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## THE EFL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AND ENGLISH READING STYLES: EVIDENCE FROM ONE ENGLISH EDUCATION PROGRAM

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### Abstract

The study was aimed to investigate the students' English reading learning styles used by EFL undergraduate students. The participants were students from one English study program at Faculty Teacher Training and Education in Jambi, which aims to produce teachers in English teaching. This study used total sampling with 75 participants consisting of 22 participants in the second semester, and 53 participants in the sixth semester. The analysis of the data was based on the students' response to twenty five statements that consist of five parts: there are auditory, kinesthetic, group, visual, and individual. For which they were required to choose any of five alternatives namely strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree, and strongly disagree. The results revealed that the most preferred reading learning style among the respondents was the auditory learning style and the least is visual learning style. Then, for the gender male used kinesthetic learning style and female used auditory learning style. In this study, suggestions for future research, students, lectures and university are also discussed.

**Keywords:** learning style, auditory, kinesthetic, group, visual, individual, survey research

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## Introduction

Nowadays, one of the foremost aimed in learning English as a foreign language is to increase awareness of learners' learning differences and their possible impacts on the learning process and results. There exist a number of factors affecting the success of foreign language learning. Reid (1987) claimed that among the factors influencing how learners learn was learning styles. Learners have one of more learning styles in learning process. Fleming (2001) defined learning style as "an individual's characteristics and preferred ways of gathering, organizing, and thinking about information" (p.1), Celcia-Murcia (2001) argued that learning styles were related to the general approaches including-global or analytic, auditory or visual—that learners apply in acquiring a new language or in learning something. Grasha (1996) defined it as, "personal qualities that influence a student's ability to acquire information, to interact with peers and the teacher, and otherwise participate in learning experiences" (p. 41). In other words, learning style refers to how a person gathers, understands, organizes, judges, and processes information that she or he receives from her or his environment. Reid (1987) identified six types of learning styles including auditory (listening to lectures and tapes), visual (reading and studying diagram), Kinesthetic (physical activity and movement), tactile (hands-on, doing lab experiments), group (studying with others or in group), and individual learning (studying alone).

Information about learning style can help teachers and lecturers become more sensitive to the differences that learners bring to the language classroom as indicated by previous studies such as Ahmed (2012), Sywelem, Al-Harbi, Fathema, and Witte (2014), Sivanandan, Letchumanan, Ramayah, Nasrijal, and Leong (2014), Ibrahim and Ramli (2010), Wu (2010), Park (1997), Wang and Huang (2006), Hayashi and Cherry (2004), Hyland (1993), and Reid (1987). Then, Wu (2010) who studied the pattern of language – learning style (LLSYs) and language – learning motivation (LLM) of ESL learners studying at a vocational institute in Hongkong found that among the six types of style preferences (visual, auditory, tactile, Kinesthetic, group and individual style), auditory preference was the most popular, followed by Kinesthetic and group preferences and the least popular was visual preference followed by individual preference. While Hyland's (1993) study on Japanese learners found that they favored Auditory and Tactile styles, and disfavored Visual and Group styles, Reid (1987) reported that Chinese university learners studying in the USA favored Kinesthetic and Tactile styles, and disfavored Group styles.

As indicated in previous studies, learners learn in various different styles. Some of them are visual (by means of charts, graphs, and pictures) while others are auditory (listening to lectures and reading) or Kinesthetic (learning by doing). Learners may prefer one, two, or three learning styles and due to these different learning styles, it is essential for teachers to be aware of the differences in learning styles. Until now, regardless of the significant volume of studied on learning styles in learning English as a foreign language that has been documented in scholarly journals and articles, most of them studied learning styles and language learning in general. Currently, research focuses on Indonesian EFL undergraduate learners' reading learning styles in learning English as a foreign language in the classroom is understudied. This study was intended to fill the gap by investigating the English reading learning styles (auditory, visual, Kinesthetic, group, and individual styles) used by EFL undergraduate learners so they can achieve the target language at one public university in Jambi. To achieve the purpose of the study, the study attempted to answer the question: What types of the reading learning styles do EFL undergraduate learners at one public university in Jambi use?

## Methodology

### *Research design and approach of the study*

This study employed quantitative method with a survey approach. According to Creswell (2012, p.13), “the quantitative method is an approach used to describe a research problem through analyzing trends, comparing groups, or relating variables using statistical analysis, and interpreting results by comparing them with prior predictions or previous research”. In here, the researchers investigated a research problem based on trends in the field or on the need to explain why something occurs. This method matched with the study to find out learners’ learning style in reading and also quantify the data. For these reasons, the researchers used a survey research methodology and designed a questionnaire survey instrument to assess the learners’ learning style in reading.

### *Research site, access, and sample*

The site for this research was at one public university in Jambi Province, Indonesia. To get access to research site among people networking sources, the researchers got permission from the head of English education program and the dean of faculty of teacher training and education at the research site. Then, in conducting the survey research, the researchers confirmed the lecturers to get permission for asking their learners to contribute in this research. Finally, the researchers asked the participants to contribute in this research. Population is a group of people who have one characteristic that different them from another group (Creswell 2012). In this study, the population chosen by the researchers consists of people that would be involved as the participants in the study is the English department’s learners at one of public university in Jambi would be involved as the participants in this research, they still learned and had passed reading skill. The sample in this study was the learners of English study program. This study used a *target population* or *sampling frame*. There were one class in the second semester with the total number of participants was 22 students and two classes in the six semester with 53 students.

### *Data collection procedures*

Questionnaire was used in this study. The researchers used *Likert scale* that consists of a series of statements all of which are related to a particular target: ranging from *Strongly agree*, *agree*, *Not Sure*, *disagree* and *Strongly disagree*. The participants would give a symbol or mark (v) on the table that is provided.

In this study, the questionnaires were constructed into two categories: (1) demographic background and (2) statements relating to student learning style in learning reading English, divided into five types of learning Style: Visual Auditory and Kinesthetic, Individual and Group. First, in the demographic background, the participants would be asked to complete about: their name, place of birth, previous senior high school, the name of the college attended, semester and gender. Second, the participants would be asked which chose statements regarding their learning style in learning reading.

In terms of data collection, survey was conducted through distributing questionnaires to English student teachers at one public university in Jambi. Furthermore, in conducted the survey,

the researchers asked the lecturers first and got permission and then the researchers asked the participants to contribute in this study. Finally, the participants would be asked to complete the questionnaires in the beginning at the end of their course for about 15 minutes. There are some steps of data collection.

*Permission*, in this step, the researchers would ask permission from the dean of the faculty of teacher training and education, the head of English education program, and also some lecturers by giving the formal letter for doing this research.

*Giving invitation letter and inform consent form*, in this step, the researchers gave the invitation letter and the inform consent form to ensure the learners to be the participants in this study. In addition, in this step the researchers would explain briefly about this research to make them understand and get general understanding about the research and the questionnaire that would be distributed.

*Distributing the questionnaire*, in here, the researchers collected the data of the participants by distributing the questionnaires. The researchers distributed the questionnaires for learners that had been ready and agreed to participate in this study. The researchers provided 15-20 minutes as the time to answer the questionnaire. After that time, the researchers collected the questionnaires to be analyzed.

*Reliability of the questionnaire*, in this study, the researchers adapted from the previous questionnaires used by other researchers. In addition, those kinds of learning styles had 25 questions in the questionnaire based on type of learning styles there are visual learning style, auditory learning style, Kinesthetic learning style, group learning style and individual learning style. However, to test the consistency of participants' choices and provide for data reliability, the questionnaire was tested with another group of undergraduate learners. Based on the pilot study, revisions would be used. In this study, to found out the reliability coefficient for the questionnaire, this study would use the Cronbach's Alpha Formula.

## ***Data analysis***

In analyzing the data, descriptive statistics are used to describe the data of the respondents' demographic background. It means that descriptive statistics proposes a tidy way of presented the data. For this study, the researchers decided to compare group percentages for describing the results. Since one of the purposes of this study is to know the learners learning style in reading, concerning with their backgrounds. Then, to describe the result, the researchers needed to calculate the percentages in learning English language skills. By using the formula of participants' choice of each item divided by the number of participants and multiplied by 100%.

## **Findings**

The purpose of this study was to analyze the student's English reading learning styles at one public university in Jambi. This study used a quantitative design with a survey approach, in survey research the attitudes were usually measured by using rating scales, following the five-point agreement scale. The site for this study was one Public University in Jambi Province, Indonesia.

### *Reliabilities of the questionnaire*

The result of try out showed the reliability of the questionnaire was 0.863. since the result of the reliability calculation was bigger than 0.7 based on the Cronbach alpha, it means that this questionnaire was reliable to be used in this research.

### *Types of the reading learning styles of EFL undergraduate learners*

According to Kolb (1984), learning style is a method of personal choice to perceive and process information. In this study, the researchers used the five of learning styles including Auditory, Kinesthetic, Group, Visual, and Individual.

**Auditory learning style**, this category consists of five items to find out learners' learning style in reading based on the visual learning style. The Statements are no. 1, 7, 9, 14, 17. The data presented that 41 respondents chose "agree" for the statement of "*In reading course, I understand better when the teachers read the instruction.*" Then it was followed by 15 respondents chose "not sure", 11 respondents chose "strongly agree", 8 respondents chose "disagree," and no one respondent chose "strongly disagree." Additionally, the data exhibited that 50 respondents chose "agree" for the statement of "*when someone or teacher tells me how to do something in class, I learn it better in reading course.*" Then it was followed by 12 respondents chose "Not Sure", 11 respondents chose "strongly agree", 2 respondents chose "disagree" and no one respondent chose "strongly disagree." Furthermore, the data disclosed that 46 respondents chose "agree" for the statement of "*In reading course, I remember lessons that I have read in class better lessons I have heard.*" Then, it was followed by 24 respondents chose "Not Sure", 2 respondents chose "strongly agree", 2 respondents chose "disagree" and 1 respondent chose "strongly disagree." Our data also indicated that 51 respondents chose "agree" for the statement of "*I understand better in reading course when the teacher give the lectures,*" then it was followed by 15 respondents chose "Not Sure", 9 respondents chose "strongly agree", no one "disagree" and "strongly disagree." Next, our data revealed that 48 respondents chose "agree" for the statement of "*I understand better in reading class when I listen to someone or teacher,*" then it was followed by 13 respondents chose "Not Sure", 11 respondents chose "strongly agree", 3 respondents chose "disagree" and no one respondent chose "strongly disagree."

**Kinesthetic learning style**, this category consists of five items to find out learners' learning style in reading including statements No. 2,8,13,16,21. Our data displayed that 48 respondents (64%) chose "agree" for the statement of "*In reading course, I like better to learn by doing something,*" then it was followed by 18 respondents chose "Not Sure", 8 respondents chose "strongly agree", 1 respondent chose "disagree" and no one respondent chose "strongly disagree." Additionally, our data presented that 50 respondents chose "agree" for the statement of "*I learn better when I do things in reading course,*" then it was followed by 14 respondents chose "Not Sure", 9 respondents chose "strongly agree", 1 respondent chose "disagree" and 1 respondent chose "strongly disagree." Next, the obtained data displayed that 46 respondents chose "agree" for the statement of "*In reading course, I like learning by doing experiments,*" then it was followed by 19 respondents chose "Not Sure", 7 respondents chose "strongly agree", 2 respondents chose "disagree" and 1 respondent chose "strongly disagree." Our data also revealed that 43 respondents chose "agree" for the statement of "*I learn things better in reading class when I involve in role-playing,*" then it was followed by 12 respondents chose "Not Sure", 9 respondents (12%) chose "strongly agree", 11 respondents chose "disagree" and no one respondent

chose “strongly disagree.” Last, our data showed that 47 respondents chose “agree” for the statement of “*I understand best in reading course when I can involve in related activities,*” then it was followed by 17 respondents chose “Not Sure”, 10 respondents chose “strongly agree”, 1 respondent chose “disagree” and no one respondent chose “strongly disagree.”

**Group learning style**, this category consists of five items to find out learners’ learning style in reading, they are statements no. 3,4,5,18,19. Our data showed that 46 respondents chose “agree” for the statement of “*in reading class I get more work done when I work with other learners,*” then it was followed by 16 respondents chose “Not Sure”, 10 respondents chose “strongly agree”, 3 respondents chose “disagree” and no one respondent chose “strongly disagree”. Also, the data showed that 46 respondents chose “agree” for the statement of “*in reading course, when I study with a group, I will learn more,*” then it was followed by 14 respondents chose “not sure”, 11 respondents chose “strongly agree”, 3 respondents chose “disagree” and 1 respondent chose “strongly disagree.” Next, the data showed that 50 respondents chose “agree” for the statement of “*in reading course, I learn best when I work with other learners.*” then it was followed by 13 respondents chose “Not sure”, 8 respondents chose “strongly agree”, 4 respondents chose “disagree” and no one respondent chose “strongly disagree”. Moreover, the data displayed that 47 respondents chose “agree” for the statement of “*I like doing on a task with two or three learners in reading course.*” Then it was followed by 12 respondents chose “not sure”, 11 respondents chose “strongly agree”, 4 respondents chose “disagree” and 1 respondent chose “strongly disagree.” Last, our data indicated that 41 respondents chose “agree” for the statement of “*in reading course, I prefer to study with other learners,*” then it was followed by 20 respondents chose “Nor sure”, 10 respondents chose “strongly agree”, 3 respondents chose “disagree” and 1 respondent chose “strongly disagree.”

**Visual learning style**, this category consists of five items to find out learners’ learning style in reading, they are statements no. 6,10,11,20,24. Our findings data showed that 46 respondents chose “Agree” for the statement of “*In reading course, I learn better by reading what the teacher writes on the whiteboard,*” then it was followed by 22 respondents chose “Not sure”, 7 respondents chose “strongly agree”, no respondent chose “Disagree” and no one chose “strongly disagree.” Next, our findings indicated that 45 respondents chose “Agree” for the statement of “*In reading course, I remember the instruction better when I read the instruction than when I listen to them,*” then it was followed by 16 respondents chose “Not sure”, 12 respondents chose “strongly agree”, 1 respondents chose “Disagree”, and 1 respondents chose “strongly disagree.” Also, our data showed that 47 respondents chose “Agree” for the statement of “*In reading course, reading instruction makes me more understand than listening to them.*” Then it was followed by 14 respondents chose “Not sure”, 13 respondents chose “strongly agree”, and 1 respondent chose “strongly disagree” and no one chose “disagree.” Then, our data exhibited that 33 respondents chose “Agree” for the statement of “*I learn better by reading than by listening to teachers,*” then it was followed by 25 respondents chose “Not sure”, 11 respondents chose “strongly agree”, 4 respondents chose “disagree” and 1 respondent (1.4%) chose “strongly disagree.” Last, the data disclosed that 31 respondents chose “Not sure” for the statement of “*In reading course, I understand more by reading course book than by listening to lectures,*” then it was followed by 30 respondents chose “Agree”, 11 respondents chose “strongly agree”, 3 respondents chose “disagree” and no respondent chose “strongly disagree.”

**Individual learning style**, this category consists of five items to look at learners’ learning style in reading. Our findings showed that 42 respondents chose “agree” for the statement of “*in reading course when I study by myself, I remember things better,*” Then it was followed by 21 respondents chose “not sure”, 8 respondents chose “strongly agree”, 3 respondents chose “disagree” and 1

respondent chose “strongly disagree.” Also, the data showed that 36 respondents chose “agree” for the statement of “*in reading course when I work alone I understand better,*” then it was followed by 25 respondents chose “not sure”, 9 respondents chose “strongly agree”, 5 respondents chose “disagree” and no respondent chose “strongly disagree.” Our findings showed that 41 respondents chose “agree” for the statement of “*in reading course I learn better when I learn alone.*” Then it was followed by 21 respondents chose “not sure”, 6 respondents chose “strongly agree” and also 6 respondents chose “disagree” and 1 respondent chose “strongly disagree.” Next, the data showed that 40 respondents chose “agree” for the statement of “*in reading course, I like to work on project by myself,*” then it was followed by 18 respondents chose “not sure”, 11 respondents chose “strongly agree”, 5 respondents chose “disagree” and 1 respondent chose “strongly disagree.” Last, the data showed that 39 respondents chose “agree” for the statement of “*in reading course, I like to work by myself.*” Then it was followed by 21 respondents chose “not sure”, 9 respondents chose “strongly agree”, 6 respondents chose “disagree” and no one respondent chose “strongly disagree.”

## Discussion

The aim of this study was to find out the student’s English reading learning styles at one public university in Jambi. Based on the previous studies, there were many kinds of learning style that learners have. Then there were categorized into five kinds of learning style that were Auditory learning style, Kinesthetic learning style, Group learning style, Visual learning style, and individual learning style. Within this study, five categories of learning style that included twenty five reasons related to the research question based on the questionnaire, that what types of the reading learning styles do EFL undergraduate learners at one public university in Jambi use? In this case, the researchers used the previous studies as the lens of study. There were various reasons had been classified into five learning styles: Auditory, Kinesthetic, Group, Visual, and Individual. (Ahmed (2012), Sywelem, Al-Harbi, Fathema, and Witte (2014), Sivanandan, Letchumanan, Ramayah, Nasrijal, and Leong (2014), Noormala and Hidayah (2010), Wu (2010), Park (2009), Wang, Wang, Wang, and Huang (2006), Hayashi and Cherry (2004), Hyland (1994), and Reid (1987). The following part discussed the finding of the learners learning style in reading under Auditory, Kinesthetic, Group, Visual, and Individual learning style based on the questionnaire.

Learners learn usually used comfortable learning style. From the results of the questionnaire, the researchers found the higher percentage learning style in Reading skill is Auditory learning style with the high percentage 64%, and followed by Kinesthetic learning style 62%, Group learning style 58%, Individual 52.6%, and the last Visual 53.58%. Learning style is as an individual preferred or habitual ways of processing and transforming knowledge. In addition, when the learners study reading skills, almost of them used auditory learning style. While, in auditory learning style learners understand better when the teacher reads the instruction, listen someone tells something, it means that learners usually listen to the teacher in learning English reading.

*Auditory learning styles* are reasons that influence and encourage female and male’s learner’s English reading in learning styles. In addition, this learning style is known as social reasons that are closely related to “In reading course, I understand better when the teacher reads the instructions, When someone or teacher tells me how to do something in class, I learn it better in reading course, in reading course, I remember lessons that I have read in class better than lesson I have heard, I understand better in reading course when the teacher gives a lecture, I understand better in reading class when I listen to someone or teachers.” The findings of Auditory Learning style showed and

discussed based on the highest percentage of each reason. In addition, auditory learning style for females showed that 78% chose agree. It means that in reading course, learners (females) understand better when the teacher tells the instruction. While auditory learning style for males showed that 92% chose agree. It means that in reading course, the learners (males) remember lessons that have read in class better than the lesson have them heard. Then auditory learning style preference for aural information that is heard or spoken (Fleming & Mills, 1992).

*Kinesthetic learning styles*, according to Fleming and Mills (1992), kinesthetic learning style preference is related to the use of experience and practice. Based on the previous studies, the researchers had considered some reason as kinesthetic learning style like “In reading course I like better to learn by doing something, I learn better when I do things in reading course, In reading course I like learning by doing experiment, i learn things better in reading class when I involve in role –playing, I understand best in reading course when I can involve in related activities. The findings of kinesthetic Learning style were showed and discussed based on the highest percentage of each reason. In addition, kinesthetic learning style for females showed that 66% chose agree. It means that in reading course, learners (females) better to learn by doing something. While kinesthetic learning style for males showed that 84% chose agree. It means that in reading course, the learners (males) like learning by doing experiment.

*Group learning styles* are reasons that influence and encourage female and male learners English reading in learning style. In addition, this learning style is known as social reasons that are close related to “In reading class I get more work done when i work with other learners, In reading course when i study with a group i will learn more, in reading course learn best when I work in other learners, I like doing on a task with two or three learners in reading course, in reading course I prefer to study with other learners.” The findings of group learning style were showed and discussed based on the highest percentage of each reason. In addition, group learning style for females showed that 72% chose agree. It means that in reading course, learners (female) like doing on a task with two or three learners in reading course. While group learning style for male showed that 72% chose agree. It means that in reading course, the learners (male) learn best when I work in other learners. Based on the research, most of the females and males had the same percentage which chose agree in different statements. According to Reid (1987 as cited in Wu, 2010) “‘Group learners’, as opposed to ‘Individual’ learners, when the learners learn is more effective to learn when they are in groups than alone.

*Visual learning styles* are reasons that influence and encourage female and male learners English reading in learning style. In addition, this learning style are known as social reasons that are closely related to “In reading course I learn better by reading what the teacher write on the whiteboard, In reading course I remember the instruction better when i read instruction than when I listen them, In reading course reading instruction make me more understand than listening to them, I learn better by reading than by listening to teacher, In reading course I understand more by reading oursebook than by listening to lectures.” The findings of visual learning style were showed and discussed based on the highest percentage of each reason. In addition, visual learning style for female showed that 66% chose agree. It means that in reading course, learners (female) learn better by reading what the teacher write on the whiteboard. While visual learning style for male showed that 72% chose agree. It means that in reading course, the learners (male) remember the instruction better when I read instruction than when I listen to them.” Visual learning styles are Preference for graphical and symbolic ways of representing information (Fleming & Mills, 1992).

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*Individual learning styles*, according to Reid (1987 as cited in Wu, 2010), “‘Group learners’, as opposed to ‘Individual’ learners, when the learners learn its more effective to learn when they are in groups than alone. The reasons that influence and encourage female and males learners English reading in learning style. In addition, this learning style is known as social reasons that are closely related to “‘In reading course when I study by myself I remember things better, In reading course when I work alone I understand better, In reading course I learn better when i learn alone, In reading course I like to work on project by myself, In reading course I like to work by myself.”

The findings of individual learning style were showed and discussed based on the highest percentage of each reason. In addition, individual learning style for females showed that 58% chose agree. It means that in reading course, learners (female) like to work on project by myself. While individual learning style for male showed that 68% chose agree. It means that in reading course, the learners (male) remember things better when study by themselves.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the English reading learning styles (auditory, visual, Kinesthetic, group, and individual styles) used by EFL undergraduate learners so they can achieve the target language at one public university in Jambi. On the whole, a successful learner learns in the several ways. Every learner has dominance in one or more styles of learning within the type of learning style including auditory learning style, kinesthetic learning style, group learning style, visual learning style and individual learning style. Auditory learning style is a learning style that learners usually learn through listening, learning best in discussion and have highly developed auditory skills and are generally like listening to what others have to say. Kinesthetic learning style is one of the learning styles that usually learners express themselves through movement, learning through moving, doing and touching, remembering the process information through interacting with the space around them, more activities and also explorations, hands on and doing the experiment. In group learning style, learners tend to learn with other learners. Here the learners need some interactions in learning processes. Visual learning style, usually learners learn through seeing, enjoying looking at map, chart, and pictures and having visual skills which are demonstrated by reading and interpreting visual images. And the last, individual learning styles commonly have characteristics including learning alone Based on the finding of this study, almost learners chose “agree” with the auditory learning style when they learn English reading. However, between males and females have different learning styles. Male students in English reading skill tended to be kinesthetic while female students tended to be auditory.

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