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## **LEARNING STYLES OF YOUNG LEARNERS IN THE LEARNING PROCESS OF A FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

The importance of learning styles in the learning process of a foreign language is reflected in many observations of educationalists for the need to adapt any teaching material in a way that addresses learners' learning styles. Teachers in early childhood education must understand the diversity of learning styles in the classroom environment. Since each child is likely to have a different learning style, young learners need a variety of lesson plans and activities to engage the entire class. Understanding how they learn will make it easier to create appropriate lesson plans for the educational program. Although different learning styles might develop as young learners get older, they will generally learn in one of three ways: *visual, auditory and kinesthetic*.

The purpose of this study is to identify preferred perceptual learning styles of young learners. To accomplish this aim, a questionnaire was delivered to 66 young learners in a public school in Korça, Albania to measure the students' preferred learning styles when they learn a foreign language which is English. The analysis of the data revealed very important results which will be useful to teachers in their language teaching process.

*Key words: learning style, young learners, a foreign language, visual style, auditory style, kinesthetic style*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Imagine if you just learned something new. Think about how you did this ... So, when you learn something new you are likely to learn other things in the same way every time. Over time you develop a behavior that will enable you to learn new things. This behavior is called a *learning style*. You may not be able to address everything in the same way but while you are developing that behavior you feel more comfortable with it. Each of us develops a behavior or style of learning new things. This is a very important fact to be considered in the classroom as it is the center of the learning process.

Teachers also have their classroom instructional styles and these may not necessarily be the same as those of the students.

When there is a discrepancy between the students and teachers' learning styles, students begin to get bored and lose their focus and achieve low results. It also happens that they lose their interest in the school as a whole.

Student learning styles are necessary for teachers as they serve as a means of understanding how they learn. Through these styles teachers can associate their styles and classroom environment in the most appropriate way. Numerous quantitative studies demonstrate that teaching based on students' learning styles achieves success in the classroom. It also improves and enhances students' satisfaction. Learning styles look like a framework for information processing in the right way.

Many studies focus on learning styles in many cultures. Recently, no study has been carried out that compares the styles of pupils of different cultures, for example it compares the styles of Turkish students with those of American. However, in Norway, Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Greece, Canada, Israel, the Philippines, Guatemala, Korea, Brazil and Egypt, the instrument of the learning styles has been translated and used to conduct very good and reliable studies.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Learning styles are widely discussed in the literature of educational psychology (Claxton & Murrell, 1987; Schmeck, 1988) and especially in the context of language learning (Oxford, 1990; Oxford & Ehrman, 1993; Wallace & Oxford, 1992).

Some definitions are enabled for the term "learning style". Keefe (1979), for example, defines the style of learning as "a peculiar, emotional and psychological condition that serves as a relatively stable indicator of how students perceive, interact and respond to the learning environment" (p.4). Reid (1995) argued that learning style is the naturalness of an individual, habitual and preferred way to receive, process and store new information and skills. Recently, Sternberg, Grigorenko and Zhang (2008) defined learning styles as individual differences in approaching tasks that can make a difference in the way in which a person perceives, learns, or thinks" (p.486).

There are various tools used to determine the learning style of a student. We could start from neuro-linguistic programming. It began in the mid-1970s by a linguist (Grinder) and a mathematician (Bandler) who had great interest in:

a) successful people, b) psychology, c) language, d) computer programming.

Neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) claims to help people change by teaching them to program their brains.

According to NLP each of us has a Primary Representative System (PPS), a tendency to think in specific ways: visual, auditory, motion, smell or taste.

Neuro-linguistic programming was specifically designed to allow us to do magic by creating new ways of understanding how verbal and nonverbal communication affect the human brain. As such, it introduces us all with the opportunity not only to communicate better with others but also to learn how to gain more control over what we consider the automatic function of our neurology. (Hofstede, 1986; Reid, 1987)

Students use the three modalities to acquire and learn new information and experience. However, according to the modality theory, one or two of these receiving styles is normally dominant. This dominant style determines the best way for a

person to learn new information by filtering what is being taught. This style may not always be the same for some tasks. The learner may prefer a style of learning for a task and a combination of other styles for another assignment. The VAK<sup>1</sup> typology uses the three main sensory, visual, auditory, kinesthetic receptors to determine the dominant learning style. It is based on modalities by which human expression can occur and consists of a combination of perception and memory. Students use the three modalities to acquire and learn new information and experience but each student uses them on a different scale. (Mattheoudakis & Alexiou, 2010)

*Visual learners* have two sub-channels: linguistic and spatial. Learners, who are visual-linguistic, like to learn through written language such as: reading and writing assignments. They remember what was written even if they did not read it more than once. They like to write directions and are more attentive to the explanation if they see the text. Visual-spatial students often have difficulty with writing language and work better with graphics, presentations, videos, and other visuals. They easily recall faces and places using their imagination and rarely lose in new environments. (Oxford, 2003)

*Auditory students* usually talk to themselves. They can also move their lips and read loudly. They may have difficulty in reading and writing assignments (Oxford, 1990). Usually they work better if they talk to a colleague or tape recorder and hear what was said.

*Kinesthetic students* work best by touching and moving. They also have two sub-channels: kinesthetics (motion) and vulnerability. They tend to lose focus if there is no or little external stimulation or movement. When listening to the lesson you may want to keep notes just for the sake of moving your hands. When they read, they like to scan the material first and then focus on the details. They usually use colored underlings and keep notes by making paintings, diagrams, or juggling. (Fleming & Mills, 1992, fq.141)

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### 1. Aims of the study

This study aims to reveal the theoretical and practical aspects of students' learning styles. The main questions that it seeks to answer are:

1. What is the main learning style of students in primary education when they learn English?
2. What is their secondary learning style?

#### 2. Methods

Choosing the methods of study is a practical decision and to some extent it is even pragmatic. This study is based on quantitative methods. (Matthews & Ross, 2010)

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<sup>1</sup> Visual, auditory and kinesthetic

## 2.1 Quantitative Methods

Quantitative approaches collect and process data that are:

- Structured – categorized and coded in such a way that they can be counted.
- Interpreted by the researcher as part of an analytical process.

The quantitative method used in the paper is:

The questionnaire – it is distributed to the students in the fifth grade of the 9-year public school "Sotir Gurra". It was designed with 15 statements and students had to mark the frequency rate for each one. The questionnaire was pilot-tested within an hour and the data were collected instantly.

## 3. Contexts and Participants

66 students in the fifth grade were asked as they are more able to understand more precisely what was being asked. Above all, children at this age are able to think about how they learn and can understand their learning preferences. Also, they if they like watching, listening or moving. On the other hand, they are not very knowledgeable to calculate their responses and give wrong answers.

## IV. FINDINGS

Students completed the statements and they had no difficulties in understanding them. They marked the statements according to the frequency below:

**Table 1. Questionnaire evaluation table**

never	rarely	sometimes	often	always
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>

The statements are divided according to students' learning styles:

*Visual Learning Style:*

1. I like to write something to better remember it.
2. I keep notes when the teacher speaks.
3. When I hear the teacher I think about numbers, figures or words.
4. I like to learn different things when I look at TV or video.
5. I like to use colors when I learn.

*Auditory style:*

1. I remember things well when I talk to someone.
2. I like to learn something when I hear it than when I read it.
3. When I open my TV I like to hear sounds rather than watching the screen.
4. I like to listen to music when I learn.
5. I can distinguish people from their voices.

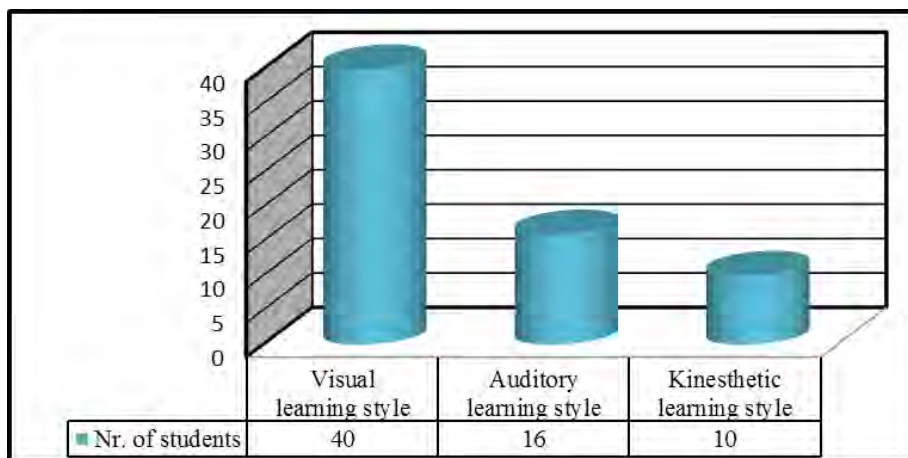
*Kinesthetic style:*

1. I like to have some breaks when I do my homework.
2. I like to play with my pens when I am in the classroom.
3. I like to move my hands when I am talking.
4. I like to paint different things in my books.
5. I like to do different moves when I am learning something.

Calculations were made based on the self-assessment rate. For example, if the students had chosen the answer *never*, then the answer got **1 point**. So the points of assimilation for a style were collected and then multiplied by 2. The greatest number of points showed us that a style was the most preferred by students.

Students' responses are presented in the following graph:

**Graph 1. Students' answers to their preferred learning style**



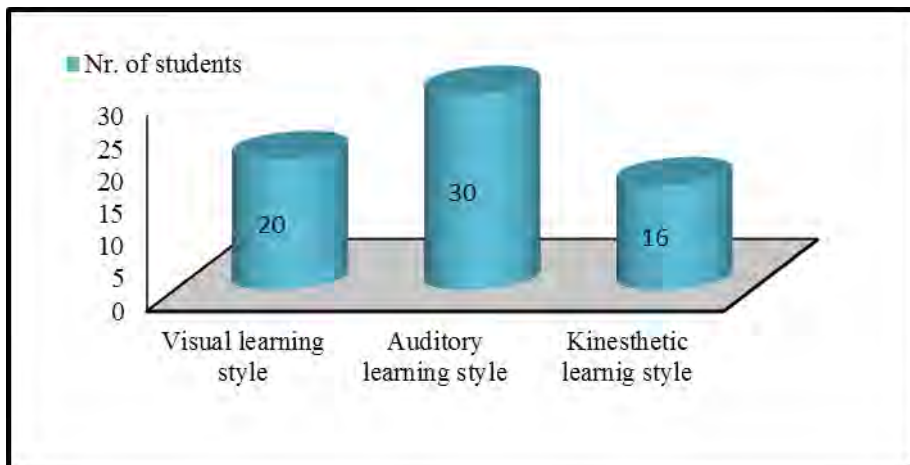
As noted by the graph, the preferred style of students is the visual learning style, being selected from 40 students. These students like to learn by writing something they learn, by keeping notes as the teacher talks, by meditating on numbers and watching more television as they memorize more images and figures. They also like to use different colors to understand better ideas.

Less favored style is the auditory learning style, chosen 16 students. This group of students likes to learn by listening more and, in particular, they like to talk to someone. They watch TV when they learn and they are also able to differentiate people from their voices.

The learning style which students prefer least, with a choice of 10 students is the kinesthetic style. This group of students likes to learn things when they move. So, they prefer to have a break when they do assignments. They like to play with their classmates and move their hands while they are talking. This group of students likes to paint their books and make different moves when they are learning something.

As far as the secondary learning style is concerned, the following answers came up:

**Graph 2. Students' secondary preferred learning style**



Having calculated the primary style chosen by the students, it resulted that the secondary preferred student's style is the auditory learning style chosen by 30 students. While 20 students had the visual learning style as their second choice and 16 students learn best through kinesthetic learning style.

It is obvious that the visual learning style is chosen by the majority of students.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

From the questionnaire analysis, it turned out that the preferred students' style is the visual learning style, being selected by 40 students. These students like to learn by writing something or by keeping notes as the teacher talks, by meditating on numbers and watching more television as they memorize more images and figures. They also like to use more different colors to understand their ideas.

After the first style was chosen by the students, we looked at the questionnaires once again to calculate the secondary learning style and it resulted that auditory learning style was chosen by 30 students. This group of students likes to learn by listening more, and concretely they like to talk to someone.

The less favourite style is kinaesthetic learning style. This group of students likes to learn by moving.

Theoretically, current study findings generally give positive support to the important role of perceived learning styles in the learning process of a foreign language.

Teachers should try to base their teaching on students' learning styles. This requires discussion as adaptability to students' learning styles helps to create a goal

in the classroom that will increase motivation and it will increase the interest and performance of students and teachers.

In practice, this is done through the provision of tasks and stimulating and appealing materials that fit more into the way they give information. In this way, it can lead students to learning more autonomously.

The findings of the current study will be useful for teachers to fit their students' learning styles. Students should be aware of the role of their favourite learning style.

Each teacher should start with himself/herself in order to understand his students. The prevalence of visual learning style techniques can be attributed to the effectiveness of visual stimuli within the context of teaching, but also the constraints imposed by books.

From the analysis of the methods of learning styles from different scholars, they do not create credibility for use in education or business. Regarding the preferences of learning and studies made for them, students learn best if they are in their preferred environment. Some scholars are sceptical about the value and preferences of learning because they have failed to adapt teaching methods to these styles in order to lead to improved students' outcomes.

But on the other hand, some differences in learning styles are important. Different scholars have argued that there are differences between those who learn in visual terms and those who learn through words. Assessment of learning styles has been done with care and it is more valuable than it is estimated by commercial individuals.

The schools can offer large environments for working with students, creating comfortable corners with DVDs, creating light spaces, giving structured tasks. These can create students the opportunity to learn and work in the preferred course.

Before teachers focus on creating opportunities for all learning styles, they should keep in mind that little students cannot find the best way they learn a foreign language. The preference of particular styles does not presuppose that the use of a style brings efficiency because poor students prefer what is easier and more comfortable for them, while learning is a difficult and uncomfortable process. Sometimes students think that the way they use to learn something is the best or the only way, these learners benefit from using new ways and have effective learning. So, an important role lies in contextual factors such as: teaching strategies and social relationships that are created in classrooms.

It is worthwhile to review the basic ideas of learning style. Recognition of the diversity of learning styles is important in our teaching practice. Language teachers should take the differences of learning style into account in the process of teaching. They should teach in a balanced way according to the range of students' learning style. One teaching approach cannot work for everyone in a class. Different teaching approaches may be integrated and different tasks or activities may be done in classroom to please all the students and produce better teaching results.

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