VARK Whistle: A Multimodal Learning Model to Empower Students’ Communication Skill

Herningtyas Nurwulansari, S.Pd.
SMPK Kolese Santo Yusup 1 Malang, Indonesia


Corresponding author: Herningtyas Nurwulansari, S.Pd., SMPK Kolese Santo Yusup 1 Malang, Indonesia.

Abstract

The fact that the core strand of learning a language is the competence to communicate in the target language has been an issue that professional teachers are aware of. Indeed, prescribed text books and teaching tools available in many schools have never been enough to either facilitate the need of language learning or empower students’ language skills. However, the factual problem is the lack of teachers’ understanding in variety of students learning styles. Even when they have ever read about it, they have not got clear ideas of handling classes with multimodal learning strategies. This paper introduced VARK Whistle as an alternative to design class activities which accommodate the need of multimodal learners. This model allows teacher to facilitate various activities designed in a single lesson plan and conducted in a time. Assessing students’ competences is also possible this way. Besides, the students have intensive opportunity to collaborate with their classmates, which also becomes another great chance to learn how to communicate properly and effectively in a fun and challenging atmosphere.

Keywords

VARK Whistle, Multimodal Learning, Learning Model, VARK, Communication Skill

1. Introduction

The core strand of learning a language is to be able to make meaning (Jeff & Gunther, 2016) in the communication, using the target language. Although the language components are important to convey the messages, imperfection is still acceptable, in some cases, as long as the messages are meaningful.

In order to achieve that goal depends on several aspects. In most cases, it is not about the learning materials which, nowadays, can be easily compiled from the internet. Even teachers with good hand outs often get stuck to enliven their classess. In this matter, strategies, methods, techniques, and more specifically, learning models, take important roles.

The design of activities prepared by the teachers might not be effective, when the students’ learning styles are thoroughly ignored. Then how to handle a big class with heterogenous students learning styles? To accomodate that need, VARK whistle is introduced.

VARK whistle is an implementation of VARK model (Fleming & Bonwell, 2001) which allows students to experience multimodal learning, so that they are able to gain more benefits from the learning process which facilitates their requirements to learn the language successfully. This VARK whistle model uses a whistle in delivering messages as well as instructions. The activities include visual, auditory, reading/writing, and kinesthetic experiences. By applying this model, students get opportunities to have intensive practice for their receptive and productive skills at the same time, in communicative contexts as well as lively atmosphere. These would be a quite ideal requirement for an effective learning process, which not only merely about
getting good scores, but also experiencing effective communication due to condusive learning atmosphere.

**1.1. Background**

Multiple Intelligences of Howard Gardner’s (2013) does not go alone in enriching learning strategies. Fleming (2001) with his VARK introduces Visual, Auditory, Read/Write, and Kinesthetic to facilitate multimodal learning needs, as well. Unfortunately, the issues have not been enough yet to guide teachers in performing their teaching learning process. They still are not able to accommodate multimodal learning classes due to lack of samples of multimodal learning models, including in learning English to empower students’ communication skill.

**1.2. Purposes**

The purpose of this research is intended to help teachers out with an alternative to design as well as to manage their classes so that students with various learning styles are able to meet their needs. When teachers are able to offer more attractive and effective ways in learning English, the competence to communicate in the language will get improved respectively.

**1.3. Problems**

The research problems are formulated as follows:

1.3.1 How Are Teachers Able to Design Their Classes to Meet Multimodal Learning Styles in English Language Learning?

1.3.2 What Learning Model Is Relevant to Multimodal Learning Styles in Order to Empower Students’ Communication Skill in English Language?

**1.4. Solutions**

Based on the problems stated above, this research offers the following assumptions:

1.4.1 Teachers Are Able to Design Their Classes to Meet Multimodal Learning Styles in English Language Learning by Implementing VARK Strategies.

1.4.2 VARK Whistle Is an Alternative Learning Model Which Is Relevant to Multimodal Learning Styles in Order to Empower Students’ Communication Skill in English Language.

**2. Method**

This research is a quantitative applied research. It implemented VARK Strategies of Fleming’s. In order to specify the strategies, VARK whistle learning model is applied through a series of activities which accommodated multimodal learning needs. The main activities were guided by whistle blowings as codes that drove students to act as they were expected. The results of the research were recorded in percentage to prove the effectiveness of the learning model applied. All the procedures and how the results indicated the effectiveness of the learning model applied, are presented as follows:

**2.1. Activities Design**

Sets of activities performing VARK were designed, both for the core lessons (style 1) and the assessment processes (style 2). VARK whistle model was applied for both, but in quite different ways due to time allotment needed in their sessions. VARK whistle model style 2 might be more dynamic and competitive compared to style 1.

The research was held at SMPK Kolese Santo Yusup 1 Malang, since the beginning of the first semester of this academic year (2016-2017) for the ninth graders with several basic competences required by the 2013 Curriculum. There were five basic competences of knowledge (concepts) and five competences of language skills (writing/speaking) included in the research and integrated into the activities using the VARK whistle model.

This learning model enabled students to experience multimodal learning through various activities in one meeting. The activi-
ties allowed the students to observe, explore, comprehend, repeat, recite, retell, reproduce, rewrite, until create or make simple products successively, according to the required language competences.

2.2. Design of the Effectiveness Indicators

As the research was an applied research, the primary indicators to prove the effectiveness of the model applied should be valid. In order to measure it, there were a few points decided to be the guide lines. Those were:

2.2.1 Students’ Enthusiasm

Because the target of this research is to prove the effectiveness of VARK whistle learning model to empower students’ communication skill, it was prominent to fulfil the basic requirements of effective learning. Students will learn effectively when they are relaxed, happy, and ready to learn. That is why the researcher observed the enthusiasm of the students to indicate that they were happy and ready to learn.

2.2.2 Students’ Involvement

When students feel happy, they would be more open. When they welcome the lesson, they would be happy to join in. This led the researcher to decide “involvement” as the next indicator the students needed to perform. Only when they got involved in the process from the beginning to the end, the effectiveness of the learning model was able to be measured.

2.2.3 Students’ Final Assessment/Communication Competence

The final judgement of the effectiveness of the learning model was indicated by the students’ achievement which was measured through activities assessment. The assessment was done during and after the VARK whistle model was employed by observing their process and evaluating their final products/work. When their messages were intelligible, excluding acceptable mistakes, then they considered “passed” the communication skill aspect.

The language aspects, which require different ways of measuring their passing grade, did not belong to this research.

2.3. Grouping Design

The observations conducted by the researcher towards the students required careful grouping in order to get valid analysis on the data since the very beginning of the process. Moreover, this grouping led to the conclusion which group of students affected most by the learning model applied. This grouping was not intended to compare one another. It was only used to get better picture of the effectiveness of the VARK whistle learning model. That is why there was not any special manipulation made among the groups.

Students were divided into 4 big groups, out of 103 students. They were classified based on their motivation in learning which was recorded from their study history and teacher’s observation, done separately from this research. However, the data used to classify the students’ level of motivation was considered as primary information because the information was presented publicly in their monthly reports and grading books.

Those four groups and their qualifications are:

2.3.1 Highly Motivated Students

Students with “A” predicate in the subject and their personalities. Students who show consistent learning excitement or learning seriousness. They are responsive as well as proactive. They are always curious about the lesson. They always want more and love challenging activities or tasks. They have got their own reasons why study.

2.3.2 Average Students

Students with “B” predicate in both subject and personality qualifications. Students in general are at this level. Whether teachers attract their attention, whether classes will work for them, might depend on whether the classes give them something they considered “beneficial”, whether the activities make them “awake”, and other reasons which seem that the outsiders are the
ones who should be responsible towards their learning success. The average students’ characteristics also work for people in general, so that what is considered important and exciting for the teachers would work the same way to the students. It means, when a teacher has designed something which she actually does not enjoy with, at all, she has prepared something the students would be unpleased with, either.

2.3.3 Less Motivated Students
Students with “C” predicate in the subject and special notes about their personalities. Most people should do additional efforts dealing with this group of people. So do teachers. Only when teachers are successful in motivating them or changing them into a self-motivated people, good results would be performed.

2.3.4 Apathetic Students
Students with below “C” predicate in the subject and problems with their personalities. Some of the students in this group are commonly described as trouble makers of the class. Some of them are actually quiet because they do not care about others, even about themselves. They do not get it, why they should waste their time with lessons, exercises, tiring activities, and sort of. Some others are kind of anti social people. With this kind of students, most teachers do not waste time too much. As long as they do not bother the class, “the show must go on”.
The descriptions above were made based on class observations and students characters which were noticed at school, where the research was conducted, as an addition to the official record of the students’ personalities.

2.4. Research Analysis
In order to analyze the results of the research, the researcher presented the percentage of students’ performances based on their enthusiasm and involvement which was observed during the learning model was applied. While for the final results of the assessment, there would be a table showing where the students were, based on the meaningful language expressions showed as well as their products/work using the target language.

3. Research Steps, Findings and Discussion
VARK whistle learning model was applied to two main activities. The first one was the big frame of “lesson plan of the day” (style 1) while the other would be a set of dynamic multimodal activities for practice, repetition, until creative simple production (style 2).

3.1. Lesson Plan of the Day
Define abbreviations and acronyms the first time they are used in the text, even after they have been defined in the abstract. Abbreviations such as IEEE, SI, MKS, CGS, sc, dc, and rms do not have to be defined. Do not use abbreviations in the title or heads unless they are unavoidable.

3.1.1. Alfa Zone
Alfa zone is the introductory session of the lesson plan. This allowed students to be relaxed and ready for the class. The options of the activities were:

a. watching a short movie/video/digital audiovisual, relevant to the lesson (multimodal: V/A/R/mixed)
b. singing together, lyrics are relevant to the lesson (multimodal: K/R/mixed)
c. brief quiz/riddles/puzzles, relevant to the lesson (multimodal: RW/K/A/mixed)
d. short storytelling, relevant to the lesson (multimodal: R/A/K/mixed)
e. TPR/dances, relevant to the lesson (multimodal: A/K/mixed)
3.1.2. Main Activities of the Day, VARK Whistle Style 1
To do this part, the learning model required whistle blowings as the substitute of short and respective instructions, from one activity to another, from one kind of modality to another one. The whistle codes were teacher’s creativity or simply copy the Morse codes in scouting.
Main activities here included all activities that allowed the students to:

a. observe information to cope with the lessons
b. ask questions, answer, explore the lessons
c. analyze, comprehend, discuss the lessons
d. practice and communicate (optional, can be included in VARK Whistle Style 2)

The multimodal learning types for above activities were accommodated by the following aids or actions:

a. movies/videos/digital work (colors/sounds/music/narration/effects/pictures, allow multimodal: V/A/R/mixed)
b. quizzes or games such as hot potatoes, walking stick, and sort of, with or without music/songs (allow multimodal: K/A/V/mixed)
c. games such as words to pics, pics to pics, jumbled letters/words/sentences, and sort of, with or without music/songs (allow multimodal: K/A/V/RW/mixed)
d. drawing, rewriting, reproducing (allow multimodal: K/RW/mixed)
e. E100 quiz: dictation, repetition, substitution (allow multimodal: A/RW/K/mixed)

![Image of a diagram representing the multimodal learning types for activity A/V, A, K, and R/W.]

Figure 1. Sample of VARK Whistle Style 1.

3.1.3. Reflection and Closing
This part took only a few part of the whole time allotment. However, as the closing of the whole process in each meeting, it was designed to do in several ways as follows:

a. PA team diary/gallery (allows multimodal: RW/K/mixed)
b. ballots taking (allows multimodal: RW/K/mixed)
c. neighbor to neighbor (allows multimodal: A/K/mixed)
d. post it (allows multimodal: RW/K/mixed)
e. our voices (allows multimodal: A/K/mixed)
f. 3SAR-smile, say hi, say thanks, appreciate, response (allows multimodal: A/K/mixed)

Figure 2. Sample of VARK Whistle Style 1.

3.2. VARK Whistle Part 2

This part of the research is the most dynamic one, because the set of activities were arranged in a such way so that the multimodal learning styles VARK was able to be applied.

The followings were samples of the procedures of VARK Whistle Part 2:

Figure 3: Sample of VARK Whistle Style 2 (Confirmation and Assessment).
### 3.3. Findings and Discussion

After applying the VARK whistle learning model in the first months of this semester, the results showed significant improvement in students’ excitement towards the lessons as well as their involvement in the class activities. The tables include the average (in percentage) of each aspect after a couple of repeated actions.

Tables 1 and 2 show that class activities that allowed the students to move around and meet others, changed their level of excitement and involvement. All of the students, means 100% students, no matter how their personal characteristics are, were pleased to join the activities.

#### Table 1. Percentage of Students’ Excitement.

STUDENTS’ EXCITEMENT (in percentage)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students Characteristics</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>A/V</th>
<th>R/A</th>
<th>K/A</th>
<th>K/A</th>
<th>K/RW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.OE</td>
<td>2. video</td>
<td>3. GS</td>
<td>4. KA</td>
<td>5. MR</td>
<td>6. MWR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>highly motivated students (19.4%)</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>average students (60.2%)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>less motivated students (8.7%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apathetic students (11.7%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. OE=ordinary explanation
2. Y=excited
3. A/V=given situations
4. R/A=move, kinesthetic activities
5. KA=move and response
6. K/RW=move, write report

#### Table 2. Percentage of Students’ Involvement

STUDENTS’ INVOLVEMENT (in percentage)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students Characteristics</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>A/V</th>
<th>R/A</th>
<th>K/A</th>
<th>K/A</th>
<th>K/RW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.OE</td>
<td>2. video</td>
<td>3. GS</td>
<td>4. KA</td>
<td>5. MR</td>
<td>6. MWR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>highly motivated students (19.4%)</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>average students (60.2%)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>less motivated students (8.7%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apathetic students (11.7%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. OE=ordinary explanation
2. Y=get involved
3. A/V=given situations
4. R/A=move, kinesthetic activities
5. KA=move and response
6. MWR=move, write report
When it came to the sessions to evaluate the students’ communication competence, although table 3 shows improvements in line with the kinesthetic activities applied, the involvement did not present the same quality as the communication competence. This might be the issues of the language components which did not belong to the research. However, in general, it can be noted that activities that included movement and interactions affected students’ learning process significantly. This fact reveals what most teachers complained about how hard it is to engage the students. It is clear now that in order to engage the students, multimodal learning strategies which include visual as well as audio stimulations are essential. Moreover, allowing the students to move around to do the guided tasks as well as meeting others is beneficial to get their attention as a return.

Table 3. Percentage of Students’ Competence in Communication.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students Characteristics</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>A/V</th>
<th>R/A</th>
<th>K/A</th>
<th>K/RW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>highly motivated students (19.4%)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>average students (60.2%)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>less motivated students (8.7%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apathetic students (11.7%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. OE=ordinary explanation
2. video
3. GS=given situations
4. KA=move, kinesthetic activities
5. MR=move and response
6. MWR=move, write report

Y=convey messages correctly
N=not convey message as expected
0=not really/so and so
did not do it/missed the concepts

4. Conclusions and Suggestions

Based on the results stated above, it was proved that VARK strategies can overcome teachers’ problems dealing with students’ multimodal learning needs which clearly affected the effectiveness of learning process itself. While in particular, in order to empower students’ communication skill in English language, VARK whistle learning model is effective in giving opportunities to each student to observe, comprehend, explore, repeat, recite, retell, rewrite, even make or create simple products, as well as assess respectively the required language competences.

In order to continuously improve the quality of our youth English learning experiences and competences, here are some suggestions the researcher would like to share:

a. applying VARK whistle would be fun not only for the learners, but also for the teachers, so it is seriously recommended to try.

b. having a fair opportunity of learning is absolutely the right of every learner and by applying this learning model, teachers accommodate that need.

c. English communication skill is urgently required, so that teachers should make it possible for any students to experience
unforgettable moments, and VARK whistle learning model gives teachers the ways.

d. trying to be creative, making your own learning models which are more suitable to your students’ characteristics is recommended, as well.

e. in order to help this research achieve its best effects, further researches focussing on effective ways to master language components which each of them requires different competences and assessment by using VARK whistle learning model can be conducted.

References