

# The Most Typical Learning Styles used in 9th Grade School and University

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## **Abstract**

*Learning a foreign language is not always an easy task. There are many components that play a vital role in the whole process. Among the most important ones we can mention the learning styles used by the learners themselves. As we know, the way students learn a foreign language varies from one to the other. As teachers, knowing more about their leaning styles helps considerably in the acquisition and learning of the foreign language by our students.*

*More specifically, the aim of this study is to find out what learning styles result to be the most typical in learning English language. For this purpose we chose two different levels of education in order to see if there would be any difference in the learning styles applied namely the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and the 3<sup>rd</sup> year in “Aleksander Moisiu” University. A questionnaire containing 30 statements, which covered a wide range of learning styles namely: visual, tactile, auditory, group, kinesthetic and individual was administered to them and quantitative techniques were used in order to analyze the data.*

*As was expected, there were certain differences concerning the major and minor learning styles used by the two groups surveyed. Recommendations for further research and implications of the findings will also be part of the article.*

**Keywords:** *English language, Learning styles, university level, 9<sup>th</sup> grade school.*

## *Introduction*

Learning a foreign language is not always an easy task. In order to be a successful language learner, one must be in contact with the language as much as possible, communicate with native speakers, try new experiences, develop a

certain feel for the foreign language, etc. Apart from these, there are numerous other elements that determine the success in learning or acquiring the language. Language learning is frequently related to various other factors including age, motivation, intelligence, interest, attitude to language, educational and cultural background, learning styles, etc. The more teachers understand the differences between students, the better they can address their needs. For this reason, the individual differences toward learning have been considered as an important issue by many researchers in this field of study. As Murray<sup>1</sup> stated, learners in the language classroom can no longer be treated as homogeneous. This element is more conspicuous nowadays that foreign language classes are student-centered rather than teacher-centered.

More specifically, Illeris<sup>2</sup> considers learning as a process where cognitive, emotional and environmental influences come together and enable acquiring, enhancing, or making changes in one's knowledge, skills and values." This perspective has led to a large number of studies dedicated to learning styles or the way in which learners adapt the new information to their methods of learning. However, in the field of education, the learning style concept has been recognized since at least the mid-1970s.<sup>3</sup> Sternberg et al<sup>4</sup> affirm that learning styles can be used as a valuable teaching tool inside the classroom." They support the view that, by diagnosing students' learning styles and matching them to teaching methods (for example for a "visual learner," presenting information through pictorial illustrations), learning can be greatly enhanced.

In the Albanian context there aren't many studies conducted on this specific aspect. For this reason we found it interesting to investigate if there were any similarities between the learning styles applied by pupils and students in the two different educational levels above-mentioned. The questionnaire used was Reid<sup>5</sup> perceptual learning style preference questionnaire (PLSPQ, 1987). The study was conducted in November 2017.

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<sup>1</sup> D. E. Murray, The tapestry of diversity in our classroom. In K.M. Bailey and D. Nunan (eds.), *Voices from the language classroom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 434-48.

<sup>2</sup> K. Illeris, "Transformative learning in the perspective of a comprehensive learning theory," *Journal of Transformative Learning* 2 (2004), 79-89.

<sup>3</sup> C. Griffiths, "Learning styles: traversing the quagmire" in *Psychology for Language Learning: Insights from Research, Theory and Practice*, eds. S. Mercer, S. Ryan and M. Williams (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> R. J. Sternberg, E. L. Grigorenko and L. Zhang, *Styles of learning and thinking matter in instruction and assessment. Perspectives on Psychological Science* 3 (2008), 486-506.

<sup>5</sup> J. M. Reid, "The learning style preferences of ESL students," *TESOL Quarterly* 21/1 (1987): 87-110.

*Literature review*

Since there are many definitions for the term Learning style we will focus on some of them in order to create a clear idea. Ellis<sup>6</sup> defines learning style as “the characteristic ways, in which individuals orientate to problem-solving”. Keefe<sup>7</sup> views learning styles as “cognitive, affective and physiological traits that serve as relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment” and which “reflect genetic coding, personality development, and environmental adaptation”. A degree of destiny intervention can be perceived in the definition given by Reinert,<sup>8</sup> who asserts that “an individual’s learning style is the way in which that person is programmed to learn most effectively, i.e., to receive, understand, remember, and be able to use new information.” Whereas Reid<sup>9</sup> believes that believes that the learning styles are retained in spite the methods used in teaching. However, it is noticed that with the passing of time it is possible to acquire new styles and adapt the old ones to specific circumstances.

Apart from the definitions it is important to be acquainted with various categorizations of learning styles. One of the most typical is that of Knowles<sup>10</sup> who differentiates between four types of learning styles:

(1) *Concrete learning style* that helps learners interested in information that has immediate value. Learners using this style are curious, spontaneous and willing to take the risks. They like variety and constant change of pace. “They dislike routine learning, written work and prefer verbal or visual experiences. They like to be entertained and like to be physically involved in learning.” For example, concrete learners want to learn by game, by pictures, films, videos, by working in pairs.<sup>11</sup>

(2) *Analytical learning style* which helps learners to be more independent, solve problems, track down ideas and develop principles on their own. Such

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<sup>6</sup> R. Ellis, “Principles of instructed language learning,” *System* 33 (2) (2005), 209-224.

<sup>7</sup> J. W. Keefe, “Assessing student learning styles,” in *Student learning styles and brain behaviour*, ed. J. W. Keefe (Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1982), 1-18.

<sup>8</sup> H. Reinert, “One picture is worth a thousand words? Not necessarily,” *Modern Language Journal* 60 (1976), 160-168.

<sup>9</sup> J. M. Reid, *Understanding learning styles in the second language classroom* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1998)

<sup>10</sup> L. Knowles, *Teaching and Reading* (National Council on Industrial Language Training: London, 1982).

<sup>11</sup> L. Knowles, “*Teaching and Reading*” (National Council on Industrial Language Training: London, 1982), cited in V. Tafani, *Language Teaching and Learning Methodology* (Tirana: SHBLU, 2003).

learners prefer logical systematic presentation of new learning material with opportunities for learners to follow up on their own. Analytical learners are serious, push themselves hard and are vulnerable to failure. Learners with analytical learning style want to learn by studying grammar, by reading books, or they want the teacher let them find their mistakes.<sup>12</sup>

(3) *Communicative learning style* which helps learners who prefer a social approach to learning. They need personal feedback and interaction and learn well from discussion and group activities. Learners with communicative learning style prefer to learn a foreign language by listening to natives, by talking to native speakers and by watching TV in English.<sup>13</sup>

(4) *Authority-oriented learning style*, which is related to learners who are responsible and dependable. These learners “like and need structure progression. They relate well to a traditional classroom. They prefer to have the teacher as an authority figure. They like to have clear instructions and to know exactly what they are doing. They are not comfortable with discussion.” Authority-oriented learners prefer “the teacher to explain everything to them, to write everything in their notebook, to have their own textbook.”<sup>14</sup>

Another model is that presented by Reid<sup>15</sup> who has developed a learning style model for learners of foreign language based on how students learn best using their perceptions: visual, auditory and kinesthetic preferences.

(1) *Visual learners* “learn better by visual means, for example by looking at pictures or films. They remember instructions best if they see them, for example, on the board. The teacher would advise these learners to write things down. In order to stay focused they should look at people who talk to them. They also should look at the pictures before they read a certain text.”<sup>16</sup>

(2) *Auditory learners* learn well by hearing things, for examples, “lectures or tapes. They like teachers to give oral instructions and they like making tape recordings of what they are learning and having” discussion. The teachers should advise the auditory learners to study out load with a friend or alone, to ask for oral instructions if they do not understand any issue to play tape recording to themselves about what they are studying.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> M. Knowles cited in “*Language Teaching and Learning Methodology*.”

<sup>13</sup> M. Knowles cited in “*Language Teaching and Learning Methodology*.”

<sup>14</sup> M. Knowles cited in “*Language Teaching and Learning Methodology*.”

<sup>15</sup> J. M. Reid, ed., *Learning Styles in the ESL/ EFL Classroom* (Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle, 1995).

<sup>16</sup> Reid, *Learning Styles*.

<sup>17</sup> Reid, *Learning Styles*.

(3) *Kinesthetic learners* learn best when they have hands-on experience, when they are physically involved or can actively participate. They like moving around when they learn and they like a variety of classroom activities. Teachers advise them to walk around the room or change their position every so often when they are learning. They should take short breaks often, say every 20 minutes. They should highlight or underline their notes or draw things on them.<sup>18</sup>

Concerning the research done in the field we can mention Peacock's<sup>19</sup> study which focused on the correlation between learning and teaching styles based on Reid's hypotheses. He found out that learners favored kinesthetic and auditory styles and disfavored individual and group styles, while teachers favored kinesthetic, group and auditory styles.

Rita and Kenneth Dunn<sup>20</sup> studied the way people learn and they found out that some students achieved knowledge only by means of selective methods. Various elements that had an impact in learning styles were mentioned in their study. Among them were: environmental, emotional, sociological and physical elements.

Among older studies, Oxford et al.'s<sup>21</sup> study is perhaps the most influential research that identified the relationships between isolated learning styles and the achievement of high school students learning Japanese. It revealed that among 107 students who participated in the study, visual students significantly outperformed auditory and tactile / kinesthetic students.

A study conducted by Naimie et al.<sup>22</sup> suggests that it is crucial for teachers to have knowledge about learner preferences and to take them under consideration in their teaching design. Their study revealed higher achievement when students' learning preferences and needs were taken under consideration by the teachers. Based on findings, it is assumed that the different learning styles dimensions have their own preferences in terms of technology usage. The study showed that findings of studies on English Language Learning indicated that in order to be effective teachers should have knowledge about the learners' learning needs,

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<sup>18</sup> Reid, *Learning Styles*.

<sup>19</sup> Mathew Peacock, "Match or mismatch? Learning styles and teaching styles in EFL," *International Journal of Applied Linguistic* 11(1) (2001), 20.

<sup>20</sup> Rita Dunn and Kenneth Dunn, *Teaching secondary students through their individual learning styles: Practical approaches for grades 7-12* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1993).

<sup>21</sup> R. Oxford and M. Ehrman, "Second language research on individual differences," *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 13 (1993), 188-205.

<sup>22</sup> Z. Naimie, et al. "Do you think your match is made in heaven? Teaching styles/learning styles match and mismatch revisited," *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences* 2 (Elsevier Ltd., 2010), 349-353, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.04.30>

individual differences in learning, the required teaching methods, learners' preferences as well as the necessary teaching materials required to meet learners' needs in the educational setting.

On the other hand, Reid<sup>23</sup> study focused on perceptual learning styles preferences for group and/or individual learning of nearly 1300 non-native speakers of English in the US and found out that ESL students differ significantly from native speakers of English in their perceptual learning styles. What was more, ESL students from different language, educational and cultural backgrounds sometimes differ significantly from each other in their learning style preferences.

Another study, made by Kenner and Weinerman,<sup>24</sup> showed that adult learners bring with them learning styles and experiences that may serve as the basis for future success. It is fundamental that these learning styles and background experiences be taken into consideration while teaching if we want to have proficient L2 learners.

### *The Study*

#### SUBJECTS

The study was conducted at two different education environments, namely "14 Nëntori" school (which is a 9<sup>th</sup> grade school) and "Aleksander Moisiu" University, Durrës. The subjects of the study consisted of 28 pupils from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade at "14 Nëntori" school and 28 students of the English branch, who were at 3<sup>rd</sup> year in "Aleksandër Moisiu" University, Durrës. The sample of the study consisted of pupils and students who were chosen randomly. Their participation in the survey was anonymous and voluntary.

#### INSTRUMENTS

The instrument used for the study was Reid's perceptual learning style preference questionnaire (PLSPQ, 1987). The questionnaire administered to pupils of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade was translated in Albanian, so that all statements were clear to them, whereas for the 3<sup>rd</sup> years students was used the original version. The questionnaire was composed by 30 statements rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree", and was designed to cover Reid's six learning style preferences that are as follows: (1) visual; (2) tactile; (3) auditory; (4) group; (5) kinesthetic; and (6) individual. In 1995 Reid went further on and categorized the 6 learning styles above as Major, Minor and Negligible. Major is a preferred leaning style, Minor is one in which learners can still function

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<sup>23</sup> Reid, "The Learning Style Preferences," 87-111.

<sup>24</sup> C. Kenner and J. Weinerman, "Adult Learning Theory: Application to Non-Traditional College Students," *Journal of College Reading and Learning* 41 (2) (2011), 87-96.

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well, and Negligible is the one that can make the learning process more difficult for them. The results were analyzed by categorizing them into above-mentioned learning style preferences and presented in the findings as well. Quantitative methods were used to analyze the data. The calculations are made based on this table:

<i>Major learning style preference</i>	38-50
<i>Minor learning style preference</i>	25-37
<i>Negligible learning style preference</i>	0-24

#### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions that we aimed at answering in our study are as follows:

1. What are the major, minor and negligible learning styles of the pupils in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade?
2. What are the major, minor and negligible learning styles of students of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year?
3. Are there any similarities in major, minor and negligible learning styles of both groups?

#### DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

All the necessary ethical procedures were followed to usefully collect the data. Permission was requested and granted for both groups. Participants were contacted personally and the aim of the study was explained to them. Participants were encouraged to take part in this study and were told that their participation and opinion will contribute to the improvement of learning English as a foreign language.

#### DATA ANALYSIS

##### Research question nr.1.

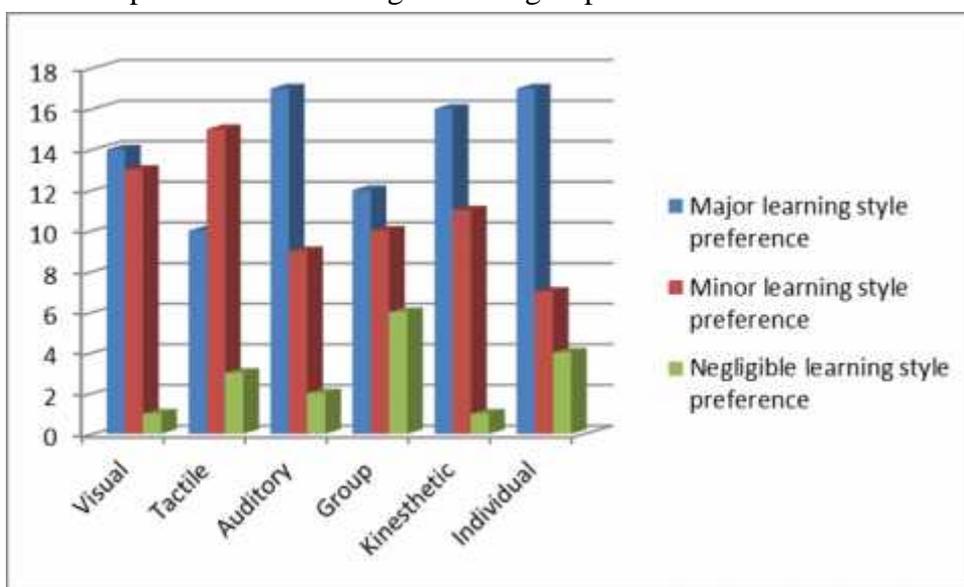
First of all, we intended to find out what were the typical learning styles of the pupils in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade that were surveyed. In this way we can answer the first research question. After the calculations the results are as presented in table nr.1.

	<b>Major learning style preference</b>	<b>Minor learning style preference</b>	<b>Negligible learning style preference</b>
Visual	14	13	1
Tactile	10	15	3
Auditory	17	9	2
Group	12	10	6

Kinesthetic	16	11	1
Individual	17	7	4

*Table nr.1. Pupils' learning styles in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade*

The data in the table is also presented graphically in graph nr.1 in order to provide a clear picture of the findings for this group.



*Graph nr.1 Pupils' learning styles in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade*

As we notice from the graph, the most typical learning styles from the “Major” category result to be Auditory, Kinesthetic and Individual, whereas the least popular seems to be Tactile. It is interesting to see that Individual learning style is among pupils’ favorites ones because it indicates that they still find it difficult to cooperate with each other and work in group or team, which is inherited by teacher-centered methods used in the past in our educational system. However, even Auditory and Kinesthetic learning styles result quite popular. Among the most popular learning styles in the “Minor” category result Visual and Tactile. As we mentioned above the “Minor” category is one in which learners can still perform well. In the “Negligible” category we notice that the pupils have chosen among others the Group learning style which seems to make things difficult for them when it comes to learning a foreign language. Furthermore, in the graph we see that that for Auditory and Individual learning styles the difference between major and minor categories is considerable.

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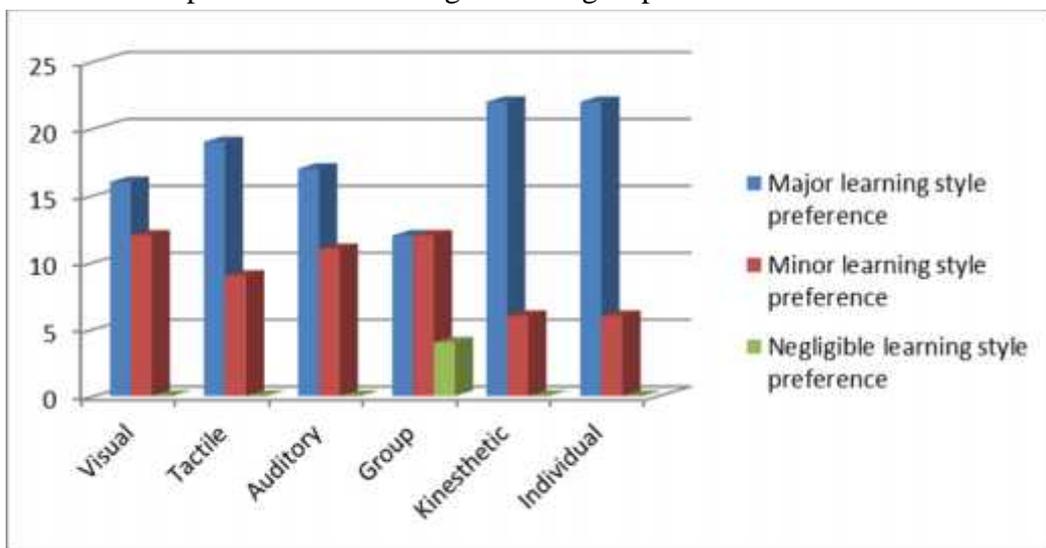
Research question nr.2

Table nr.2 presents the findings concerning the learning styles of 3<sup>rd</sup> year university students, including the classification in major, minor and negligible categories.

	<b>Major learning style preference</b>	<b>Minor learning style preference</b>	<b>Negligible learning style preference</b>
Visual	16	12	0
Tactile	19	9	0
Auditory	17	11	0
Group	12	12	4
Kinesthetic	22	6	0
Individual	22	6	0

*Table nr. 2. Students' learning styles*

The data in the table is also presented graphically in graph nr.2 in order to provide a clear picture of the findings for this group.



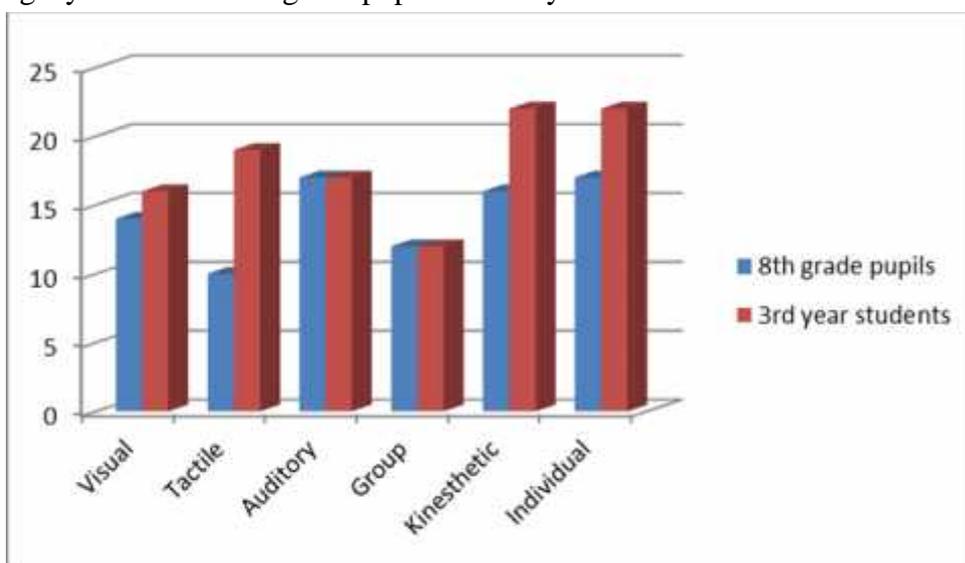
*Graph nr. 2 Students' learning styles*

Based on the table and graph nr.2 we can say that the majority of the students surveyed have chosen Kinesthetic and Individual learning style pertaining to the “Major” category. It shows that they favor learning by experience, by being involved physically in classroom experiences and remember information better when they actively participate in activities. A combination of stimuli, for example,

an audio tape combined with an activity will help them understand new material. But also they seem to favour even studying alone and working by themselves. Concerning the “Minor” category the learning styles that students can still use effectively in their learning process include: Visual, Group and Auditory learning styles. Whereas in relation to “Negligible” category what attracts the attention is the fact that students have chosen only Group learning style which seems to be the only one that hinders their progress in learning. Another element that we notice is that the number of students that have Group as a major learning style is equal to those who have chosen it as a minor learning style.

### Research question nr.3

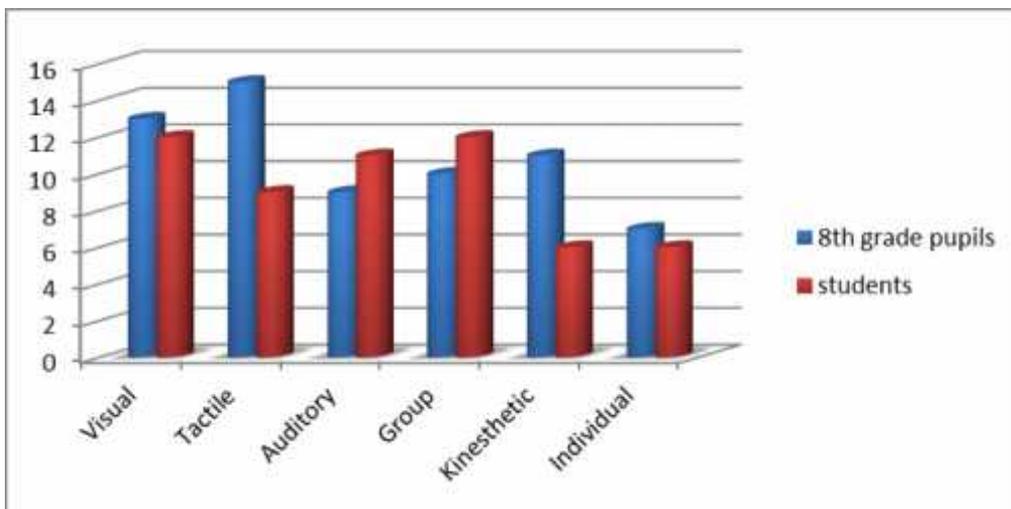
In graph nr. 3 are presented the differences regarding the choice of major learning styles between 8<sup>th</sup> grade pupils and 3<sup>rd</sup> year students.



*Graph nr. 3 Comparison of “Major” category between pupils and students*

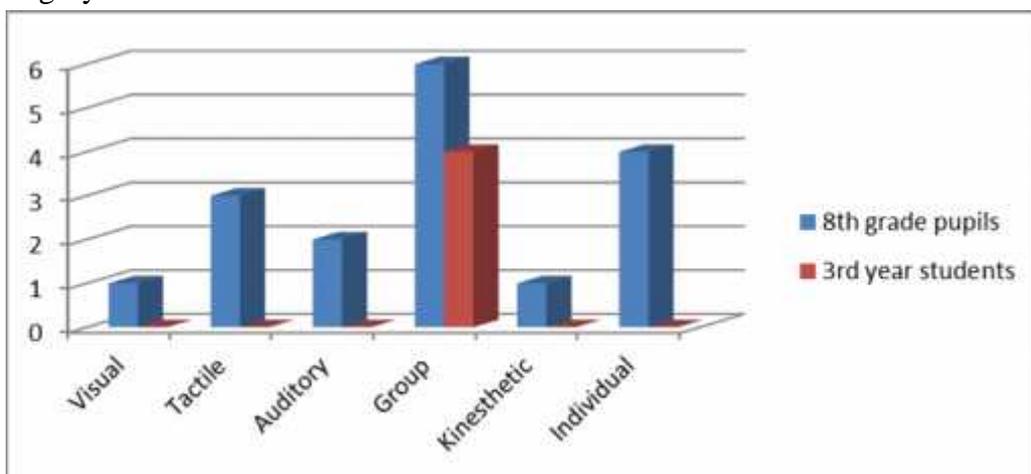
What we notice from the graph is that the most conspicuous learning styles for students result to be Kinesthetic and Individual followed by Tactile. Nearly the same can be said about the 8<sup>th</sup> grade pupils who have chosen Auditory, Kinesthetic and Individual learning styles among their favourite ones. It seems that apart from activities that pertain to Kinesthetic and Individual learning styles, pupils find useful even activities related to Auditory learning style such as oral explanations, reading aloud, hearing audio tapes, lectures, and class discussion, teaching other pupils etc. We have to emphasize that for both pupils and students, Group learning style remains at quite a low level.

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*Graph nr. 4 Comparison of “Minor” category between pupils and students*

In this graph are presented the differences regarding the choice of learning styles in the “Minor” category between 8<sup>th</sup> grade pupils and 3<sup>rd</sup> year students. What attracts the attention almost immediately is that in this category the majority of 8<sup>th</sup> grade pupils have selected Tactile and Visual learning styles whereas 3<sup>rd</sup> year students have opted for Visual, Group and Auditory learning styles. The only similarity between them lies in the choice of Visual learning style that appears to be useful to both groups in learning the foreign language. Another similarity is found in relation to Individual learning style that is the least popular in this category.



*Graph nr. 5 Comparison of “Negligible” category between pupils and students*

Graph nr. 5 presents the differences regarding the learning styles in the “Negligible” category between 8<sup>th</sup> grade pupils and 3<sup>rd</sup> year students. What

becomes evident when we see the graph is the fact that students have reported only Group learning style as the only style that makes it difficult for them to tackle with English language, whereas 8<sup>th</sup> grade students have reported various styles. Among the most problematic appear to be Group and Individual learning styles. The similarity between the two levels lies in Group learning style which indicates that students are not involved enough in group or team work while in class, in order to make them feel at home even with this style of learning. It is the teacher's duty to engage them more frequently in activities of this kind.

### *Conclusions*

After carefully analyzing the questionnaire administered in both levels of education, we reached the following conclusions:

1. Among the most popular leaning styles for 8<sup>th</sup> grade pupils in the "Major" category are Individual, Auditory and Kinesthetic learning styles. In the "Minor" category the most typical ones result Visual and Tactile learning styles whereas in "Negligible" category Group and to some degree Individual learning styles are reported to be problematic
2. Concerning 3<sup>rd</sup> year university students, the most popular leaning style in the "Major" category are Kinesthetic and Individual learning styles. In the "Minor" category the most typical ones result Visual, Group and Auditory learning styles. Whereas in the "Negligible" category students have chosen only Group learning style.
3. By comparing the "Major" categories of the two groups it is evident that both pupils and students have expressed their preference especially for Auditory and Individual learning styles. Another similarity noticed here is related to the fact that Group learning style is the least popular for pupils and students alike.
4. By comparing the "Minor" categories of the two groups, it results that the first similarity that we can notice lies in the choice of Visual learning style that appears to be useful to both groups in learning the foreign language. Another similarity is found in relation to Individual learning style that is the least popular in this category.
5. By comparing the "Negligible" categories between pupils and university students we notice that both groups have indicated Group learning style as the most problematic among those listed there.

*Limitations of the Study*

There were several limitations that would make a considerable difference in the discussion of the results for the research questions raised in the study. The first is related to the survey sample. The limited number of participants had its own impact in the results of the study. In other words, a larger sample would have provided more specific results.

Another limitation is related to the instrument used in the data collection procedures. This study may have generated more reliable results with multiple data sources, as for example interviews with students and teacher, focus groups, etc. as their opinions are always validity for a better study. Using data from different sources would have enabled me to conduct a thorough search.

Finally, the fact that in Albania there are not many studies related to this aspect of learning process has its own impact on the study.

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