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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

## A Match or a Mismatch between Student and Teacher Learning Style Preferences at King Abdullah Second School for Excellence in Jordan

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| **ABSTRACT**

It is crucial to study learning and teaching styles because some studies have shown that a match between teaching and learning styles helps to enhance the learning process. So, teachers should identify their own teaching styles as well as their learning styles to obtain better academic achievement in the classroom. This study focuses on the students' learning styles, teachers' teaching styles, and whether there is a match or mismatch between student and teacher teaching style preferences in King Abdullah Second School for Excellence in Jordan. The results show that most tenth grade students at King Abdullah Second School for Excellence in Jordan prefer to learn by using visual and individual styles. Also, the English teacher, Mr. Ashraf's major teaching style preferences are visual and individual. Thus, there is a match between the teacher's preferred teaching style and the students' preferred learning style at King Abdullah Second School for Excellence, Irbid, Jordan.

| **KEYWORDS**

Learning styles, Teaching styles, Match, Mismatch.

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### 1. Introduction

Language learning styles, as defined by Reid (1995) as a natural, habitual, and preferred way(s) of absorbing, processing, and retaining new information and skills, have aroused a great deal of attention and been the focus of a number of second language studies in the years since Reid's influential work on the topic was published in 1987.

One of the most important concepts in education is that teachers need to become aware of the uniqueness of their students in order to achieve a better learning outcome. An important aspect of the differences among students is their learning styles and how this affects success in learning (Sarasin, 1999). Several studies have reported that if there is a mismatch between learners' learning styles and methods of instruction or the curriculum, it can adversely affect foreign language achievement (Peacock, 2001 & Selma Kara, 2009). Teachers and students need to know more about each other's approaches to teaching and learning. When teachers know more about students' learning preferences, they will be in a better position to see which teaching styles would be more appropriate and effective in increasing students' learning capabilities. Since the learning and teaching styles play a crucial role in the learning process, educators should not neglect the problem of addressing them. This particular study is interested in determining the learning and teaching styles in King Abdullah Second School for Excellence in Jordan to examine the matching and mismatching between the learners' learning styles and their teachers' teaching styles.

#### 1.1 The Education System in Jordan

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is a small country located in the Middle East. It is bordered by other Arab states, including Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Palestine. The geographical area of Jordan is 97940 Km (Zughoul 2003). The total population number in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is 6 million. The most important professions of the citizens in Jordan are agriculture, minor industry and handicrafts. The state contains limited gas and petroleum resources, as stated by the World Trade Organization

(WTO). Al-Ali (2006) stated that the development and growth of the industrial and agricultural sectors in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is an outcome of the development and progress of the higher education sectors. Gill (2002:22) also says that "the language has penetrated deeply into the international domains of political life, business, safety, communication, entertainment, the media and education". This means that the English language is used in many walks of life today. Besides the existence and usage of the English language in many parts of the world, it is helpful and purposeful for many purposes. It is known as the global language of communication, and the Jordanian people have to learn the language of international communication and the language of telecommunications, computers, and the internet to communicate with the world. Furthermore, having good job opportunities and being able to communicate at the international level would offer people the opportunity to develop and achieve their goals and improve their lives.

The development of higher education in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan started during the sixties when the Teacher's College was founded in the country. The foundation of the academic institutions in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is inspired by the high demand for manpower in the local and international markets. The first university in the state to be founded is Jordan University (1962). It is the main campus and academic institution in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Followed by Yarmouk (1976) and six other government universities around the state. Later, the Ministry of Education declared the foundation of other government and private universities. To date, the number of public and private universities in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has reached 24 since 1989. Furthermore, education in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is offered at different levels, such as post-secondary colleges and universities. The goal of establishing and offering education is to provide specialized training and career oriented education and meet the demand of the local market for skilled labour (Obeidat 2005).

### ***1.2 The Status of English As A Foreign Language in Jordan***

In Jordan, English is taught at primary-secondary schools, colleges and university levels as a foreign language (EFL). The Ministry of Education and Higher Education and Scientific Research takes the responsibility of teaching and learning in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (Bacha, 2002). The goal of teaching EFL in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is shouldered by the two ministries, with which language learners must be familiarized with the four language skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. According to the objectives set by the two ministries, language learners are expected to express themselves, read, and comprehend learning materials.

In addition, they are expected to use English as a foreign language system in their learning process effectively so that they can develop efficient communication skills (Bataineh and Zghoul, 2006). Curriculum planners and designers in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan consider the objectives of teaching and learning EFL in different fields of education, such as science, commerce, arts, management and vocational training. In other words, EFL learning materials are planned to assist learners in communicating personal ideas, opinions, and feelings and deploying well-organized and grammatically correct structures. Therefore, because of the importance of English as a global language, it has grown to be a compulsory subject in teaching and education in Jordan in order to cope with the high of the global markets since the world has become a global village (Al-Khateeb, 2004).

### ***1.3 Research Objectives:***

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To investigate the learning styles of the ten students at King Abdullah Second School for Excellence in Jordan.
2. To identify the teaching styles of the teachers at King Abdullah Second School for Excellence in Jordan.
3. To find out if there is a match or mismatch between the students' learning style preferences and their teacher's teaching style preference.

Based on the objectives of the study, several questions are designed by the researcher to guide this study.

### ***1.4 Research Questions:***

This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the major, minor and negligible learning style preferences of the students in learning English in the tenth grade at King Abdullah Second School for Excellence in Jordan?
2. What are the major, minor and negligible teaching style preferences of teachers in teaching English in the tenth grade at King Abdullah Second School for Excellence in Jordan?
3. Is there a match/ mismatch between the students' learning style preferences and their teachers' teaching style preferences?

### **1.5 Statement of the problem**

The low level of most Arab students in acquiring good English language ability ( Makhzoomi 1986, Rababah 2003, Abdul Haq 1982) is largely recognized and is a source of serious concern to so many EFL teachers. The researcher believes that one of the causes of this deficiency may be due to the mismatch of English language teaching-learning styles used in the tenth grade in Jordanian schools.

As teachers, we sometimes wonder why some students can easily learn what is taught in class, whereas some find it difficult. We also question why some students can learn certain skills but not others and why they cannot learn all other skills equally well. As always, we also wonder why some students do not excel in class as well as others, even though all of them receive the same input from their teachers.

Most of the time, teachers seldom give attention to the problem of what learning styles are suitable for their students. They may not realize that knowing students' learning styles would make the learning and teaching process easier. Teachers were not aware of the problem; hence, the students will learn at the same pace by neglecting their learning styles. Teachers may discover that some of the students perform well, and some of them have problems acquiring the language. Some teachers may ask their students to do as much work as possible so that the students will benefit from them, but they forget that each student has different preferences in learning. Perhaps only some of the students can learn something by doing certain activities in class, but others think it is boring and apathetic to learn.

The students may have a variety of learning styles, but they do not know which one suits them best. Reid (1995) stated two major hypotheses about learning styles form the background to current work in the area: "All students have their own learning styles and learning strengths and weaknesses" and "A mismatch between teaching and learning styles causes learning failure, frustration, and demotivation". In the present research, the students are exposed to their learning styles so that they can harness their learning styles or find out which learning styles suit them with the teacher's teaching styles.

### **1.6 The significance of the study**

The focus of the present research was more on the students' learning and teaching styles. Many people seem to ignore individual styles in the learning process. It is important for us to realize that "people learn in many different ways" (Reid, 1995). Many researchers have done research in this field. They suggested that follow-up research should be conducted in order to create a meaningful learning and teaching environment for both teachers and students.

It is known that most teachers tend to teach in the way they were taught or in the way they preferred to learn. Sometimes, conflicts might arise because of a mismatch between the teacher's teaching style and the learner's learning style, which might have negative consequences both on the part of the learner and the teacher. For this reason, as Stebbins (1995) asserts, teachers should know the general learning style profiles of the whole class, which will enable them to organize and employ instructional materials accordingly.

Raising students' awareness regarding their learning styles might make them not only more prepared for learning but also more analytic about their learning styles. Reid (1995) states that developing an understanding of learning environments and styles "will enable students to take control of their learning and to maximize their potential for learning" (p. xiv).

The researcher hopes that it will contribute to knowledge of learning styles. Furthermore, students can widen their knowledge about learning styles. Since they will be exposed to what learning styles are, they will use them in order to learn the language and must be aware of their learning styles, which are used to enable them to be successful in their studies and to achieve the ultimate accomplishments in their academic demands. The English language is considered a foreign language for those students; therefore, they must be aware of all the demands of the language in order to compete and communicate with other speakers of the English language.

### **1.7 Limitations of the study**

The study was limited to the tenth grade students and their English language teacher at King Abdullah Second School for Excellence in Jordan. The teaching and learning questionnaires administrated throughout the study were those of Reid's. Reid's model is distinct from the other models in that it is based on students' reactions and responses to actual classroom practices and activities. It is also distinct in that it is not based on a general assessment of personality or cognitive characteristics.

Learning styles might be different from one student to another based on the nature of the student himself, the nature of the surrounding environment where the student lives, and other issues. Thus, the results and outcomes of this study cannot be generalized for all Arab students since each country has its own system of teaching the course and has its own surrounding environment that may affect the nature of the students, leading to an impact on their learning styles.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Learning and teaching styles**

People learn in many different ways. For example, some people learn primarily with their eyes (visual learners) or with their ears (auditory learners); some people prefer to learn by experience or by hands on tasks (kinesthetic or tactile learners); some people learn better when they work alone while others prefer to learn in groups. Peavler (2000) stated that in learning music, for example, or anything else, students display a primary mode of learning. If a student is mainly kinesthetic and the teacher never leaves the chair, merely giving verbal feedback, the student, as claimed by Peavler, will quickly lose focus and will not remember more than one or two of the points made by the teacher during the period of the lesson. On the other hand, if the teacher moves around while talking with his students and also allows the students to move, the students will maintain concentration for longer periods of time and be more apt to recall more ideas from the lesson (Peavler 2000, 26-28).

Teaching and learning, as visualized by Angela (2014), are similar in that they are related to advertising and buying an expensive product. Although Angela's point may seem relevant to some extent since teaching, learning, and classroom processes are interdependent, teaching and learning remain an argumentative matter as to what, where, when, who, whom and how to teach and learn. Educational activities are much more than advertising and buying.

Teaching, as described by Teeters (2001), is more than simply laying out the feast of knowledge with the hope that students will be motivated enough to partake. The effect of teaching, as explained by Teeters, can have a significant impact on the levels of student motivation through exciting interest, encouraging learning, and introducing information. In her example, Angela reveals that one can have to buy (Meaningful Learning) with and without advertising (Teaching). As it is commonly known that not all advertisements can attract customers, some types of teaching also may not lead to real learning, especially when both teachers and students have different style preferences, mainly in how to teach and learn, as is the case in formal schooling. Angela confessed, however, that just as advertising managers strive to increase the effectiveness of advertising to produce more buying, teachers also strive to increase the effectiveness of their teaching to produce more meaningful learning. However, "Meaningful Learning" can only be formed by students in their own minds, as indicated by Saunders (cited in Angela 2014).

This simply means that there are conditions to be considered by educationists and teachers to make learning meaningful and find its way into students' minds. Some of the basic but necessary conditions that would facilitate learning are teachers' awareness of students' backgrounds, individual differences, needs, educational capabilities and students' learning styles.

### **2.2 Previous studies**

Many scholars have investigated the learning and teaching styles in different countries to provide teachers and students with a different view of learning and teaching and how to apply them in classrooms. The authors who have done research on this topic are as follows:

Alhourani (2021) investigated the learning and teaching styles among EFL students and their teachers from Saudi Arabia and whether there is a match or mismatch between students' learning styles and their teacher's teaching styles. The findings showed a negative preference towards individual style. The major learning style preferences of the English language teacher were visual and individual, followed by tactile and kinesthetic as his minor style preferences, while his negligible teaching style preferences were auditory and group. There was a mismatch between the teacher's teaching style and the students' learning style.

Meanwhile, in another study conducted by (Amir & Jelas, 2009), it was discovered that students at the University Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) preferred learning styles that were kinesthetic. The study also indicates that the learning styles of the male and female students with regard to kinesthetic and auditory styles are different. Male students seem to prefer both kinesthetic and auditory compared to female students. The study also found that different races have significantly different learning styles. Another study by Hayashi M and Cherry D (2004) examined Japanese learning style preferences and found that Japanese students preferred an auditory-oriented learning style.

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1 Participants of the study**

The subjects of this study were one class-tenth grade in King Abdullah Second School for Excellence in Jordan, which comprised 10 students in addition to one EFL teacher teaching the tenth grade in King Abdullah Second School for Excellence in Jordan. All fifteen students were males, and their ages ranged between 15-16 years old. The English teacher in this study was Mr. Ashraf.

### **3.2 Research Context**

The setting in which this study takes place is the Jordanian High School (King Abdullah Second School for Excellence), which is located in Irbid. The school was established in 2002/2003 during King Abdullah's rule. The school adopts the curriculum approved by the Jordanian Ministry of Education. The students study five days each week, but every Friday and Saturday of each week are official holidays for teachers and students. Students have at least 35 classes each week, 7 classes per day.

### **3.3 Instruments**

#### **3.3.1 Questionnaire**

A questionnaire is one of the data collection methods that can achieve the goal of this study. The researcher used the learning style questionnaire adopted from (Reid, 1995) and the teaching styles questionnaire adopted from (Peacock, 2001). Many scholars (Hourani, 2018; Oxford, Ehrman & Lavine, 1991) have emphasized their research by using those questionnaires.

##### **3.3.3.1 Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (Reid 1995)**

The Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (PLSP) was distributed to a whole class of fifteen students to identify preferred learning styles. It consists of two parts. Part 1 relates to students' demographic characteristics and includes items concerning students' gender and age. Part 2 consists of thirty items, including six learning style preferences: auditory, visual, tactile, kinesthetic, group instruction, and individual instruction. Responses are on a five-point scale ranging from (1) = strongly disagree to (5) = strongly agree. The thirty items measure the perception of learning style preference within various aspects of the learning environment. The auditory learning style includes items 1, 7, 9, 17, and 20. The visual learning style includes items 6, 10, 12, 24, and 29. The tactile learning style includes items 11, 14, 16, 22, and 25. The kinesthetic learning style includes items 2, 8, 15, 19, and 26. The group instruction learning style includes items 3, 4, 5, 21, and 23. The individual instruction learning style includes items 13, 18, 27, 28, and 30.

##### **3.3.3.2 Teachers Teaching Style Preference Questionnaire (Peacock 2001)**

The teachers' teaching style preference Questionnaire attempted to address what current Jordanian EFL teachers' in schools preferred teaching styles. It is a modified version of the PLSP used for the teaching styles by Peacock (2001), and the teacher was asked about his teaching style using the same six categories as the student form. This questionnaire was administered to the English teacher of tenth grade at King Abdullah Second School for Excellence in Jordan to identify his teaching styles. There is a total of twelve items in this questionnaire. Every two statements cover the six teaching style preferences: visual, auditory, tactile, kinesthetic, group and individual.

Statements 5 and 8 are related to visual preference, while statements 9 and 11 are for tactile preference. On the other hand, statements 1 and 7 indicate auditory preference, and statements 2 and 6 indicate kinesthetic preference. Statements 3 and 10 are used for group preference, while statements 4 and 12 are for individual preference.

##### **3.3.2 Semi structured interview**

The researcher interviewed four students and their teachers. The interview will support the questionnaire's results and help the researcher gain more insights into the students' responses in a face-to-face meeting. Seidman (1991:7) asserts that "interviewing is a powerful way to gain insights into educational issues through understanding the experience of the individuals whose lives constitute education. As a method of inquiry, interviewing is most consistent with people's ability to make meaning through language". A set of interview questions were constructed based on the information on the questionnaire. Interviews were conducted with four focal students and their teachers after they filled out the questionnaires.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

Data with respect to students' learning and teaching styles were collected through the perceptual learning style preference questionnaire. Another questionnaire, the teachers' teaching style preferences, was administered with the purpose of identifying teacher's teaching styles. The statistical analyses were conducted by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Regarding the analysis of the results obtained from the questionnaires, descriptive statistics was used to find their major, minor, and negligible learning and teaching style preference categories.

Finally, the interviews with the selected students and their teachers were transcribed based on Gail Jefferson's system transcription (1979) to find information related to learning and teaching styles and determine if there was a match/ mismatch between teaching and learning styles.

### **4. Results**

This section contains the results of the data collected to answer the research questions of this study. Figure 4.1 indicates the overall results of the data from the Perceptual Learning Style Questionnaire of the tenth grade students in the school.

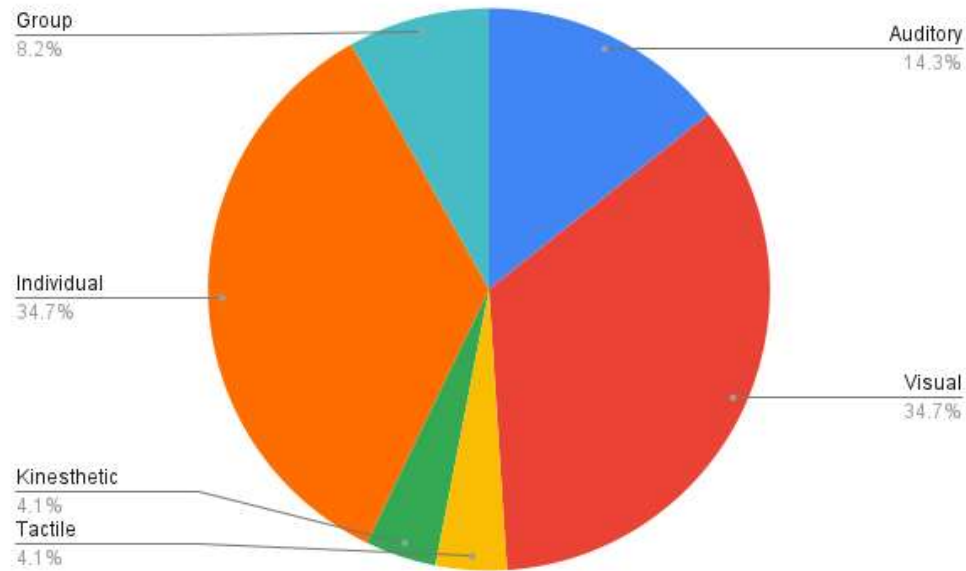


Figure 4.1: The whole group of tenth grade Jordanian students' major preference of learning style

Figure 4.1 indicates that the most representative and popular style was the visual and individual, which means the majority of the tenth grade students in King Abdullah Second School for Excellence had multiple learning styles. The results indicate their percentage as major learning style (34.7%), followed by auditory style (14.3%). Whereas, the group was (8.2%) and only (4.1%) preferred the tactile and kinesthetic style. This can be seen from the extracts below:

R (researcher)      S (student)

**Extract 1**

R: How do you like to be taught in your English language class, Sanad?

S: I like to study by reading alone.

R: How?

S: I prefer to watch YouTube educational channels.

**Extract 2**

R: Which do you prefer, listening to the teacher's explanations or reading them?

S: Reading is better

R: why?

S: I like Reading more than listening because I memorize better in this way.

**Extract 3**

R: Do you like to study in a group or individual?

S: I like individual mmmm because I like to work according to my style ..... group work means different styles

Figure 4.2 shows the overall findings of Mr. Ashraf's teaching style preference according to the Teacher Teaching Style Questionnaire.

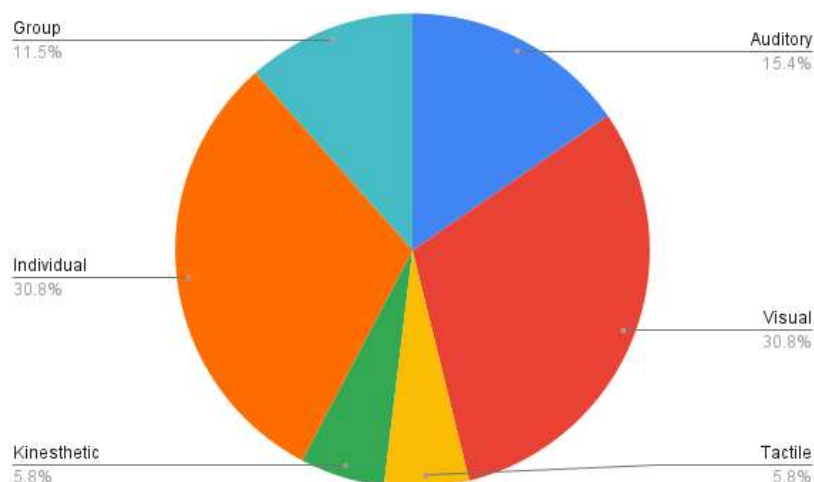


Figure 4.2 Mr. Ashraf's Teaching Style Preferences

Figure 4.2 indicates that visuals and working individually were the highest percentages in his teaching style, with 30.8% followed by auditory and group styles accordingly. Meanwhile, 5.8% prefer tactile and group styles.

By analyzing the data from the interview with Mr Ashraf, the researcher got a better understanding of Mr Ashraf's teaching style in order to answer research question three: "Is there a match/ mismatch between the students' learning style preferences and their teachers' teaching style preferences?". to determine if there was a match or mismatch between the learning styles of the students and the teaching styles of the English teacher of tenth grade at King Abdullah Second School for Excellence.

Clearly, Mr Ashraf preferred to use a visual style most of the time when teaching tenth grade class. It's noticeable from the researcher's interview with Mr. Ashraf that he changed his way of teaching a bit to make students understand better. In terms of working in groups or working individually, he preferred students to work alone, clarifying that if the students were given the opportunity to work in groups, they would waste their time talking to each other out of their lesson, and some of them will be sleepy during their discussion.

From the questionnaire that was distributed and the researcher's interviews with the students and their teacher, it is noticeable that there was a match between their styles, where most of the students preferred working individually and using their eyes to learn as their teacher preferred to. So, their matching was the best approach to enhance their academic performance.

The findings in some previous studies corresponded to the results of this study as there are some similarities and differences. In terms of answering question one, the results showed that the majority of the class had multiple major learning style preferences, which are similar to other researchers on ESL/EFL students. Some of the researchers on EFL/ESL students showed that the majority of ESL/EFL students had visual style as their major style, and this study indicated that the whole class preferred visual style as their major style, but they also preferred working individually as their major style while in the literature review, the majority of the researchers showed working individually as negligible learning preference among their participants. For example, Reid (1987) reported that Chinese students (N=90) studying in the USA disliked individual styles. Likewise, Melton (1990) found that Chinese students (N= 331) liked group styles and disliked individual styles. Different from Melton and Reid's studies, the students in their studies liked to work as groups, while Jordanian students in this case study are more visual, and they like to work individually to understand better and feel more comfortable.

Also, based on the previous studies, these results seemed to be partly similar to other studies done by ESL/EFL teachers. For example, the study done by Wallace (1995), Ghwela (2010), and others found that the largest proportion of teachers preferred individual styles. These findings correspond to the findings of this study, which show that Mr. Ashraf's major teaching style preferences are visual and individual styles.

#### 4.1 Recommendations for further research

Further investigation of students' learning styles associated with variables of learning styles such as gender and whether these differences in gender are related to motivation towards learning a foreign language should be investigated. Moreover, the researcher recommends that other studies in this area should be conducted, as the area is very broad and the research can be taken from different perspectives, with a larger sample over a longer period of time, in order to achieve more generalization of

the findings. Further studies should be conducted to determine if teaching experience or level of education influences teachers' preferences for teaching styles.

Lastly, the outcomes of this research indicate that important differences exist among Jordanian students and Jordanian teachers. Thus, based on the results of this research, it is noticeable that the researcher's learning and teaching styles play a significant role in students' achievement, and it is valuable to carry out such research to determine the factors behind the high, medium, and low achievers.

## **5. Conclusion**

The findings of the study stated that most tenth grade students at King Abdullah Second School for Excellence in Jordan had multiple learning styles, with at least visual and individual as their major learning style preferences. Also, the English teacher, Mr. Ashraf's major teaching style preferences are visual and individual. Thus, there was a match between the teacher's preferred teaching style and the students' preferred learning style at King Abdullah Second School for Excellence, Irbid, Jordan.

Finally, It is crucial to understand each individual's learning style. Once teachers understand and match their teaching styles with their students' learning styles, that can be very helpful and beneficial to the students, which ultimately increases educational success.

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