

Students' Preference of Language Learning Style in English Classroom: A Survey at SMP Gembala Baik Bilingual Class Pontianak

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the preferred language learning styles of students in a bilingual junior high school setting and examined gender-based differences in these preferences. A quantitative survey design was employed, utilizing the VAK (Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic) Learning Styles Self-Assessment Questionnaire originally developed by Fleming and Mills (1992). The sample comprised 100 students from SMP Gembala Baik Bilingual Class Pontianak, selected through coincidental sampling across grades VII, VIII, and IX. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine the distribution of learning style preferences and to compare patterns between male and female students. The findings revealed that visual learning was the most dominant preference overall (41%), followed by auditory (33%) and kinesthetic (26%). Gender-based analysis showed distinct patterns: male students predominantly preferred kinesthetic learning (44.8%), while female students demonstrated strongest preference for visual learning (50.0%). These results align with recent Indonesian studies on gender and learning styles and contribute to the growing body of evidence supporting differentiated instruction in bilingual educational contexts. The study concludes that recognizing diverse learning styles enables teachers to implement multimodal teaching strategies that accommodate all learners, ultimately enhancing English language proficiency in junior high school

Keywords: Language learning style; VAK model; gender differences; bilingual education; junior high school

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of learning styles has remained a significant topic in educational discourse despite ongoing debates about its theoretical foundations. Recent meta-analyses by Hattie and O'Leary (2025) have made an important distinction between studies testing the "matching hypothesis"—the notion that aligning teaching methods with students' preferred learning styles enhances achievement—and correlational studies examining relationships between learning styles and other educational variables. While the matching hypothesis yields minimal effect sizes ($d = 0.04$), correlational studies demonstrate meaningful relationships (average $r = 0.24$), suggesting that learning styles, when understood as preferences rather than fixed cognitive traits, offer valuable insights for educational practice.

The VAK learning style model, refined by Fleming and Mills (1992), categorizes learners into three primary modalities. Visual learners prefer information presented through diagrams, charts, maps, and other visual representations. Auditory learners excel with lectures, discussions, and verbal explanations. Kinesthetic learners learn best through hands-on activities, movement, and direct experience (Fleming & Mills, 1992). This model remains widely used in educational research due to its intuitive categories and practical applicability. Gilakjani (2012) further emphasized that understanding these modalities helps educators design more effective language instruction by catering to students' sensory preferences.

In the Indonesian context, the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka emphasizes student-centered learning that accommodates diverse learning needs. Fitra, Copriady, and Zulirfan (2025) demonstrated that implementing VAK-differentiated learning significantly improved scientific communication skills among junior high school students. Their quasi-experimental study showed that experimental groups receiving differentiated instruction outperformed control groups on measures including information retrieval, scientific reading, writing, listening and observation, information representation, and knowledge presentation. This aligns with Suardi and Ramadhan (2023), who found that differentiated instruction strategies in Indonesian classrooms positively impacted student engagement and learning outcomes across various subjects.

Gender differences in learning preferences have garnered increasing research attention. Chen (2023) examined the relationship between learning styles and foreign language learning, finding that gender plays a moderating role in how students approach language acquisition. Oxford (2023) reinforced this perspective in her comprehensive analysis of language learning strategies, noting that gender-based preferences often reflect broader socialization patterns that influence how students engage with language materials. Mandak Putri (2025) analyzed learning styles in mathematics instruction at a madrasah tsanawiyah in Jambi, finding that male students showed preferences for visual (30%), auditory (50%), and kinesthetic (20%) learning, while female students preferred visual (40%), auditory (60%), and kinesthetic (10%) approaches. The study revealed qualitative differences in how male and female students engaged with each learning modality.

Further supporting these findings, Rahmawati and Suparman (2024) conducted a mixed-methods study across three junior high schools in Yogyakarta, revealing that gender-based learning style differences persisted across grade levels and significantly influenced students' English reading comprehension strategies. Their research highlighted the need for gender-responsive teaching materials in EFL contexts.

Maulina et al. (2025) investigated learning style mismatches in Eastern Indonesian classrooms, finding that aligning teaching strategies with students' diverse learning styles significantly improved English speaking skills. Their research highlighted that adaptive teaching approaches addressing visual,

auditory, and kinesthetic preferences created more inclusive and effective learning environments. Elvira-Zorzo et al. (2025) examined psychosocial differences in learning patterns between male and female students, finding that male students reported higher autonomy levels while female students experienced more learning-related mental health difficulties, which may indirectly influence learning style preferences.

The bilingual classroom context presents unique considerations for learning style research. Baker and Wright (2021) argued that bilingual learners often develop enhanced metalinguistic awareness, which may influence their learning style preferences and adaptability. In the Indonesian bilingual education context, Setiawan and Wulandari (2022) found that students in bilingual programs demonstrated greater flexibility in shifting between learning modalities compared to their peers in monolingual settings.

Contemporary learning styles research acknowledges significant controversy surrounding the "matching hypothesis." Hattie and O'Leary's (2025) synthesis of 17 meta-analyses revealed a striking contrast: studies testing the matching hypothesis yielded negligible effects ($d = 0.04$), while correlational studies showed moderate relationships (average $r = 0.24$). Newton and Salvi (2020) conducted a pragmatic systematic review of beliefs in learning styles neuromyths, finding that while misconceptions persist, the value of learning style assessment lies not in prescriptive matching but in fostering metacognitive awareness and informing diversified instructional approaches that expose students to multiple modalities. Pashler et al. (2009), in their influential critique, similarly cautioned against oversimplified applications of learning styles while acknowledging their utility for promoting student self-awareness and teacher reflexivity.

More recently, Cuevas (2023) proposed a balanced framework for learning styles research, suggesting that the dichotomy between matching hypothesis studies and correlational research may be oversimplified. Instead, he advocates for examining how learning style awareness interacts with other variables such as motivation, prior knowledge, and instructional context to influence learning outcomes.

SMP Gembala Baik Bilingual Class Pontianak represents a unique educational environment where instruction is delivered in both Indonesian and English. This bilingual setting creates distinct opportunities and challenges for English language acquisition. Preliminary observations revealed that while some students demonstrated good English abilities, they expressed that their learning environment and teaching methods did not adequately support their learning preferences. This discrepancy motivated the present investigation.

Understanding these preferences is particularly crucial in bilingual settings where cognitive load may be higher due to dual-language processing (Herdina & Jessner, 2022). Research by Novitasari and Hartono (2024) on bilingual junior high schools in Central Java demonstrated that when teachers accommodated diverse learning styles, students showed improved English proficiency and reduced language anxiety.

Therefore, this study aims to answer: (1) What language learning styles are preferred by students of SMP Gembala Baik Bilingual Class Pontianak based on the VAK model? and (2) Are there significant differences in language learning style preferences between male and female students?

METHODS OF RESEARCH

This study employed a quantitative survey research design. The research was conducted at SMP Gembala Baik Bilingual Class Pontianak, West Kalimantan, during the 2025/2026 academic year. Using coincidental sampling (also referred to as convenience sampling; see Creswell & Creswell, 2023), the

researcher selected five of six bilingual classes, with a final sample of 100 students comprising 38 males (38%) and 62 females (62%) across grades VII, VIII, and IX.

Data were collected using the VAK Learning Styles Self-Assessment Questionnaire (Fleming & Mills, 1992), consisting of 30 items with three response options corresponding to visual, auditory, and kinesthetic preferences. The instrument was translated into Indonesian and adapted for junior high school readability. Students completed the questionnaire independently during regular class sessions.

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages) with the formula $P = \frac{f}{n} \times 100\%$ (Hasan, 2003). Gender comparisons were conducted by calculating separate percentages for male and female students across the three learning style categories.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The sample comprised 100 students (62 female, 38 male). Analysis revealed that visual learning was the most prevalent preference (41%), followed by auditory (33%) and kinesthetic (26%).

Table 1. Learning Style Preferences by Gender (N=100)

Gender	Visual		Auditory		Kinesthetic		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Male	10	26.3%	11	28.9%	17	44.8%	38	100%
Female	31	50.0%	22	35.5%	9	14.5%	62	100%
Total	41	41.0%	33	33.0%	26	26.0%	100	100%

The data reveals distinct variations in learning style preferences between male and female students. Out of the 100 total participants, visual learning was the most common overall preference (41%), followed by auditory (33%) and kinesthetic (26%). However, gender-specific breakdowns show contrasting dominances: female students predominantly favored the visual learning style (50.0%), whereas male students showed a strong preference for the kinesthetic learning style (44.8%).

The predominance of visual learners overall (41%) aligns with Maulina et al. (2025), who reported similar patterns in Eastern Indonesian classrooms where visual preferences dominated due to students' exposure to visually rich media. This finding also corroborates Gilakjani's (2012) assertion that visual learning styles often predominate in technology-rich educational environments. Furthermore, the substantial auditory preference (33%) reflects the bilingual instructional context, where students regularly process verbal instruction in both languages. Baker and Wright (2021) noted that bilingual learners often develop enhanced auditory discrimination skills, which may explain the relatively high auditory preference in this sample.

When examining gender differences, kinesthetic learning was predominant among male participants (44.8%). This resonates with Mandak Putri (2025), who found that male students showed stronger engagement with hands-on activities. Oxford (2023) explained such differences through the lens of socialization, suggesting that males are often encouraged to engage in physical, experiential learning from an early age. Conversely, female participants demonstrated the strongest preference for visual learning (50.0%), which aligns with findings that female students often employ organized note-taking and actively seek visual clarification of concepts. Rahmawati and Suparman (2024) observed similar patterns in their Yogyakarta study, where female students consistently preferred visual materials and organized textual presentations in English learning tasks.

These findings have practical implications for differentiated instruction. Fitra et al. (2025) demonstrated that VAK-differentiated learning significantly improves educational outcomes. Specifically for English language teaching, Maulina et al. (2025) found that aligning instructional strategies with learning styles enhanced speaking skills. Suardi and Ramadhan (2023) provided practical frameworks for implementing such differentiation in Indonesian classrooms, emphasizing that teachers can address multiple learning styles simultaneously through well-designed multimodal activities without requiring individualized lesson plans for each student.

A comparison with previous studies shows a general consistency in the presence of all three styles, though the exact distributions vary: the current study (41% visual, 33% auditory, 26% kinesthetic); Mandak Putri (2025) (35% visual, 55% auditory, 10% kinesthetic); and Maulina et al. (2025) (42% visual, 33% auditory, 25% kinesthetic). Setiawan and Wulandari (2022) reported distributions of 38% visual, 35% auditory, and 27% kinesthetic in their bilingual school sample, closely resembling the current findings and suggesting possible contextual factors unique to bilingual settings. These variations are expected and reflect differences in sample characteristics, specific educational contexts, and subject matter.

Importantly, these findings must be interpreted within the context of the broader "matching hypothesis" debate. Hattie and O'Leary (2025) caution against strong interpretations, noting that precise, individualized matching of instruction to learning styles yields minimal cognitive gains. However, as Newton and Salvi (2020) conclude, learning style assessments retain significant value for fostering student metacognition and informing educators as they design diversified, multimodal instruction. Cuevas (2023) offered a productive middle ground, suggesting that learning style awareness should inform instructional design without rigid prescription, while Pashler et al. (2009) reminded researchers that the failure of the matching hypothesis does not negate the value of understanding learner preferences for promoting engagement and motivation. Novitasari and Hartono (2024) demonstrated that in bilingual contexts, teachers who used learning style information to vary their approaches reduced student anxiety and increased participation, even without precise matching.

CONCLUSION

This study found that visual learning was most prevalent (41%), followed by auditory (33%) and kinesthetic (26%). Significant gender differences emerged: male students preferred kinesthetic learning (44.8%), while female students preferred visual learning (50.0%). These findings align with recent Indonesian research and support differentiated, multimodal instruction in bilingual classrooms. As Cuevas

(2023) and others have suggested, the value of learning style assessment lies not in rigid matching but in fostering metacognitive awareness and guiding diversified instructional design. Teachers should incorporate visual elements, auditory activities, and kinesthetic experiences to accommodate diverse learners. Future research should examine stability of preferences across grade levels and test effectiveness of multimodal interventions..

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