



INDIVIDUAL LEARNING STYLES IN PRE-SCHOOL ENGLISH CLASSROOMS

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19659094>

ABSTRACT

This study investigates individual learning styles among 30 pre-school children aged 4-6 years who are learning English as a foreign language. Using the VAK (Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic) model, the research identifies dominant learning preferences in two groups of 15 children each. A mixed-methods approach, including a learning styles assessment, classroom observations, and a teacher interview, revealed that 65% of children are visual learners, 25% auditory, and 10% kinesthetic. Findings indicate a significant mismatch between teaching methods and learning styles, with kinesthetic activities underused despite high engagement rates. The study recommends multisensory teaching approaches to create more inclusive pre-school English classrooms.

Keywords: learning styles, VAK model, pre-school education, English language teaching, young learners, visual learners, auditory learners, kinesthetic learners, multi-sensory instruction, early childhood education.

INTRODUCTION

Every child is unique, and this uniqueness is especially evident in the classroom. In early childhood education, particularly in pre-school English classrooms, children learn in different ways. Some learn best by seeing pictures and videos; others prefer listening to songs and stories, while some need to move and touch objects to understand new words. These different ways of learning are known as individual learning styles [1]. The concept of learning styles has become increasingly important in modern education. Recent research suggests that understanding how young learners process information can help teachers design more effective lessons [2]. The most common model used in early childhood education is the VAK model, which identifies three main learning styles: Visual (learning by seeing), Auditory (learning by hearing), and Kinesthetic (learning by doing) [3]. Despite the importance of learning styles, many pre-school teachers still use the same teaching methods for all children. Research shows that when teachers do not consider individual learning styles, some children may struggle to learn English effectively [4]. For example, visual learners might get bored if the teacher uses only songs without pictures, while kinesthetic learners may find it difficult to sit still and listen for long periods [5].

In many pre-schools, there is limited knowledge about how to identify and support different learning styles. A recent study found that only half of the pre-school teachers had proper training in using VAK learning styles in their classrooms. This gap between theory and practice creates challenges for effective English language teaching in early childhood settings. The purpose of this study is to explore how individual learning styles affect English language learning in pre-school classrooms.

Specifically, this research aims to identify the dominant learning styles among pre-school children learning English, examine how one teacher can adapt teaching methods to different learning styles in two different groups, and provide practical recommendations for creating inclusive English lessons that meet the needs of all learners. This study is significant for several reasons. First, early childhood is a critical period for language development, and understanding learning styles can make English learning more enjoyable and effective [6]. Second, by using appropriate teaching methods for different learning styles, teachers can prevent early frustration with language learning and build positive attitudes toward English. Finally, this research will contribute to the field of early childhood English language teaching by providing practical strategies that teachers can immediately apply in their classrooms.

Defining Learning Styles. Learning styles refer to the different ways that individuals prefer to learn and process new information. According to educational researchers, a learning style is "the way a person processes, internalises, and studies information". In other words, it is the preferred method that a learner uses to understand and remember new things.

Everyone has a unique learning style, and this style affects how well they learn in different situations. For example, some people remember information better when they see it written down or in pictures. Others prefer to listen to explanations or discussions. Some people need to physically do something or move around to really understand a new concept. Learning styles are especially important in early childhood because young children are just beginning to develop their learning preferences. Research shows that between the ages of 3 and 6, children start to show clear preferences for how they like to learn. This is a critical time because these early preferences can influence how they approach learning for the rest of their lives. In pre-school English classrooms, understanding learning styles is crucial because young children are learning a new language while developing basic learning skills. If teachers use methods that match children's learning styles, English learning becomes easier and more enjoyable. However, if there is a mismatch between teaching methods and learning styles, children may become frustrated and lose interest in learning English.

The VAK Learning Styles Model. The most widely used model for understanding learning styles in early childhood education is the VAK model. VAK stands for Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic. This model was developed based on the work of psychologists who studied how people process information through different senses. Visual learners learn best through seeing. They prefer to look at pictures, diagrams, charts, and written words. In pre-school English classrooms, visual learners enjoy looking at picture books, watching videos, seeing words written on the board, and using colours and visual organisers. Research suggests that approximately 65% of the population are visual learners, making this the most common learning style.

Auditory learners learn best through listening and speaking. They remember information by hearing it and often enjoy talking about what they are learning. In pre-school settings, auditory learners benefit from listening to stories and songs, participating in discussions, repeating words aloud, and using rhythm and music to remember English words. About 30% of people are auditory learners.

Kinesthetic learners learn best through physical activity and hands-on experiences. They need to move, touch, and manipulate objects to understand new

concepts. In pre-school English classrooms, kinesthetic learners need movement activities, touching real objects, role-playing, and using their bodies to act out English words and phrases. Only about 5% of people are strongly kinesthetic learners, but many young children show kinesthetic preferences because they naturally learn through play and exploration.

Previous Studies. Several studies have investigated learning styles in young learners. A study by Çakıroğlu (2014) found that most pre-school teachers were aware of learning styles, but only half had received proper training in how to apply this knowledge in their classrooms [2]. This gap between knowledge and practice is a common problem in many countries. Research by Alharbi (2014) examined how VAK learning styles affected reading comprehension in young learners. The study found that when teachers matched their teaching methods to students' preferred learning styles, students' reading scores improved significantly. This shows that understanding learning styles can have real benefits for language learning outcomes. Another important study by Fauzi (2015) looked at how different teaching methods affected students with different learning styles. The results showed that visual learners performed better when teachers used pictures and videos, while kinesthetic learners improved more with hands-on activities. However, some researchers argue that the learning styles theory has limitations. Coffield et al. (2004) reviewed many studies and found that there is not always strong scientific evidence that matching teaching to learning styles improves learning. Despite this criticism, many teachers continue to find the VAK model useful for planning varied and inclusive lessons. Research specifically focused on pre-school children is more limited but growing. A recent study emphasised that in early childhood, it is especially important to use multi-sensory approaches that combine visual, auditory, and kinesthetic elements. This is because young children are still developing their learning preferences and benefit from experiencing language in many different ways.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design. This study uses a mixed-methods approach, which means it combines both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data provides numbers and statistics about learning styles, while qualitative data gives a deeper understanding through observations and interviews. The study is descriptive and exploratory. It aims to describe the current situation of learning styles in pre-school English classrooms and explore how one teacher can address different learning needs in two separate groups. This design was chosen because learning styles in early childhood education are a topic that needs both numbers and detailed descriptions.

Participants. The participants were selected using purposive sampling. The criteria for selection were pre-school children aged 4-6 years old, one English teacher with at least one year of experience, and parents who permitted for their children to participate. The study included 30 pre-school children divided into two groups of 15 children each. Group A had 15 children (8 boys and 7 girls) aged 4-6 years, and Group B had 15 children (7 boys and 8 girls) aged 4-6 years. Both groups were taught by one English teacher with 3 years of experience teaching young learners. The study was conducted at one pre-school in [city name] that offers English language programs. The pre-school was selected because it represents a typical setting where English is taught as a foreign language to young children.

Instruments. Three main instruments were used to collect data. First, a modified VAK Learning Styles Checklist for Young Learners was used to identify children's learning styles. This checklist includes 15 items that observe how children respond to different activities: 5 items for visual learning, 5 items for auditory learning, and 5 items for kinesthetic learning. Each item is scored on a simple scale: Yes (2 points), Sometimes (1 point), or No (0 points). Second, the researcher observed 12 English lessons (6 lessons with Group A and 6 lessons with Group B) using a structured observation checklist. The checklist recorded which learning style activities the teacher used, how long each activity lasted, how children responded, and whether the teacher adapted activities for different learners. Third, a semi-structured interview was conducted with one English teacher. The interview lasted 30 minutes and included questions about her knowledge of learning styles, how she identifies children's different learning needs, what challenges she faces with two different groups, and what training she has received. Data Collection Procedures. The data collection took place over 4 weeks. In the first week, learning styles assessments were administered to all 30 children individually. Each assessment took about 10 minutes per child and was done during free play time. In the second and third weeks, classroom observations were conducted. The researcher observed 3 lessons per week with each group. In the fourth week, the teacher interview was conducted, and all data were organised for analysis. Data Analysis. The numerical data from the learning styles checklists were analysed using descriptive statistics. This included frequencies and percentages for each learning style in both groups. The qualitative data from observation notes and interview transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Learning Styles Distribution. The learning styles assessment was completed with 30 pre-school children in two groups. The results for Group A showed that 10 children (67%) were visual learners, 4 children (27%) were auditory learners, and 1 child (6%) was a kinesthetic learner. In Group B, 9 children (60%) were visual learners, 3 children (20%) were auditory learners, and 3 children (20%) were kinesthetic learners. Overall, combining both groups, 19 children (63%) were visual learners, 7 children (23%) were auditory learners, and 4 children (13%) were kinesthetic learners. These results are close to the typical VAK distribution found in other studies. When analysed by age, the data showed interesting patterns. Among 4-year-olds (10 children), 50% were visual learners, 30% auditory, and 20% kinesthetic. Among 5-year-olds (12 children), 67% were visual learners, 17% auditory, and 16% kinesthetic. Among 6-year-olds (8 children), 75% were visual learners, 25% auditory, and 0% kinesthetic. This shows that visual learning becomes more dominant as children get older. Teaching Methods Used. The classroom observations of 12 lessons revealed how the one teacher worked with two different groups. With Group A, the teacher used visual activities for 45% of lesson time, auditory activities for 40%, and kinesthetic activities for 15%. With Group B, the teacher used visual activities for 40% of lesson time, auditory activities for 35%, and kinesthetic activities for 25%. The teacher explained in the interview that she noticed Group B had more active children, so she naturally included more movement activities with them. However, she did not formally assess their learning styles. She said: "I just noticed that Group B cannot sit still like Group A, so I let them move more". Observers rated children's engagement during different types of activities. Kinesthetic activities produced the highest engagement levels in

both groups (75% highly engaged in Group A, 65% in Group B). Visual activities produced good engagement (50% highly engaged in Group A, 40% in Group B). Auditory activities had the lowest engagement (35% highly engaged in Group A, 30% in Group B).

Teacher Perspectives. The teacher's interview revealed important information about working with two groups. The teacher had heard about learning styles from a workshop two years ago but had not received formal training. She said, "I know some children learn better with pictures and some with songs, but I didn't know there was a name for this. I just try to use different activities to keep them interested." When asked about challenges with two groups, she explained: "Group A is calmer and likes to look at books. Group B is very active and always wants to play games. It is difficult to prepare different lessons for both groups, so I usually use the same plan but change the activities a little." The teacher identified several challenges. Limited time was the biggest problem. She had only 30 minutes with each group, and she felt pressure to cover the same content. She also mentioned the lack of resources: "We don't have many pictures or toys. I want to do more activities, but I don't have materials." Despite challenges, the teacher used some successful strategies. She explained: "When I teach animals, I show pictures, we sing the animal song, and we all move like the animals. This way, everyone learns something." She also noticed individual differences: "I see that Ali in Group A never sings with us, but he always looks carefully at the pictures. So I show him more pictures, and he learns better now."

DISCUSSION

The finding that 63% of children are visual learners supports the VAK model literature. However, Group B had more kinesthetic learners (20%) than Group A (6%), which explains why the teacher naturally used more movement activities with them. This suggests that experienced teachers can intuitively recognise learning differences, even without formal training. The classroom observation results show that the teacher relied heavily on visual and auditory methods, which is common in many pre-schools. However, kinesthetic activities, though rare, produced the highest engagement levels. This supports the argument for multi-sensory approaches in early childhood education. An important finding is that the teacher adapted her methods slightly for each group based on their general behaviour, but she did not differentiate instruction for individual children within groups. For example, the one kinesthetic learner in Group A did not receive enough movement activities, while the auditory learners in Group B might have benefited from more songs. The teacher's comment that "Group B cannot sit still like Group A" shows that she recognised group differences but interpreted them as behaviour issues rather than learning needs. With proper training in learning styles, she could better address these differences and explain to parents why different groups need different activities.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated individual learning styles among 30 pre-school children in two groups taught by one English teacher. The research found that visual learning is the dominant style (63% of children), but there were significant differences between the two groups. Group A had mostly visual and auditory learners, while Group B had more kinesthetic learners. The study found that the teacher intuitively adapted some methods for each group but did not formally assess or address

individual learning styles. Kinesthetic activities produced the highest engagement levels but were underused, especially with Group A. The teacher faced practical challenges, including limited time, curriculum pressure, and a lack of resources. The study concludes that even one teacher working with two groups can improve English learning by understanding and addressing different learning styles. Simple strategies like using the "see-hear-do" rule for all lessons can help meet diverse needs without requiring separate lesson plans for each child. Based on these findings, several recommendations are made. For teachers working with multiple groups, it is recommended to formally assess learning styles at the beginning of the year using simple observation checklists. Teachers should include visual, auditory, and kinesthetic elements in every lesson, regardless of the group's general characteristics. For teacher trainers, training should focus on practical strategies for differentiating instruction in real classroom conditions with limited time and resources. For school administrators, providing basic resources like picture cards, simple toys, and space for movement activities can support diverse learning needs. Understanding individual learning styles is especially important in pre-school English classrooms where children are beginning their language learning journey. When children's learning styles are supported, they are more engaged and motivated. This study shows that even small changes in teaching methods can make a big difference for young learners.

Future research should follow the same children over time to see if learning style preferences change as they grow. Intervention studies where teachers receive training in learning styles-based instruction would help measure the impact on children's English learning outcomes. Comparative studies between different pre-schools could also provide valuable insights.

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