

# Probing University-level Students' English Learning Style Preferences: A Case Study of Laotian English Majors

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**Abstract** This study examines the preferred English learning styles among Laotian university-level English majors. It is a qualitative research, using a semi-structured interview with 10 purposively selected participants involved in a face-to-face interview. The findings reveal that most participants have more than one preferred learning style in English learning. Most of the participants have the tendency to prefer visual learning style over the others. Males prefer to be more kinesthetic-tactile learners than females, whereas females have the tendency to prefer learning in groups. The findings also show that the present learning styles applied by most participants differ from the ones they did in the past. Teacher, peer, and technology correlate with the participants' English learning style preferences. An analysis of students' learning styles is strongly recommended for teachers. An effective learning can happen if the teacher' teaching styles are adapted to student needs and styles of learning.

**Keywords:** influential factors, learning style preferences, university students

## **Introduction**

An investigation of English learning style preference has been of interest among researchers for decades. According to a wide literature, learning style has been defined differently. For some scholars (Nasreen, 2014; Xu, 2011; Zhou, 2012), learning style is meant as an individual learner's methods of absorbing or receiving information in which they feel most comfortable to learn effectively. Learning methods or styles among students are diverse and very complicated for teachers to understand (Yassin & Almasri, 2015; Wong, 2015). As Wong pointed, even students who are from the same cultural background and in the same educational system, have different learning preferences. Clearly, it is impossible to assume that learners learn in the same way. Some persons would be more comfortable to learn through data, while others would be in favor of learning through models and theories (Vaseghi, Ramezani, & Gholami, 2012). Without knowing how students learn, it might lead to a mismatch in teaching and learning styles, and may cause difficulties for teachers. This means that teachers should consider matching their teaching methods with students' learning styles through incorporating different pedagogical methods and classroom practices (Baig & Ahmad, 2016; Jhaish, 2010; Nasreen, 2014; Wang, 2012). Reid (1987) proposed six different learning styles applied by learners which include visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile, group, and individual learning styles. This concept on Perceptual Learning Style Preferences has been very well-known among English language educators and researchers. Barzegar and Tajalli (2013) even explored Iranian students' English learning styles and analyzed the data using Reid's concept. In the case of Thailand, Khmakhien (2012) also utilized the concept in examining the preferred learning styles among Thai learners of English. More researches (Arunreung et al., 2013; Gilakjani, 2012; Tai, 2013; Tuan, 2011) have also replicated their study with similar concept. However, there has been a modification of the concept, for instance Tai (2013)

added “learning through computer” to the original six learning styles of Reid. According to a wide literature, students’ preferred learning style is correlated with factors such as gender (Fundu, 2015; Inal et al., 2015; Jhaish, 2010; Karthigeyan & Nirmala, 2013; Lau & Yuen, 2010), time (Gurpinar et al., 2011; Naserieh, 2009; Reid, 1987; Tuan, 2011), teachers’ teaching (Guvenc, 2015; Reys, et al., 2012; Zepke, et al., 2010), peer (Donkoh, 2015; Liu, 2012), and culture (Khanum, 2014; Inal et al., 2015; Ramayah et al., 2011). Hundreds of past studies on learning style preferences have been done. However, a few researches have analyzed the perspectives from participants who are English majors (Khmakhien, 2012; Shuib & Azizan, 2015). In the same while, there have been too many studies analyzing quantitative data, so this study is designed for qualitative analysis, aiming to explain how students actually learn English by asking them to speak out rather than rating in a scale. This study is aimed to contribute to the existing knowledge of the area, especially in capturing possible influential factors that are associated with learning style preferences. In addition, identifying learning styles preferred by Lao, EFL learners has not yet been conducted by local and international researchers, particularly with university-level students.

### **Concepts of Learning Styles**

According to Lee and Kim (2014), learning style refers to how an individual learner absorbs, remembers, and processes the information and knowledge in learning situations. For Nasreen (2014), the definition of learning style preferences describes “the characteristic strengths and favorites in the ways people take in and process information, (p. 30).” Similarly, Yassin and Almasri (2015) view that learning style is meant by “the way in which somebody approaches the acquisition of knowledge, (p. 28)”. More consistently, Barzegar and Tajalli (2013) define learning style as “a student’s consistent way of responding to and using stimuli in the context of learning, (p. 2).” To conclude, learning style is about an individual learner’s approaches in

which he/she receives and processes information in a way that he/she feels most comfortable to learn effectively through.

Learning style has been of great interest to several researchers due to its influence on educational dimensions. Learning style serves as an influential role towards learning settings (Alkhatanai, 2011; Lee, 2010). Similarly, learning style presents the overview of how learners learn something comfortably and effectively (Zhou, 2012). It is also claimed that learning style determines learning accomplishment among language learners (Jhaish, 2010; Razawi et al., 2011; Vaseghi et al., 2012). Several researchers agree that recognizing learners' diverse learning styles is critical to the development of teaching effectiveness. By knowing students' preferred learning styles, teachers are able to design suitable instructional methods and encourage students to learn better and achieve the educational purposes (Gilakjani, 2012; Mulalic et al., 2009; Razawi, et al., 2011; Tai, 2013). Seemingly, Yassin and Almasri (2015) propose a view that teachers may encounter difficulties in their teaching practices because of diversity of students' needs and learning situations. From this issue, it might lead to mismatches in teachers' teaching and students' learning styles or it may be an obstacle for students to learn things effectively.

Felder and Silverman (1988) classify learning styles into four paired-groups: "Sensing or Intuitive," "Visual or Verbal," "Active or Reflective," and "Sequential or Global." For Reid (1987), learners basically learn through four different learning channels: Visual learning, Auditory learning, Kinesthetic learning, Tactile learning, and other two social aspects: individual and group learning. According to Neil Fleiming (2012), VARK learning style preference is divided into four different modalities: visual learning, auditory learning, read/write learning and kinesthetic-type learning. Last but not least, Honey and Munford (2002) classified learning styles into four different groups of learners: activist learner, reflector

learner, theorist learner, and pragmatist learner (as cited in, Tantarangsee, 2011).

### **Learning Style Preferences and Correlated Factors**

A number of factors are thought to have an influence and correlate with learning styles. First and foremost, gender has been found to be significantly correlated with students' learning style preferences. Most studies have proved that female and male learners learn in different styles (Fundu, 2015; Inal et al., 2015; Jhaish, 2010; Karthigeyan & Nirmala, 2013; Naserieh, 2009; Radwan, 2014; Reid, 1987; Wang, 2012). Some other researchers (Arunreung et al., 2013; Khmakhien, 2012; Shuib & Azizan, 2015) found opposite results. For instance, Inal, Büyükyavuz, and Tekin (2015) pointed that female students are more likely to favor group learning than their male counterpart, while male students preferred to learn individually. Naserieh (2009) found the same result; male students prefer to learn individually. However, Jhaish (2010) revealed that male students are more in favor of group learning style.

Time has been found as another factor correlated with students' learning styles. The term "time" in this article is actually meant by learning experiences and ages of learners. Through conducting a wide literature, several scholars (Fundu, 2015; Naserieh, 2009; Reid, 1987; Tuan, 2011; Zhou, 2012, and etc.) have agreed that learning styles are affected by time. For instance, in a Turkish context, Gurpinar, Bati, and Tetik (2011) explored if learning styles of 574 students changed over time. According to their findings, 46.9%, 49.3%, and 56.4% of students from three different courses confirmed the changes. Similarly, Reid's study (1987) revealed an interesting result that older-aged learners are more likely to perceive a higher level of preferences on learning styles than younger learners. Ababneh's (2015) study showed that participants express perceived favor in several learning styles. Later, a study conducted by Naserieh (2009), compared the differences among

138 student participants categorized by age. The study indicated that younger students differ from their older counterparts in learning choices. In contrast, Tuan (2011) found opposite results. In Tuan's comparative analysis, older-aged learners are more auditory and kinesthetic learners, while younger ones preferred more group learning styles. Additionally, several researchers (Alkhatnai, 2011; Tuan, 2011) have agreed that the length of learning experience do correlate with learning style preferences, for instance a case study by Tuan indicated that 12-year learning experience makes more individual learners than shorter-experience time learners. However, some empirical studies found inconsistent trend, Khmakhien's (2012) research revealed that there was no significant difference between learning style preference and learning experience.

Other influential factors that affect students' learning styles include the teacher (Alkhatnai, 2011; Khmakhien, 2012; Wong, 2015). For example, the teacher engages or may not engage their students in learning (Reys et al., 2012). By being friendly, teacher ensures that students will have no pressure, instead they become more comfortable to learn and participate in any teaching activities (Guvenc, 2015). Additionally, Zepke, Leach, and Butler (2010) mentioned that good relationship between teacher and student leads to quality in teaching and learning, as students enjoy dealing with challenging tasks. Through conducting a wide literature, teacher has been largely claimed as a factor strongly correlated with students' learning style preferences. The educational systems are also involved (Abante et al., 2014; Ramayah et al., 2011; Tuyet, 2013). As revealed by Tuyet's research (2013) that the two main powerful factors affecting Vietnamese students' learning passiveness are cultural characteristics and educational system (involving evaluation method, class settings, classroom facilities, environments). This trend is more consistent with previous research done by Ramayah and colleagues (2011), who found educational technology and Abante and colleagues (2014) who

found teaching aids and materials to be strongly correlated. In fact, several scholars (Donkoh et al., 2015; Liu, 2012; Ramayah et al., 2011) found that peer is a strong determinant of learning styles choices of students. In contrast, Donkoh and colleagues (2015) showed that participants do not agree that peer affected their learning styles. Besides, previous studies have proved that culture affects learning style preferences. For instance, in Ababneh's (2015) study, the results explained that Jordanian females are naturally quiet, shy, and conservative; they speak with low voice. By this reason, Jordanian female students are more likely to prefer learning individually, not keen for group learning and discussions. Alkhatnai (2011) found that Saudi students prefer group learning; they enjoy working and discussing with others in group. Alkhatnai explained that the group learning style by the students may reflect to Arab society, as Saudi people prefer working in group, too. Correspondingly, other researchers (Khanum, 2014; Inal et al., 2015; Ramayah et al., 2011, Reid, 1987; & Tuyet, 2013) also found the same result, that culture is a key determinant of learners' learning style choices. Even though hundreds of researchers have great attention to the investigation of students' learning styles, little studies have focused on adult learners, especially participants who are English majors (Khmakhien, 2012; Shuib & Azizan, 2015). Moreover, in past studies on English learning style preferences, the findings were mainly from quantitative analyses. As a result, the present authors would like to employ an interview study to examine the Laotian English majors' English learning style preferences, expecting to hear the participants' oral descriptions about their English learning experiences.

### **Purposes of the Research**

This research aims to understand the learning styles preferred by university-level students who major in English at the Faculty of Education, in a university in Laos. This study sought answers to the following objectives: (1) To probe what learning styles

participants apply in acquiring English; (2) To describe how males and females prefer to learn English; (3) To explain the differences between their prior and current preferred learning styles; and (4) To explain what factors have tendency to correlate with their choices of learning styles.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

As it is aimed, this research is to capture the reality and some complexities in students' English learning styles. The present authors expect to see how students would describe their preferred English learning modes. Therefore, a qualitative-method approach is employed in this study. According to Creswell (2012), a qualitative research is well suited to use for identifying a problem and the reality of phenomenon in detail. Moreover, through a face-to-face interview, the researchers and the participants did more interaction, as participants were able to ask for clarifications if they don't understand a particular question posed and/or researchers can even probe deep to elicit more information.

### **Participants**

This study interviewed the English majors who enrolled in the continuing program for English Teacher Education at the sampled university. There was only one class with 30 students in this program. These students were in one of the present authors' English Phonetics class. Before selection, the authors introduced the research to the students, and asked them whether or not they felt comfortable to take part. It seemed that almost all of the students agreed to be interviewed thus the authors purposively selected 10 students from the class to participate in a face-to-face interview. To be equal in gender, five males and five females were the participants for this study, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants' details and duration spent in each interview

No.	Participants	Sex	Duration (Minute)	Dates
1.	Vorlasing	M	00:15'	10 Oct 2017
2.	Xayyadeth	F	00:16'	10 Oct 2017
3.	Lattanavong	M	00:17'	19 Oct 2017
4.	Panyavong	F	00:18'	19 Oct 2017
5.	Thammavong	M	00:20'	23 Oct 2017
6.	Phongsavath	F	00:19'	23 Oct 2017
7.	Kounpanya	M	00:19'	24 Oct 2017
8.	Deemanivong	F	00:16'	24 Oct 2017
9.	Keo-asa	M	00:18'	29 Oct 2017
10.	Nampong	F	00:19'	29 Oct 2017

### Instrument

In this study, a semi-structured interview is the primary instrument. The present authors developed the interview protocol. It consisted of 15 questions that drew deep in four main points, according to the central research questions: (1) What are the participants' preferred learning styles?, (2) What are the differences between their past and current learning style preferences?, (3) What are the differences in their English learning style preferences between males and females?, and (4) What could affect their preferred learning styles? Most sub-questions were more open-ended (eg. Would you describe how you learn better? Please describe a typical teaching style is effective for learning to you?). The idea was to give participants more choices and to make them comfortable to give responses. As soon as the interview guide was developed, it was reviewed by two experts to ensure the content validity. There were some mistakes with the wordings but were corrected to ensure clarity in data collection.

## **Data Collection**

The present authors scheduled the 10 selected participants for interview, according to their date and time availability/preferences. The length of the interview ranged between 15 to 20 minutes, and the average lasted about 17.7 minutes. During each interview, the authors firstly started asking the participants with two or three broad questions (eg. what was your English learning style like in previous school or the past a few years? is there any difference between their prior and current learning styles?). Then more follow-up questions and probes followed. The idea was to develop the interaction more naturally and to cover all spots of the examination. During each interview, the authors audiotaped the talks by having a smartphone as a recorder. Also, there was note-taking during the interviews in order to ensure that every important point was captured.

## **Data Analysis**

In this interview study, Reid's (1987) concept on perceptual learning style preferences was utilized for the purposes of describing or judging on what learning styles the participants have towards their English learning. According to Reid, learners can be categorized into six different groups: 1) visual learners (they learn well by seeing pictures, charts, or words in books, they prefer teachers to explain lessons in a written form. through reading, charts, pictures, etc.), 2) auditory learners (they learn well through listening, such as lectures, audiotapes, etc. They prefer teachers to give oral explanation or have more class discussion), 3) kinesthetic learners (this group of learners learn best through doing things or participating in classroom activities. They prefer teachers to assign role-plays and field trip outside school), 4) tactile learners (They learn well by experimenting, building things or touching materials), 5) group learners (They learn better through group interaction, they prefer to learn and share ideas with other students), and 6) individual learners (This type of learners learn better through spending

time alone and working by themselves). Having collected the data, the authors conducted content analysis, following Creswell's (2012). In analyzing such data, the authors made a critical assessment of the participants' description speech, then labeled or marked, and categorized the data according to the themes, and determined in the conceptual framework.

## Findings

Having analyzed the interview data, the authors have put the brief descriptions of the findings in Table 2, as follows.

Table 2. Frequency Distribution for Qualitative Data

Generated Themes	Verbatim Responses and Frequencies	Codes and Constructs	Description of the General Theme
Participants are more visual, kinesthetic, and individual learners	Visual= 5; Individual=5; Kinesthetic=4; Auditory=3; Tactile= 3; group=3	Major LS preferences	Participants' personal preferences of LS. Participants' uses of LS in English learning situations in both inside and outside of classroom
Participants have multi-LS preferences	P1=(kines+indivi) P2=(audi+group) P3=(visual+indi) P4=(visual+group) P5=(kines+tact+indi) P6=(visual+audi) P7=(kines+tact+indi) P8=(visual+audi) P9=(kines+tact+indi) P10=(visual+group)	More LS frequently cited by the participants	Other LS in which participants learn better through
Males are more kinesthetic learners, while females are more group learners	Males: P1 (M)=(kines+indivi) P3 (M)=(visual+indi) P5(M)=(kines+tact+indi) P7(M)=(kines+tact+indi) P9(M)=(kines+tact+indi) Females: P2 (F)=(audi+group) P4 (F)=(visual+group) P6 (F)=(visual+audi) P8(F)=(visual+audi) P10(F)=(visual+group)	Major LS preferences, categorized by male and female groups	Male & Female participants' personal preferences of LS. Male & Female participants' uses of LS in English learning situations in both inside and outside of classroom
LS preferences are influenced by Time	Supporting quotes by= p1+p3+p4+p5+p7+p8+p9+p10 eg. <i>"In the past, I did not have time learning in groups or with friends. It's unlike the present days,"</i> said p3.	Tendency of changes in LS between prior and current LS preferences	Participants' descriptions on their LS preferences in two different times (past and present time)

LS preferences are correlated with Teachers	Supporting quotes by = p1+p2+p3+p7+p8+p9+p10 eg. <i>"A teacher inspires me in having this learning style. I used to ask him about how to become fluent at English. I ask that in order to follow his ways of learning or how he learns English best,"</i> said p7.	Tendency of correlation between LS and Teachers	Participants' descriptions on how teachers affect their LS preferences
LS preferences are correlated with Technology	Supporting quotes by = p5+p6+p7+p9 eg. <i>"I like reading and reviewing some difficult English vocabulary through using my smartphone. It is very easy,"</i> said p5.	Tendency of changes in LS between prior and current LS preferences	Participants' descriptions on how technology affect their LS preferences
LS preferences are correlated with Peers	Supporting quotes by = p2+p3+p10 eg. <i>"I like sharing ideas with peers because each student will have their own understanding. When all of them share it out, that will be more learning,"</i> said p10.	Tendency of changes in LS between prior and current LS preferences	Participants' descriptions on how peers affect their LS preferences

Notes: (LS=learning styles; P=participants)

As indicated in Table 2, the authors have generated several themes on understanding the learning style preferences of Laotian English learners at a university-level. The following sections detail all the generated themes.

### **The Participants have the Tendency to Prefer Multi-learning Styles**

This qualitative study finds that all of the participants do not hold on to a single learning style, meaning that they own multi-learning style preferences. For the 10 participants, three of them are learners of a combination of three different learning styles, while the other seven participants apply the two learning styles in English learning. One example that supports this tendency was from Vorlasing, a pseudonym, as he said that:

*For me, I learn best through doing. I prefer to learn English and practise doing exercises about*

*English alone. What I do is that I will act myself as two different roles and practise speaking English: practise asking & answering alone. I do not like teaching styles by teachers which are more lectures. When teachers lecture, they like to relate to other matters which are not sometimes about the lessons.*

Clearly, the above quote represents that he has more than a learning style preference: kinesthetic and individual learning. This finding correspondingly reflects to past studies (Ababneh, 2015; Donkoh et al., 2015). For instance, Donkoh and the association proved that majority of the participants in their study are classified as a combination of auditory and visual learners. This trend might be very true, as the learning and teaching situation are diverse in a university level. Wong (2015) also views that there is a high flexibility in students' learning styles.

***Laotian English majors are more Visual, Individual, and Kinesthetic learners:***

The finding shows that six out of 10 participants frequently cited to visual, and five of them frequently cited to individual and kinesthetic learning styles as their best learning choices. This means that most participants have the tendency to be more visual, individual, kinesthetic learners than the auditory, tactile, and group learners, which only two or three cited to the latter learning styles. An example quote by Thammavong, a pseudonym, supports the trend well:

*For me, I like most when teachers give more examples with instructions. I don't really like it when teachers only lecture without demonstrations. That makes students have difficulties to understand things.*

The finding of this study confirms that Wang (2012), who investigated the learning styles and learning strategies among students of Shanghai University, and proved that kinesthetic, visual, and individual learning styles are the most favored learning characteristics by the student participants. More consistently, Gilakjani (2012), Shuib and Azizan (2015) found the same finding, that visual learning mode is the highest preference. This study also contributes to more researches (Lee & Kim, 2014; Liu, 2012; Tuan, 2011), proving that university students are more likely to prefer individual learning style. However, in a work done by Tai (2013) in the Taiwanese context, the study claimed that Visual and individual learning styles are the least preferred learning styles among students.

### **Males have a tendency to Differ from Females in Learning Style Preferences.**

Having compared how males and females describe their learning modes, the finding reveals that the males have a tendency to be kinesthetic learners. Several researchers (Lau & Yuen, 2010; Mulalic, et al., 2009; Wong, 2015) found similar results, indicating that males prefer learning with challenging tasks. Similarly, this trend supports what Lau and Yuen viewed, that males prefer to test concepts and ideas, and they are more likely to think independently. However, Wang (2012), and Barzegar and Tajalli (2013) found a conflict, indicating that females were found to be more kinesthetic learners than males. On the side of female, this study points that female participants have a tendency to have more preference on group learning style than their male counterparts. It was found to be consistent with past studies. There have been several researchers (Barzegar & Tajalli, 2013; Inal et al., 2015; Naserieh, 2009; Radwan, 2014) which proved that females are more likely to discuss lessons or learn in groups with peers. According to Radwan's work, females are in favor of communication-oriented style. In addition, female students expressed to be more active learners

by finding opportunities to develop their English abilities both in classrooms and outside classrooms than males. Moreover, Khalil (2005) said that female is naturally more socialized than male, so they have a tendency to communicate and build networks of people better than male (as cited in Radwan, 2014). On the other hand, this study seems to have a conflict with some past studies, for instance, male students were found to be in favor of group learning style (Jhaish, 2010). These scholars (Arunreung et al., 2013; Khmakhien, 2012; Naqeep & Awad, 2011; Shuib & Azizan, 2015) found that males did not differ from females, in terms of their English learning style preferences.

### **Changes in Learning Styles Preferences are Influenced by Time.**

Whether or not the participants' learning styles change overtime is also a paramount interest in this study. Unsurprisingly, the study reveals that the learning styles adopted in the past among the sample are clearly changed. They have become more visual learners now, shifting from being auditory learners in the past. Based on this finding, it seems that what Wong (2015) concluded was true, stating that an individual's preferred learning styles are changeable over time. Correspondingly, such a trend seems to be relevant to a number of scholars, who proved that learning style is associated with time such as learning experiences (for instance, Alkhatnai, 2011; Gurpinar, Bati, & Tetik, 2011; Hassan et al., 2012; Tai, 2013; Tuan, 2011) and ages of learners (for instance, Fundi, 2015; Naserieh, 2009; Tuan, 2011; Zhou, 2012). A study of Gurpinar and the team (2011) may be a good example among the others mentioned above, finding changes in learning styles among medical students through making comparisons between the two periods of time. Moreover, Reid's (1987) work reported that adult learners learn differently from the younger ones, stating that the adults have the tendency to prefer visual and individual learning styles. In this respect,

what were seen in this interview study (participants changed from being auditory to visual learners) could be consistent with Reid's. On the other hand, this finding differs from the previous works done by Inal, Büyükyavuz, and Tekin (2015) and Khmakhien (2012), who found no difference or changes in learning styles among students in different grades.

### **Preferred Learning Styles are in Correlation with Factors such as Teachers, Technology, and Peer.**

#### ***Teacher:***

Several scholars (Alkhatnai, 2011; Khmakhien, 2012; Reys et al., 2012) all have found that teacher's teaching methods have a significant influence on the learning styles of learners. Accordingly, this interview study reveals the same finding. It was found that teachers' teaching do not match with students' learning modes. Student participants expect to learn with visual aids as they learn better when they can see what is being taught. This mismatch in teachers' teaching styles and students' learning styles seems to strongly contribute to what Yassin and Almasri (2015) viewed, that it is the teachers' difficulty in teaching to respond students' needs or styles because students are diverse in learning mode preferences. The study also points that participants' current learning styles differ from the ones they adopted in the past. For example, they had a tendency to learn more kinesthetically now compared to the past. This might be true to say that a cause for such a change is influenced by teaching methods of teachers, meaning that their English teachers in their past classes did not push them to engage in hands-on activities. The trend, it was found to be very consistent with Khmakhien (2012), and Wong (2015), who mentioned that students' preferred learning styles can be changeable due to teachers' teaching performances. Furthermore, it was also found in this study that majority of participants prefer to learn from teachers who are friendly (not too serious) and interactive with students because they feel more comfortable

to ask questions or discuss issues with teachers when they have concerns or difficulties. Similarly, Guvenc (2015) agreed that teacher matters, that if students can feel that their teachers pay great care on them, they become very happy and curious to participate in any activities teachers assign or conduct. This idea is also consistent with several other scholars such as Reyes and colleagues (2012), Zepke, Leach, and Butler (2010), who confirmed that teacher-student relationship have a powerful influence on students' learning and achievements.

Technology is found as another influential factor that correlates with learning style preferences.

***Technology:***

This study finds that the majority of the participants go for visual learning style; they express great preference of reading things. In particular, they prefer to read the learning materials they download from the internet. Even checking new English vocabulary, they seem to use electronic tools quite often as it is more convenient from them. This trend matches past studies. For instance, Souriyavongsa and his association (2013) found that most Lao university English majors prefer to use electronic dictionary to check or learn about new English words. Similarly, Ramayah and colleagues (2011) also found that a purpose of utilizing technology by most of their students is to download educational materials and other related things. Ramayah and the team also found that students who like learning through technology have a tendency to be reading-focused. Consistently, the present study shows the same finding. Other scholars (Alkhatnai, 2011; Tai, 2013) found that participants in their research perceive very positive attitudes towards technology as it provided them a comfortable learning mode. This means that they can learn lessons online or downloaded materials on their own. This view was found to be very similar to what the present researchers found. For instance, most informants claim that technology facilitates their self-learning, as they can download

whatever English lessons they are interested in and they can learn it whenever they have time. Several scholars (Parvin & Salam, 2015; Tabatabaei & Gui, 2011) propose reasons for having positive perceptions about technology among students that students have fun and become more interactive learners if teachers utilize technology in their instructions.

***Peer:***

In this study, peer is also found to be the participants' good partner in English learning in case they have difficulties in understanding the lessons. As they claim, they consider their peers necessary for their learning, especially in time of doing their preparation for an exam. They prefer to discuss with friends, because through discussion they learn better. This study seems to support other researchers' works, such as by Ramayah, Nasrijal, Leong, Sivanandan, and Letchumanan (2011), who that peer is a strong determinant influencing students to prefer visual and auditory learning styles. Similarly, Liu's work (2012) showed that students' learning styles are developed through socializations with peers. However, Donkoh and colleagues (2015) found a different finding, indicating that peer has no influence on their learning choices, as perceived by the participants.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study probes on the preferred learning styles applied in acquiring English among university-level students. The study also analyze possible differences in learning styles between male and female students, between their past and current learning styles, as well as the influential factors in association with their English learning.

The study finds that the participants applied multiple learning styles in their English classes. Most frequently used

styles are found to be visual, individual, and kinesthetic learning. Males have a tendency to be kinesthetic learners, while females have a tendency to be categorized as group learners. One finding also reveals that participants' preference of learning styles changes is associated with time; they become more visual learners now, shifting from being auditory learners in the past. And three factors: teachers, technology, and peer have a tendency to be in correlation with their learning style preferences.

It is shown that a variety of learning styles exists among students in the class. All teachers should understand the differences in students' learning modes. For instance, some students would feel more comfortable to learn individually, whereas others would not. In addition, teachers need to do some preliminary investigations to seek insights into and understand how students learn; at least once prior to each academic year commencement. What teachers can do is just to conduct a small survey in their own classes to understand more about students' learning situation, learning modes, and things around the classroom. Additionally, it is recommended for teachers to treat all students equally and fairly. Being interactive with students as well as showing good rapport with them leads to effective learning among students. In literature review, many scholars have proposed that teacher is a strong determinant for students' learning. That means if teachers give great care to students, they become happy and feel more confident to take part in any classroom activities. Teachers should be aware of that giving lectures does not work all the time. Teachers need to plan carefully when they should lecture and when they should not. As mentioned earlier, teachers need to recognize differences in learners. Teachers, therefore, need to adapt and adopt the different types of teaching aids and through different activities. Simply put, teachers should make students to be both listeners and speakers or doers as well. In addition, as it is found that the majority of participants preferred individual learning style, teachers should add more activities as well as

learning which make students think independently on their own. The idea of having students in groups does not always work. Teachers should note that some students might not feel comfortable to learn with others due to different personal characteristics such as self-efficacy for socialization, ability to absorb information, and learning style preferences.

This research has provided understandings of students' English preferred learning styles in the context of Laos and in the qualitative perspective. However, such understandings need more confirmation from further studies. The present authors, therefore, would strongly recommend future research to look at the relationship between learning styles and other factors such as peer, teachers' teaching styles, technology, and culture background. To further develop the relevance of teaching by teachers and students' learning styles, an investigation of mismatch between teachers' teaching and students' learning styles is also recommended.

In this study, some limitations existed because only ten students were purposively selected and invited to the face-to-face interviews and the data was solely dependent on the participants' oral descriptions. Therefore, the replicate studies might be convincing with generalizability of the results by having bigger size of participants as well as integrating a quantitative-method approach.

### **Acknowledgments**

This work has been fully supported by the Faculty of Education (FED), National University of Laos. I highly appreciate it for the leadership of FED that facilitate and give encouragement all the way. My sincere thanks also go to my research team: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Athithouthay Chatouphonexay, Say Phonekeo, M.Ed., and Toby Xaixanith,

M.Ed. for their commitment on giving invaluable and helpful advices for the completion of this study.

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