



LEARNING STYLES OF YOUNG BIPA LEARNERS IN MALANG AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR THE DESIGN OF INDONESIAN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the learning styles and media preferences of 34 BIPA student (ages 7–12) from three international schools in Malang. Results indicate a dominant visual learning style, with auditory as secondary and kinesthetic least preferred. Students favor picture- and writing-based vocabulary activities, as well as animated films and picture books. Preferred topics include nature–weather and folklore. These findings underscore the need for multimodal, contextual BIPA instruction that integrates visual and audio elements to enhance motivation and comprehension.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesian Language Learning for Foreign Speakers (BIPA) at the early childhood level plays a strategic role in supporting second-language acquisition and children's cognitive and social development. At this stage, foreign students are in their golden age, when their language-learning abilities are highly plastic, so the right learning approach is a determining factor in their success in mastering Indonesian. One important aspect in designing BIPA learning for children is understanding learning styles, namely, the unique

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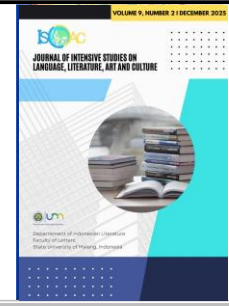
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ways in which learners process, understand, and remember new information. By recognizing children's learning preferences, teachers can create learning activities that are more adaptive, enjoyable, and meaningful, thereby making the second-language learning experience more effective and relevant.

Various learning styles, such as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic, provide a framework for teachers to understand how children respond to learning stimuli. Research by Widharyanto and Binawan (2020) shows that foreign students have diverse learning styles, influenced by their cultural backgrounds, previous educational experiences, and early childhood developmental characteristics. On the other hand, Riyanti and Sungkono (2020) emphasize that the compatibility between teaching methods and learning styles can increase engagement, motivation, and language retention. Malang, a heterogeneous city and a center of BIPA learning, recognizes that students' learning styles are becoming increasingly relevant. This city not only welcomes foreign students from diverse cultural backgrounds but also has an educational ecosystem that encourages innovative, contextually relevant pedagogical practices.

Children's media preferences, alongside their learning styles, play an essential role in shaping the effectiveness of Indonesian language acquisition. Young learners respond differently to various types of media, such as pictures, videos, music, interactive games, and physical activities. Aminah, Werdiningsih, and Maharany (2025) found that learning media aligned with children's preferences not only enhances motivation but also accelerates vocabulary and structural comprehension. Likewise, integrating local cultural content, including folktales, traditional songs, and regional games, has been shown to enrich learning experiences and help children connect the language to Indonesian sociocultural contexts (Nur Afnia, Daeng, & Hasriani, 2023). Thus, instructional designs that take into account both learning styles and media preferences are increasingly important for improving the effectiveness of BIPA instruction for children.

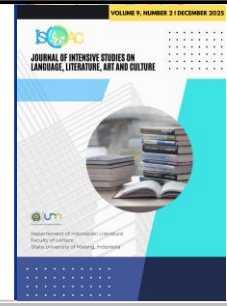
However, studies on the learning styles of young BIPA learners in Indonesia remain limited, especially those that explicitly link these findings to the development of

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responsive, adaptive, and child-centered Indonesian language learning designs. Much of the existing research focuses on adult or adolescent BIPA learners, whereas children, as second-language learners, have unique characteristics such as the need for play-based activities, high curiosity, and sensitivity to meaningful learning experiences. Consequently, research on the learning styles of young BIPA learners in Malang City is crucial to addressing this gap and providing an empirical foundation for designing more innovative, developmentally appropriate instructional models.

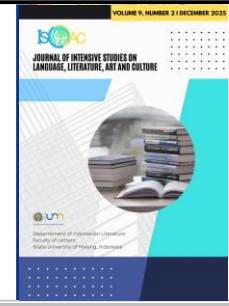
Recent international studies offer valuable insights relevant to early childhood second-language learning within the BIPA context. A study in Hong Kong (2024) demonstrated that learning interest and home environment substantially influence preschool children's language development, highlighting the importance of considering motivation and social support beyond the classroom. An experimental study in Japan (2024) reported that using digital applications in English language learning improved grammar understanding, learning satisfaction, and persistence among elementary students, indicating that interactive digital media can support visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles. Moreover, research on game-based learning for 11–12-year-olds (2025) found that engagement and enjoyment in digital games significantly improved vocabulary retention and overall learning success, reinforcing the value of interactive methods for enhancing children's motivation. Perspectives from intercultural communication in second-language teaching (2025) further emphasize the importance of integrating cultural elements to ensure effective, contextually relevant language acquisition for children. Additionally, studies on teacher practices and early childhood literacy environments (2024) reveal that teacher-child interactions and the quality of learning environments significantly influence children's language and literacy development, underscoring the need for instructional designs that respond to learners' needs and styles. Collectively, these findings provide a robust empirical basis for designing BIPA learning strategies that integrate interactive media, enjoyable activities, and relevant cultural content.

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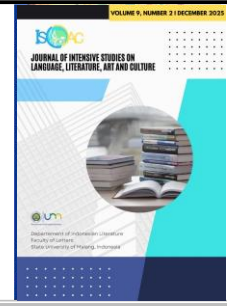


This study aims to identify the learning styles of young BIPA learners in Malang City and analyze their implications for Indonesian language instructional design. The findings are expected to contribute to teachers, curriculum developers, and BIPA institutions in designing more effective, inclusive, and child-sensitive learning strategies. Furthermore, this research enriches the literature on second-language education for early childhood, particularly within Indonesia's multicultural educational context.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach to explore the learning styles of young BIPA learners in Malang City and their implications for Indonesian language instructional design. A qualitative design was selected to enable an in-depth and contextual understanding of children's learning preferences, experiences, and instructional needs, generating rich descriptive data that reflect learners' real classroom situations (Creswell, 2014). The participants were 34 BIPA learners aged 7–12, purposively selected for their active involvement in Indonesian language learning. Data were collected in natural instructional settings through child-friendly questionnaires administered in two stages: identifying visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning tendencies, and examining learners' preferences for instructional media and content, including images, audio, videos, interactive games, folktales, and traditional songs. Teachers assisted during the administration process to ensure learners' comprehension without influencing their responses.

To ensure instrument validity and trustworthiness, the questionnaire was developed based on established learning style frameworks and adapted to the developmental characteristics of young language learners. Content validity was established through expert judgment involving experienced BIPA teachers and a language education specialist, who reviewed the relevance, clarity, and age appropriateness of the items. A pilot administration was conducted with a small group of learners outside the main sample to identify potential ambiguities and improve item clarity. Data credibility was further



strengthened through triangulation, with learners' responses compared to teachers' classroom observations, thereby enhancing the accuracy and reliability of the findings. Data analysis followed a descriptive qualitative procedure. Learners' responses were systematically organized, coded, and categorized by learning style, preferred instructional media, and favored learning content. Patterns and dominant tendencies were identified to reveal meaningful relationships between learners' learning styles and their instructional preferences. The interpreted findings were then linked to principles of child-centered and developmentally appropriate language instruction, providing an empirical basis for designing responsive, engaging, and effective BIPA instructional strategies for young learners.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

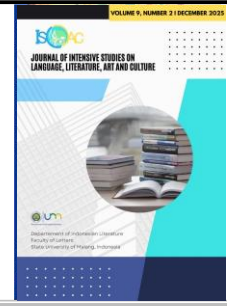
Findings

The findings indicate that learners in three international schools in Malang predominantly prefer a visual learning style. Among the total responses, most students favored learning through pictures, videos, and colors, while fewer preferred auditory learning through listening to stories or songs, and only a small number demonstrated a kinesthetic preference for movement, play, or hands-on activities. These results suggest that visual input plays a central role in supporting learners' comprehension and engagement, although auditory and kinesthetic modalities remain relevant for accommodating diverse learning preferences.

Discussion

Learning Style Preferences of Young BIPA Learners

The questionnaire for this study was administered to students in three international schools in Malang City as part of an investigation into learners' preferences in language learning. Data collection was conducted over a two-month period and involved 34 respondents aged 7–12 years. Each participant was asked to select their preferred way of



learning, whether they felt more comfortable learning through pictures or videos (visual), listening to stories or songs (auditory), or engaging in movement and hands-on activities (kinesthetic). The data analysis indicates that most students preferred the visual learning style, followed by the auditory style, with kinesthetic learning the least preferred. These findings provide an initial overview of learners in international schools in Malang and serve as a basis for developing more appropriate and responsive instructional strategies.

When learning, I prefer to:

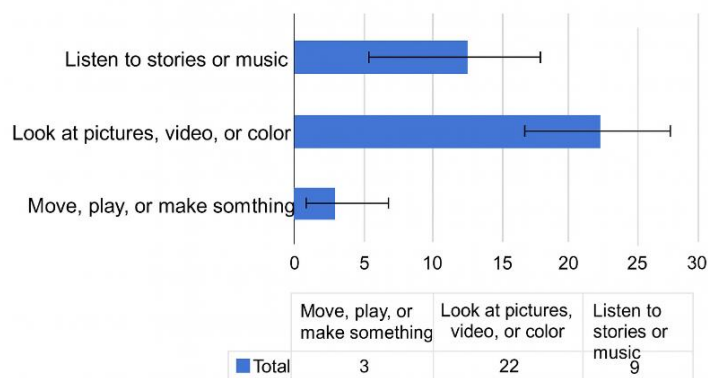
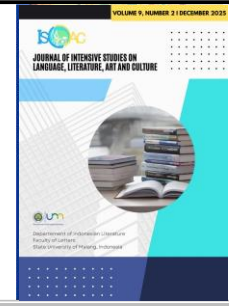


Diagram 1

Based on the questionnaire results shown in Diagram 1, respondents' learning style preferences indicate a clear tendency toward the visual type. The option "Seeing pictures, videos, or colors" received the most selections, with 22 respondents. This finding suggests that most learners comprehend material more effectively when it is presented through visual stimuli, such as illustrations, diagrams, photographs, or video. This may be attributed to the role of visual processing in helping learners connect abstract concepts with concrete representations, making information easier to understand and retain.

The option "Listening to stories or songs" ranked second, with 9 respondents choosing it. This indicates the presence of a group of learners with an auditory learning preference.



These learners benefit more from exposure to sound-based inputs, such as direct explanations, audio recordings, music, or oral storytelling. Auditory learning is typically associated with strong listening skills, sensitivity to intonation, and a tendency to process information linearly through spoken sequences. Meanwhile, the category “Moving, playing, or making something” received the fewest selections, with only 3 respondents. Although small in number, this group represents learners with a kinesthetic learning style, who tend to understand material through physical activity, hands-on practice, educational games, or tactile exploration. These learners require instructional strategies that incorporate movement, object manipulation, or simulations.

Overall, the results indicate that while most learners exhibit a visual learning preference, auditory and kinesthetic styles are also present. These findings imply that instructional designers should adopt a multimodal approach. Teachers or facilitators can combine strong visual media with verbal explanations and simple interactive activities to accommodate diverse learner preferences, thereby making the learning process more effective, inclusive, and engaging.

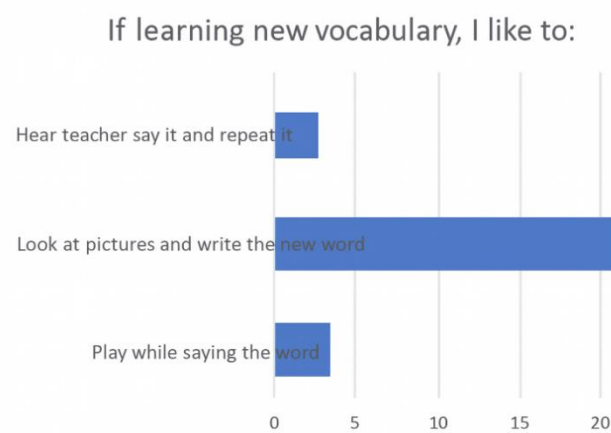
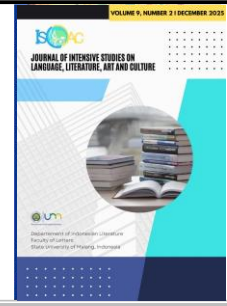


Diagram 2

The results in Diagram 2 reveal a clear preference for visual learning in vocabulary



acquisition. The option “Seeing pictures and writing the new word,” chosen by 25 respondents, indicates that most children process vocabulary more effectively through visual stimuli. This aligns with Mayer’s *Multimedia Learning Theory* (2020) and Paivio’s *Dual Coding Theory* (2007), which argue that combining words and images strengthens comprehension and memory.

Six respondents preferred “Playing while saying the word,” reflecting kinesthetic learning tendencies. These learners benefit from movement, hands-on tasks, and games, consistent with the VAK model (Fleming & Mills, 1992) and active learning principles (Hannafin & Land, 1997). Meanwhile, four respondents selected “Listening and repeating,” indicating a smaller group with auditory preferences, consistent with Nation’s (2013) emphasis on verbal repetition for vocabulary retention.

Overall, the findings demonstrate heterogeneous learning styles, with visual preference dominant, accompanied by auditory and kinesthetic tendencies. This highlights the need for a multimodal instructional approach that integrates visual materials, audio support, and simple interactive activities to ensure inclusive and effective vocabulary learning.

Types of Instructional Media that Support the Learning Styles of Young BIPA Learners

Based on the results of the second questionnaire, a diagram was obtained that illustrates children’s preferences for the instructional media they find appealing. The diagram presents various media types, including animated films, illustrated storybooks, digital games, pictures or posters, and role-play activities. These data provide important insights into children’s tendencies to select media that are most engaging and facilitate their understanding of learning materials, particularly in language learning. The analysis of this diagram forms the basis for identifying how particular media align with children’s learning style preferences and how these media can be utilized to enhance the effectiveness of the learning process.

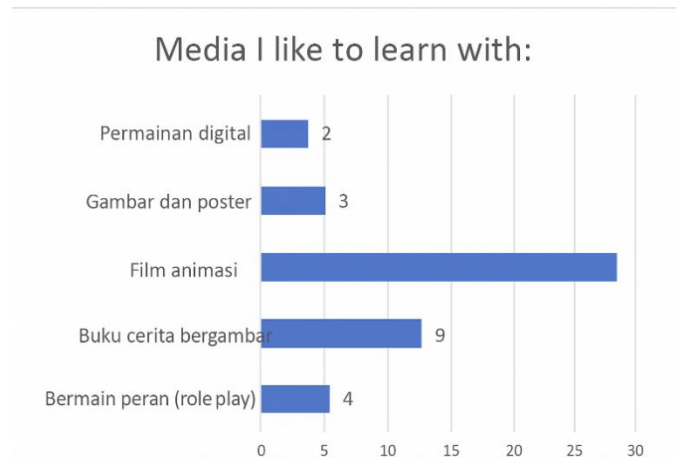
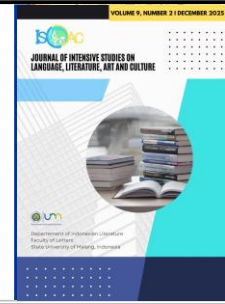


Diagram 3

The results of the second questionnaire, as presented in Diagram 3, indicate that animated films are the most preferred learning medium, selected by 17 respondents. This predominant choice suggests that most learners exhibit visual–auditory tendencies, as animated films combine moving images, color, sound, narration, and emotional cues. Such media effectively support learners’ comprehension of language materials by providing concrete visual context, repeated exposure to vocabulary, and audio elements that facilitate pronunciation modeling. This finding aligns with Mayer’s (2020) Multimedia Learning Theory, which posits that learning becomes more effective when information is presented through a combination of words and images, thereby engaging dual processing channels in the brain. Similarly, Berk (2009) found that videos and animations can enhance attention, motivation, and information retention among young learners.

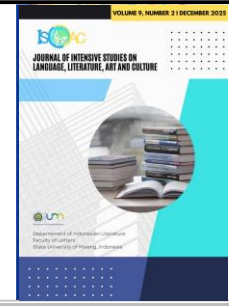
The second most preferred medium is illustrated storybooks, chosen by 9 respondents. This preference shows that learners also appreciate media that harmoniously integrate text and illustrations. Illustrated storybooks provide a narrative context that enables students to understand vocabulary meaning through visual cues and storyline development. This result supports Paivio’s (2007) Dual Coding Theory, which

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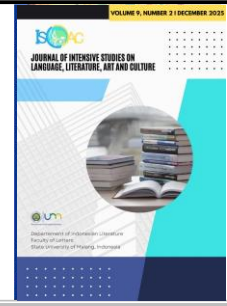


posits that combining text and images creates dual memory traces, thereby strengthening comprehension and vocabulary retention. For visual learners, storybooks are particularly effective because they present linguistic structures explicitly and engagingly.

Furthermore, role-play activities were selected by 4 respondents, reflecting learners' preferences for kinesthetic learning. Role play enables children to learn through action, social interaction, and direct experience. This activity supports language acquisition in authentic situations, thereby enhancing pragmatic comprehension. Hannafin and Land (1997) emphasize that experiential learning can increase engagement and deepen understanding by having learners actively construct meaning through embodied action. Role play is thus effective for kinesthetic learners who require movement to process information.

Meanwhile, digital games and pictures/posters were selected by only 2 respondents each, making them the least preferred options. Although chosen by a minority, both media still reflect stylistic diversity among learners. Digital games suit visual–kinesthetic learners who prefer highly interactive tasks, whereas pictures or posters are more appropriate for visual learners who favor structured and static information. These findings reinforce Fleming and Mills's (1992) VAK model, which argues that each learner has unique preferences and that instruction should offer a variety of media to accommodate diverse learning styles.

Overall, this questionnaire indicates that learners prefer multimodal educational media, particularly animated films and illustrated storybooks that combine visual, textual, and auditory elements. This underscores the importance of designing multimodal learning environments. Imhof (2018) highlights that 21st-century learning demands the integration of multiple modalities (visual, auditory, kinesthetic) to enhance engagement and instructional effectiveness. Therefore, BIPA teachers working with young learners should integrate visually rich media, audio-supported materials, and hands-on activities to ensure inclusive instruction that aligns with children's developmental needs.



Thematic Content Preferred by Young BIPA Learners

The subsequent questionnaire also generated data on the thematic content most favored by young BIPA learners. The diagram illustrates a range of topics that children find engaging and enjoyable when learning Indonesian, including nature and weather, animals, folktales, and traditional Indonesian foods. Analysis of these findings is crucial, as topic preferences directly influence learners' motivation, engagement, and overall success in language acquisition. By understanding the themes that appeal to children, BIPA instructors can design learning materials that are more contextual, meaningful, and developmentally appropriate, while also aligning with learners' interests.

Topics I like to learn about in Indonesian language:

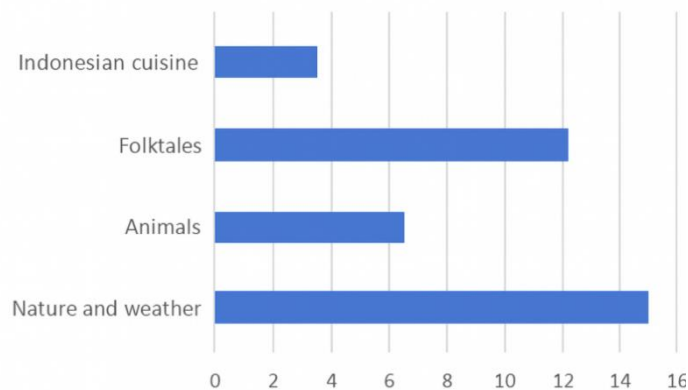


Diagram 4

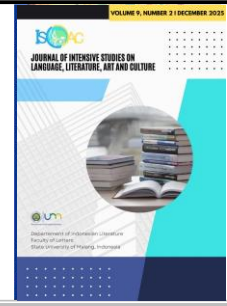
The results of the fourth questionnaire indicate that “Nature and weather” is the most preferred topic, selected by approximately 17 respondents. The strong interest in this theme suggests that children tend to favor content closely related to their daily experiences, which can be directly observed. Nature-based topics support visually rich

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learning, exploratory activities, and concrete visual media that naturally support vocabulary acquisition. Recent studies by Coyle and Marsh (2020) affirm that environmental and natural-phenomena themes are highly effective in children's language learning because they provide context-embedded linguistic input, supported by visual and experiential contexts, making comprehension easier.

The second-most-preferred topic is "Folktales," chosen by roughly 10 respondents. This preference reflects children's interest in narratives, characters, and imaginative story structures. Folktales not only introduce linguistic elements but also convey cultural values, moral lessons, and Indonesian local wisdom. Recent work by Huang and Kunday (2021) suggests that the use of traditional stories in children's language education enhances vocabulary acquisition through stories and strengthens cultural connectedness, particularly for foreign learners. Folktales also support auditory and visual learning through storytelling, illustrations, and dramatization. "Animals" emerges as another popular topic among several learners. This theme is highly suitable for young BIPA learners because it is concrete, easy to visualize, and closely connected to children's daily lives. It enables the use of language games, picture cards, songs, and educational videos. Ellis (2022) emphasizes that children tend to acquire vocabulary more quickly when the instructional theme is familiar, high-interest, and engages the senses. The animal theme also lends itself well to various instructional approaches, such as Total Physical Response (TPR), which integrates movement and language.

Lastly, "Indonesian traditional foods" is the least preferred topic. Although selected by fewer respondents, this theme remains important because it introduces Indonesia's rich culinary culture and offers opportunities for experiential learning activities, such as drawing food items, role-playing shopping scenarios, or viewing photos and videos of local dishes. Recent studies by Thomas and Yamada (2023) indicate that cultural integration in children's language education increases intrinsic motivation and fosters greater curiosity, particularly when paired with strong visuals and exploratory activities.

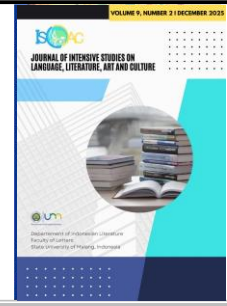
Overall, these findings reveal that young BIPA learners are more attracted to topics

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that are familiar, easily visualized, and provide narrative or experiential learning opportunities. This supports Imhof's (2018) assertion that effective twenty-first-century language pedagogy must be multimodal, contextual, and aligned with learners' interests to maximize engagement and comprehension. Thus, BIPA instructors are encouraged to design learning materials that incorporate themes of nature, storytelling, and children's real-life experiences, making learning more engaging, meaningful, and developmentally appropriate.

Although earlier questionnaire data illustrated variations in children's learning styles visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and mixed the thematic preferences shown in this diagram indicate that learning styles do not directly determine topic choices among young BIPA learners. A child with a visual learning tendency does not necessarily choose visually rich themes such as nature or animals; similarly, an auditory learner does not automatically prefer folktales. The variation in topic preferences does not follow a pattern linked to learning styles. This aligns with contemporary academic critiques asserting that learning styles do not dictate content preferences; rather, they describe how children process information, not what they want to learn. According to Newton and Salvi (2020), the concept of learning styles is often misunderstood as a topic preference, whereas it merely reflects sensory tendencies in the reception of information. They argue that "learning styles do not dictate subject-matter interest; learners may prefer certain topics due to emotional or experiential relevance rather than sensory modality."

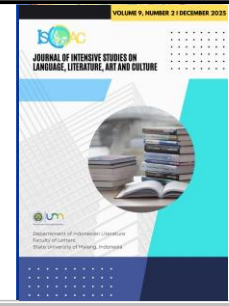
Research by Kirschner and Hendrick (2020) further demonstrates that interests and hobbies exert a much stronger influence on children's content choices than learning styles. Children select topics because they are meaningful, connected to their life experiences, and trigger curiosity, not because of their sensory processing preferences. This explains why themes such as nature and weather, animals, and folktales are more popular: these topics are common in children's daily lives and often overlap with their play, media consumption, and reading. Topic relevance to hobbies also shapes children's interest in learning content. Renninger and Hidi (2019) state that "situational interest in children is triggered by

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familiarity and personal enjoyment, not by cognitive processing styles.” Children who enjoy outdoor play tend to choose nature-themed stories; those who enjoy listening to stories prefer folktales; and those who love animals are more drawn to animal-themed stories. Recent work by Carvalho and Rincon (2022) adds that hobbies serve as a driver of intrinsic motivation in language learning. When learning content aligns with children’s interests, such as drawing, role-playing, or watching nature videos, their motivation increases regardless of their learning style. Consequently, content that resonates with children’s hobbies is often more effective in promoting engagement and language retention.

Thus, theme selection in young BIPA learners reflects their interests, experiences, and hobbies rather than their learning styles. Learning styles primarily guide how content should be delivered (e.g., through images, audio, movement, or multimodal activities), whereas children’s emotional and experiential connections determine what they want to learn. These findings align with modern educational approaches that emphasize interest-based learning, particularly for early childhood and foreign-language learners.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on this study's findings, young BIPA learners in Malang exhibit diverse learning styles, though the majority show a strong preference for visual learning. Children tend to comprehend material more effectively when it is presented through images, videos, colors, and other visual representations. Meanwhile, auditory and kinesthetic learning styles also appear, albeit in smaller proportions, underscoring the need for multimodal instruction.

In vocabulary learning, activities involving viewing pictures and writing new words are the most preferred, followed by movement-based tasks and oral repetition. This confirms the importance of integrating visual teaching materials and hands-on activities in BIPA instruction for children. In terms of learning media, animated films and picture storybooks are the most favored, as they combine visual, auditory, and narrative elements



that support contextual language comprehension. Media such as digital games, posters, and static images receive minimal attention, suggesting that children are more engaged with dynamic, richly multimodal media.

In addition, the themes “nature and weather” and “folktales” emerge as the most preferred learning topics. Their appeal is influenced more by children’s interests and personal experiences than by their learning styles, suggesting that content development should consider experiential relevance and cultural values.

Overall, these findings emphasize that BIPA instruction for children must be responsive, adaptive, and grounded in learners’ experiences. Effective learning for young BIPA learners is achieved through the integration of strong visual media, auditory activities, and simple kinesthetic experiences within a multimodal framework. By taking into account learning styles, interests, and the thematic relevance to children’s everyday lives, Indonesian language learning can become more engaging, meaningful, and conducive to successful second-language acquisition.

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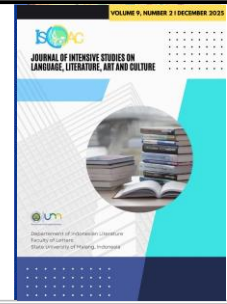
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