Students' Learning Styles and Their Speaking Proficiency: Evidence from MAN 1 Makassar

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Abstract

This study investigates how different learning styles—visual, auditory, and kinesthetic—influence students' English-speaking performance. Speaking is widely recognized as the most challenging language skill, and students' preferred modes of learning are believed to shape how effectively they develop oral proficiency. Using a descriptive quantitative design, data were collected from eleventh-grade students at MAN 1 Makassar through a learning style questionnaire adapted from the VAK model and a speaking performance test assessed using Heaton's criteria of accuracy, fluency, and comprehensibility. The results reveal clear performance differences across learning style categories. Auditory learners achieved the highest mean score, classified as Very Good, demonstrating strong fluency and clear comprehensibility with only minor pronunciation or grammatical issues. Visual learners obtained a Good classification; they performed well overall but showed noticeable limitations in grammatical accuracy. Kinesthetic learners received a Fairly Good classification, exhibiting moderate ability and particular challenges in fluency, as their speech tended to be fragmented and required more processing time. These findings indicate that students' learning styles are meaningfully associated with their speaking performance, with auditory learners showing the greatest advantage—likely due to their preference for processing spoken input and verbal explanations. Meanwhile, kinesthetic learners may require more interactive, movement-based activities to support their oral production. The study underscores the importance of incorporating varied instructional strategies that align with different learning preferences. Teachers are encouraged to design multimodal speaking activities to ensure equitable support for all learner types and to maximize students' opportunities for successful oral communication.

Keywords: Learning style, Speaking ability, English language learning

Introduction

Language learning is a natural human ability, supported by the theory of Universal Grammar, which allows people to acquire languages instinctively. Language holds a central role in education, serving both as the subject being taught and the primary medium of instruction. It enables communication between teachers and students while also facilitating the learning process itself.

In the context of global communication, language is essential, especially when interacting across different cultures and regions. While communication in a shared native language tends to be smooth, international communication often demands in a widely Speaking a foreign language, especially English, is often considered the most challenging of the four fundamental

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A Research Article

language skills—listening speaking, reading, and writing—speaking is often regarded as the most complex. It involves an active, interactive process of exchanging and constructing meaning. Burharnuddin (2022) defines speaking as a structured form of interaction that requires clarity and repetition. Similarly, Lai-Mei and Seyedeh (2017) identify speaking as the most difficult skill for language learners to master.

In Indonesia, English is a mandatory subject from elementary school through university. However, students often lack sufficient exposure to real-life English conversations, resulting in limited speaking ability. One of the key issues is that teachers frequently focus on the four basic language skills without adapting their instruction to suit students' individual learning preferences.

Learning styles—categorized as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic—play a significant role in how students process and retain new information. Visual learners prefer images and diagrams, auditory learners benefit from listening activities, and kinesthetics' learners perform best through hands-on experiences. According to Pandie, Daik, and Kamau (2018), learning styles are the strategies individuals use to best acquire and apply knowledge. Recognizing and incorporating these styles into teaching methods helps make language learning more effective and personalized.

Motivation also has a major impact on language learning outcomes. Ghaedi and Jam (2014) found that visual learners tend to show higher levels of motivation in higher education settings. Ozen (2017) highlighted that motivated students are more likely to engage actively in learning tasks and achieve better results. Djamaluddin and Wardana (2019) emphasized that learning is an ongoing process that requires both engagement and relevance to be effective.

Although many studies have examined the influence of learning styles on academic achievement and motivation, few have specifically investigated their connection to speaking ability. Some evidence suggests that auditory learners may feel anxious or struggle to concentrate in noisy environments, while kinesthetic learners benefit from movement-based speaking activities. These findings support the idea that students' individual preferences should be considered in the development of teaching strategies.

Past research has often treated learning styles and speaking ability as separate topics. However, understanding how learning preferences directly impact speaking performance is essential. Yulminastri (2019) argues that successful learning depends not only on instruction but also on personal factors such as sensitivity to environmental distractions or the need for physical activity. This highlights the importance of tailoring language instruction to meet the diverse needs of students. Burharnuddin (2022) identified differences in learning styles related to students' speaking ability. Through interviews with students in Class B at SMP UNISMUH Makassar, it was found that two students had a visual learning style, ten were auditory learners, and eight were kinesthetic learners. This suggests a variety of preferred learning methods among students that may affect how they develop speaking skills.

Similarly, Sulastri (2019), in her thesis titled *"The Correlation Between Learning Style and Students' Speaking Ability at Grade VIII SMP Negeri 6 Panyabungan,"* investigated the relationship between learning style and speaking ability. Her research revealed that many students did not understand their own learning preferences, which made it difficult for them to study English effectively. A lack of speaking practice, low motivation, reluctance to speak English, and limited opportunities further contributed to their poor speaking performance. Sulastri's study aimed to find a correlation between learning style and students' speaking ability using a quantitative research method with a correlational design. The study involved 55

participants, selected using a 10% error margin formula. Data collection tools included a learning style questionnaire and a speaking test, with students' speaking performances recorded and analyzed.

In contrast to studies that focused on other language skills, such as Alkubaidi (2014), who found no significant correlation between learning styles and writing achievement among English majors in Saudi Arabia, the current study seeks to examine whether learning styles influence speaking ability. While past research has mostly explored the impact of learning styles on reading, writing, and listening, this study shifts the focus toward speaking. It aims to determine if and how different learning styles—visual, auditory, and kinesthetic—affect students' success in speaking English.

Learning Style

According to Pandie, Daik, and Kamau (2018), learning is a key part of education, shaped by individual learning styles that guide how information is absorbed and applied. Putri (2018) describes learning styles as consistent behavioral patterns in learning, while Jaleel and Thomas (2019) highlight different modalities like acting, reflecting, and visualizing. Oxford (2020) emphasizes learning styles as preferred ways of processing information. Santoso (2021) categorizes them into visual, auditory, and kinesthetic types. Recognizing learning styles allows educators to adapt teaching methods, making learning more effective, inclusive, and personalized to support students' academic success and lifelong learning.

There are three main types of learning styles, as expanded by Fleming (1992): visual, auditory, and kinesthetics'. The following section focuses on these three styles, as they are the ones explored in this study. Visual learners prefer to learn through pictures, diagrams, and written text. They are good at remembering what they see and often take neat notes. Potert (2020) adds that visual learners like demonstrations more than verbal explanations and may have trouble following spoken instructions. Auditory learners, as described by Abdurrahman (2018), learn best by listening. They enjoy lectures, discussions, and explaining things out loud. Sunti (2017) notes that these learners often talk while working, remember spoken information well, and may struggle with writing. Potert (2020) also states that auditory learners are good at imitating sounds and enjoy verbal activities. While, kinesthetics' learners prefer learning through movement and hands-on activities. Pandie, Daik, and Kamau (2018) explain that they understand better by touching and doing. Barliana (2019) adds that these learners like physical activities and often need to move around to focus. According to Potert (2020), they tend to use gestures, enjoy practical tasks, and may struggle with sitting still or writing.

Speaking Ability

Speaking is one of the four essential language skills and plays a crucial role in effective communication, as it enables individuals to express their thoughts, ideas, and emotions clearly and confidently in various social and academic contexts. allowing individuals to express ideas, emotions, and perspectives. Developing speaking proficiency is particularly important for students, as it supports self-expression, critical thinking, and confidence. According to Sari (2019), speaking is central to interpersonal interaction, while Angga (2014) It emphasizes the importance of active listening and mutual engagement as essential components for achieving effective and meaningful communication.

In educational contexts, speaking instruction enhances learners' communicative competence, preparing them for academic and social success. However, mastering spoken English poses challenges due to its complexity, requiring not only vocabulary and grammar but

also fluency, pronunciation, and sociolinguistic awareness. Real-life practice is essential for developing communicative strategies. Factors such as poor reading habits, unequal participation, and limited English exposure can hinder speaking ability (Jooh, 2019). Encouraging student interaction in classrooms is therefore crucial, as it fosters engagement, confidence, and overall improvement in speaking skills (Goble, 2021).

According to Brown (2016), speaking can be categorized into five types: imitative, intensive, responsive, interactive, and extensive. Imitative speaking emphasizes accurate pronunciation and phonological precision, typically practiced through repetition of words, phrases, or sentences without requiring comprehension of meaning. *Intensive* speaking targets specific language features—such as grammar or vocabulary—through short, precise responses. *Responsive* speaking involves short conversational exchanges, like greetings and simple questions, promoting basic interaction. *Interactive* speaking includes more complex dialogues, either transactional (exchanging information) or interpersonal (building relationships). *Extensive* speaking consists of monologues such as speeches or presentations, requiring sustained discourse with minimal audience feedback. While each type plays a role in language learning, this research centres on *intensive speaking*, which emphasizes controlled, brief oral output designed to demonstrate specific linguistic competence. Intensive tasks are suitable for assessments, where learners show proficiency through concise, accurate responses. Unlike extensive speaking, which involves longer performance and broader skills, intensive speaking allows focused evaluation of learners' mastery of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation within a limited linguistic scope.

According to Douglas (2019), speaking consists of five essential components: grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, and pronunciation. Grammar, as defined by Allua and Thompson (2019), provides the structural foundation of language, enabling speakers to form coherent and meaningful sentences. Mastery of grammar is essential for effective communication and clarity in expression. Vocabulary, Thompson (2020) and Neuman & Dwyer (in Bintz, 2011) say that it is the set of words a person knows and uses to talk to other people. People who have a strong vocabulary can say what they mean and understand what others are saying in a variety of situations.

Comprehension involves more than recognizing spoken words; it includes understanding the speaker's intent, context, and meaning. Jooh (2019) emphasized that comprehension is a shared process between speaker and listener, relying on active engagement and cognitive interpretation. Fluency, according to Vanlalhriati & Singh (2018), is the smooth and efficient production of speech under time pressure. It includes not just speed, but also coherence and communicative effectiveness. It reflects a speaker's ability to express ideas spontaneously and accurately.

Pronunciation, as defined by García et al. (2019), involves producing sounds clearly and effectively, including both segmental (individual sounds) and suprasegmental features such as stress, rhythm, and intonation. Proper pronunciation enhances intelligibility and emotional expression in speech. Each of these components contributes to overall speaking proficiency. Grammar and vocabulary provide linguistic tools, comprehension ensures mutual understanding, fluency supports natural delivery, and pronunciation ensures clarity. Together, these elements form the basis of a strong speaking performance. Effective instruction and assessment in speaking must address all five components, as they interact to support clear, accurate, and meaningful communication in real-world contexts.

Method

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design, which aims to present numerical data objectively in order to describe patterns or tendencies related to students' learning styles and their English-speaking performance (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This design was selected because the study did not intend to test hypotheses or examine causal relationships, but rather to identify and describe observable variations in speaking proficiency across different learning style groups.

The participants were eleventh-grade students at MAN 1 Makassar in the 2022/2023 academic year. A total of 30 students were selected using purposive sampling (Sugiyono, 2016). Although the sample size is relatively small, it was chosen based on classroom availability, accessibility, and the need for manageable scoring during the speaking assessment. The sample was considered sufficient for descriptive analysis, as the goal was to represent typical learners within the selected class rather than to generalize findings statistically to a larger population.

Two instruments were used: (1) Learning Style Questionnaire: A closed-ended questionnaire adapted from Neil Fleming's VAK model, consisting of items measuring visual, auditory, and kinesthetic preferences. Responses were used to categorize students into their dominant learning style group; (2) Speaking Performance Test: Students delivered a 5–7-minute speech on the topic *"The Effect of Social Media."* The task was selected because it allows students to demonstrate accuracy, fluency, and comprehensibility in a controlled but communicative context.

Speaking performance was assessed using Heaton's (1998) criteria—accuracy, fluency, and comprehensibility—rated on a scale ranging from *very poor* to *excellent*. To enhance reliability, the speaking tests were evaluated independently by two raters: the English teacher and the researcher. Inter-rater scoring discrepancies were discussed until agreement was reached. A summary rubric describing the scoring categories was used to ensure consistency across ratings.

Data from the questionnaire and speaking test were analyzed descriptively. Frequencies and percentages were calculated to summarize the distribution of learning styles and speaking performance levels. Scores were presented in tabular form to illustrate trends across the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic groups. No inferential statistics or advanced statistical procedures were applied.

Results and Discussion

Results

Speaking Performance Based on Students' Learning Styles.

The subsequent findings in this study present the results of students' speaking ability tests, aimed at determining the influence of their learning styles on their speaking performance. The test was carried out on 30 students, each with a different learning style. Following are the student test results:

Visual Learning Style

The table presents an evaluation based on criteria such as accuracy, fluency, and comprehensibility, offering a detailed analysis of the students' language proficiency, as shown in the table below.

Table 1. Student speaking test results

Criteria	Rating	Description
Accuracy	4	Pronunciation remains moderately influenced by the speaker's mother tongue, though it does not result in significant phonological errors. While there may be some grammatical and lexical mistakes, only one or two major errors may lead to confusion.
Fluency	5	The speaker occasionally needs to make an effort to find the right words; however, the overall delivery remains smooth, with only a few unnatural pauses.
Comprehensibility	5	The speaker's intentions and overall meaning are generally clear, though occasional listener interruptions may be required for clarification.
Total		14
Average		4.6
Classification		Good

As can be seen on the table 1, the results from the student speaking test provide a detailed evaluation of three students, each representing a different learning style, with a focus on those with a visual learning preference. The accuracy rating of 4 indicates that while These students' pronunciation is moderately influenced by their mother tongue; however, they do not display any serious phonological errors. While there are some grammatical and lexical mistakes, they are generally minor and do not significantly hinder communication. mistakes, these do not significantly hinder understanding. In terms of fluency, the students received a rating of 5, suggesting that they generally deliver their speech smoothly, even though they occasionally search for words, resulting in a few unnatural pauses. Comprehensibility also scored a 5, reflecting that the students' intentions and overall messages are clear, with only minor interruptions from listeners seeking clarification. With a total score of 14 and an average rating of 4.6, the students fall into the "Good" classification, showcasing their strong speaking abilities, particularly in fluency and comprehensibility. However, this also highlights the need for improvement in accuracy.

Auditory Learning Style

The table evaluates criteria such as accuracy, fluency, and comprehensibility, providing a detailed analysis of the students' language proficiency. As can be seen on the table below.

Table 2. Student speaking test results

Criteria	Rating	Description
Accuracy	6	Pronunciation is only minimally influenced by the speaker's mother tongue, with only two or three minor grammatical or lexical errors present.
Fluency	5	The speaker occasionally needs to make an effort to search for words; nevertheless, the overall delivery remains smooth, with only a few unnatural pauses.
Comprehensibility	4	Most of what the speaker says is easy to follow, and their intentions are consistently clear. However, several interruptions are required to assist in conveying the message and seeking clarification.
Total		15
Average		5
Classification		Very Good

As can be seen on the table 2, the results are the evaluation of the speaking test for the student with the auditory learning style provides insights into their language proficiency across three criteria: pronunciation, fluency, and comprehensibility. With an accuracy rating of 6, the

student's pronunciation is only slightly influenced by their mother tongue, and the presence of two or three minor grammatical or lexical errors indicates a strong command of the language. In terms of fluency, they received a rating of 5, suggesting that while they occasionally need to search for words, their overall delivery remains smooth with only a few unnatural pauses. Comprehensibility scored a 4, indicating that most of what they communicate is easy to follow, and their intentions are generally clear, although some interruptions are needed for clarification. With a total score of 15 and an average rating of 5, the student falls into the "Very Good" classification, demonstrating effective speaking abilities and highlighting the positive impact of the auditory learning style on their language proficiency.

Kinesthetic Learning Style

The table evaluates criteria such as accuracy, fluency, and comprehensibility, providing a detailed analysis of the students' language proficiency, as illustrated in the table below.

Table 3. Student speaking test results

Criteria	Rating	Description
Accuracy	4	Pronunciation is still moderately influenced by the speaker's mother tongue; however, there are no serious phonological errors. Although a few grammatical and lexical mistakes are present, only one or two major errors cause confusion.
Fluency	3	The speaker frequently needs to make a considerable effort to express ideas and often struggles to find the intended meaning. The delivery is somewhat halting and fragmented, with a limited range of expression.
Comprehensibility	4	Most of what the speaker says is easy to follow, and their intentions are generally clear; however, several interruptions are necessary to assist in conveying the message and seeking clarification.
Total		11
Average		3,7
Classification		Fairly Good

This speaking test result is from a student with a kinesthetic learning style and provides valuable insights into their language proficiency across three main criteria: accuracy, fluency, and comprehensibility. The student received a rating of 4 for accuracy, indicating that their pronunciation is moderately influenced by their mother tongue, with no serious phonological errors present. However, there are a few grammatical and lexical mistakes, including one or two major errors that may cause confusion. In terms of fluency, the student scored a 3, suggesting they often struggle to express themselves and frequently search for the right words. Their delivery is somewhat halting and fragmented, reflecting a limited range of expression. Finally, for comprehensibility, the student received a rating of 4, indicating that most of what they say is relatively easy to follow, and their intentions are clear, though several interruptions are needed for clarification. With a total score of 11 and an average rating of 3.7, the student is classified as "Fairly Good," highlighting a moderate level of speaking proficiency while also indicating areas for improvement.

Based on the speaking test results, it can be seen that students with an auditory learning style achieved the highest performance, with a total score of 15 and an average rating of 5, classified as "Very Good." Visual learners followed with a total score of 14 and an average of 4.6 ("Good"), while kinesthetic learners had the lowest performance, with a score of 11 and an average of 3.7 ("Fairly Good"). These findings suggest that students with auditory learning preferences have an advantage in developing speaking skills, possibly because they are more familiar with processing spoken language. On the other hand, kinesthetic learners require more

targeted strategies to improve fluency and accuracy in speaking tasks. Therefore, learning style appears to be a factor influencing students' speaking abilities, with auditory learners demonstrating better performance in this context.

Discussions

Learning style refers to a set of different characteristics that outline students' preferred ways of learning, along with the instructional techniques that shape their cognition, learning environment, and engagement with the subject matter (Fauzan et al., 2020). To assess and clarify these learning styles, the researchers used a questionnaire containing 14 statements as a basis for understanding students' learning preferences.

This study focuses on the VAK learning styles model proposed by Fleming (1987), which categorizes learners into three types: Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetics'. Consequently, the research findings are cantered on these three dimensions, as they represent the primary learning styles commonly observed among students learning English in Indonesia. Based on the questionnaire results, the researcher found that the auditory learning style was the most preferred among eleventh-grade students at MAN 1 Makassar. Visual learning emerged as the second most preferred style, followed by kinesthetics' learning as the least preferred. The results of this study align with findings from Arsyad & Sari (2024), which indicated that auditory learning is the most common style among students. Auditory learners benefit significantly from verbal instructions and discussions with teachers and classmates (Karisma & Hamzah, 2025). These learners typically prefer listening to the lecturer or an audio recording rather than watching PowerPoint presentations, highlighting their inclination toward verbal communication and auditory input.

Moreover, Rahmawati and Sari (2022) found that auditory learners show a strong preference for learning activities that involve listening and verbal interaction. Specifically, these learners benefit most from attending lectures where information is conveyed orally, actively participating in oral presentations that allow them to practice their speaking and listening skills, and following detailed verbal instructions given by teachers. This study highlights that auditory learners understand and remember information more effectively when it is presented through verbal explanations, discussions, and auditory aids such as recorded lectures, audio materials, or teacher-led explanations. These learners tend to experience less difficulty with material presented in oral form compared to written text, and they often use repetition and verbal practice as strategies to internalize new concepts.

In contrast, Visual learners are characterized by their preference for visual stimuli and concrete representations to aid in understanding and processing information. Based on the results of the questionnaire, 10 out of 30 students stated that they liked the visual learning style. According to Fleming (2006), visual learners benefit from engaging with graphical elements, such as diagrams, charts, and illustrations, which enhance their ability to comprehend and retain information.

Study conducted by Masic et al. (2020) found that Indonesian students showed a strong preference for visual learning styles. Most of the students tend to learn towards utilizing visual media like diagrams and illustrations in their English learning process. Furthermore, research by Budianto et al. (2022) also supports this finding, emphasizing that the effective use of visual aids enhances student motivation and participation in the learning process. Putra and Utami (2023) also emphasize the importance of adapting teaching strategies to students' visual learning preferences, which facilitates better understanding and engagement. These findings

highlight the critical role of recognizing and integrating diverse learning styles, especially visual learning, to improve educational outcomes.

Kinesthetics' learners are individuals who primarily engage in physical activities as a means to acquire, comprehend, or internalize information (LeFever, 2011). This is evident in students who frequently engage in physical movement during the learning process. They participate actively by moving around, presenting in front of the class, and often find it difficult to remain seated for long periods. Such physical involvement helps them feel more comfortable and enhances their comprehension of the material being taught. According to Porter and Hernacki (2000), in this learning modality, understanding and memory are more effectively achieved through tactile interaction or physical touch.

Several studies have indicated that a significant number of students prefer kinesthetics' learning (Fendrik et al., 2022; Ibrahim & Hussein, 2016). Individuals with a kinesthetics' learning tendency often achieve better learning outcomes when they are physically engaged in hands-on activities. However, based on the results of the questionnaire in this study, kinesthetics' learning was the least preferred style among eleventh-grade students at MAN 1 Makassar, with most students favouring auditory and visual modalities instead. There were only 6 out of 30 students who used kinesthetics' as a learning style. This limited representation highlights the challenges faced by kinesthetics' learners in traditional classroom settings, where physical activity may be minimal. As noted by Felder and Silverman (1988), kinesthetics' learners often struggle in educational environments that do not accommodate their need for movement, leading to decreased focus and Students may struggle to maintain attention in the absence of external stimulation. Without movement or active engagement initiated by the teacher, they are more likely to lose focus. During lectures, such students might take notes primarily as a way to keep their hands active. When reading, they often prefer to scan the material initially before concentrating on specific details in order to grasp the overall meaning.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that students' learning styles contribute meaningfully to their English-speaking performance. Auditory learners achieved the highest results and were classified as "Very Good," reflecting their strength in processing spoken input and expressing ideas fluently. Visual learners demonstrated "Good" performance, showing strong comprehension but occasional issues with accuracy. Meanwhile, kinesthetic learners received a "Fairly Good" classification and experienced greater challenges, particularly in fluency, likely due to the limited physical engagement provided in conventional classroom activities.

These results suggest that instructional practices aligned with auditory and visual modalities tend to support speaking development more effectively than those suited for kinesthetic learners. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to incorporate multimodal teaching strategies—such as a combination of visual aids, listening activities, and movement-based tasks—to ensure equitable support for all learners.

Future studies could involve a larger and more diverse sample to strengthen generalizability, or adopt a mixed-methods approach to explore deeper qualitative insights into how learning styles interact with speaking performance. Expanding the scope of tasks and assessment types may also provide a more comprehensive understanding of learners' oral proficiency.

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