

Learning Styles of Young Learners in the Learning Process of a Foreign Language

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Abstract

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 activities to be engaged in the entire class. Understanding how they learn will make it easier for teachers to create appropriate lesson plans for the educational programs. 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 the preferred perceptual learning styles of young learners. To accomplish this aim, a questionnaire with 30 sentences (10 sentence per one learning style) was delivered to 370 young learners in the public school “Sotir Gurra” in Korça, Albania during the academic year 2022-2023 from the first grade up to the fifth grade. Their foreign language is English and French. Young learners had to choose the frequency of the actions from 1-3. The analysis of the data revealed that the preferred students’ style is the visual learning style, being selected by 153 students. 118 students resulted to prefer the auditory learning style. The less favourite style is the kinaesthetic learning style, being chosen by 99 students.

Keywords: 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 students in the classroom. (Chen, 2010)

When there is 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 very 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 are found in various literature that demonstrate that teaching based on students' learning styles achieves success in the classroom also improves and enhances their satisfaction. Learning styles look like a framework for information processing in the right way. (Brown, 2007)

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 Albanian students with those of any country. 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. (Faisal, 2019)

2. 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, and 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 claims to help people change by teaching them to program their brains.

Programming claims that 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 VAK¹ 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

¹¹ Visual, auditory and kinesthetic

focus on the details. They usually use colored underlings and keep notes by making paintings, diagrams, or juggling. (Fleming & Mills,1992, fq.141)

3. Method

3.1 The aim of the study

This study aims to reveal the practical aspects of students' learning styles. The main question that this study seeks to answer is:

1. What is the main learning style of students in primary education when they learn a foreign language (English or French)?

3.2 The design of the study

The method of this study is based on the quantitative process data, which are:

- structured, categorized, and coded in such a way that they can be counted.
- interpreted by the researcher as part of an analytical process. (Matthews & Ross, 2010)

The instrument of the study is a questionnaire that is distributed on paper in the Albanian language to young learners from the 1st grade up to the 5th grade of the 9-year public school "Sotir Gurra" during the academic year 2022-2023.

The modality (learning channel preference) questionnaire reproduced here is by O'Brien (1985). It was divided into three sections with 10 sentences each: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic sections. Young learners read each sentence carefully and considered whether it applied to them. The little ones were helped by the teacher. On the line in front of each statement, they indicated how often the sentence applied to them, according to the chart below:

Table 1: Frequency points for each sentence of the students' questionnaire

1	2	3
Never applies to me.	Sometimes applies to me.	Often applies to me.

The maximum score in any section was 30, which reflects the preferred learning style of the young learners, and the minimum score was 10.

3.3 Contexts and Participants

The context of the study is the primary school "Sotir Gurra" in Korça, Albania. This school was chosen because the foreign languages that are taught here are diverse. In the first and second grades, all six classes have English as the foreign language. In the third grade, two classes learn French and one class learns English. In the fourth grade, two classes learn English, whereas only one class learns French. In the fifth grade, two classes learn French and one class learns English.

In the 1st grade, there were 71 students in three classes. In the 2nd grade, there were 78 students in three classes as well. In the 3rd grade, there were 76 students divided into three classes. In the 4th grade, there were 67 students divided into three classes. And in the 5th grade, there were 78 students as well.

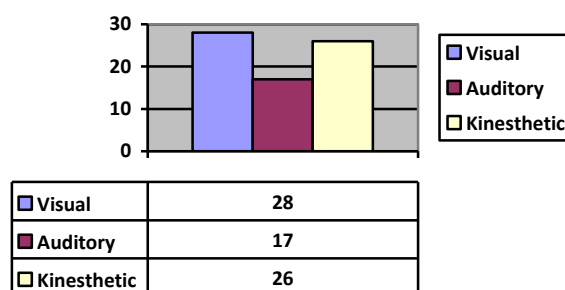
The younger children in the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades needed help comprehending the sentences, whereas the older ones in the 4th and 5th grades were able to complete the sentences alone. They were able to think about how they learned the foreign languages (English and French), and they could understand their learning preferences. Also, they knew if they liked watching, listening, or moving when they learned a foreign language.

Once they had completed the questions, the young learners handed in the questionnaires.

4. Findings of the study

First, students in the 1st grade were asked. The results of the questionnaire with young learners for this class are as follows:

Graph 1: The results of the preferred style of the 1st grade

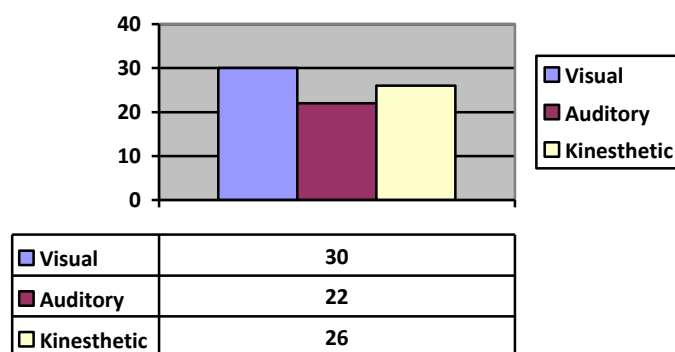


As it is shown in the graph, of the 71 students, the majority of the young learners in the first grade—28 students—have the visual learning style as their favorite one when they learn a foreign language. They like to draw more pictures. They remember more when they write a word down, or when they want to remember something, they think of a picture of it in their

minds. 26 students have the kinesthetic learning style as their favourite style. They like to move around the class. They are expressive and learn best when they are shown how to do something. Staying at a desk is not for them. Whereas, 26 students belong to the auditory learning style. They prefer to listen to people carefully and start doing something. They remember more things when they listen to them than when they see or read them. Writing for them is tiring.

The results of the 2nd grade are as follow:

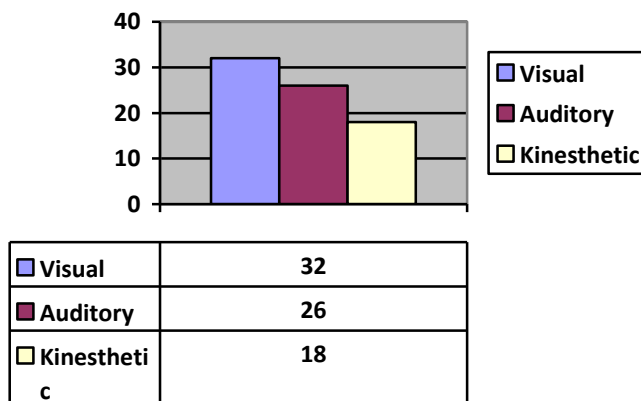
Graph 2: The results of the preferred style of the 2nd grade



From 78 students that are in 2nd grade, 30 students have the visual learning style as their favourite one. They learn a foreign language better when they see flashcards or when they see the person speaking in front of them. They also prefer to work in a quiet place. 26 students belong to the kinesthetic learning style. They are able to follow the instructions and move around the class. They want to have frequent breaks in the class or at home when they study. They are not so skilled at giving verbal explanations or directions. 22 students have the auditory learning style as their favourite. They want to listen to things (songs, games) more often. Writing is tiring for them. They press down too hard with their pen or pencil when they write.

As far as the 3rd grade is considered, the results are as follow:

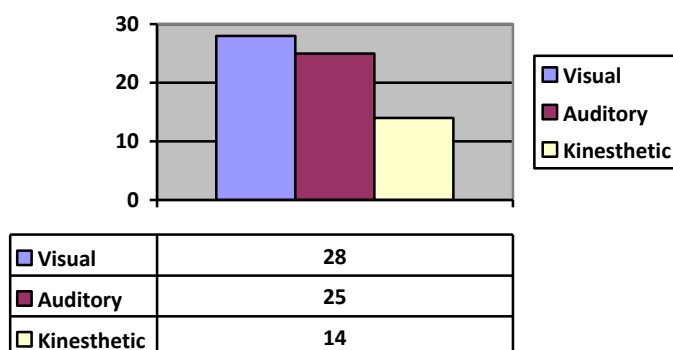
Graph 3: The results of the preferred style of the 3rd grade



From the 76 students that are in the 3rd grade, 32 like the visual learning style. Whereas 26 students like the auditory learning style and only 18 students like the kinesthetic learning style. We can see a change here, as the least favourite style is that of the kinesthetic style. It means that students do not want to learn by moving around the class. They are more focused on what they see or hear.

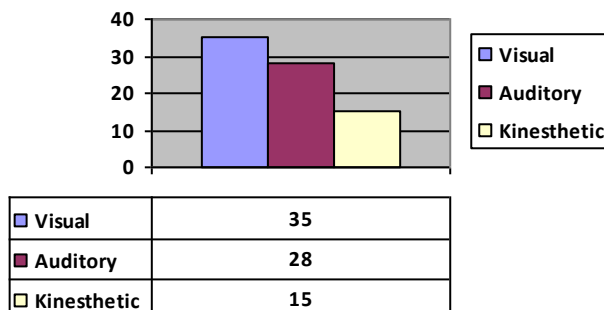
The results of the 4th grade are as follow:

Graph 4: The results of the preferred style of the 4th grade



In the 4th grade, there are 67 students, and the majority of them, 28 students, like the visual learning style. 25 students like the auditory learning style, and only 14 students like the kinesthetic learning style.

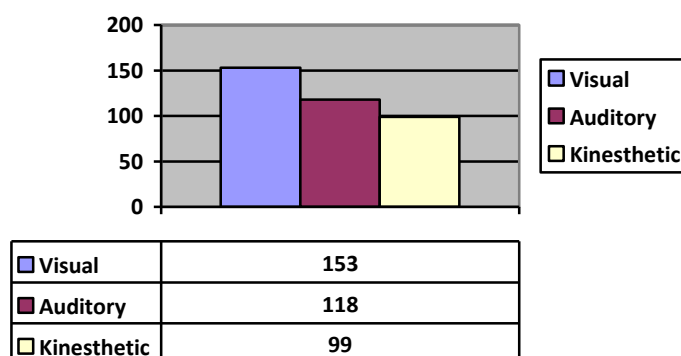
Graph 5: The results of the preferred style of the 5th grade



From the 78 students that are in 5th grade, 35 prefer the visual learning style, 28 like the auditory learning style, and only 15 prefer the kinesthetic learning style.

The overall results of the preferred learning style from the 1st to the 5th grade are as shown in the graph below:

Graph 6: The results of the preferred style of the grades 1-5



As mentioned above, the total number of students from the 1st to the 5th grade is 370. From them, 153 students chose the visual learning style as their favorite one. 118 students had an auditory learning style, and 99 students had a kinesthetic learning style.

The results of this study point out the preferences of students' learning styles in foreign languages. Since two foreign languages (English and French) are learned from them, it is very important for teachers to know how to accommodate students' particular needs. Teachers of these foreign languages will improve the quality of the teaching process by including multimodal activities to accommodate the three learning styles. In this way, foreign language teaching becomes effective as students have the opportunity to grasp the learning style that best suits them.

5. Conclusion

From the questionnaire analysis, it turned out that the preferred students' style is the visual learning style, which was selected by 153 students. These students like to learn by writing something or by keeping notes as the teacher talks, by meditating on numbers, and by watching more television as they memorize more images and figures. They also like to use more colors to communicate their ideas.

118 students preferred the auditory learning style. This group of students likes to learn by listening more, and specifically, they like to talk to someone.

The least favorite style is the kinaesthetic learning style, chosen by 99 students. This group of students likes to learn by moving and being active around the classroom.

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 increase the interest and performance of students and teachers.

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

The findings of the current study will be useful not only for English and French teachers but also for Albanian teachers of primary education to fit their teaching techniques to students' learning styles.

On the other hand, even students must be aware of the role of their favourite learning style.

The prevalence of visual learning style techniques can be attributed to the effectiveness of visual stimuli not only within the context of teaching but also within the context of digital media that is around them. For this reason, schools must provide vast rooms for working with students, as well as comfy corners with DVDs, bright spaces, and structured chores. These can allow pupils to learn and work in their own learning style. (Reid, 1995)

In conclusion, in order to focus on providing opportunities for all of these learning styles, teachers should remember that young kids cannot always find the optimum way to learn a foreign language. Poor students favour what is easier and more comfortable for them, yet learning is a challenging and unpleasant process. As a result, environmental factors such as

instructional tactics and social ties formed in classrooms play a crucial impact. To satisfy all of the students and achieve better teaching outcomes, different teaching philosophies may be integrated, and various tasks or activities may be carried out in the classroom.

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