

**‘ELT for a Global World’**



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# Individual differences

A seminar course for TEFL students

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# Learning Styles

# Definition

‘an individual’s natural, habitual, and preferred way(s) of absorbing, processing, and retaining new information skills’ (Reid, 1995, p. VII)

# Basic assumptions (1)

- ‘Learning styles persist regardless of teaching methods and content areas’ (Reid, 1995, p. VIII)
- ‘There is an interaction between style and situation’ (Ehrman, 1996, p. 53)
- Learning style preferences influence the choice of learning strategies (Ehrman, 1996)
- ‘Learning style mismatches are at the root of many learning difficulties’ (Ehrman, 1996, p. 50)
- Some learning style preferences are firmly set.

# Basic assumptions (2)

- Learning styles are very closely linked to cognitive styles and to personality dimensions:
  - **The Big Five** (McCrae & Costa, 2008)
    - openness to experience (imaginative vs. practical)
    - conscientiousness (systematicity vs. disorganization)
    - **extroversion-introversion** (sociable vs. reserved)
    - agreeableness (cooperative vs. uncooperative)
    - neuroticism-emotional stability (anxious vs. calm, content)

# Taxonomies

## *Cognitive learning styles*

field-independent/field-dependent

analytical/global

inductive/deductive

reflective/impulsive

sequential/random

concrete/abstract

## *Sensory learning styles*

auditory, kinaesthetic, visual, tactile,

group/individual

## *Personality learning style*

introverted/extraverted, tolerance/intolerance of  
ambiguity (Ehrman, 1996)

# Problematic issues

- Theoretical issues:
  - Too many taxonomies (over 71!)
  - Trait vs. State
  - Sensory preferences vs. Processing skills
- Measurement issues
  - A continuum between dichotomies (answers are context dependent).
  - Construct validity issues

# Instruments

- Learning Styles Inventory (Dunn, Dunn, & Price, 1975) includes preferred features of physical environment;
- Perceptual Learning Style Preferences Survey (Reid, 1987);
- Myers-Briggs Temperament Sorter (Myers & Briggs, 1987);
- Ehrman & Leaver's Learning Style Questionnaire (2003): sensory dimensions not included.



# Research findings

- Moderate and confusing results.
- Patterns of behaviour that do not seem to appear in correlational studies:

## Learning styles and

- Language learning aptitude
- Learning efficiency (self-efficacy)
- Style flexing to meet situational demands
- Culture

# Current views

- Research on learning styles has come to a halt.
  - Learning styles seem to be intuitively important BUT
    - there is a lack of a well-established theoretical basis
    - lack of well-established measuring instruments.
- (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015)

# Future directions in learning styles research

1. link between learning styles - learning strategies.
2. mild preference vs. strong preference
3. learning styles - measured with the help of personality tests

# Pedagogical implications

- Raising awareness and providing advice for language learners (cf. Advising in language learning – Carson & Mynard, 2012)

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