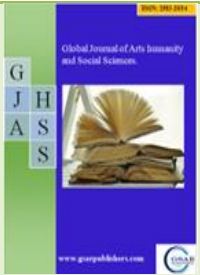
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Teaching English as a foreign language to undergraduate students of music and design according to their learning styles

BY

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Abstract

The paper is dedicated to the contradictory issue of teaching design and music students of English as a foreign language according to their dominant learning styles. The existing literature mostly agrees that taking into consideration students' dominant learning style increases their academic achievement, however, there are viewpoints that this idea is wrong. The goals of the current article were, first, to find out which dominant learning styles the design and music students at Batumi Art Teaching University, Georgia would demonstrate and, second, to find out whether teaching according to this learning style would benefit them academically. A small-scale experiment was conducted in two groups (10+10 students), one of which was at random chosen the experimental one and the other the control one. The experiment lasted for one month. The pre-and post-experimental language testing revealed that the experimental group's results were statistically significantly increased, while the control group results were insignificantly increased.

Keywords: learning style, English as a foreign language, students of music, students of design

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Introduction

Contemporary educational psychology underlines the need to teach students in ways most beneficial for them. Since the 1970s the issue of learning styles has been topical in student-centred education. A learning style is a student's consistent way of responding to and using stimuli in the context of learning (Claxton & Ralston, 1978). Scarpaci and Fradd (1985) defined learning styles as the "ways in which individuals perceive, organize, and recall information in their environment" (p. 184).

The most popular classification of learning styles is VARK (visual, auditory, reading/writing, and kinesthetic/tactile) by Fleming (1995; Fleming & Baume, 2006). The classification is linked to the dominant sense applied in the process of learning (eyesight, hearing, and touch), however, the reading/writing style is related to the role of language in learning. Visual learners benefit from pictures, videos, tables, and graphs while encoding and recalling information. The majority of designers are visual learners as their profession is related to images. They have a good sense of color, eye gauge, space, proportions, etc. Auditory learners benefit from hearing information, they have a good auditory memory and discriminate well language sounds and intonation. Musicians

normally are characterized by auditory learning. Besides listening, auditory learners are good at speaking as well and normally enjoy it. Reading/writing learners are good at languages, especially in written form. Many of them are linguists and language teachers, writers, and journalists. In the process of study, they benefit from reading texts and writing down the vocabulary, fulfilling all sorts of written tasks. Kinesthetic/tactile learners are not numerous. Movement and the sense of touch are their best cues while perceiving and recalling information. This style is more characteristic of sportsmen, dancers, drivers, as well as music performers.

Therefore, besides the personal peculiarities of learners, learning styles may be related to their profession (probably, they choose the profession which corresponds to their favourite learning style, making learning easier and more pleasant) (Rinehart et al., 2015; Sadler-Smith, 2000). However, not much research has been done on teaching English according to the learning styles of music and design students. To compensate for this **gap, the goal** of the article was to investigate the efficiency of taking into consideration professionally typical learning styles while teaching English to



music and design students at Batumi Art Teaching University, Georgia.

Although there is some controversy concerning the impact of the application of activities preferred by students due to their learning style (Fridley & Fridley, 2010; Pashler et al., 2009), on the whole, literature (e.g., Chen & Chen, 2018; Cimermanová, 2018; Ismail et al., 2023; Yilmaz-Soylu & Akkoyunlu, 2009) confirms the positive impact of their application. The main reasons for the controversy are:

- 1) Methodological: the empirical research may not be conducted following strict requirements (Pashler et al., 2009)
- 2) Psychological: the positive results may be obtained due to motivational/enjoinment reasons (Cuevas, 2015).
- 3) Practical: normally, in the group at least three out of four styles are represented, so, anyway, all styles will have to be applied in teaching (Kauchak & Eggen, 2011).
- 4) Practical/pedagogical: although people have a dominant learning style, for efficient learning they need to apply various styles, to avoid monotonous teaching/learning (Ormond, 2012; Woolfolk, 2015).

To compensate for the above-described existing gap, the goal of the article was to investigate the efficiency of taking into consideration professionally typical learning styles while teaching English to music and design students at Batumi Art Teaching University, Georgia.

Materials and Methods

A quantitative (experimental) design was applied. Two groups learning English as a foreign language having the same level of language skills (B1), to make their results comparable, were selected for the experiment. One of them was at random chosen as the experimental (treatment) one, while the remaining group became the control one. In both groups, the learning style was defined by using a free online questionnaire (<https://vark-learn.com/the-vark-questionnaire/>). The students were asked to fill out the questionnaire and find out their dominant learning styles. Based on the questionnaire results, the teaching style relevant to the learning styles of the majority of the students was chosen for the experimental group, while the teaching in the control group

The students were informed that the results of the experiment would be anonymous and confidential and that they could quit at any moment if they felt that the experiment in some way was unpleasant or harmful for them.

Table 1 presents the demographic data of the students involved in the experiment.

Table 1. Students' demographic data

	Control group	Experimental group
Age	17-19	17-19
Gender	7f, 3m	6f, 4m
Specialties	Music (6), Design (4)	Music (5), Design (5)
Dominant learning style (8-10 points):		
Visual	3	4
Auditory	5	5
Reading/Writing	1	-
Kinesthetic/tactile	1	1
Another important learning style (if available) (5-7 points)		
Visual	2	2
Auditory	1	1
Reading/Writing	-	1
Kinesthetic/tactile	2	-
Total number	10	10

	Control group	Experimental group
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Reading/Writing	1	-
Kinesthetic/tactile	1	1
Another important learning style (if available) (5-7 points)		
Visual	2	2
Auditory	1	1
Reading/Writing	-	1
Kinesthetic/tactile	2	-
Total number	10	10

It is possible to see that the dominant styles in both groups were visual and auditory. The verbal style (reading/writing) can, in fact, be ignored, while kinesthetic may have a certain impact on learning English. These data make the groups comparable.

Both groups were taught by the same coursebook (New English File pre-intermediate), syllabus, and teacher, and the number of weekly hours delivering English was the same (3) to avoid the impact of any extraneous variable. The independent variable was the purposeful and intensive application (or a lack of such) of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic/tactile activities

The control group was taught completely according to the coursebook, where the activity types (considering the learner styles) are balanced. In the experimental group 40% of visual, 50% of auditory, and 10% of kinesthetic/tactile activities were applied. This ratio was achieved by omitting from the textbook the excessive reading/writing learning style activities and substituting them with the researcher-selected/made-up activities.

The experimental period lasted for a month. Two free online language tests (pre- and post-experimental - <https://testizer.com/questions/>) consisting of 25 grammatical and vocabulary tasks were conducted to the students in both groups.

The visual activities included matching the pictures with the text (heard or read), describing pictures/paintings/other art objects/photos, making up a story based on a series of cartoons, interpreting a graph/table/drawing, role-play (e.g., customer – real estate agent, customer – interior designer; at a design exhibition), watching videos and immersion in virtual reality (Han et al., 2023; Miguel-Alonso, 2023; Philominraj et al., 2017). Auditory activities

(some of them mixed with visual activities) covered listening-based gap-filling and true/false tasks, listening to the teacher’s and friends’ stories, listening to texts and making up its picture plan for further retelling, reading aloud, studying with audio recordings instead of printed text, listening to songs for vocabulary memorization, watching videos, listening to audiobooks, audio recording oneself (for self-assessment and improvement of pronunciation), listening while reading, oral quizzes, oral rehearsal, using mnemonic devices that are based on alliteration, rhyme and/or rhythm, discussions based on listening materials, and homework given as teacher’s audio notes (Cárdenas-Claros et al., 2023; Kayalar & Kayalar, 2017; McCarter, 2008).

Results and discussion

Due to ethical reasons, students’ names are not given in Table 1, instead, CS1, S2,... (control group students) ES1, S2, etc. (experimental group students) is written. Each student had to memorize his/her code till the post-experimental testing so that the researcher could compare not only the mean group results but also individual students’ results.

Table 1. Students’ language testing results (assessment out of 25 points)

Student	Control group		Experimental group	
	Pre-experimental results	Post-experimental results	Pre-experimental results	Post-experimental results
CS1/ES1	19	18	20	23
CS2/ES2	20	20	20	22
CS3/ES3	17	18	18	21
CS4/ES4	16	16	17	21
CS5/ES5	20	21	20	24
CS6/ES6	22	22	21	25
CS7/ES7	21	24	21	24
CS8/ES8	19	20	20	23
CS9/ES9	18	18	17	22
CS10/ES10	21	20	19	23
mean	19.30	19.70	19.30	22.80
standard deviation	1.89	2.31	1.49	1.31

It is possible to see that some control group students maintained the same results, others decreased them, and a few increased their results. The mean results of the control group increased a little, while the standard deviation also increased, which indicates that the teaching method applied is not equally efficient for all students. To understand whether the obtained minor improvement has any

statistical significance, a paired-samples T-test was conducted. Table 2 presents its results.

It is possible to see that all experimental group students improved their results. The mean result also increased from 19.3 to 22.80. To understand whether the obtained improvement has any statistical significance, a paired-samples T-test was conducted. Table 3 presents its results.

Table 2. Paired-samples T-test (control group: pre & post-experimental results)

	Paired differences					t	d	Sig (2-tailed)
	Mean	SD	St. error mean	95% confidence interval of the difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Var. 1 & Var. 2	-.40	1.17	.37	-1.24	.44	-1.08	9	.31

$p=.31 > 0.05$, so the difference between the pre-and post-results of the control school was statistically insignificant.

Table 3. Paired-samples T-test (experimental group: pre & post-experimental results)

	Paired differences					t	d	Sig (2-tailed)
	Mean	SD	St. error mean	95% confidence interval of the difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Var. 1 & Var. 2	-3.50	.84	.27	-4.11	-2.89	-13.02	9	.00

$p=.00 < 0.05$, so the difference between the pre-and post-results of the control school was statistically significant.

Conclusion

The experimental study revealed that the music and design students’ dominant learning styles were auditory and visual, which may be explained by the peculiarities of their future professions – this is in line with the findings of Türker and Bostancı (2023), however, they found that the dominant learning style of their students was kinesthetic one.



The study also revealed that the two groups' mean results before the experiment were the same ($M=19.3$). After the experiment the control group only statistically insignificantly increased their result ($M=19.7$), which can be explained by maturation (improvement due to the duration of study). On the other hand, the mean result of the experimental group which was taught according to their two dominant learning styles increased statistically significantly to $M=22.8$.

However, the results cannot be viewed as representative due to the group's size and the duration of the study. More research on the issue is desirable to come to reliable results.

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