



Learning Style Preferences of Iranian EFL High School Students

Reza Vaseghi (Corresponding author)
Department of Language and Humanities Education
Faculty of Educational Studies
University Putra Malaysia
E-mail: r.vaseghi@hotmail.com

Hamed Barjesteh
Department of ELT, Islamic Azad University,
Ayatollah Amoli Branch, Amol, Mazandaran, Iran
E-mail: h.barjesteh@hotmail.com

Sedigheh Shakib
Department of Language and Humanities Education
Faculty of Educational Studies
University Putra Malaysia

Received: 24-03-2013

Accepted: 07-05-2013

Published: 01-07-2013

doi:10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.2n.4p.83

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.2n.4p.83>

Abstract

The current study examined the learning style preferences of 75 Iranian students at Marefat high school in Kuala Lumpur of which, 41 are females and 34 are males. As there are very few researches in which the learning style preferences of Iranian high school students investigated, this study attempts to fulfil this gap. To this end, in order to identify the students' preferred learning styles (Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic, Tactile, Group, and Individual) Reid's Perceptual Learning Style Preferences Questionnaire was used. Results indicated that the six learning style preferences considered in the questionnaire were positively preferred. Overall, kinesthetic and tactile learning were major learning styles. Auditory, group, visual, and individual were minor.

Keywords: Learning Style Preferences, High School Students, EFL

1. Introduction

Learning style is generally conceived as faiths and preferred manners that people use them to help their process of learning in various situations (Borich and Tombari 1997; Hohn 1995). According to Brown (2000) "learning styles serve as relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment" (p. 114).

Learning process can be achieved through various learning styles. Knowing these learning styles is important in learning process, because, every learning style could lead to raises the success rate of each student especially when it matches with individual need. There are various definitions of learning style (LS). But, among these different definitions Reid (1995) which is one of the distinguished researcher in this area, defined learning style as an individual's habitual, natural and desired way of receiving, processing, and keeping new data. Concerning learning styles' relation with language learning, Oxford (2003) defined learning style as the general approaches like visual or auditory which are applicable in language learning and other subjects.

English in Iran used and taught as a foreign language that is significant for educational, scientific, and socio-cultural reasons (Rashidi, 1995). Teaching English in Iranian public schools starts from the first grade of middle school until the end of secondary school and students have the opportunity to study the language around three hours class per week.

In Iran, little attention has been paid to learners' learning styles among Iranian EFL learners (Bidabadi and Yamat, 2010). Learners are not aware of their learning styles and perhaps there is mismatch between the teaching styles and learners' learning styles. As another problem in this area there are very few studies regarding Iranian learners' learning styles particularly in high school levels. This study was carried out to identify the preferred learning styles of Marefat Iranian EFL high school students. Therefore, this study aims to answer the following research question:

What are the learning style preferences of Marefat Iranian EFL high school students?

2. Literature Review

According to Reid (1987), learning styles or learning preferences are referred to various approaches how a learner obtains, organizes and bring back the information. There are growing proofs in literature demonstrating that learning

styles are one of the components which are influential in the process of language learning (e.g., Cohen 2003; Ehrman, Leaver & Oxford 2003; Oxford 1999; Oxford 1991). Kang (1999, p. 1) states that “learning styles are internally based characteristics of individuals for the intake or understanding of new information”. In addition, Dörnyei (2005) reported that the meaning of learning style (LS) is an individual approach to learning, a customary way the individual perceives, and interacts with the learning environment and responds to it.

According to LdPride (2010), learning styles are various procedures of learning. These approaches are designed for an individual how they learn in ideal way. There are many characteristics that influence effective learning. Rubin (1975) stated that the good language learning depends on three factors namely motivation, opportunity, and attitude.

Some personality characteristics have been associated with successful language learning and these include “having high self-confidence (Long 1991, p. 184 in Larson Freeman), being curious (Ellis & Sinclair, 1985 in Willis 2001, p. 158), and being willing to take risks” (Ruben 1979 in Willis 2001:156). Among these characteristics, motivation and attitude have also been recognized as important variables, which influence foreign language learning. Language learning and languages’ attitudes have a close relationship (Starks & Paltridge, 1996). According to Sarnoff (1970, p. 279), attitude is “a disposition to react favorably or unfavorably to a class of objects”.

Gardner (1985, p. 10) stated that attitudes are the main factors of incentive in learning of language. To Gardner, “motivation refers to the combination of effort plus the desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitudes toward learning the language”. Also, Gardner explains that the learner’s attitudes towards target group and language as one of the personality trait determine the motivation of learning a foreign language, in particular, and foreign people in general, generalized attitudes, and motives for learning. According to Pocket Oxford English Dictionary (2000), motivation is the reason or reasons behind one’s action or behavior and another meaning is enthusiasm.

According to Dörnyei (1998), motivation play a key role in learning. It is an emotion, inner source, reason, purpose that moves a person to a specific action. The two well-known classifications of motivation with respect to language learning are integrative/instrumental and intrinsic/ extrinsic motivation. According to Hudson (2000), instrumental motivation refers to a learning which is achieved by studying of second language in feasible way. A person that has the instrumental motivation learns the language for an aim including passing school or university, getting a work, achieving high social status or translation work, and reading technical text.

The second type of motivation is integrative motivation. This type of motivation has recognized as a learner’s orientation to learn second language (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991). Integrative motivation has a tendency to merge into the other groups. Intrinsic motivation is “the motivation that comes out by engaging in an activity for its own sake” (Prinrich & Schunk 2002, p. 245). “Extrinsic motivation involves engaging in an activity just as a means to an end” (Prinrich & Schunk 2002, p. 245).

3. Methodology

3.1 subjects

The current study, students of Marefat high school in Kuala Lumpur were served as subject. The total number of respondents who participated in this study is 75 (41 female and 34 male). The learners were between 15-17 years old in different 3 levels of high school. Students in 1st level of high school in Iranian Educational system were 15 years old who studied English in fourth year of education. Students in 2nd level of high school were 16 years old who studied English in fifth year of education. In the 3rd level of high school students were 17 years old who studied English in sixth year of education.

3.2 Instrument

The instrument that was used for this research was the Perceptual Learning Style Preference questionnaire (PLSPQ) adopted by Reid (1987). The Reid’s Perceptual Learning Style Preference questionnaire is an effective and a high reliable instrument for perceiving the perceptual learning style preferences of ESL/EFL learners (Peacock, 2001). The questions in the questionnaire were conducted in two languages; Persian and English language. This was to help students understand and reply according to their level of English. The first parts of the questionnaire included two statements on learners’ profile which is age and level of high school. The second part of the questionnaire consisted of 30 items that are related to the learning style preferences of students. To further ensure the reliability of the test, before the actual study, a pilot study was used to validate the instrument. The acquired test reliability index was 0.72.

3.3 Procedures

The researchers made clear the purpose of the study for students. This was to make sure that the students were familiar with the purpose of the Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire. The questionnaires were distributed to the students. The researchers gave explanation to them about the objectives of the questionnaire before they answered it. The students were asked to answer the questions in twenty minutes. The questionnaires were then collected by the researchers.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS statistical software 18.0. The descriptive statistics were utilized to rank order the learning style from the most preferred to the least preferred categories.

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1 Learning Style Preferences of Marefat Iranian EFL High School Students

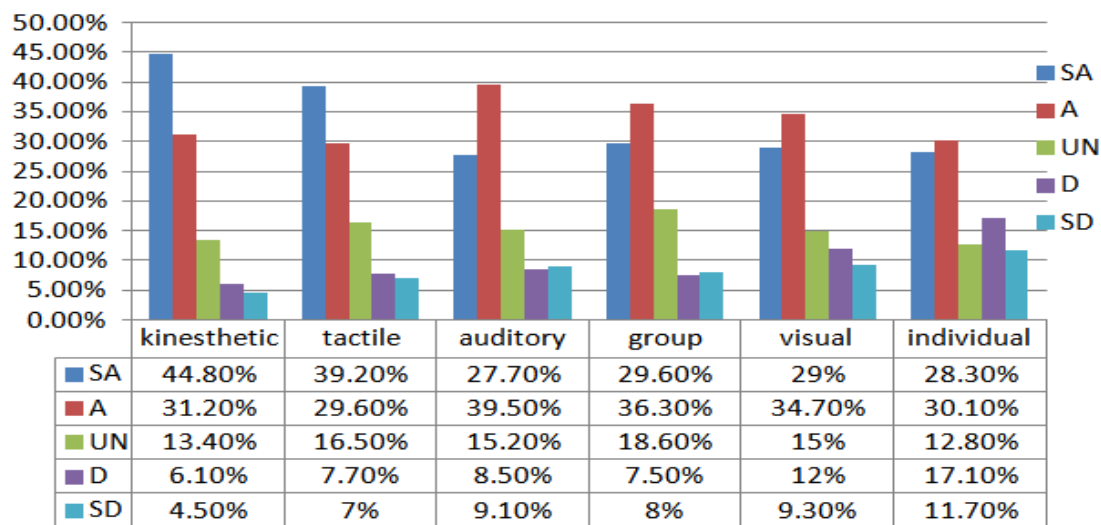


Figure 4-1. Students' overall learning style preferences

The results revealed that the Iranian students at Marefat high school had two major and multiple minor learning styles. The majority of students preferred kinesthetic and tactile as their strong major learning styles. These learning styles have a higher percentage of strongly agree than agree. Also, most of the students chose auditory, group, visual, and individual as their minor learning styles. These learning styles have a higher percentage of agree than strongly agree. The strongest major learning style for students was kinesthetic, while individual learning was the strongest minor learning style. All learning styles according to the students' responses were positive. They were positively preferred in the following order: Kinesthetic, Tactile, Auditory, Group, Visual, and Individual. As the figure 4.1 shows, Kinesthetic learning style with 44.8% and Tactile learning style with 39.2% have higher percentage of strongly agree and they were the major preferred learning styles of Iranian high school students. The other four learning style (Auditory (39.5%), Group (36.3%), Visual (34.7%) and Individual (30.1%) with the higher percentage of being agree were candidates for minor learning styles.

In line with the study done by Reid (1987), the findings of the present study shows that the kinesthetic and tactile learning styles were positive, major learning styles and also both studies reported that the visual, auditory, and individual learning styles were positive, minor leaning styles. However, there were several differences between the two studies. First, Reid reported that five of the perceptual learning styles were positive learning styles while one was a negative learning style. But, this study showed that all of the perceptual learning styles were positive learning styles. Second, study done by Reid showed that the group learning style was a negative, not preferred learning style while this study found that the group learning style was a positive, minor learning style and also there is no negative learning style in this study. The differences found in these two studies may be because of the difference in students' level of proficiency because the study conducted by Reid involved university students, but, in the present study participants were high school students.

Moreover, in a study done by Rossi-Le (1995) showed higher preferences in kinesthetic and tactile styles than other styles and it agreed with what Reid (1987) declare. Furthermore, in a study done by Stebbins (1993) It has been declared that kinesthetic and tactile learning style were strongly preferred by English ESL students and group learning was the least preferred mode. The difference between these studies with the present study is group learning.

The following tables provide a demonstration of students' responses to each statement in the questionnaire for each learning style individually.

Table 4.1. students' kinesthetic learning style preferences

ITEM	SA	A	UN	D	SD
	%	%	%	%	%
2. I prefer to learn by doing something in class.	60	25.3	6.7	6.7	1.3
8. When I do things In class, I learn better	49.3	30.7	13.3	4	2.7
15. I enjoy learning in class by doing experiments.	34.6	30.7	20	8	6.7
19. I understand better in class when I participate in role-playing.	37.3	33.3	16	8	5.4
26. I learn best in class when I can participate in related activities.	42.7	36	10.6	4	6.7

The result from Table 4.1 shows that 60% students prefer to learn by doing something in class which is the major feature of kinesthetic learners. 49.3% of students strongly agreed that they learn better when they do things in class. 42.7% of students learn best in class when they can participate in related activities and also 37.3% of students understand better in class when they participate in role-playing. Overall, the percentage of being strongly agreed in each question was more than others, so kinesthetic learning style was students' major learning style preference. This result was consistent with the research findings of Melton (1990), Reid (1987), and Riazi & Mansoorian (2008).

Table 4.2. students' Tactile learning style preferences

ITEM	SA %	A %	UN %	D %	SD %
11. I learn more when I can make a model of something.	50.6	30.7	13.3	2.7	2.7
14. I learn more when I make something for a class project.	38.6	36	10.7	8	6.7
16. I learn better when I make drawings as I study.	32	28	20	10.7	9.3
22. When I build something, I remember what I have learned better.	32	22.7	18.7	13.3	13.3
2. I enjoy making something for a class project.	42.6	30.7	20	4	2.7

As the table 4.2 illustrates, 50.6% students learn more when they can make a model of something. 38.6% of students strongly agreed that they learn more when they make something for a class project and also 42.6% of the students enjoy making something for a class project. Students mostly strongly agreed with each statement in tactile learning style. Therefore, this learning style was the other major learning style preference for the students. The finding was similar to a number of previous research results (Riazi & Mansoorian; Wang 1992; Reid 1987).

Table 4.3. students' Auditory learning style preferences

ITEM	SA %	A %	UN %	D %	SD %
1. When the teacher tells me the instructions I understand better.	28	41.4	13.3	8	9.3
7. When someone tells me how to do something in class, I learn it better.	25.3	42.7	10.7	13.3	8
9. I remember things I have heard in class better than things I have read.	26.7	45.3	14.6	6.7	6.7
17. I learn better in class when the teacher gives a lecture.	28	34.6	18.7	6.7	12
20. I learn better in class when I listen to someone.	30.7	33.3	18.7	8	9.3

As shown in table 4.3, 28% of the students strongly agreed with the statements that they understand better when the teacher tells them the instructions, while 41.4% agreed with the same statement. 25.3% of the students strongly agreed that they learn better when someone tells them how to do something in class, whereas 42.7% agreed with the same statement. 26.7% of students strongly agreed that they remember things they have heard in class better than things they have read, while 45.3% of them agreed with the same statement. Most of the students agreed with the statements for the auditory learning style.

Auditory learning style was minor learning style among Iranian Marefat high school students, with a higher percentage of agree than strongly agree. This may imply that Iranian students have limited English language environment. They are not in contact with English regularly and because of it, they might have difficulty in listening to spoken explanations. The result was concurs with the findings of Reid (1987), Mulalic, Shah, and Ahmad (2009), and Rossi-Le (1995).

Table 4.4. students' Group learning style preferences

ITEM	SA %	A %	UN %	D %	SD %
3. I get more work done when I work with others.	22.6	42.7	18.7	6.7	9.3
4. I learn more when I study with a group.	30.7	36	20	5.3	8
5. In class, I learn best when I work with others.	28	32	21.3	12	6.7
21. I enjoy working on an assignment with two or three classmates.	28	36	14.6	10.7	10.7
23. I prefer to study with others.	30.7	42.7	18.6	2.7	5.3

As seen in table 4.4, 22.6% of the students strongly agreed with the statement that they get more work done when they work with others, while 42.7% agreed with this statement. 30.7% of the students strongly agreed that they learn more when they study with a group, while 36% agreed with the same statement. Approximately, 60% of the students strongly agreed and agreed that they enjoy working on an assignment with two or three classmates. 73.4% of the

students strongly agreed and agreed that they prefer to study with others. In general, for group learning style, students expressed the other minor learning style preference. The finding of this study was also supported by the many previous studies (Wang 1992; Rosniah Mustaffa 2005; Mulalic, Shah, and Ahmad's 2009; Riazi & Mansoorian 2008).

Table 4.5. students' Visual learning style preferences

ITEM	SA %	A %	UN %	D %	SD %
6. I learn better by reading what the teacher writes on the chalkboard.	25.3	30.7	13.3	17.4	13.3
10. When I read instructions, I remember them better.	34.7	40	6.6	9.3	9.3
12. I understand better when I read instructions.	28	37.3	20	8	6.7
24. I learn better by reading than by listening to someone.	32	34.7	16	12	5.3
29. I learn more by reading textbooks than by listening to lectures.	25.3	30.7	18.7	13.3	12

Table 4.5 demonstrates that 74.7% of the students strongly agreed and agreed with the statements that when they read instructions, they remember them better. 65% of the students strongly agreed and agreed that they understand better when they read instructions. 32% of the students strongly agreed that they learn better by reading rather than by listening to someone, whereas 34.7% agreed with the same statement. In general, visual learning was the other student's minor learning style. This style is a minor one due to Iranian traditional educational system. The result of this study was similar to Reid (1987), Mulalic, Shah, and Ahmad (2009), and Rossi-Le (1995).

Table 4.6. students' Individual learning style preferences

ITEM	SA %	A %	UN %	D %	SD %
13. When I study alone, I remember things better.	28	33.3	10.7	12	16
18. When I work alone, I learn better.	24	36	13.3	17.4	9.3
27. In class, I work better when I work alone.	22.7	34.7	13.3	20	9.3
28. I prefer working on projects by myself.	24	30.7	14.7	18.7	12
30. I prefer to work by myself.	28	30.7	12	17.3	12

Table 4.6 indicates that 61.3% of the students strongly agreed and agreed with the statement that they remember things better when they study alone. 60% of the students strongly agreed and agreed that they learn better when they work alone. 22.7% of the students strongly agreed that they work better in class when they work alone, while 34.7% of the students agreed with the same statement. Individual learning style was the last student's minor learning style. In line with the Reid (1987) study, the findings of this study revealed that individual learning was a strong minor learning style preference.

5. Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

In conclusion, the majority of students preferred kinesthetic and tactile as their strong major learning styles. These learning styles have a higher percentage of strongly agree than agree. Also, most of the students chose auditory, group, visual, and individual as their minor learning styles. All learning styles according to the students' responses were positive. Although the dominant instructional method in Iran is still traditional teaching, Kinesthetic and Tactile learning as a major learning style may show that there is a mismatch between students learning style preference and traditional teaching English styles that it focuses on learner's memorization. It can be concluded that, on the one hand, teachers should provide a learning environment that students to be active in the class. There is possibility that kinesthetic learners are more risk takers and that is important for their success in learning English (Omaggio 1978 in Rachma 2001). On the other hand, students should progress towards tactile learning style. Working in laboratory, taking notes in the classroom are the most helpful ways to remember and then learn. Knowing how learning process can be achieved by different styles is important in developing and improving learning of students (Vaseghi et al, 2012). This study would not only help improve the learning process among students but also help improve teachers' teaching style.

5.1 Suggestions for Further Research

For a more comprehensive picture of the situation, further research is recommended, and the suggestions are as follows:

- (i) This study only displayed the learning style preferences of Iranian EFL students at a high school in Kuala Lumpur. High school period is important in Iranian educational system. Therefore, there is a lack of research on high school students' language learning styles in Iranian classroom. Further research related to their classroom learning styles in Iran should be done in order to improve the quality of high school education.
- (ii) A study should be conducted to explore the preferred learning styles of male and female students and also the reasons for utilizing them.

(ii) Other researches may be done on a larger sample of learners in the future. Only 75 students were involved in this research thus, the findings do not represent the voices of all Iranian EFL high school students in terms of learning style preferences. Further study is recommended with a larger sample size. Larger sample sizes would allow these results to be compared to a larger and hopefully a more generalizable population.

References

- Ahmad, A. (2011). *Language learning style preferences of Low English proficiency (LEP) students in a tertiary institution*. Malaysian Journal of ELT Research 7 (2): 33-62.
- Alsafi, A. (2010). *Learning style preferences of Saudi Medical students*. Master thesis. Essex University. (online) <http://www.essex.ac.uk/linguistics/dissertations/2010/docs/Alsafi.pdf> (19 August 2011).
- Bidabadi, F. & Yamat, H. (2010). *Learning style preferences by Iranian EFL Freshman University students*. Master thesis. Bangi: University Kebangsaan Malaysia. (online) <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042810020355> (26 April 2011).
- Borich, G.D. & Tombari, M.L. (1997). *Educational Psychology: a contemporary approach*. London: Addison-Wesley Educational Publisher Inc.
- Claxton, C.S. & Murrell, P.H. (1987). *Learning styles: implications for improving Educational practices* AAHE-ERIC/Higher Education Report, No. 4 Washington, D.C: Association for the study of higher Education.
- Crookes, G. & Schmidt R. W. (1991). *Motivation: reopening the research agenda*. Language Learning, 41(4): 469-512.
- Dörnyei, Z. (1998). *Motivation in second and foreign language learning*. Language Teaching 31: 117-35.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2005). *The psychology of the language learner: individual differences in second language acquisition*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Ehrman, M. E., Leaver, B. L., & Oxford, R. L. (2003). *A brief overview of individual differences in second language learning*. System 31: 313-330.
- Feingold, A. (1992). *Sex differences in variability in intellectual abilities: A new look at an old controversy*. Review of Educational Research, 62, 61-84.
- Gardner, R.C. (1985). *Social Psychology and Second language learning: The Role of attitude and motivation*. (London: Edward Arnold).
- Hajbaghery, M. & Aghajani, M. (2011). *Traditional lectures, Socratic Method and Student Lectures: Which One do the students prefer?* Webmed Central Medical Education 2(3):WMC001746.
- Honigsfeld, A. M. (2001). *A comparative analysis of the learning styles of adolescents from diverse nations by age, gender, academic achievement level and nationality*. Ph.D dissertation, Dissert Abstr Int, 62, 969.
- Honigsfeld, A.M. & Dunn, R. (2006). *Learning-style characteristics of adult learners*. Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin, (Winter) 72(2): 14-31.
- Kang, S. (1999). *Learning styles: implications for ESL/EFL instruction*. Forum 37(4): 1-6. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service EJ 601615)
- Melton, C.D. (1990). *Bridging the cultural gap: a study of Chinese students' learning style preferences*. RELC Journal 21 (1): 29-54.
- Mulalic, A., Shah, P., & Ahmad, F. (2009a). *Learning-style preference of ESL students*. Asean Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education 1(2):9-17.
- Young, D. J. (Ed.) (1999). *Affect in foreign language and second language learning: A practical guide to creating a low-anxiety classroom atmosphere*. Boston: McGraw-Hill College. pp. 216-237.
- Oxford, R.L. (2003). *Language learning styles and strategies: An overview*. Learning Styles & Strategies/Oxford, GALA.
- Pettigrew, F. & Zakrajsek, D. (1984). *A profile of learning style preferences among physical education majors*. Physical Educator 41(2): 85-89.
- Printrich, P. R. & Schunk, D. H. (2002). *Motivation in education: theory, research, and application*. (2nd Ed.). New Jersey: Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Rashidi, N. (1995). *Teaching and learning English in Guidance and high schools in Kordestan: Problems and suggested solutions*, Online master Thesis, University of Shiraz, Iran.
- Reid, J. M. (1987). *The learning style preferences of ESL students*. TESOL Quarterly 21(1):87-111.
- Reid, J.M. (ed.) (1995). *Learning styles in the ESL/EFL classroom*. Boston: Heinle and Heinle.
- Riazi, M. & Riasati, M. J. (2007). *Language learning style preferences: a case study of Shiraz EFL Institutes*. The Asian EFL Journal Quarterly 9 (1):97-125. (Online) http://www.asian-efl-journal.com/March_2007_EBook.pdf (10 June 2011)

- Riazi, A. & Mansoorian, M. A. (2008). *Learning style preferences among Iranian male and female EFL students*. The Iranian EFL Journal Quarterly 2: 88-100. (online) <http://www.iranian-efl-journal.com/Iranian-EFL-Journal-second-edition.pdf> (20 June 2011).
- Rosniah Mustaffa. (2007). "Stretching" ESL Learners Learning Styles: a case study of first year undergraduates at UKM.GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies.Vol.7(1).(online) [http://www.ukm.my/ppbl/GEMA%20vol%207%20\(1\)%202007/abs%20p1_32_v7\(1\).pdf](http://www.ukm.my/ppbl/GEMA%20vol%207%20(1)%202007/abs%20p1_32_v7(1).pdf)(15 September 2011).
- Sims, R. R. & Sims, S. J. (1995). *Learning enhancement in higher education*. In R. R. Sims & S. J. Sims (Eds.), *The importance of learning styles*. Westport, CN: Greenwood Press. pp.89-98.
- Tai, F.M. (1999). *Preferred teaching styles of Taiwanese EFL teachers and preferred learning styles of traditional and nontraditional EFL students*(Doctoral dissertation, University of South Dakota).(online) <http://ir.lib.ksu.edu.tw/bitstream/987654321/3032/1/%25E8%25AB%2596%25E6%2596%2587.pdf> (11 may 2011)
- Thomas Young Tachie. (2010). *Learning style preferences as predictor of performance in science in public junior secondary schools in Ghana*. Thesis Master, University of Education, Winneba, Ghana.
- Vaseghi, R., Ramezani, A.E., & Gholami, R. (2012). *Language Learning Style Preferences: A Theoretical and Empirical Study*. *Advances in Asian Social Science*.
- Wang Chu, M. (1992). *Chinese students learning a foreign language survey*. "China English Learning Psychology", Gui Shichun ed. Hunan: Hunan Education Press. pp.72-89
- Yong, F.L. & McIntyre, J.D. (1992). *A comparative study of the learning styles preferences of students with learning disabilities and students who are gifted*. *Journal of Learning Disabilities* 25(2): 124-132. (Online) <http://ldx.sagepub.com/content/25/2/124.short> (1 October 2011)
- Young Tachie, T. (2001). *Learning style preferences as predictor of performance in Science in Public Junior Secondary schools in Ghana*. Department of Science Education.