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# AN INVESTIGATION OF STUDENTS' LEARNING STYLE PREFERENCES AND TEACHERS' TEACHING STYLE PREFERENCES IN EFL CLASSROOMS: GRADE 9 AND 11 STUDENTS AND TEACHERS AT SHOA ROBIT SECONDARY PREPARATORY SCHOOL

MULU, WONDIMU

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SCHOOL**

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**June, 2011**

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SCHOOL

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Masters of Education in TEFL

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### **Thesis Approval**

The thesis titled “An Investigation of Students' Learning Style Preferences and Teachers' Teaching Style Preferences in EFL Classroom: grade 9 and 11 students at Shoa Robit Preparatory School” by Mulu Wondimu is approved for the degree of “Masters of Education in TEFL”.

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## **Declaration**

I, the undersigned, declare that except where reference is made to the work of others, the work described in this thesis is my own or was done in collaboration with my advisor. This thesis does not include proprietary or classified information. I have also duly acknowledged and referenced all materials used in this work. I understand that non-adherence to the principles of academic honesty and integrity, misrepresentations/ fabrications of any ideal/data/fact/source will constitute sufficient ground for disciplinary action by the University and can also evoke penal action from the sources which have not been properly cited or acknowledged.

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Signature

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**Definition of terms and acronyms**

EFL: English Foreign Language.

ESL: English Second Language.

TS: Teachers Questionnaire.

PLSQ: Perceptual Learning Style Questionnaire.

LSPs: Learning Style Preferences.

LS: Learning style

SDs: Standard Deviation

## **Abstract**

*This quantitative descriptive study was designed with the aim of investigating the learning style preferences of EFL students and teaching style preferences of EFL teachers in the classroom at Shoa Robit Secondary Preparatory School. The participants of the study were 200 grade 9 and 11 students who were randomly selected from eleven sections using stratified random sampling techniques and the 6 teachers who are taught in grade 9 and 11. Among the 200 participants, 92 were females and 108 were males. This study looks specifically at the effect of age and sex on learning style preferences of the participant students. Finally, this study examined the match/mismatch between the students' and teachers' style preferences. Questionnaires and classroom observation were employed in order to generate the required data from the aforementioned research participants. Descriptive statistics, ANOVA, Tukey test, and T-test were used to analyze the data. The results from the descriptive statistics show that the participant student generally favor group, tactile-kinesthetic and visual learning styles as their major preferences; and auditory, and individual learning style categories as their minor and weak preferences respectively. The ANOVA and Tukey test results show statistically significant mean differences between the different learning styles categories. No difference in learning style preferences according to the ages of the students was found; the t-test results for sex difference indicate statistically significant differences between male and female students in the area of tactile-kinesthetic learning styles at  $t=(2.043)$   $df=198$   $P=(0.042)$ . As for the match and mismatch, both match and mismatch was observed between students and teachers. For instance, for visual and auditory styles, match was observed. And for tactile-kinesthetic, group, and individual styles mismatch was observed based on the classroom observation and the descriptive statistic results. Finally, in line with the findings recommendation, like teachers should make effort to teach in a way which matches the students' preferred learning style and others were forwarded.*

## **CHAPTER ONE: Introduction**

### **1.1. Background of the Study**

The English language is widely acknowledged as a universal language for many global industries, markets, and academic institutions. Thus, it has become critical for people to learn English. Acknowledging this fact, the Ethiopian government introduced the education of English language into the education system as a subject in school, as a medium of instruction in some levels, and as a common course and major field of study in colleges and universities. Thus, for Ethiopian elementary, secondary, college and university students alike, who live in the global society, it has become critical for them to learn the English language. Nowadays, also the emphasis given to English language education has increased in Ethiopia.

Similarly, driven by the same impetus, scholars and educators alike in the field of language and other disciplines have continuously sought and come up with what they believed is the best method of learning English. As a result, since the early 1950s, a plethora of methodologies have been experimented with by scholars and teachers hoping to discover the best way to enable learners to succeed in their language learning. However, these scholars and their respective language teaching approaches and methodologies failed to bring the desired outcome; that is, to make learners effective learners. As Richards and Rodgers (2001) commented that one of the many reasons why these scholars and their respective language teaching approaches and methodologies failed to bring the desired outcome was that each of them did not recognize the role of learners or individual differences in language learning.

Therefore, towards the second half of the 1970s, scholars in the field of ESL/EFL began to acknowledge that students are not all alike in their language learning and, thus, have shifted their focus from the characteristics of languages and language teaching methodologies to the language learners' individual characteristics and the variables that affect language learning. In other words, greater emphasis has been put on learners and learning rather than on teachers and teaching. This prominent shift within the field of language education has resulted in a huge number of studies that recognize learner differences in language learning.

Accordingly, language learning styles have become one of the most highly researched characteristics of individual learners. Extensive investigations, for instance, Brown, (1994), Reid, (1987, 1995), Felder, (1996) Oxford, (1990) Wallace and Oxford, (1992) Oxford and

Ehrman (1993), Ellis, (1987) Chauhan, (1993) and Winebrenner, (1996 ) have shown the importance of having awareness about learners' language learning styles as one integral component of the learning and teaching process. Thus, the issue of how learners perceive, interact with and respond to the learning environment and the kinds of language learning styles they prefer in approaching the learning has become the primary concern of the researchers dealing with language learning.

Reid (1987, 1995), Oxford (1990), Felder (1996) and many other scholars have also suggested that language learning styles are related to individual characteristics and preferences; as a result, language learning styles reflect the individual preferences on how they perceive the environment and react with this environment. While such definitions demonstrate that there are numerous types of learning styles, broadly speaking, they are generally grouped together into three areas: Perceptual learning styles, Social interaction learning styles, Cognitive learning style by Nunan (2003), and Reid (1995). The same point of view also revealed by Boström, (2011) he suggests that language learning styles may comprised of different elements in it but the truth is that one or two types.

Contiguous to learners' language learning styles, teachers' preferred ways of teaching are also important for promoting effective learning in the classroom. Grasha (1996), Zhenhui (2001), Felder (1996), Reid (1987, 1995) all suggest that teachers have their own teaching style which favor some of the learners' language learning styles and disfavor some of the others. From this it can be concluded that because of these differing learning and teaching styles, learning may potentially be obstructed from occurring in the classroom when there is a severe mismatch. In favor of this idea, Felder (1996) asserted that one potential problem that can hinder language learning from occurring in the classroom is the difference between learners and teachers in their preferred learning and teaching styles. He further explains that if a teacher is primarily a lecturer and the students are primarily visual learners, then instruction may be hindered by a clash between learning and teaching styles. The findings of many researchers have also indicated that understanding and applying learning and teaching styles concepts in the educational endeavors can be significant in addressing the learning preferences of learners and eventually helping them become more successful in their learning (Zhenhui, 2001; Wallace and Oxford, 1992; Peacock, 2001; Grasha, 1996; Frod and Chen, 2001; Brown, 2000).

Providing that students and teachers have differences in their language learning styles and

teaching styles preferences a number of studies have proposed that a lack of match between preferred language learning styles and teaching styles would result in lower motivation and poorer performance (Felder and Silverman, 1988). Peacock (2001) studied the correlation between language learning and teaching styles based on Reid's hypothesis. He found that a mismatch between teaching and language learning styles causes learning failure, frustration and demotivation. He also found that Hong Kong City University students favored kinesthetic and auditory styles and disfavored group while their teacher favored group and visual styles. Ramburuth and Mc Cormick's (2006) in studying Asian and Australian high school students learning style preferences; their findings discovered that Asian and Australian students had the learning style of collaboration. Moreover, Cambodian, South East Asian and Vietnamese students' language learning style preferences were studied by Park's (2000) and Sullivan (1996) respectively. Similar findings were yielded from these two different studies. That is, the participant students in Park's (2000) strongly prefer group, tactile-kinesthetic, and visual learning styles and those students in Sullivan (1996) also strongly prefer group and tactile-kinesthetic learning styles.

Zhenhue (2001) also analyzed matching teaching styles with learning styles in East Asian contexts. He found that students favored kinesthetic and auditory learning styles and disfavored visual and group learning style while their teachers favored visual and individual styles. He also mentioned that effective matching between teaching and learning styles can only be achieved when teachers are aware of their learners' needs, capacities, potentials, and learning style preferences. Moreover, he indicated that it is often necessary to alter teaching styles to create teacher-student style matching. Oxford and Ehramn (1993) added that matching teaching styles with learning styles gives all learners a more equal chance in the classroom and helps them better in their learning. Thus, teachers should cater to the learning preferences of individuals, at least to some degree, while teaching in the classroom. Other studies have also claimed that understanding students learning styles and having commitment to accommodate them helps to improve students' learning attitudes, behavior, and motivation (Felder, 1995; Reid, 1987, 1995; Oxford, 1995).

Growing bodies of literature also show that, learners' learning style preferences vary within individuals and also are influenced by different variables. Sexes, age, years of study, field of study, and subject matter are few of the variables that have been shown to have an effect on learning style preferences. Previous studies into the learning styles of ESL/EFL students, for

example, Yu (2007), Maubach and Morgan (2001), Oxford (1995), point out that there is a correlation between gender and the preferred styles of learning. Yu (2007) documented various sex differences between boys and girls in his study of little children. He observed that girls were more sensitive to sounds and more proficient at fine motor preferences than boys. Boys in contrast, have shown an early visual superiority. Maubach and Morgan (2001) also found gender differences in their study of learning styles of Mexican and Anglo-American secondary schools students. They concluded that both Mexican and Anglo-American female students were more persistent than male students; male Mexican -American students had the strongest tactile-kinesthetic preferences and the least auditory, whereas girls in general preferred the least amount of tactile-kinesthetic learning. In the study of learning styles preferences of Mexican , American, Korean, American and Anglo-American student in secondary school, Oxford (1995) and Rossi-Le(1989) and Witte (2010) observed that across the four ethnic groups, boys had statistically significant higher preferences for kinesthetic learning style than girls. As for the age factor various studies for instance, Tia (2000), Nancy (2006), Zimmerman (2007), Dam, (1997), Price, (1980), Rossi-Le (1989) claim that age factor has a great effect on learning styles preferences of learners.

In general, research findings have asserted that learners with differing learning preferences may be able to achieve similar level of success if their learning preferences is early identified and accommodated. This indicates that due attention should be given to learning style preferences as they are one important component of the educational process. This fact remains true for the teaching-learning process anywhere in the world, but when one looks deeply into the teaching offered in most of the Ethiopian secondary schools, it seems that very little attention is given for learner differences in learning the language. The researcher witnessed this teaching problem; that is, not to accommodating individual difference in learning of teachers for the three years teaching experience she had at Rabel and Mezezo Secondary Schools from 1999 to 2001 E.C. For this reason, the researcher of this study gained interest to investigate this area of concern in the EFL classroom in the Ethiopian secondary schools context. For the purpose of this study the components of perceptual and social interaction learning styles type that are: visual, auditory, tactile-kinesthetic, and group and individual have been considered. A governmental school found in North Shoa Administrative zone specifically, in Shoa Robit Town is the area where the research is conducted.

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

Chauhan (1999) suggests that learners have differences in their learning styles preferences, intellectual abilities, socio-economic conditions, expectations, emotional development, needs, motivations, interests and so on. Moreover, he asserts that these differences have a profound effect on the learning ability of learners; thus, the teacher is responsible to create a favorable learning environment that will accommodate differences of students in the classroom.

Furthermore, the research conducted by different scholars, for example, Brown (1994), Winebrenner (1996), and Ellis (1987) in ESL classrooms have shown that students are different in their learning preferences. Some students may rely on visual presentations, others prefer spoken language; still others may respond better to hand-on activities, others may also prefer interaction to learn better, still some others may favor working independently. A teacher's teaching also varies as students learning do; teachers have different strengths and preferences with regard to how they develop individual teaching styles. For instance, as Grasha (1996) and Reid (1995) point out, some teachers like to lecture, some others like to demonstrate and discuss, some focus on rules and others on example, still others emphasize memory and others understanding.

Research findings assert that although students have differing preference for their learning, they may be able to achieve similar level of success providing that teachers accommodate their learning styles. This indicates that efforts must be made to accommodate the learning styles preferences of learners as they are an integral part of the educational process. Such researchers also acknowledged that the match between teaching and learning styles preferred by students and teachers is significantly important in achieving the desired outcome. In this field of study, research has been conducted by Muluken (2009) and Tadesse (2010) in the Ethiopian context. Muluken investigated the relationship between learning styles preferences and language learning strategies of first year Bahir Dar University students. He found auditory, tactile-kinesthetic, visual, and group, learning styles as major preferences and individual as minor preferences. "Female students' perceptual learning styles preferences, their achievement, and teachers' teaching styles" is the title of Tadesse Hirpa's work. Tadesse conducted his research in Tana Beles Girls' Boarding School found in Benishangul Regional State. His report indicates that the female students preferred group learning style followed by tactile-kinesthetic learning styles while their teachers favored tactile-kinesthetic learning style followed by group learning style.



Although studies have been conducted in EFL classroom in the Ethiopian context, little has been done to see the sex and age influence on learning styles preferences. Moreover, in the previous studies attention has been given for University students and female only classes. But the mixed-sex school where the sex factor plays its main role seems to have been overlooked. Hence, this study investigates teaching style preferences of teachers and learning styles preferences of students in a mixed-sex class. Determining the dominant teaching styles and learning styles is not the only target of this study; it also aims to investigate the student differences in learning style preferences according to their sex and age. Thus this study includes sex and age as a factor in investigating learning style to determine what effect they may have on students learning preferences. And finally, this study also aims to determine if there is a match/mismatch between teaching and learning style preferred by teachers and students. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following research questions.

1. What learning styles do students prefer when learning English?
2. Is there any difference between male and female students with respect to their learning style preferences when learning English?
3. Is there any difference between learners in learning style preferences based on age?
4. What teaching styles do teachers prefer when teaching English?
5. Is there a match between students' learning style preferences and their teachers teaching styles?

### **1.3, Objectives of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to refine teachers' current understanding about their students learning styles preferences and their own teaching style. As a result this study intends to:

- Investigate the different learning styles preferred by EFL learners/students to approach the language learning.
- To assess whether there is significant difference between learners/students in learning styles preference based on sex.
- To investigate whether there is significant difference between learners/students in learning styles preference in relation to their age.
- To assess teaching styles preferred by teachers in teaching English language.
- It also aims to determine whether there is match between teachers teaching style preference's and students learning style preferences.

#### **1.4. Significance of the Study**

This study investigates students' learning style preferences and teachers' teaching style preferences in the EFL classroom. Previous studies done in ESL settings have suggested that identifying the preferred style of learners' and teachers' in the classroom to learn and to teach respectively are crucial to the learning-teaching process. Thus, although studies have been conducted in EFL context of Ethiopia little has been done to see the learning style preferences of the secondary school students. Thus, this study assesses the learning styles and teaching styles of learners in the Secondary and Higher Education Preparatory School. Thus, it is believed that the information gained from this study will add knowledge to the researcher's understandings about the topic under discussion. Moreover, the information from this study may also help teachers, students in Secondary and Higher Education Preparatory School to understand the nature and patterns of the relationship among his/her style preferences and learners' style preferences.

Secondly, specifically the study might prove useful to both target students and their teachers. It is useful to learners in raising their awareness regarding their LSP. Recognizing the weakness of their own style and the strength of other learning styles is important for students in order to be effective learners (Oxford and Ehrman, 2003). Similarly, Leibling and Robin (2003) argues that "knowledge about one's own learning style preferences can lead to enhanced learning and helps the learner focus on improving weaker point" (p.23). As learners become more aware of their PLSP, they may be motivated to expand their repertoire of LS.

Similarly, the results of this study might raise teachers' awareness regarding their students LS preferences which may in turn enable teachers to see their own teaching style. It is believed that teachers teach with a bias towards the LS they prefer and use as a learner themselves (Price, 1980). Thus, teachers awareness of their learners' profiles of LS preferences will help them to modify consciously their behaviors towards students, choose tasks for their classes that cater for a range of learning styles thereby reducing a possible teacher – students style conflict. Moreover, the results of this study may also help teachers to evaluate their approaches to media, lesson plans, content selection, and adapting material based on the students' learning style. Dunn and Dunn (1978), for example, found that learning outcomes were significantly affected when students were presented with learning materials that were either matched or mismatched with learning style; consequently, the results of this study also important for material developers and curriculum designers in providing an insight on how to

give attention to students learning styles while writing material and designing curriculum for secondary school students.

### **1.5. Delimitation**

The scope of this study is limited in both the number of participants it involves and its area of investigation. The participants of the study were grades nine and eleven students and teachers of Shewa Robit Secondary Preparatory School. The total number of participants, as mentioned in sampling section, was limited to not more than 200 students and 6 teachers. The areas of focus in this study are EFL students learning style preferences (also in relation to age and gender), teachers' teaching style preferences, and the relationship between them in the classroom.

### **1.6. Limitation of the Study**

Because the number of teacher participants was low, it became difficult to employ statistical software to see the significant match or mismatch between the students and teachers style preferences. Thus, in this study, the descriptive statistic results (i.e. the means) and the data from observation was used to compare the students and teachers style preferences match or mismatch. In this case, though the descriptive statistics results show a difference between teachers and students learning and teaching style preferences, it does not show if this difference is significant enough to indicate a real difference in the target population. However, the data from classroom observations did exemplify the differences which were observed by comparing the mean scores of teachers and students. Despite this limitation, the present study can still be considered useful in that it investigated an issue which has not been researched before with regard to learning style preferences of Ethiopia EFL learners in secondary school.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITRATURE.**

This chapter summarizes the literature reviewed for this research study. The review is comprised of five sub – sections. The first section begins with a highlight of teaching and learning in the classroom, the second section outlines various thoughts on learning style in ELT. The third section presents a review of literature on teaching style. In the fourth section research findings in favor of congruence between teaching style and learning style as well as learners/student difference in learning style preferences by sex and age is presented.

#### **2.1. Teaching and Learning in the Classroom**

Doyle (1981) viewed the classroom as an “ecology” in which teachers and their students spend considerable time in each other presence. The teaching and learning in this ecology is highly affected by many factors. The student and teachers factors are among those which affect English learning in the classroom. Teacher factors: Learners' success in English language learning also depends on the teachers because they are the ones who plan what to teach, how to teach it, and how to evaluate what has been taught. Thus, teachers should possess not only knowledge in the language itself but also the knowledge of how to teach it. If the teaches do not possess teaching ability and have little teaching experience, or have not been properly trained to teach, this may result in unsuccessful teaching and learning. Besides, the teachers' knowledge, experience and their teaching styles may also affect language teaching and learning. The teachers' teaching styles depends on their beliefs in language learning, their attitudes to the language itself and their personality. Most teachers may teach in the way they like to or believe it to be an effective language teaching. However, learning may not be effective if the teachers do not teach in the way the learners would like to be taught, which will lead to a lack in the matching between learning and teaching styles Felder (1996). Students’ factors: students come to a language program with different profiles of talents, interests, learning habits, and purposes that may crucially affect their performance in a language course. In general students differ in the ability they bring to the task. For example, some students have a good ear and pick up languages quickly; others require much greater effort to achieve the same results Brumfit (1995). Thus, from the expression above it could be conclude that these diversities of students and teachers in learning and teaching significantly affected learning and teaching in the classroom. Similarly, Capel (2001) suggests that there are no typical students in the classroom; students in school come from different cultural backgrounds and have had a wide variety of life experience attributes that can significantly

enrich or hinder the learning of students in the classroom.

Students are unique in their learning approach in the classroom, some students do extremely well with a highly structured or teacher directed whole class approach; others perform much better in working in small group and cooperative setting; others function more introspectively and individually; some students have a masked preferences for the visual or the auditory mode (Lefrancois, 2000). From the discussion above it can concluded that each students has unique characteristics to learn the language in the classroom. Teachers, on the other hand, have their own approaches to teaching English in the classroom. In line with this, Richards (1998) asserted that language teachers often come to an English classroom with their earlier educational experiences, cultural background, and social interaction experiences, which may further shape their styles about English language teaching. Hence because of these distinctive sets of characteristics of learners' and teachers', teachers teaching and learners learning may or may not go in line.

For this reason, Doyle and Rutherford (1984) suggests that understanding the realities of the classroom life and the challenges it poses is paramount important both for the teachers and students themselves. If a teacher keeps balance between their students learning and their teaching, it in turn enables them to make effective teaching and learning environment both for students and themselves. Similarly, Riaizi and Riasati (2007) point out that to deliver an effective teaching in class, teachers should know what the students preferences are, where their students' come from, how they approach language learning, what they feel about their language experiences, and how they like to learn language. In other words, students should get an opportunity to express their opinion about how they learn both from themselves and their teachers.

In general, research on language teaching and learning has been focused mainly on teachers' classroom action and behaviors and their effect on students learning. They acknowledged that teachers' knowledge and beliefs form the underlying framework of the classroom life and guiding teachers' and students' practices. However, they do not deny students' beliefs about teaching and learning which influence how they approach learning. Thus, in this regard, teachers need to be informed about students' beliefs so that they can have better understanding and can manage their teaching as well as their students learning.

## 2.2. Learning Styles

Research pertaining to learning styles, suggest that it is important to first define learning and then style of learning. There is no single definition for learning (Skehan, 1998), this author defines learning as “An enduring change in an individual as a consequence of an experience in a particular situation (P.78). Whereas, Ellis (2002) describes learning as “A Process where a human absorbs information, memorizes and process it for further uses. (P.21). Similarly, Klob (1984) thought that learning is a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience between teachers and students. Defining learning as process Banner and Rayner (2000) and Klob (1984) suggest that there is no right way to learn in a specific situation. Everyone has his/her own ways in learning, this way also varies from one situation to another depends on the learning goal.

In this regard many researchers for instance, Brown (2000), Dunn & Griggs (1993), James (2001) have proclaimed the different ways via which individual achieve learning cumulatively called learning styles. The findings of their research also offer substantial promise to teachers counselors, and the students themselves in terms of finding better ways for students’ to learn. In ELT Literature there are many definition of learning styles, however; those definitions represent different conception of an identical dimension. Accordingly, learning style is defined in various ways

### **Kinsella ( in Reid, 1995) defined language learning style as**

*an individual's natural, habitual, and preferred ways of absorbing, processing, and retaining new information and skills which persist regardless of teaching methods or content area. Everyone has a learning style, but each person's is as unique as a signature. Each signature appear to be influenced by both nature and nurture; it is a biological and developmental set of characteristics (1995:171)*

### **For Brown (2000), learning style is**

*a term that refers to consistent and rather enduring tendencies or preferences within an individual. Styles are those general characteristics of intellectual functioning (and personality type, as well) that especially pertain to you as an individual, and that differentiate you from someone else. For example, you might be*

*more visual oriented, more reflective than someone else-these would be styles that characterize a general pattern in your thinking or feeling (2000:113)*

**For Nunan (2003), learning style is**

*any individual's preferred ways of going about learning. It is generally considered that one's learning styles will result from personality variable including psychological and cognitive make up, sociocultural background, and educational experience (2003:168).*

**Similarly, Dunn and Griggs (1988) cited in Oxford (2003) viewed learning style**

*as the way in which each person begins to concentrate on, process and retain new and difficult information through different sense channels, style pertain to the person as an individual, and that differentiate her/him from someone else. It refers to beliefs, preferences and behaviors' used by individuals to aid their learning in a given situation. It is generally assumed that as biologically and developmentally imposed characteristics that make the same teaching method wonderful for someone and terrible for others (2003: 111).*

For Reid (1995) also learning style is an individual, habitual and preferred ways of observing, processing and retaining new information and skills. According to Oxford (2003), language learning style is the general approach that individual uses in acquiring a new language or in learning any other subject. Similarly, for Keefe.(2003) learning style is the consistent pattern of behavior and preferences by which an individual approaches learning. It is therefore the composite of characteristic, cognitive, affective, and physiological behaviors that serves as relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment. A learning style is the more or less consistent way in which a person perceives, conceptualizes, organizes, and recalls information Ellis (1997).

Wright (1987) also defines learning style as the way a person processes, internalizes, and studies new and challenging materials. Thus, it affects the way students think, act and approach their learning. Other definition presented by Riding and Rayner cited in Conti and

Welborn (1986) indicates that, learning style is an individual's repertoire of learning strategies (ways in which learning tasks are habitually responded to). Thus, for the purpose of this study the definition offered by Reid (1987, 1995), Nunan (2003), Brown (2000) are used.

### **2.3. Perceptual Learning Style Model**

There are many different kinds of learning style models based on different aspects. In this study, the model which is relevant to the study has been discussed. The model concentrates on human observation channels, and two social aspects of learning that was developed by Reid (1987 or 1995) was discussed. Sharing similar view Dornyei (2005) mentions that the learning style dimension that most language teachers and even many language learners would familiar with is the categorization of sensory preferences into Visual, Auditory, and Tactile-kinesthetic.

The observation channel models of Reid (1987) divided learning style into six based on the perceptual channel and social aspects of learning. The categories are (visual, auditory, Tactile-kinesthetic), group and individual learning style. Though Reid categorized the perceptual channel into four types, when we deeply examine the Tactile and Kinesthetic learning styles they almost have similar preferences to learn. In line with this view, Dornyei (2005) avers that both students with tactual and kinesthetic learning style prefer to learn by try things out, touch, feel, and manipulates things. The only difference exists between these students with tactual- kinesthetic learning style is, a student with tactual- learning style preferences needs to practice things experimentally in the laboratory. From the discussion above it is possibly infer that the kinesthetic learning style type is categorize under the tactile learning style. According to observational channel description students who absorb content best by listening are auditory learners. Those who learn best by seeing are visual. Learners, while a need to add a physical action to the learning process are tactile-kinesthetic learners. Moreover, the ones who feel comfort by independent learning and group study are called individual, and group learners respectively.

#### **2.3.1. Visual Learners**

The visual learners may think in pictures and learn best from visual displays including diagram, illustrated textbooks, overhead transparencies, videos, flip chart, table demonstrations, handout, and mind maps Reid (1987). Similarly Lightbown and Spada (2006) also explained that students who absorb content best by seeing are visual learners.



Haynes (1998) address that during a lecture or classroom discussion, visual learners often prefer to take detail notes to absorb the information. In the classroom these learners need to see the teacher's body language and facial expression to fully understand the content of the lesson. Thus, they tend to prefer sitting at the front of the classroom to avoid visual obstruction (e.g. peoples, head).

### **2.3.2. Auditory Learners**

As the name implies, auditory learners feel comfort by hearing to learn best the language. Reid (1987) suggests listening and speaking are important for auditory learners. At the same time, she suggests verbal lecture, discussion (talking things through and listening to what other have to say) are some of the comfortable ways where by auditory learners absorb the content of the lesson. Linghtobown and Spada (2006) explained that auditory learners interpret the underlying meanings of speech through listening to tone of voice, pitch, speed and other nuances. Thus, for those learners written information may have little meaning until it heard. In sum these learners often benefit from reading texts aloud and using a tape recording.

### **2.3.3. Tactile-kinesthetic Learners**

The learners who get more from hand – on working are tactile-kinesthetic learners. These learners as Ried (1987) explained learn best by experience and by being involved physically in classroom experiences; for example drama and role play are some of the activities these learners prefer to learn the language best. Therefore, in the classroom the learning environment which can be provided them activities with a combination of physical stimuli helps those learners understand better the language element they learned.

### **2.3.4. Group Learners**

Group studying make them feel comfortable and it is the best way for them to acquire knowledge, regarding these learners Richard (1998) explained that students with group learning style prefer to work with others. They get more from communicative learning – environment. Thus, they prefer social approach to learning. They need personal feedback and interaction, and learn well from discussion and group activities. Students with this style also pay value for class interaction and class work with other students and they remember information when they work with two or three classmates, thus, the stimulation of group work will help such students to understand new information better. Reid (1987) suggests that

in the group learning style situation individuals is rewarded in proportion to other in the group.

### **2.3.5. Individual Learners**

These students get more from work done alone. He/she thinks best, and remembers more when she/he has learned by alone. They care more for her/his own opinion than for the ideas of others. They may face much trouble from over socializing during class. Thus, these students need to be allowed to do important learning alone (Elliot 2000). Individual students prefer studying alone and they learn best independently, such students learn new information best when reading it themselves. Progress and achievement is best visible when they learn alone (Reid, 1987).

Reid (1987) also classified styles as major, minor, or negative, each student has major, minor, and negative learning style preferences, major learning style indicated that an individual could function well as a learner. A minor learning style preference indicates that an individual still can function well. Weak learning style preferences indicate that the students may have difficulty in learning through this particular style. Learners who are in a position to choose how they acquire a new language can ensure that their preferred style matches the teaching methodology of the particular language course they want to enroll in (Lefrancois, 2000). Reflective learners, for instance, may not do so well in purely conversational classes and auditory learners will probably want to avoid a course with reading requirement. In general, however, different they are in their learning preferences; students may be able to achieve similar level of success if teachers' accommodate their learning style. Any way though there are many learning and teaching styles, the researcher focused on perceptual learning styles like auditory, visual, tactile-kinesthetic, group and individual style during the data collection.

### **2.4. Teaching Styles**

What is teaching style? This is a difficult question to answer as there is yet no definitive definition of teaching style widely agreed upon by the researchers. However, there have been many attempts to define teaching style. Cook (1991) described the word teaching style referring to the element of fashion and changeability in teaching. Teaching Style also reflects what Matthews and Hamby (1995) describe as our preferred ways of using the abilities that we have. In relation to education, a teaching style may be described as a pervasive quality that plays an important role in several aspects of our teaching (Grasha, 1996). This implies that it is not simply an accumulation of techniques or interesting mannerism, but also it has inherent

in it the teachers personality and how this influence the ways she/ he selects instructional process.

Meanwhile, Reinsmith (1997) describe teaching style as a teachers' presence and the nature and quality of our encounter with students. Another definition presented by Conti and Welborn (1986) describes teaching style as a label associated with previous identifiable sets of classroom teaching behaviors which are consistent even though the content that is being taught may changed. Brown (2000) states teaching style reflects the beliefs, and values that a teacher holds about the learners' role in the exchange that occurs in the classroom. According to Cook (1991), a teaching style is a loosely connected set of teaching techniques believed to share the same goals of language learning and the same view of language learning. From the expression above it can be concluded: teaching styles is teachers display in the classroom. It is also multidimensional and affects how teacher present information, interacts with students, manage classroom task, supervise course work, socialize students to the field and monitor students.

However, William and Burden (1997), viewed teaching style as being a results of the teachers past learning and teaching experience, present frame of mind and body, and future plans and actions. For this reason he suggests that teaching style is highly individualistic and is something that is constantly in a state of flux. Because of this, he concluded that it may be difficult to investigate teaching style. However , researchers such as (cook, 1991; Frod and Chen, 2001; Elliot, 2000; Zhenhui, 2002; Peacock, 2001; Boström,2011). And this is the assumption that this study adheres to. For this study teaching style define as natural, habitual, and preferred way(s) of teaching new information and skills in the classroom.

Researches on teaching style mainly support the idea that most teachers teach the way that they have been taught, , for example, teachers who have experience learning in an environment that was centered on the instructor and relied heavily on lectures, would understandably initially repeat that which worked for them in their own teaching style. Therefore, research on teaching style should be given due attention and priority since they play a significant role in giving an insight on effective teaching.

## **2.5. Matching Learning and Teaching Style**

Both students and teachers get the most from their interaction in the classroom when the students learning style match with teachers teaching style. Students will gain more

knowledge, retain more information, and perform for better when teaching style match learning style (Boström, 2011). Frod and Chen (2001) explored the relationship between matching and mismatching of instructional presentation style with students' styles that is the area of matching of students and teachers' styles. The result suggests that matched condition group had better performance than the mismatched conditions group. Felder (1995) moreover, stated that matching teaching style to learning style can significantly enhance academic achievement, student's attitudes and behaviors at the primary and secondary school level and specifically in foreign language instruction.

Oxford and Lavine cited in Shrum and Alisan (2000) claimed that students whose learning styles resemble that of teachers are more likely achieve good grades and want to continue studying the language than are students whose learning styles do not resemble that of teachers teaching styles, and even discontinue studying the language. If teachers and students become aware of their major learning style preferences, they may be able to help one another and understand diverse views and make an effort to composite for any style mismatch. According to Elliot (2000) styles matching give teachers practical means of identifying students style thus, it can improving their ability to match students' preferences with their own teachers method.

Studies in Netherlands, USA and Australia also had found that interpersonal teacher behaviors, especially; teaching style is important contributor to learners effective outcomes. Teachers who accommodate learning styles in their interactions with learners were found to poster greater learners' achievement and more positive attitudes towards their subject (William and Burden, 1997). Similarly, Zhenhui (2002) analyzed matching teaching style with learning styles. He mentioned that an effective matching between teaching and learning styles can only be achieved when teachers are aware of their learner's needs, capacities, potentials, and learning style preferences.

He also mentioned that it is necessary to alter the teaching styles to create a teacher- student style matching. Peacock (2001) also studied the match between learning and teaching styles based on Reid's hypotheses. He found out that a mismatch between teaching and learning style cause learning failure. Reid (1987) in same way explained that matching teaching style with learning styles give all learners an equal chance in the classroom and build student self-awareness. From the expression above it can be concluded: learning style and teaching style should match to obtain a good students and teacher's performance in the classroom. Thus,

that is match between teachings and learning style in L2 classroom creates a motivating environment that aids the learning and teaching process.

But while matching learning styles with instructional mode is apparently facilitate positive interpersonal relationship and while it would seem to point out the way for increased learning the empirical studies that supports this idea, regarding our country high schools are rather scarce. Thus, giving that matching may affect the learning effectiveness; this study seeks to consider the level of match/ mismatch in students' learning style and teachers teaching styles within the EFL classroom. In general in the literature a number of educators have proposed that teaching would be more effective if teachers took account of differences in students' learning styles (Zbenhui 2001). Supporting this view was the research student reported by Reid (1987) claiming that everyone has a learning style and, if teacher is adapted to accommodate that style, it is anticipated that this will result in improved learning. Felder (1996) also noted that a better understanding of learning styles by teachers can help reduce the students' level of frustration and improve instructional delivery method. Brown (2000) suggested that instructors should attempt to alter their teaching method to give students with differing learning styles an opportunity to learn in an environment more conducive to their preferences.

Furthermore, it has been widely documented and recognized that students' success in the classroom depends not only on the intellectual abilities, skill and talent of students but also on the students learning style (Klob, 1984). Dunn and Griggs (1988) arrest those students who understand their learning styles can improve their learning effectiveness in and out of the classroom. Felder and Silverman (1988) also made numerous claims about the benefit of learning style instruction. According to them, if students approach studies using their preferred learning style, it will be enhance them to study for the same amount of time or less, remember more, get better grade enhance their level of self confidence, and reduce their anxiety as they tackle classroom life. Additionally, knowing learning style may be helpful to teachers who have not previously thought seriously about difference among students.

Therefore, knowing the learning style of students is a valuable skill in education. Knowledge of learning style may help educators to identify and solve learning problems among students, help their students to become more effective, help become more sensitive to the differences they bring to the classroom. It can also serve as a guide in thoughtfully and systematically designing learning experiences that match students' styles. Dornyei (2005) in his book

advised that understanding how students are working in their preferred learning mode, they probably find that they are better to concentrate on their study tasks. Thus approach a task from a student preferred learning style results in a better fit or match. In other words, studying feels right. Generally given that little information of learning style and teaching style may affect learning effectiveness, this study seek to identify the preferred learning and teaching style of students and teachers and the match/mismatch between them in EFL classroom context.

## **2.6. Learning Style, Gender and Age.**

### **2.6.1. Difference in Learning Styles Preferences by Gender**

Because of the different reason like brain processing, culture, and creative thinking difference males and females learn differently from each other. Research on sex difference in learning styles in EFL classroom suggested that Male tend to be more tactual and visual and they need more mobility in more informal environment than Females. Male are more nonconforming and peer motivated than Female, Male tends to learn less by listening. Females, more than males tend to auditory, authority oriented, need significantly more quite while learning. They are more- self – and authorities – motivated and are more conforming than males (Banner and Rayner, 2000; Oxford, 1995; Maubach and Morgan, 2001; Capel, 2001; Dam, 1997).

Social preferences of males and females are also different during the process of learning males students prefer learning task connected with competitions in hierarchical group, while females students learn by collaboration in small groups in which mutual liking is important (Dam,1997), furthermore, research conducted by ( Lighbown and Spada, 2006) suggest that males fell more comfortable in lecture role, which is a demonstration of expertise and status, but females feel more comfortable in a listening role which show a desire to collaborate bond and to be liked by products of a world of connections, not status, females prefer to share their expertise with other, rather than rivaling with them.

Doing the language learning tasks connected with problem-solving, male students and female ones show clear difference in their approach to this learning task. Moreover, when specific language tasks are considered females do better on some of them and males do better on other, for example, females exceed on tasks requiring perceptual speed but male do better on the general information task (Winebrenners 1996). Additionally, those scholars stated that females are better than males' on language learning task connected with remembering verbal information, they have better episodic memory than male, but male do better with the travel

direction task. Providing that females and males are different in their preferences to approach learning in EFL classroom? Researchers conventionally argued that, as they are learning in one class at the same time, by the same teachers it is therefore, essential to treat all the individual equally as an individual's regardless of their gender different rather than assuming giving priority to the one is addressing the other (Dunn and Dunn, 1978; Frod and Chen, 2000; Felder, 1996; James, 2001).

### **2.6.2. Difference in Learning Styles Preferences by Age**

All babies are born with a tactile-kinesthetic learning style predominant. Parents naturally acknowledged the fact that babies learn by doing, by getting into everything, touching everything, pulling things apart and knocking them down. However; success in school task later requires them to make the translation from tactile-kinesthetic to auditory-analytical. Thus age level characteristics may coordinate with learning styles (Wineberenner, 1996). Harrison, Andrews, & Saklofske cited in Price (1980) also stated that learning styles indicated a tendencies to be modified by the situation or intentional choices or life experience although students demonstrate a relatively stable learning style preferences over time. Mattews and Hamby (1995) added that Children are essentially more tactile-kinesthetic in the elementary school. By upper elementary school however students already spend the greater part of the day by listening and reading, in other words, they engage in a far fewer tactile-kinesthetic activities.

Knowles cited in Wiberenner (1996) showed that when becoming adult, adults need know why they should learn something before undertaking to learn it. Adults are life-centered, task-centered or problem-centered in their orientation to learning in contrast, to youth who are subject-centered. For adults motivation to learn is more internal than external. Their internal motivation is a commitment to invest energy to learn because learning is perceived as of value. The same point of view also expressed by Robles cited in Tai (2000) she stated that adults learning approaches are not one –dimensional. She noted that one of the foundations for adult learning is life experience. Knowles cited in Zimmerman (2007) identifies these characteristics of adult learning as: (a) self-directed (b) centered on solving problem at hand (c) focused on the application of the material being presented, and (d) involved in their life experiences.

Ommen and Brainard cited in Tai (2000) they studied Taiwan students learning style, and

found that younger students preferred iconic and direct experience and learning modes, and held lower expectation for performance excellence. In contrast, older students preferred traditional instructional formats, including organized and detailed learning materials, and should a strong tendency towards dependency behavior Develbiss cited in Paula (2001) in his/her study of Brazilian students learning style; he/she found that older students preferred a more structured environments and a knowledgeable teacher while younger students wanted more freedom and teacher affiliation.

Moreover, Lemire and Gray cited in Paula (2001) assert that although students demonstrate relatively stable learning style preferences over time that preferences may changed because of life experience or in coordination with age level characteristic. For instance, Kindergarten students enjoy hand-on and visual activities while high school and college students prefer an individual learning environment. Zimmerman (2007) in his comparative study of the learning style of 5<sup>th</sup> , 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students in Western New York; in his finding, he confirms that age is one of the variable that affect learning style preferences.

The results of his study indicate that students in grade five through grade eight learn better in small group rather than alone or with their teachers. However, even after grade eight when many students learn best alone, there were students who prefer to learn either with their teacher or in teams. Tai (2000) also comparatively analyzed the learning style preferences of Brazilian and Germany students by gender and age; he took 1774 adolescent students aged from 13-15, and 17 years old. The results of his study indicate that younger students require more structure in their school environment. They are greatly affected by their learning preferences, and therefore; they have great needs for their preferences to be accommodated in their learning environment. They prefer hand-on activities to learn. From the expression above it could be conclude the age or developmental level of students appears to have an effect on learning styles.

Therefore, since most schools in Ethiopia educate both males and females of varying ages, the researcher of this study believes that information pertaining to sex and developmental (age) factors in learning styles preferences may help schools in better meeting students' needs. In line with this, Zimmerman (2007) asserts that knowledge of learning styles by sex and age may provide teachers with valuable information about how to best structure learning groups, class assignment, test situation and learning materials so that students can maximize their learning potential and meet success in school.



### **3. CHAPTER THREE**

#### **3.1. Methodology**

This study used descriptive survey research design, with the aims of finding the learning style preferences of students and teaching styles preferences of teachers and the congruence between them. Moreover, this study also has the purpose of investigating the effect that sex and age variables have on perceptual learning style preference and social interaction learning styles.

#### **3.2. The Target Population**

All the grades nine and eleven English students and teachers in Shewa Robit Preparatory School (1306 in number) for the 2010-2011 academic year were the total population. From this total, 6 are teachers and the rest are students. One thousand total students are in grade nine (from this 510 were male and 490 were female) and 300 are grade eleven (196 male and 104 female). The rationale for selecting grades nine and eleven as a population is: since grade nine is the transition period between the elementary and secondary school life, identifying and making students well informed about the way they prefer to approach the language learning environment is key since the early age of secondary school life is such an important educational stage. By choosing grade nine students, the researcher felt that those students would benefit by having the rest of their educational career to act accordingly of their preference. Moreover, it also helps teachers to consider their students' differences and vary their techniques of teaching whereby their students achieve the best from their teaching. Here, the researcher does not contend that grade nine is the specific grade level where students learning style preferences should gain attention, rather she maintains that grade nine is the grade level in which students begin to encounter a more complex learning situation and may, therefore, benefit from knowing about how they prefer to learn best. Moreover, according to the present educational system of Ethiopia, grade nine is also the grade level in which students have laid a base for the matriculation exam they will take year after in grade 10. Therefore, being attentive to accommodate the diversity of learner's language learning preferences at the early age of secondary school life in general, can help the students benefit for the rest of their stay in the school by flexing their learning styles accordingly if they aware of their preferences before. Since the age factor is to be investigated in this study, grade eleven students were chosen to participate as a different age group for purposes of comparison.

### 3.2.1. Sampling

Since the number of teachers at this school was small and easily manageable, all the teachers in the school were included as participants. Hence, comprehensive non random sampling technique was used for the teacher participants. Regarding students, as their number was too large for managing and interpreting data within the scope of this study the researcher then selected a total sample of 200 students using stratified random sampling. The sample includes 92 female students and 108 male students. In relation to age, 126 students ranged from 13-15 years of age and the rest 74 students were 19-22 years old. The rationale behind selecting the age group 13-15 and 19-22 and leaving the other age group (16-18) was to create an age gap because Naughton (2000) cited in Oxford (1995) suggests that students who are approximately of similar age group in a particular grade level may share similar characteristics/learning style preferences. The rationale behind using stratified sampling technique was to keep the chance of the different strata in the sex variable (i.e. female and male). In other words, to keep the number of female and male in proportion according to their total number. Although the number of participants selected for the study is relatively small when compared to the total population, the researcher believes that they represented the population to which they belong since random selection techniques were used.

Demographic variables		Total numbers
Gender	Female	92
	Male	108
Age	13-15	126
	19-22	74

### 3.3. Instrument

#### 3.3.1. Questionnaire

In this study, the researcher conducted a survey study involving a quantitative method. As a result, two methods of data collection were used. The major data collection tool was the questionnaire and the observation was used as support for the information gathered through the teachers' questionnaire. Data on learning styles was collected from 200 students using the Perceptual Learning Style Preferences Questionnaire (PLSPQ) developed by Reid (1987). The PLSPQ is chosen because it is the only well established/widely used questionnaire of its kind created specifically for adult EFL learners to assess learning style preferences.

Moreover, it is also the only validated questionnaire created to assess both the perceptual learning styles preferences and the social learning styles preferences altogether at the same time.

Another reason behind selecting Reid's questionnaire is, as it was previously mentioned in Chapter Two, Dornyei (2005) avers that the learning style dimension that most language teachers and even many language learners familiar with is the categorization of sensory preferences into Visual, Auditory, and Tactile-kinesthetic. Aside to these, Reid's (1987) questionnaire also has items which were designed for the purpose of data collection from other learning styles type (i.e. social learning style) regardless of the differences that exist between the sensory and the social learning styles. And finally, it was chosen because all the kinds of learners are subject to using one or more of the five styles and rejecting the others. In other words, learners learning style preferences can not be out of the range of the five learning modalities. Moreover, since the statements are easy to understand, this questionnaire can be fit for a wide range of EFL learning contexts. And thus, it is comprehensible by and applicable to students of varying cultural, environmental, and linguistic backgrounds.

Therefore, the instrument derives data on the individual preferences for Visual, Auditory, Tactile-Kinesthetic, Individual, and Group learning styles. It is comprised of twenty five randomly arranged statements of which five groups of the statements are allotted to cover each of the five modalities on a scale from 1 to 5 (strongly disagree to strongly agree). Here, the students indicated how much they agree with each item when they learn English (see Appendix A). Similarly, data on language teaching style was collected using a modified version of the PLSPQ. Here, both the scale and the items in the PLSPQ were modified and used by the researcher as a base to develop the teaching style questionnaire. The teachers responded to each statement as it applied to their teaching of English (see Appendix B).

### **3.3.2. Validity and Reliability**

Though the level of the item's structure was easy to understand, considering the techniques through which the participants were selected, meaning that, as the participants were randomly selected there may be students who face problem to understand the English version well because of linguistic background. Therefore, the English version was translated by the researcher into the student's first language and checked by Amharic expert before the data was collected.

Reliability of both the student and teacher questionnaires were checked before the questionnaires were distributed to the target population. To do this, the questionnaire was distributed to 10 students and 5 teachers found within the same school as the actual study. During the administration of the pilot study, both the teachers and students are asked by the researcher to write the number which stands for the item that was in any way unclear to them.

Having finished the collection of data in the pilot, the researcher calculated the Cronbach Alpha both for the students and teacher questionnaire. Due to the nature of the questionnaire (having six questions for each of the five learning style categories) the Cronbach Alpha was calculated for each group individually. For the students' questionnaire, the results of the Cronbach Alpha were: visual=0.54, auditory=0.55, tactile=0.53, group=0.65, and individual=0.54, but as George and Mallery (2003) suggest the Cronbach alpha result “ > .9 – Excellent, > .8 – Good, > .7 – Acceptable, < .6 – Questionable, < .5 – Poor. Moreover, the pilot responses to the items which were ambiguous determined that modification was needed; therefore, question numbers 5, 14 and 28 were modified according to the students' suggestions.

Moreover, though Reid's (1987) developed five items for each learning styles the researcher in this study added one new item to all learning styles group while keeping the other original items. This was done in order to make the questionnaire more reliable, valid and context appropriate. Here after, the final revised questionnaire was distributed for the second time to collect data for pilot study. At this time, the questionnaire was distributed for 10 students (5 from grade 11 and the rest 5 from grade 9) at Shoa Robit Secondary Preparatory School. Following this, Cronbach Alpha was calculated for the last time the results were (0.64 for visual, 0.6 for auditory, 0.67 for tactile, 0.87 for group and 0.8 for individual).

### **3.3.2. Observation**

Data for the study were also collected using classroom observation as the substantial means to cross check the information that were gathered through teachers' questionnaire. This aims to see how much teachers respond to students learning preferences while teaching English in the classroom. Thus, a semi structured observation checklist having two items with same content as the questionnaire for each learning style category were developed and used. The items were set in ‘yes’ or “no” format. Here, the possible learning style activities that have been assumed by the researcher to be employed by teachers in the classroom were described.

The rationale behind using semi-structured observation checklist is to have a chance to jot down additional learning style activities that have not yet included in the observation checklist but that have been used by teachers in the classroom.

### **3.4. Data Collection Procedure**

The data was collected in two phases. In the first phase of the data collection process involved the administration of both the PLSQ and TSQ. In this process, in order to familiarize participants with the terminology and thinking process involved in specifying the learning styles preferences and teaching styles preferences, an introductory session with each group of students and teachers was held for some minutes prior to administering the questionnaire. Moreover, the students were informed the purpose of the study, that their response to the questionnaire would be kept confidential and would have not effect on their course grades or on their teachers' impression but instead that it would eventually be helping teachers improve their English teaching and students themselves to aware their preferences to approach a certain language learning environment. Furthermore, the researcher administered the questionnaire when the participants were free of other works. This was to reduce stress on the participants in thinking how to respond appropriately. Finally, the completed questionnaire was collected right after the participants completed them. In the second phase data was collected through observation. The observation was carried out for four working days in a week for three consecutive weeks. Three teachers (2 from grade nine and one from grade 11) were observed. This is, because of period overlaps.

### **3.4. Data Analysis Procedure**

The research questions were answered by applying the following statistical analyses. First, to measure the participants learning style and teaching style preferences, in research questions 1 and 4, the descriptive statistics were applied by calculating the mean scores and standard deviations of the items in each group in the two questionnaires to represent the participants learning style and teaching style preferences. However, only calculating the mean scores would have made it difficult to determine if there were any significant differences among the groups mean in each questionnaire when answering research questions 1 and 4, so the analysis of variances (ANOVAs) were applied, respectively, to the five groups in each of the two questionnaires as independent variables and the mean scores of the five learning styles and the five teaching styles as dependent variables to test the significant effects after the descriptive statistics. Moreover, Tukey test was also computed in order to see between which

learning style means statistically significant difference existed.

In reporting the results gained through descriptive statistics, a scale for learning style preferences outlined by Park (2000) was used. The T-test was also used to determine whether there was any statistically significant differences between the student participants in learning style preferences based on their sex and age. And finally, the information obtained through classroom observation interpreted qualitatively and triangulated with the information obtained through teachers' questionnaire.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Again, this study explores students' perceptual learning style preferences (PLSPs) and teachers teaching style preferences. Moreover, it sought to identify the influence of sex and age (developmental) differences in perceptual learning styles preferences of grade 9 and 11 EFL students. In addition, this study had the objective of identifying the potential match or mismatch that exists between the students' perceptual learning style preference and teachers' teaching style preferences. With this in mind, in the following sections, descriptive and statistical analysis of the responses gained from the two questionnaires (i.e. perceptual learning style questionnaire and teachers teaching style questionnaire) will be presented.

### **4.1. FINDINGS**

#### **4.1.1. Research question 1: What learning styles do students prefer when learning English?**

In identifying the participants' preferences for the five learning styles the responses of the participants from the questionnaires (PLSQ) were computed for descriptive statistics. Thereafter, as noted in chapter three scales were employed as a key to categorize the participants' mean scores under major, minor, and weak preferences. Researchers in the field of language learning styles have used different scales in reporting their results even when using the same instrument. For instance, Reid (1987), Park (2000, 2002), and Rossi-Le (1989) used different scales for their research using the PLSP. Reid (1987) multiplied her participants' means by two and used the following ranges of points: 38-50 for major, 25-37 for minor, and 0-24 as negligible in her categorization of the individual preference means; however, she offers no clearly defined rationale for this. Park (2000, 2002), on the other hand, directly used her participants' means without the extra step of multiplying by two, thus creating a scale in which preference mean scores of 18.00 and above indicate major learning style, 16.50 and above indicate minor and 16.49 or less show weak preferences. Thus, in the present study, Park's (2000, 2002) scales for preferences mean score (18.00 and above, 16.50 and above, and 16.49 or less) was used. Table1 below presents the descriptive statistics results for the participant students' learning style preferences (bolded information indicates major style preference).

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for PLSPs of the Students (N=200).**

Learning styles	N	Means	Standard deviations
<b>Visual</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>22.28</b>	<b>3.48</b>
Auditory	200	17	4.11
<b>Tactile-kinesthetic</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>24.47</b>	<b>3.42</b>
<b>Group</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>24.53</b>	<b>3.94</b>
Individual	200	16.32	4.68

In order to see the general tendency of the participants' learning styles and of their subgroups (male and female), descriptive statistics have been run. In particular, the means and standard deviations have been calculated for each learning style category and compared to the scales provided by Park (2002) (see Table 1 above). Overall, the participant students showed the strongest preference for group learning style as a major with a mean of 24.43 and SD of 3.94. Tactile-kinesthetic and visual learning styles categories were also classified as major learning styles with means of 24.47 and 22.28 and standard deviation of 3.42 and 3.48 respectively. On the other hand, the auditory and individual style categories were classified as minor and weak learning styles preferences with means of 22.28, and 16.32 and standard deviation of 3.48 and 4.68 respectively.

Examining the standard deviations is also important in order to see the spread of data around the mean (Pewewardy 2002). In this study, the students' learning style preferences yielded interesting results when comparing the standard deviations of the major, minor and weak learning style preferences. The comparison shows that most of the SDs of the major learning style preferences are smaller than those for the minor and weak preferences. This indicates that the scores of the students in the major learning style preferences are more homogeneous and more clustered around the mean than those of the minor and weak preferences which gives more confidence in the strength of this study results for the major preferences. The SDs of group learning style is smaller than the individual learning style; this indicates the students had homogeneous scores for the group modalities. On the other hand, the SDs of individual learning style show that students' scores were not clustered around the mean. In other words, each student had very different total score from extremely high to extremely low for the individual learning style.



As presented in Table 1, different mean values were yielded from the descriptive statistics for each learning style category. However, the representation of the mean scores in the five learning styles is not enough to state that there were significant differences in the variables from the highest mean score of the learning style categories to the lowest mean score of them. Therefore, a one-way ANOVA was applied to the five learning style categories as independent variables and the mean scores of the five learning styles as dependent variables and tested the significant differences between the mean of the five learning styles categories.

**Table 2: ANOVA of Students' PLSPs Means.**

Source of variation	Sum of squares (SS)	Degree of freedom (df)	Mean square (MS)	F observed	F critical	P-value
Between group	350.05	4	88.01	20.1	13.46	.000
Within group	435.68	995	0.44			
Total	787.68	999				

Significant level at  $p < 0.05$

Statistically significant differences between means were determined by comparing the observed F with the critical value of F. In the above table, the observed F is (20.1026) and the critical F with 4 and 995 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of confidence is (13.46). Finally, the observed F exceeded the critical F. Therefore, the value computed showed that as there was significant difference among the means of each learning style categories. On the other hand, at 95% level of confidence there was evidence from the sample data that the mean scores for the learning style preference were different. Thus, the results show there are statistically significant differences between the means of the learning style preferences of the students. This mean difference showed that students did have different preferences for the learning styles. Although the computed ANOVA result showed as there was significant difference between the mean value of each learning style, at this point, it is difficult to know which learning styles' mean is significantly different from the other. As a result, a multiple comparison of means was computed and the results were summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3: Tukey Test of the Five Means of Students PLSPs.**

Learning styles		Mean differences	P-value
X <sub>1</sub> =22.28	X <sub>2</sub> =17.00	.88000*	.000
	X <sub>3</sub> =24.47	.36500*	.000
	X <sub>4</sub> = 24.53	.36461*	.000
	X <sub>5</sub> = 16.32	.99055*	.000
X <sub>2</sub> =17.00	X <sub>3</sub> =24.47	1.24500*	.000
	X <sub>4</sub> = 24.53	1.24461*	.000
	X <sub>5</sub> = 16.32	.11055	.454
X <sub>3</sub> =24.47	X <sub>4</sub> = 24.53	.00039	1
	X <sub>5</sub> = 16.32	1.35555*	.000
X <sub>4</sub> = 24.53	X <sub>5</sub> = 16.32	1.35516*	0

Significant level at  $p < 0.05$

As indicated in the table above, the comparison among the means of the learning style is significant at  $p < 0.05$ . Therefore, from Table 7, it can be seen that the mean differences between visual and auditory, visual and tactile-kinesthetic, visual and group, visual and individual, auditory and tactile-kinesthetic, auditory and group, tactile-kinesthetic and individual, group and individual are significant. On the other hand, significant mean difference was not observed between the mean of auditory and individual, and tactile-kinesthetic and group learning style; another point to be noted is that the highest mean differences are observed between the mean of tactile-kinesthetic and individual, group and individual learning style. As their mean score indicates the group, tactile-kinesthetic and visual learning styles were preferred most strongly by the participant students. However, to gain a clearer picture of what students report to actually prefer to do in the classroom, it is also worthy to look at some examples items in the questionnaire. Among the six items for group learning style category, 51% of the respondents expressed a strong agreements for “In class I enjoy when I do activities with others.” The item “When I build a model of something in the classroom, I remember what I have learned.” reflecting tactile-kinesthetic learning styles was reported by 62% of the participants as the most preferred ways of learning English in the classroom. Similarly, an item of the visual learning style “I usually learn more when teachers provide me with pictures, tables, and charts.” has been responded by 52% of the participant students as strongly preferred.

**4.2.1. Research question 2: Is there any difference between female and male students with respect to their learning style preference when learning English?**

To better understand the underlying structure of the above general tendencies, the population under investigation has been divided into two subgroups: male and female. The means and SDs of the learning style preferences of these groups have been calculated and the results are presented below in Table 4.

**Table 4: Means and SDs of the PLSPs of Female and Male Students.**

Sex	Visual	Auditory	Tactile-kinesthetic	Group	Individual
Female students mean	22.05	16.88	23.93	24.43	16.64
Male students mean	22.47	17.1	24.92	24.61	16.03
Standard deviation of female students	3.56	4.37	3.54	3.86	4.15
Standard deviation of male students	3.46	3.94	3.26	3.62	5.22

Table 4 indicates that there are some differences observed in order of the learning style preferences between male and female participant students. The female students seem to prefer group learning style most strongly, followed by tactile-kinesthetic and visual learning styles (in that order) as major preferences with means of 24.43, 23.93 and 22.05. However, they indicated auditory and individual learning style categories as minor preferences with means of 16.88 and 16.64 respectively. Notably, although both auditory and individual categories have been identified as minor preferences, the female students seem more in favor of the auditory category with a higher mean score.

On the other hand, the male students showed strongest preferences in the order of tactile-kinesthetic, group and visual learning style categories as major learning style preferences; whereas, the auditory and individual categories that fall into minor and weak preference respectively. The means for the major learning style preference categories are 24.92, 24.61, and 22.47 for tactile-kinesthetic, group and visual respectively with tactile-kinesthetic scoring higher than the rest. On the other hand, the auditory and individual learning style categories are classified as a minor and weak preference with a mean of 17.1 and 16.03.

Generally, the SDs of the learning style preferences of the two groups showed that the male group, having smaller SDs than the female, is more homogeneous than the female group. Interestingly, the two groups have almost the same SD (4.56 for female and 4.51 for male) for the group learning style category which has been identified as the strongest major learning style preference for the whole sample which makes this result even more indicative. Finally, the only case where the female group has a smaller SD than the male group is in the case of the individual learning style preference, which has been identified as weak preference for the male group.

After calculating and reporting the descriptive statistics results, an independent t-test was used in order to investigate whether there was statically significant difference between male and female participants in perceptual modality preference or not. In so doing, the results of the t-test are presented in Table 5 as follows:

**Table 5: Independent Sample T-test for Sex Differences**

Learning style preferences	Sex	N	df	Mean	St.dev	t-value	Sig (2-tailed)
Visual	F	92	198	22.05	3.50	.845	.399
	M	108		22.47	3.46		
Auditory	F	92	198	16.88	4.30	.379	.705
	M	108		17.10	3.94		
Tactile-kinesthetic	F	92	198	23.93	3.54	<b>2.043</b>	<b>.042</b>
	M	108		24.92	3.26		
Group	F	92	198	24.43	3.86	.315	.753
	M	108		24.61	4.01		
Individual	F	92	198	16.64	5.22	.909	.364
	M	108		16.03	4.15		

Significant level at  $p < 0.05$

The results of the t-test revealed that out of the five learning style categories, statistically significant difference was found between male and female students on preference for tactile-kinesthetic learning style. The t-test result ( $t=2.043$ ,  $df=198$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) of this study has found sex to play a significant role in influencing the students preference for tactile-kinesthetic learning style. Male students were found to prefer tactile-kinesthetic learning style than the

female students. This result was supported by mean for males of 24.93 (st.dev. Of 3.26) and 23.93 for females (st.dev. Of 3.54) and data gathered through classroom observation. This will be further illustrated in the discussion section.

**4.1.3. Research question 3: Is there any difference between students in learning style preference based on age?**

**Table 6: Independent Sample T-test for Age Differences**

Learning style preferences	Age	N	df	Mean	St.dev	t-value	Sig(2-tailed)
Visual	13-15	126	198	22.15	3.43	.642	.522
	19-22	74		22.48	3.58		
Auditory	13-15	126	198	17.06	4.19	.285	.776
	19-22	74		16.89	3.98		
Tactile-kinesthetic	13-15	126	198	24.30	3.09	.907	.365
	19-22	74		24.75	3.93		
Group	13-15	126	198	24.43	3.90	.432	.662
	19-22	74		24.68	4.01		
Individual	13-15	126	198	16.53	4.89	.885	.377
	19-22	74		15.93	4.29		

Significant level at  $p < 0.05$

A t-test was also used to investigate the age factor effect on learning style preferences. The results from the independent group t-test showed that there were not any significant differences between the learning style preferences of students who belong to the two age categories (i.e, 13-15 and 19-22) see Table 6 above.

**4.1.4. Research question 4: What teaching styles do teachers prefer when teaching English?**

Assessing teachers' teaching style preferences to see the match/mismatch that exists with students' learning preferences was also one of the objective of this study. Thus, to determine this descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were computed for the teachers' teaching styles preferences.

**Table 7: Descriptive Statistics for Teachers' Responses on the Teaching Style Preferences.**

	Total number of teachers (N=6)	
	Mean	Standard deviation
Visual	23.5	3.89
Auditory	16.33	2.66
Tactile-kinesthetic	22.83	3.49
Group	26	2.53
Individual	15.16	5.64

Table 7 displays the descriptive statistic for teachers with regard to the five style preferences. Based on the mean score in the above table teachers seemed to teach in a way that would accommodate group, visual and tactile-kinesthetic learners respectively. Group style with the mean score (M=26 ) was most preferred, visual (M=23.5 ) being the second most dominant style, and tactile-kinesthetic style with the mean score (M=22.83) ranked third; auditory and individual styles with the mean score (M=16.33) and (M=15.16 ) respectively were the fourth and fifth accommodating styles. No more difference among the SDs of visual and tactile-kinesthetic, group and auditory styles was observed as shown in table7. This implied that teachers have almost similar preference towards these styles. On the other hand, the SDs of individual style showed that there were great differences among teachers towards individual style.

**Table 8: ANOVA of Teachers' Teaching Style Preference Means.**

	Sum of square	Df	Mean square	F	P-value
Between group	540.87	4	135.21		
Within group	362.5	25	14.5	9.32	0
Total	903.37	29			

Significant level at  $p < 0.05$

The data in Table 8, shows that the observed  $F(9.32)$  exceeds the critical  $F(2.17)$  with 4 and 25 degree of freedom at  $p < 0.05$  level of confidence. Therefore, there were differences among teachers' teaching style means. As noted in the previous section the ANOVA results alone were not enough to see between which teaching styles means statistically significant

difference existed. Thus, multiple comparisons among the mean of each teaching style was made and the results were summarized and presented in Table 9.

**Table 9: Tukey Test of the Five Means of Teacher's Teaching Style Preference.**

Teaching Styles		Mean differences	P-value
X <sub>1</sub> =23.5	X <sub>2</sub> =16.33	7.16*	.024
	X <sub>3</sub> =22.83	.66	.99
	X <sub>4</sub> = 26.00	2.5	.78
	X <sub>5</sub> = 15.16	8.33*	.007
X <sub>2</sub> =16.33	X <sub>3</sub> =22.83	6.8*	.048
	X <sub>4</sub> = 26.00	9.66*	.002
	X <sub>5</sub> = 15.16	1.16	.983
X <sub>3</sub> =22.83	X <sub>4</sub> = 26.00	3.16	.609
	X <sub>5</sub> = 15.16	7.66*	.014
X <sub>4</sub> = 26.00	X <sub>5</sub> = 15.16	10.83*	.000

Significant level at  $p < 0.05$

Table 9 shows that the mean difference between visual and auditory, visual and individual, auditory and tactile-kinesthetic, auditory and group, tactile-kinesthetic and individual, and group and individual showed statistically significant differences. On the other hand, statistically significant difference was not found between the mean of visual and tactile-kinesthetic, visual and group, auditory and individual, and tactile-kinesthetic and group teaching styles. Therefore, the conclusion based on the information in Table 9 was, there were real differences among teachers in implementing visual and auditory, visual and individual, auditory and tactile-kinesthetic, auditory and group, tactile-kinesthetic and individual, and group and individual teaching style in the actual classroom.

#### 4.1.5. Research question 5: Is there congruence between students' learning style preferences and their teachers teaching styles

**Table 10: Means of Student's PLSPs and Teachers' Teaching Style Preferences.**

Respondents	Visual	Auditory	Tactile-kinesthetic	Group	Individual
Mean of students' Learning Style Preferences	<b>22.28</b>	17	<b>24.47</b>	<b>24.53</b>	16.32
Mean of Teachers' Teaching Style Preferences	<b>23.5</b>	16.33	<b>22.8</b>	<b>26</b>	15.16
Standard deviation of students'	3.48	4.11	3.42	3.94	4.68
Standard deviation of teachers'	3.89	2.65	3.49	3.53	5.64

Table 10 illustrates that the major styles students preferred the most in learning English were: group, tactile-kinesthetic and visual styles. Additionally, the teachers most preferred styles in teaching English were in the order of group, visual and tactile-kinesthetic styles. The auditory and individual styles were fell into minor and weak preference category for both groups. However, while the same three style categories were chosen as most preferred the order of preference differed

The information gathered from the classroom observations also reveals similar results concerning the visual and group styles. On the other hand, the classroom observation witnessed a different result about auditory, tactile-kinesthetic and individual styles. This will be illustrated further in the discussion section.

## 4.2. Discussion

A global view of the findings related to learning style preferences of the participants shows that the majority of the participants expressed a preference for group modes which involves discussion and collaboration for learning. Furthermore, the visual and tactile-kinesthetic styles were also chosen as major preferences, while individual and auditory learning styles fell into minor and weak preference categories. Questionnaire responses show that while



group learning style is the strongest, major preference were also found for tactile-kinesthetic style (which calls for moving and acting for effective language learning) and visual style (which would call for visual presentation of lesson).

When we view learning styles as a culturally based construct, it is interesting to compare the findings of this study, which investigates grade 9 and grade 11 Ethiopian students, to other studies that have been conducted internationally. The findings of the most preferred learning styles in this study are similar with Ramburuth and McCormick's (2006) findings which discovered that Asian and Australian Students most strongly preferred the learning style of collaboration. Moreover, the findings of this study also concur with those of Park (2000) and Sullivan's (1996) studies in two ways. First, the general tendencies found in the participants students mostly agree with the general tendencies of Cambodian and South East Asian students studied by Park's (2000) and Vietnamese students studied by Sullivan (1996). That is, the participant students in this study strongly prefer group, tactile-kinesthetic, and visual learning styles and those students in Park's (2000) and Sullivan (1996) also strongly prefer group and tactile-kinesthetic learning styles. Second, the students in the former two studies and in this present study all had less preference for the individual learning style. Although we must be careful in learning style studies not to stereotype learners into one learning style category or another based on their culture/where they come from, studies such as the present one may not only be useful locally in the Ethiopian context, but may also begin to inform ESL teachers abroad (with many Ethiopian learners in their classrooms) on the ways in which their Ethiopian students learn best.

The possible explanation of the group learning style preference for the secondary and higher education preparatory school students in learning English may be the educational goal of the curriculum in the present day education system. Because the guidelines in the present day educational curriculum for teaching English in elementary, junior high school and higher education preparatory levels is to enhance students to develop basic communication ability that they can apply in actual environments. This, in turn, leads the students to develop interaction ability for learning English in the classroom instead of passive learning. Therefore, this educational innovation gradually guides students to transfer their major ways of learning for example, reading the information on the blackboards and textbooks, and listening to teachers' lecture to ways of learning like: involving themselves as active learners whereby they can interact with their teachers and classmates to learn the language. Thus, this

trend may likely lead the students to form the group learning style when they learn English. Finally, though discrepancy in exact order of preference was observed, the findings of the major learning styles can lead one to say the participant students in this study preferred and used the group, tactile-kinesthetic and visual styles equally well. In other words, the students are multi-modal learners, and prefer more than one learning styles. Thus, these findings implied that it would be good for teachers to use a multi-style teaching approach while teaching English in the classroom so their students can learn via various styles.

On the other hand, although Mulukens' and the present study both involved Ethiopian learners, the findings of the present study are not exactly consistent, in terms of style preference, with those of Muluken's (2009) findings. Muluken found that the most preferred learning style among Bahir Dar first year students to be in the order of auditory, tactile-kinesthetic, visual, and group learning styles; whereas, the findings of the present study indicate that students in the secondary school and higher preparatory school level mostly preferred group, tactile-kinesthetic and visual modalities for learning English in the classroom. The cause of the difference in the results of the two studies might be the participants enrolled in the two studies. Muluken (2009) participants are University students who studied English as their major field of study whereas the participants in the present study are students who learn English as a subject in secondary and higher education preparatory school. Further, the way learning is structured in high school and university level may also possibly contribute for this difference. Meaning that, for instance, if we look the way learning is structured in the university level: instruction is mainly lecture method with students taking notes, relatively teachers' supports are reduced and students autonomy and self-directed learning are practiced, moreover, regular contact with teachers and classmate is relatively reduced instead lots of independent study outside classroom is practiced. Thus, this, in turn, may encouraged the students to engage in the way of learning behaviors listening to verbal lecture, discussion (talking things through and listening to what other have to say) associated with auditory learning while learning in the classroom so as to support themselves to remember what they have been learned in the classroom when they study alone. However, in the secondary and higher education preparatory level: there is high teachers assistance for students instead of self-directed learning; teachers give home works, assignments, and classroom activities to students, remind them what to do and what not to do, assist the students for the work and check the students work, they also present materials to students to help them understand what they have learned. Teachers also often available for conversation

before, during and after classes. Thus, this trend of the teaching and learning process in the Secondary School and High Education Preparatory level may lead students to form group learning style.

Furthermore, though the present study findings agree with Tadesse's (2010) in that it indicates a sort of similarity in the major learning style preferences for students, there are findings unique for this study. In Tadesse's study, more significant difference were found among the mean of visual and auditory, visual and individual, auditory and tactile-kinesthetic, auditory and group, tactile-kinesthetic and individual, group and individual. On the other hand, significant mean difference were not found among the mean of tactile-kinesthetic and group, visual and tactile-kinesthetic, visual and group, auditory and individual. Whereas, in the present study, except the non-significant statistical results found between the mean of the auditory and individual, and tactile-kinesthetic and group learning style, a statistically significant mean difference was observed among the mean of the rest learning style categories that are: visual and auditory, visual and tactile-kinesthetic, visual and group, visual and individual, auditory and tactile-kinesthetic, auditory and group, tactile-kinesthetic and individual, group and individual. In other words, Tukey test demonstrated that the variable of group learning style preference had significant differences from the other three variables. That is, junior high school and higher education preparatory school students significantly preferred group learning style over visual, auditory, and individual learning styles, and they significantly less preferred individual learning style to visual, auditory, tactile-kinesthetic and group learning styles. What is more, the participant students did not show significant effects on auditory, individual, tactile-kinesthetic, and group learning style preferences. In other words, the students' auditory and individual, tactile-kinesthetic, and group learning style preferences fell in the same rank, however, the students' mean score for the auditory, individual, tactile-kinesthetic, and group learning style seem different.

Thus, from the information in Tadesse's (2010) study, the researcher of this study infers that though the students preference seems to different for the group, tactile-kinesthetic and visual learning styles, the participants preferred and used equally well the group, tactile-kinesthetic and visual learning major learning styles. Therefore, it might be difficult to conclude that the participants who enrolled in Tadesse study have differences in order of preference for these learning style categories. But, in this study it could be possible to draw a conclusion that the participant students had unique and personal preferences for most of the learning style

categories. In this regard, Oxford (2003) avers that learning styles are not dichotomous (black or white, present or absent). They rather generally operate on a continuum or on multiple intersecting continua. For instance, a person might be more extroverted than introverted, or equally visual and auditory but with lesser tactile-kinesthetic involvement. Finally, the researcher of this study, therefore, suggests that the background variable sex might be account for the results mentioned above. Because in this study both the female and male students were take part whereas Tadesse's (2010) participants were only female students.

The findings of the individual learning style being significantly less preferred to the other four learning modalities was similar to Reid's (1987) and Rossi-Le (1989) findings. That is, the mean scores of individual learning style similarly fell into the less preferred category both in the former two studies and in the present study. The reason why the individual learning style was not preferred equally well with the other learning style categories might be the nature of language learning. Meaning that, when comparing English instruction with other subjects like mathematics and social studies, English instruction needs more interaction with teachers and classmates to practice and to use the language in class. In addition, one of the important elements for language learning is to use the language and to communicate with it. Moreover, most of the activities in English learning also did not encourage individual learning. For instance, the practice of question and answer, dialogues, opinion expression, giving permission, asking directions, asking for help and so on are activities that need two or more than two students to practice in most of the time. Thus, it greatly influences the students' modality preference. In this regard, Frod and Chen (2001) noted that when learners involve themselves in learning a foreign language it is difficult to them to develop progress in a language learning by learning it alone. Finally, the weak preference for individual learning style expressed by the participant students could be a reflection of their lack of exposure to individual assignment or learning activities.

Regarding the second aim the findings suggest that except the difference in exact order of preference, the female and male students have similar major learning preference. Moreover, though the means of the male students are higher than that of the female with (1.09) for tactile-kinesthetic style, (0.18) for group style and (0.22) for auditory style, the female students had more positive preference than the male in almost all categories, even the category for which the males showed weak preference. However, the findings of the T-test

reveal statistically significant difference between male and female participant students in the area of tactile-kinesthetic learning style. Male students demonstrated a greater preference for tactile-kinesthetic learning style at  $t = (2.043)$   $df = 198$   $P = (0.042)$  than the female students did. The findings of the classroom observation also witnessed similar results; female students were seen in the classroom when they were reluctant to physically participate in the activity. The results of this study, therefore; similar to Rossi-Le (1989) and Witte (2010), and Maubach and Morgan (2001) findings. Rossi-Le (1989) in her investigation of the relationship between perceptual learning style and language learning strategy she also aimed to see the effect that background variables like: age, gender ethnicity, and culture have on students learning style preferences. She found that the sex variable as a significant variable in the area of tactile-kinesthetic learning style. In her study male students showed greater preference at  $P = (0.031)$  for tactile-kinesthetic learning style than the female students. Moreover, Witte (2010) while studying Egyptian University students learning style preferences, found that at  $F(1,202) = 6.45$   $P = (0.012)$  the male students demonstrated greater preferences for tactile-kinesthetic learning style. In the same vein, Maubach and Morgan (2001) study results indicated that at  $P = (0.001)$  male high school students had significantly more score on tactile-kinesthetic learning style than their counterparts. One possible reason for the present finding might be because of cultural factors that have traditionally encouraged males to engage in the hands-on model building behaviors associated with tactile-kinesthetic learning and might have discouraged females in this regard.

In relation to the age factor, the results of this study indicated that there was no difference between participant students in learning style preferences by age. The results of this study are similar with Park's (2002) who also found no statistically significant age differences in any of the six learning style preference categories. Among ESL learners, Reid's (1987) study also did not show statistically significant difference in learning style preference among students by age.

According to the mean score the group, visual and tactile-kinesthetic styles were fell into the margin of major preference both in the students and teachers group though their preference order is quiet different. In the students: the style via which students are most comfort for their learning after group learning style is tactile-kinesthetic style and the visual style was chosen as third preferred style. But, the sequential order of the mean scores of teachers teaching style preference indicate that the style respected in the second and third place to

teach English are visual and tactile-kinesthetic respectively. What is more, when comparing the mean of students and teachers for the visual, auditory and tactile-kinesthetic styles students mean score show greater preference for tactile-kinesthetic and auditory style while their teachers teaching is highly biased towards the visual styles. To make the discussion more clear, the data that gained via observation will be discussed in terms of each style.

However teachers and students preference for visual style seemed different according to their mean score, the classroom observation witnessed that most of the teachers instead accommodate this style in their teaching. Many of the visual activities were found to be parts of the participants' actual classroom practice. Teachers mostly preferred to write notes, answer for exercises, and instruction for what to do and how to do on the black board. Moreover, while the work was going on, the teachers told to their students to read each point which was given in their textbook. What is more, the teachers sometimes brought visual aids to classroom so as to aid their teaching. As a result, since students were provided with instruction written on the board and the textbook, detail notes written on the board to be absorb the information visually, and with visual aids to relate the lesson they have learned thus most of the students benefited from the teachers teaching in the classroom. This, in turn, leads to say that teachers were found to be in the same path with their students for visual learning style preference.

Concerning auditory style, the findings of the questionnaire reveal that this style fell into minor preference categories both in the teachers and students group. Verbal lectures, discussion, talking things through and listening to what other have to say are some of the comfortable ways where by auditory learners absorb the content of the lesson as Reid (1987) explained. Teachers in the school are found in the good position to accommodate this style as it was noticed in the classroom observation in spite of their self report. All the three teachers frequently taught through lecturing, when they gave answers for activities, they prefer to read each question in the textbook and their answers to the students. They also ordered their students to read aloud the question first and the answer they did next. Moreover, students have allowed to talk freely and expressed their idea while discussing problem in group. Though it was not common for all lesson teachers sometime brought information on CD that related to the daily lesson and displayed through tap recorder in their classroom. Therefore, it can be said that teachers actively give opportunity to their students to encourage and use their less preferred modes. This in turn, helps them benefit from auditory learning style. In line

with this, Felder and Silverman (1988) suggest that Students will inevitably be called upon to deal with problems and challenges that require the use of their least preferred modes, and should be given practice in the use of those modes on a regular basis.

The first place where differences occurred between teachers and students is, in the preference for tactile-kinesthetic style. When comparing the mean there were difference between teacher and students a mean of (24.47) for students and (22.8) for teachers. Likewise, this finding is supported by the classroom observation. Even though most of the students in all the classes that were observed needed to participate in enacting activities, teachers did not teach in a way that it accommodate these students as noticed in the classroom observation. Despite their self-report, many of the tactile-kinesthetic learning activities were not found to be parts of the participants' teachers' actual classroom practice. Except in some instance, data collected from the classroom observation showed that the practices acknowledged by the teacher respondent were not found to be true. Teachers barely used activities that call students for practical involvement in the classroom. Even if the teachers did teach by themselves lessons that presented in the textbook in advance of these students. For instance, teachers were observed while they were teaching a lesson topic like "Steal and Rob", "Asking and Giving Opinion," by themselves even though this lesson invites students for practical involvement. The possible explanation why teachers practice does not match with students' preference for hands-on learning may be because of the textbook. Because, though the activities were presented, no instruction was given clearly for how those activities should be taught. This finding thus implies that when materials and textbooks were organized for the teaching and learning process, it is vital organize them with clear instructions that enable teachers in what way they can teach a certain language activities.

Regarding the group styles, both teachers and students preference seemed to be the same because it fell into the same preference category. In the classroom observation, relatively speaking, some group learning activities were seen employed, and students were encouraged to use them. Accordingly, teachers arranged students in group and gave instructions for what to do in the discussion. Teachers also made students read the text before discussion and ask questions that facilitate overall discussion. This possibly happens only as the activities in the textbooks require a sort of discussion to teach. However, unlike self-reports of the teachers, except very limited instances, teachers' teaching practice appeared to be highly dependent on two common tasks. The first one is getting students to form groups and discuss the activities

in the textbook; and the second one is getting them do activities in the textbook in group. Only one of the teachers was seen providing students with class work and group assignment which was done with other students. However, though the teachers teaching relatively seemed to accommodate the group modalities; there still exist differences between the two groups. Because most of the activities did not appear to be practiced as it was noticed in classroom observation. What is more, even though the teachers arranged the classroom setting for the purpose of group learning, they did not frequently bring activities that enhance students' preference for group learning in the classroom. It was sometime that the teachers used activities that relating to collaborative work as compared to the visual and auditory styles. The disparity in teachers' self-report and actual classroom practice may have occurred possibly because of the theory-based concept of teachers about group learning.

The findings from the questionnaire revealed that both the teachers and students group had less preference for the individual learning style with a mean of (15.16) and (16.32) respectively. However, though the individual style was rated as relatively least preferred style of learning by the student participants, in the classroom observation, it was noticed that even if a few in their number, they were students who have needed to learn independently of their classmates. Because in the classroom some students were seen when they expressed hesitance and unwillingness while their teachers asked them to discuss activities with their classmates. They need to have a sit alone and need to do all activities by themselves. As for teachers, the findings of the classroom observation consistent with teachers' self-report. In the classroom except the one teacher who always striving to encourage independent learning the two teachers did not encourage their students to learn independently of others. Thus, it can be said that teachers neglect teaching some of the important activities that can actually help the students use their less preferred modes. For this reason, it can be assumed that students miss the benefit they get from individual learning.

Although there is a match on some levels, the descriptions above indicate that the EFL students and teachers who engaged in learning and teaching English in Shoa Robit Preparatory School were also confront a mismatch in some degree in terms of the auditory, tactile-kinesthetic, group, and individual learning styles. A number of researchers propose that mismatches often occur and have bad effects on students' learning and attitudes to the class and to English learning (Reid 1987; Wallace and Oxford,1992; Felder 1995; Felder and Silverman,1988; Yu, 2007; Oxford, 1990; Peacock, 2001; Zhenhui, 2001; Mattews and



Hamby 1995). Reid (1987), “the understanding and use of different teaching styles by the instructor, as well as the awareness of individual learning styles by the students, may influence success in the classroom.” (p:91). A similar point of view also expressed by Felder (1995), that style differences between students and teachers consistently and negatively affect student success. Furthermore, Felder and Silverman, (1988) also add that if mismatching occurs between the teaching styles used by teachers and the learning styles of their students “the students are likely to become uncomfortable, bored and inattentive in class, do poorly on tests, get discouraged about the courses, the curriculum and themselves, and in some ways change to other curricula or drop out to other school” (p:28).

Moreover, the findings of this study are in line with what Tadesse (2010), Zhenhui (2001), Peacock (2001), Haynes, (1998) and Felder (1996) observed. All these researchers’ findings’ indicate that students and teachers are often unlike in their ways to learn and to teach. Sharing the same views, William and Burden (1997) noted that each learners and teachers were different and will bring to the learning process a unique set of personal attributes and preferred ways of learning and teaching.

To conclude, generally, the perceptual learning styles of the students in Shoa Robit Secondary Preparatory School are classified into major, minor and weak preferences. The major learning styles preferences were: group, tactile-kinesthetic and visual. On the other hand, auditory, and individual learning styles are considered to be minor and weak preferences respectively. Moreover, the comparison between the learning style preferences of male and female students is consistent with the literature. What is more, previous literatures suggest a difference between the learning style preferences of students because of age factor; significant age effect were not found in this study. Regarding teachers practice in the classroom in accommodating students' preference to learn English match was observed to some degree in areas of visual and auditory styles, mismatch were also seen in terms of the tactile-kinesthetic, group, and individual learning styles.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Summary, Conclusion, Recommendation and Suggestion for Future Research**

#### **5.1. Summary**

This study was designed for the purpose of investigating the students' preference for perceptual and social interaction learning styles, the purposes of this investigation was not; attempt to show that any one group of students is either better or worse than any other. Rather this study sought to determine which perceptual and social interaction learning style is mostly favored by students in a secondary school. The second aim of this study also focused on examining the sex and age factor effect on the students learning style preference. And finally, this study had a purpose to determine the match/mismatch between the students and teachers learning and teaching style preferences. In order to achieve this objective, the following questions were posed:

1. What learning styles do students prefer when learning English?
2. Is there any difference between males and females students with respect to their learning style preferences when learning English?
3. Is there any difference between learners/students in learning style preference based on age?
4. What teaching styles do teachers prefer when teaching English?
5. Is there a match between students' learning style preferences and their teachers teaching styles?

With this in mind, a total of 200 students, of which 92 were female and 108 were male, at Shoa Robit Secondary Preparatory School were selected to participate in this study. The students were randomly selected. The data were collected using questionnaire and classroom observation. Two different scale 5 Likert type self-reporting questionnaires, one for the purpose of identifying the student participants learning style preferences and the other for the purpose of identifying teachers teaching style preferences were employed. A pilot study was carried out to test the reliability of the items. Based on calculated Cronbach Alpha coefficient some necessary improvements were made on the students' questionnaire before using it in the main study. The final calculated Cronbach Alpha coefficient (0.64 for visual, 0.6 for auditory, 0.67 for tactile-kinesthetic, 0.87 for group and 0.8 for individual) were for the students' questionnaire and for the teachers' questionnaire, (0.83 for visual, 0.82 for auditory, 0.86 for tactile-kinesthetic, 0.92 groups, and 0.67 for individual). Both the questionnaires had a total of 30 items of which six items represent each learning style category (see Appendix A and B).

In addition, 3 randomly selected EFL teachers (classes) were observed for 3 consecutive weeks using structured observation checklist (see Appendix C). The observation was made to have a comprehensive image on the teachers' actual classroom practices in relation to learning styles.

The raw data obtained from these instruments were organized and summarized systematically for further analysis. In doing so, both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to analyze responses of the questionnaires. Mean scores and standard deviation were used to describe the students' learning style preferences. One-way ANOVA was computed to see if the difference between the mean scores were statistically significant both for the students and teachers' responses, followed by multiple comparison of mean analysis. T-test was also used to determine the sex and age difference effect on students' learning style preferences. Finally, the descriptive statistical results (the mean and standard deviation) of both students and teachers were compared in order to determine where the match/mismatch occurred between the students and their teacher. Data obtained from the classroom observation was also qualitatively analyzed and triangulated with the empirical findings.

Based on the analysis of the data obtained from the questionnaire and the classroom observation, the major findings of the study included the following points:

- From mean scores for each learning style (Table 1) it could be concluded that students in this study mostly favored group learning style though they were also comfortable with practice that calls for moving and acting in a certain language learning activity (i.e. tactile-kinesthetic style) coupled with visual presentation of lesson (i.e. visual style).
- As for male and female students, the findings reveal that both groups prefer learning through interaction and discussion in group activities, involving physically in classroom experiences, and visual presentation of lesson. However, though the potential preferences of the male and female students for the group, tactile-kinesthetic and visual learning style is almost similar, there still difference exists between the two groups specifically in the area of tactile-kinesthetic learning style. The result of the T-test reveals male students demonstrate greater preference for tactile-kinesthetic learning style at ( $t=2.043$ ,  $df=198$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) than the female students.

- However slight differences were seen between the mean of the two age group (i.e. 13-15 and 19-22), no statistically significant differences were found in relation to age factor as the result of the T-test indicated.
- Regarding teachers practice in the classroom in accommodating students preference to learn English despite their self-report the findings from classroom observation show match to some degree between teachers and students preference in areas of visual and auditory styles and mismatch in terms of tactile-kinesthetic, group and individual styles.

## 5.2. Conclusion

Based on the findings, the following conclusion could be drawn:

With regard to students learning style preference, the findings of this study reveal that the most preferred style of the participant students to learn English were: group, tactile-kinesthetic and visual. Thus from this finding it can be possible to conclude that the EFL students in Shoa Robit Secondary Preparatory School are multi-modal learners. Therefore, employing a multi-style approach with these students might offer some benefit to meet their preference of learning.

As for teachers practice to accommodate students preference to learn in their teaching disparity were seen in the areas of group, tactile-kinesthetic and individual style as it was noticed in the classroom observation. Thus, it can be lead to deduce that teacher practice tend to be focus on some limited students preferences to learn. This in turn leads to say a discussion about how to present information in the classroom and about how to perceive and retain information in the classroom (the teaching and learning) probably should be the primary concern between the EFL teachers and learners in Shoa Robit Secondary Preparatory School. Thus, based on the discussion teachers can be monitoring and adjusting presentation of lesson to accommodate individual differences and enhance the learning of all students. In addition, the discussion also enables teachers to bring varieties of activities to their classroom which in turn give a chance for all students to have at least some activities that appeal to them based on their preferences.

### 5.3. Recommendations

In line with the findings it is recommended that teachers should make effort to teach in a way which matches the students' preferred learning styles. This is because, according to Reid (1987), "the understanding and use of different teaching styles by the instructor, as well as the awareness of individual learning styles by the students, may influence success in the classroom" (p.127). Furthermore, if mismatching occurs between the teaching styles used by teachers and the learning styles of their students "the students are likely to become uncomfortable, bored and inattentive in class, do poorly on tests, get discouraged about the courses, the curriculum and themselves, and in some ways change to other curricula or drop out to other school" Felder and Silverman (1988 p: 28). Such a view has been noted in the literature of second/foreign language learning. Other studies also show that matching teaching styles to learning styles can significantly enhance academic achievement, student attitudes, and student behavior at the primary and secondary school level (e.g. Griggs and Dunn, 1984; Banner and Rayner, 2000) at the college level (e.g. Brown, 2000; Matthews and Hamby 1995), and specifically in second/foreign language instruction (e.g. Oxford, 1990; Wallace and Oxford, 1992).

- The findings of this study indicated that except the auditory and individual learning styles which fell into the margin of minor and weak preference category, the remaining three i.e. the group, tactile-kinesthetic and visual were the most preferred styles for learning English in the classroom. As a result, the school teachers would be advised to incorporate a variety of activities in language classrooms to accommodate at least the most preferred learning styles of the students' and at most all the learning styles in their teaching. For example, teachers can meet the students' preference for group learning by raising questions and problems to be worked on by students in small groups; the teachers can also be given some cooperating homework assignments. For tactile-kinesthetic learning by providing enact dialogues and team competitions; for visual by writing instructions and notes on the board and by supporting the lesson they presented in the classroom by diagrams, pictures, and charts. On the other hand, to help students to flex their less preferred LSPs (to be individual-oriented), teachers might provide time-intervals for students to think about what they have been discussing with their classmate; and assign brief writing and

reflection exercises. Here, caution should be taken by EFL teachers of the school not to expose students in a teaching style inconsistent with their LSPs over extended periods of time.

However, it is worth suggesting that teachers should not teach exclusively based on their students' preferred modes of instruction. Rather, students should be given the opportunity to deal with some problems and challenges that require the use of their less preferred modes by providing them with some practice in the use of those modes. Therefore, caution should be taken by EFL teachers not to teach students exclusively based on their students' less preferred modes of instruction. In this regard, Smith and Renzulli, (1984) Suggest that instructors should help their students build up their skills in both their preferred and less preferred modes of learning. Sharing similar views, Felder (1996) avers that: If professors/teachers teach exclusively in a manner that favors their students' less preferred learning style modes, the students' discomfort level may be great enough to interfere with their learning. On the other hand, if professors/teacher teaches exclusively in their students' preferred modes, the students may not develop the mental dexterity they need to reach their potential for achievement in school and as professionals.

- The findings of this study has also shown the importance of determining students' learning styles, the results suggest that students should be made aware of their learning style preferences. Students may get granted for their learning style preferences. In other words, they should be aware of their learning styles or even the styles of other students. The awareness of their learning styles may encourage them to realize the importance of learning styles and the crucial role they play in their learning. According to Park (2002), knowing ones learning style is important thus conducting survey research is one of the ways to assess students' learning styles. It is important to then make the results available to the students. Similar point of view also expressed by Reid (1987) understanding and identifying students learning styles is important in that they can aid teachers in treating the diversity of learners in a class in one hand. And can also help students to improve and develop their learning of a second language in the other hand. Therefore, in order to understand students learning styles and maximize the effectiveness of their language learning students' learning styles preferences needs to be accompanied by teachers' awareness of their students. Giving this, the researcher would advise teachers of the school to conduct action

research or develop a habit of gathering information about their students learning through open dialog discussion (i.e. asking students to express their feelings on piece of paper about how to learn the language in the classroom or give opportunities to them to express their feeling orally) whereby the teachers are able to identify their students learning preferences and evaluate their teaching. This, in turn, would enable them to verify their teaching way and accommodate the different learning styles in their teaching.

- In doing so, it would be recommended that teachers need to have clear vision and basic concepts about learning styles. Because without understanding the role of learning style in students' learning, it would be difficult for them to perceive the purpose and realize its potential. Hence, in service trainings through workshops and seminars which concern on building confidence and reduce intimidation by demonstrating that teachers do not have to teach many different lessons to accommodate their learners; rather, yet if teachers use a variety of techniques to accommodate the majority of most preferred style, will be giving teachers a service. Then, from such programs, the teachers may be informed about the concept and role of learning styles in the teaching learning process, and how to accommodate learning styles in their teaching. In addition, teachers should be given opportunities to take part in Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programs, collaborative planning, and classroom observation with a peer. Thus, these activities may help share experiences among themselves about their students learning and their own teaching.
- Though the findings of this study reveal that the female and male students have similar major learning preference. However, differences are established between the male and female students in the area of tactile-kinesthetic learning style. Thus, this difference should be reconsidered by teachers when teaching foreign languages for students of different sex in one class. Therefore, teachers should use a wide range of activities with such classes that should consider the females' tendency to seek for group work and suit the male preference for practical involvement or hands-on activity. so that both male and female students are more interested in the subject matter and less likely to become bored with the lessons

#### **5.4. Suggestion for Future Research**

It is hoped that this study will be the basis for future research that would be of substantial benefit to improve instruction, both through modifications in teaching styles and improving learners' self-knowledge.

- Further investigation into teaching and learning styles that includes larger areas would certainly be worthy, as this is the most important component of the teaching and learning process.
- Furthermore, even though this study's results did not show statistically significant differences among students in learning style preferences in relation to their age, further research in the area of age as a variable may be needed to provide valuable insights for the EFL learning and teaching process in the Ethiopian context. Because various studies, for instance, Tia (2000), Nancy (2006), Zimmerman (2007), Dam (1997), Price (1987), and Rossi-Le (1989) claim that age has a great effect on learning style preferences of learners.
- Observation could show a clear picture of the actual practice of teachers in the classroom. Thus, a study of greater length, involving more observations, would certainly be worthy in order to investigate the match and mismatch between students and teachers' style preferences. Additionally, to look further into match/mismatch between students and teachers, they should be asked to provide their perception on this topic.
- Moreover, because learning style preferences are thought to be culturally based, it would be interesting to conduct a study looking at different groups within Ethiopian students.



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