TEACHERS’ STRATEGIES IN DEALING WITH STUDENTS’ VARIOUS LEARNING STYLES

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Sarjana Pendidikan

VICTORIA EVANGELISTA
NIM: 112012047

ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION PROGRAM
FACULTY OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
SATYA WACANA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
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THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Sarjana Pendidikan

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SATYA WACANA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

SALATIGA

2016
TEACHERS’ STRATEGIES IN DEALING WITH STUDENTS’ VARIOUS
LEARNING STYLES

Victoria Evangelista

ABSTRACT
There will always be a possibility that a mismatch may occur between students’ learning styles and their teachers’ teaching style. This mismatch commonly results in students’ lack of understanding and motivation in learning the target language. Therefore, teachers’ strategies are needed to overcome this problem. This study aims to investigate teachers’ strategies in dealing with students’ various learning styles in English classes of several senior high schools in Salatiga. 12 English teachers from six different senior high schools; three private schools and three public schools, were interviewed. The results of the interviews were classified based on three strategies which derived from Bacay’s (2006) study: (1) requiring the students to adjust to teachers’ teaching style (more teacher-centered); (2) adjusting to students learning styles (more learner-centered); and (3) balancing between numbers 1 & 2. In general, there are two main factors that may influence a teacher to use a certain strategy—what I refer to as internal and external factors. The former includes teachers’ beliefs about effective teaching, their power, or their students’ needs. Whereas, the latter, may include limited time, government policy, materials or topics of the lesson, and most probably the average amount of students they teach in one class. It was found that the strategy mostly used was the third strategy, the second was the first strategy, and the least used was the second strategy due to the factors mentioned above.

Key words: strategies, learning styles

INTRODUCTION
A language classroom typically contains students who have different learning styles. As explained by Oxford (2003), learning style refers to “the general approach preferred by the student when learning a subject, acquiring a language, or dealing with difficult problem” (p. 273). According to her, there are different learning styles, namely sensory style dimensions (visual/auditory/hands-on), social style dimension (extroverted/introverted), and cognitive style dimension (concrete-sequential/abstract intuitive, closure-oriented/open, detail focused/holistic, analyzing/synthesizing).
Learning style varies between one student and the other, where a learning style preferred by a particular student may well be unsuitable for certain other students.

To discuss the issue of this paper in the context of English Language Training (ELT), it is important to assume that students’ learning style does not stand alone. However, it is closely related to the teacher’s teaching style because “teaching and learning styles are the behaviors or actions that teachers and learners exhibit in the learning exchange” (Brown, 2003, p. 3). The diversity not only applies to learning styles, but also to the teaching style between one teacher and the other. The variation of teaching style can derive from the variety of learning styles mentioned above. Nonetheless, Pratt (2002) suggests that teaching styles are also built from different approaches to teaching which are transmission, developmental, apprenticeship, nurturing, and social reform. Therefore, there will always be a possibility that a mismatch may occur between students’ learning style and their teachers’ teaching style.

Students’ understanding of the materials may be hindered merely by the mismatch between the teacher’s teaching style and the students’ learning style. This is also supported by the belief that “in a class where such a mismatch occurs, the students tend to be bored and inattentive, do poorly on tests, get discouraged about the course, and may conclude that they are not good at the subjects of the course and give up” (Oxford et al, as cited in Zhenhui, 2001, p. 1). Furthermore, “much research supports the view that when students’ learning preferences match their instructor’s teaching styles, student motivation and achievement usually improves” (Miller, 2001; Stitt-Gohdes, 2003, as cited in Brown, 2003, p. 3). This suggests that the mismatch
between learning and teaching style causes potential problems in ELT, whether it is the students’ hindered understanding, low motivation, or slow improvement.

Although the topic of English teaching and learning styles and strategies have been discussed by former graduates of English Department of Satya Wacana Christian University, most of the discussions were limited to only one of the area on either teaching strategies or learning strategies. For example, Purba’s (2011) study on ‘Strategies of teaching English at the first grade of Bethany Elementary school in Salatiga’, Ekowati’s (2010) study on ‘Strategies in teaching vocabulary used by two fourth grade teachers in two elementary schools in Batang regency’, Wohangara’s (2011) study on ‘The strategies of learning English in SMP’, and so forth. No study investigating the mismatch between teachers’ teaching styles and students’ learning styles have been found. Moreover, none seems to have studied the strategies teachers use to deal with students’ various learning styles. Therefore, this study aims to investigate teachers’ strategies in dealing with students’ various learning styles in English classes of several senior high schools in Salatiga.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Learning Styles in General Psychology

Gardner, in the field of General Psychology, proposes the theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI). According to him, there are eight types of intelligences namely linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and naturalist intelligence (Hetland, Karen, & Veneema, 1997). Hetland, Karen, and Veneema (1997) also mentioned that “while all humans possess the right intelligences, each person has his own particular blend or amalgam of the
intelligences” (p. 2). In a simpler term, I refer a person’s intelligence as their learning style. This basically means that people have different types of learning in which one person’s learning style may consist of the combination of a number of intelligences.

**Language Learning and Teaching Style**

As this variety of intelligences apply to learning different kinds of subjects, it is reasonable that when people learn a language, they also have a variety of learning styles. Just as I have mentioned in the introduction of this paper, it is not uncommon for a classroom to have different types of students with their own learning styles. Any class may consist of students who do not only differ in age, but also in cultural and linguistic backgrounds, in which teaching styles and activities that suit one group of learners may not be as successful and appealing to other group of learners (Richards, 2015). It is also almost impossible that a classroom consists of learners who have exactly the same type and combination of learning style. This is strongly supported by Richards (2015) who stated that:

> Even in fairly homogeneous classes, students may have very different interests, needs, learning styles and reasons for learning English. Learners do not always share the same language-learning goals. Since their aptitude or talent for language learning also differs, some master new sounds without difficulty and remember things they have studied relatively easily. For others, these areas are a struggle. Language learning may create anxiety for some learners, while for others, it is something they enjoy. (p. 136).

Therefore, it is important to assume that learning styles do not stand alone but are closely related to and go hand in hand with teaching styles because “teaching and learning styles are the behaviors or actions that teachers and learners exhibit in the learning exchange” (Brown, 2003, p. 3). Thus, a teaching style holds an important role in the process of students’ English language learning. It would be very conducive if a classroom consists of students and teachers with matching learning and teaching styles as Kumaravadivelu (as cited in Zhenhui, 2001) suggests that the smaller the
difference between teacher intention and learner interpretation, the bigger are the possibilities of achieving the students’ desired learning outcomes.

**The Mismatch between Learning and Teaching Style**

Unfortunately, this is not always the case. In their study about the match or mismatch between learning and teaching styles, Asba, Azman, and Mustaffa (2014) mentioned that there are potential consequences of the mismatch between teaching and learning styles. This means that problems may emerge due to the mismatch. The problems do not merely apply to the students, but also the teachers. It is believed that in a classroom where a mismatch occurs, students tend to be more tired, pay less attention, have lower test results, unmotivated about the course, and even quit (Felder & Spurlin, as cited in Asba, Azman, & Mustaffa, 2014). On the other hand, teachers who are faced with students’ low test grades, passive classes, poor attendance, and dropouts, may become too critical of their students or even start to question their own competence as teachers (Felder, Silverman, & Oxford, as cited in Asba, Azman, & Mustaffa, 2014). Therefore, strategies are needed to overcome this problem. Though these strategies may not be of great importance by certain teachers, strategies are still required to deal with students’ various learning styles.

**Key Concepts**

Before discussing any further, I must make clear that I will focus on the concepts and terms of learning style and strategies. In this paper, I refer to learning style as the general approach preferred by students that serves as relatively stable indicators of how they learn a subject, acquire a language, or deal with difficult problems (Bird, Romanelli, & Ryan, 2009; Oxford, 2003). Furthermore, the word strategy, according to the Oxford online dictionary (www.oxforddictionaries.com)
and Kvint (2009), refers to a plan of action to find, formulate and develop a strong belief designed to achieve a long-term or overall aim successfully if followed faithfully. In the context of teaching, I refer strategy as the plan of action designed by the teacher to deal with students’ various learning styles in hope that the problems caused by teaching and learning mismatch may be hindered or overcome.

**Review of Previous Studies**

Many theses by English Department students of Satya Wacana Christian University have studied and researched the topic of English teaching and learning styles and strategies. Unfortunately, the discussions were mostly limited to one area of the topic of either teaching strategies or learning strategies. For example, Purba’s (2011) study on ‘Strategies of teaching English at the first grade of Bethany Elementary school in Salatiga’; Ekowati’s (2010) study on ‘Strategies in teaching vocabulary used by two fourth grade teachers in two elementary schools in Batang regency’; Wohangara’s (2011) study on ‘The strategies of learning English in SMP’; and so forth. No studies have been found to have specifically investigated the mismatches between teachers’ teaching styles and students’ learning strategies. None have also been found to have studied the strategies teachers use to deal with students’ various learning styles. Nonetheless, there are a number of published articles and chapters which similarly discuss these topics, such as Azba, Asman, and Mustaffa’s (2014) study on “A match or mismatch between learning and teaching styles in science education”; Brown’s (2003) “Teaching style versus learning style”; Pratt’s (2002) “Good teaching: one size fits all?”; and Zhenhui’s (2001) “Matching teaching styles with learning styles in East Asia contexts”. However, all those studies have not been conducted specifically in Indonesia, let alone in Salatiga. This is why I attempt
to investigate teachers’ strategies in dealing with students’ various learning styles based on the theory of learning and teaching styles by Reid (cited in Richards, 2015) and Cohen (cited in Learning style preferences, n.d.) which shall be combined by my own adaptation of theoretical framework on strategies based on Bacay (2006).

Types of Learning Styles

Many experts have grouped learning styles into different kinds of classifications. Oxford (2003), for example, has mentioned that there are three classes of learning styles, namely sensory style dimensions (visual/auditory/hands-on), social style dimension (extroverted/introverted), and cognitive style dimension (concrete-sequential/abstract intuitive, closure-oriented/open, detail focused/holistic, analyzing/synthesizing). Nonetheless, to make it simpler and more focused, I will base the classification of learning style on Reid’s (cited in Richards, 2015) classification added with 2 types of learning style by Cohen et al (cited in Learning Style Preferences, n.d.) which are: (1) visual learning style, (2) auditory learning style, (3) kinesthetic learning style, (4) tactile learning style, (5) group learning style, (6) individual learning style, (7) detail focused learning style, and (8) holistic learning style.

These eight learning styles have their own sets of characteristics. Visual learning style is the style of learning where learners respond to new information visually, prefers visual, pictorial, and graphic form of learning experiences, learn better by reading and seeing words in books, workbooks, and on the board, can often learn independently from books, and take notes of lectures to remember new information. The second style, auditory learning style refers to the style where learners learn better by hearing words and oral explanations, listening to recordings,
teaching other students, and by talking to their classmates and teacher. Kinesthetic learning style is to account for learners who learn better when they are involved physically in an experience, and remember better when they actively participate in the activities. As for tactile learning style, learners learn better in ‘hands-on’ activities, like to manipulate materials, build, fix, or put things together. The fifth learning style which is group learning style is when learners learn and understand new materials better in groups, class work, or when working with other students. Whereas in individual learning style, learners learn better on their own, capable of understanding new materials by themselves, and remember the material better when they learn alone. The additional two learning styles proposed by Cohen are detail focused learning style and holistic learning style. In detail focused learning style, learners learn better when they are explained in detail, and focus on details of every material. Whereas in holistic learning style, learners learn better when the material is explained as a whole set rather than detailed information, and focus on the big picture of the material.

**Types of Strategies in Dealing with Students’ Various Learning Styles**

As for the strategies, which will be the main discussion of this paper, I have taken and synthesized the strategies into three large themes based on Bacay’s (2006) study. The strategies are (1) requiring the students to adjust to teachers’ teaching style (more teacher-centered), (2) adjusting to students learning styles (more learner-centered), and (3) balancing between numbers 1 & 2.

The first strategy is to require the students to adjust with their (teachers’) teaching style. This strategy is more teacher-centered because the students are expected to adapt their learning style with the teachers’ teaching style. Bacay (2006) mentions that even though matching teaching and learning styles would give good
benefits, “Felder and Brent (2005) say the teacher is not expected to tailor-fit his/her teaching style according to students' preferences” (p.1) because “if a teacher is inclined towards meeting the needs of students with a particular learning style, other students with different learning styles will feel left out” (p.1). She also stated that “students who are consistently taught through their dominant learning styles will not know how to learn using their less preferred learning styles” (p.1). Thus, by adjusting to teachers’ teaching style, learners can be more independent and encouraged to explore and develop their abilities more rather than if they are always spoiled by the teaching style which always matches their learning style.

On the other hand, the second strategy, adjusting to students learning styles is more student-centered. As I have mentioned quite a few times previously, adjusting to students learning styles will most likely make the learning and teaching styles match. Therefore, this situation will give greater benefit and outcomes to students’ achievements. However, it is not always an easy task because it involves greater attention and sacrifice of the teacher to let go of their ego and to really pay attention to the students.

Lastly, the third strategy is to balance between the first and the second strategy. Bacay (2006) more specifically argued that “teachers should adopt a balanced teaching style to help more students learn effectively and become more flexible in the way they learn” (p.1). This means that teachers should at some point stick to their own teaching style, encouraging students to become more flexible to the teaching-learning situation, and at some point try to vary their teaching style in dealing with students’ various learning styles.
It is hoped the findings which includes the strategies and its underlying reasons may not only be useful for the teachers themselves but may also be useful for other English teachers reading this paper as a way of overcoming or being more precautious toward the challenges and difficulties in dealing with their students’ various learning styles.

**Research Question**
What are ESL/EFL teachers’ strategies in dealing with students’ various learning styles in several senior highschools in Salatiga?

**THE STUDY**

**Research Methodology**
This research is conducted with a qualitative method by interviewing a number of senior high school English teachers in Salatiga about their strategies in dealing with students’ various learning styles. The data collected are analyzed deductively based on the themes mentioned in the theoretical framework which are added with further explanation on a few emerging aspects from the results of the interview.

**Context**
This research is conducted in Senior High schools limited to the ones located in Salatiga, Central Java, Indonesia. Senior high school has been chosen since I consider it to be the stage where students are no longer children, but are teenagers who will soon enter adulthood. I believe that they are somewhere between the child-adult continuum. In other words, they are in between the line of being less
independent and independent learners. It is also more likely that in this stage, students are aware of their learning style and of other various learning styles.

**Sampling**

This research uses purposive sampling, more specifically quota sampling. Quota sampling is the process of data collection in which the samples are targeted based on a number of criteria or convenience determined by the researcher (Ary, Cheser & Sorensen, 2010). Therefore, six schools have been chosen as the representative of senior high schools in Salatiga. I have chosen three public schools and three private schools as the targets. These schools have been chosen due to their convenience and familiarity on the part of the researcher. The total number of interviewees from the six schools is 12 teachers. This is due to the limited time and busy schedule of the teachers.

**Data of Participants.** Before asking the main questions, I asked the teachers about their teaching background which includes years of teaching, teaching hours, grades being taught, and the average number of students they usually teach in a class. Based on the data collected, all the teachers have taught English for more than five years. The longest was a teacher who taught for 29 years, and the shortest was six years. The rest of the teachers ranged from 10-26 years. However, most of them have mostly taught for more than 15 years. Most of them teach between 20-30 hours per week and have experienced teaching every grade and streams of senior high school. Moreover, the average of students they usually teach is mostly between 20-35 students.
**Data Collection Methods**

The data are collected using a semi-structured interview. The interviews were done in a face-to-face meeting with the each teacher individually in their schools. Due to the limited time, the interviews were only conducted once for each teacher and lasted for an average of 10-20 minutes.

**Data Collection Instrument**

As the data are collected using a semi-structured interview, the questions given are the same for each teacher, but allow flexibility to elicit further answers and other information that may not be addressed by the original questions. The interview questions are as follows:

1. **Background questions:**
   a. How long have you been teaching English?
   b. What grades do you teach?
   c. How many students are there in one class?
   d. How many hours per week do you teach English in your school?

2. **What is your preferred teaching style?**

3. **What kind of learning styles do you think your students have?**

4. **How do you deal with students’ learning styles?**

5. **Why do you do that (the answer of number 4)?** (What benefits can you get from your strategy? What belief (if any) underlies your reason? What motivates you to do so? Or are there any other factors (such as school regulations, other barriers) that may affect your strategies in dealing with students’ various learning styles?)
6. If there were something else you could do about dealing with students’ learning styles, what would it be?

7. What would be your advice to other teachers dealing with students’ learning styles?

*Will be adapted based on the theoretical framework

Unless otherwise stated, the presented data were transcribed verbatim from the teachers.

**Data Analysis Procedure**

After the interviews were done, I transcribed the data and coded them based on similar answers. The similar answers were then collected into separate groups and named based on the existing theories of strategies in dealing with students’ various learning styles.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Interviews regarding teachers’ strategies in dealing with students’ various learning styles were done to 12 teachers from a total of six senior high schools in Salatiga; three private schools and three public schools. The findings which are discussed in this section include the teachers’ teaching background for the sake of checking teachers’ awareness of the research problem and the strategies they use in dealing with students’ various learning styles as the main point of this research.

**Teachers’ Awareness of the Research Problem**

It was necessary to make sure that the participants of this research were aware of the research problem before they could determine which strategies they used in dealing with students’ various learning styles. Therefore, before I dug into the main
questions, I asked the teachers about their teaching background and their teaching styles as well as their students learning styles according to their observation as teachers who meet their students regularly. These questions were asked to make sure that the teachers have actually dealt with or simply be aware of the fact that a classroom would always consist of students with different learning styles no matter how similar they might appear from the outside. As Richards (2015) mentions that no matter how similar students may be, they may have different learning styles, needs, interest, and even motivation for learning English.

The result was all teachers could answer the questions regarding their own teaching style and was very much aware that the students have their majority of learning styles with some variations of the minority of learning styles. For example, when asked about their students’ learning style, teacher A answered, “[my students’ learning styles are] mostly visual, kinesthetic, task-based, and competitive, and one more maybe auditory”, she then added, “…my challenge is to face the passive students” (Interview, January 18, 2016). This shows that she is aware of her students’ learning styles for both the majority and minority ones. On the other hand, when asked about her own teaching style, she answered that she is a fun lover; that is, she likes using games, very kinesthetic, encourages a lot of movements and is very active. This example represents all the other teachers whom I have interviewed as the way of showing their awareness of their own teaching style and their students’ learning styles. Each teacher has more or less the same types of answers, though not necessarily exactly similar.

All in all, I believe that these teachers are aware of the fact that their students have different kinds of learning styles. Thus, out of this awareness, the findings show
that each of the teachers has a strategy in dealing with students’ various learning styles.

**Teachers’ Strategies in Dealing with Students’ Various Learning Styles**

As mentioned in the literature review section of this paper, there are three strategies in dealing with students’ various learning styles. The first strategy is requiring the students to adjust to the teacher’s teaching style (teacher-centered), the second is adjusting to the students learning style as much as possible (learner-centered), and the third is trying to balance between requiring the students to adjust as well as adjusting to the students learning styles. Table 1 shows the percentage of teachers who deal with students’ various learning styles based on these three strategies (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Teachers’ strategies in dealing with students’ various learning styles.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRATEGY</th>
<th>PARTICIPANTS</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1 Requiring students to adjust to teachers’ teaching style (teacher-centered)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2 Adjusting to students’ learning styles (learner-centered)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3 Balancing between adjusting to students and requiring the students to adjust to teachers (between Strategies #1 &amp; 2)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: “#” means “number.”*
The following discussion will be sequenced according to the most frequent to the least frequent strategy found amongst the participants.

**Balancing Between Adjusting to Students’ Learning Styles and Requiring the Students to Adjust to Teachers’ Teaching Style.** The result shows that the strategy most used is Strategy #3. As much as 66.7% of the teachers dealt with students’ various learning styles by trying to balance between Strategies #1 and #2. There are basically four main reasons of why the teachers used this strategy. They are (1) teacher’s belief that students’ can grow and learn better if they balance between adjusting and reinforcing a certain learning style, (2) government’s policy of implementing the teaching strategy of 2013 curriculum, (3) limited time, and (4) topics or materials of the lesson.

The first reason was mentioned by Teacher B and H. For example, Teacher B mentioned that she tried to adjust to the students, but also attempted to get them to work on something they do not really like in order for them to enjoy and learn more. When asked for further detail about this, she explained:

*(Excerpt 1)*

... I want my students to really get something when they sit in my class. ... So if I just use one learning style, they will get bored sooner, they’ll have no motivation to learn English. So that’s why I want them to enjoy the class by giving them different experience. (Interview, January 13, 2016)

They thought that it is necessary to adjust to students. However, the teachers believed that there must be a balance, because adjusting fully to students would not be good for the students’ growth and learning experience. This supports Bacay (2006) who argued that “teachers should adopt a balanced teaching style to help more students learn effectively and become more flexible in the way they learn” and
“students who are consistently taught through their dominant learning styles will not know how to learn using their less preferred learning styles” (p.1).

The second reason is the government’s policy of implementing the 2013 curriculum teaching strategy. Teacher G explained how the 2013 curriculum encourages the teachers to give less lectures and more time for students to explore:

(Excerpt 2)
… If we follow this new curriculum strategy then actually teachers should not give too much lecturing or teaching but it is students who must be active to find out what kind of things that they learn at that time and the job of the teacher here is just to facilitate students. But it doesn’t work with all the materials and subjects that I give to students. (Interview, January 15, 2016)

This means that although the teacher would like to adjust to students learning styles and materials which may be different from the style suggested by the government, they may not always be able to.

The third and quite common reason conveyed by the teachers of this strategy is the limited time they have as teachers, both the time to prepare their teachings and materials as well as the time to teach. An example of the limited time to prepare the teaching is explained by Teacher G:

(Excerpt 3)
In one hand, we have to follow the government’s regulation that teachers should at least stand in front of the class 24 hours per week. That is the least… 24 hours standing in front of the class is quite time consuming. We do not have enough time to think about, prepare good materials for students. But on the other hand, students always hope teachers to make their class alive and interesting and help them to learn things in an interesting, good way. I wish we had more time to prepare everything. (Interview, January 15, 2016)

Furthermore, Teacher H explained about how the teaching hour is too limited:

(Excerpt 4)
[I wish for] more hours for English I think, so that we can do many activities. Because I think we have many materials, and we have to do many styles of learning, we have to do many style of teaching, but we can’t do this. Actually I have many ideas on how to teach them... But because of the limited time I can’t. (Interview, February 4, 2016)

Thus, this clearly explains how time can be quite a crucial factor in dealing with students’ various learning styles. These teachers actually wished to adjust to the
students as much as possible, but due to the hours of teaching and limited time as a teacher, they were not able to facilitate their students’ learning styles maximally.

The last and most common reason among these teachers is the materials and topics of the lesson which made them unable to adjust fully to the students’ learning style. This fourth factor was mentioned by all eight teachers who used this strategy. As an example, teacher D elaborated on how visual learning may not be accommodated well when teaching grammar and vocabulary as she stated:

(Excerpt 5)
I think most of them are more on visual learners, because they will remember more when they see something. But the difficulty is that when we teach for example grammar, it’s a bit hard to find some materials which are visual, because they have to memorize many patterns that makes English difficult for them. And also the vocabulary, I think my students in this year are quite low in vocabulary skills, so I need to improve their vocabulary first, then we can continue. Because you know that National Examination is more on reading skills and listening, so vocabulary is the key of their success. (Interview, February 11, 2016)

Teacher I also explained how she had to adapt the teaching style with the materials:

(Excerpt 6)
Of course I have to adapt to the materials and also how to teach the material. So I think the style depends on the materials. Sometimes we have to be teacher-centered when we explain the materials, sometimes we have to ask the students to work in groups or work individually. It depends on the materials. (Interview, February 11, 2016)

Analyzing from the answers of these teachers, I conclude that topics and materials of the lesson play quite a big role in determining their teaching style. Not all teaching and learning styles may fit to a certain material. Sometimes, the teachers must consider these materials more than the students’ preferred learning style. Therefore, this made the teachers unable to fully adjust to the students’ learning styles, but they tried to balance between adjusting and reinforcing a certain learning style to the students.

Requirements for the Students to Adjust to Teachers’ Teaching Style (Teacher-Centered). The second in the rank of most used strategy is Strategy #1 (i.e., requiring the students to adjust to the teacher’s teaching style). Three out of 12 teachers used
this strategy for mainly four reasons: (1) their teaching style fits best for the students, (2) their teaching style can be contagious to the students, (3) teacher’s power, and (4) teacher’s reluctance to be too preoccupied with accommodating too many learning styles.

The first reason is the most common reason that each teacher mentioned in the interview. The teachers thought that their teaching style is the best for the students’ development, regardless of whether the students like it or not. An example of this statement can be seen from Teacher C who mentioned, “I think my teaching style is the best for them, so they can still remember, and always remember, hopefully” (Interview, January 25, 2016). Another example was explained by Teacher J as he explained how he tries to encourage the students to follow his teaching style:

(Excerpt 7)
I give them more individual works [individual learning]. I usually give assignments to students. But before I give the assignments, I explain to them about the objectives of the assignment. If they do this, they will get this… in order to encourage them to do the exercises. (Interview, February 11, 2016)

These teachers stuck to their teaching style with the belief that it will work best for the students. This belief contradicts Willing (1988) who asserted that lectures [teachers] should accommodate all types of learning styles even if it clashes with their idea of what is effective in a class (cited in Asba, A., Azman, H., & Mustaffa, R, 2014).

The second reason is the belief that their teaching style can be contagious to the students. This reason was particularly explained by Teacher A when asked about how she would deal with students’ various learning styles which might not fully match her active, fun, competitive, and kinesthetic teaching style:

(Excerpt 8)
I think I will try to make my teaching style contagious to their learning style. And they will be like what I want. I will start with my 10th graders because most of them, it’s very different
with the last time I had for the 10th graders with the same language class... I will still stick to my teaching style. So far, from my experience, I think students would enjoy it. Nobody dislikes fun, right? (Interview, January 18, 2016)

Fun in her case includes many games, especially competitive games. She mentioned that her students are competitive learners when she explained:

(Excerpt 9)

... They are competitive learners. They like competitive games. It’s the appropriate one for them. Actually, it is time consuming to prepare all these things, because we need some cutting out trigger [learning materials which needs to be cut out], and also things to summarize the core of the reading and also how to make them analyze the text organization of these. It’s worth giving to the students because they can get something, and they learn something enthusiastically. (Interview, January 18, 2016)

Her statement is very much in line with Jones (2005) who stated that the most boring lesson when made into a competition [in terms of games] can become exciting for both adults and children, although these fun and motivating activities may be time consuming for the teachers to create. Thus, I agree that a great number of senior high school students, when encouraged to be active like so, may actually enjoy the lesson more. This should be verified (or even falsified) in a separate study because there might be students who do not really enjoy competitive games in class.

The third reason is the teachers’ power. A teacher felt that she, as the teacher, has power over her students. It is the students who must follow her teaching style and must adjust even if they are slow learners. Teacher C explained this further:

(Excerpt 10)

Of course, I use my power here. They have to follow me. It’s classical, although we have fast and slow learners. For the slow learners, sometimes I ask them to ask me if they still don’t understand. (Interview, January 25, 2016)

This statement then leads us to the fourth reason which was also mentioned by Teacher C when she said “If I follow what they want, usually it’s report [troublesome]” (Interview, January 25, 2016). As Xiao (2006) mentions, Asian students are expected to show total obedience or even submission to their teachers.
This may explain why some teachers tend to use their power to implement their teaching styles instead of their students’ preferred learning style.

**Adjusting to The Students’ Learning Styles (Learner-Centered).** The least strategy used is the 2nd strategy (i.e., adjusting to the students’ learning styles as much as possible). In fact, only one teacher uses this strategy. Therefore, I consider this strategy to be quite a rare case, especially after I looked into the factors which made the teacher choose this strategy. Teacher F, the only teacher who applied this strategy mentioned that the main reason was because the students of her school are ‘special’ students. In other words, they are students who are not exactly like other students from other schools. They need special attention, and must be dealt with more patience. Though she cannot accommodate all learning styles, she tries her best to adjust to the majority of the students’ learning style. This can be further seen in her explanation:

(Excerpt 1)

Since they are maybe ‘different’ from most of the students here [in Salatiga], they are ‘special’. So I try to adjust to them. If I stick to my way that I choose at the first time, maybe they won’t understand what I want... *Mereka kan gak akan mengerti begitu, jadi oke, jadi harus dicangkup atau kalau pada akhirnya mereka tidak memahami begitu, ya harus berpikir ulang harus apa ini, saya harus bagaimana, kalau yang begini tidak berjalan, apa yang harus saya lakukan? Jadi lebih ke, situasi di kelas itu sangat berbeda dengan apa yang saya cita-citakan, akan jadi berbeda* [They won’t understand, so okay, I have to find out why. I have to think about the solution. Sometimes the situation in the classroom is not as expected]. Being a teacher is an art. (Interview, February 10, 2016)

When asked for further explanation, she said:

(Excerpt 12)

They are special as I told you. One student will be different from the others. Don’t treat them like what you want them, but just treat them as they are. *Jadi mereka itu seperti apa, ya kita menurun dari belakang. Mereka tekniknya begini, oh berarti yang saya siapkan tadi tidak berjalan, berarti kita masuk ke dunia mereka, mereka mau nya seperti apa* [So we have to follow their technique, try to enter their world, what they want]. Adapt with the students. (Interview, February 10, 2016)

Hsieh, Jang, Hwang, Chen (2011), Zhang (2007), Felder (1995), and Reid (1987) believes that mismatches do occur between teachers’ teaching style and their
students’ learning styles which is followed by potential consequences (cited in Asba, A., Azman, H., & Mustaffa, R., 2014). In this case, the consequence mentioned by teacher F is that students will not understand the lesson. Therefore, though sometimes she finds it quite troublesome to fully accommodate to the students’ learning styles, she chooses to keep trying to adjust to them as best as she can to hinder these unwanted consequences.

CONCLUSION

As discussed a number of times in this paper, there may be a mismatch between teachers’ teaching style and students’ learning styles. However, the most common problem found is the mismatch between the styles which may cause students’ lack of understanding and motivation in learning the target language (Oxford et al, cited in Zhenhui, 2001). Strategies are needed to deal with students’ various learning styles. Therefore, this research aims to investigate teachers’ strategies in dealing with students’ various learning styles in English classes of several senior high schools in Salatiga.

Based on the findings of the current study, it turned out that all the teachers interviewed were aware of this situation and had their own strategies in dealing with students’ various learning styles. The strategy mostly used was the third strategy (i.e., balancing between adjusting to the students learning styles and requiring the students adjust to their teaching styles). 8 out of twelve teachers use this strategy for 4 main reasons, which are; (1) teacher’s belief that students’ can grow and learn better if they balance between adjusting and reinforcing a certain learning style, (2) government’s policy of implementing the teaching strategy of 2013 curriculum, (3) limited time
both for the teaching hours and teaching preparation, and (4) topics or materials of the lesson which cannot be accommodated by some teaching styles. The second in rank is the first strategy (i.e., requiring the students adjust with their teaching styles). 3 out of twelve teachers used this strategy for 4 reasons; (1) teacher’s belief that their teaching style fits best for the students, (2) teacher’s belief that their teaching style can be contagious to the students, (3) teacher’s power, and (4) teacher’s reluctance to be too occupied in dealing with too much learning styles. Lastly, the least strategy used is the second strategy (i.e., adjusting to the students’ learning styles as much as possible). This strategy was used by only one teacher whose school has limited amount of students who are considered to be quite ‘special’. The reason for using this strategy is because the students are rather different from other students in other schools, and need special attention from their teachers.

In general, the result of this finding proposes 2 main factors that may influence a teacher to use a certain strategy—what I refer to as internal and external factors. The former includes teachers’ beliefs about effective teaching, their power, or about their students needs. Whereas, the latter, which somehow forces teachers to use a certain strategy, may include limited time, government policy, materials or topics of the lesson, and most probably the average amount of students they teach in one class. These factors play quite a considerable role in determining which strategies can possibly be used in dealing with students’ various learning styles.

Lastly, I hope that this research may be of great use for teachers of English as a second or foreign language (TESOL) specifically in Salatiga, when considering which strategies may be used in certain circumstances when facing students’ with various learning styles. Moreover, I believe that this research can be developed into a
larger scale of research in the future which I had not managed to conduct due to the limited time and other sets of obstacles. Other than interviews, observations may be done in the classroom to give a clearer picture of the circumstances, questionnaires regarding teaching and learning styles may be distributed to the students and teachers, and interviews may also be done to the students as the follow up of the interviews done to the teachers. Thus, I believe that this research may have different results if conducted in different locations and circumstances. As a conclusion, this research can still be explored further and deeper as one of the ways to contribute to the pedagogical implication for teachers of English as a second or foreign language in dealing with students’ various learning styles.
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REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

TEACHER A (STRATEGY #1)
Date: Monday/January 18, 2016
Time: 8.30 – 8.50.

8. Background questions:
   e. How long have you been teaching English? 29 years
   f. What grades do you teach? 10, 11, 12, all types of classes (MIA, IIS, Language, Lintas Minat) ➔ Coordinator of grade 10, Bu Diana grade 11, Bu Nunuk grade 12
   g. How many students are there in one class? 25-30
   h. How many hours per week do you teach English in your school? 27 x 45 minutes. For Lintas Minat, most of the students take English. They choose English for their elective program. (more info about this on the recording).

9. What is your preferred teaching style? (how do you teach? Why?)*
   My teaching style first. I like something that can interact, can make students do something, and make students see something, work on some things. Yea, I’m a fun lover, so I like the students to have fun. Things like games. Because I know my students’ learning style. I can compare when I’m teaching with just kinds of verbal things, they just keep quiet, and then maybe they will lose attention and get sleepy, etc (they are kinesthetic learners). But when I gave them something to do on, for example, just about reading, from the books, or ppt presentations, if I say “just read by your heart” then maybe most of them will not have responsibility to read. But when I ask them to do it in turns and in random turns, they will stay awake and try to be alert with their turn. For the second, comprehension checking, when I just let them “please do number 1 until 10”, and then let them go by themselves, I think will also lose their concentration instead of writing or working on their tasks, they don’t do what I say, they will do the other things. That’s why I need to check their understanding by having them do something in a game. Like when it’s kinds of running comprehension game.
   Yeah, another type of learning style for them is that they are social, they like interaction, they’re social/group learners. They like to socialize with their friends, so they can do this comprehension checking together while doing something in front of
the class, like get in turns to take the questions, and then go back and discuss, go back again.

Another one is, they also like to have competitors, they are competitive learners. They like competitive games, it’s the appropriate one for them.

Actually, it is time consuming to prepare all these things, because we need some cutting out trigger, and also things to summarize the core of the reading and also how to make them analyze the text organization of these. It’s worth giving to the students because they can get something, and they learn something enthusiastically. I tried to be relaxed, not to prepare anything, just doing something like traditional teachers in this start of the semester, to have for example, I tried to make kinds of try out in the 10th grade classes of Language class. Actually they are smart students, but they are very passive, they don’t like to let themselves go to express opinion. Maybe they are just kinds of “listening to the teacher” habit. Coming from SMP maybe. When I try to push them to ask me questions and to answer questions enthusiastically, but just quiet, quiet, and quiet, and I feel games. That’s why after 2 or 3 weeks, I try to implement again what I usually do. Like today, I was preparing the cut out figure and try to make them do something there. Not only stuck in their seats. Yea, I see that my students like kinesthetic things, and then group learners, just make their thoughts active, not just listening and not doing anything.

Fun lover teacher, like to make students active, more on kinesthetic teaching style, visual, doesn’t really like traditional teaching (only explain).

In some cases, I like to explain things when it is time for explaining, for example when the students should master some kinds of grammatical items. Maybe the problem is that I always force them to speak in English, because if not there is a sanction which is called antrophy, but sometimes in explaining the grammatical items, I need to mix between English and Indonesian just for the sake of the students understanding. It also depends on the materials. But I think any kind of materials can be made into a fun way in teaching.

I try to be a fun teacher, because you see, it’s very different with students in the past in my time, we like to have the self study, we have high discipline. Well okay, maybe for some cases, students like to have analytical thinking. It happens when I assess them with kinds of writing assessment at home, to my surprise, they can do many good things and good analytical thinking. But some still have
some difficulties in expressing ideas. Sometimes we also need to give them assignments like these, self analysis.

10. **What kind of learning styles do you think your students have?** (the majority? Different styles – what are they?)

   Mostly **visual, kinesthetic, task-based**, and **competitive**. And one more maybe **auditory**. Auditory in cases of using recordings, because they also need to know what is really said by the native speaker. When they have something/the recording played, they have the concentration to listen. I like them to have a kind of closed-procedure activities, maybe answering the question based on the listening they have just heard.

11. **Do you find any mismatch between your teaching style and the students’ learning style? What does the mismatch cause?** (e.g. they don’t understand, they don’t enjoy, their grades are low, they complain)

   My challenge is to face the passive students. The ones unmotivated. So, by doing kinds of group works, everybody will be active. Usually I will **limit the domination of students**, like by saying “in a group, one student can only answer the question twice”. So everybody will be answering the questions and do something.

12. **How do you deal with students’ learning styles?**

   (Answered in number 2).

13. **Why do you do that (the answer of number 5)?** (What benefits can you get from your strategy? What belief (if any) underlies your reason? What motivates you to do so? Or are there any other factors (such as school regulations, other barriers) that may affect your strategies in dealing with students’ various learning styles?)

   So that all can be active, motivated, and enjoy the class. So that there is equal participation.

14. **If there were something else you could do about dealing with students’ learning styles, what would it be?**

   I think for the **time**, yes. Especially for general English which is only allocated for 2 teaching periods that is once in a week, we need more time. But for English as the Peminatan, it’s okay because we have it twice a week, so we can create and have
many variation in it. But when we have very limited time, we will try to make it more effective with very limited time.

15. **What would be your advice to other teachers dealing with students’ learning styles?**

They should put themselves in the students’ shoes. Suppose if they were the students, how would they enjoy learning? They should think about that, so if they were in the students’ position. This is just like when I was in SMA, for me English is not so interesting because we were only taught grammar, and to listen to the teachers. You know, when I entered the English Department, I needed to have 3 months study for speaking, because we never had speaking activity, while nowadays speaking is very important, especially if we use English not only for understanding the grammatical items. That’s why the teachers who always try to have kinds of the rigid method of teaching, like students need to understand grammar and grammar, I think it can be done, but of course they still need to think of how to make it more interesting for the students.

And another one is, try not to be lazy in preparing things, especially in creating many kinds of activities which can involve students more in their teaching, to socialize by having kinds of group works, or at least pair work.

➔ There’s not much mismatch between her teaching style and students’ learning styles (because the majority of students like fun teaching), but if the students were mostly passive, what would she do?

I think I will try to make my teaching style contagious to their learning style. And they will be like what I want. I will start with my 10th graders because most of them, it’s very different with the last time I had for the 10th graders with the same language class, they were very active, but now so passive.

I will still stick to my teaching style. So far, from my experience, I think students would enjoy it. Nobody dislikes fun, right?
APPENDIX B

TEACHER F (STRATEGY #2)
Date: Wednesday/Feb 10, 2016
Time: 11.40 – 11.55 a.m.

1. Background questions:
   a. How long have you been teaching English? 5-6 years
   b. What grades do you teach? 10, 11, 12
   c. How many students are there in one class? 10th grade = 13, 11th grade=14, 12th grade=24 (all of them less than 50), she is the only English teacher there.
   d. How many hours per week do you teach English in your school? 20 x 45 minutes

2. What is your preferred teaching style? (how do you teach? Why?)*
   I think it depends on the material I teach. If I’m teaching grammar, I like to use lectures. For speaking, maybe I would act as a facilitator for them, and they will create a dialog, work in groups, if they need to ask something, they can come to me. It depends on the materials.

   But overall, what kind of teaching do you prefer?
   Actually, I would like them to do group learning. But most of them does not work very well, since when they are in groups, they talk about things that is not the topic of the things that I ask them to do. Tapi ya itu tadi, kadang-kadang tidak berjalan dengan baik. In their group, I want them to solve the problems by themselves, but sometimes they talk about something else.

3. What kind of learning styles do you think your students have?* (the majority? Different styles – what are they?)
   Majority:
   They are visual learners. They like to see pictures, or movies, and things like that. They are visual. And they like to listen to a lot of music. So when they are making notes, they’ll ask me to please, we want to listen to some songs, etc.

   Others:
Some of them, well only 10 percent of them are really quiet and prefer individual learning.

So I try to accommodate more on the majority of the students learning style, which is visual.

4. Do you find any mismatch between your teaching style and the students’ learning style? What does the mismatch cause? (e.g. they don’t understand, they don’t enjoy, their grades are low, they complain)

Of course when I want to teach them visually, I have to prepare the visual things. I want to teach narrative with visuals, then I have to prepare using slides or just show them the pictures. I have to prepare those for the teaching.

5. How do you deal with students’ learning styles?*

If I summarize our conversation, so I guess you are the kind of teacher who adjusts to the students learning style?

Yes, since they are maybe ‘different’ from most of the students here (in Salatiga), they are ‘special’. So I try to adjust to them.

If I stick to my way that I choose at the first time, maybe they won’t understand what I want. For example if I teach them by using English all the time, *yang diharapkan seperti itu kan*, they just stare at me with empty eyes, like “what are you talking about?”. They won’t understand. *Mereka kan gak akan mengerti begitu, jadi oke, jadi harus dicangkup atau kalau pada akhirnya mereka tidak memahami begitu, ya harus berpikir ulang* *harus apa ini, saya harus bagaimana, kalau yang begini tidak berjalan, apa yang harus saya lakukan? Jadi lebih ke, situasi di kelas itu sangat berbeda dengan apa yang saya cita-citakan, akan jauh berbeda.* [Sometimes the situation in the classroom is not as expected, and I have to find a way to make the students comfortable]. Being a teacher is an art.

6. Why do you do that (*the answer of number 5*)? (What benefits can you get from your strategy? What belief (if any) underlies your reason? What motivates you to do so? Or are there any other factors (such as school regulations, other barriers) that may affect your strategies in dealing with students’ various learning styles?)

(Answered in number 5)
7. If there were something else you could do about dealing with students’ learning styles, what would it be?

Here I’m teaching 20 hours. And with the other things I have to do besides teaching, since I am the vice principal, there’s a lot of things that I have to do, and there’s a lot of things I want to do for them and for myself. Sometimes I just adapt what I have done last year, kalo taun kemaren begini, saya cukup begini, dengan sedikit perubahan. Tapi saya ingin melakukan hal yang lebih dengan banyak metode-metode belajar itu yang baru-baru dengan begini, dengan how to teach grammar using games. But, itu, kadang-kadang dengan keterbatasan siswa kami, kadang itu tidak masuk, yang masuk justru gamesnya saja. Tapi ada juga yang memang grammar pake games ya mereka bisa masuk, jadi ya itu, memanfaatkan metode belajar yang ada, sebetulnya saya masih ingin seperti itu, masih ingin belajar banyak hal, tapi waktunya itu.

8. What would be your advice to other teachers dealing with students’ learning styles?

You can say that I’m a junior teacher. So, for advice, mungkin saya yang harus diberi advice. As I told you before, I still need a lot of learning, saya perlu disupervisi. I need that. Kalo di sekolah-sekolah lain itu ada beberapa teachers lain in their school, they can ask their opinion, but I’m here just alone. Mungkin saya yang butuh advice disini.

But, if you were to give advice as a teacher who is more senior than me, what would it be?

Be a flexible teacher. They are special as I told you. One student will be different from the others, Don’t treat them like what you want them, but just treat them as they are. Jadi mereka itu seperti apa, ya kita menurun dari belakang. Mereka tekniknya begini, oh berarti yang saya siapkan tadi tidak berjalan, berarti kita masuk ke dunia mereka, mereka mauanya seperti apa. Adapt with the students. (Student-centered teacher).
APPENDIX C

TEACHER B (STRATEGY #3)
Date: Wednesday/January 13, 2016
Time: 9.15 – 9.30 a.m.

1. **Background questions:**
   a. How long have you been teaching English? 21 years
   b. What grades do you teach? 10 (IPA), 12 (IPS), 11 (BHS, IPA, IPS)
   c. How many students are there in one class? 25-32
   d. How many hours per week do you teach English in your school? 26 x 45 minutes

2. **What is your preferred teaching style?** (how do you teach? Why?)*
   I usually teach my students using various styles. Sometimes I just explain, sometimes use games to make them more excited in following the lesson. Sometimes I give assignments, tasks (task-based). It depends on the topics and on the class.
   But if you could choose, which style are you most comfortable with? If you didn’t really have to consider the topics.
   Well, that’s difficult because each teaching style has its consequence. Using games, usually the students will respond positively in class, but then they forget the main things, what they remember is the game. For task-based, usually the things will remain longer in their mind, but it means lots of work for correction. So I think I just use all of them equally so that I will not have much paper to mark, and the students will be excited and they will learn something. I only use games and display powerpoints, and sometimes they just remember the picture and the excitement of the game and they don’t really remember the things. So I prefer to use all equally.

3. **What kind of learning styles do you think your students have?** (the majority? Different styles – what are they?)
   They are more on visual. (majority)
   Some are kinesthetic. Because some of them, they really enjoy it when they have games. They like moving, they don’t really like sitting, especially the 10<sup>th</sup> graders.
   For the 12<sup>th</sup> graders, maybe because of their maturity, they like working on something more than games. It’s different.
4. Do you find any mismatch between your teaching style and the students’ learning style? What does the mismatch cause? (e.g. they don’t understand, they don’t enjoy, their grades are low, they complain)

(Answered in number 2 & 3) → every teaching style she uses has its own mismatches with the students.

5. How do you deal with students’ learning styles?*

(Answered in number 2)

6. Why do you do that (the answer of number 5)? (What benefits can you get from your strategy? What belief (if any) underlies your reason? What motivates you to do so? Or are there any other factors (such as school regulations, other barriers) that may affect your strategies in dealing with students’ various learning styles?)

The first thing is that I want my students to really get something when they sit in my class. And also I want them to love sitting in my class. So if I just use one learning style, they will get bored sooner, they’ll have no motivation to learn English. So that’s why I want them to enjoy the class by giving them different experience.

7. If there were something else you could do about dealing with students’ learning styles, what would it be?

To expect my students to have the same style of learning would be impossible. Actually the change that I expect to happen is in myself. I wish that I have more time, be more creative and more diligent in preparing my classes so that every time I conduct any activity in class, that is something well prepared and my students will really get something from my class. So I don’t want changes to happen from my surrounding, but from myself.

8. What would be your advice to other teachers dealing with students’ learning styles?

My advice would be, learn your students well so that we can give them what they want. It’s not only giving them what they want, but what they need. So when they sit in class studying English, when they have different experience, they will be motivated. Try to always think of something new to do in class. And doing that is not that easy.