LEARNING STYLE PREFERENCES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGES ACQUISITION: A CASE STUDY OF ROMANIAN EFL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT
THIS PAPER DEALS WITH THE IDEA THAT STUDENTS LEARN DIFFERENTLY AND THAT THE LANGUAGE LEARNING DEPENDS ON AGE, GENDER, MOTIVATION, INTELLIGENCE AND ANXIETY LEVEL, LEARNING STRATEGIES AND STYLES.
A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF STUDENTS' LEARNING STYLES HELPS TEACHERS TO BETTER DESIGN THE INSTRUCTION IN ORDER TO MATCH STUDENTS' NEEDS AND RESPOND TO INTERCONNECTEDNESS AND HOLISTIC ASPECTS OF THE MIND. IN THIS STUDY, WE AIMED TO EXPLORE WHICH LEARNING STYLES PREFERENCES STUDENTS HAVE AS MEASURED BY THE C.I.T.E. LEARNING STYLES INSTRUMENT AND TO PRESENT THE OBTAINED DATA FROM 40 FEMALE STUDENTS AT THE FACULTY OF MEDICAL AND BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCES OF THE "CONSTANTIN BRANCUSI" UNIVERSITY OF TARGU JIU, ROMANIA IN THEIR FIRST YEAR OF STUDY.

***KEY-WORDS**: LEARNING STYLES, EFL LEARNERS, FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACHIEVEMENT, LEARNING OUTCOMES*

1. Introduction

In the past twenty years, the study on learning styles sparked a strong interest, but also a whole controversy among academic psychologists and didacticians.

Language learning depends on age, gender, motivation, intelligence and anxiety level, learning strategies and language learning styles. The idea that people learn differently and need different teaching styles first became a popular concept during the 1970s and has influenced the way education and learning were perceived.

Theorists suggest that students learn differently by seeing, hearing, reflecting, reasoning logically and intuitively so differentiated instruction helps to develop a better educational process and to cover, not all, but a great part of students' learning needs.

More and more teachers are adjusting their approach depending on their students' learning needs. Some teachers give lectures, others lead students to self-discovery; some focus on applications and practice; some focus on memory and understanding etc. When teaching English, teachers must keep all students in mind when developing lesson plans and course syllabus, lectures, and interactive learning. Task Based Language Teaching approach "is regarded as an appropriate means of teaching because it places emphasis on the meaning rather than the language form and task-based activities offer students an opportunity to

develop cognitive processes" [1], but, from our analysis, a hybrid approach that blends the best of everything a teacher has to offer, could better fit each student's learning style. Effective teaching methods engage gifted and slow-learning students as well as students with attention deficit tendencies.

On the one hand, teachers have to engage their students and get them excited about learning using interactive teaching styles like brainstorming, Q&A session, case studies, pair work etc. and, one the other hand, a deeper understanding of their learning styles helps students to better monitor their learning and evaluate their level of understanding. Learning is not about reading and rereading a text and, spending a lot of time is not sufficient to ensure effective learning. That is why learning style inventories are designed to help respondents determine which is their style in order for them to develop flexible understanding and for teachers to teach the material in multiple contexts so that a flexible representation of knowledge to be developed and relevant features to be extracted.

Keefe (1987) formally defines learning styles as "characteristic cognitive, affective, and psychological behaviors that serve as relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment."

Researchers in the field of learning styles preferences used varied measuring instruments in their studies such as Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983), Kolb's Learning Style Inventory (Kolb, 1984), Fleming's VARK learning style model (Fleming, 2001), Memletic learning styles (2003) etc. and the majority of them acknowledged that students perform better when they received information in their preferred learning style.

Furthermore, this study sets out to find out which learning styles are major, minor or negligible for students.

2. Methodology

This research used the *Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire* adopted from *C.I.T.E. Learning Styles Instrument* and *VARK model*. We reduced the number of questions from 45 to 30 and provided it bilingually for a better understanding. The participants in this study were 40 EFL female students at the Faculty of Medical and Behavioural Sciences of the "Constantin Brancusi" University of Targu Jiu, Romania in the first year of study. The subjects of the study were selected based on a cluster random sampling, comprising all the language levels. There were 30 questions and students have to choose numbers from 1 to 5 corresponding to Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Disagree (D) or Strongly Disagree (SD) for each question according to the answers that most closely resemble their preferences.

Students rated themselves and come up with a major, a minor, a negligible learning style, or multiple learning styles. Descriptions of each learning style were given to help understand a student's preferred mode of learning.

The six key learning styles we used in the questionnaire were: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile, individual and group.

Some people learn primarily *seeing words* in books, on the chalkboard, whiteboard or video projector. They remember and understand information and instructions better if they read (visual learners).

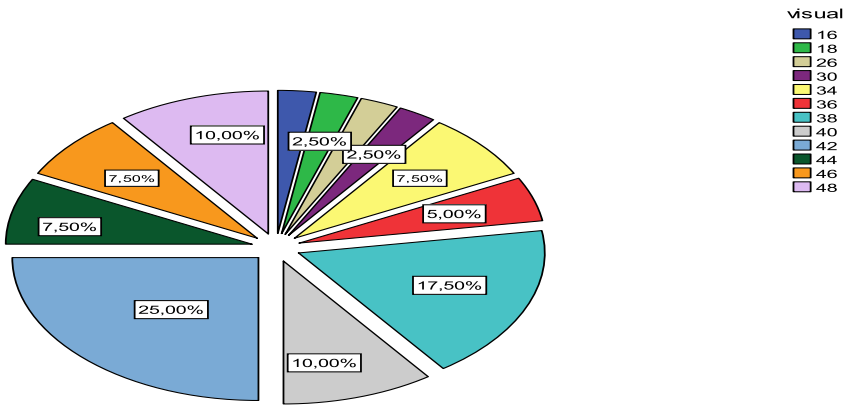
Some students learn from *hearing words* and remember information by reading aloud or moving their lips as they read. They benefit from hearing audio files, lectures, and class discussion (auditory learners).

There are some who learn best by *experience*, by being involved physically in classroom experiences. They remember information well when they actively participate in activities and role-playing in the classroom (kinesthetic learners) or by "hands-on" tasks, *touching and working with provided materials* (tactile learners).

Some students learn better when they work *alone* (individual learners) while others prefer to learn in *groups* (group learners) because the stimulation they receive from others helps them learn and understand new information.

3. Discussion and results

In graph 1, we presented the distribution of the 40 respondents taking into account their scores for the visual style:



Graph 1 – Visual style

As we can see, 2.50% respondents accorded 16 points, 2.50% accorded 18 points, 2.50% accorded 26 points, 2.50% accorded 30 points, 7.50% accorded 34 points, 5.00% accorded 36 points, 17.50% accorded 38 points, 10.00% accorded 40 points, 25.00% accorded 42 points, 7.50% accorded 44 points, 7.50% accorded 46 points and 10.00% accorded 48 points for the visual style.

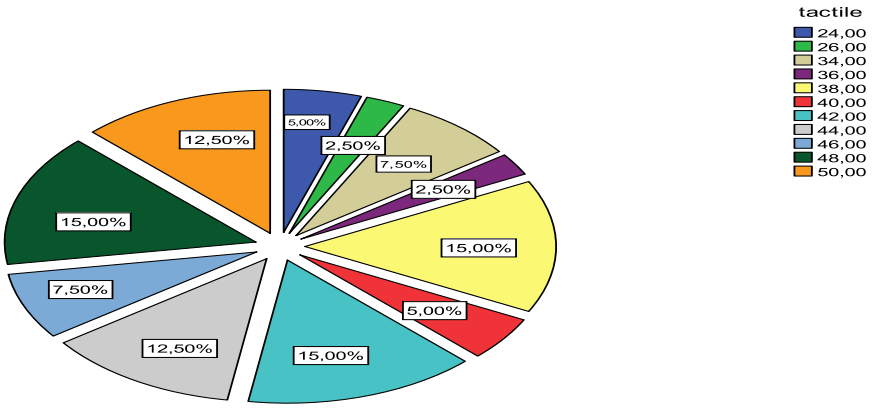
Table 1 – Descriptive statistics for the visual style

N	Valid	40
	Missing	0
Mean		39,30
Std. Error of Mean		1,120
Median		41,00
Mode		42
Std. Deviation		7,083
Variance		50,164
Skewness		-1,668
Std. Error of Skewness		,374
Kurtosis		3,564
Std. Error of Kurtosis		,733

Range	32
Minimum	16
Maximum	48

Table 1 shows a high homogeneity for the scores given by the 40 subjects for the visual learning style.

In graph 2, we presented the distribution of the 40 respondents taking into account their scores for the tactile style:



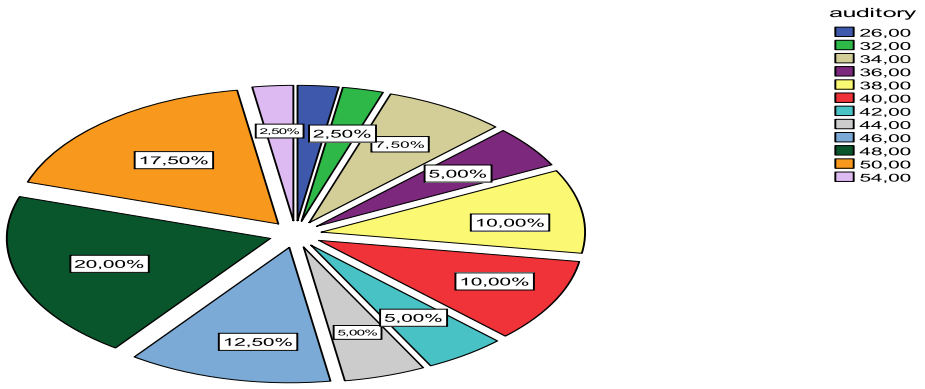
Graph 2 – Tactile style

As we can see, 5.00% respondents accorded 24 points, 2.50% accorded 26 points, 7.50% accorded 34 points, 2.50% accorded 36 points, 15.00% accorded 38 points, 5.00% accorded 40 points, 15.00% accorded 42 points, 12.50% accorded 44 points, 7.50% accorded 46 points, 15.00% accorded 48 points and 12.50% accorded 50 points for the tactile style.

Table 2 – Descriptive statistics for the tactile style

N	Valid	40
	Missing	0
Mean		41,7000
Std. Error of Mean		1,08498
Median		42,0000
Mode		38,00[a]
Std. Deviation		6,86201
Variance		47,087
Skewness		-1,017
Std. Error of Skewness		,374
Kurtosis		,857
Std. Error of Kurtosis		,733
Range		26,00
Minimum		24,00
Maximum		50,00
a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown		

For this style, we observe a higher homogeneity than for the visual learning style.



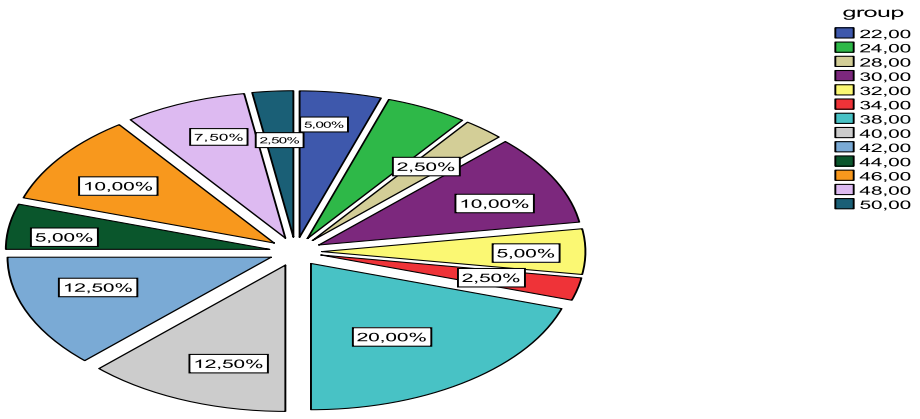
Graph 3 – Auditory style

As we can see in graph 3, 2.50% respondents accorded 26 points, 2.50% accorded 32 points, 7.50% accorded 34 points, 5.00% accorded 36 points, 10.00% accorded 38 points, 10.00% accorded 40 points, 5.00% accorded 42 points, 5.00% accorded 44 points, 12.50% accorded 46 points, 20.00% accorded 48 points, 17.50% accorded 50 points and 2.50% accorded 54 points for the auditory style.

Table 3 – Descriptive statistics for the auditory style

N	Valid	40
	Missing	0
Mean		43,3500
Std. Error of Mean		1,01119
Median		46,0000
Mode		48,00
Std. Deviation		6,39531
Variance		40,900
Skewness		-,674
Std. Error of Skewness		,374
Kurtosis		-,200
Std. Error of Kurtosis		,733
Range		28,00
Minimum		26,00
Maximum		54,00

For this style, we observe a very high homogeneity compared to the other analyzed learning styles.



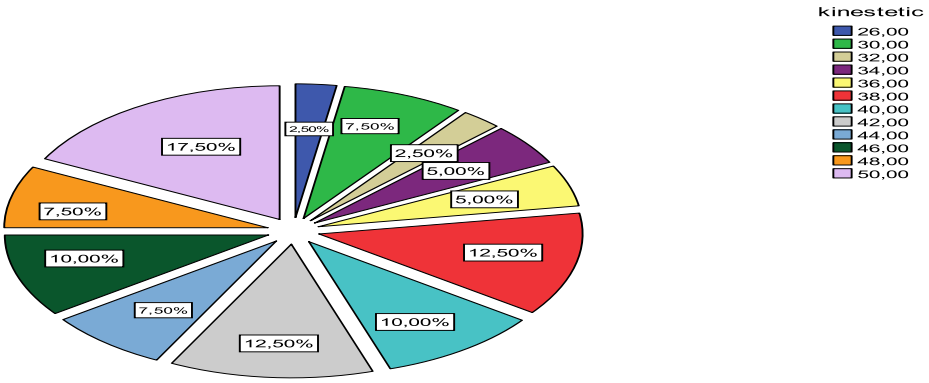
Graph 4 – Group style

For the group style, 5.00% accorded 22 points, 5.00% -24 points, 2.50% -28 points, 10% -30 points, 5.00% - 32 points, 2.50% -34 points, 20% -30 points, 12.50% -40 points, 12.50% -42 points, 5.00% -44 points, 10.00% -46 points, 7.50% -48 points and 2.50% -50 points.

Table 4 – Descriptive statistics for the group style

N	Valid	40
	Missing	0
Mean		37,9500
Std. Error of Mean		1,19290
Median		39,0000
Mode		38,00
Std. Deviation		7,54457
Variance		56,921
Skewness		-,586
Std. Error of Skewness		,374
Kurtosis		-,418
Std. Error of Kurtosis		,733
Range		28,00
Minimum		22,00
Maximum		50,00

The homogeneity is lower than those recorded for the other analyzed learning styles.



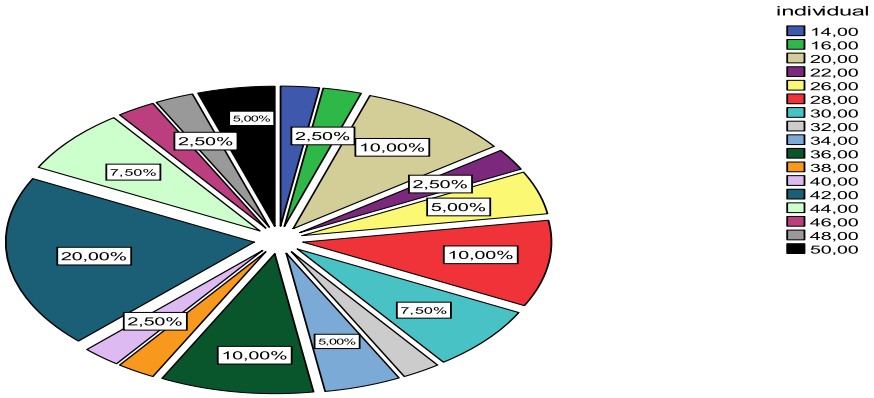
Graph 5 – Kinesthetic style

For the kinesthetic style, 2.50% accorded 26 points, 7.50% -30 points, 2.50% -32 points, 5.00%-34 points, 5.00% - 36 points, 12.50% -38 points, 10% -40 points, 12.50% -42 points, 7.50% -44 points, 10.00% -46 points, 7.50% -48 points and 17.50% -50 points.

Table 5 – Descriptive statistics for the kinesthetic style

N	Valid	40
	Missing	0
Mean		41,4500
Std. Error of Mean		1,04510
Median		42,0000
Mode		50,00
Std. Deviation		6,60982
Variance		43,690
Skewness		-,445
Std. Error of Skewness		,374
Kurtosis		-,583
Std. Error of Kurtosis		,733
Range		24,00
Minimum		26,00
Maximum		50,00

The distribution of the awarded scores is homogeneous.



Graph 6 – Individual style

For the individual style, 2.50% accorded 14 points, 2.50% -16 points, 10.00% -20 points, 2.50%-22 points, 5.00% - 26 points, 10.00% -28 points, 7.50% -30 points, 2.50% -32 points, 5.00% -34 points, 10.00% -36 points, 2.50% -38 points, 2.50% -40 points, 20% -42 points, 7.50% -44 points, 2.50% -46 points, 2.50% -48 points and 5.00%- 50 points.

Table 6 – Descriptive statistics for the individual style

N	Valid	40
	Missing	0
Mean		34,2500
Std. Error of Mean		1,54121
Median		36,0000
Mode		42,00
Std. Deviation		9,74745
Variance		95,013
Skewness		-,330
Std. Error of Skewness		,374
Kurtosis		-,866
Std. Error of Kurtosis		,733
Range		36,00
Minimum		14,00
Maximum		50,00

The distribution of the awarded scores is homogeneous.

Table 7 - Descriptive statistics for the 6 learning styles

Descriptive Statistics						
Learning style	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Variation coefficient (%)**
visual	40	39,30	7,083	16	48	18.02
tactile	40	41,7000	6,86201	24,00	50,00	16,45
auditory	40	43,3500	6,39531	26,00	54,00	14,75
group	40	37,9500	7,54457	22,00	50,00	19,88

kinesthetic	40	41,4500	6,60982	26,00	50,00	15,95
individual	40	34,2500	9,74745	14,00	50,00	28,43

Minor: Individual and Group
Major: Auditory, Tactile, Kinesthetic, Visual.
*Major 38-50; Minor 25-37; Negligible 0-24

4. Conclusion

The results of the study show that the individual and group learning styles are minor, the auditory, kinesthetic and visual are major and the auditory learning style has the highest central tendency indicator. There is no negligible style showing that all the 40 students, no matter their age, learn differently and they have more than one learning style. For some, the scores are roughly equal, so we can talk about multi-sensory learners. We noticed that the gap between the six learning styles is not significant.

Educators need to design their teaching programmes in a way that reaches visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile, individual and group learners using methodologies such as flipped classroom, cooperative learning, task-based language learning, gamification, design thinking etc.

This assessment is also a great way to provide students with insight into their learning style and assist them with developing learning strategies and study skills that match their learning styles.

Endnotes

[1.] Simion, M. O. and Genova T. (2019) *The Effectiveness of Task-based Language Teaching to ESP Bachelor Students at Two Universities in Bulgaria and Romania*, BCES Conference books, vol 17, Global Education in Practice: Teaching, Researching, and Citizenship, pp. 38-44.

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Website
https://transitioncoalition.org/blog/assessment-review/c-i-t-e-learning-styles-instrument-2/