Chapter 5

Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

The objectives of this study were to investigate learning style preferences of ethnic group Non-English majors at the Southwest Nationality Institute, and then to develop a supplementary material project based on the students' learning style preferences. The sample subjects were selected from sixteen departments at this Institute. There were three instruments (questionnaires, task framework, and classroom observation) implemented in this study. The process of doing this study started from developing the learning style questionnaires, finding the subjects' learning style preferences, designing the supplementary material, observing the classrooms, evaluating the effectiveness of the supplementary material, and improving the material.

The results of this study showed that:

1. The subjects often used visual and individual styles; they sometimes used syllabus-free, tactile, kinesthetic, global, analytic, extrovert, group, and syllabus-bound styles. And they occasionally used introvert and auditory styles in language learning.

2. Based on the results of the style survey, this SMP was constructed through task framework and authentic material to match the students' learning style preferences. The effectiveness of this material was evaluated through the classroom observation and the project survey. The results reflected that

this supplementary material was effective in using authentic input to increase the students' interests and to motivate their independent learning. Meanwhile, this study indicated that teachers needed to create suitable learning material by using learners' learning style preferences, especially to guide learners to choose to work on their language styles with little help or no help from the teacher. However, some parts of this SMP needed to be improved due to the difficulty of authentic input.

Discussion about Learning Style Preferences

As the results of the learning style survey indicated, Southwest Nationality Institute students often used visual and individual styles and occasionally used introvert and auditory styles in their language learning.

The subjects preferred visual style because this style helped them to better and more easily understand the input. Moreover, they have been trained to acquire information through reading materials by using their visual style.

The respondents in this study tended to be individual learners because of the current English textbooks and, along with that, the traditional style of classroom instructions. Moreover, teachers assign students to complete the exercises individually. Furthermore, the teachers have been using the traditional teaching approach of using whole-class activities, which encourage the students to be individual learners, instead of group work learners.

Because of the environment described above, the students have been shaped into individual and visual learners since they started studying. The students have no opportunity to explore and try new learning styles that could help them in language learning. Learning style, which refers to the

habits/behaviors people exhibit when they acquire new information, could be trained in specific learning situations. As Littlewood (1988) states, it is possible to help adult learners to explore their language learning style in order to suit the requirements of different learning situations.

On the other hand, the subjects in this study occasionally used auditory style. This resulted from the lack of practice in listening activities in current English textbooks. This defect certainly influenced the students' communicative skills because the difficulty in encoding information from listening led to the difficulty in understanding the context, which consequently led to the difficulty in communicating with others. Obviously, auditory style is very important in learning languages and should be introduced and practiced. If students can adapt themselves to this learning style, it can help them develop their abilities in language learning.

Therefore, only occasional use of a learning style does not necessarily mean that the students do not enjoy other styles. Rather, it is caused by a lack of experience resulting from the teaching approaches and current English textbooks.

Discussion about the Supplementary Material

Language teachers should know not only students' strengths but also their weaknesses in language learning in order to be able to reinforce those strengths and to overcome those weaknesses. This SMP was constructed with the aim of adapting teaching material to the students' learning style preferences or strengths.

Visual and individual styles were included in this SMP from the first task to the last one because the students often used these two styles in their language learning. Because using students' strengths is most likely to yield more

successful language learning. In this SMP, the overhead projector, local photos, related reading materials, videos, and the Internet searches were very popular tools that complemented the students' visual style. Simultaneously, the listening activities, note-taking exercises, writing summaries, selecting material from the Internet, and the oral presentations allowed the students to use their individual style maximally.

However, it is insufficient to only adapt the students' often used learning styles in designing this material because the students need to know and use different learning styles in different learning situations. As Brown (1994,192) states, "good learners learn different styles of speech and writing and learn to vary their language according to the formality of the situation." Therefore, this SMP implemented the students' "sometimes used styles in constructing the classroom activities, for example, the activities in task 3 encouraged the students to cooperate with their peers while arranging the word cards into logical sentences. Some advantages of group work are claimed by Brown (1994): group work is effectively generates interactive language, offers an "embracing affective climate", promotes learner responsibility, and improves students' ability to cooperate with peers and to solve their problems for the common goal.

Moreover, this SMP provided some activities based on analytic and global styles. The reading and writing activities in task 4, the listening comprehension, note-taking activities in task 2, task 5, and task 7 offered many opportunities for students to use both analytic style and global style.

Lastly, Brown (1994) indicates that the recent advances in educational applications of computer hardware and software have effectively provided a new resource for language classrooms. Therefore, the Internet access was included in

task 6 because it helped the use of more tactile and individual styles. Moreover, this activity led the students into a real world and into self-study.

Recommendations of this Study

Based on the finding of this study, this researcher given the following recommendations:

1. Learners need to be encouraged to learn and to adapt different learning styles in different learning situations.

2. Learners should have more opportunities to practice their social and cooperative skills.

3. Learners should be given access to the Internet.

4. Language teachers need to create classroom activities and to reconsider their teaching approaches according to their students' learning styles.

5. Language teachers should be given computer training.

6. The current English textbooks need to add appropriate authentic materials according to the students' interests.