Navigating Diversity: Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in EFL Teachers' Implementation of Learning Style-Based Strategies

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Abstract

This study explores the supporting and inhibiting factors in EFL teachers' implementation of learning style-based strategies, focusing on Miss I, an EFL teacher at SMAN 2 Pangkep. The research aims to identify how Miss I accommodates students' diverse learning styles and the challenges she faces in doing so. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the study involved classroom observations and interviews with Miss I and her students. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data. Findings indicate that Miss I's willingness to adjust her teaching methods based on student engagement, along with the positive student attitudes and basic resources such as textbooks with pictures and mobile phones, played a key role in her ability to accommodate different learning styles. However, inhibiting factors included her lack of formal training in learning styles and differentiated instruction, limited classroom facilities, and passive student participation. Despite these challenges, Miss I demonstrated flexibility and creativity in her approach, though the absence of adequate training and resources limited her full capacity to address all students' needs. The study recommends future research on the impact of teacher training programs for differentiated instruction and exploring the integration of technology to support diverse learning styles in resource-constrained classrooms.

Keywords: *EFL teaching strategies, learning styles, differentiated instruction, teacher flexibility, classroom engagement*

Introduction

Every student has a different way of processing information and learning in the classroom. Learning style is the way or approach that a person uses to receive, process, and remember information. Reid (1998) identified three main learning styles: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. Visual learning style refers to the tendency of students to understand information more easily through pictures, diagrams, or writing. Meanwhile, auditory learning style prioritizes hearing, in which students find it easier to absorb information through verbal instructions or discussions. Kinesthetic learning style, on the other hand, involves physical movement, where students learn more easily through practical activities or direct experiments.

Recognizing and understanding these learning styles is very important in education, especially in teaching EFL (Tu, 2024; Ali & Yahya, 2022). Given that English learning in Indonesia is often limited to the classroom with little exposure to the real world, teachers must be careful in creating teaching strategies that are not only effective but also suitable for the various learning styles of their students. English is a very important subject in Indonesia, and effective language learning will greatly depend on how teachers adapt their teaching to the differences in students' learning styles (Wahyuningsih and Afandi, 2020).

However, despite the importance of understanding students' learning styles, the implementation of teaching strategies that align with these styles does not always go smoothly. One of the main challenges faced by many teachers is the difficulty in identifying and accommodating the diverse learning styles of students in the classroom. Teachers are often hindered by rigid curricula (Sharma, 2023; Grecu, 2022), large class sizes, and limitations in resources and training (Omar & Jamaludin, 2024; Mahananda, 2024). An education curriculum that is more focused on standardized tests tends to limit flexibility in choosing teaching methods that can accommodate these diverse learning styles. In addition, teacher-centred teaching and a lack of materials that can be adapted to specific learning styles make it difficult for many students to absorb information effectively, resulting in a teaching and learning process that does not run as expected.

In Indonesia, this diverse education system presents even greater challenges. Differences in learning styles among students are not always appreciated or well understood. Different learning styles require different approaches to teaching. However, many teachers still use a uniform teaching approach without considering these differences, which risks making learning ineffective and exclusive for all students. One major challenge is the lack of training for teachers in identifying and accommodating students' learning styles, as well as the lack of access to technology and learning materials that can be adapted to different learning styles.

Previous studies, such as those conducted by Fitriyani (2016) and Dedi Miswar (2020), have discussed the importance of understanding students' learning styles and applying appropriate teaching strategies. However, although these studies provide insights into how learning styles can influence teaching strategies, there is

still a gap in research that specifically explores how EFL teachers identify students' learning styles and how they adjust their strategies based on these identifications. Existing research has mostly focused on how the teaching strategies used by teachers influence student learning outcomes, but there is little discussion of the factors that influence teachers' ability to identify and adapt their teaching to students' learning styles effectively.

Therefore, this study aims to fill this research gap by exploring the factors that support and hinder EFL teachers in identifying students' learning styles and adapting their teaching strategies. This study will focus on the important role of teachers in creating a more inclusive learning experience by paying attention to the differences in learning styles that exist in the classroom. By understanding these factors, this study is expected to provide deeper insights into how teachers can adapt their strategies to meet the diverse learning needs in EFL classrooms in Indonesia. Thus, this study will make an important contribution to understanding how EFL teachers can be more effective in identifying and accommodating students' learning style differences, as well as how teaching strategies can be adapted to improve learning outcomes in the classroom.

Method

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach, which aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied by classifying data into specific themes. According to Creswell & Creswell (2023), in a qualitative descriptive approach, researchers focus on data collection and analysis with little use of interpretive theories or concepts. In this study, the data collected were in the form of text and images, which were then analysed using thematic analysis techniques. This process allowed the researcher to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how EFL teacher accommodate students' learning styles in the classroom.

The subject of this study was an EFL teacher at SMAN 2 Pangkep known as Miss I. Miss I has been teaching at the school since 2016 and was chosen as the subject because of her high awareness of differences in student learning styles. In addition, she also strives to implement various teaching strategies to improve students' learning experiences in the classroom. The researcher also interviewed several tenth-grade students to obtain their perspectives on the teaching strategies implemented by the teacher. The interviews with students aimed to explore how they felt the strategies impacted their learning process.

The data collection techniques used in this study consisted of observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to directly observe the interactions between teachers and students in the classroom, in order to obtain a natural picture of how students' learning styles were accommodated in the learning process. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers and several students to explore their experiences related to the implementation of teaching strategies in the classroom. The documentation used includes photos or videos taken

during the teaching process and lesson plans used by teachers. The use of these three techniques is important to provide rich and in-depth data about the participants' experiences in learning and teaching.

The data collected from observations, interviews, and documentation were then analysed using thematic analysis techniques, as described by Braun & Clarke (2006). The analysis process began with familiarization with the data, in which the researcher read and transcribed the interview data to gain an initial understanding of the information contained in the data. After that, the researcher codes the data, where each part of the data is given a code that is relevant to the research questions.

The next stage is theme searching, where the researcher groups similar codes to find the main themes that emerge in the data. This process is followed by theme review to ensure that the themes identified accurately reflect the data. Finally, the researcher writes a research report presenting the findings with examples of data supporting those findings. Thus, this thematic analysis technique enables researchers to gain deeper insights into how EFL teacher identify and accommodate students' learning styles in the classroom.

Results

In implementing teaching strategies that accommodate diverse student learning styles, after conducting observations and interviews in the classroom, several key findings emerged that explain how Miss I adapted her teaching practices and the challenges she faced. The following table describes the supporting factors that help Miss I in accommodating students' learning styles in the EFL classroom.

Table 1 Factors Supporting the Accommodation of Students' Learning Styles in EFL Teaching Strategies

No	Supporting Factors	Explanation	Extract
1.	Willingness to Adjust Teaching Methods	Miss, I tried to adjust her teaching based on student engagement without formal knowledge of learning styles.	*'Although I don't really have a deep understanding of these students' learning styles, I just know that the one who is visual is, auditory is, and kinaesthetic is...'*
2.	Active Observation of Student Reactions	Miss, I observed students' reactions to adjust her teaching methods for visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic learners.	*'I looked while observing when I thought in EFL classroom, the one who was quick to understand if there was a picture or not, the one who liked group discussion...'*
3.	Use of Simple and Varied Strategies	Miss, I used various strategies like pictures, discussions, and ice-	*'I usually used various kinds of teaching strategies, such as some pictures, discussions, ice*

		breaking to cater to different learning styles.	*breaking...'*
4.	Flexibility with Lesson Flow	Miss, I showed flexibility by adjusting activities based on students' focus and engagement in real-time.	*'If I saw the class was not conducive, I tried to turn up their attention back to get them would be active again.'*
5.	Maintaining a Positive Classroom Atmosphere	Miss, I kept the classroom relaxed to encourage participation, allowing different learning styles to emerge naturally.	*'If the class was too tense, students were also tense, usually they would be silent because of they afraid, so I make it relaxed but still respected and listened to.'*

The following table describes the inhibiting factors encountered by Miss I in accommodating students' learning styles in the EFL classroom.

Table 2 Factors Inhibiting the Accommodation of Students' Learning Styles in EFL Teaching Strategies

No	Inhibiting Factors	Explanation	Extract
1.	Lack of Formal Training on Learning Styles	Miss I's reliance on intuition instead of structured knowledge made it difficult to fully apply strategies tailored to learning styles.	*'Because of my lack of knowledge, and I have never participated in special training and there should be special training for teachers about students' learning styles.'*
2.	Limited Classroom Facilities	The lack of feedback mechanisms prevented Miss I from effectively gauging the impact of her strategies on students' learning styles.	*'There is also a lack of smart TV here and two projectors, there is smart TV but only in class XI...'*
3.	Passive or Shy Students	The large class size made it hard to monitor each student's individual progress and needs.	*'During the discussion, there were also just silent, not everyone wanted to talk, there were still passive.'*

Based on findings obtained through observation and interviews, supporting and inhibiting factors in accommodating students' learning styles in EFL classes can be seen from the efforts and challenges faced by Miss I. Although limitations in formal training and classroom facilities are obstacles, Miss I's willingness to adjust teaching methods and actively observe students' reactions demonstrates a positive attitude towards professional development and flexibility in teaching.

With a variety of simple yet varied strategies and efforts to create a positive classroom atmosphere, Miss I has succeeded in making learning more inclusive for students with diverse learning styles. However, challenges such as a lack of facilities and limitations in providing feedback remain obstacles that need to be overcome to improve the effectiveness of teaching in the future. These findings provide a clear picture of the importance of adapting teaching strategies to accommodate students' diverse learning styles, as well as the need for further support for teachers in overcoming existing obstacles.

Discussion

This study revealed several key factors that either supported or hindered Miss I's efforts to implement teaching strategies that accommodate students' diverse learning styles in the EFL classroom. The findings from classroom observations and interviews provide valuable insights into how Miss I adapted her teaching practices and the challenges she faced.

One of the main supporting factors was Miss I's willingness to adjust her teaching methods. Although she lacked formal knowledge of learning style theories like VARK (Fleming, 1992), she actively experimented with different approaches based on her observations of what worked for her students. This aligns with Hsu (2014), who emphasized that a teacher's openness and responsiveness to student needs are more important than relying solely on complex theories, improving student engagement and learning outcomes. Miss I's ability to observe and adjust to students' reactions, such as identifying which students engaged more with pictures, group discussions, or listening activities, was another key factor.

This approach mirrors formative assessment, as described by Black & William (2009), where teachers use daily observations to inform their teaching decisions. Additionally, Miss I used simple, varied strategies like pictures, group discussions, and ice-breaking activities, which aligned well with students' learning preferences. These strategies helped keep students engaged and provided a dynamic learning environment, as confirmed by Tian & Zheng (2023), who noted the effectiveness of collaborative, problem-solving activities for student engagement.

Basic resources, such as textbooks with illustrations, also supported Miss I's efforts by providing visual aids to engage students without requiring extra materials. The allowance for students to bring phones and search for information online further enhanced learning by connecting students to digital resources, which, while informal, contributed to their learning experiences, as discussed by Syahni & Wandira (2023).

However, several inhibiting factors also emerged. A major challenge was Miss I's lack of formal training in learning styles or differentiated instruction. She admitted that her teaching relied largely on intuition and experience, which reflects Pashler et al. (2008)'s observation that without training, teachers may struggle to effectively meet the diverse needs of their students. The lack of multimedia resources, such as projectors or smart boards, further hindered Miss I's ability to deliver diverse

sensory input, as noted by Tomlinson (2014) and Parsons et al. (2018), who highlighted the importance of varied resources in catering to different learning preferences. Additionally, while group discussions were an effective strategy for many students, some remained passive or shy, which limited the success of these interactive methods. This challenge underscores the importance of active student participation for the success of differentiated teaching strategies.

Conclusion

This study examined the factors that supported and inhibited Miss I's efforts to implement teaching strategies that accommodate students' diverse learning styles in the EFL classroom. The findings highlight that Miss I's willingness to adjust her teaching methods based on students' reactions, along with generally positive student attitudes and the availability of basic resources like textbooks with pictures and mobile phones, significantly contributed to her ability to tailor her strategies. However, several inhibiting factors, including a lack of formal training on learning styles, limited classroom facilities, and passive student participation, posed challenges to fully accommodating the diverse needs of her students. While Miss I demonstrated flexibility and creativity, the absence of formal training and adequate resources limited the effectiveness of her strategies.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that future research focuses on exploring the impact of specialized teacher training in differentiated instruction and learning styles. Training programs designed to equip teachers with practical tools for addressing diverse learning needs could enhance the effectiveness of EFL instruction. Additionally, further studies should explore the potential of integrating technology to support differentiated teaching strategies, particularly in resource-limited classrooms.

It would also be beneficial to examine students' perspectives on the teaching strategies used in EFL classrooms to better understand their experiences and tailor strategies to their needs. This study's limitations include its small sample size and focus on a single teacher in one institution. Future research should consider a broader sample of teachers and schools to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and strategies involved in accommodating diverse learning styles in EFL classrooms.

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