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A Study on Students' Learning Styles in Speaking Course at The English Department of Widya Gama Mahakam University, Samarinda

Rahmaniah[1], Hasbi Sjamsir[2], Iwan Setiawan[3]
Mulawarman University, Indonesia
rahma.kpn@gmail,com[1], Sjamsirhasbi@yaho.com[2], Iwansetiawan@fkip.unmul.ac.id[3]
Correspondence author Email: rahma.kpn@gmail.com

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Abstract
This study investigates students' learning styles in the Speaking Course at the English Department of Widya Gama Mahakam University, Samarinda. The research aimed to identify problems faced by students when using their learning styles and analyze the advantages and disadvantages of different learning styles in speaking development. The study employed a qualitative case study design with six purposively selected fourth-semester students representing visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis with theory triangulation for validation. For thematic analysis, we followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework, and for the theory triangulation, applied Fleming's VARK model. The findings revealed distinct learning style preferences that significantly influenced speaking course. Visual learners demonstrated strong preparation and organizational skills but struggled with spontaneous conversations and real-time communication. Auditory learners showed excellent listening abilities and natural speaking fluency but faced challenges with written preparation and environmental distractions. Kinesthetic learners excelled in interactive activities and experiential learning but encountered difficulties in traditional classroom settings and abstract discussions. Each learning style group faced specific challenges: visual learners experienced anxiety in unstructured speaking situations and over-dependence on visual supports; auditory learners struggled with spelling and written organization; kinesthetic learners had difficulties with sedentary learning environments. Despite their strengths, each learning style demonstrated notable limitations in comprehensive speaking development. The research contributes to understanding the relationship between learning styles and speaking skill acquisition in EFL contexts. The result is that while learning style preferences should be accommodated, students need multimodal learning strategies to overcome single-modality limitations.
Keywords: Learning styles; speaking course; visual learners; auditory learners; kinesthetic learners; English as Foreign Language (EFL).

1. Introduction

In the contemporary globalized world, English proficiency has become increasingly crucial for effective communication, with speaking course representing one of the most essential competencies for language learners (Rao et al., 2007). The ability to articulate ideas

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clearly and engage in meaningful verbal exchange has been identified as a fundamental requirement for successful academic and professional advancement (Al-dheleai et al., 2019). However, despite the recognized importance of a speaking course, many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students continue to face significant challenges in their oral communication learning (Fiorilli et al., 2022).

Recent studies indicate that individual learning differences play a critical role in language acquisition success, particularly in speaking course (Wilson, 2012). Research has demonstrated that students process information through different modalities—visual, auditory, and kinesthetic—which directly impacts their learning effectiveness (Lahdenperä et al., 2022). According to (Nafis, 2017), approximately 46% of students prefer visual learning styles when acquiring English language skills, suggesting that understanding learning style preferences is essential for optimizing language instruction. However, the relationship between learning styles and speaking course remains underexplored, with limited research examining how different learning modalities affect students' speaking course experiences.

The significance of this research gap is further emphasized by findings from (Faridah, 2019), who revealed that learning styles may not be the dominant factor affecting language skill achievement, suggesting that other variables such as motivation, aptitude, and cognitive ability require consideration. This contradiction in existing literature highlights the need for more comprehensive investigation into how learning styles specifically impact speaking course and what advantages and disadvantages each learning modality presents in speaking course contexts(Serhan, 2020).

Current pedagogical approaches often fail to accommodate diverse learning preferences, potentially limiting students' speaking course effectiveness (Hung, 2012). According to (Alzain et al., 2018), teachers must understand students' learning styles to effectively assess individual preferences and implement appropriate instructional strategies. However, many EFL students remain unaware of their learning patterns, particularly in

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speaking course acquisition, leading to suboptimal learning outcomes and persistent communication difficulties(Mahnegar, 2012).

This study addresses the critical need to investigate the relationship between learning styles and speaking course among EFL students. By examining the problems, advantages, and disadvantages associated with different learning modalities in speaking instruction, this research aims to provide evidence-based insights for enhancing pedagogical practices and improving student learning experiences. The findings will contribute to theoretical understanding of learning style applications in second language acquisition while offering practical guidelines for educators seeking to create more inclusive and effective speaking instruction that accommodates diverse learning preferences(Alnujaidi, 2018).

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative case study design (Creswell, 2003) to explore students' learning styles in speaking courses, utilizing an interpretive approach to understand participants' experiences in their natural settings (Hollweck, 2016). The research was conducted at the English Language Education Program of Widya Gama Mahakam Samarinda, East Kalimantan, Indonesia, focusing on fourth-semester students during the 2023 academic year. Six participants were strategically selected through purposive sampling with sampling technique from a population of 19 students, ensuring representation of all three learning style categories—visual, auditory, and kinesthetic, with two participants from each category (Patton, 2002).

The selection process involved initial assessment through classroom interactions and self-reported learning preferences, followed by categorization based on established learning style characteristics and strategic selection to ensure comprehensive coverage of diverse learning approaches. This sample size was justified by qualitative research principles that prioritize depth over breadth, allowing for intensive data collection and analysis within the study's scope (Guest et al., 2017).

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Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews using prepared interview guidelines, with the researcher serving as the primary instrument, supported by specific interview protocols designed to explore participants' learning style preferences and speaking course experiences (Ary et al., 2018).

The interview process began with open-ended warm-up questions about general English learning experiences, progressing to specific inquiries about speaking course preferences and effective learning strategies (Miles et al., 2014). Data analysis followed systematic qualitative procedures involving organizing, coding, and interpreting interview transcripts through multiple stages: initial coding to identify key concepts, categorization according to learning style theories, and interpretation of patterns within and across learning style categories (Cohen. & Et.al, 2007). For thematic analysis, we followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) systematic six-phase framework:

Phase 1 - Familiarization: Researchers immersed themselves in data through repeated reading of transcripts, observational notes, and reflective memos, generating initial impressions and potential pattern identification.

Phase 2 - Initial Coding: Line-by-line coding identified meaningful data segments using both inductive and deductive approaches. Codes captured learning behaviors, challenges, strategies, cultural influences, and teacher practices.

Phase 3 - Theme Searching: Codes were organized into potential themes through visual mapping, categorical clustering, and theoretical alignment. Themes emerged around learning style manifestations, contextual influences, and pedagogical adaptations.

Phase 4 - Theme Reviewing: Themes were refined through internal coherence checking and external distinctiveness verification. Researchers ensured themes accurately represented data while maintaining analytical clarity.

Phase 5 - Theme Defining: The final themes were clearly defined, with specific characteristics, boundaries, and relationships. Each theme's contribution to understanding learning style impacts was articulated.

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Phase 6 - Report Writing: The findings were synthesized into a coherent narrative that connected themes to research questions and theoretical frameworks, while maintaining the authenticity of participant voice.

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, the study employed theory triangulation as the primary validation strategy, applying multiple theoretical perspectives related to visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles to interpret the data, thereby comparing and contrasting interpretations to increase the depth and reliability of findings while ensuring conclusions accurately reflected participants' experiences in speaking courses. Multiple theoretical perspectives (Fleming's VARK, Kolb's experiential learning, Gardner's multiple intelligences) were applied to interpret findings, comparing and contrasting explanations to enhance interpretation depth and reliability. This process involved analyzing data through each theoretical lens, identifying convergent and divergent interpretations, and developing integrated understanding. (Honorene, 2017).

3. Findings and Discussion

4.1.1 Students' Learning Styles in The Speaking Course

The research revealed that students exhibited diverse learning styles in their Speaking Course, primarily categorized into visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners. Each style was characterized by distinct preferences and behaviors that influenced how students approached speaking tasks. The findings were derived from in-depth interviews conducted with six students, supplemented by classroom observation and coding analysis of their learning patterns.

A. Visual Learners

Visual learners demonstrated a strong preference for visual stimuli and written materials when developing speaking skills. They processed information most effectively through visual channels and relied heavily on seeing information to understand and retain language elements.

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Student A, identified as a visual learner, expressed their learning preferences: "When I'm learning new vocabulary for speaking, I need to see the words first. I create colorful mind maps with pictures and symbols - it's like my brain needs to photograph the information before I can use it in conversation." The student elaborated on their cognitive processing: "During speaking practice, I often visualize the sentence structure in my mind. I imagine the grammar rules as diagrams, and this helps me construct sentences correctly when I speak."

Their preparation strategies were distinctly visual: "Before any presentation or speaking activity, I spend hours creating visual aids - not just for the audience, but for myself. I need charts, pictures, and written notes to feel confident." Student A further explained their media consumption habits: "I watch English movies with subtitles in both English and my native language. Seeing the words while hearing them creates a strong memory connection that helps me in spontaneous conversations."

Student B, another visual learner, shared complementary insights: "I struggle with verbal instructions in class. I always ask the teacher to write key points on the board or provide handouts. When practicing dialogues, I need to see the conversation script first, then gradually move away from it." Their note-taking strategy was unique: "I use different colored pens for different types of speaking tasks - blue for formal presentations, red for casual conversations, green for debates. This color-coding helps me organize my thoughts when speaking."

B. Auditory Learners

Auditory learners showed a clear preference for listening-based activities and verbal processing. They learned most effectively through hearing information and engaging in oral exchanges, demonstrating strong abilities in sound recognition and verbal memory.

Student C, an auditory learner, described their learning approach: "I record myself speaking on different topics every day and listen back to analyze my pronunciation, fluency, and word choice. It's like having a conversation with myself, and I can hear my progress over time." They emphasized the importance of sound patterns: "I learn new phrases by listening to

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their rhythm and intonation. Sometimes I hum the melody of a sentence before I can say it properly. Music and language have similar patterns for me."

Their classroom participation was notably active: "I volunteer for every speaking activity because I learn by doing. Group discussions energize me - I can think better when I'm talking through ideas out loud rather than writing them down first." Student C explained their memory techniques: "I create audio diaries where I practice new vocabulary in context. I also listen to podcasts at 1.5x speed to challenge my listening skills, which directly improves my speaking response time."

Student D, another auditory learner, provided additional perspectives: "I participate in online language exchange programs where I speak with native speakers for hours. The immediate feedback and natural conversation flow help me internalize correct pronunciation and colloquial expressions." Their learning routine included: "I listen to English radio while doing other activities. Even when I'm not actively focusing, my brain is processing the language patterns, and I notice improvements in my spontaneous speaking."

C. Kinesthetic Learners

Kinesthetic learners preferred hands-on, experiential learning approaches that involved physical movement and tactile engagement. They demonstrated optimal learning when they could incorporate bodily movements and interactive activities into their speaking practice.

Student E, a kinesthetic learner, shared their activity preferences: "I learn best when I can move around while speaking. I practice presentations by walking around my room, using gestures, and even acting out scenarios. Physical movement helps me remember what to say next." They described their learning environment needs: "I can't sit still during long speaking activities. I need to change positions, use props, or interact with objects to maintain focus and engagement."

Their creative learning methods were innovative: "I use props and real objects when learning descriptive vocabulary. For example, when learning about cooking, I actually cook while describing the process in English. The physical actions help cement the language in my

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memory." Student E explained their presentation style: "During speeches, I incorporate hand gestures, facial expressions, and body language intentionally. It's not just about communication - the physical movements help me remember my content and feel more confident."

Student F, another kinesthetic learner, emphasized their experiential needs: "Traditional classroom settings are challenging for me. I prefer outdoor activities, field trips, or simulation exercises where I can practice English in real-world contexts." Their learning strategies included: "I associate new vocabulary with physical actions. For instance, when learning action verbs, I perform the actions while saying the words. This creates a muscle memory that supports my speaking."

4.1.2 Problems Faced by Students When Using Their Learning Styles

The investigation revealed significant challenges that students encountered when relying solely on their preferred learning styles. These problems highlighted the limitations of single-modality approaches and the need for more flexible learning strategies.

A. Visual Learners' Problems

Student A identified several critical challenges: "In spontaneous conversations, I panic because I can't pause to visualize grammar rules or sentence structures. Real-time speaking doesn't allow me the processing time I need to organize my thoughts visually." They explained their anxiety: "Phone conversations are my worst nightmare because I can't see facial expressions, body language, or visual context clues that help me understand and respond appropriately."

Processing speed was a significant concern: "I often miss important information in fast-paced group discussions because I'm trying to create mental images of what people are saying. By the time I've processed one point visually, the conversation has moved on to something else." Student A described their frustration: "I depend too heavily on visual aids and feel lost without them. In informal conversations, I can't ask people to write things down or provide visual support."

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B. Auditory Learners' Problems

Student C revealed unexpected difficulties: "While I'm strong in listening and speaking, I struggle with written preparation for presentations. I can't organize my thoughts effectively on paper, which affects my ability to structure longer speeches." They explained their spelling challenges: "I often misspell words that I can pronounce perfectly because I learn them through sound rather than visual memory. This creates problems when I need to refer to written notes during speaking activities."

Student D identified additional problems: "I get easily distracted by background noise during speaking activities, which affects my concentration and performance. I also struggle with silent preparation time - I need to think out loud, which can be disruptive to others."

C. Kinesthetic Learners' Problems

Student E articulated their challenges with traditional learning environments: "Long lectures or speaking activities that require sitting still are torture for me. I lose focus quickly and my speaking performance deteriorates when I can't move or use gestures." They described their online learning struggles: "Virtual classes are especially difficult because I can't move around freely or use props effectively. The limited physical interaction makes it hard for me to engage with speaking activities."

Student F contributed additional insights: "I sometimes overwhelm conversation partners with excessive gestures or movement, which can be distracting or culturally inappropriate. I need to learn to moderate my physical expression while maintaining my learning effectiveness."

4.1.3 Advantages and Disadvantages of Learning Styles in Speaking Development

Through comprehensive analysis of interview data and classroom observation, this study identified specific advantages and disadvantages associated with each learning style in speaking skill development.

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A. Visual Learners' Advantages and Disadvantages

Advantages: Student A highlighted their strengths: "My visual learning style gives me excellent preparation skills. I can create comprehensive study materials, organize information systematically, and remember vocabulary through visual associations better than my classmates." They emphasized their analytical abilities: "I excel at understanding grammar patterns and sentence structures because I can visualize them. This helps me speak more accurately, especially in formal presentations."

Disadvantages: However, Student A acknowledged limitations: "I'm over-dependent on visual supports and struggle significantly in spontaneous speaking situations. I also process information slower than auditory learners, which puts me at a disadvantage in fast-paced conversations."

B. Auditory Learners' Advantages and Disadvantages

Advantages: Student C described their strengths: "I have excellent listening skills and can pick up pronunciation, intonation, and rhythm naturally. I'm also very comfortable with spontaneous speaking and can participate actively in discussions without extensive preparation." They emphasized their processing speed: "I can process verbal information quickly and respond appropriately in real-time conversations. This makes me effective in debates and interactive speaking activities."

Disadvantages: Student C acknowledged their weaknesses: "I struggle with written preparation and organization, which affects my performance in formal presentations. I also have difficulty with silent study time and need to verbalize my thoughts, which can be disruptive."

C. Kinesthetic Learners' Advantages and Disadvantages

Advantages: Student E highlighted their strengths: "I excel in interactive speaking activities and role-playing exercises. My use of body language and gestures enhances my communication effectiveness and makes my presentations more engaging." They emphasized

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their memory techniques: "I have excellent memory for language learned through physical activities and can remember vocabulary and phrases associated with actions very well."

Disadvantages: Student E acknowledged their limitations: "I struggle in traditional classroom settings and have difficulty with sedentary learning activities. I also sometimes overwhelm others with excessive movement or gestures during conversations."

4.2 Discussion

The findings of this study reveal the intricate nature of how students approach learning in the speaking course at the English Department of Widyagama Mahakam University Samarinda. The identification of three distinct learning style categories—visual, auditory, and kinesthetic—provides valuable insights into the diverse pedagogical needs within the speaking course curriculum. This diversity aligns with (Reid, 1995) classification of learning styles, which proposed six types of learning styles including visual, auditory, and kinesthetic preferences among ESL students.

The visual learners in this study demonstrated a remarkable reliance on visual stimuli and written materials to develop their speaking competencies. Student A's preference for creating "colorful mind maps with pictures and symbols" and Student B's systematic color-coding approach for different speaking tasks reflect the deep-seated need for visual organization in language learning. This finding resonates with Fleming's (2016) learning style theory, which suggests that visual learners focus on realistic displays such as charts, graphs, illustrations, handouts, and videos as helpful learning instruments.

The students' strategies of watching movies with subtitles and creating visual aids for presentations indicate an adaptive approach to integrating visual elements into speaking preparation. This aligns with (Yang et al., 2016) assertion that visual learning style refers to a preference for learning through vision, where visual learners rely on sight to take information. The characteristic described by (Shamsuddin & Kaur 2020)that visual learners are "good at remembering what they see" and "good at memorizing using visual association" is clearly demonstrated in this study's findings.

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However, the study reveals a concerning over-dependence on visual supports that becomes problematic in authentic speaking situations. Student A's admission of "panic" during spontaneous conversations and Student B's struggle with abstract concepts highlight the limitations of relying solely on visual processing in speaking activities. This finding suggests that while visual learning preferences should be accommodated, students must also develop flexibility to function effectively in dynamic speaking environments where visual aids are not available. This challenge aligns with (Shamsuddin & Kaur 2020)observation that visual learners are "bad in memorizing verbal instruction," which directly impacts their ability to engage in spontaneous oral communication.

The auditory learners in this study exhibited natural advantages in speaking development, particularly in terms of pronunciation acquisition and real-time communication skills. Student C's practice of recording and analyzing their own speech, combined with Student D's engagement in language exchange programs, demonstrates the inherent compatibility between auditory learning preferences and speaking objectives. These students' ability to process verbal information quickly and respond appropriately in conversations aligns with the characteristics of auditory learners described by Lwande et al. (2021), who emphasize that auditory learners excel in "listening carefully," "talking," and "listening with a partner."

The auditory learners' use of rhythm and intonation patterns to learn new phrases reflects a sophisticated understanding of the prosodic features of language. Student C's comparison of language learning to music ("I hum the melody of a sentence") suggests an intuitive grasp of the phonological aspects that are crucial for effective speaking performance. This finding supports Fleming (2016) assertion that auditory learners "learn best by hearing information" and "tend to get an awesome agreement out of lectures."

Nevertheless, the study uncovered significant challenges that auditory learners face in speaking courses, particularly in areas requiring written preparation and visual organization. Student C's struggle with organizing thoughts on paper and Student D's difficulty with silent preparation time reveal the limitations of auditory learning in comprehensive speaking

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development. These findings align with Shamsuddin and Kaur (2020)observation that auditory learners have "job problems which commit to visualization" and prefer "spelling loudly rather than to write."

The kinesthetic learners in this study demonstrated unique approaches to speaking development that emphasize physical movement and experiential learning. Student E's practice of walking while presenting and Student F's integration of real-world activities into language learning reflect the importance of embodied cognition in language acquisition. This finding aligns with Fleming (2016) description of kinesthetic learners who "learn best by touching and doing," where "hands-on involvement is imperative."

The kinesthetic learners' use of props, gestures, and real-world contexts in their speaking preparation demonstrates creative adaptation to their learning preferences. Student E's practice of cooking while describing the process in English and Student F's association of vocabulary with physical actions reveal sophisticated multimodal learning strategies. These approaches correspond with Fleming (2016) observation that kinesthetic learners have characteristics such as "utilizing body language" and "memorizing something by moving and looking."

However, the study also reveals significant challenges that kinesthetic learners face in traditional speaking environments. Student E's description of long lectures as "torture" and Student F's struggles with virtual classes highlight the mismatch between conventional pedagogical approaches and kinesthetic learning needs. This finding aligns with Fleming (2016) description of kinesthetic learners as being "uncomfortable with a loud situation" and having difficulty "incapable in a long time" of sedentary activities.

4. Conclusion

This research provides comprehensive insights into the diverse learning styles exhibited by students in the Speaking Course development at the English Department of Widyagama Mahakam Samarinda. Through in-depth qualitative analysis, the study reveals that students demonstrate distinct preferences across three primary learning modalities: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic approaches to Speaking Course acquisition. Visual learners demonstrate

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exceptional organizational and preparation capabilities, utilizing visual aids and color-coding systems, but face significant challenges in spontaneous communication situations. Auditory learners exhibit natural advantages in pronunciation acquisition and real-time communication but struggle with written preparation and formal presentation structuring. Kinesthetic learners show remarkable creativity in integrating physical movement and experiential learning but face substantial challenges in traditional classroom environments and virtual learning contexts.

The study reveals that over-reliance on single learning style preferences creates significant limitations for all student groups, with each learning style demonstrating both distinct advantages and notable disadvantages that can hinder comprehensive Speaking Course development. This finding emphasizes the critical importance of developing multimodal learning strategies and pedagogical approaches that accommodate diverse learning preferences while promoting flexibility and adaptability. The research contributes valuable theoretical and practical insights to second language acquisition and speaking pedagogy, highlighting the need for differentiated instruction that recognizes individual learning differences while fostering comprehensive communicative competence and supporting the development of more inclusive and effective speaking course curricula.

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