

## Students' Learning Styles In English Online Classes: A Case Study

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### ABSTRACT

Online classes are a solution in education during the COVID-19 pandemic. The change from offline to online classes brings changes to the way students learn. This paper aims to explore English Department students' learning styles in English online classes. The qualitative descriptive method is applied. The findings show that the student's learning style applies multimodal modality preference. However, multimodal modality preference in the students' combination of learning styles also shows a tendency to rely on single modal preference. This denotes the students' dominant learning style. It can be concluded that online classes support student learning styles without changing the students' dominant learning style. The implications of the findings denote the power of visual media in students' learning process. This reinforces the use of media in an advance teaching-learning processes.

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### Introduction

Online classes started in 2020 until now because of covid-19. It is helping the world to reduce covid-19. The online class is a form of adaptation of offline classes in the middle of the pandemic. This adaptation is possible with advances in technology. In the era of technology, humans not only adapt to technology but are also controlled by technology in some ways. They can



access a class on their laptop or cell phone. In Indonesia, especially in Surabaya, COVID-19 raises year by year, a few schools or universities allow students to study face-to-face and others still forbid it. The result of online school learning in this pandemic is to make schools shut all across the world. Education has changed. Teaching is undertaken remotely by digital platforms. All changes that occur in the world of education bring changes to the way students learn. It causes a different method of learning and education system because students have to adapt to virtual classes (Li & Lalani, 2020).

Learning style is the tendency of students to adopt a certain learning strategy by actively seeking and trying to answer the question. Therefore, in the end, the students can get a learning approach that is in accordance with the demands of learning. Learning styles are divided into four parts; they are shortened as VARK (Visual, Aural, Reading and Writing, Kinesthetic). This learning style emphasizes the tendency of the learners to use their senses in learning.

Firstly, visual learners are a method of learning by seeing. Usually, they used graphic displays such as charts, diagrams, illustrations, handouts, and videos. Visual learners who prefer this learning would rather see information presented in a visual rather than in written form. Secondly, aural or auditory learners are learning best by hearing information. They tend to get a great deal out of lectures and are good at remembering things they are told; for example, audio listening and listening to their lectures. Thirdly, reading and writing learners prefer to take in information that is displayed as words and text. For instance, reading a book and writing in a notebook. Next, kinesthetic learners are learning best by touching and doing hands-on experiences. For example, building some projects and playing a game. According to Norbert (2020), learning styles of various learners' approach learning in significantly different manners and this is the reason learning styles (VARK) appeared. Based on 2U (2020) on learning styles students' preferred learning modes have a fundamental influence on their behavior and learning.

The problem of this current research is that this paper examines the students' method of learning during online classes. In this respect, this paper



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figures out the student's dominant learning style in learning the English language. VARK is the reference to identify the student's learning style.

This current research is an adaptation of the previous study. Prior to this current research, the use of VARK to analyze student learning styles has been carried out by Widharyanto and Binawan (2020). The differences between this current study and the previous study include some points. Firstly, the previous study discusses the learning strategies in five ethnic groups, the similarities and differences in learning styles, and the language learning strategies of the five ethnic groups. However, this current research discusses the learning strategies of students regardless of their ethnicity. Secondly, the participants of the previous research were in large numbers, 175 students in the first and third semesters of the Indonesian Language and Literature Education Study Program at a private university in Yogyakarta. Meanwhile, this current study was limited to small numbers, 10 students from English Department at Widya Kartika University, Surabaya. However, the same research instrument was used, namely the VARK questionnaire version 8.01.

This current research used a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the student's learning styles in English online classes. Besides the use of the VARK questionnaire version 8.01, the interview was conducted. Two participants were selected to be interviewed. The questionnaire consisted of 16 statements that describe a daily event that learners do, and 4 answer choices of actions that describe the visual, aural-auditory, read-write, or kinesthetic learning styles.

The questionnaire was filled out by 10 students from batch 2020 of the English Departments at Widya Kartika University. The questionnaire was presented in Google form. We calculate the number of responses from the Google form that was distributed from December 15th, 2021, until December 17th, 2021. After participants filled out all the questionnaires, the participant's answers were input into VARK official website. Automatically the system shows the results indicating the learning style of each participant. After knowing the results of the dominant learning styles, two participants with the dominant learning were selected to be interviewed on December 30th, 2021 in a Zoom meeting.



## Discussion

The findings of VARK (Visual, Aural, Reading, and Kinaesthetic) learning style test of the participants of Widya Kartika English Department students can be seen in table 1.

**Table 1.** English Online Classes Language Learning Styles

Name (Pseudonym)	Major Learning Style	Language Learning Styles Score			
		Visual	Aural	Read/Write	Kinesthetic
Participant 1	Multimodal (VARK)	5	10	8	14
Participant 2	Multimodal (ARK)	3	9	9	11
Participant 3	Multimodal (VARK)	5	10	8	14
Participant 4	Strong Aural	1	8	3	4
Participant 5	Multimodal (ARK)	3	9	7	6
Participant 6	Multimodal (VARK)	9	10	6	10
Participant 7	Multimodal (VARK)	4	4	5	5
Participant 8	Multimodal (ARK)	0	6	5	6
Participant 9	Multimodal (ARK)	2	5	5	6
Participant 10	Multimodal (VARK)	4	11	6	9

From the table, the students' learning styles use multimodal VARK (Visual, Aural, Read, and Kinaesthetic). They use the senses of hearing, experience, and practice. It can be seen that 5 out of 10 learners have VARK (Visual, Aural, Read, and Kinaesthetic) learning styles in which their most dominant learning style is kinaesthetic learning style. That means that the learners learn best and get information when lectures give some simulations, when giving presentations and presenting videos, or when moving in a live environment.



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Besides kinaesthetic learning styles, the findings show that some of the students used aural learning styles. An aural learning style is a learning style in which learners learn best through listening to some directions and answering answers; for example, listening to lectures rather than taking notes. Based on the table, 7 out of 10 learners are dominant with an aural learning style. They like to read aloud, so it will help them understand the materials that are given by the lecturer.

Then, an aural learning style is followed by a read-write learning style. In this learning style, the learners often use notes as the most important way to convey and receive lessons from the lecturer. Based on the table, 3 out of 10 learners are dominant with a read-and-write learning style. The learners who have a reading/writing learning style really like words that have meanings and interesting backgrounds. They also like to use lists in their notes or handouts to sort things into categories.

Visual learning style is the least style used by the students. In this learning style, the learners prefer to use pictures, graphic examples, the use of colors, and map explanations to communicate ideas and thoughts. Based on the table, 1 out of 10 learners uses a visual learning style. The learners tend to have a photographic memory and can use color, tone, and brightness to remember the materials that were given by the lecturer. The learners can also easily visualize objects, have a high sense of balance and harmony, are very color-oriented, and can easily visualize images.

The findings also show that 4 out of 10 learners have ARK (Aural, Read, and Kinaesthetic) learning styles. They are less comfortable when they face a visual learning style, so they rarely use visuals in their learning style. 1 out of 10 learners who filled out the questionnaire had strong aural, the participants prefer the aural learning method because, according to the learners, aural learning is more comfortable and they understand the learning delivered through the aural method better.

The learning style test was followed by an interview. The follow-up interview was based on the results of the major learning styles of the learners. Prior to the interview, the selected participants were asked to fill out the questionnaire. The findings of the interview show that none of the learners has a strong preference for either the reading/writing learning style



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or the kinaesthetic learning style. In this respect, the two selected participants of the interview show that they are a multimodal learning style, with the dominant aural learning style.

Based on the follow-up interview. It is known that students with multimodality preferences learn more through YouTube and twitch media. Their learning is also supported by watching activities, for example watching American English video games. They prefer content with the English language because they stated that this activity strengthens their English proficiency. In addition to games, the interviewees watch people's stories in English.

Doing a listening workbook exercise with some reading content is difficult. The interviewees get difficulties digesting the content of the reading section of the listening workbook while listening. Reading can cause stress. The level of stress depends on the level of reading difficulty. Easy reading can relieve the students' stress levels.

It is easier for the students to digest explanations from the lecturer through the blackboard and by comparing the explanation with books. This way enables the students to understand the lecturer's explanation better. The students are difficult to rely only on either listening to the lecturer or reading the book. Relying on a single method causes difficulty in understanding the lecturer's explanation.

Open discussion is preferable because it can bring a new perspective to a phenomenon that is happening in the students' real life. The students state that online learning is very suitable for English learning because, during the learning session, home situations can support online English classes. The quiet situation of the house supports the experience of online English classes. Natural classes which tend to be noisier cause a lack of focus and difficulties in understanding the lecture's explanation. The use of electronic media also supports the students to understand the material given by the lecturer. The learning process of English as a foreign language is improved by the use of media (Linuwih and Trihastutie, 2020). Visual media makes English learning close to the students.

Based on the follow-up interview, the students with aural modality preference usually use favorite songs such as anime, action, sad, happy songs,



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and almost all genres to improve their understanding of the material. The students use the song while studying or doing assignments. The students' focus is improved with the use of their favorite music during the studying period. Music is not a distraction, but a stimulus for their affection and focus on learning. Reading books with various topics, including news, novels, and illustrations is conducted in parallel with listening to favorite songs. This way stimulates the students' understanding of the book they are reading. The use of music stimulus suggests that exposure to music can have a positive influence on learning (Hogenes, Oers, and Diekstra, 2014; Lee, L. and Lin, S.C, 2015).

The use of technology, for example, cell phones and laptops, stimulates the students' interest in online English classes. The students' interest is encouraged by the visual media during online English classes. Though the shifting from natural classes to online classes requires a process adaptation, this process happens smoothly and quickly. The students' interest stimulates their positive emotions in English classes. Emotion is one of the influencing factors of the student's success in learning English classes (Trihastutie and Fadilah, 2019).

### **Conclusion**

It can be concluded that the students have a combination of learning styles. It is a combination of visual learning style, aural learning style, Read/write learning style, and kinesthetic learning style. This combination of learning styles highlights multimodal modality preference. However, multimodal modality preference in the students' combination of learning styles also shows a tendency to rely on single modal preference. This denotes the students' dominant learning style. Online classes support student learning styles without changing the students' dominant learning style. The implications of the findings denote the power of visual media in students' learning process. This reinforces the use of media in advanced teaching-learning process.



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