

# A Study of the Preferred Learning Styles of Postgraduate English Specialization Students at Yadanabon University

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## Abstract

In the teaching-learning process, teachers must be aware of the learning style preference of the students so that they can create effective teaching strategies. In order to have a better interaction between the teachers and the students, it is important to create a combination of effective teaching strategies and activities which are compatible with the learning style preference of the students. This study aims to identify the preferred learning styles of postgraduate English specialization students at Yadanabon University. The objectives of the research are to classify the learning style preference of the students, to find out what type of learning style is the most preferred and to analyze their preferred learning styles to create suitable teaching activities for the students. In collecting the data needed to identify the learning style preference of students, the theory of learning style and perceptual learning style preference questionnaire created by Reid (1987) were used. In this study, (97) postgraduate English specialization students at Yadanabon University were chosen as the participants. The findings of the present research show that the preferred learning styles of the students are different. The most dominant type of M.A first year students is “kinesthetic learning style” (78%). However, for M.A second year students, “group learning style” (82%) is the most significant type. According to the result of the study, it is found that most of the students from both classes chose kinesthetic and group learning styles as their major learning styles. Based on the findings of the research, it is proposed that teachers should create blended teaching strategies in order to cater to the students’ needs. It is hoped that the present research will provide some help English language teachers in creating effective teaching activities to some extent.

*Keywords:* learning style, students, teachers, activities, strategies

## Introduction

Learning is the process of acquiring new, or modifying existing knowledge, behaviours, skills, values or preferences. Everyone needs to learn new skills throughout their life. The learning process is slightly different in each individual. Individual learning styles depend on not only a learner’s previous experience but also one’s cognitive, emotional and environmental factors. Therefore, it is important for the teachers to

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recognize the learning styles of their students so that they can apply best practice strategies into their daily activities. Effective teaching inevitably leads to effective learning.

By recognizing preferred learning styles of the students, teachers can gain better perspective on how to apply these learning styles in considering lesson plans. In the teaching-learning process, the awareness of the students' preferred learning styles and using effective classroom activities can improve the speed and quality of students' learning. Therefore, this research aims to identify the preferred learning styles of postgraduate English specialization students of Yadanabon University.

The objectives of the research are as follows:

- To classify the learning style preference of the postgraduate English specialization students at Yadanabon University
- To find out what type of learning style is the most significant
- To analyze their preferred learning style to create suitable teaching activities for the students

### **Literature Review**

In this section, theoretical background proposed by Reid (1987) and related researches are presented.

#### **Learning Styles**

A learning style is a student's consistent way of responding to and using stimuli in the context of learning. Many educators define learning styles differently. Keefe(1979) defines learning styles as the "composite of characteristic cognitive, affective and physiological factors that serve as relatively stable indicators of how a learner perceives, interacts with, and responds to the learning environment." Steward and Felicetti (1992) define learning styles as those "educational conditions under which a student is most likely to learn." According to Dunn et al (1978), learning style is "the way in which each person absorbs and retains information and skills; regardless of how that process is described, it is dramatically different for each person." Sims & Sims (1990) put forward that learning styles are typical ways a person behaves, feels and processes information in learning situations. Reid (1987) summarizes definitions of learning styles as internally based characteristics of individuals for the intake or understanding of new information. Essentially learning styles are based upon how a person perceives and processes information to facilitate learning. Thus, learning styles are not really concerned with what learners learn, but rather how they prefer to learn.

There are six perceptual learning styles proposed by Reid (1987): visual learning style, auditory learning style, kinesthetic learning style, tactile learning style, group learning style and individual learning style.

#### **(1) Visual learning style**

Visual learning style is learning by seeing. Visual learners benefit greatly from teaching that utilizes illustrations, charts, diagrams, videos, etc. They prefer using images, pictures, colours and maps to organize information and communicate with others. A classroom is a very good place for visual learners to learn because teachers use overheads, the chalkboard or the whiteboard, pictures and many other visual items, Power Point presentations, handouts etc.

#### **(2) Auditory learning style**

Auditory learning style is the process of learning through speaking and listening. Auditory learners prefer listening and speaking as a main way of learning. They are able to understand and get information easily during a lecture. They prefer attending lectures and recording them to hear again later. They like to discuss the concepts they do not understand immediately and enjoy small group discussions. They attain new information by reading aloud and benefit from hearing audio tapes, lectures and classroom discussion.

#### **(3) Kinesthetic learning style**

Kinesthetic learning style is learning by doing. In Kinesthetic learning style, an individual learns best by experience. Kinesthetic learners prefer to carry out physical activities in the classroom than listening to a lecture or watching demonstrations. They get information by participating in activities, role-playing in the classroom and making charts or posters for group work activities. During the learning process, they are able to process information best when they are physically engaged.

#### **(4) Tactile learning style**

Tactile learning style is learning in which an individual learns through “hands-on” experiences with materials such as working on experiments in a laboratory, handling and building models. Touching and working with materials provide the learners with the most successful learning situation. They learn best by writing notes or instructions, by being involved physically in class related activities. Tactile learning style is often grouped with the kinesthetic learning style, but it more moderate.

#### **(5) Group learning style**

Some learners love group situations because they learn more easily when they study with other students. They remember information better by working with two or three

classmates. By being involved in group interaction and class work with other students, they learn and understand new information. Group activities enable the students to find out deeper meaning and improve their thinking skills.

#### **(6) Individual learning style**

Individual learning style is the process of learning in which an individual learn better when he studies alone. He enjoys working alone and makes better progress in learning when he works by himself.

#### **Related Researches**

A research entitled “Learning Style Preferences among Medical Students in the College of Medicine, University of Bisha, Saudi Arabia” was conducted at the College of Medicine, University of Bisha, Saudi Arabia from October 2018 to March 2019. The aim of the research is to describe the learning styles among undergraduate medical students at the College of Medicine, University of Bisha. In the study, students’ preference of learning style was assessed through VARK: Visual, Aural, Read/ Write and Kinesthetic learning style) inventory questionnaire version 7.1. VARK inventory was developed by Neil D. Fleming. In this study, students learning styles were categorized into unimodal and multimodal patterns. According to the findings of the research, students in the College of Medicine, University of Bisha (UBCOM) have different patterns and types of learning style. Aural is the dominant unimodal style and the visual style is widely distributed among students of different levels.

Another related research is “The Need to Incorporate Kinesthetic Learning as One of Primary Methods in Maritime English/ Communication Classes” conducted by Malaysian Maritime Academy. The aim of the research is to discover the most preferred learning styles in the teaching of Maritime English particularly in two distinctive classes, the nautical cadet officers and the ship crew members. For this study, the PLSPQ (Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire) method developed by Reid (1987) was used. The questionnaire sets were distributed to 30 respondents from cadet officers who were learning Maritime English. The data collected was analyzed by using SPSS software according to descriptive statistics which is median analysis to identify which type is the most preferred by respondents. According to the findings of the research, it was found that kinesthetic learning is the most preferred learning style in Maritime English Class. Visual style is second and the last is auditory style. It is clear that majority of the students like to

experience things by themselves and this makes them feeling “actively involved” in the lessons, rather than just passive listeners of lecturers.

### **Research Methodology**

The present research focuses on the study of perceptual learning style preference of (97) postgraduate English specialization students at Yadanabon University. In order to collect the necessary data, perceptual learning style preference questionnaires created by Reid (1987) were distributed to the students. The research procedure includes collecting the data, analyzing the data and interpretation of the data. The frequencies of types of learning styles are counted and expressed as percentage. In collecting the data, the following symbols were used.

- LS = Learning Style
- Fr = Frequency
- M1 = First Year Master Students
- M2 = Second Year Master Students

### **Data collection and Data Analysis**

In order to collect the necessary data, perceptual learning style preference questionnaires created by Reid (1987) were used. There are 30 statements in the questionnaire and five items for each type: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile, group, individual. Participants in this survey are (97) postgraduate English specialization students at Yadanabon University: (37) first year master students and (60) second year master students. The participants were distributed the questionnaires and they had to choose one of the five items: “strongly agree,” “agree,” “undecided,” “disagree,” or “strongly disagree.” The questionnaire of every participant was scored as follows:

- When the choice of the participant is the first item “strongly agree,” the score is 5.
- When the participant chooses the second one “agree”, a score of 4 is given.
- When the participant’s response is “undecided”, he/she gets a score of 3.
- The score is 2 when the participant chooses the item “disagree”.
- When the answer is “strongly disagree”, the score is 1.
- After completing all the numerical values for each learning style, the total of each type is multiplied by two.
- Learning style categories are classified as Major Learning Style, Minor Learning Style and Negligible Learning Style.
- The learning style of the participant who gets the score between 38 -50 is regarded as Major Learning Style.

- The score between 25 –37 is considered as Minor Learning Style.
- The score under 25 is regarded as Negligible Learning Style.

The data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed and the frequencies and percentages of different types of learning style were shown in Table (1).

**Table 1: Types of Preferred Learning Styles of Postgraduate English Specialization Students at Yadanabon University**

Learning Style		M.A. First Year		M.A. Second Year		Total	
		Fr	%	Fr	%	Fr	%
Visual	Major LS	12	32%	11	18%	23	24%
	Minor LS	25	68%	44	73%	69	71%
	Negligible LS	0	0%	5	9%	5	5%
Auditory	Major LS	23	62%	34	56%	57	59%
	Minor LS	14	38%	25	42%	39	40%
	Negligible LS	0	0%	1	2%	1	1%
Kinesthetic	Major LS	29	78%	48	80%	77	79%
	Minor LS	7	19%	12	20%	19	20%
	Negligible LS	1	3%	0	0%	1	1%
Tactile	Major LS	20	54%	35	58%	55	57%
	Minor LS	16	43%	25	42%	41	42%
	Negligible LS	1	3%	0	0%	1	1%
Group	Major LS	23	62%	49	82%	72	74%
	Minor LS	13	35%	9	15%	22	23%
	Negligible LS	1	3%	2	3%	3	3%
Individual	Major LS	12	32%	4	7%	16	16%
	Minor LS	21	57%	31	52%	52	54%
	Negligible LS	4	11%	25	41%	29	30%

As shown in Table (1), the preferred learning styles of postgraduate English Specialization are different. Most of the students from M.A first year chose kinesthetic learning style as their major learning style. However, group learning style was chosen as their major learning style by most of the students from M.A second year. It is found that students from both classes preferred visual learning style as their minor learning style. No students from M.A first year chose visual learning style and auditory learning style as their negligible learning style. No one from M.A second year preferred kinesthetic learning style and tactile learning style as their negligible learning style. Significantly, individual learning

style was chosen as their negligible learning style by almost half of the students from M.A second year.

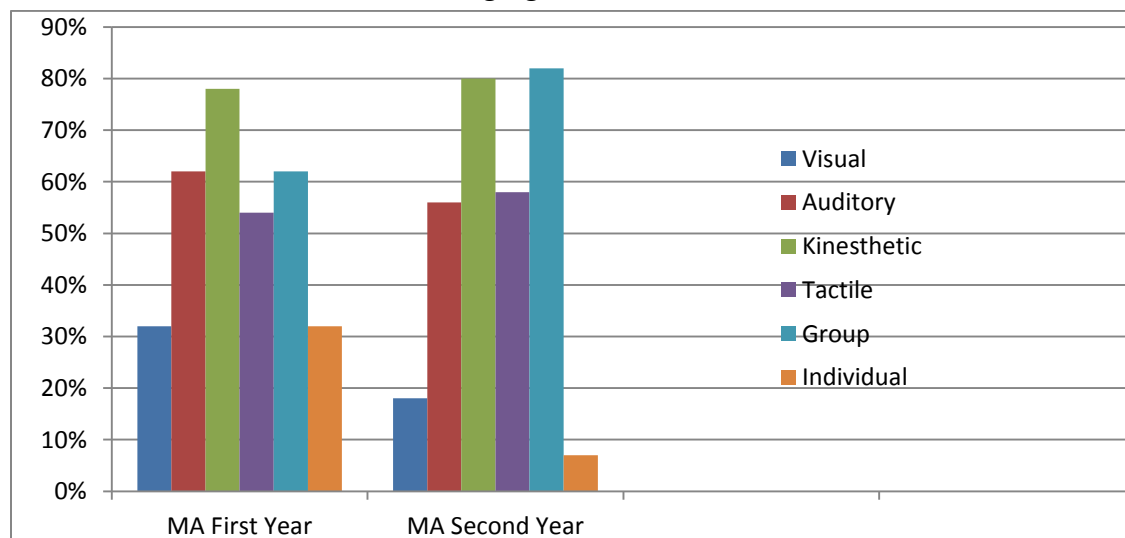
**Table 2: Percentages of Major Learning Style of Postgraduate English Specialization Students at Yadanbon University**

Year	Visual	Auditory	Kinesthetic	Tactile	Group	Individual
M.A. First Year	32%	62%	78%	54%	62%	32%
M.A. Second Year	18%	56%	80%	58%	82%	7%

According to Table (2), it is found that most of the students from both classes are much more interested in kinesthetic and group learning style. Half of the students from both classes chose tactile learning style as their major learning style. One third of the students prefer visual and individual learning style as their major learning style. A few students from M.A second year chose visual and individual learning styles as their major learning style.

### Findings and Discussion

In this section, the findings of the research on the preferred learning styles of postgraduate English Specialization students at Yadanabon University are presented. In this research, perceptual learning style preference questionnaire created by Reid (1987) was used to investigate learning style preferences of postgraduate English Specialization students at Yadanabon University. According to the collected data, it is found that different students have different learning styles. Different major learning styles of postgraduate students are shown in the following figure.



### Figure (1) Major Learning Style Preference of Postgraduate English Specialization Students at Yadanabon University

According to the figure above, the most significant type of M.A first year students is kinesthetic learning style (78%). The second prominent types are auditory and group learning styles (62%). The third one is tactile learning style (54%) and the fourth significant ones are visual and individual learning styles (32%) respectively. M.A first year students chose kinesthetic learning style as their favourite. According to Neil D. Fleming's VAK model of learning, kinesthetic learners process information best when they are physically engaged during the learning process. Therefore it can be assumed that they prefer carrying out physical activities to listening to a lecture. It is suggested that physical activities such as making charts or posters for group projects, working jigsaw puzzles are suitable for those students. They chose auditory and group learning styles as their second priority. It is reasonable to assume that they prefer to listen to tapes or CDs, take notes, discuss and debate. During a lecture, they are able to comprehend easily, process and get information. They learn better when learning in groups and in discussions. Therefore, the activities focused on reading activities, listening to audio tapes or CDs, small group discussion and group presentation should be chosen for them. Half of the students chose tactile learning style as their major learning style. As tactile learning involves learning by doing something, they enjoy making something for a class project. A few students chose visual and individual learning styles as their major learning style. They want to see information to learn it so teachers should use visual items such as overheads, the chalkboard, pictures, graphs and photos for those students. Only a few students prefer to work by themselves.

As shown in figure (1), group learning style (82%) was chosen by M.A second year students as their favourite. Their second favourite one is kinesthetic learning style (80%). The third one is tactile learning style (58%). The fourth one is auditory learning style (56%) followed by visual learning style (18%) and individual learning style (7%) respectively. Therefore it can be assumed that students from M.A second year are more interested in group work activities, classroom discussion and group presentation. As they chose kinesthetic learning style as their second priority, it can be concluded that they enjoy doing physical activities. Suitable physical activities such as making charts or posters for group projects, group presentation, role-playing in the classroom should be chosen for those students. According to the results of the analysis, it is found that most of the students from M.A second year are less interested in individual learning style. Only a few students who enjoy working alone chose individual learning style as their major learning style. Most of



them want to be involved in group interaction and class work with other students. Tactile and auditory learning style were chosen by half of the students from M.A second year as their major learning style and 18% of the students chose visual learning style.

According to the results of the study, it is found that most of the students from both classes chose kinesthetic and group learning styles as their major learning styles. Cooperative learning activities that maximize students' learning should be chosen. As there are the students who chose different learning styles such as tactile, visual and auditory learning styles as their major learning styles, it can be concluded that the teachers should use a combination of active learning strategies such as role-playing, working jigsaw puzzles, group presentation, reading activities, listening to audio tapes or CDs.

### **Conclusion**

Different students have their most preferred different learning styles for learning a language. Therefore, teachers must recognize the learning styles of their students and use best practice strategies. It is important to update their teaching methods and it is necessary to find out the strategies and classroom activities which are very effective in the learning process. Therefore, this study aims to find out the preferred learning styles of postgraduate students at Yadanabon University.

According to objective one, the preferred learning styles of postgraduate English Specialization students at Yadanabon University are classified through a set of perceptual learning style preference questionnaires created by Reid (1987). It was found that over 70% of the students prefer kinesthetic learning style and group learning style as their major learning style. This shows that majority of students like to experience things by themselves and want to participate actively in the classroom. Only very few students chose visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile and group learning styles as their negligible learning style. This means that only very few students may have difficulty learning in that way. Half of the students favoured the different learning styles as their minor learning style. Therefore, it can be concluded that half of the students can learn better in several different ways. They can function well as learners.

Objective two tries to find out the type of learning style which is the most significant. The results show that the most preferred type of M.A. first year students is kinesthetic learning style (78%) and group learning style (82%) is chosen by M.A second year students as the most prominent one. According to the results, the most preferred learning style of postgraduate English Specialization students is kinesthetic style (79%).

According to objective three, the students' preferred learning styles were analyzed to create suitable teaching activities for the students. It was found that most of the students prefer kinesthetic and group learning styles. Visual, auditory, tactile and individual learning styles were chosen by some of the students. It is clear that students learn in many different ways. Learning styles affect not only the way individual students acquire and process information but also the teaching process. Therefore, it is suggested that the teachers should apply teaching methodology that best suits students' learning styles so that the students will perform better and they can achieve their academic success.

It can be concluded that recognizing preferred learning styles of the students has implications for the teachers to some extent. As it is important to have a better interaction between the teachers and the students, teachers should create a combination of effective teaching strategies and activities which are compatible with the learning style preference of the students. This study only focuses on the investigation of the preferred learning styles of postgraduate English Specialization students at Yadanabon University. It is recommended that further studies should be conducted into the learning style preference of undergraduate English Specialization students or other specializations students at Yadanabon University should be conducted.

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