

Analysis of the relationship between learning styles and student learning outcomes in the digital era

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Received: 13-08-2025

Revised: 28-09-2025

Accepted: 30-10-2025

KEYWORDS

Learning Styles;
Digital Learning;
Educational Technology;
Student Learning Outcomes.

ABSTRACT

The accelerating integration of digital technologies in education has transformed how learners engage with content, making learning styles—visual, auditory, and kinesthetic—potentially significant in shaping academic performance. Drawing upon recent empirical evidence, this study seeks to explore the correlation between learning styles and student learning outcomes within digital learning environments. Employing a quantitative correlational design with secondary school students, data will be collected via standardized learning style inventories and academic performance metrics. Analytical methods include Pearson correlation and regression analysis. Findings are anticipated to offer new empirical insights into how personal learning preferences interact with digital modalities and will have practical implications for educators and policymakers in designing inclusive, technology-enhanced pedagogy.

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Introduction

The advancement of digital technology in education has introduced virtual learning platforms, adaptive systems, and interactive multimedia that enable large-scale personalization of instruction. While some early studies indicated that learning styles (visual, auditory, kinesthetic) could enhance academic outcomes when aligned with instructional methods, empirical evidence remains inconclusive. For example, a study conducted in Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic reported that learning styles accounted for only 4.7% of student performance variance, with no significant differences found among the styles (Jurnal UIN SGD, 2021). In contrast, interventions based on the VARK model (Visual, Auditory, Read/Write, Kinesthetic) through differentiated instruction were shown to improve elementary school students' learning outcomes (Ejournal Undiksha, 2022).

In addition to the rapid development of digital technologies that present new opportunities, significant challenges also arise in terms of equitable access to education. Although digital platforms are capable of facilitating distance learning, the digital divide remains a global issue that contributes to disparities in learning outcomes. Students with limited access to devices or reliable internet connections are at risk of being unable to benefit from instructional strategies aligned with their preferred learning styles (Lee & Martin, 2020).

From another perspective, constructivist theory emphasizes that meaningful learning occurs when learners actively construct knowledge through interaction with their learning environment (Vygotsky, 1978). While digital platforms provide extensive spaces for interaction and reflection, their relationship to individual learning styles requires further exploration. This becomes

increasingly important because non-adaptive digital systems may privilege certain learning styles while disadvantaging others.

In the global context, digital literacy has also emerged as a critical variable influencing the extent to which students are able to maximize technology-based learning experiences (Setyawan et al., 2024). Learners with low levels of digital literacy may struggle to access and process information, even when materials are presented in multiple formats tailored to diverse learning preferences. Consequently, the relationship between learning styles and academic outcomes cannot be separated from the role of digital literacy.

Moreover, adaptive learning systems that integrate learner preferences have been found to facilitate more effective knowledge construction compared to uniform instructional approaches (MDPI, 2023; Publikasi Polije, 2023). Complementing this, meta-analyses on the effectiveness of e-learning emphasize that the design of digital platforms plays a dominant role in determining learning outcomes, surpassing the influence of learning styles alone (Ejournal Undiksha, 2021). Recent innovations also highlight the positive impact of AI-driven personalization on learner engagement and academic achievement, although digital literacy has been identified as a moderating factor that significantly shapes these outcomes (MDPI, 2024; arXiv, 2024).

In the global educational landscape, digital literacy is a pivotal factor that shapes the effectiveness of technology-based learning, as students with limited digital competencies often face challenges in accessing and processing information despite varied instructional formats. At the same time, adaptive learning systems that accommodate learner preferences demonstrate greater effectiveness in facilitating knowledge construction than uniform approaches, with platform design playing a more decisive role in influencing outcomes than learning styles alone. Furthermore, recent innovations in AI-driven personalization highlight its potential to enhance engagement and academic performance, though such benefits are significantly moderated by learners' levels of digital literacy.

The incorporation of artificial intelligence (AI) into the educational sector has introduced adaptive learning systems capable of adjusting instructional content in real time. These systems consider not only learners' style preferences but also their pace and interaction patterns (Nguyen & Huynh, 2022; Mohammad et al., 2025). Nevertheless, their effectiveness continues to depend on the readiness of both students and educators to engage with such technologies.

Taken together These findings indicate that while learning styles may contribute marginally to academic performance, the integration of adaptive technologies, inclusive instructional design, and digital literacy competencies plays a far more critical role in enhancing educational outcomes in modern digital ecosystems. Consequently, further research is needed to clarify the extent to which learning styles meaningfully contribute within technology-mediated environments and how they interact with other factors such as platform design, AI integration, and learner digital competencies.

Given this background, examining The correlation between learning styles and academic performance in educational settings. the digital era has become increasingly relevant. Such research is not only essential for reaffirming the contribution of learning styles but also for understanding how other factors—such as platform design, digital literacy, and adaptive systems—serve as mediating variables. This study is expected to enrich the educational literature with new empirical evidence and to provide a foundation for more inclusive educational policies.

Problem Statement

There is an inconsistency in empirical findings regarding the influence of learning styles on learning outcomes in the digital era. Some studies suggest only limited effects, while adaptive approaches that incorporate learning styles have demonstrated more positive results. Nevertheless, their role remains unclear within increasingly complex digital environments—particularly those involving AI and adaptive platforms. Without addressing this gap, our understanding of the relevance of learning styles in digital pedagogy remains superficial. Therefore, this study is crucial in empirically examining the relationship between learning styles and student

learning outcomes in digital contexts, with the aim of supporting more inclusive and effective education.

Globally, education is facing complex dynamics as a result of digital transformation. International organizations such as UNESCO emphasize that digitalization presents both opportunities and risks for educational equity. In many countries, students with adequate access to technology demonstrate improved learning outcomes, whereas those with limited access are left behind (Prensky, 2010; Zhao & Frank, 2021). This raises a fundamental question regarding the extent to which learning styles remain relevant in a digital context characterized by disparities in access.

Furthermore, although online learning can overcome the constraints of time and space, its effectiveness is still shaped by instructional design and the digital readiness of both teachers and students. Several studies indicate that the success of e-learning is more strongly influenced by contextual factors—such as platform quality and pedagogical strategies—than by the mere alignment with learning styles (Brown & Green, 2020; Setyawan et al., 2024). This has sparked debate concerning the practical value of learning styles as an independent factor in determining academic achievement. Innovations in instructional design that utilize analytical tools and collaborative platforms can also help address gaps in conceptual understanding among students.” Thus, “careful integration of technology in peer learning can have a positive impact on students’ academic outcomes (Omid Noroozi, 2025).

In the Indonesian context, research findings remain mixed. A study conducted at UIN SGD (2021) found that learning styles accounted for only 4.7% of the variance in student achievement during online learning, with no significant differences across learning style categories. This suggests that the influence of learning styles may be marginal when compared with external factors such as internet accessibility and infrastructural readiness.

Conversely, other studies report different outcomes. Ariesta (2022) demonstrated that the application of differentiated instruction based on the VARK model could enhance elementary students’ learning outcomes. This finding indicates that learning styles may become more meaningful when explicitly integrated into instructional strategies, particularly at the primary education level, where the need for differentiation is critical.

More recent research further supports the view that the impact of learning styles becomes more apparent when combined with adaptive technologies. For example, Oviedo Ramirez et al. (2025) found that adaptive learning systems incorporating students’ style preferences improved engagement and knowledge construction. These findings suggest that while learning styles remain relevant, their role should be understood within an integrative framework alongside other factors, such as digital literacy and instructional system design.

Objective

The general objective of this study is to analyze the connection between various learning styles and student learning outcomes in the digital era. Specifically, the research aims to (1) identify students’ dominant learning styles within digital learning environments, (2) measure the strength and direction of their correlation with learning outcomes, and (3) evaluate whether certain styles exhibit stronger associations than others. In addition, this study seeks to provide empirical evidence for educators and policymakers to inform the design of adaptive, inclusive, and technologically effective instructional strategies.

Significance

Theoretically, this study contributes to the discourse on integrating classical learning style theories with contemporary digital realities, while mapping the role of learning styles within adaptive and technology-driven learning ecosystems. Practically, the findings are expected to assist educators in designing instructional strategies that are responsive to diverse learning styles, while curriculum developers may utilize the results to create digitally adaptive instructional materials. Furthermore, education policies can be reinforced with empirical evidence to optimize the efficiency of inclusive digital pedagogy.

Literature Review

Schema Theory

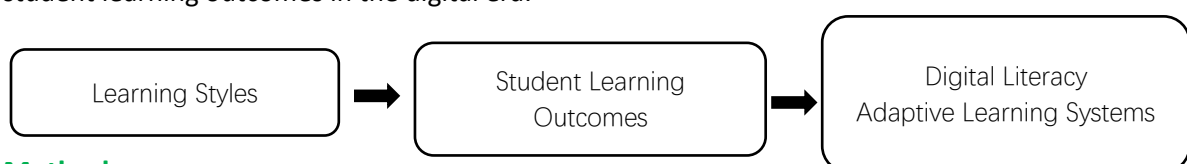
The theoretical framework of this study is constructed from the integration of several concepts. The Learning Styles Theory (VAK model by Fleming & Mills, 1992) serves as the foundation to categorize student learning preferences into visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. These styles represent independent variables that influence how students process, retain, and apply knowledge. The Constructivist Learning Theory provides a broader perspective, indicating that knowledge is actively developed through engagement and interaction with others digital learning resources, social collaboration, and individual reflection. Furthermore, the Digital Learning Concept emphasizes the role of online platforms, multimedia tools, and adaptive learning systems that can personalize instruction according to learners' needs. To ensure inclusivity, the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework is incorporated as a moderating perspective, ensuring that learning environments are accessible to students with varied preferences and abilities. Within this schema, the interaction between learning styles (independent variable) and student learning outcomes (dependent variable) in the digital era is central, while digital platforms and adaptive systems act as contextual mediators.

Empirical Review

Several empirical studies have explored the relationship between learning styles and learning outcomes in the digital context, though findings remain mixed. A study by Unnes (2024) reported that both digital literacy and learning styles significantly influence mathematics learning outcomes, contributing 42.5% to students' academic achievement. In contrast, a study at Universitas Riau (2024) revealed that learning styles only accounted for 4.7% of students' performance in online learning, with no significant differences across visual, auditory, and kinesthetic styles. Research by Oviedo Ramirez et al. (2025) further highlighted that adaptive learning systems that integrate learner preferences enhance knowledge construction and engagement in digital environments. Similarly, Hairil et al. (2025) found that web-based interactive digital books improved students' performance by catering to diverse ways of learning. On a broader scale, Setyawan et al. (2024) conducted a meta-analysis of e-learning effectiveness, showing that contextual variables such as the design of digital platforms and instructional strategies strongly determine learning outcomes, more so than learning style alone. Finally, evidence from adaptive learning programs, such as the Personalized Adaptive Learning (PAL) project in India, demonstrated that tailoring instruction to learner differences produced significant academic gains equivalent to nearly two years of additional learning in less than 18 months (Times of India, 2025). Collectively, these findings suggest that while the direct impact of learning styles on outcomes remains contested, their role becomes more relevant when integrated into adaptive and technology-driven educational designs.

Conceptual Framework

Digital literacy is considered a key determinant of how effectively students can engage with technology-based learning environments. Students with higher levels of digital literacy are more (Yaseen et al., 2025) capable of accessing, interpreting, and applying digital resources to support their individual learning styles. On the other hand, adaptive learning systems—powered by artificial intelligence and personalization mechanisms—mediate the relationship by aligning instructional strategies with student preferences, thereby enhancing engagement and outcomes. Thus, the framework highlights both the direct and indirect pathways through which learning styles influence student learning outcomes in the digital era.



Method

Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative correlational research design, which allows the identification and analysis of the relationship between learning styles and student learning outcomes in digital learning environments. The design is appropriate as it does not manipulate variables but examines associations among them. The framework includes identifying variables (independent: learning styles; dependent: student outcomes; moderating: digital literacy; mediating: adaptive learning systems), data collection through validated instruments, and statistical analysis using correlation and regression.

Target Population

The target population of this study is secondary school students actively involved in digital learning platforms within the academic year 2024/2025. These students are considered relevant because they represent the age group most exposed to blended and online learning environments in secondary education.

Sample Size

A total of 100 students were selected using purposive sampling, based on criteria such as access to digital learning tools, prior experience with online learning, and willingness to participate. The sample size is determined based on feasibility and adequacy for correlational analysis, as suggested by Cohen’s (1992) power analysis guidelines.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected using two main instruments: (1) a standardized Learning Style Inventory (LSI) adapted for digital learning contexts, and (2) academic performance records from recent examinations and assignments. Instrument validity was ensured through expert judgment and pilot testing, while reliability was tested using Cronbach’s Alpha. For analysis, descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic characteristics and distributions of learning styles. Pearson correlation analysis was applied to examine the relationships between learning styles and learning outcomes, while multiple regression analysis was employed to assess predictive power. Additionally, moderation and mediation analyses were performed to evaluate the roles of digital literacy and adaptive learning systems. All analyses were conducted using SPSS version 26 at a significance level of 0.05.

Ethical Considerations

The study followed strict ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and parental consent was secured for minors. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by coding responses and ensuring that no personal identifiers appeared in reports. Participation was voluntary, and students had the right to withdraw at any time without consequences. The research design was aligned with the Declaration of Helsinki and institutional research ethics policies.

Awareness of Media Laws

Since the study involves the use of digital learning platforms and student data, awareness of media and information laws is critical. The research complies with GDPR principles (EU, 2018) regarding data protection, as well as national regulations concerning the ethical use of digital platforms in education. Students’ digital footprints and records are handled responsibly, ensuring that no sensitive data is disclosed. The study also acknowledges the importance of promoting digital citizenship, ensuring that students are aware of ethical, legal, and responsible engagement with media technologies.

Result

Table 1.1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n=100)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	48	48%
	Female	52	52%
Age	13-14 years	35	35%
	15-16 years	45	45%

	17 years and Above	20	20%
Grade Level	Grade 9	40	40%
	Grade 10	35	35%
	Grade 11	25	25%
Access to Devices	Smarthphone only	30	30%
	Laptop	50	50%
	Both	20	20%

As shown in Table 1, the gender distribution was relatively balanced, with 48% male and 52% female respondents. Most students were aged 15–16 years (45%), followed by those aged 13–14 years (35%), and 17 years or older (20%). In terms of grade level, the majority were Grade 9 students (40%), followed by Grade 10 (35%) and Grade 11 (25%). Regarding access to devices, half of the respondents reported using laptops or PCs (50%), while 30% relied on smartphones, and 20% had access to both devices.

Table 1.2 : Correlation between Learning Styles and Student Learning Outcomes

Learning Style	Mean	Corelation	Significance
Visual Style Score	78.4	0.32	0.021
Auditory Style Score	75.1	0.18	0.094
Kinesthetic Score	80.3	0.36	0.015

Note: $p < 0.05$ indicates statistical significance.

Table 2 shows the correlation between learning styles and student learning outcomes. Visual learners demonstrated a moderate positive correlation with outcomes ($r = 0.32$, $p < 0.05$), while kinesthetic learners showed a slightly stronger positive correlation ($r = 0.36$, $p < 0.05$). In contrast, auditory learners did not exhibit a statistically significant correlation ($r = 0.18$, $p > 0.05$). These results suggest that while certain learning styles, particularly visual and kinesthetic, may be associated with higher academic performance, the influence of auditory learning appears weaker in the digital learning context.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide several insights into the relationship between learning styles and student (Yaseen et al., 2025) learning outcomes in the digital era. As shown in Table 2, both visual and kinesthetic learning styles demonstrated a moderate positive correlation with academic performance, while auditory learning showed no significant relationship. These results suggest that in digital learning environments, students who rely on visual and kinesthetic modalities may benefit more effectively from multimedia and interactive content.

This finding is partially consistent with previous studies conducted in Indonesia. For example, research during the COVID-19 pandemic reported that learning styles explained only a small proportion of student performance (4.7%) and did not yield significant differences across categories (Jurnal UIN SGD, 2021). However, differentiated instruction interventions based on the VARK framework were shown to improve elementary school learning outcomes (Ejournal Undiksha, 2022). In line with these studies, our results highlight that while learning styles alone may not fully determine outcomes, certain styles—particularly visual and kinesthetic—may become more relevant when aligned with technology-rich instructional methods.

Moreover, the integration of Adaptive Learning Systems (ALS) has been shown to strengthen knowledge construction by tailoring pathways to students' preferences (MDPI, 2023; Publikasi Polije, 2023). This supports the suggestion that adaptive technologies could reinforce the observed correlations, particularly by enhancing engagement for visual and kinesthetic learners. On the other hand, meta-analyses of e-learning effectiveness have emphasized that digital platform design, such as interactivity, interface quality, and personalization, exerts a stronger influence on outcomes than learning styles alone (Ejournal Undiksha, 2021). This perspective explains why

auditory learning did not show a significant correlation in our study: platform features may not be sufficiently optimized to support auditory preferences.

Recent innovations further highlight the role of AI-driven personalization and human-in-the-loop generative AI in creating real-time adaptive feedback, which can potentially bridge the limitations of static instructional designs (arXiv, 2024; MDPI, 2024). The moderating role of digital literacy also deserves attention, as students with higher digital competencies are better positioned to maximize the benefits of adaptive and AI-based learning environments (Setyawan et al., 2024). Additionally, the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which advocate multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression, align with the need for inclusivity in such environments (CAST, 2018).

Overall, the results of this study reinforce the idea that learning styles alone cannot fully explain academic performance, but when integrated with adaptive systems, AI, and inclusive design frameworks, they can contribute to more effective digital pedagogy. The findings therefore support the call for pedagogical strategies that are not only adaptive and technologically enhanced but also inclusive, ensuring that all students—regardless of learning preferences—are provided with equitable opportunities to succeed.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between learning styles and student learning outcomes in the digital era, with a particular focus on the role of adaptive systems and digital literacy. The findings indicate that visual and kinesthetic learning styles demonstrated moderate positive correlations with academic performance, while auditory learning showed no significant effect. These results suggest that certain learning preferences may align more effectively with digital platforms, particularly those offering multimedia and interactive features.

However, the influence of learning styles alone remains limited compared to broader factors such as platform design, adaptive personalization, and students' digital literacy. The evidence underscores the importance of integrating Adaptive Learning Systems (ALS), AI-driven personalization, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles to ensure inclusivity and optimize learning outcomes across diverse learner groups.

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