



A Case Study of an Afghan EFL Learner's English Learning Style Preferences at Kabul University

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Abstract: English language proficiency is essential for academic and professional success, yet learners differ in how they acquire and develop these skills. Although learning style preferences play a critical role in EFL contexts, limited research has explored their impact on English language skill development among Afghan university students. This study investigates the role of learning style preferences in the development of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) skills of a single Afghan undergraduate learner in the English Language and Literature Department at Kabul University. Purposive sampling was used to select the participant, allowing an in-depth exploration of a learner's oral English language skills. A single-participant case study design was employed, providing detailed insight into individual language learning processes while limiting generalizability. Data were collected through a semi-structured interview, a learning style questionnaire, and oral and written language tasks. Quantitative data from the questionnaire were analysed using descriptive statistics to identify the participant's dominant learning style. Qualitative data from interviews and tasks were examined through thematic analysis, involving systematic coding and theme development to interpret patterns related to the participant's language learning history, oral proficiency, and written expression. Findings reveal a dominant auditory learning style, which aligns with stronger listening and speaking skills. Social environment, motivation, and media exposure also influenced English language development. These results suggest that aligning instruction with learners' preferred styles can enhance English language skill acquisition in EFL contexts such as Afghanistan.

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INTRODUCTION

Learning style preferences are widely recognized as an important dimension of individual differences in second and foreign language learning, influencing how learners perceive, process, and retain new linguistic information over time (Yotta, 2023). Across a range of EFL contexts, research has shown that learners frequently develop relatively stable

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preferences for visual, auditory, kinesthetic, group, or individual learning, and that these preferences can shape their levels of classroom engagement, the strategies they employ, and, in some cases, their language achievement (Liu, 2025). University EFL learners, in particular, often report combinations of auditory and kinesthetic preferences, while individual learning is sometimes the least favored style; at the same time, other studies identify dominant visual or group preferences or complex multimodal profiles, highlighting substantial variability both within and across learner populations (Ariani et al., 2021; Firissa & Gebremariam, 2024). This diversity underscores the need to examine learning styles not as fixed labels but as part of a broader constellation of learner characteristics that interact with instructional context.

In Afghanistan, English language plays a crucial role in academic advancement, scholarship opportunities, and employment, yet many university students study in teacher-centered, textbook-driven environments (Noori, 2019) with few opportunities for tailored support or explicit discussion of learning styles. By providing a detailed picture of how one Afghan EFL learner's preferences relate to his language learning history and skill performance, this study offers contextually grounded insights that can inform both classroom practice and learner support at Kabul University and similar institutions (Yaseeni, 2024).

Empirical research on learning styles and English proficiency has produced a complex and sometimes contradictory picture. On the one hand, some correlational and survey-based studies report significant positive associations between particular styles (e.g., visual or group preferences) and overall English achievement or specific skills such as vocabulary knowledge, reading comprehension, and written performance; in these studies, cognitive and metacognitive strategies that align with learners' preferred modalities often emerge as important mediating factors (Liu, 2025; Al-Hubaishi & Al-Mekhlafi, 2023). On the other hand, several investigations find weak, inconsistent, or non-significant relationships, suggesting that learning style preferences alone do not determine language outcomes and must be understood in interaction with other variables such as motivation, anxiety, teacher beliefs, and the affordances of the learning environment (Liu, 2023). Methodologically, much of the existing work relies on large-scale questionnaires, typically using frameworks such as Reid's Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (PLSPQ) or Fleming's Visual, Auditory, Read/Write, and Kinesthetic (VARK), which are valuable for mapping style distributions but less suited to capturing how styles are enacted and negotiated by individual learners in specific educational and sociocultural contexts (Ariani et al., 2021).

From a pedagogical perspective, recent literature increasingly cautions against simplistic matching of teaching to a single preferred style and instead advocates for flexible, multimodal approaches. A study by Benitez-Correa et al. (2022) found that

learners benefit when teachers consciously vary input and activities across visual, auditory, and kinesthetic channels, encourage collaborative as well as individual work, and explicitly raise learners' awareness of their own preferences and strategy repertoires. This is particularly important for productive skills such as speaking and writing, where overreliance on one modality (for instance, visual note-taking) may limit opportunities for practice and feedback. Thus, contemporary studies tends to treat learning styles as one useful lens among many for understanding learner diversity, rather than as a deterministic account of success or failure.

Existing studies have largely focused on mapping overall learning style distributions among university EFL students, reporting, for example, that large proportions of learners at Parwan University express positive orientations toward visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities (Aalemy & Amiry, 2022). While these findings provide an initial picture of style preferences, they usually stop short of linking particular style profiles to detailed evidence of language skill development, classroom behavior, or strategy use. Pedagogically, there has been little discussion of how Afghan instructors might meaningfully respond to diverse style profiles within the constraints of large, exam-driven classes, or how students themselves might be supported to adopt more flexible, multimodal learning strategies. Consequently, there remains a need for detailed, context-sensitive case studies that examine learning style preferences within authentic educational settings and provide a richer understanding of learners' experiences beyond descriptive survey findings (Yin, 2018).

Therefore, the present study addresses the lack of contextualized, learner-level evidence concerning how an Afghan university student's learning style preferences relate to his English language development and language learning history within the institutional context of Kabul University. Although previous research on individual differences in second language learning has examined learners' cognitive styles, learning strategies, and instructional preferences, it has provided limited understanding of how these factors interact within learners' actual learning experiences and language development processes (Ehrman et al., 2003).

This study seeks to address these limitations by employing a mixed-methods single-case study design focusing on an Afghan EFL learner at Kabul University. Specifically, the study aims to identify and characterize the learner's dominant learning style preferences, examine the extent to which these preferences are reflected in his oral and written English language abilities, and explore the role of his language learning history in shaping his current level of English proficiency and the strategies he employs during the language learning process.

1. What learning style preferences does the learner demonstrate?

2. How are the learner's learning style preferences related to his oral and written English skills?
3. How has the learner's language learning history influenced his current English proficiency?

Theoretical Framework

The present study is grounded in two major theoretical perspectives: Reid's (1987) Perceptual Learning Style Theory and Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, specifically the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Together, these theories provide a comprehensive lens for understanding how individual sensory preferences and social environments interact to shape language learning trajectories.

Perceptual Learning Style Theory propose that learners have relatively stable preferences for the sensory modalities through which they perceive and process new information (Reid, 1987). In the context of EFL acquisition, these styles typically categorized as visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic influence how a learner engages with instructional materials and classroom activities. For the Afghan EFL learner in this case study, identifying a dominant perceptual style (such as an auditory preference) helps explain why certain skills, like oral proficiency, may develop more rapidly than others when instructional input aligns with these natural inclinations.

Complementing this individual focus, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory emphasizes that language learning is a socially mediated process rather than a purely internal cognitive one (Vygotsky, 1978; Shabani et al., 2010). Central to this theory is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), defined as the distance between a learner's independent problem-solving ability and their potential achievement under the guidance of a more knowledgeable other (MKO). This study uses the ZPD to analyze how the participant's language learning history and social environment including family support, peer interactions, and exposure to media have provided the necessary scaffolding to bridge the gap between his initial proficiency levels and his current academic standing at Kabul University.

By synthesizing these theories, the study examines the participant not as an isolated learner, but as an individual whose learning style preferences are both a cause and a consequence of his interactions within a specific sociocultural context. This integrated framework allows for a nuanced exploration of how environmental factors and personal history either facilitate or restrict access to the ZPD, ultimately determining the effectiveness of the language learning process.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a mixed methods case study design to provide an in-depth understanding of a single Afghan EFL university student's English language learning profile. Mixed methods research is a research paradigm that systematically integrates

both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis within a single study or a series of investigations to provide a more comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena than either approach could achieve independently (Johnson et al., 2007). A case study approach is appropriate because the focus is on one learner in a specific institutional and sociocultural context, and the aim is to gain a detailed, contextualized account of his learning history, preferences, and skills rather than to generalize to a larger population (Duff, 2014). Case study research plays a vital role in applied linguistics and EFL research by providing rich, contextualized accounts of individual learning experiences and by illuminating how learner characteristics and contextual factors interact over time (Duff, 2014; Nunan, 1992). Accordingly, this design is well suited to the present study's research questions, which seek to describe the learner's learning style preferences, explore how these preferences relate to his oral and written English skills, and examine how his language learning history has shaped his current proficiency.

Within this case study, a mixed-methods framework is used to integrate quantitative and qualitative data in a complementary way. Quantitative data on the learner's style preferences were collected through a structured learning style questionnaire, providing clear, descriptive indicators of the participant's dominant modality (auditory, visual, or tactile/kinesthetic). Qualitative data were then gathered through a semi-structured interview and performance-based language tasks (oral and written), resulting in rich, detailed accounts of the participant's language learning history and actual English use. The qualitative strand deepens and explains the quantitative findings by showing how the identified learning style relates to the learner's experiences, strategies, and strengths or weaknesses in oral and written performance.

The two approaches are integrated at the interpretation stage: the questionnaire results are used as an organizing lens for analyzing and discussing the interview and performance data, and the qualitative themes, in turn, help to interpret the numerical profile. Using quantitative data first provides a clear, focused starting point for describing the learner, while the subsequent qualitative analysis allows the researcher to explore why that pattern exists and how it manifests in real language behavior. This sequential, integrated use of quantitative and qualitative methods strengthens the credibility and depth of the findings by combining the breadth and clarity of numerical description with the nuance and contextual insight of qualitative evidence.

Participant

This study employed purposive sampling within a single-participant case study design to obtain an in-depth understanding of an Afghan EFL university student's language learning history, learning style preferences, and English proficiency development in a educational context. Purposive sampling is widely recommended in qualitative and case study research when the objective is conceptual depth and contextual insight rather than

statistical representativeness, because cases are selected for their information-rich characteristics and relevance to the research questions (Ishak & Bakar, 2014; Palinkas et al., 2015). A 19 year old junior student from the English Language and Literature Department, Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literature, at Kabul University (pseudonym: Omar Ahmadi) was purposefully selected as a typical, motivated EFL learner with sustained engagement in English study, allowing for a detailed examination of individual learning processes that might not be visible in large-scale quantitative research. Methodological discussions of purposive typical case sampling emphasize that, in single-case designs, the key criterion is theoretical and contextual fit, not random selection, because the primary goal is analytic, rather than statistical, generalization (Ishak & Bakar, 2014; Palinkas et al., 2015; Seawright & Gerring, 2008). Consequently, selecting one typical, information-rich case was appropriate for illuminating how an Afghan EFL learner navigates linguistic, institutional, and sociocultural constraints in developing English proficiency, in line with established qualitative sampling guidelines (Robinson, 2014).

Data Collection and Instrumentation

This study employed four instruments for data collection: a semi-structured interview, a questionnaire for learning style component, an oral skills assessment, and a written skills assessment. These tools were selected and designed to generate data and information relevant to the research questions.

The semi-structured interview was designed and developed by the researcher, based on the specific objectives of the study and a review of relevant literature on language learning histories. It consisted of 21 open-ended questions, accompanied by follow-up prompts to maintain focus and elicit rich, detailed responses. The interview focused on the participant's language learning background and experiences, including when and where they learned English, the types of teachers and methods they encountered, and significant successes or challenges. The interview lasted a little over 17 minutes, was audio-recorded with the participant's consent, and was subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis, thereby providing the primary source of qualitative data.

The questionnaire was constructed by the researcher in alignment with the study's purposes and informed by theoretical and empirical work in second language learning and motivation. Its items were designed to complement the interview by systematically eliciting information relevant to the research questions, thus providing structured, supporting data alongside the qualitative interview data.

As part of the questionnaire component, an adapted learning style questionnaire was used to identify the participant's preferred learning style across auditory, visual, and tactile/kinesthetic modalities. This instrument consisted of 20 closed-ended items,

adapted from the widely used EducationPlanner.org learning style inventory and modified to align with the specific objectives and context of the present study. Each item offered three response options (A, B, and C), and responses were scored according to the original questionnaire guidelines: predominantly A responses indicated an auditory learning style, predominantly B responses indicated a visual learning style, and predominantly C responses indicated a tactile/kinesthetic learning style. The questionnaire required approximately 25 minutes to complete.

The participant's oral English proficiency was assessed through speaking task. The participant was given a single topic and allowed to speak freely without time restrictions, an open-ended format chosen to encourage natural, spontaneous speech production. The participant spoke for 2 minutes and 15 seconds. The response was audio-recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed for linguistic features relevant to the aims of the study.

To assess written language ability, the participant was provided with an open-ended writing prompt and asked to write a paragraph in English. The task was completed at home to reduce time pressure and anxiety. The participant wrote the response by hand, producing 267 words in approximately one hour. The handwritten text was later typed for clarity and analysis, while the original handwriting sample was retained. The typed version was used for all subsequent analytical procedures.

Data Analysis

Data from the four instruments a learning style questionnaire, a semi-structured interview, an oral skills task, and a written skills task were analyzed using a combination of quantitative and qualitative procedures. The quantitative data obtained from the learning style questionnaire were examined using descriptive statistics, specifically by calculating the frequencies of responses across categories A, B, and C to identify the participant's dominant learning style. Qualitative data from the semi-structured interview, oral performance, and written text were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method used to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns of meaning (themes) within a dataset such as interview transcripts, focus groups, observations, or documents (Nowell et al., 2017). This process involved systematic coding, grouping similar codes into categories, and developing overarching themes related to the participant's language learning history, oral performance, and written expression. All transcripts were read and reread to refine codes, check consistency, and enhance the credibility of the interpretations.

The validity of the instruments in this study was supported by aligning each tool with the research aims and relevant literature, and by using established measures where possible. The semi-structured interview and the oral and written tasks were designed directly from the research questions and informed by previous work on language learning

histories and proficiency, so that the prompts targeted the intended constructs; their wording and instructions were reviewed and refined to improve clarity. The questionnaire, including the learning style section, was based on theoretical and empirical work in second language learning and motivation, and the learning style component was adapted from the widely used EducationPlanner.org inventory, ensuring coherent coverage of auditory, visual, and tactile/kinesthetic modalities. Reliability of the learning style questionnaire was examined through test–retest administration over a two-week interval, with a high positive correlation between scores at the two time points indicating stable results. For the interview, oral, and written tasks, reliability was supported through standardized administration (consistent instructions, recording, and timing) and systematic transcription and analysis procedures, which were intended to promote consistent scoring and interpretation.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the study. The participant provided informed consent prior to data collection, and participation was entirely voluntary. Confidentiality and anonymity were protected by assigning a pseudonym.

FINDINGS

Learning Style Preferences

In this case study, the participant’s learning style was assessed using a 20-item close-ended questionnaire, adapted from www.educationplanner.org, with each item offering three response options: A, B, or C. The participant was allocated 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire but finished it within 25 minutes. Responses were analyzed by identifying the most frequently chosen option: “A” indicating an auditory learning preference, “B” representing a visual learning preference, and “C” reflecting a tactile (kinesthetic) learning preference. The participant’s results comprised 9 A’s, 8 B’s, and 3 C’s, suggesting a dominant auditory learning style, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. *Participant’s Learning Style Preferences*

Learning Style	Auditory	Visual	Tactile/Kinesthetic
Mr. Ahmadi selected	9 A’s	8 B’s	3 C’s
Percentage	45%	40%	15%

Oral English Skill Development

The participant demonstrated intermediate oral proficiency. He noted his own ability, stating, *"I have a good understanding of English and also I can speak very well in English."* Strengths were observed in fluency and pronunciation, which he attributed to his media habits, mentioning, *"Most of the time I watch B.B.C news and for that reason may be my accent is British."* However, weaknesses were identified in vocabulary precision, a

difficulty he acknowledged, explaining, " *The very major problem I would say thing that was frustrating me was vocabulary for English.*" To address this, he described a personal strategy, reporting that he learns " *Approximately, ah fifteen words per day* " by noting them on paper with examples. These patterns align with his auditory learning preference and structured approach to vocabulary acquisition. To assess Mr. Ahmadi's oral language proficiency, he was asked to speak on the topic 'The Importance of Education' for a minimum of 2 minutes and a maximum of 5 minutes. He spoke for 2 minutes and 15 seconds. His speech was recorded and transcribed. Overall, his oral proficiency is rated at the intermediate level. The analysis focused on three aspects: vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar.

Throughout his speech, Mr. Ahmadi demonstrated difficulty using precise vocabulary in context. For example, he said, "*We can remove and eradicate,*" where using only one of the terms would have been sufficient. In another instance, he stated, "*All the problem in a society and also all the tensions that are made before in the inside the society,*" where the word 'problem' alone would have conveyed the intended meaning, as 'tension' is more appropriate for individual contexts. Additionally, he was uncertain whether to use 'earn' or 'make' before 'money,' saying, "*We can earn money and we can make money.*" These errors are developmental in nature, likely resulting from learning English in a structured context where emphasis is placed on language rules rather than contextual meaning, as noted by Lightbown and Spada (2006). This explains his limited ability to select vocabulary appropriately in specific contexts.

Mr. Ahmadi demonstrated generally accurate pronunciation, reflecting a sound understanding of English phonetic rules (see Table 2). However, several pronunciation errors were observed. Specifically, he produced two developmental errors by pronouncing development as /d e v ʌ l u: p m e n t/ instead of /dɪ'veləpmənt/ and consider as /kænsi:dær/ instead of /kən'sɪdər/. In addition, he made one transfer error by pronouncing technology as /ti:tnælɒdʒ/ instead of /tek'nɑ:lədʒi/. This error appears to have resulted from the influence of Dari phonological patterns on his English pronunciation. These pronunciation errors are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Participant's Pronunciation Errors

Word	Mr. Ahmadi's IPA	Correct IPA (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.)	Type of Error
Development	/d e v ʌ l u: p m e n t/	/dɪ'veləpmənt/	Developmental
Consider	/k æ n s i: d æ r/	/k ə n ' s ɪ d ə r/	Developmental
Technology	/t i: t n æ l ʊ dʒ/	/t e k ' n a: l ə dʒ i/	Transfer

Mr. Ahmadi's overall grammatical competence can be characterized as ranging from upper-intermediate to advanced; however, several notable errors were identified in his

production. In terms of prepositional usage, he produced the phrase *"To for the development of our country,"* in which the preposition 'to' is redundant; the target-like form is *"for the development of our country."* This error appears to be developmental and can plausibly be attributed to cross-linguistic influence from Pashto, where prepositional systems differ from those of English. With regard to transitions, he used two semantically overlapping transition signals in succession (*"Also, in addition, by education"*), which constitutes redundant use of conjunctive markers and thus an inappropriate cohesive device in formal English writing; this aligns with Hogue's (2008) description of incorrect use of multiple transitions with the same meaning. Finally, in the domain of tense and aspect, he employed the simple present in *"You see that technology is improve a lot"* instead of the present perfect form 'You see that technology has improved a lot.' In light of Thomson and Martinet's (1960) account that the present perfect is required for recent actions with current relevance, this instance is likewise classified as a developmental error.

Written English Skill Development

The written assessment of Mr. Ahmadi's work indicates an upper-intermediate to advanced level of written English. He is able to generate clear ideas, use generally adequate vocabulary, and produce an extended paragraph of 267 words on an assigned topic. At the same time, the analysis shows developmental difficulties in paragraph organization, tense consistency, and punctuation, alongside minor issues in word choice and redundancy. The following analysis examines his written language proficiency, organization, vocabulary, and grammar with punctuation, each aspect supported by specific evidence from his writing.

In terms of written language proficiency, Mr. Ahmadi was asked to write a paragraph on the topic *"What are my responsibilities as a university student?"* with a minimum of 200 words. He produced a 267-word paragraph, which was subsequently typed for analysis. The evaluation concentrated on three key areas organization, vocabulary, and grammar with punctuation to identify both strengths and areas for further development.

With regard to organization, the paragraph is generally well-structured but contains some errors in content and organization. The opening sentence, *"Everyone has responsibilities and I, as a university student, also have some responsibilities,"* includes information not directly related to the assigned topic, which required a specific focus on Mr. Ahmadi's responsibilities as a university student. This constitutes a developmental error, reflecting incomplete knowledge of topic sentence conventions. According to Hogue (2008), a topic sentence should clearly introduce the main focus of the paragraph. Similarly, the concluding sentence, *"To sum up, responsibility or being responsible is a characteristic of successful people,"* does not fully summarize the main points of the

paragraph and therefore represents another developmental error. Effective paragraph conclusions should clearly reinforce the paragraph's central ideas (Hogue, 2008).

In vocabulary, Mr. Ahmadi demonstrates generally strong knowledge but makes minor errors in word choice and usage. He occasionally uses redundant or unnecessary words, as in the phrase *"Responsibility or being responsible"* within a single sentence. These errors are developmental in nature and indicate the need for continued practice in selecting concise, appropriate words and parts of speech in context. Nonetheless, these choices do not prevent understanding of his intended meaning.

Regarding grammar and punctuation, Mr. Ahmadi shows good overall grammar knowledge, though some errors are evident. He occasionally mixes tenses, as in the sentence: *"For instance, if I have grammar for tomorrow, I must review the previous lesson, do the home works and read the coming lesson; so by doing these I got myself prepared for the class."* In this example, *"I have grammar for tomorrow"* refers to a future event, while *"I got myself prepared"* is in the past tense, resulting in tense inconsistency. This is a developmental error that can be addressed through targeted practice in tense usage. Punctuation errors were also observed, such as the incorrect use of a comma in *"Everyone has responsibilities and I,"*. According to Hogue (2008), coordinating conjunctions like 'and' connect similar ideas, and a comma should not be placed after the subject. Such errors likely reflect differences between English and Pashto punctuation rules and can be reduced through focused instruction on English punctuation conventions.

Language Learning History

Mr. Ahmadi acquired Pashto from early childhood within a family and social environment in Peshawar, Pakistan, where Pashto was the dominant language of both home and community communication. During the interview, he explained that he was *"Surrounded by Pashto speakers"* and that both his family members and the broader environment used Pashto as the primary means of interaction. He further confirmed that Pashto was spoken not only at home but also outside and at school, stating that *"In Pakistan we were just speaking Pashto", "Pashto home and outside school"*. This consistent social exposure, peer interaction, and daily communication reinforced his native language development from an early age. As a result, his Pashto proficiency is currently advanced, reflecting full native-like acquisition.

Mr. Ahmadi moved to Kabul at around six years of age with limited knowledge of Dari, stating that he could speak it *"Dari very a little"* upon arrival. He initially faced difficulties with vocabulary and sentence construction, explaining that he *"I did not know what word to use or what to say in Dari."* However, continuous exposure at home, in the surrounding

community where Dari was widely spoken, and at Mahmood Tarzi High School where all subjects were taught in Dari led to gradual improvement.

Mr. Ahmadi began purposeful English language learning at age ten through English language centers in Kabul, he said, *"I started from the age of ten"*. Moreover, he stated that *"I started learning English in some courses."* Motivation emerged as a key factor influencing his English proficiency. His goals included using English for global communication, he mentioned, *"English is the language of communication, also the language of business, and also it is worldwide accepted,"* pursuing higher education abroad, he explained, *"I wanna go abroad as well for getting my master's, for example, to USA, UK,"* and pursuing a career as a translator, he noted, *"I wanted to be a translator of English to native speaker."*

English learning challenges included psychological and environmental barriers. He said, *"The environment can be something a barrier,"* adding that he explained, *"When I am speaking English some of them say you not an Afghan or actually they are kidding me or they are making fun of me."* Additionally, vocabulary acquisition was a persistent difficulty: he mentioned, *"Actually, at first at the beginnings speaking was very frustrating for me. And the second, actually, as far as vocabulary is related to speaking so the very major problem I would say thing that was frustrating me was vocabulary for English."* He developed a personal strategy to overcome this, he noted, *"Approximately, ah fifteen words per day"* on paper with examples.

Currently, his English proficiency is at an intermediate level, reflecting significant progress driven by motivation and perseverance. He expressed pride in his ability, he expressed, *"Actually, as general thing, now the most rewarding thing for me is that I have a good understanding of English and also I can speak very well in English. I can speak it very well. So that something that is very rewarding for me."*

Factors Influencing Language Learning

The participant acquired and learned all three languages effectively but struggled with different factors. First of all, the environment played a decisive role in acquiring Pashto, Dari and English. Pashto learning was reinforced by family and community use in Pakistan, as he stated: *"Actually, I was surrounded by Pashto speakers, so I learned the Pashto by them. My mother from my family, from the environment that was there (Pakistan). So actually I studied, I learned Pashto from them."* Dari acquisition was shaped by school, community, and university interactions after moving to Afghanistan. He explained: *"Dari, again like Pashto when we came to Afghanistan, now we are living in Kabul. Also, we are living in place that this time is surrounded. All people who are living besides us are so they are Persians or they speak Persians. So form that so I learned how to speak Persian also Dari."* At school, *"Subjects were all in Dari,"* and at university, he continued to use Dari

alongside English. English learning was influenced by observing professional advantages associated with proficiency such as his goals to study abroad and become a translator and by formal instruction in educational courses, which he began at age ten.

However, his language learning was influenced by psychological and cultural factors. Psychological factors negatively affected his English development. He described how teasing from peers caused embarrassment: *"Yeah, actually when I am speaking English some of them say you not an Afghan or actually they are kidding me or they are making fun of me, so that can be a bit something, something a barrier for English learning."* Early experiences also included frustration with vocabulary, which he called the *"Major problem."* However, positive reinforcement later motivated continued improvement, particularly in English, as he noted the *"Positive feeling"* when people appreciate his English skills.

In addition, cultural interactions further shaped his learning. Exposure to local culture in Pakistan and Afghanistan facilitated Pashto and Dari acquisition, while English learning was influenced by media exposure, such as regularly watching 'B.B.C news,' highlighting the role of cultural input in second-language development.

DISCUSSION

This case study indicates that Mr. Ahmadi's English language learning has been shaped by an interplay of social, psychological, and personal factors that operate through his learning style preferences, multilingual background, and developing oral and written proficiency. The discussion addresses three core aspects of the study: his dominant learning style, the way this preference relates to his oral and written English skills, and the influence of his language learning history on his current proficiency. Overall, the case supports learner-centered perspectives that emphasize individual learning styles, motivation, and socio-affective variables, while also revealing areas where instructional practices and theoretical claims do not fully converge.

The findings first point to a predominantly auditory learning style, as indicated by the 20-item learning style questionnaire and his reported study behaviors. Mr. Ahmadi consistently relies on listening to the radio in English, watching English-language media, and actively participating in classroom discussions as primary strategies. These behaviors align with descriptions of auditory learners, who are reported to benefit most from hearing language input through lectures, recordings, and interactive dialogues (Castolo & Rebusquillo, 2008). Recent research also emphasizes that auditory learners gain particular advantage from aural input and interactive listening tasks, which resonates with his preference for audio-based resources and self-study outside the classroom (Liu et al., 2024; Rassaei, 2018; Yuan & Tang, 2025). At the same time, this case suggests that an

auditory preference interacts with motivational and contextual factors, indicating that learning style should be viewed as a dynamic tendency rather than a fixed trait.

The relationship between this learning style and his oral and written skills shows both convergence with and limitations of learning-style theory. In oral proficiency, Mr. Ahmadi demonstrates intermediate-level performance, with accurate pronunciation and generally fluent delivery. These practices mirror evidence that auditory learners benefit particularly from aural input and interactive listening tasks (Liu et al., 2024; Rassaei, 2018; Yuan & Tang, 2025). However, he experiences difficulties with vocabulary use, prepositions, and the present perfect tense. These patterns echo arguments that exposure to input alone is not sufficient for robust grammatical development without focused practice and feedback (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). In written proficiency, his upper-intermediate-level skills include generally well-organized paragraphs and largely correct grammar and punctuation, yet developmental errors occur in topic sentence formulation, tense consistency, word choice, and comma placement. This combination of strengths and weaknesses complicates simple interpretations of learning style: while auditory strengths clearly contribute to comprehension and oral expression, they do not automatically translate into mastery of written conventions. Pedagogical strategies such as audio-lingual exercises, interactive discussions, clarification-request techniques (Ur, 2012), extensive reading, and structured writing tasks can help bridge the gap between auditory learning preferences and language performance in both oral and written domains.

Mr. Ahmadi's language learning history further illuminates his current English proficiency by situating it within a broader multilingual trajectory. His early exposure to Pashtu in Pakistan, subsequent acquisition of Dari upon returning to Afghanistan, and sustained engagement with English through formal education and media have created a rich multilingual foundation. This trajectory is consistent with research on multilingualism and cognitive flexibility, which suggests that managing multiple languages can enhance metalinguistic awareness and facilitate additional language learning. Social factors, such as observing the advantages of English proficiency for higher education and employment, strengthened his motivation to learn English. Psychological factors, including initial teasing by peers and positive reinforcement from professors, influenced his self-confidence and persistence, consistent with Vygotsky's (as cited in Shabani et al., 2010) theory that social and cultural contexts shape language learning outcomes. At the same time, the case underscores that supportive feedback and meaningful opportunities to use English in authentic contexts are crucial for converting multilingual potential into sustained proficiency.

Taken together, these findings emphasize the importance of learner-centered instruction that responds to individual learning styles, motivation, and socio-affective

factors without treating them as static categories. Teachers can enhance language acquisition for auditory learners like through audio-lingual drills, listening-based tasks, participatory discussions, debates, jigsaw listening activities, and collaborative projects (Brown, 2007; Hedge, 2000). Such alignment between instructional methods and learner preferences can foster intrinsic motivation and autonomy, but this case also suggests the need for balance: matching teaching to learning style should be complemented by opportunities that stretch learners beyond their dominant preferences, particularly in areas like grammar, vocabulary, and written conventions where auditory exposure alone may be insufficient.

CONCLUSION

This case study investigated the role of learning style preferences, language learning history, and contextual factors in the English language development of an Afghan EFL learner. The findings revealed that Mr. Ahmadi demonstrated a predominantly auditory learning preference, supported by his frequent engagement with English media, listening-based learning experiences, and participation in interactive communication. Although visual learning characteristics were also evident, auditory input appeared to play a central role in his language learning process.

The findings further showed that the participant's learning style preference was related to his oral and written English performance in different ways. His extensive exposure to spoken English contributed to strengths in listening comprehension, pronunciation, and oral fluency, resulting in intermediate-level oral proficiency. However, difficulties in vocabulary selection, grammatical accuracy, and contextual language use indicated that auditory exposure alone was insufficient for achieving complete linguistic accuracy. Similarly, his written performance demonstrated relatively strong language control and organization at an upper-intermediate level, while developmental challenges remained in paragraph structure, vocabulary precision, tense consistency, and punctuation.

The study also demonstrated that the participant's language learning history significantly influenced his current English proficiency. His early acquisition of Pashto through family and community interaction, subsequent learning of Dari through social and educational exposure, and later development of English through formal instruction, media exposure, and personal motivation contributed to his multilingual competence. These findings highlight the importance of considering the interaction between individual learner characteristics, social environments, motivation, and previous language experiences in understanding English language development.

The findings have important implications for EFL teaching and learning, particularly in multilingual contexts such as Afghanistan. While incorporating auditory and interactive activities may support learners' oral development, balanced instruction that includes

extensive reading, structured writing practice, and targeted feedback is necessary to strengthen grammatical accuracy, vocabulary use, and written communication. Teachers should consider learners' individual preferences and backgrounds while avoiding reliance on a single learning modality.

Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations. As a single case study, the findings reflect the experiences of one learner and cannot be generalized to all Afghan EFL learners. In addition, the study focused on the participant's current language abilities and learning experiences at a specific point in time; therefore, it does not capture possible changes in his proficiency development over a longer period. Future research could address these limitations by investigating larger samples, comparing learners with different learning preferences, conducting longitudinal studies, and examining instructional approaches that support the development of both oral and written English skills.

Overall, this case study demonstrates that English language development results from the dynamic interaction of learner preferences, linguistic background, motivation, and contextual experiences. Understanding these interconnected factors can contribute to more responsive and effective EFL instruction in diverse educational settings.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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Authors Contributions

All authors contributed to this study. Ahmad Arsalan Zaiel led the research, including the development of the research framework, the design of the research instruments, and the collection of data through semi-structured interviews, learning style questionnaires, and oral and written assessments. Abdullah Noori contributed to the development of the data analysis framework and assisted in the interpretation of the quantitative findings. Mohammad Hassan Rasuli supported the qualitative data analysis and thematic coding of interview transcripts. All authors read and approved the final version of the research paper and accept responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the research.

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Data Availability Statement

Data collection materials are available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author.

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