

Unheard Voices: Navigating Learning Style Mismatches in Eastern Indonesian Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

In Papua, Indonesia, English education is situated within a unique policy context in which the Special Autonomy Law mandates English as a second language, yet it is often taught as a foreign language in practice. This discrepancy has contributed to challenges in developing students' speaking proficiency. This study aimed to explore the mismatch between 7th-grade students' learning styles and teachers' instructional strategies in a junior high school in Sorong, Indonesia with the goal of proposing more adaptive teaching approaches. A mixed-methods design was employed, combining the VARK learning style questionnaire with qualitative interviews to gather data on students' preferences and classroom practices. The results showed that aligning teaching strategies with students' diverse learning styles significantly improved their speaking skills. These findings underscored the importance of implementing adaptive instructional methods to meet varied learning needs and enhance English language proficiency among junior high school learners in Indonesia. This research contributes to the growing evidence supporting learning style-based instruction, particularly in the context of English language education in Indonesian junior high schools.

Keywords: English as a second language, learning styles, mixed-methods, speaking skills, teaching strategies

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INTRODUCTION

Effective learning processes must be differentiated to meet the diverse needs of students. In Indonesia, particularly in Papua, English has been designated a second language under the Special Autonomy Law No. 21 of 2001, Article 58, Clause 2. This legal framework elevates English instruction beyond the typical foreign language learning context, positioning it as a critical skill for education and communication across various sectors (Dabamona et al., 2025). With the advent of the Independent Curriculum, the practice of differentiated instruction has been employed to customize pedagogical approaches in accordance with the diverse attributes and circumstances of learners. This approach is crucial in Papua, where English is a second language, heightening the need for student-centered teaching methods that address individual needs. By applying differentiated instruction, educators not only enhance students' speaking abilities but also equip them to utilize English as an everyday communicative tool, aligning with its status as a second language in the region.

The literature on learning styles and speaking skills can be classified into three essential categories. First, research on learning styles and information processing reveals how different learning styles—visual, auditory, reading/writing, and kinesthetic—impact information processing and retention (Fleming & Baume, 2006; James et al., 2023). While these styles

significantly influence how students absorb language information, studies such as those by Suparsih (2022) and Whitman (2023) indicate a lack of focus on how these styles affect speaking skills, explicitly highlighting a gap in integrating learning style preferences with speaking proficiency (Suparsih, 2022; Whitman, 2023). Second, research on teaching strategies and speaking skills explores how aligning teaching methods with students' learning preferences can enhance speaking abilities. Guerra and Solis (2022) suggest that educators often fail to utilize strategies that align with learning styles to improve speaking proficiency, a concern echoed by Indrakusuma et al. (2024) and Suparsih (2022), who argue that traditional teaching methods do not sufficiently address diverse learning styles in speaking instruction (Guerra & Solis, 2022; Indrakusuma et al., 2024; Suparsih, 2022). Finally, studies on the relationship between learning styles and speaking proficiency examine how learning preferences correlate with speaking performance. Indrakusuma et al. (2024) find that auditory and kinesthetic learners benefit from specific activities, such as discussions and role-plays, but note that comprehensive research on this relationship is still limited. Bualat et al. (2023) and Guerra and Solis (2022) call for further studies to explore how tailoring speaking activities to learning styles can improve oral fluency and communication skills. Although the policy treats English as a second language, in practice, English is approached more as a foreign language.

Despite these insights, there remains limited integration of learning styles into teaching strategies aimed at improving speaking abilities.

This research is conducted within the context of the new curriculum's objectives, aiming to address the gaps identified in prior studies by exploring the relationship between students' learning styles and teachers' teaching strategies, with a focus on enhancing speaking skills among grade 7 students at a Junior High School, Sorong City. Specifically, this study seeks to uncover the prevalent learning styles among students and examine how teachers adjust their teaching approaches to cater to these diverse learning needs. Furthermore, this research endeavors to offer strategic insights for teachers, enabling them to enhance the efficacy of speaking instruction through a more profound comprehension of students' learning preferences, thereby aligning with the educational goals of the new curriculum.

This study proposes three arguments regarding the relationship between students' learning styles and teachers' strategies in teaching speaking skills. First, when teachers adapt their strategy to match students' learning styles, such as visual, auditory, or kinesthetic, students demonstrate enhanced engagement and improved speaking performance. Second, the misalignment between teaching strategies and students' learning styles creates barriers to effective language acquisition, leading to diminished confidence and speaking abilities. Third,

tailored teaching strategies that address individual learning preferences foster better language outcomes and promote greater motivation and participation in the classroom. As a result, students benefit from a learning environment that accommodates their diverse needs, ultimately improving their proficiency in speaking English. This article examines these dynamics to provide insight into how targeted instructional methods can overcome challenges and enhance the development of speaking skills in students.

METHOD

This study delves into the dynamics between students' learning styles and teachers' instructional approaches to teaching speaking skills, utilizing a mixed-methods research design that combines quantitative and qualitative analyses for a holistic view (Creswell, 2014). The research adopted an explanatory sequential mixed method, starting with collecting and analyzing quantitative data through the VARK questionnaire administered to 29 junior high students in Sorong City, followed by qualitative insights gained from interviews with an English teacher and six students. This methodological approach aimed to uncover the diverse learning styles present within the student body and evaluate the effectiveness of various teaching strategies in a junior high school setting.

The quantitative phase involved analyzing the VARK questionnaire responses using descriptive statistics to

identify the prevalent learning styles among students, while the qualitative phase included in-depth interviews to explore the teaching strategies in speaking lessons and how students react to them. Data from the interviews were thematically coded to identify patterns relating to the teaching and learning of speaking skills (Dörnyei, 2007). Integrating the findings from both strands of the study provided a detailed picture of how learning styles influence teaching strategies and, subsequently, students' speaking proficiency. This comprehensive analysis sheds light on the potential for refining

instructional practices to accommodate diverse learning preferences better and enhance speaking skills.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The Students' Learning Styles

Following the application of Sudjono's formula to analyze the responses from the questionnaire, the resultant data has been meticulously tabulated to illustrate the distribution of learning styles among the students. This comprehensive representation can be observed in the chart that follows:

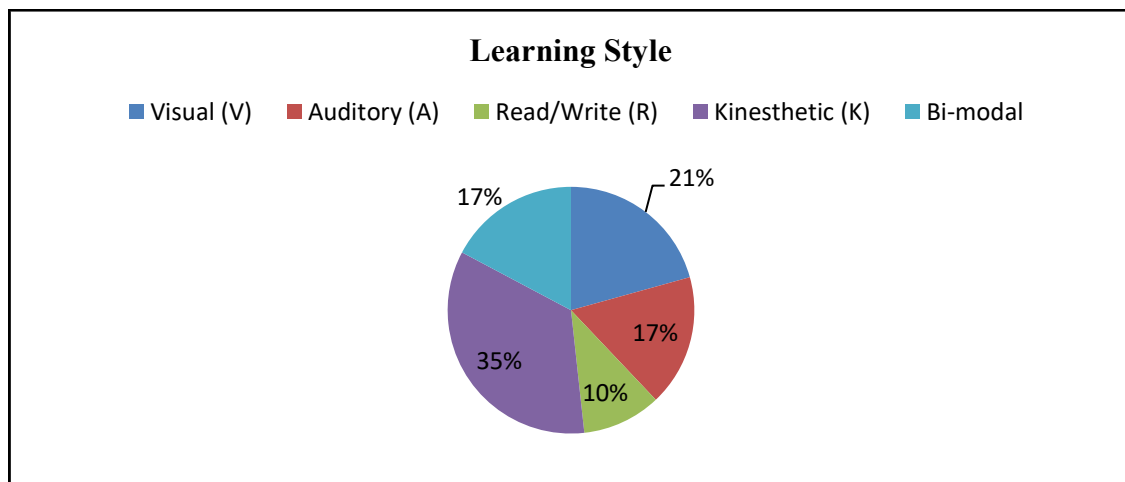


Figure 1. The Students' Learning Style

The chart displays the breakdown of learning style preferences among 29 participants. The largest group, 35%, prefers the kinesthetic (K) learning style, followed by 21% who favor the visual (V) style. Auditory (A) learners comprise 17% of the participants, while 10% prefer the read/write (R) style. Additionally, 17% of the participants show a bi-modal

preference, indicating a combination of two learning styles. The total percentage of participants is 100%, encompassing all 29 study participants.

Furthermore, researchers found that some students have a combination of learning styles. For example, there are 2 students with a combination of auditory and read/write learning styles (AR), 2

students with a combination of auditory and kinesthetic learning styles (AK), and 3 students with a combination of kinesthetic and visual learning styles (KV). This means that 24.13% of the students have a combination learning style, indicating that students may need more than one way to learn effectively.

The Teacher's Strategy

In this section, the researcher interprets the interview data to determine the teacher's strategy in accommodating students' learning styles in teaching speaking to seventh-grade students. By interviewing Mrs. AK as an English teacher, and six students.

The teacher's strategy is a carefully planned and organized series of activities that involve using various methods and resources to achieve specific learning goals. Strategies are helpful for learning English skills both in and out of the classroom. They are essential for the success of the teaching process. A teacher's strategy should be interesting and able to capture students' attention. Students can benefit from learning how to use contextual clues to understand unfamiliar items. (Linse Caroline; Nunan, 2005).

AK : "For grade seven, the English learning materials in speaking class are still learning basic materials about greetings, introductions, spelling and telling the time, also describing people and places, so the strategies I use are role play, picture

description and story telling because the students here are more excited when they learn through play".

Teacher AK's statement provides insights into the instructional strategies used for teaching speaking skills to seventh-grade students. The speaking class at this level focuses on foundational topics such as greetings, introductions, spelling, telling time, and describing people and places. To engage the students effectively, Teacher AK employs strategies like role play, picture description, and storytelling. These strategies were chosen because students tend to show greater enthusiasm when learning through playful and interactive methods. This finding supports the argument that when teachers adapt their strategies to align with students' learning styles—whether visual, auditory, or kinesthetic—students exhibit improved engagement and speaking performance. Role play and storytelling allow kinesthetic learners to actively participate, while picture description caters to visual learners. By providing opportunities for hands-on, visual, and interactive learning, Teacher AK's approach not only fosters students' motivation but also enhances their ability to absorb and practice speaking skills. Consequently, this alignment between teaching methods and student preferences contributes to more effective language acquisition and encourages higher participation in class.

Role-play

Role-plays are activities in which students pretend to be in different social contexts and take on various social roles (Harmer, 2007). This helps students experience roles they don't usually play in real life. The selection of social roles is based on students' needs, and this kind of learning provides students with social experiences on how to play specific roles in the context of communication. Students act as someone else in a particular situation. Role play is one of the ways we can give our learners the opportunity to practice and improve a range of real-life spoken language in the classroom.

SA and SB: "We feel more comfortable standing than sitting when presenting assignments, and we prefer to learn speaking while playing role plays."

The responses from SA and SB provide clear support for the argument that tailored teaching strategies aligned with students' learning preferences foster better language outcomes and promote greater motivation and participation in the classroom. Both students expressed a preference for standing rather than sitting while presenting assignments, indicating a kinesthetic learning style that thrives on physical movement during tasks. Additionally, they highlighted role-playing as their preferred method for learning speaking skills, which further emphasizes their need for active and hands-on learning experiences. This preference aligns with the

kinesthetic dimension of learning, where students engage more effectively through movement and experiential activities. When teachers incorporate such strategies, students like A and B feel more comfortable and confident, which leads to increased participation and a more immersive speaking experience. These findings suggest that adapting instructional techniques to match kinesthetic learners' needs can significantly enhance their speaking performance and overall classroom engagement.

Picture Describing

Picture describing is considered as an easy way to teach speaking skills to students who are at their beginner level of learning English. By looking at the picture, the students are expected to easily remember the pictures that are shown to them. At this time, the student's brain development is at its best. Consequently, it must be utilized to the maximum in learning a foreign language, especially in learning speaking skills. Margaretha (2023) stated that using the picture strategy can help the teacher teach vocabulary related to concrete meaning (Margaretha et al., 2023).

SC and SB: We don't like speaking lessons that only contain written conversations because we don't know what they mean, so we prefer conversations with pictures so we can understand what they are talking about or doing.

In support of the argument that tailored teaching strategies addressing individual learning preferences foster better language outcomes and promote greater motivation and participation in the classroom, both SC and SB expressed a clear preference for visual aids during speaking lessons. This response highlights how the use of visual aids, such as images accompanying dialogues, enables students to better comprehend the content and context of conversations, ultimately supporting their speaking development. The preference for visual materials over purely written exercises demonstrates that students engage more effectively when instructional methods align with their visual learning styles. This tailored approach not only enhances comprehension but also encourages active participation, as students feel more confident and motivated when the lesson format matches their learning preferences.

Storytelling

Storytelling can be a valuable tool for developing listening, speaking, and writing skills. It promotes language learning by enriching students' vocabulary and helping them acquire new language structures. Students often enjoy hearing the same stories multiple times. When implementing this strategy, teachers can vary the presentation by using books, pictures, or animated characters. It's important for teachers to be creative in the way they present the story.

SE and SF: We prefer to listen to our friends when learning speaking, therefore we are happy when the teacher asks students to explain the material.

SE and SF both shared a preference for auditory learning, explicitly noting that they benefit from listening to their peers during speaking activities. They highlighted that being asked to explain material or listen to their classmates enhances their learning experience. The sentiment aligns with the argument that when teachers adapt their strategies to match students' auditory learning styles, engagement and speaking performance improve. By encouraging peer explanation and fostering an interactive auditory environment, the teacher successfully caters to these students' preferred learning modality, boosting their confidence and motivation in speaking tasks. The alignment between the teaching strategy and the students' auditory learning style demonstrates the positive impact of tailored approaches on language outcomes.

Discussion

The results of this study reveal insights into students' English learning styles and the strategies teachers use in teaching speaking. Analysis of the questionnaire data identified five distinct learning styles among students: visual, auditory, read/write, kinesthetic, and a combination of these styles. These findings emphasize the diversity of learning preferences in language acquisition.

Furthermore, through interviews with teachers and students, it became evident that teachers implement various strategies to accommodate these learning styles when teaching speaking skills. These strategies reflect a conscious effort to tailor instruction to meet the diverse needs of learners, supporting the broader argument that alignment between teaching methods and student learning preferences enhances language acquisition outcomes.

The Types Of Students' Learning Styles

The results of this study show that students have different learning styles that significantly impact their language acquisition abilities. Specifically, the study identified five distinct learning styles among the students: visual, auditory, read/write, kinesthetic, and combination. Notably, the data indicate that kinesthetic learning is the most prevalent style among seventh-grade students, with most students prefer learning through physical activities and direct engagement. Kinesthetic learners retain information more effectively when actively participating, taking notes, and underlining key concepts. This is consistent with the research of Lin (2024), who emphasize the importance of movement and emotion in facilitating knowledge retention for kinesthetic learners. Techniques such as game-based learning, walking dictations, and physical exercises can be particularly effective in enhancing language acquisition for these students.

In English education, these findings underscore the need for instructional approaches that accommodate kinesthetic learners. Previous research supports the notion that when teaching strategies are aligned with students' learning styles, engagement and language learning improve significantly (Chen, 2023; Zhang, 2023). For instance, Guerra and Solis (2022) argue that a mismatch between teaching strategies and students' learning preferences often results in diminished confidence and speaking abilities. In contrast, when teachers implement strategies that involve physical activity – such as role-play or games – kinesthetic learners are more likely to participate actively and retain the material. This highlights the importance of adopting varied pedagogical approaches to meet the diverse needs of students in the language classroom.

The findings have important implications for English language education in today's world. There is a growing recognition of the significance of student-centered learning. Adapting instruction to students' learning styles, especially in diverse classrooms, can improve language outcomes by increasing motivation and participation. Kinesthetic learners benefit from hands-on activities, so using strategies involving movement and interaction could enhance speaking skills and overall language proficiency (Chen, 2023; Mutiara Noor Imani & Megawati, 2023; Zhang, 2023). This indicates that teachers should use game-based learning and other

active strategies to support students who learn best through physical engagement.

Considering this, it is important for educators to receive training on how to effectively incorporate kinesthetic learning techniques into their classrooms. Future research should delve into the long-term impact of these strategies on students' language proficiency, especially in speaking skills, and explore how these methods can be adapted for students with various learning styles. Furthermore, curriculum developers should think about including flexible, activity-based approaches to English education, ensuring that all learners—especially kinesthetic learners—receive adequate support in their language learning journey.

The Teacher's Strategies

The study findings show that the teacher understands the different learning styles and characteristics of students when learning English. However, there are challenges in assessing each student's learning style individually. This is in line with the research of Mutiara Noor Imani and Megawati (2023) as well as Noviska & Anastasia (2023), who emphasize that recognizing and adapting to different learning styles can significantly improve speaking abilities in language acquisition. Although the teacher showed awareness of these styles, the lack of time and resources to individualize instruction is a common challenge in English language teaching contexts. The current literature supports

the idea that teaching methods tailored to individual learning needs lead to better outcomes, especially in speaking skills (Hasbullah et al., 2023; Mutiara Noor Imani & Megawati, 2023; Noviska & Anastasia, 2023). This suggests that addressing students' learning preferences can lead to more effective, engaging, and learner-centered classrooms, ultimately improving language acquisition.

In this study, the teacher used various strategies to accommodate different learning preferences. For example, students who are visual learners benefited from materials containing images and diagrams, while kinesthetic learners participated in activities such as mind mapping and quizzes. Auditory learners responded well to strategies involving verbal instructions and discussions, which is consistent with the idea that they absorb information through pitch, tone, and emphasis. The teacher's use of diverse methods aligns with Koglin et al. (2020) on learning style preferences, emphasizing that understanding individual learning styles allows for the creation of more effective teaching strategies. These strategies led to increased engagement, motivation, and speaking performance, especially among visual and kinesthetic learners.

However, the misalignment between teaching strategies and students' learning styles remains a critical issue. As noted by Ridwan et al. (2019), natural and environmental factors shape an individual's learning style, which may explain the predominant kinesthetic

learning preference observed among students in Sorong City. This prevalence could be attributed to both innate and socio-cultural influences in the local context. The teacher's recognition of these preferences is critical, as mismatches between instructional methods and learning styles can lead to barriers in language acquisition, such as diminished confidence and reduced speaking abilities (Noviska & Anastasia, 2023). If students' learning styles are not adequately addressed, it may impede their ability to internalize and express language concepts effectively.

In modern English education, these findings show the ongoing necessity for teachers to use different teaching methods that cater to individual learning preferences. Recent research suggests that adjusting teaching strategies to match learners' preferred learning styles increases motivation and participation in the classroom (Sejdiu Shala et al., 2024). These approaches are particularly relevant in today's diverse classrooms, where students have various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This emphasizes the importance of teacher training programs focusing on understanding learning styles and preparing teachers to create adaptable and flexible lesson plans.

The implications for English education are clear: teachers must be supported with professional development opportunities to better assess and address students' diverse learning needs. While this study highlights the success of some

strategies, further research is needed to explore how these strategies can be systematically integrated into the curriculum. Integrating technology, such as digital tools for personalized learning, could also be examined to enhance the alignment between teaching strategies and students' learning preferences. Educators can significantly improve speaking performance and overall language proficiency by fostering a deeper understanding of students' learning styles and offering tailored instructional methods, ensuring that students are fully engaged and motivated in their learning journey.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that seventh graders have different learning styles that impact their proficiency in the English language, particularly in speaking skills. The analysis revealed that kinesthetic learning styles were the most common, with 35% of students preferring to learn through physical activity and direct involvement. Other learning styles, such as visual, auditory, and read/write, also had a significant but smaller percentage of students. These findings highlight the importance of adjusting teaching methods to match students' learning style preferences. By using various strategies, like role play for kinesthetic learners and picture descriptions for visual learners, teachers can enhance students' motivation and speaking abilities. This study underscores the need for diverse learning

approaches to achieve more effective learning outcomes.

The research presented here contributes to the literature on learning styles and teaching strategies in the context of English language learning. This study introduces new data on students' learning style preferences at a junior high school level in Sorong, a topic that has not been widely explored in the context of eastern Indonesia. It also emphasizes the importance of integrating kinesthetic, visual, and auditory strategies in the language learning curriculum, providing a foundation for further research on the adaptation of teaching methods in various contexts.

However, it's important to acknowledge some limitations of this research. The study was conducted in a school in Sorong with a relatively small sample of 29 students, which limits the generalization of findings to a wider population. Additionally, the study only focused on learning styles in speaking skills, neglecting other aspects of language teaching, such as writing and reading skills. These limitations create opportunities for more in-depth follow-up research, particularly using longitudinal methods to examine the long-term impact of learning style-based teaching strategies. Further research should also involve more schools in different regions to test the validity of these findings in a broader context.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

All authors played different roles in completing this article. NM was responsible for the conceptualization and design of the study, as well as for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data, and contributing to the writing of the manuscript. AR provided material support, contributed to the study design, edited the manuscript, critically revised it, and contributed to the writing. Lastly, MD made a significant contribution to the data analysis and supervision, as well as to the study design, editing, and writing of the manuscript.

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