**The Merits of Language Learning Styles**

**in English for Young Learners**

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***Abstract:*** *Language Learning Style is one of the internal factors that plays major roles in the success of English language learning for young learners. Previous studies showed that this internal factor help both teachers and students in language teaching and learning. Language learning styles can tell the teachers about the ways the students learn English. Therefore they can provide a wide range of methods and materials effectively. Additionally, the students themselves can learn easily and fast by knowing their own styles in learning English. They can also predict their own personal strengths and weaknesses; so that they are aware of the problems they may face during the learning process and can overcome them easily. The fundamental purpose of this paper is to present about language learning styles and its merits in English for Young Learners.*

***Keywords:*** *Merits, learning styles, English for young learners (EYL).*

***Abstrak:*** *Gaya belajar bahasa merupakan salah satu faktor internal yang berperan sangat penting dalam menentukan suksesnya pembelajar muda dalam belajar Bahasa Inggris. Berbagai hasil penelitian terdahulu menunjukkan bahwa faktor internal tersebut sangat berperan dalam membantu para guru dan siswa di dalam proses belajar mengajar. Gaya belajar bahasa dapat membantu guru dalam mengidentifikasi cara belajar siswa. Sehingga memudahkan guru dalam mempersiapkan berbagai metode dan materi secara efektif. Selain itu, para siswa juga mampu belajar dengan lebih mudah dan cepat apabila mereka mengetahui gaya belajar yang dimilikinya. Mereka pun bisa menyadari kelebihan dan kekurangan mereka dalam belajar Bahasa Inggris, sehingga mereka akan lebih siap dalam menghadapi berbagai tantangan yang mungkin ditemui selama proses belajar dan mereka merasa mampu mengatasi hal tersebut dengan mudah. Makalah ini menyajikan tentang pentingnya gaya belajar bahasa bagi pembelajar muda.*

***Kata Kunci:*** *Peranan, gaya belajar, Bahasa Inggris bagi pembelajar muda.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Language mastery is not an instant outcome of teaching and learning language, particularly English. Teachers in preschool and primary education programs in every country may have English language learners in their classrooms. There are many factors affecting the success of learning and teaching English for young learners. Two of the factors are internal factors and external factors. Language learning styles is categorized as the internal factor which plays major roles in teaching and learning English for young learners.

Various scholars have defined learning styles differently. Ahmad (2011) points out “learning styles are a person’s natural, habitual and preferred ways of absorbing, processing and retaining new information and skills (p. 33). In addition, Abidin, Rezaee, Abdullah, and Singh (2011) state that “learning styles were found to affect learners’ learning behaviors” (p. 144). Learners who have different learning style preferences tend to behave differently in the way they perceive, interact, and respond to the learning environment. Learning styles are considered by experts to be one factor of success in higher education. Acquiring and processing of information by learners can occur in various ways. Their learning styles might be influenced by their previous learning experiences, genetic make-up, and culture (Vaseghi et al., 2012).

The students apply the styles and strategies to accomplish the goals that they will achieve after learning. Language styles and strategy that are applied by the students will be diver from time to time based on the material they taught, subject they got, and their own condition. A learner may apply variety and number of language learning styles. The number and variety of the styles used will give different contributions to the learners’ language learning achievement and their proficiency. In line with the Anderson’s explanation (2005) that the learners who have large number of variety and large number of learning strategies will be more proficient language learners. Based on the foregoing discussion, this theoretical based-paper presents about language learning styles, English for young learners, and the merits of language learning styles in EYL.

**LANGUAGE LEARNING STYLES**

Styles vary across individuals. Brown (2007) states, “Style is a term that refers to consistent and rather enduring tendencies or preferences within an individual” (p. 119). For instance, a person might be more visually oriented, more tolerant of ambiguity, or more reflective than someone else. These would be styles that characterize a general or dominant pattern in someone’s thinking or feeling. The concept of style differences in learning offers a structure for 'learning how to learn' and 'teaching learners how to learn more effectively'. This, in turn, provides a basis for a richer application of communicative methodology in Foreign Language lessons (Banner & Rayner, 2000). To learn, we depend on our senses to process the information around us. Nosratinia (2011) states “most people tend to use one of their senses more than the others” (p. 4). Based on this, there are three basic types of learning styles that mostly used by language learners, namely, visual, auditory, and kinesthetic.

**ENGLISH FOR YOUNG LEARNERS**

Children are natural language learners. They have learned their native language with apparent ease, and by the time they are 6 years old they have brought it to a level of fluency that is the envy of non-native speakers (Pearsonhighered, 2009). Following Klancar (2006), when teaching English to young learners, teachers constantly have to keep in mind the fact that what they have in front of them is a mixed class with varied abilities, expectations, motivation level, knowledge and last but not least, different learning styles and strategies. Thus, it is very crucial for the teachers to vary their approaches and offer as much opportunity as possible to make the whole class find a little something to hold on to, expand and grow.

How children acquire a certain language in a relatively short time, produce sounds and combine them into thousands of words and construct those words into sentences to express their feelings and thoughts are always amazing to see (Yusuf, 2012). The success in learning a foreign language depends on a variety of factors such as the duration and intensity of the language course, the characteristics and abilities of the teacher, the appropriateness of the teaching methodology, the quality of the textbook, the size and composition of the learner group, the amount of natural L2 practice opportunities, and last but not least, the characteristics of the language learner (Cohen, 2005).

In this part, the writers focus on the last factor which is on the learners characteristics. The importance of learner characteristics cannot be overestimated. Foreign language instruction must take into the needs and characteristics of young learners in order to be successful. Teaching objectives and approaches should be geared to the learners’ cognitive level and interests. According to Lefever, 2007), young learners at the transition level (ages 5–8) generally have these characteristics, such as: keen and enthusiastic, curious and inquisitive, outspoken, creative and imaginative, outdoor instruction and active learning, imaginative and creative, active and like to move around, interested in exploration, learn by doing/hands-on experience, holistic, and natural learners searching for meaningful messages. Other important characteristics of young English language learners that may be useful for educators to keep in mind are proposed by Cloud, Genesee, and Hamayan (2002). They stated that young children’s first language is not yet fully developed and they need to develop their native language(s) along with English. Children should be provided with opportunities formeaningful interaction in both languages, including verbal interactionand engagement with printed materials such as books and othermedia. In as many ways as possible, programs for young English Language Learners shouldsupport children’s native languages.

**THE MERITS OF LANGUAGE LEARNING STYLES TO YOUNG ENGLISH LEARNERS**

Language learning styles influence the process of teaching and learning English for young learners in educational field. Many roles in teaching and learning English for young learners can be identified based on the language learning styles used by the young learners. The merits of these factors that can be obtained by both teachers and young learners are: informing the teachers about the ways the students learn English, helping young learners to learn easily and fast by knowing their own styles in learning English, and predicting young learners’ own personal strengths and weaknesses.

First of all, language learning styles can inform the teachers about the ways the students learn English. Therefore the teachers are able to provide a wide range of methods and materials effectively. The key of success in teaching second or foreign language is systematically offering a great variety of activities within a learner-centered and using communicative approach (Hamida, 2012). Furthermore, in her article, she explains that educators can assume that learning styles are adaptable, that learning style preferences can be identified and modified, and that unconscious or subconscious learning styles can become conscious learning strategies, then students, native speakers of English as well as Non Native Speakers should be exposed to the concept of learning styles. Furthermore, Ketabi (2012) points out that gathering information to see how the learners learn, what strategies they used are, will help the teachers learn more about the language learner learning process. Moreover, Chamot (2004) emphasizes that explicit and integrated strategy instruction, language of instruction, transfer of strategies to new tasks, and models for language learning strategy instruction are important issues of language learning strategies instruction.

The second merit of language learning styles is to help the learners learn easily and fast by identifying their own styles in learning English. There are different learning styles or preferred ways of interacting. When learning styles are taken into account, learning can be enhanced. Some children learn best if they have a visual stimulus, others an auditory one or a kinesthetic (practical) task. In addition, the students’ awareness of their existing strategies and the choices of strategies they can choose to use with new materials will help them to solve problem and complete task easily (Abhakorn, 2008). Moreover, Oxford (1990) believes strategies that fulfill certain conditions will make learners learn easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situation.

The last merit of language learning styles for young English learners is to predict their own personal strengths and weaknesses. By knowing their personal strengths and weaknesses, they will be more aware of the problems that they may face during the learning process and can overcome them easily. Cohen (2005) believes that the affective strategy instruction will lead less successful language learners to be better language learners. Moreover, Dhanapala et al. (2007) find out that “Second Language learners in particular, who were well aware of their own learning process and of the strategies, assist them to achieve learning outcome” (p.684).

It is necessary to bear in mind that there is really no right or even no wrong way or strategy to learn. Everyone is unique and each learning style and strategy offers merits as well as drawbacks. Understanding learning style and strategy can help ones to learn as well as work in a more efficient manner.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Taking into account factors related to young learners, which involve knowledge on how they learn as well as their characteristics into the teaching and learning process will continuously remind teachers to review whether their practices have been in accordance with the principles of teaching English to young learners. This will, in turn, result in a more effective learning. As young ELLs enroll in preschool and primary school programs in record numbers, educators must continually strive to provide effective developmentally and linguistically appropriate instruction for all learners. This instruction should take into consideration the characteristics of young English language learners and their language development, the learning conditions that are most effective for these learners, and the kinds of instruction that best meet their needs. In short, language learning styles and strategies have beneficial merits which can inform the EYL teachers about the ways the learners learn English, and to help the young English learners learn easily and fast and to predict their own personal strengths and weaknesses.

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