

Newsletter on European education

BY CORNERSTONE EU

the learning style illusion

It's getting warmer in Finland, but I hope the snow doesn't disappear as yesterday I went ice-skating with my family and we played ice hockey and it was great.

What else is new? I **started playing in ukulele orchestra**, where we have like 20 ukuleles and a few bass ukuleles and a small drum set. The orchestra leader is teaching and instructing us and playing the drums, and it's actually a lot of fun.

So far we've played Billy Jean, Godfather theme song and Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds, which is the hardest song. **The orchestra has been trying to learn it for years now**, and this is going to be the year that they get it. But what if the player's learning styles just don't math the teaching?

What kind of learner are you? I can answer for you: the same as everyone else, turns out. This week, we are talking about the myth of learning styles.

"I'm a visual learner", "she didn't teach in my style" or "I'm a kinesthetic learner, so I learn by doing and feeling. That's why attending to this lecture is simply a waste of my time. I will go for a walk".

We've probably all heard and said these types of sentences. I always considered myself to be a kinesthetic learner, who learned best by writing, doing and being active, practice rather than theory.

But preferences and identity labels aren't the same as scientifically valid predictors of better learning outcomes. Let's dive in!

THE LEARNING STYLE MYTH

Learning is what school is all about. In today's world, everyone should be a life long learner. But what even is learning? Scientific definition is that learning is acquisition of knowledge or skills through study, experience, or being taught. Basically learning is getting information to stay in your head or body, preferably long term. **Learning style theories suggest that people have different, individual ways of making the information to stay** in their heads. Theories divide learners into groups like *kinesthetic, audistic or visual*, so learning by doing, hearing or seeing. The theories therefore imply that teaching material should be presented to students differently to accommodate these differences.

APPEAL OF LEARNING STYLES

Learning style theories are appealing because they offer people both an identity and an explanation for their perceived learning difficulties. It is often easier to say **“I am a visual learner and the lecturer just talks”** than to admit that the course materials are difficult to understand.

However, *the fact that learning style theories have largely been empirically disproven does not mean that students do not have different preferences regarding how they receive information.*

Students also differ in their learning strategies and study techniques, and some may learn more efficiently by using certain methods rather than others.

A further issue with research on learning styles concerns methodology. Many studies rely heavily on students' self-evaluation, using questionnaires and surveys that are prone to bias and often already assume the existence of distinct learning styles.

ISSUES WITH THE SIMPLIFICATION

There are over 50 different learning style theories, where the scientists have tried to determine the best ways for individuals to learn. *The most popular learning style theory VARK* (Visual-Auditory-Read/Write-Kinesthetic) is also the one with the most contradictions.

Focusing on a just on the learning style we reinforce a simplistic view of learning. **Learning has a lot more to do with how students process the information they're given**, not just how they receive the information.

Issue with the simplification of learning styles is that they can quickly become limiting: the students can think they are unable to learn in a specific way, because their learning style is different.

These limits can also make the students feel like **they are not in control of their own learning**, which is simply not true. By learning different types of techniques and focusing on the materials, everyone can be in charge of their own learning.

On the other hand, I think it's always beneficial to do self-reflection on your own learning. In the end, it's all about what helps the students learn the best.



World University Rankings by Subject 2026: results announced

THE RANKINGS INFLUENCE GLOBAL REPUTATION, RESEARCH COLLABORATIONS, AND STUDENT MOBILITY PATTERNS ACROSS CONTINENTS.

Rises among Asian institutions and a number of European universities holding strong or improving in specific subjects. Chinese and UK universities seem to be the biggest ranking winners this year.

UK ministers scrap foreign students target in shift to overseas hubs strategy

GOVERNMENT REPLACES RECRUITMENT GOAL WITH PLAN TO INCREASE 'EDUCATION EXPORTS' TO £40BN A YEAR BY 2030

The UK government announced a major shift in its international education priorities, scrapping the target of attracting 600 000 international students annually and instead focusing on global education hubs and overseas campuses to strengthen British education exports and partnerships. Stricter visa compliance and support structures for universities abroad are part of the strategy.

First Meeting of the Committee of Experts on AI and Education (EDU IA)

THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE'S FIRST MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND EDUCATION (EDU-IA) TOOK PLACE IN STRASBOURG ON 14-15 JANUARY 2026, BRINGING TOGETHER APPOINTED EXPERTS TO BEGIN SHAPING HOW AI SHOULD BE INTEGRATED RESPONSIBLY INTO TEACHING AND LEARNING ACROSS MEMBER STATES.

This group will contribute to future policy guidance and tools to ensure AI in education aligns with core European values like human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

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