LEARNING STYLES PREFERENCE, GENDER AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE PERFORMANCE OF EFL LIBYAN SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA

Khalid Muktar Othman Tawir and Siti Maziha Mustapha
Faculty of Arts, Communication and Education, Infrastructure University Kuala Lumpur

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to determine if there were relationships among learning style preference, gender and English language performance of EFL Libyan secondary school students in Malaysia. Specifically, the study was guided by three research questions focused on Libyan student's level of performance in EFL class in Malaysia, their learning styles and gender, and the relationship between students' learning styles and their English language performance. There has been a limited number of studies on Libyan secondary schools' student studying in Malaysia. This study was a correlational study involving 108 Libyan secondary school students in Malaysia. Data was analysed using the statistical package for Social Science (SPSS, version 20.0). The results showed that most learners who participated in this study had a medium proficiency level in the English language and majority of the Libyan students preferred independent learning style. It was found that there was a difference in the learning styles preferred by female and male secondary school students. The study also revealed that there was no significant relationship between students' overall learning styles and their English language performance and. Recommendations were offered. Future researches could use more than one school to obtain accurate results and could also focus on gender biases.

Keywords:
Learning styles preference, gender, English as a Foreign Language

INTRODUCTION

The formal language in Libyan schools is Arabic. The English language is considered a foreign language. In the past, there were specific periods where the teaching and learning of the English language was completely ignored due to political reasons which had affected the performance of Libyan students. It was very hard for them to achieve good grades in the English language subject in schools. Between the years 1993-1994, English language teaching was re-introduced to the Libyan educational system. However, so far Libyan students still face many challenges and difficulties of learning the English language, such as lack of qualified teachers, language laboratories at schools, and absence of teaching training programs (Elabbar, 2014).

Learners have different ways to learn. There have been several studies done to investigate students' learning styles and how they learn a second language or foreign language (Rebecca, 2003). It is important to note that learning style is a major factor that can influence students' performance and success. Students need instructional strategies to achieve higher scores (Ghwela et al, 2017). Kibasan and Singson (2016) found that Libyan students had significant differences in learning styles. Their learning styles differed from one to another. Moreover, the study also found that gender was one of the factors which affected learning styles. Most of the

Libyan students were visual learners, followed by kinaesthetic and few are auditory. Therefore, it seems that most students prefer to read the concepts from their books or hand-outs. According to Felder (1993) "students whose learning styles are compatible with the teaching style of a course instructor tend to retain information longer, apply it more effectively, and have more positive post-course attitudes toward the subject than do their counterparts who experience learning or teaching style mismatches. They preferentially focus on different types of information, tend to operate on perceived information in different ways, and achieve understanding at different rates"(Felder, 1993, p. 286). Among Libyan students, some studies showed that the attitudes of female secondary school students towards English are slightly more positive than that of male students (Zainol Abidin et al, 2012). This study is aimed at highlighting the contribution of learning styles which can boost Libyan students' achievements in EFL class. Hence, the study also sheds some light on the gaps in literature with respect to the Libyan secondary school students' learning styles and their English language performance in EFL classes.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Question 1: What are the learning styles preferred by EFL Libyan secondary school students in Malaysia?
Question 2: Is there a significant difference between learning styles and gender of students?
Question 3: Is there a significant relationship between learning style preference and English language performance among EFL Libyan secondary school students?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Karthigeyan and Nirmala (2013) found that among the five learning style categories, students preferred visual learning style primarily which was the predominant learning style of students' in second language learning followed by an auditory learning style which was secondary learning style preference of students. Next to auditory learning style, students preferred group and individual learning style. Students' least preferred learning style was kinaesthetic learning. According to Ariz Naqvi (2017), several studies have investigated the relationship between learning style and academic performance in various disciplines. He found that there was a strong relationship between converging learning style and performance scores of the students.

Dobson (2010) found that students had different learning styles. Students' learning was enhanced when instructors presented information using the particular styles that students preferred which then can reflect their performance. Mohamad, et al at (2011) discovered that a very successful learner learned in several different ways. On the whole, every student had a certain degree of preferences in each type of learning style, and the majority of them had dominance in one or more styles of learning. Within the learning style dimension, the findings revealed that the subjects strongly preferred the physiology type which included the visual, auditory and kinaesthetic elements.

The results of a study carried out by Tuan (2011) indicated that there were some significant relationships between students' learning style preferences and such variables as fields of study, length of tertiary study, gender, age, learning language experience, and English proficiency level. According to Tuan, traditionally, the teaching of EFL in Vietnam was dominated by a teacher-centred, book-centred, grammar-translation method and an emphasis on mechanical memory which resulted in a number of typical learning styles, with visual learning being one of them. Ali Sarabi et al. (2014) found that there was a significant difference between females and males regarding preferred learning styles. They found that female student preferred

using auditory learning styles more than males while male students preferred to use kinaesthetic learning styles more than female students.

Shabani (2012) in his study revealed that Iranian non-academic EFL learners used different learning styles as measured by the Paragon Learning Style Inventory (PLSI) (1998), with the majority of them applying Sensate and Judger styles. This means that they were more interested in what their five senses showed them rather than what their imagination told them. It also implied that they were less interested in what existed at present rather than what could exist in the future. They also liked to have things decided and life was likely to be planned and more orderly for them rather than flexible and spontaneous. Yemane et al. (2017) proved that there were preference differences among male and female students, significant associations between gender and learning style preferences were not found to be evident, therefore, instructors must integrate these of materials that assist in enhancing visual understandings. Results from the study showed a significant relationship between students' learning styles and their achievement in learning English. In comparison with monolinguals, bilinguals were superior in learning English.

Sahar (2017) found that the most of the Libyan students who participated in her study had a medium proficiency level in the English language. Meanwhile, the results showed that the majority of the Libyan students preferred competitive learning style. This study found that there was a significant relationship between Libyan students' overall learning styles and their EFL performance. Sana Ababneh (2015) investigated the relationship between Jordanian EFL students' learning styles and their level of proficiency and achievement in English as a foreign language. This study found that there was no statistically significant relationship between students' styles and their achievement in English, as the most of the students were considered to be poor in their English performance.

METHODOLOGY

The design of this study was quantitative in nature, i.e., descriptive and inferential as well. The research design used in this study was correlational to measure the relationship between two or more variables. According to Marguerite et al. (2008), the main purpose of correlational research is to determine, through the application of a quantitative statistical analysis, whether a relationship exists between the variables under investigation. The variables are examined to determine whether they have the relationship.

The number of students who participated in this study was 108 students, 66 were males and 42 were females, EFL learners in Libyan secondary schools in Malaysia. The ages of those respondents ranged from fifteen (17) to eighteen (18) years old. These students shared comparable abilities of the standard Arabic language and had been enrolled in the English as a foreign language class. In addition, they shared comparable linguistic, cultural and educational backgrounds. They had been taught English for two years in the secondary school.

Data collection

This study used Grasha–Reichmann student learning styles scales (GRSLSS) questionnaire. Grasha and Sheryl Reichmann developed the Grasha-Reichmann Learning Style Scales (GRSLSS) in 1974 to determine college students' styles of classroom participation (GRSLSS) (Simon, 2004). It comprised of 54 statements, 12 for the first learning style and each statement carried out five possible responses. The scaled values used against each response were strongly disagreed (SD)=1, disagreed (D)=2, not decided (ND)=3, agreed (A)=4 and strongly agreed (SA)=5. English Language Test was administered by the teachers to all the participants to get their scores.

The data collection took place in Libyan secondary school students in Malaysia. The researcher handed out the questionnaires to the participants in their classroom. Then, the researcher informed the participants the purpose of the study and explained the questionnaire to them. The participants were given adequate time about 20 minutes to complete the task in the classroom. Then, the collected data were analysed based on the research questions of the study. The scores received by the participants after the English language test were recorded.

Data Analysis

The SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science, version 20) was used to provide statistical information about the relationship between learning style preference, gender and English language performance among English as foreign language in Libyan secondary school students in Malaysia. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (PPMCC), was a measure of the linear dependence (correlation) between two variables, meanwhile T-test were utilized to answer the research questions.

RESULTS

The demographic data were used to describe the characteristics of the respondents who completed the questionnaire. This was critical to understand the representation of the sample. The demographic information facilitated a foundation comprehension of the distinctiveness of the sample population used in this study. The demographic characteristics of the participants in this study were analyzed using SPSS; descriptive analysis to obtain the frequency and percentage. The findings of the demographic characteristics were as follows:

Gender

Table 4.1 shows that the majority (n= 22; 61.1%) of the respondents were male; while the females accounted only 42 participants (38.9%).

Table 4.1 Gender distribution of the respondents in the study (N=36)

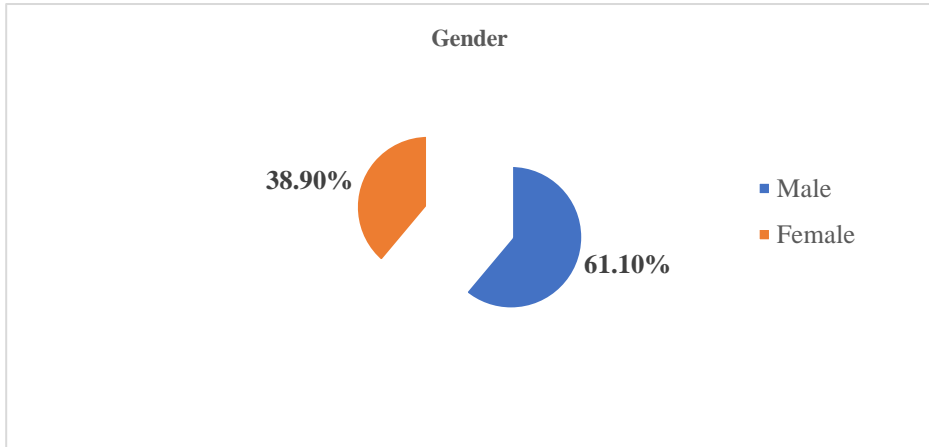| Program	Frequency	Percentage
Male	66	61.1%
Female	42	38.9%

Figure 4.1: Respondents' gender

The age of the respondents in this study ranged from 15 to 20 years old. The majority (n= 78; 72.2%) of the respondents were aged from 17 to 18 years old; followed by the respondents aged from 15 to 16 years old (n=21; 19.4%). While the smallest proportion of the respondents were aged between 19-20 years (n=9; 8.3%) (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Age of the participants in the study (N=108)

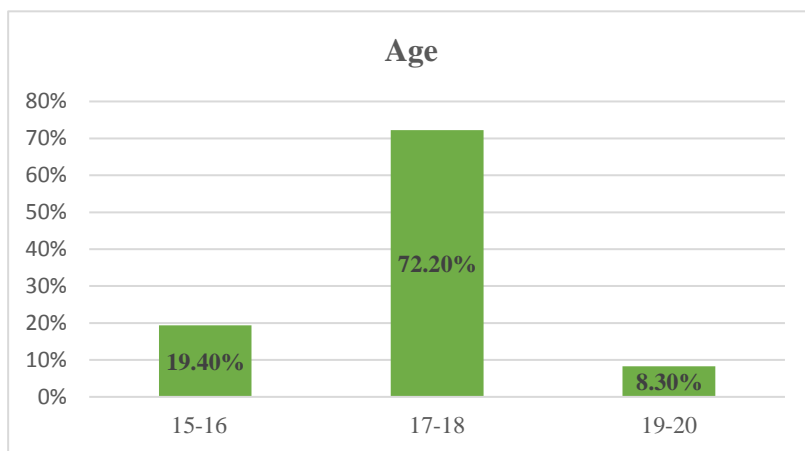| Age	frequency	Percentage
15-16	21	19.4%
17-18	78	72.2%
19-20	9	8.3%

Figure 4.2: Respondents' age

Respondents' English Language Performance

The result of this study indicated that the respondents' marks in the English Language Grade were ranged from 59 to 90; with the mean score of English Language Grade Mean=75.08 (SD± 7.27). The majority (n=60; 55.6 %) of the respondents obtained marks between 75-85 marks; followed by the respondents who scored marks between 65-74 (n=27; 25%). A small proportion of the participants obtained marks between 55-64 (n=12; 11.1%), and marks between 85-100 (n=9; 8.3%) as shown in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Respondents' English Language Performance (N=108)

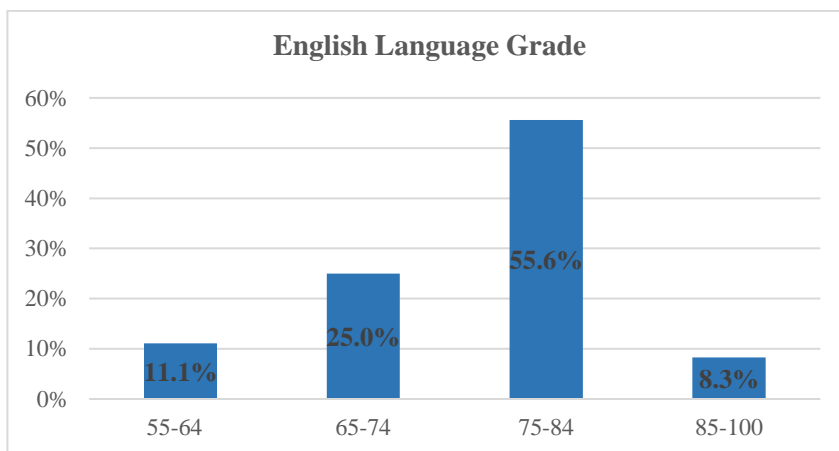| Marks	Frequency	Percentage
55-64	12	11.1%
65-74	27	25%
75-84	60	55.6%
85-100	9	8.3%

Figure 4.3: Respondents' English Language Grade

Respondents' Year of Study

The result of this study showed that all the respondents in this study (n=108; 100%) were in the final year of secondary school "third year" (Table 4.4).

Table 4.4 participants' year of study (N=108)

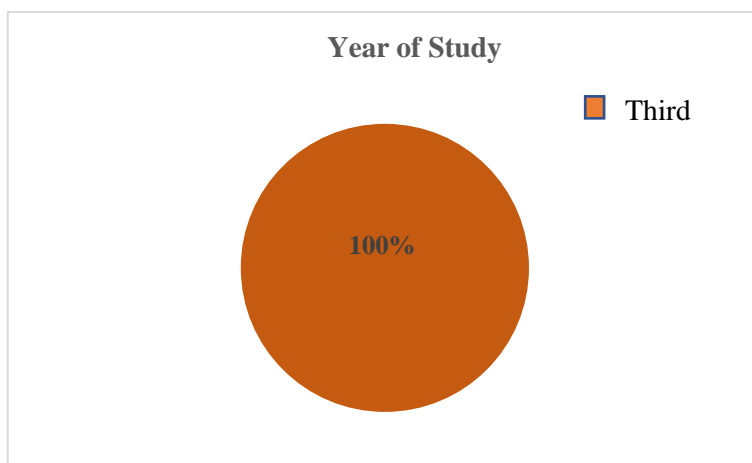| Year of study	Frequency	Percentage
Third year	108	100%

Figure 4.4: Respondents' year of study

Research Question 1: What are the learning styles preferred by Libyan secondary school students in Malaysia?

The results obtained from the descriptive analysis of Libyan students' English performance indicate that most of the participants of both genders who were surveyed, scored between 50 to 90; with mean score of English Language Grade Mean=75.08 (SD± 7.27) in their last semester's English language examination The majority (55.6 %) of the respondents obtained marks between 75-85 marks; followed by the respondents who scored marks between 65-74 (25%). Whereas a small proportion of the participants obtained marks between 55-64 (11.1%), and marks between 85-100 (8.3%). Hence, it is concluded that the Libyan students who participated in the present study obtained a variety of English marks. There was a similarity between this study and the study carried out by Sahar Ali (2017). She pointed out that EFL Libyan students in Malaysia obtained a variety of English scores ranging from high A to moderately weak C with slight differences between each band.

The comparison of the mean scores for each learning style shows that there was a considerable slight difference between the frequencies of the six learning styles used by the Libyan secondary school students in Malaysia namely: Avoidant, Participative, Collaborative, Independent, Dependent, and Competitive. The mean scores of the six learning styles ranged from

2.85 to 3.3. The result showed that the independent learning style recorded the highest mean total score (Mean = 3.31) among the six learning styles, this lead to conclude that the independent learning style) with mean score of 3.3, is the most preferred learning style; while avoidant style was reported as the lowest preferred learning style among the students (Mean = 2.85). The findings of this study were in contrast to findings from Sahar Ali (2017) as she pointed out the most participants preferred to be learning towards competitive, participative, and avoidant styles.

Table 4.3: Descriptive statistics of the six domains of learning styles scores, (N= 36)

Styles	(n)	Mean	SD
Avoidant	108	2.85	0.516
Participate	108	3.27	0.748
Collaborative	108	3.22	0.683
Competitive	108	3.29	0.700
Independent	108	3.31	0.879
Dependent	108	3.07	0.721

Research Question 2: Is there a significant difference between learning styles and gender of students?

Several studies have been conducted on difference between male and female in regards to their learning styles. Yulina Natsir et al. (2016) found that there was no difference between male and female students' learning styles. Natsir's finding contradicts the finding from this study as it was found that there was a significant difference in the overall learning styles between male and female respondents. This finding also does not support Garner-O'Neale and Harrison (2013) who did not find any significant relationship between gender and learning preferences. According to June Kibasan (2016), there was no significant difference according to gender and learning styles performance. Addition to another study proved that there was no significant difference between the learning style preferences of male and female nursing students using VARK learning styles questionnaire. According to Munir Shuib and Siti Norbaya (2015), there was no significant difference between male and female respondents with respect all four learning dimensions. Thus, this study showed that learning styles preferences among the USM ESL students did not differ by their gender. The same finding was reported by Yemane (2017). Different than other studies, the finding from this study supported that there was a significant difference between learning styles preference and gender.

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Lstyles	Equal variances assumed	.556	.461	-3.076	34	.004	-.77792	.25292	-1.29192	-.26392
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.889	22.343	.008	-.77792	.26926	-1.33584	-.22000

Table 4.4: Results of t-test - differences in preferred learning style between male and female

Independent Samples Test	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Lstyles	male	66	2.7364	.65214	.13904
	female	42	3.5143	.86278	.23059

*is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in preferred learning styles between male and female respondents is rejected. In other words, there is a significant difference between male and female respondents in the learning styles preferred.

Research Question 3: Is there a significant relationship between learning styles preference and English language performance among Libyan secondary school students?

The results show that there was no a significant relationship between English Language performance and overall learning styles (p>0.05). This study supports the finding from Gappi (2013) where she found that there was no significant correlation between the academic achievement and the learning style preferences of the participants. However, this finding is contradictory to a study carried out by Roslan (2011) where he found that there was a positive and significant relationship between the six independent variables, namely as independent, dependent, collaborative, competitive, participant and avoidant on the dependent variable - student's CGPA.

Table 4.5 shows that there was no relationship between respondents' English language performance and their preferred learning styles. There was no relationship between respondents' English language Performance and dependent learning style(r = 0.104, p= 0.548); independent learning style (r = 0.151, p= 0.381); collaborative learning style (r = 0.099, p= 0.567); participated learning style (r = 0.031, p= 0.859); competitive learning style (r = 0.145, p= 0.400); avoidant learning style (r = -0.055, p= 0.750). Furthermore, the result of this study showed the null hypothesis: "There is no relationship between respondents' Learning styles and English language Performance" is accepted. In other words there was no significant relationship between English Language performance and all learning styles.

Table 4.5: Person correlation English Language Performance and Learning styles

Correlations

		Dependent	Independent	Collaborative	Participate	Competitive	Avoidant
Scores	**Pearson Correlation "r"**	0.104	0.151	0.099	0.031	0.145	-0.055
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.548	0.381	0.567	0.859	0.400	0.750
	N	108	108	108	108	108	108

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study indicated that Libyan students' English performance the most of the participants of both genders who were surveyed, scored between A -D in their last semester's English language examination. Hence, it is concluded that the Libyan students who participated in the present study obtained a variety of English marks. There was a similarity between this study and the study carried out by Sahar Ali (2017), which pointed out that EFL Libyan students in Malaysia obtained a variety of English scores ranging from high A to moderately weak C with slight differences between each band.

The comparison of the mean scores for each learning style shows that there was a considerable slight difference between the frequencies of the six learning styles used by the Libyan secondary school students in Malaysia namely: Avoidant, Participative, Collaborative, Independent, Dependent, and Competitive. The result showed that the independent learning style recorded the highest total score among the six learning styles, this lead to conclude that the independent learning style is the most preferred learning style; while avoidant style was reported as the lowest preferred learning style among the students. The findings of this study are in contrast to findings from Sahar Ali (2017) as pointed out the most participants preferred to be learning towards competitive, participative, and avoidant styles.

Several studies have been conducted and found that there was a difference between male and female students in regards to their learning styles. However, Yulina Natsir. et al. (2016) found that there was no difference between male and female students' learning styles. Natsir's finding contradicts the finding from this study as it was found that there was a significant difference in the overall learning styles between male and female respondents. The finding from this study also did not support Garner-O'Neale and Harrison (2013) who did not find any significant relationship between gender and learning preferences. The results from this study also contrasted the findings carried out by June Kibasan (2016). She found that there were no significant differences according to gender and learning styles performance. Similarly, Munir Shuib and Siti Norbaya (2015) found that there was no significant difference between male and female respondents with respect all four learning dimensions. The same finding was reported by Yemane (2017).

This current study shows that there was no a significant relationship between English Language performance and overall learning. These findings confirm the results of a study done by Gappi (2013) who found that there was no significant correlation between the academic achievement and the learning style preferences of the participants. However, this present finding was contradictory to the study carried out by Roslan (2011) who found that there was a positive

and significant relationship between the six independent variables, namely independent, dependent, collaborative, competitive, participant and evident on the dependent variable - student's CGPA.

Based on the findings, the following pedagogical implications must be taken into consideration. Gresha (1996) stressed that students' learning style became the mechanism responsible for how they could be presented as the core of their disciplines. Furthermore, these were the reasons that led researchers to investigate predominant learning styles. The findings of this study are expected to assist the students to identify their own learning styles. Meanwhile, teachers have to follow the latest progress and the new teaching methods or strategies in accordance with the learning styles of the students. Curriculum designers and educational trainers should be implemented to improve teachers' performance with regards to catering to different learning styles preferred by the students.

Finally, the results of this study could assist learners, educators, directors, administrators, stakeholders and teachers to maximize the learning of English as a foreign language by aligning their teaching practices to students' learning styles. Furthermore, decision makers or stakeholders can use this study to enhance policy formulations with regard to teacher training; designing teaching and learning aids as well as taking the necessary consideration for the enhancement of the classroom environment that would be compatible with support students' varied learning styles.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study aimed at discovering the relationships among learning style preference, gender and English language performance of EFL Libyan secondary school students in Malaysia. This study sheds light on some recommendations that take consideration for future research. Further research needs to be conducted to investigate the relationship between learning styles and secondary school performance in the English language by using a larger sample in order to obtain sufficient results. This study recommends further researches to use more than one school to obtain accurate results. In addition, future research has to focus on more gender biases and how it influences the learning of the English language.

CONCLUSION

The objectives of this study were to investigate the learning styles preferred by Libyan secondary school students and to determine whether there is a relationship between learning style, gender and English language performance. It was concluded that there was a difference in learning styles preferred female and male in secondary school students. The results showed that there was no significant relationship between learning style preference and English Language performance among EFL Libyan secondary school students in Malaysia.

REFERENCES

Ageila, A. E. (2014). Libyan English as a Foreign Language School Teachers' (LEFLSTs) Knowledge of Teaching: Action Research as Continuing Professional Development Model for Libyan School Teachers. *Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 19 (4), 74-81.

Dobson, J. (2010). A comparison between Learning Style Preferences and Sex, Status, and Course Performance. *Advance in Physiology Education*, 34(4),197-204.

Elabbar A A. (2014) Libyan English as a Foreign Language School Teachers' (LEFLSTs) Knowledge   of Teaching: Action Research as Continuing Professional Development Model for Libyan School Teachers. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* (IOSR-JHSS),19 (4), 2279-0845.

Felder, R. M. (1993). Reaching the Second Tier: Learning and teaching styles in College Science Education. *Journal of College Science Teaching*, 23(5), 286-290.

Gappi, L.   (2013). *International Journal of Educational Research and Technology*, *IJERT*: Published By: Society of Education, Indi 4 (2), 70 – 76.

Grasha, A.F. (1996). *Teaching with Style: a guide to enhancing learning by understanding teaching and learning styles.* Pittsburgh: Alliance Publishers.

Garner-O'Neale, L. D., & Harrison, S. (2013). An Investigation of the Learning Styles and Study Habits of Chemistry Undergraduates in Barbados and their Effect as Predictors of Academic Achievement in Chemical Group Theory. *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, 3(2), 2239-978.

June II A. K., & Evangeline, C. S. (2016). *Culture and Education: a study on learning style of Libyan college students in Tripoli, Libya*, 6(1), 17-24

Karthigeyan and Nirmata.K .(2013). *Learning Styles Preference of English Language Learners*, (Vol. 2): Educationia Confab

Luu Trong Tuan. (2011). Matching and Stretching Learners" Learning Styles. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 2, (2), 285-294.

Maguerite G. Lodico, Dean T. Spaulding, and Katherine H. (2008). Methods in Educational Research: From Theory to Practice. The Evaluation Center, Western Michigan University, *Journal of MultiDisciplinary Evaluation*, 5 (9),1556-818

Mufida, G., Rosniah, M., Noorizah , M. (2017). Perceptual Learning Style Preferences of EFL Libyan University Learners. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research*, 5(2),409-416.

Mohamad, J., Zainol, A., Abbas, A., Helan ,N., & Kiranjit, K., Balbir, S. (2011). Learning Styles and Overall Academic Achievement in a Specific Educational System. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 1(10).

Mohammad, B. S. (2012). *Different Learning Style Preferences of Male and Female Iranian Non-Academic EFL Learners*. English Language

Natsir, Y., & Yusuf, Y., & Huri, A. (2016). *The Male and Female EFL Students' Language Learning Styles*. University of Syiah Kuala, Banda Aceh, Indonesia,14, 2527-8037

Naqvi, A., & Naqv, F. (2017). A Study on Learning Styles, Gender and Academic Performance of Post Graduate Management Students in India. *International Journal of Economics & Management Sciences*, 2162-6359

Rebecca , L. Oxford, Ph.D. (2003). *Learning Style and Strategies: an overview*. Oxford, GALA.

Roslan, N. (2011). *Investigating the Learning Style among UITM Melaka TESL Students Based in ESL Classroom*. Project Paper, UITM.

Sahar, A. E. (2017). Learning Styles and Academic Performance of Libyan Students in English As A Foreign Language (EFL) Class In Malaysia. *Research Journal of Education*. Faculty

of Arts, Communication and Education, Infrastructure University Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Malaysia, 5(10) ,2347-822

Sana, A. (2015). Learning Styles and Preferences of Jordanian EFL Graduate Students. Al-Balqa' Applied University. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 6 (15), 31-37

Sarabi,A, A., Jafari, M., Sadeghifar, J., Tofighi, S., Zaboli, R., Peyman, H., Shams, L. (2015). The Relationship Between Learning Style Preferences and Gender, Educational Major and Status in First Year Medical Students: A Survey Study from Iran. *Iranian Red Crescent Medical Journal*, 17(1), e18250.

Yemane, Y., Ambaye, E., Alehegn ,A., Sahile. E., Dimtsu, B, et al. (2017). Assessment of Gender Difference on Learning Styles Preferences among Regular Undergraduate Students of Mekelle University Collage of Health Science. *J. Stem Cell Biol. Transplant*, (1), 2- 14.

Munir Shuib & Siti Norbaya Azizan. (2015). Learning Style Preferences Among Male and Female ESL Students in Universiti-Sains Malaysia. *The Journal of Educators Online*, 13(2).