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## **Learning Strategies by EFL Students with Different Learning Styles: Implication for Learning and Teaching**

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### **Abstract**

In order to develop teaching and learning in language classroom, previous studies investigated how learning styles influenced the use of learning strategies from learners who study either at different levels or in different contexts. Also, this study would like to be a part of increasing the effectiveness of learning and teaching. Therefore, it aims at investigating the students' learning styles and exploring their learning strategies, which were used to succeed in learning language skills, listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, and vocabulary. The participants of the study were 79 undergraduate students who were studying in Foreign Language Program at Songkhla Rajabhat University, Thailand. The questionnaire was used as the instrument for the study to indicate the students' learning styles and learning strategies. It was distributed during the first semester of the students' first year. The data obtained revealed that the majority of the students are Kinesthetic learn style, followed by Group learning style, Auditory learning style, Individual learning style, Tactile learning style and Visual learning style. It was also found that metacognitive and cognitive strategies were mainly used by the students from different learning styles. It is expected that the findings of the study could give the guideline for developing language learning and shed light on providing activities to fit the students with different styles in order to develop their language skills. Playing the role as the facilitator by teachers to scaffold the students to use a variety of strategies to learn more effectively is also suggested.

*Keyword:* Learning Styles, Learning Strategies

### **Introduction**

English is used as the official language in a large number of countries. Some people use English for education or looking for a new experience by traveling around the world. Recently, Thailand has already joined ASEAN Economic Community(AEC) that challenges Thai students in terms of developing their English ability to compete with others from other countries in ASEAN.

Among learners' individual differences, learning styles and learning strategies are the variables which relate to learners' performance while learning. Besides, an awareness of learners' learning styles influences effective learning strategies used to facilitate language learning (Hilles & Sutton, 2001).

### **Learning Styles**

Learning styles in language learning are defined as any individual learner's habitual behaviors -- such as concentrating, processing, and retaining new and difficult information -- and preferred way used to learn the new information (Willing, 1993; Dunn, Dunn, & Perrin, 1994; Oxford, 1995; Reid, 1995). In second language classroom, Christison (2003)

pays attention to three broad categories of learning styles. Those are sensory styles which rely on physical channels such as ears, eyes, and touch to perceive the new information, personality styles which focus on individual's behaviours, and cognitive styles which emphasize thinking process. However, in the present study, Reid's Perceptual Learning Style Preference model, which is under sensory styles, was selected to identify the students' learning styles. The summary of the explanations of six learning style preferences, which are developed by Reid (1987), is presented below:

#### Perceptual Learning Style Preference Model

- Visual: learn well from seeing
- Auditory: learn well from hearing
- Kinesthetic: learn well by experience and being involved physically in classroom experiences
- Tactile: learn well from doing hands-on experiences
- Group: learn well when studying with at least one other student
- Individual: learn well when working alone

### Learning Strategies

Learning strategies are defined as mental steps or learning processes which are selected consciously to learn a new language or to take actions to improve second language learning (Cohen, 1990; Wenden, 1991). Learning strategies are classified differently, such as direct and indirect strategies (Oxford, 1990), and cognitive and self-management strategies (Wenden, 1991). However, the well-known classification which is proposed by O'Malley and Chamot (1990) was used as the basis of the study. They divided learning strategies into three categories which consist of metacognitive strategies involving higher order executive skills, cognitive strategies concerning direct operation on incoming information, and social/ affective strategies relating to interaction with others.

### Research Questions

This study was conducted to answer the for the following questions:

- 1) What are learning styles of Thai undergraduate students studying in Foreign Language Program?
- 2) What are learning strategies used by students with different learning styles?

## Methodology

### Participants

The participants of the study were 79 out of 99 undergraduate students (N=80%) in Foreign Language Program at Songkhla Rajabhat University, Thailand. Their age was between 18 and 20.

### Instrument

The questionnaire consists of three parts. The first one is about the students' personal information, such as their major and their student codes.

The second part is about indicating the students' learning styles. This part consists of 30 items which adapted from Reid's perceptual learning style preference questionnaire (PLSPQ, 1987). There are Visual Learning Style which prefers using eyes, Auditory Learning Style which prefers using ears, Tactile Learning Style which prefers learning by hands, Kinesthetic Learning Style which prefers learning by participating, Individual Learning Style which prefers working alone, and Group Learning Style which prefers working with others.

Example of an item in the questionnaire:

Strongly Agree (SA)  
 Agree (A)  
 Undecided (U)  
 Disagree (D)  
 Strongly Disagree (SD)

	SA	A	U	D	SD
1. When the teacher tells me the instructions I understand better.					

The last part is open-ended question which asks the students to report their learning strategies used to succeed in six language skills, listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, and vocabulary.

Example of an item in the questionnaire:

Part 3: Explain problems and solutions while learning English.

Skills	Problems	Solutions
Listening	.....	.....

### Data Analysis

The data obtained from the questionnaire was analysed by using descriptive statistics for the students' learning styles and using keywords to reveal the use of their learning strategies which used classification proposed by O'Malley and Chamot (1990) as the basis of the study.

For Example:

Learning strategies	Keywords
Metacognitive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I <u>plan</u> to ...</li> <li>I <u>set</u> the schedule to remember 10 words a day.</li> </ul>
Cognitive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I <u>find</u> the words I don't know the meaning from dictionary.</li> </ul>
Social/ affective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trying to <u>speak English with my friends</u> could help my speaking skills.</li> </ul>

### Findings

**Research Question 1:** What are learning styles of Thai undergraduate students studying in Foreign Language Program?

The data obtained from the questionnaire was analysed and presented as follows.

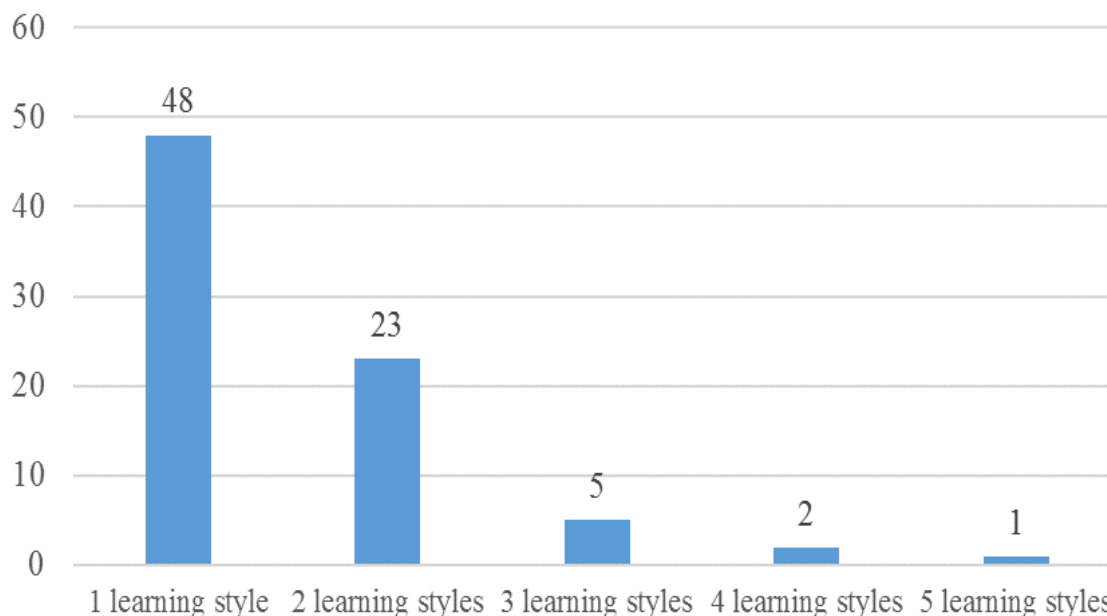


Figure 1. Summary of the students' learning styles

Figure 1 shows that the majority of the students has one learning style (60.76%, N=48), followed by two learning styles (29.12%, N=23), three learning styles (6.33%, N=5), two learning styles (2.53%, N=2) and five learning styles (1.26%, N=1).

The data also showed the variation of learning styles (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Summary of the Students who have one Learning Style*

Learning style	Number	%
Visual	1	2.08
Auditory	10	20.83
Kinesthetic	16	33.33
Tactile	2	4.17
Group	15	31.25
Individual	4	8.34
Total	48	100

As seen from Table 1, the majority of the highest number of the students are Kinesthetic learning style (33.33%, N=16), followed by Group learning style (31.25%, N=15), Auditory learning style (20.83, N=10), Individual learning style (8.34%, N=4), Tactile learning style (4.17%, N=2), and Visual learning style (2.08%, N=1).

**Research Question 2:** What are learning strategies used by students with different learning styles?

Table 2

*Summary of Learning Strategies Used by the Students Who Have One Learning Style*

Skill	Learning style																	
	Visual			Auditory			Kinesthetic			Tactile			Group			Individual		
	Meta	Cog	Soc	Meta	Cog	Soc	Meta	Cog	Soc	Meta	Cog	Soc	Meta	Cog	Soc	Meta	Cog	Soc
Listening	1			7	3	1	9	9	1		1		5	12		2	2	
Speaking	1			2	7	1	8	8		1	1		5	10	1	3		1
Reading	1			4	5		5	11		1	1		7	8		3	1	
Writing		1		3	8		8	10		1			7	8		4		
Grammar	1			7	5	1	9	8			1		5	11		2	2	
Vocabulary	1			4	6		11	6	1		1		7	9		4	1	
Total	5	1		27	34	3	50	52	2	3	5		36	58	1	18	6	1

As presented above, the data revealed that in general, most students from all learning styles preferred using metacognitive strategies to improve their language skills. It was also found that the students who are from Group learning style tended to use cognitive strategies to enhance them succeed in language learning, whereas those from Individual Learning style intended to use metacognitive strategies to help them develop language skills.

### Conclusion

From the study, we found that among 79 students, the majority of the students has one learning style (N=48), followed by two learning styles (N=23), three learning styles (N=5), four learning styles (N=2), and five learning styles (N=1). It was also found that metacognitive and cognitive strategies were mainly used by the students. However, it should be noted that the students who prefer working alone reported the main use of metacognitive strategies while dealing with language skills.

The implications of the study about providing activities to fit the students with different styles in order to develop their language skills are suggested based on the task-based learning framework proposed by Willis (1996). It consists of three phases – *pre-task*, *task cycle*, and *language focus*.

As for *pre-task phase*, the clear introduction to the topic and task instructions including showing clear example of the task the students have to do should be provided. *Task cycle phase* involves using language in varying circumstances. Using group work would be an effective way to enhance the students share their knowledge and experience together. They could also use language through the interactions among group members. *Language focus phase* concerns the analysis and the practice. In this phase, the students should be required to repeat the language they prepared with their friends. Allowing the students to ask questions about the language they learned should be provided.

As for the teachers, playing the role as the facilitator to scaffold the students to use a variety of strategies while doing activities to learn more effectively is also suggested. However, it would be better to have more participants for further study to generalize the data obtained for the students and teachers in different contexts.

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