

A NEW APPROACH TO TEACHING AND LEARNING¹**Raluca Andreea ION**

Abstract

This paper offers an example of a methodology change underpinning the design of a new course in teaching Common Agricultural Policy. The objectives of this research are to identify the best methods of teaching and learning a subject in English and to apply them in the teaching process. The methods were chosen after carrying out a survey about students' learning preferences and their perceptions about the teacher's role.

The results of the survey show that students prefer practical activities in seminars: case studies, projects, working in pairs, games. During lectures, students want to receive handouts and write down only the teacher's explanations. They agreed that Power Point presentations are useful for large classes and that small group activities are suitable not only for seminars, but for lectures as well. Students consider that some issues of Common Agricultural Policy may be learned by watching TV news in English and by reading newspapers in English. The teacher's role within the process of teaching and learning is to act as a team member, thus the teacher and all the students in the class constitute a team and should interact like members of a team.

Based on the results of the survey I have designed the methods, materials and activities that I use in teaching the subject Common Agricultural Policy. In the part

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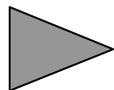
“New methods of learning”, the methods and material used are described from a theoretical point of view, while in the last section of the paper: “New methods of learning Common Agricultural Policy in English – Methodology in action”, all the methods used are exemplified. The new methods focus on using group work and pair work activities rather than individual work. It intends to enable participatory and cooperative learning, where the teacher is not an absolute planner and manager of the class, but a facilitator, team member, motivator, and group organizer.

The new methods introduced are: role-plays; critical thinking skills: analysis, interpretation, inference, explanation, evaluation, self-regulation; discussion: brainstorming, jigsaw activities, fish-bowl activities, pyramid discussion; group work, pair work and others.

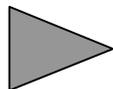
There are a lot of papers and articles on the topic of participatory learning, new methods of teaching and learning and other related issues, but none of these focuses on modern methods of teaching Common Agricultural Policy.

It is hoped that teachers will find the present study useful in their efforts of preparing and teaching the classes not only of Common Agricultural Policy, but on other topics as well

Keywords: role-plays, critical thinking skills, group and pair work



Students’ learning preferences



Purpose of the research. Research questions

The main topic of this piece of research is: Students’ learning preferences. Its objectives are:

- to identify students’ preferences regarding the methods of learning, such as: case studies, games, solving exercises, role-play, writing down everything the teacher says, going out with the class and practising English, working in pairs or groups or learning with the whole class, in large courses and seminars;
- to identify students’ acceptance and preferences regarding the materials and methods of learning: news-papers, TV news, handouts, Power Point presentation;

- to identify the favourite model of learning: individual work, pair work or group work;
- to identify the students' perceptions about the teacher's role.

The overarching research question of this piece of research is:

Which are the students' preferred learning methods?

In addition, there are also other specific questions to be answered:

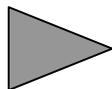
Do students learn better in a classical way of lecturing to the whole class and solving exercises individually or in a modern way of using case studies, games, role-play, team projects, working in pairs and/or groups?

Do students want to be asked about their interests and needs?

Which is the favourite model of learning: individual work, pair work or group work?

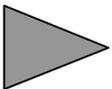
Are pair work and group work suitable only for seminars or can they be used in large courses as well?

Which is the teacher's role within the process of teaching and learning?



Methodology

In order to answer these questions, a piece of qualitative research was carried out. For data collection structured interviews were developed using a questionnaire format. The respondents were selected among the students of the Faculty of Agro-food and Environmental Economics, who have chosen to learn the subject Common Agricultural Policy in English. The students were asked whether they agreed or not with some statements related to the teaching methods. The data were analysed using the Likert scale, which is a scale with five stages: from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Also, a scale with four stages was used, from very much-much-a little-not at all.



Results and discussions

The results show that students consider they learn best by receiving information from the teacher, in both cases – seminars and lecture, the average mark for these answers being the highest: 3.4 on a scale from 1 to 4.

Regarding the seminar, the hierarchy of preferences is as follows:

- learning by receiving information from the teacher (3.4),
- learning by solving case studies (3.25),
- working in pairs (3.2),
- learning by games (3.1),

- working as a project team member (3.05),
- solving exercises (3),
- and learning by participating in role-plays (2.8)
- working in small groups (2.8).

It results that students prefer practical activities in seminars: case studies, games, projects. They also prefer to work in pairs, as indicated by the high average mark of 3.2 on a scale from 1 to 4, but working in groups does not rank high in the students' preferences (2.8 points on the 1 – 4 scale). A conclusion may be that they are not used to group-work, because, usually, in seminars students are asked to solve exercises and less to discuss and debate issues.

As regards lectures, the hierarchy of preferences is as follows:

- learning by receiving information from the teacher (3.4),
- receiving handouts and writing only the teacher's explanations (3.3),
- talking about their interests and needs, with teacher's help (3.2),
- teacher's asking them about their interests and needs (3.05),
- learning by working in pairs (3),
- learning by working in small groups (2.7),
- learning by writing down everything that the teacher says (2.2).

It results that students prefer the method of having handouts in classes and writing only the teacher's explanations. They reject the classical way of teacher delivering a lecture and students writing down after dictation, this method obtaining the smallest average: 2.2. They want to be asked about their interests and to talk about them, so that the knowledge taught by professors could be suited to their needs.

The second part of the research refers to the methods and material used in class and students expressed their acceptance for them. The results are as follows:

- ✓ Everybody agreed that Power Point presentation is useful in lectures. This statement received the highest average mark of 1.7, on a scale from -2 to +2.
- ✓ Besides Power Point presentation, students expressed their acceptance for learning better when they do tasks or activities in class (1.55).
- ✓ They enjoy working on an assignment with two or three classmates, so working in small groups is a method that they prefer (1).
- ✓ They agreed that group work and pair work are suitable for large courses (0.75).

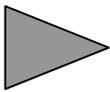
- ✓ Students learn better by doing activities in class, than by working alone, after classes, as shown by the ranking the statement: „I remember things I have heard in class better than things I have read” received: 0.6, as compared to the statement „I learn better when I study/work alone”, which received 0.1.

- ✓ Students consider that some issues about Common Agricultural Policy can be learned by reading newspapers in English (0.55) or by watching TV news in English (0.55).
- ✓ They still agree with the classical way of learning (the statement „I learn better in class when the teacher gives a lecture” received a positive mark of 0.55).
- ✓ Students disagreed that „Group work and pair work are suitable only for seminars” as this statement received a negative mark: -0.25.

The third part of the research refers to the teacher’s role within the process of teaching and learning. The results, reflected on the average marks, show that:

- ✓ Students want the professor to act as a team member (this statement received the highest mark: 1.65 on a scale from -2 to +2);
- ✓ A teacher must be a planner and a manager. In the first case, he or she must plan and structure the learning activities (1.6 points) and in the second one, he or she must organise and manage the classroom environment so as to maximise learning (1.6 points);
- ✓ A teacher must be a motivator. He or she must seek to improve students’ confidence and interest in learning and to build a classroom climate that will motivate students (1.35 points);
- ✓ The teacher must act as a group organiser, thus in the students’ opinion the teacher’s role is to develop an environment in which students work cooperatively in group tasks (1.1 points);
- ✓ The teacher must act like a facilitator, when the teacher’s role is to help students discover their own ways of learning and to work independently (1 point).

To conclude, the results show that the hierarchy for the teacher’s role is: team member, planner and manager, motivator, group organiser, and facilitator.



Conclusions of the research

From all the considerations above, we may answer the research questions as follows:

Which are the students’ preferences for learning methods?

In seminars, students prefer practical activities: case studies, games, projects, exercises, activities done by working in pairs. They favour less doing role-plays and working in small groups. It shows that they are not used to discussing in seminars, just to solving exercises. They would prefer to do something else, like case studies, games.

In the case of lectures, students prefer to learn by receiving information from the teacher and receiving handouts and writing only the teacher's explanations.

Do students learn better in a classical way of lecturing to the whole class and solving exercises individually or in a modern way of using case studies, games, role-playing, team projects, working in pairs and/or groups?

This question is difficult to answer, because the results show different opinions. Case studies, games, working in pairs and projects have received high marks (3.25, 3.1, 3.2, 3.05), while working in small groups has only 2.8, less than solving exercises, which has an average mark of 3. We may conclude that students prefer practical activities, but they are less used to participating in debates in seminars for which they are supposed to work in small groups. This leads us to the conclusion that students must be taught how to learn. They must be taught to start identifying their own methods of learning and then trained to apply them.

A negative case has been identified. Students prefer to work in pairs, as indicated by the high average mark of 3.2 received by this method, but they do not prefer to work in groups, as shown by the lower mark of 2.8. However, these results do not change the conclusions. Students are not used to working in groups, because in seminars they are usually asked to solve exercises and less to discuss and debate issues.

Do students want to be asked about their interests and needs?

Students want to be asked about their interests and needs and they want to talk about them, as indicated by the points received by the statements referring to this approach (average marks of 3.05 and 3.2 respectively, on a scale from 1 to 4). This conclusion is relevant for professors. Teachers must consider students' interests and needs in deciding on the methods and materials to be used in class.

Which is the students' favourite model of learning: individual work, pair work or group work?

Students prefer to work in small groups, better than individually.

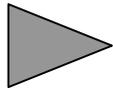
Are pair work and group work suitable only for seminars or can they be used in large course as well?

Students agree that pair work and group work are suitable for seminars and large course as well.

Which is the teacher's role within the process of teaching and learning?

The hierarchy for the teacher's role within the process of teaching and learning is: team member, planner and manager, motivator, group organiser, and facilitator.

These results guide me in what areas I should change the methodology.



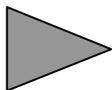
New methods of learning

The main features of the new approach to teaching and learning are:

1. A new teacher-student relationship based on catering for the learning needs of students;
2. Active involvement of the students in the learning process;
3. More teacher-student interaction;
4. Diverse patterns of interaction: introduction of pair and group work;
5. A new role for the teacher as learning facilitator instead of information/knowledge provider.

The results of the survey show the need of changing the methodology and philosophy of teaching, so that teachers perform a new role in the educational process – the role of creating a stimulative and motivational environment where students can learn collaboratively through group work and pair work activities.

The new methods are presented in action in the last section of this article.



New methods of Learning Common Agricultural Policy in English – methodology in action

This section presents the methodology in action. The methodological principles underpinning the textbook *Learning Common Agricultural Policy* are related to a student-oriented approach and to the Cooperative Learning philosophy, whereby students are encouraged to engage actively in their own learning through complex cognitive involvement in the tasks, interaction and cooperation in the classroom.

There is a wide range of activities that aim to challenge the students intellectually and to give them ground for debate. This way, when using this textbook, the focus of learning is put on developing cognitive and communication skills.

In addition, some of the tasks deal with situations related to the students' current academic requirements, and are meant to help improve their reading, note-taking, oral presentation, team work projects and academic writing skills.

The final goal is to motivate and challenge the students to learn by engaging their intelligence, imagination and knowledge in solving the tasks and in participating in pair and group activities.

1. Cognitive skills in action
- 1.1. Reading in action

Reading is used in different parts of the book Learning Common Agricultural Policy. For instance, after presenting the historic steps of the European Union construction, there is a reading activity requesting students to work in groups. They are asked to read Churchill's speech, Jean Monet's speech and Schuman's declaration and find the main claims that the authors make in their speech. The reading activity is followed by discussions in groups (brainstorming activity) and speaking activity – students being asked to report back to the class their thoughts and opinions.

- 1.2. Writing in action

Writing activities are interrelated with other activities, for instance: oral presentation (example 1), when one group of students makes a short presentation of the single market, for example, and the other group write down what they understood after the presentation, or applying knowledge acquired before and completing a table with missing information (example 2, 3 and 4), or after gathering information from different sources, students are asked to complete a table (example 6). Example 4 is a “fill in the gaps” exercise, which is used very often in the textbook. It applies the method of learning by discovering. The words can be provided (example 4) or not (example 5).

Example 1 Writing and making oral presentations:

Group work

Students are divided into two large groups.

Group no.1: Make a short presentation of the Single market, based on the following information:

The Single market

- successful achievement
- the right to live, work, study or retire in another EU country
- ...
- difficult to be ever complete or finalized
- purpose: to make markets work better and deliver more benefits for EU citizens

Present it to Group no.2!

Group no.2: Write down the main features of the Single market and provide feed-back to Group no.1.

Example 2 Writing by completing a table with information that students already know:

Individual work

Can you explain the following terms?

Acquis communautaire

Acceding country

Candidate country

...

Lisbon strategy

Example 3 Writing by completing a table with information that students already know:

Individual work

When did the following countries become member states of the EU?

- Ireland

- The UK

- ...

- Malta

- Romania

Example 4 Writing by filling in the gaps with given words:

Exercise



Use the following words in order to fill in the gaps, as follows:

wine agricultural set aside fruit and vegetables rotation direct payments organic	Land conferring payment entitlement is to be used for activity, except for permanent crops such as....., the production of....., and potatoes other than those intended for the manufacture of potato starch.
	Farmers must part of their land, except that used for production or for materials not intended for human or animal consumption. They are then entitled to..... The land set aside must be maintained in good agricultural and environmental condition and may be subject to.....

Example 5 Writing by filling in the gaps with words that are not given:

Exercise



Can you complete the following sentences?

The main measures of the Delors package were:

- setting-up farmers in
- allowances for farmers;
- allowances for farmers in the and areas;
- reducing
- improving andof agricultural products.

Example 6 Writing after gathering information from different sources:

Exercise



Look on the internet (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu>) and find the nine different councils of the Council of the European Union. Among them, there is the Agricultural and Fisheries Council. Which is the content of the agricultural and fisheries policies and how are the proceedings of the Agricultural and Fisheries Council prepared?

Councils of the Council of the European Union	1. 2. 3. 4.	5. 6. 7. 8. 9.
The content of the agricultural and fisheries policies		
Proceedings of the Agricultural and Fisheries Council		

1.3. Role-plays in action

Students are asked to analyse the current EU policy agenda watching Euronews on TV. They are supposed to report back to the class the latest news. Each week, there are two different reporters.

Example:

Home work



Analyse current EU policy agenda.

Homework: observe the media for one week and take notes on the coverage of EU issues and present them in front of the class as a Euronews reporter.

1.4. Discussion and debates

1.4.1. Jigsaw activity follows, for example, after reading the texts given in example 1. Different groups read different texts and then report back to the class.

In example 2, the reading activity is followed by a writing activity. Students are asked to read in advance the text “Romanian Accession: A commentary” and then to write the main advantages and disadvantages of Romania’s accession based on the information from the text and from their own point of view.

Example 1:

Group work

Students are divided into three groups.

Each group is asked to read and analyse one of the resources presented in Annexes Churchill’s speech, Jean Monet’s speech, and Schuman’s Declaration. Each group reports back to the class, outlining their thoughts on the selected documents.

Brainstorming activity: students are asked to comment upon whether these motives for European integration are still relevant today.

Example 2:

Exercises

Based on the information contained in the Appendix ..., complete the following table with the advantages and disadvantages of Romania’s accession.

No.	Advantages	Disadvantages

1.4.2. Fish-bowl activities are present in almost all group work. Students are divided into groups, and generally work on similar topics or issues, and then report back to the class. Besides this technique, there is a pyramid discussion that gives students time to rehearse their arguments in small groups before they face the whole class.

Example:

“The studies show that the Commission's proposal to sever the link between production and subsidy ("de-coupling") would favour the extensification of production and would secure significant income gains for EU farmers.

According to the analysis, farm income would increase in 2002 by 8.5 % compared to 2001. ... De-coupling in the new Member States would produce similar trends to those in the EU-15, as producers’ decisions would be driven by market considerations rather than by the maximisation of farm subsidies.”

1.5. Critical thinking skills

1.5.1. Analysis is used for identifying the relationships among statements, questions, concepts, descriptions, or other forms of representation intended to express belief, judgment, experiences, reasons, information, or opinions. In the textbook there are different exercises of mapping out the argument (example 1) and to analyse and compare information (example 2).

Example 1

Group work

Read the following text that is a Green Paper on Urban Transport related to the EU's environmental and transport policies. Find the main claim, reasons and objections to the claim, completing the argument map.

“Around 80% of European citizens live in an urban environment. They share in their daily life the same space, and for their mobility the same infrastructure. Urban mobility accounts for 40% of all CO2 emissions of road transport and up to 70% of other pollutants from transport.

European cities increasingly face problems caused by transport and traffic. The question of how to enhance mobility while at the same time reducing congestion, accidents and pollution is a common challenge to all major cities in Europe. Cities themselves are usually in the best position to find the right answer to this question that takes into account their specific circumstances.

..... “

Example 2

Look up on the internet and find the population of each member state. Compare this with the number of seats held by each member state in the European Parliament.

Country	Population	Number of seats (2007-2009)
Belgium		24
.....		...
United Kingdom		78
TOTAL		786

1.5.2. Interpretation as a critical thinking skill is used in different exercises, for example, the sub-skill of categorisation. The students are asked to list the policy areas under each category, after the main categories are presented and explained.

Example 1:

The policies covered by the European Union are divided into four large categories:

- overarching policies
- functional policies
- sectoral policies
- other policies

The overarching policies are global policies, concerning general issues of the economy.

The functional policies are those policies that enhance cohesion and enable the functioning of all other activities.

The sectoral policies regard a specific industry.

Other policies are those that are not included into these three groups mentioned above.

The policies of the European Union are:

Internal market	Fisheries policy
Regional policies	Free movement of goods, services, capital and persons
Competition policy	Civil protection
Social policy	Energy policy
Euroatom	Research and development policy – it includes education, culture, health, customer protection
Criminal affaires	European Coal and Steel Community
Trade	Common Foreign and Security Policy
Common external tariff	
Environmental policy	
Common agricultural policy	

Group work

Complete this table, listing the policy areas under each category:

Overarching policy	Functional policy	Sectoral policy	Other policies

Example 2:

Group work

Link the key elements in the left column to the paragraphs in the right one.

<i>Market unity</i>	This principle consists in applying import taxes to agricultural products coming from abroad.
<i>Community preference</i>	This principle means that all member states are involved in the process of financing the Common Agricultural Policy.
<i>Financial solidarity</i>	This principle results from the Treaty of Rome, Article 39: “common market includes agriculture and trade with agricultural products”. At that time, the agricultural market was the single common market.

1.5.3. Inference is used for drawing reasonable conclusions considering relevant information given in advance flowing from data, statements, principles, evidence, judgments, beliefs, opinions, concepts, descriptions etc. As sub-skills of inference, drawing conclusions is the most used.

1.5.4. Evaluation enables drawing conclusions, as students assess the credibility of statements or other representations which are accounts or descriptions of a person’s perception, experience, situation, judgment, belief, or opinion. They assess the logical strength of inferential relationships among statements, descriptions, questions or other forms of representation.

Example:

Based on the information contained in the Annex ... complete the following table with the impact of Eastern Enlargement.

No.	Impact

1.5.5. Explanation is used to give someone a full look at the big picture. For example, the sub-skills of describing results, proposing and defending with good reason one's causal and conceptual explanations of events or points of view.

Example:

Group work

Students are divided into five groups. Each group receives a brochure on different topics and group members share their opinions with one another.

2. Patterns of interaction

2.1. Plenary lecture in action

Plenary lecture is used for explaining concepts and theories or for telling stories about historical development of an event or several events. For instance, the plenary lecture is used for presenting the historic steps of the political construction of the European Union.

2.2. Group work in action

Activities for group work are tools used throughout the textbook.

Example 1

Group work

Which are the Member States of the European Union?

No.	Country
1	
2	
..	...
27	

Example 2

Group work



Make comments on the text above. Find other effects of the reform upon European economies.

Comments
Other effects

3. Other techniques

3.1. Multiple choice questions:

1. Which of the following statements is true?

- a) single market has driven quality down and prices up
 - b) single market has driven quality up and prices down
 - c) single market has driven quality and prices down
 - d) single market has driven quality and prices up
 - e) none of these
2. Which of the following countries uses Euro?
 - a) Poland
 - b) Sweden
 - c) United Kingdom
 - d) Slovenia
 - e) Slovakia

3.2. True or false?

Decide whether the following sentences are true or false:

1. The political criteria refer to the achievement of stability of applicant country's institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities.
2. An applicant country should negotiate over 32 accession chapters.

3.3. Learning through discovery

Example 1

Group work



Think of what kind of measures used to be financed by the Guarantee Section and what kind of measures used to be financed by the Guidance Section, completing the following table:

expenditure on the agricultural market organisationsrural development measures that accompany market support other rural development expenditure certain veterinary expenditure information measures relating to the CAP.	The Fund's <i>Guarantee Section</i> has financed: - The Fund's <i>Guidance Section</i> has financed: -
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Example 2
Exercise



Use the following words in order to fill in the gaps, as follows:

<p>indicative price threshold price intervention price</p>	<p>The is the minimum price at which imported products may be sold. It encourages Community economic operators to buy within the Community, so respecting the principle of Community preference.</p> <p>The is the guaranteed price below which an intervention body designated by the Member States buys in and stores the quantities produced.</p> <p>The is the price at which the Community authorities consider that transactions should take place. It is close to the price which the products would normally command on the Community market.</p>
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Example 3
Group work



Complete the arrows with “rural development policy”, “agricultural structural policy”, and “regional policy” discovering the links between all three policies (Figure 1).

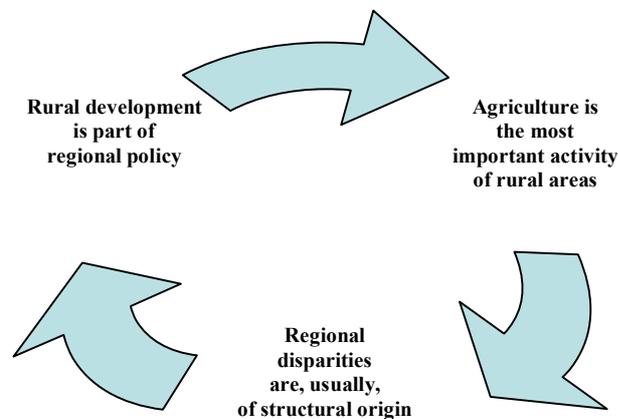


Figure 1 Links between rural development policy, agricultural structural policy, and regional policy

3.4. Oral presentation

Group work

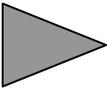


Students are divided into twelve groups. Each group makes a summary of CMO for one of the following products:

- Arable crops
- Wine
-
- Poultrymeat
- Eggs

The summary should contain: objective, act, products concerned, intervention, and trade with non-EU countries. The groups make short presentations of the CMO in front of the class. The information available may be found on the internet:

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/markets/index_en.htm



Conclusions

A conclusion of the present paper is that the new approach to teaching and learning corresponds to students' learning preferences.

The textbook contains multiple activities which respond to students' preferences for learning: case studies, games, projects, many of them involving group activities. Because in the lecture students still prefer to learn by receiving information from the teacher, some of the classical methods of teaching are kept: plenary lecture, or whole class learning. Even so, during a session, teacher stops the explanations and invites group activities, as the results of the survey showed that students agreed that pair work and group work were suitable both for seminars and large courses.

Another conclusion is that students must be trained how to learn. They want to be taught in a modern way, without writing down all the information provided by the teacher in a plenary lecture, but they do not really know what a modern way implies (the statement related to group activities has a small average mark and group activities belongs to a modern approach to learning). The explanation may be the fact that they are less used to participating in debates in seminars, where they are supposed to work in small groups. Solving exercises is the most common activity in classical seminars. This leads us to the conclusion that students must be taught to start identifying their own methods of learning and then trained to apply them.

One of the most important conclusions is that the new approach to teaching and learning is focused on pair work and group work, rather than learning in isolation. On the one hand, the book is full of examples of group activities and, on the other hand, the results of the survey show that students prefer to work in small groups, better than individually.

In the new approach to teaching and learning, the teachers' role has changed. They act like team member and facilitator, helping students to discover their own methods of learning and encouraging them to work in groups.

These conclusions have significant implications for the work of teachers in their efforts of planning the classes. The results of the survey show that students want to be asked about their interests and needs and they want to talk about them. This conclusion is relevant for professors when they design the methods and materials to be used in class. Teachers must consider students' interests and needs when making a choice of their methods and materials.

Further research may be undertaken in the direction of searching students' opinions after attending the classes of Common Agricultural Policy taught using the new methodology to see whether the methods of the new approach made them learn better and review their learning preferences.

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