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Exploring Students' Learning Styles in English Language Learning: Implications for Differentiated Instruction Strategies

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A B S T R A C T

Learning styles play an important role in shaping how students process and internalize language input. Information about students' learning styles enables teachers to select appropriate approaches that address and accommodate their needs. This study investigates the preferred learning styles of junior high school students in English language learning and examines the implications for differentiated instructions. Using a quantitative descriptive design, data were collected from 45 eighth-grade students through a standardized learning style questionnaire adapted from Nisa'ul Kumalasari. The results reveal that seven categories of learning style are identified, namely visual learning, tactile learning, auditory learning, group learning, individual learning, reading learning, and kinesthetic learning. From the seven categories, auditory learning and tactile styles emerged as the two most dominants. These findings indicate that students learn more effectively through listening and collaborative interactions. This highlights the need for teachers to implement multimodal instructional strategies that integrate auditory, visual, and kinesthetic elements to accommodate diverse student needs and enhance learning engagement.

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INTRODUCTION

In the realm of English language education, understanding students' learning styles is essential to enhancing instructional effectiveness. Learning styles are generally defined as individuals' preferred ways of absorbing, processing, and retaining information (Felder & Silverman, 2020). These preferences reflect how students naturally approach learning tasks and respond to various teaching methods.

Learning styles commonly manifest in the form of visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile, or social modes of learning. Each mode emphasizes distinct approaches to processing information, ranging from reliance on visual aids to engagement through physical movement or collaborative interactions. This diversity highlights the varied cognitive and sensory channels students use in classroom settings.

In language learning specifically, learning styles significantly influence how students perceive input, practice linguistic skills, and engage with classroom tasks. For example, students with auditory preferences may benefit more from listening activities and teacher explanations, while visual learners tend to rely on images, written texts, and demonstrations. Understanding these tendencies enables teachers to support student learning more effectively.

Recent studies have emphasized the diversity of learning styles among students. Setiyani (2019) found that students display a range of preferences, including visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities. Such findings reflect the reality that classrooms are composed of learners with distinct needs and strengths, reinforcing the importance of recognizing varied learning profiles.

Similarly, research by Kusumaningtyas (2025) highlights the need for teaching strategies that accommodate these differences. The study suggests that adapting instruction to suit diverse learning styles can lead to improved comprehension and increased student satisfaction. This approach encourages teachers to adopt flexible and responsive pedagogical methods.

The significance of aligning instructional strategies with students' learning preferences is further supported by Goyibova (2025). She argues that differentiated instruction—an approach that tailors teaching methods to meet varied learner needs—can enhance student engagement and academic achievement. Such practices not only address learner diversity but also contribute to a more inclusive educational environment.

Moreover, technological advancements have opened new possibilities for accommodating diverse learning styles. Research by Bayu Rahadian and Budiningsih (2023) discusses classroom management applications capable of analyzing student learning styles and recommending suitable teaching methods and media. These innovations provide practical tools for implementing differentiated instruction in modern classrooms.

In light of these developments, this study aims to explore the preferred learning styles of junior high school students in Surabaya and determine how these preferences can inform differentiated instruction strategies. By identifying the dominant learning styles within this group, the research seeks to offer actionable recommendations that can help educators enhance the effectiveness of English language instruction.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design to describe the distribution of students' preferred learning styles in English language learning. The respondents were 45 eighth-grade students of SMP Negeri 16 Surabaya in the 2024/2025 academic year. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their willingness to participate and regular attendance in English classes.

The primary instrument in this study was a close-ended learning style questionnaire adapted from Nisa'ul Kumalasari. The questionnaire consisted of 35 statements representing seven categories of learning styles: visual, auditory, reading, kinesthetic, tactile, group, and individual learning. Each item used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). This instrument was chosen because it is widely used in previous educational studies and provides a clear classification of students' learning preferences.

Data collection was conducted in May 2025 during regular English class sessions. The researcher distributed the questionnaire, and students completed it individually within approximately 15–20 minutes. All responses were collected directly after completion and included in the analysis.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated for each learning style category to identify students' dominant learning tendencies. Frequencies and percentages were also used to illustrate the distribution of students' preferences across the seven learning style types. The descriptive approach was chosen because it effectively presents learners' characteristics without requiring inferential statistical testing.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study describe the distribution of students' learning style preferences based on the seven categories proposed in the questionnaire, namely visual, tactile, auditory, group, kinesthetic, individual, and reading learning styles. Each category is represented by several statements that measure students' tendencies in processing and understanding learning materials. The mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) of each statement reflect how strongly students identify with a specific learning style. Overall, these results provide an overview of how students at the research site engage with learning through different sensory and interactional modalities.

Table 1. Type of Learning Style

Type of Learning Style	M	SD
Visual Learning	3.64	0.97
Tactile Learning	3.76	0.95
Auditory Learning	3.90	0.92
Group Learning	3.77	0.88
Kinesthetic Learning	3.74	0.90
Individual Learning	3.56	1.00
Reading Learning	3.66	0.92

Based on the results of the study on seven types of learning styles visual, tactile, auditory, group, kinesthetic, individual, and reading—different mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) scores were obtained. The highest average score was found in the Auditory Learning Style (M = 3.90; SD = 0.92), followed by the Group Learning Style (M = 3.77; SD = 0.88) and the Tactile Learning Style (M = 3.76; SD = 0.95). Meanwhile, the lowest average score was found in the Individual Learning Style (M = 3.56; SD = 1.00). These findings indicate that most students tend to understand lessons better through listening, discussing, and interacting with others rather than studying independently. This pattern is consistent with previous studies showing that Indonesian students rely heavily on verbal explanation and peer interaction in English learning.

The tendency toward the auditory learning style is evident in several indicators with high mean values, such as "*I understand better when the teacher explains rather than when I read from the board or a textbook*" (M = 4.24) and "*My concentration is easily lost or disturbed if the surrounding environment is noisy*" (M = 4.11). This data suggests that students comprehend better when teachers explain lessons directly, but they are also sensitive to environmental noise that can disrupt their listening process. Therefore, a conducive classroom environment and verbal communication-based teaching strategies are crucial for effective learning. Similar results were reported by Setiyani (2019), who found that Indonesian EFL learners prefer teacher explanations because they help clarify vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar more effectively than text-based input.

The preference for auditory learning is further supported by the realities of modern classrooms, which increasingly incorporate audio-rich media such as educational videos, podcasts, and recorded explanations. Lee and Park (2022) also showed that audio-based materials improve student engagement in online and blended environments, helping explain why auditory learning dominates in this study.

The second-highest learning preference is the group learning style. Items such as "*I enjoy working with 2–3 classmates*" (M = 4.07) illustrate students' comfort with collaboration. Indonesian classroom culture naturally fosters group work, where students frequently engage in discussions and shared activities. Rahman and Setiawan (2020) found that collaborative tasks reduce language learning anxiety and encourage greater participation among Indonesian learners.

By contrast, the individual learning style received the lowest score. Many students may feel less confident studying alone, especially when encountering unfamiliar English input. The cultural emphasis on cooperation, along with the influence of the current curriculum, which promotes project-based and group tasks, likely contributes to lower individual preference.

Although auditory and group learning styles appear most dominant, it is important to emphasize that relying solely on these styles may not support all learners equally. Studies such as Frontiers in Psychology (2020) argue that matching teaching strictly to learning styles does not guarantee improved academic performance. Instead, multimodal teaching—integrating auditory, visual, reading, and kinesthetic activities—tends to be more effective.

In practical terms, teachers should continue utilizing interactive verbal explanations, discussions, and audio-based media, as these align with the most dominant learning tendencies. However, these should be complemented with visual aids, demonstrations, and hands-on activities to create a balanced and inclusive learning environment. This multimodal approach ensures comprehensive learning while still supporting the auditory and group strengths observed in this cohort.

Table 2. Visual Learning Style

Number	Statements	M	SD
1	I find it easier to remember what I see rather than what I hear	4.04	0.77
8	I like listening to music while studying	3.62	1.08
15	My concentration is not easily disturbed even when the environment around me is noisy	2.82	1.11
22	I prefer when the teacher demonstrates or uses teaching aids when delivering the lesson	4.13	0.92
29	I have difficulty remembering verbal instructions unless they are written down, and often ask others to repeat them	3.58	0.98
Average		**3.64**	**0.97**

Based on the analysis in Table, the visual learning style shows a mean (M) of 3.64 and a standard deviation (SD) of 0.97. This indicates that students' tendency to learn through visual observation falls within the moderate–high category. The highest-rated statement was "*I prefer when the teacher demonstrates or uses teaching aids when delivering the lesson*" (M = 4.13), suggesting that most students understand material more effectively when teachers use visual aids or demonstrations. Conversely, the lowest-rated statement was "*My concentration is not easily disturbed even when the environment around me is noisy*" (M = 2.82), implying that students' focus is easily distracted by a noisy environment.

This finding illustrates that visual learning continues to play an essential role, especially when teachers incorporate pictures, videos, or visual teaching aids. In modern learning contexts, technologies such as PowerPoint slides, infographics, and instructional videos have been shown to enhance conceptual understanding and retention (Mayer, 2021).

Table 3. Tactile Learning Style

Number	Statements	M	SD
2	I learn better when I can create a model or a concept map sketch	3.96	0.95
9	I learn more when I make something for a class assignment	4.07	0.83
16	I learn better when I draw something related to what I study	3.53	1.02
23	When I make something, I remember what I have learned better	3.84	0.89
30	I like making something to fulfill class assignments	3.38	1.04
Average		**3.76**	**0.95**

The tactile learning style recorded a mean of 3.76 and an SD of 0.95, indicating that students enjoy learning through touch or hands-on product creation. The highest mean score appeared in "*I learn more when I make something for a class assignment*" (M = 4.07), while the lowest was "*I like making something to fulfill class assignments*" (M = 3.38).

These findings show that students better comprehend materials when they actively participate in creating models, drawing, or crafting products. This aligns with the concept of *active learning*, in which learners gain experience through hands-on practice rather than passively listening or reading (Prince & Felder, 2021). In the 21st-century classroom, tactile-based activities foster creativity, problem-solving, and meaningful learning experiences (Omar et al., 2023).

Table 4. Auditory Learning Style

Number	Statements	M	SD
3	I understand better when the teacher explains rather than when I read from the board or a textbook	4.24	0.79
10	When discussing in groups, I can recall the material well	3.96	0.92
17	My concentration is easily lost or disturbed if the surrounding environment is noisy	4.11	0.86
24	I learn better in class when the teacher gives lessons through lectures because it is easier to remember	3.51	1.05
31	I recognize many songs and commercials on television	3.69	0.97
Average		**3.90**	**0.92**

The auditory learning style achieved the highest mean score (M = 3.90; SD = 0.92). The most highly rated item was "*I understand better when the teacher explains rather than when I read from the board or a textbook*" (M = 4.24), suggesting that students comprehend more effectively through verbal explanations. Another high-scoring item was "*My concentration is easily lost or disturbed if the surrounding environment is noisy*" (M = 4.11), showing that auditory learners depend heavily on a quiet environment.

This tendency reflects students' strong preference for auditory-based learning through listening and verbal interaction. In current educational settings, audio-based learning resources—such as podcasts, instructional videos, and recorded lectures—are increasingly popular and have been found to improve student engagement and understanding (Zhang et al., 2024).

Table 5. Group Learning Style

Number	Statements	M	SD
4	I can accomplish more when I work with others	3.64	0.90
11	I learn more when I study in groups	3.78	0.86
18	I like working with 2 or 3 classmates when completing assignments	4.07	0.85
25	I prefer learning with other people	3.78	0.88
32	In class, I learn best when I work with others	3.60	0.93
Average		**3.77**	**0.88**

For group learning style, the mean was 3.77 with an SD of 0.88, indicating that students are comfortable learning collaboratively. The highest-rated statement was "*I like working with 2 or 3 classmates when completing assignments*" (M = 4.07), implying that small-group collaboration is the most effective form of teamwork.

This aligns with current trends in collaborative learning, where students not only enhance conceptual understanding but also develop social and communication skills. Models such as *Collaborative Learning* and *Project-Based Learning (PjBL)* have been shown to improve both academic achievement and social competence (Kim & Cho, 2023).

Table 6. Kinesthetic Learning Style

Number	Statements	M	SD
5	I prefer learning by doing something in class	3.64	0.97
12	I understand better when learning with real objects as learning aids	4.20	0.79
19	I enjoy learning in class through experiments	3.64	0.92
26	I understand the lesson better when I participate in role playing	3.60	0.89
33	I feel uncomfortable when I have to sit still in class for a long time	3.62	0.94
Average		**3.74**	**0.90**

The kinesthetic learning style obtained a mean of 3.74 and SD of 0.90. Students with this learning style tend to grasp material more effectively when engaging in physical activities or direct practice. The highest-rated item was "*I understand better when learning with real objects as learning aids*" (M = 4.20), confirming that they require real-world experiences through experiments, simulations, or movement-based activities.

In modern education, project-based and simulation learning are considered ideal for kinesthetic learners. These activities not only deepen conceptual understanding but also enhance student motivation and engagement (Mahmud et al., 2025).

Table 7. Individual Learning Style

Number	Statements	M	SD
6	When I study alone, I can remember more easily	3.69	0.96
13	When I work alone, I learn better	3.40	1.02
20	In class, I work better than when I work alone	3.36	1.07
27	I prefer working on my own	3.73	0.94
34	I prefer doing assignments by myself	3.60	0.98
Average		**3.56**	**1.00**

The analysis shows that the individual learning style received the lowest mean (M = 3.56; SD = 1.00). The highest-rated item was "*I prefer working on my own*" (M = 3.73), while the lowest was "*In class, I work better than when I work alone*" (M = 3.36).

This suggests that most students prefer social interaction and collaboration over independent learning. This may be due to Indonesia's educational culture, which emphasizes group and cooperative learning. Nevertheless, individual learning remains crucial for fostering self-discipline and independence, which are key components of lifelong learning (Rahman & Setiawan, 2020).

Table 1.8. Reading Learning Style

Number	Statements	M	SD

7	I like reading and then taking small notes of what I read	3.71	0.91
14	I understand and recall better when I read the lesson	3.56	0.94
21	I learn better by reading from the board or textbook rather than listening to the teacher's explanation	3.53	0.97
28	I easily remember what I read and what I write	3.62	0.92
35	I like seeing beautiful handwriting or my classmates' neat writing	3.89	0.88
Average		**3.66**	**0.92**

The reading learning style had a mean of 3.66 and SD of 0.92, indicating that students frequently engage in reading as a learning approach. The highest-rated item was *"I like seeing beautiful handwriting or my classmates' neat writing"* (M = 3.89), suggesting that the aesthetic quality of writing and note organization can influence motivation.

In contemporary education, reading remains a foundational skill, particularly with the increasing accessibility of e-books, digital articles, and online resources. However, since students today are more engaged by visual and interactive media, teachers should integrate reading strategies with digital tools to maintain relevance and engagement (Santos & Rios, 2025).

CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated the preferred learning styles of eighth-grade students in English language learning and found that auditory learning was the most dominant style, followed by group and tactile learning. These results indicate that students learn most effectively through listening, verbal explanation, and collaborative interaction, while individual learning was the least preferred. The dominance of auditory and group learning styles reflects both the characteristics of Indonesian EFL learners and the influence of classroom practices that emphasize teacher explanations and peer collaboration. Based on these findings, several pedagogical implications can be drawn. English teachers should incorporate multimodal instructional strategies that integrate auditory, visual, and kinesthetic elements to address diverse learning needs. Emphasizing verbal explanation, small-group activities, and interactive discussions can enhance engagement for students who prefer auditory and collaborative learning. At the same time, teachers are encouraged to gradually strengthen students' independence through structured individual tasks to balance their learning preferences. For future research, it is recommended to examine learning styles using larger and more diverse samples to improve generalizability. Further studies may also explore the relationship between learning styles and English proficiency levels or investigate how digital learning tools can support multimodal instruction. Additionally, qualitative approaches such as interviews or classroom observations could provide deeper insights into how learning styles manifest in real classroom interactions.

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