation both variables was very low correlation. The value of R Square or coefficient of determination was 0.005. It can be interpreted that the independent variable X has a contribution effect of 0.5% on the variable Y and the other 99.5% was influenced by other factors outside the variable X. The probability value was .070 which was greater than .05. It means that there was no correlation between learning style and students’ English proficiency. Therefore, high score or low score in TOEFL test is not affected by learning style.

**Discussion**

Based on the result of this study, of the six learning styles, the most preferred learning style was tactile learning style and kinesthetic learning style. The results of this study are consistent with the study done by Chu and Chew (1997) and Melton (1990) where students preferred kinesthetic and tactile. Tactile learner prefers to learn with hand-on activity. They can learn best when they can include their touch such as building project, making class project, or taking notes while listening or reading. Based on Daud (2004), tactile learner feels like they have to do something when they are learning. They feel enjoy with activity that involve their touching. Tactile style directly involves the learner by actively encouraging them to do something in order to
learn about it. They express their learning best with projects that they make such as mini-books, games, dioramas, skits, model making, building blocks, art materials, math manipulative, and so forth. Additionally, student preferred to kinesthetic learning style. Students who prefer activity can be active learners. They enjoy activity that they can involve in or participate. They could be more when they are engaged in hands on activity rather than sitting for hours in a classroom. This type of learners also likes to participate in science experiments, drama, dance and educational trips.

In this study, minor learning styles were visual, auditory and group. Minor learning style can be explained as one of learning styles in which learners can still function. Visual learner learns by something visually such textbook, diagram, picture, and etc. Alsafi (2010) found that kinesthetic, auditory, and tactile learning style were preferred by the participants while they disfavored using visual, group, and individual learning styles. The results of previous study have similarity to the finding of this study.

The result of test of correlation showed that there was no correlation between students' learning style and their English proficiency. Based on the hypothesis testing, the value of coefficient correlation was greater than the level significance which means there was no correlation between students’ learning style and their English proficiency. The researcher assumed that lack of statistical power is one of the reasons. The study needs a larger sample to detect the correlation. This would not affect the coefficient correlation, but it would affect whether or not it is statistically significant. Besides, sample selection can affect the strength of relationships calculated with correlations. As stated by Runyon, Haber, & Coleman (1994) “sometimes misguided researchers select only the extreme cases in their samples and attempt to look at the relationship between the two variables”. It shows that the researcher should pay attention in deciding the sample because the number can affect the result of correlation test.

Other assumption is dealing with data of this study, TOEFL score and learning style preference. There was a gap between the data. The gap itself can make bias in the result of this study.
Regarding of the result of this study, major, minor, and negligible learning styles namely kinesthetic and tactile learning style had low correlation to English proficiency. The result of this study is similar with Isemonger and Sheppard (2003) in which they found that no significant differences between learning style and the participants’ score on proficiency test as a predictor of English language ability. Learning style may not be a strong predictor of foreign language proficiency. The result of this finding is consistent with the result of several researchers (Ehrman & Oxford, 1995; Dailey, Onwuegbuzie & Bailey, 1997) who have reported that learning style are only weakly on indirectly related to foreign language achievement.

Conclusion

Regarding the result of this study, the researcher comes up with the conclusion that the most preferred learning styles were kinesthetic and tactile learning style. Second, the result of the correlation between students’ learning style and their English proficiency showed that was no correlation between learning style and English proficiency. Student may be different each other in order how they learn. The mix and match between teachers’ teaching style and student’s learning is needed in order to improve language learning, design appropriate material and etc which probably can make a better learning environment.

References


