

Students' Learning Styles in Learning English and Religious Subjects: A Study in UiTM Mukah

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Abstract

A variety of theories that attempt to explain why people learn differently are referred to as learning styles. The four predominant learning styles are visual, auditory, read or write, and kinaesthetic. Each individual has their own learning style depending on the environment, emotions, sociological, and physiological factors. This study aims to identify the students' learning styles in learning English and religious subjects at UiTM Mukah. This paper adopts quantitative study using questionnaires (Google Form) as a research instrument. Data were collected from students of three faculties; Academy Contemporary of Islamic Studies, the Faculty of Business and Management, and the Faculty of Plantation and Agrotechnology. The respondents were students in the first semester of the study session 2023-2024, from various programs, starting from the first to the third year of study. The data collected in this study were analysed descriptively. The results of the study found that the learning style of each student at UiTM Mukah vary, with most of the students adopt reading and writing strategies in learning both language and religious subjects. Through this study, students are able to identify their learning styles and adapt the right learning methods. . Lecturers and students should accommodate different learning styles to foster a more inclusive and effective learning environment, benefiting all students.

Keywords: English Subjects, Higher Education, Learning Styles, Religious Subjects, VARK

Introduction

Studies on students' learning styles have been a topic of interest in educational research for many years. Scholars such as Fathor et al (2020) stated that each student's learning style is based on his own way and according to a certain instrument. A learning style that suits everyone can also increase the effectiveness in learning and facilitate the process of understanding. Similarly, Lucimar and Anna (2020) conducted a systematic review and found little empirical evidence to suggest that adapting teaching to match individual learning styles enhances knowledge.

More than 70 theories of learning methods have been established over several decades. Most of these theories are used to identify learning styles for each individual. Students' learning styles can vary greatly from person to person, and recognizing and understanding

these differences is crucial for educators seeking to provide effective instruction. Moreover, some students may thrive in a structured, organized environment, while others may excel with more flexibility and freedom in their learning process. Understanding these differences in learning styles can help educators tailor their lessons and assignments to better suit the needs of their students, ultimately leading to improved academic performance and a more positive learning experience.

Conversely, researchers like Francisco et al (2020) have discussed the four models based on students' learning style: individual, cooperative, dependent and autonomous which outlines and is associated with practical, conventional, critical and efficient student models. The conclusions explain that there are no pure models, as there are nuances that connect them in real classroom practice, but the level of student preference helps to measure the impact and confirms the improvement in teaching through university work projects. Educators can also encourage students to develop a deeper awareness of their own learning styles, empowering them to seek out resources and study techniques that best align with their preferences. By fostering an appreciation for the diversity of learning styles, both lecturer and students can work together to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment that caters to the individual needs of each student.

Furthermore, the work of Fathor et al (2020) on experiential learning management has also contributed to the discourse on learning styles. This study outlines three learning styles based on a combination of visual auditory and kinesthetic. It is important to know that the concept of learning styles remains a subject of debate within the educational community, and there is ongoing research exploring the efficacy of different approaches to accommodating diverse learning preferences.

Thus this study aims to identify students' learning style in learning religious and English languages mainly at UiTM Kampus Sarawak, Mukah Branch, using VARK learning styles developed by Neil Fleming in 1987.

Literature Review

Definition of Learning Styles

The evolution of the concept of learning styles can be followed back to the studies conducted by two notable psychologists of the 20th century: Jean Piaget in 1968 and Carl Jung in 1976. The exploration of learning styles within the context of language education, particularly English language teaching, emerged in recent decades through the contributions of scholars such as (Kinsella, 1995; Oxford, 1990; Reid, 1995; Anderson, 1995; Hussain, 2017). MacKeracher (2004) "defined learning styles as characteristic cognitive, effective, and psychosocial behaviors that serve as relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment". Learning styles can be defined in multiple ways, depending on one's perspective. Brown (2000) describes learning styles as the way individuals interpret and handle information during learning experiences. He suggests that learning style preference represents a facet of learning style, indicating a tendency to favor particular learning situations or conditions over others.

Learning style pertains to the method through which information is received, processed, retained, and utilized effortlessly. Each student possesses a distinct learning approach. Student learning styles are identifiable among visual, auditory, and kinesthetic categories. Visual learners comprehend information through visual stimuli, auditory learners through auditory input, and kinesthetic learners through physical movement and tactile experiences.

There are different learning styles theories developed by other researchers. One of it is Learning Styles Inventory (LSI). Developed by Kolb in 1971, it focuses on learner's preferences in terms of concrete versus abstract, and action versus reflection. Learners are subsequently described as divergers, convergers, assimilators, or accommodators (Romanelli, 2009). Divergers like to use personal experiences and practical ideas to formulate theories that they could apply. Convergers deal with abstract concepts to come up with concrete results, as they like to put their theories into practice. Assimilators work with abstract concepts to come up with another theories of their own, while accommodators learn better with hands-on, as they keen to learn from real experiences (Romanelli, 2009).

Kolb's Learning Styles Inventory (LSI) was further developed by Honey and Mumford in 1986, called Honey and Mumford Learning Styles. It identifies four unique styles or preferences utilized during the learning process; it's suggested that individuals typically gravitate toward one or two of these styles. Furthermore, various learning tasks may align better with specific styles. Recognizing your dominant learning style can assist in determining the likelihood of an activity being beneficial for you. There are four main domain; activists (learn by doing), Reflectors (observing and thinking of what happened), Theories (like to understand the theories behind them), and Pragmatics (Trying new things out) (Roswell, 2005)

The Importance of Appropriate Learning Styles

Learning styles are ways and preferences of how people learn. It can affect how learners understand, retain, and apply new knowledge. Understanding your own learning style can assist the learning process, thus, lead to better performance.

Understanding learning styles holds significant importance for several reasons, with three key ones standing out. Initially, individuals possess diverse learning styles owing to inherent differences among them. Secondly, acknowledging these variations provides an avenue to employ a diverse array of teaching methods effectively. Relying solely on a single approach without consideration can result in a tedious learning atmosphere, potentially disengaging certain learners. Essentially, without adapting to various learning styles, the educational process may lack practical relevance. Lastly, by truly discerning the groups we engage with in education and communication, we can effectively manage numerous aspects of these interactions. Of course, teachers may not know every detail; however, being aware of their students' learning styles, psychological qualities and motivational differences will help us regulate our lessons appropriately and according to the conditions (Coffield, 2004)

Hussain (2018) examines the learning styles and strategies employed by English language teachers pursuing a master's degree at an Open University in Pakistan. The findings suggested that there was insufficient evidence to assert differences in the utilization of various learning approaches (deep, surface, and strategic) between male and female students enrolled in distance programs. Educators in distance learning institutions could benefit from these findings by incorporating them into their instructional materials. Additionally, the results could raise awareness among distance learners about their prevalent learning styles and approaches.

A study done by Harahap, Halimah, and Walad Ahkas (2023) The aim was to assess the impact of study habits and learning styles on the academic performance of students in Islamic religious education. The study found that study habits accounted for 43.5% of students' learning outcomes, while learning styles contributed 18.1%. These results highlight the

significant role of learning styles in enhancing academic achievement in Islamic religious education. Moreover, when combined, study habits and learning styles together explained 61.4% of the variance in learning outcomes, suggesting their collective importance. The remaining 38.6% of factors affecting academic performance lie beyond the scope of this study. Therefore, the findings suggest that improving academic performance can be achieved by focusing on enhancing both study habits and learning styles.

VARK Theory and Modalities

The abbreviation VARK refers to the four sensory modalities that are used to learn information: visual, auditory, read/write, and kinesthetic. These four modes were proposed by Fleming and Mills (1992) and appear to represent the experiences of both teachers and students (VARK Learn Limited, 2024).

Visual learners prefer printed information such as maps, diagrams, charts, graphs, flow charts, and all other symbolic arrows, circles, hierarchies, and other devices that people employ to express what could have been presented in words. It does contain patterns, shapes, white space, designs, and the various formats that are used to draw attention to and communicate information. When a diagram showing the relationships between various objects is drawn on a whiteboard using meaningful symbols, it will be beneficial to individuals who prefer visual aids (VARK Learn Limited, 2024).

Auditory learners prefer talks, lectures, and tutorials as well as hearing knowledge (Chaudry, Ashar, & Ahmad, 2020). A preference for information that is "heard or spoken" is shown by the Aural mode. Students who choose this as their top preference say that lectures, group discussions, radio, email, utilizing mobile phones, speaking, and talking things out are the greatest ways for them to learn.

Read-write learners prefer to have printed words and texts as a means of information by textbooks, lecture notes and hand-outs. Information presented as words is what is meant to be read/written. Most educators and learners strongly favor this style. This preference emphasizes text-based input and output including reading, writing in all its forms especially assignments, essays, manuals and reports. People who prefer this modality are often addicted to PowerPoint, the Internet, lists, diaries, dictionaries, thesauri, quotations and words (VARK Learn Limited, 2024).

Kinaesthetic learners learn best through active, "hands-on" methods. These students prefer to engage with the real world. Kinaesthetic learners typically find it challenging to maintain concentration and can easily become distracted (Gilakjani, A.P., 2011). Those who favor this style have a connection to reality "either through practice, simulation, examples, or actual personal experiences". This style includes demonstrations, simulations, and videos of "real" things, as well as case studies, practice, and applications (VARK Learn Limited, 2024).

In general, the way each individual learns is different depending on several factors. Firstly, physical elements, such as nutrition, physical defects, and health. Second, environmental elements include classrooms, equipment, and texts. Third, emotional and social elements, such as the nature of the interactions that students have with their teachers in the classroom, the way that students view teachers, and the leadership and inspirational qualities of teachers' personalities. Lastly, learning factors include things like lack of expertise and the limited background of the topics or concerns being taught (Khairy, H.A, 2018).

Research Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative approach using a questionnaire as an instrument to obtain data on the students' learning styles in learning English and religious subjects at UiTM Mukah. This research method was chosen for its efficiency in gathering information, thus saving costs, time, and energy. To gather data on students' learning styles at UiTM Mukah, the researchers utilized and obtained data from Google Form distributed to the participants.

A total of 237 diploma students at the UiTM Mukah campus responded to the survey. These students were enrolled in various programs, including Diploma in Planting Industry Management (32 students), Diploma in Herbs Production (3 students), Diploma in Aquaculture (1 students), Diploma in Herbs Production Technology (3 students), Diploma in Aquaculture Technology (14 students), Diploma in Business Studies (64 students), Diploma in Banking Studies (37 students), Pre-Diploma in Commerce (81 students), and Pre-Diploma in Islamic Studies (2 students). The distribution of respondents across different academic years as follows: 190 respondents from year 1 students, 46 respondents from year 2 students, and 1 respondent from year 3 student. The imbalance in the number of students was observed across faculties and programs of study.

The questionnaire, prepared by the researchers and distributed via Google Form, consisted of questions aimed at identifying students' learning styles in English and religious subjects. A total of forty-eight questions were used to assess students' learning styles, categorizing them as visual, auditory, read/write, or kinaesthetic learners. All questions in the questionnaire were structured on Likert scales (disagree, neutral, and agree). A descriptive analysis was conducted based on the overall percentage of responses. A comparative analysis was performed on the data obtained regarding the learning styles in learning English and religious subjects.

Results and Findings

Respondents Demography

Table 1

Respondents Demography

		English Subjects	Religious Subjects	Total
Faculty	Academy Contemporary of Islamic Studies	0	2	2
	Faculty of Business and Management	64	118	182
	Faculty of Plantation and Agrotechnology	18	35	53
Program of Study	AT110 (Diploma in Planting Industry Management)	10	22	32
	AT112 (Diploma in Herbs Production)	1	2	3
	AT117 (Diploma in Aquaculture)	0	1	1
	AT122 (Diploma in Herbs Production Technology)	2	1	3
	AT127 (Diploma in Aquaculture Technology)	5	9	14
	BA111 (Diploma in Business Studies)	22	42	64
	BA119 (Diploma in Banking Studies)	14	23	37

	BA002 & BA003 (Pre-Diploma in Commerce)	28	53	81
	IC001 & IC002 (Pre-Diploma in Islamic Studies)	0	2	2
Level of Study	Year 1	61	129	190
	Year 2	21	25	46
	Year 3	0	1	1

Table 1 presents the respondents demography for those taking both English and religious subjects. For English subjects, most of the respondents were from the Faculty of Business and Management (64), followed by the Faculty of Plantation and Technology (18). There were no respondents from the Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies. Most of the students were from Pre-Diploma in Commerce (28), followed by Diploma in Business Studies (22), and Diploma in Banking Studies (14). To add more, there were respondents from Diploma in Planting Industry Management (10), Diploma in Aquaculture Technology (5), Diploma in Herbs Production Technology (2), and Diploma in Herbs Production (1). There were no respondents from Pre-Diploma in Islamic Studies and Diploma in Aquaculture.

However, for religious subjects, most of the respondents were from the Faculty of Business and Management (118), followed by the Faculty of Plantation and Technology (35) and Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies (2). Regarding the study program, most respondents were from Pre-Diploma in Commerce (53), followed by Diploma in Business Studies (42), and Diploma in Banking Studies (23). Nevertheless, the lowest respondents were Diploma in Aquaculture (1), followed by Diploma in Herbs Production Technology (1), followed by Diploma in Herbs Production (2) and Pre-Diploma in Islamic Studies (2).

It can be concluded that most respondents took part in this study were students from the Faculty of Business and Management (182), followed by students from Faculty of Plantation and Technology (53) and Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies (2).

Students' Learning Styles in Learning English and Religious Subjects

In this section, the findings of students learning styles will be analysed based on the likert scale as below:

Likert Scale Summary

Items	Abbreviation
Agree	A
Neutral	N
Disagree	D

Table 2

Visual Learning Style

		English Subjects			Religious Subjects		
		A	N	D	A	N	D
1	I organize my work and living space to avoid distractions.	54	28	0	101	53	1
2	I sit in the front of the room to avoid distraction and away from doors, windows, wall maps or bulletin boards.	28	36	18	52	76	27
3	I use neatly organized or typed materials.	37	45	0	71	82	2
4	I use flash cards and clustering strategies to improve my memory.	22	41	19	47	81	27
5	I recreate images in different ways and use all the blank spaces on the page.	39	38	5	68	62	25
6	I use reminders like note pads, Post Its, to-do lists, etc.	62	17	3	102	47	6
7	I use underlining, highlighting in different colours, symbols, flow charts, graphs, or pictures in my notes.	60	20	2	101	48	6
8	I turn visual cues into words as I prepare for exams.	37	41	4	81	66	8
9	I allow sufficient time for planning and recording thoughts when doing problem solving tasks.	44	37	1	69	78	8
10	I use test preparation strategies that emphasize organization of information and visual encoding and recall.	45	37	0	89	63	3
11	I participate actively in class or group activities.	44	38	0	77	75	3
12	I develop written or pictorial outlines of responses before answering essay questions	50	31	0	81	72	2
TOTAL		522	409	52	939	803	118

Table 2 presents respondents who adopt a visual learning style. For English subjects, 522 of the answers agreed that the visual learning style suits them, while 52 students disagreed. However, for religious subjects, a total of 939 answers agreed that they are visual learners, and 118 disagreed on that learning style. From both, there were 1,212 answers that were not sure of this learning style.

The total answer for visual learning style is 2,843, with 1,461 (51%) of the answers agreeing on the adoption of this learning style in learning English and religious subjects. While 170 (6%) disagreed with this method, 1,212 (43%) were unsure of it.

Table 3

Auditory Learning Style

		English Subjects			Religious Subjects		
		A	N	D	A	N	D
1	I work in quiet areas to reduce distractions, avoiding areas with conversation, music, and television.	51	27	4	87	53	15
2	I sit away from doors or windows where noises may enter the classroom.	27	43	12	55	71	29
3	I rehearse information orally by saying it out loud.	41	32	9	77	62	16
4	I attend lectures and tutorials regularly.	57	25	0	111	42	2
5	I discuss topics with my classmates and lecturers to monitor my understanding of the material.	58	23	1	90	62	3
6	I practice verbal interaction to improve motivation and self-monitoring.	44	37	1	77	73	5
7	I use tape recorders or any other recording app on my smartphone/tablet to document lectures and reading materials.	23	44	15	48	67	40
8	I remember to examine illustrations in textbooks and convert them into verbal descriptions.	32	43	7	60	77	18
9	I read the instructions for tests or assignments aloud, or I will have someone read them to me, especially if the instructions are long and complicated.	28	41	13	55	67	33
10	I use verbal brainstorming and tape-recording writing and proofing.	23	47	12	43	77	35
11	I read my notes aloud	37	29	16	56	72	27
12	I practice writing my answers using past-year examination papers and I speak my answers	45	36	1	81	62	12
TOTAL		466	427	91	840	785	235

Table 3 shows the respondents with the auditory learning style. 91 answers disagreed with the 466 answers who said that the visual learning technique is best for them in English courses. In contrast, 840 answers overall indicated that they are visual learners, whereas 235 disagreed on this learning style in learning religious subjects. In addition, 1,212 answers from both areas were unsure about this learning strategy.

The total number of responses for the auditory learning style is 2,844, of which 1,306 (46%) believed that this method is suitable in learning English and religious subjects. 1,212 (43%) people were doubtful about this style, whilst 326 (11%) disagreed with auditory learning style.

Table 4

Reading and Writing Learning Style

		English Subjects			Religious Subjects		
		A	N	D	A	N	D
1	I like to write and read as words have interesting meanings and backgrounds to me.	56	25	1	96	55	4
2	I like to use lists (a, b, c, d, and 1, 2, 3, 4) and arrange things into categories.	61	20	1	108	42	5
3	I like to extract meanings from headings and titles.	48	32	1	84	66	5
4	I like correcting mistakes.	62	20	0	99	52	4
5	I like to search for clarity in what has been written or read.	48	34	0	90	65	0
6	I like to convert notes into a learnable package by reducing them from three pages down to one page.	52	29	1	83	65	7
7	I write out the words again and again.	36	42	4	81	65	9
8	I read notes (silently) again and again.	51	27	4	103	46	6
9	I do extra suggested reading.	43	36	3	66	80	9
10	I organize any diagrams, or graphs ... into statements, e.g. <i>"This graph shows that the trend is..."</i>	37	39	6	58	84	13
11	I use digital device like apps on smartphones/tablets to arrange my ideas and to try different words.	49	30	3	88	56	11
12	I arrange lists into multiple-choice questions and compare/contrast them from each other.	41	38	3	82	68	5
TOTAL		584	372	27	1038	744	78

Table 4 displays the reading and writing learning style in learning English and religious subjects. From the total of 983 answers, 584 agreed that this method works best for them in learning English subjects, while 27 answers disagreed on this learning style. However, 1,038 answers stated that this learning method is appropriate in learning religious subjects whilst 78 disagreed. A total of 1,116 responses expressed uncertainty over this kind of learning.

Out of the 2,843 answers, 1,622 (57%) thought that reading and writing learning style would be a good fit for English and religious subjects. 105 (4%) answers disagreed with the technique, while 1,116 (39%) were unsure on this style.

Table 5

Kinaesthetic Learning Style

		English Subjects			Religious Subjects		
		A	N	D	A	N	D
1	I keep verbal discourse short and to the point.	33	46	3	61	89	5
2	I actively participate in discussions.	43	38	1	79	70	6
3	I use direct involvement and hands-on activities to improve motivation, interest, and memory.	42	37	3	72	76	7
4	I look for courses that have laboratories, field trips, etc. and lecturers who give real-life examples.	35	39	8	63	82	10
5	I use case studies and applications (example) to help with principles and abstract concepts.	35	43	4	68	79	8
6	I read or summarize directions, especially if they are lengthy and complicated.	45	35	2	91	58	6
7	I use recorded reading materials.	23	41	18	34	83	38
8	I use practice, play acting, and modelling to prepare for tests.	31	41	10	47	73	35
9	I allow myself for physical movement and periodic breaks during tests, while reading, or while composing written assignments.	44	34	4	65	76	14
10	I roleplay the exam situation.	31	41	10	40	80	35
11	I teach the material to someone else.	36	43	3	65	84	6
12	I write practice answers, paragraphs or essays.	51	28	3	83	69	3
	TOTAL	499	466	69	768	919	173

Table 5 illustrates the answers of kinaesthetic learning style in learning English and religious subjects. 499 students said that this approach is the most effective for them while learning English-related subjects, whereas 69 students disagreed with this way of learning. For religious subjects, 768 answers agreed and 173 disagreed on kinaesthetic learning style. 1,385 answers in all indicated uncertainty on this learning style.

Among the 2,844 answers, 1,267 (44.5%) felt that the kinaesthetic learning style is the most suitable method in learning English and religious subjects. However, 1,385 (49%) were not sure of the answers, and 242 (8.5%) disagreed with this style

Discussion and Conclusion

Analyzing the preferred learning styles of students in English and religious studies at UiTM Sarawak Mukah Branch has prompted lecturers to develop innovative teaching approaches. Each student possesses unique methods of processing, perceiving, and retaining information, which significantly influence their learning outcomes. This study focuses on four main learning styles: Visual, Auditory, Reading/Writing, and Kinesthetic.

Findings indicate that most students prefer the Reading/Writing style, followed by Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic styles. Lecturers are advised, based on the insights from Sigit and Bibin (2023), to incorporate tasks addressing current issues related to the subject matter. Students inclined towards Reading/Writing typically prefer comprehensive reading materials

and structured note-taking, while showing less enthusiasm for hands-on activities or excessive visual and auditory stimuli.

Visual and Auditory styles rank as the second and third preferences respectively, with students valuing multimedia resources. These learners benefit from incorporating drawing and listening techniques to aid comprehension. Lecturers are encouraged to integrate images, videos, and storytelling to engage Visual and Auditory learners, as suggested by (Sigit and Bibin, 2023).

Kinesthetic learners, the least common style among UiTM Mukah Branch students in English and religious subjects, thrive in active learning environments with hands-on activities and physical engagement. They prefer lessons involving movement and practical applications, often communicating verbally while using gestures to reinforce their points, as highlighted in (Imran, 2017).

However, the study has limitations, including its focus on Language and Religious studies students and an uneven distribution of respondents between these subjects. This discrepancy arises from the mandatory nature of religious studies compared to English, which is only offered in specific programs.

In conclusion, recognizing that students typically exhibit a blend of learning styles is crucial. Teaching methods' effectiveness varies depending on the subject and individual preferences. Lecturers and students should be mindful of these styles to enhance the learning process. By accommodating diverse learning styles, educators can foster a more inclusive and effective learning environment, benefiting all students.

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