

## Learner Types and Their Preferences in Learning English

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### Abstract

*The research was conducted to find out the most dominant learners' types and to describe their preferences in learning English at the first semester in academic year 2018/2019 English Education Study Program, Languages and Arts Faculty, Universitas Negeri Medan. The subject of the study was one class consisting 30 students. The collecting data in the research was by using learner types and preferences questionnaires and observing the learning process in the classroom. The result showed that there were some types of learners in this case. Concrete learner with their preferences are playing game, paying attention to the pictures, watching film is the most dominant one (40.00%). Preference of analytical learners relates to study grammar and English book, it also relates to find the learners' own problems (16.67%). Communicative learners (23.33%) with their preferences tend to listen to native speaker, to talk to friend in English and to watch English channel in you tube. The learners who are authority-oriented (20.00%) with their preferences are understanding the teacher's explanation and writing everything in a notebook.*

### Keywords

Learner types;  
learners' preferences;  
learning English



## I. Introduction

The development of science and technology, especially in information and communication technology that is very fast in 21st century era has a huge influence on the changes of the pattern of human life. The Changes are influenced by the demands of skills by 21st century workforce. UNESCO has outlined 21st century learning paradigm in the four visions of 21st century education, they are: (1) learning to think, oriented to logical skills, (2) learning to do, oriented to problem solving skills, (3) learning to be, oriented to character building, and (4) learning to live together, oriented to be tolerant and work in team (Hidayat, 2013). According to Hanover Research (2011), there are 27 types of 21st century skills that must be mastered by 21st century students. Based on these concepts, 21st century skills are really needed to be taught to students. (Ghofur, 2019)

Ormrod (2007) stated that learning is an experience' consequence of mental representation or associations altering for long term. The students learn from the value and information which are got in the classroom so that it will attract the students' interest to enjoy teaching and learning process. There are some different terms used in language learning such as cognitive style, learning style, personality types and sensory preference. The usage of those terms is sometimes interchangeably, but it is sometimes differentiated based on the occasion in language learning (Cassidy, 2004). Every student has his own way in learning English. The different style in learning proved that everyone is unique with their different preferences. The unique things of students are influenced by some factors. The factors include ethnic group, age group, previous education level, speaking proficiency level, and learning program type. The multiple students' background show that conducting learning English in the classroom guides the teacher to accommodate the various types of learners. This reason caused that learning style and learning types are still relevant and important to be

discussed as one of issues to learn English in the classroom which is a foreign language to enrich the teacher's knowledge in designing learning strategies. James and Gardner (1995) stated that learning style is the learners' way to perceive, to process, to store, and to recall effectively what the students are trying to learn English. Learning styles influence the process of educational and the students' performance (Gordon, 1998). Dunn and Griggs (1998) stated that learning style is used by the learners as the their attitude and favorites in learning English in the classroom.

In reality English teachers are not still aware of the learning types in designing learning process for English lesson. In some English classes, teachers always face a situation where many students are not interested to learn English, they just come in to class to play and talk too much with their friends or some of them are sleepy and bored as well as waiting the English class finished. This condition often being the problem if the teachers do not apply the appropriate strategy. In deciding the learning strategies used for learning English, teacher should think about learners' personality factors because these factors are more important than the other variables such as, socio- cultural and educational background of the learners. Identifying learner types and learning styles is relevant toward English learning process. Furthermore, the idea stated that teaching must relate to students' learning types is very important to determine appropriate learning strategy based on their learning types while teaching in the classroom. Willing (1988) stated that in accommodating learning styles, it is important to choose suitable teaching styles, teaching method and classroom management. Since by implementing the appropriate teaching styles, teaching method and classroom management can improve learner satisfaction and attainment in English learning. Therefore, it is relevant to identify the students' learning style and their preferences in order that the teacher can design the tasks to ease students' learning English. In addition, students' learning styles will influence a teaching process. Pintrich (2003) stated that regarding teaching process, teachers should develop fascinated, motivated, and varieties assignment, materials and learning activities. If teaching process is suitable with students' learning styles, it will help the students to comprehend the language learning since their language skills will improve.

Howard Gardner divided human intelligences into eight kinds, namely (1) mathematics-rhythmic; (2) visual- spatial; (3) verbal- linguistic; (4) logical- mathematical; (5) bodily-kinaesthetic; (6) interpersonal; (7) intrapersonal; and (8) naturalistic. This kind of model was adopted in some educational institutions to develop the learning strategies. Psychologists divided learners style into three kinds, namely: Visual, Auditory, and Kinaesthetic. Based on Pourhosein (2012) stated that as the visual learners, the students can learn by using pictures, charts and graph visually. Then, auditory learners like reception skills such as listening to the lectures and reading. the learners who are Kinaesthetic learners need action to learn. Furthermore, the students can have more than one kind of learners type.

The model also developed as the guidance for teacher to know their students' style and design the learning activities in the classroom. The two models were applied in all subjects such as Math, Science, Language, and Social. These models need to be studied more to get the appropriate way toward combination of learning styles in learning language. Furthermore, learning styles of the students and their preferences are various toward the students based on different situations (Shirani, 2010). Willing (1988:150), categorised four types of learners relate to the preferences learning in learning English, namely: (1) concrete learners, (2) analytical learners, (3) communicative learners, and (4) authority- oriented learners. The categorisations based on the students' preferences in learning English. This

model was used in this research to investigate learners types and their preferences in learning English

## **II. Research Method**

The research aimed to know the dominant of learners' types and to describe their preferences in learning English at the first semester English Education Study Program. Languages and Arts Faculty, Universitas Negeri Medan in academic year 2018/2019. Therefore the research was conducted by using descriptive qualitative research. The instrument of collecting data in this research was based on Learning Style Preferences Questionnaire (Willing, 1988). The subject used in the study was 30 students from one class in English Education Study Program. Those students come from different background. There are students coming from the other cities in North Sumatera which makes them having different social, cultural, and experiences in learning English as a foreign language.

There were three main questions provided to be answered by the first semester English Education Study Program. Those questions were about the students' favourite learning way; the most helpful learning way toward the students; and the learning ways which the students will use to improve their language skills. There are some options which can be chosen by the students including the pictures, movies, videos, and games. Then, the students also like some activities such as, listening to L1 speakers; having a course book and small group work; reading newspaper; and going on excursions. Based on questionnaires results, the students' learning styles were categorized based on Willing (1988) who categorised learner four types based on their preferences in learning English, namely: (1) concrete learners, (2) analytical learners, (3) communicative learners, and (4) authority- oriented learners.

Furthermore, the research also used interview as an instrument of collecting data by asking the questions to the subject used in the study. The questions provided were about the most helpful in learning another language and at least helpful in learning another language for the subject of the study.

## **III. Discussion**

Learners type is an important element which influences learning process as well as achievement. Knowing the learners type helps teacher and learner to be cooperative in learning. It helps students learn more fast and easier by selecting and using appropriate strategy to understand theory and practice some skills. In the learning process, the teacher or lecturer should know the learner types to raise effectiveness in learning English. Four types of learners identified adapted from Willing (1988) using the questionnaire given to the subject were (1) concrete learners, (2) analytical learners, (3) communicative learners, and (4) authority- oriented learners.

Furthermore, based on Nunan (1991) had provided four types learners definition. Concrete learners learn English by using pictures, games, movies, video, and cassettes; talking with the partners; and practising language skills outside class. Then, Analytical learners like studying grammar, English books and reading newspapers, learning by themselves, finding the students' own mistakes and solving the problems provided by the teacher. In addition, the learning styles of communicative learners are listening to native speakers; talking to partners in English; watching television using English as its language; using English in the other places such as, public transportation and public places; hearing new vocabularies; and doing conversations to the other people using English. Furthermore, as authority- oriented learners prefer using their own textbook and a notebook in writing

everything; studying grammar; reading; and seeing the vocabularies in improving new vocabularies.

The researchers collected the data from English Education Study Program students at first semester, Languages and Arts Faculty, Universitas Negeri Medan in academic year 2018/2019. In this study the collecting data was based on qualitative research data. The qualitative findings were obtained from questionnaires and interviews. Learner type questionnaire consisted three questions that the students' answer and respond to three questions were categorised into four learner types. Below are the questions used to investigate learners' type and preference in learning English.

- A. Which learning ways did you like while learning English?
- B. Which learning ways did you find most helpful while learning English?
- C. Which learning ways would you use in learning another language?

The table below shows top ten learning preferences for each of the response categories toward the three questions above.

**Table 1.** The Top Ten Learning Preferences for Each of the Response Categories

No	A	B	C
1	Learning by games	Reading newspaper	Talking to L1 speakers
2	Learning by doing	Watching television	Pictures, films, video
3	Watching television	Learning by doing	Learning by doing
4	Going on Excursions	Talking to friends	Talking to friends
5	Pictures, films, video	Practising out of class	Practising out of class
6	Reading newspaper	Talking to L1 speakers	Watching television
7	Small group work	Going on excursions	Small group work
8	In class conversation	Small group work	In class conversation
9	Talking about interests	In class conversation	Having a course book
10	Talking to friends	Pictures, Films, Video	Learning by hearing

Based on Willing (1988) who categorised the learning styles of students as concrete, analytical, communicative and authority- oriented learners, the researchers knew that the discussion which established the findings of this study showed that the concrete learners obtained 40% in the class. It means that there were twelve students from thirty students. These concrete learners use games, pictures, movies, video to learn English; talking with partners; and practising English in the other places.

Then, analytical learner in learning English obtained (16,67 %) from the class. It means that there were five students from thirty students prefer to study grammar and English books; and to read news; to learn the language alone; to find their own mistakes and to solve the problem provided by teacher.

The research found that communicative learners obtained (23,33%), it means that the communicative learners choose their learning styles such as listening to native speakers; talking to partners in English; watching television using English as its language; using English in the other places such as, public transportation and public places; hearing new vocabularies; and doing conversations to the other people using English.

Furthermore, the result of the research found that authority-oriented learners obtained (20,00 %) or six students from thirty students. Learners like using their own textbook and a notebook in writing everything; studying grammar; reading; and seeing the vocabularies in improving new vocabularies .

Based on the explanation above, it was known that the dominant learners at first semester English Education Program, Universitas Negeri Medan in academic year 2018/2019 were concrete learners obtained 40% in the class. It means that the dominant students prefer to use games, pictures, movies, video to learn English; talking with partners; and practising English in the other places.

This research not only gave questionnaires but the researcher also interviewed the students by asking some questions such as, (1) what the students found most helpful in learning another language; and (2) what the students found least helpful in learning another language.

From the explanation above it was found that the most striking thing about the research was the fact that, not only diverse context and environments in which the subjects learned English, but also practically approve that formal classroom instructions provided was insufficient. S Therefore, motivation, a prepared outside classroom characterised most of the responses from these learners. The freeform responses reinforced the general pattern of responses provided by interview.

The responses given by students with different learner types for questions about thing that helped most are: (1) doing conversation with English speakers/ in groups; (2) Finding opportunities to practise outside class; (3) Accessing media- radio, television, newspapers; (4) having formal classes/ learning with a teacher; (5) having motivation; (6) Reading; (7) studying grammar rules/ drills; (8) Listening; (9) studying pronunciation; and (10) studying vocabulary.

In addition, based on the students' responses toward the questions asked by the researchers, it found that there were some things that helped least the students in learning English. They are (1) Learning grammar/ drills; (2) Lack of opportunity to use English outside class; (3) Poor teaching; (4) Being criticised/ punished; (5) Practising with L2 speakers/ poor L1 speakers; (6) Classes too big/ too many levels; (7) Use L1 too much; (8) Accessing media; (9) Fear of making mistakes; (10) Lack of motivation; (11) Childish materials, e.g. picture book; (12) Lack of audio- visual facilities; (13) Rigid timetables and programmes; (14) Memorising; and (15) No time to study.

Based on the results of interview, it showed that the dominant learners at the first semester of English Education Study Program, Universitas Negeri Medan in academic year 2018/2019 were concrete learners. It was known based on the respond of the students toward the most helpful in learning a foreign language showing the students prefer to do conversation with native speakers/ in groups; to get the chances in practising English outside of the class; and to access media such as, television, newspapers which related to the concrete learners.

These data were interpreted that teacher as the learning instructor should design the appropriate learning strategies in teaching and learning process. The chances to activate English learning outside of the class were the most frequently nominated things in facilitating development of teaching strategies which are suitable with the students' learning styles and

their preferences. The data showed learning grammar was in helped least category doesn't mean that teacher should be abandon the teaching grammar. The teaching grammar should be able to show the students how the instruction of grammar can improve communicative purpose and it was needed as one of the factors in practising English outside classroom, more over for analytical learners, they need grammar to improve their ability in using English for comprehending reading texts. All the learner types should be accommodated by combining learning English strategies inside and outside classroom. It was relevance with Willing (1988) who stated that in accommodating learning styles, it is important to choose suitable teaching styles, teaching method and classroom management to improve learners' satisfaction and attainment. Therefore, the teachers can create an appropriate teaching and learning method in the classroom. Since the learners come from different background which makes the students having different social, cultural, and experiences in learning English as a foreign language. Furthermore, from those differences create the different style in learning proved that everyone is unique with their different preferences. The unique things of students are influenced by some factors such as ethnic, age, education, speaking proficiency level, and learning program type.

#### IV. Conclusion

1. There were thirty students in first semester of English Education study program, Universitas Negeri Medan. The conclusion showed that : concrete learners obtained 40% in the class, Analytical learners 16,67 %, Communicative Learner 23,33 %, and Authority-Oriented Learners 20, 00 %. Therefore, the dominant learners found were concrete learners.
2. Each learner types has preferences in learning English; Concrete learners used games, pictures, films, video or something related to visual media. Analytical learners preferred to study grammar, English book, alone, and others relate to analysis. Communicative learners choose their learning styles by listening to native speakers; talking to partners in English; watching television using English as its language; using English in the other places such as, public transportation and public places; hearing new vocabularies; and doing conversations to the other people using English. The learners who are authority- oriented like listening to the lectures' explanation, using the students' textbook, and writing everything in a notebook relating to English learning.
3. The learning strategies suggested to be designed inside and outside classroom to accommodate the different of learner types and to encourage learners to activate their ability in practising English.

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