

Beyond Literacy: Thinking and Learning Styles

**A case study of Iraqi Schools of the
Distinguished**

ما بعد معرفة القراءة والكتابة : أساليب التفكير والتعلم

دراسة حالة مدارس المتميزين العراقية

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إعدادية الخضراء للبنين

يهدف هذا البحث لتسليط الضوء على تأثير أساليب التفكير والتعلم على عملية تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية لطلاب مدارس المتميزين العراقية في جانب الكرخ في العاصمة العراقية بغداد. تم إختيار ١٠٠ طالب (بواقع ٥٠ طالب من الصف الاول المتوسط و ٥٠ طالبة من الصف الثالث المتوسط). تم توزيع استبيان من ٣٠ سؤالاً على الطلبة المذكورين أعلاه وتم إرشادهم لكيفية ملئ الاستبيان بشكل مناسب. أظهرت النتائج أن أساليب التفكير والتعلم تمثل ادوات فعالة ومفيدة للطلاب حيث تساعدهم على تطوير لغتهم الإنجليزية حتى بشكل غير مباشر وبشكل شبه يومي. الكلمات المفتاحية: معرفة القراءة والكتابة, اساليب التفكير والتعلم, اللغة الإنجليزية؛ العقل, الطلاب, الاستبيان.

Abstract

This paper aims to shed light on the influence of Thinking and Learning Styles on the process of learning English upon the students of Iraqi Schools of the Distinguished in al- Karkh side of the Iraqi capital, Baghdad. 100 students were chosen (50 first class students and 50 third class students). A questionnaire consisting of 30 questions was distributed to the aforementioned students as the researcher instructed them on how to fill in the questionnaire appropriately. Results show that Thinking and Learning Styles are effective and useful tools among students that help them improve their English language even indirectly as they practise them almost daily.

Keywords: Literacy; Thinking and Learning Styles; English; The Brain; Students; Questionnaire.

Introduction

Due to their wide importance in our education field, Thinking and Learning Styles become effective tools by their own. Many students around the globe are using them and many and many students are developed and enhance their educational level by using them every day. Since Thinking and Learning Styles are a means of communication, it is clear that students communicate with their teacher through these diverse styles. Therefore, they have a great impact on the way students learn English language being a lingua franca in this changing world. This paper explored the Thinking and the Learning styles in the students' minds. The paper also sought to accomplish some if not many styles and devices, and tools which are characterized by a centralized and effective policy. Moreover, this paper also deals with the effect which Thinking and Learning Styles have on the students' way of learning English. It investigates how students use these styles to learn English as well as age differentiations as there are: first and third class students.

Chapter one

1. Literacy

Literacy is an ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy is a human right essential for lifelong learning and social change Literacy, broadly conceived as the basic knowledge and skills needed by all in a rapidly changing world, is a fundamental human right. Literacy is the ability to read, view, write, design, speak and listen in a way that allows you to communicate effectively. The power of literacy lies not just in the ability to read and write, but rather in a person's capacity to apply these skills to effectively connect, interpret and discern the intricacies of the world in which they live.

Beyond Literacy, the students gradually start developing their styles of thinking or learning. Hence, it can be helpful to create diverse sensory learning styles that combine visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and verbal (Linguistic) styles. Hence, these styles definitely enhance the students' level of thinking and learning processes. (Benson, 2018) I think reading and writing are very important skills for all of us. These skills facilitated our need to learn and acquire new knowledge. The power of literacy skills is not only in reading and writing, but also in the ability of a person to apply these skills to connect, explain, and clearly distinguish the complexities of the world in which they are living. Moreover, the first and most important thing to do for teachers, to help teaching effectiveness, is to have their students have good reading and writing skills.

2. Thinking and Learning Styles

2.1 Thinking Styles

Thinking styles can be defined as the preferred ways of applying the individuals' intellectual ability and knowledge to a problem. The individuals differ on the way they focus their abilities on a particular task in spite of having levels of intelligence. Hence, we conclude that all of us have a certain level of

intelligence, but definitely we don't have the same abilities when focus using on a particular assignment.
(<http://www.learningstylesonline.com>)

2. 2 Learning Styles

Most people use a combination of learning styles, but most of them prefer to learn using only one or two of these styles. If they can learn to use both sides of the neo cortex (whole brain learning), and use different learning styles, their learning will be improved and the quality of education will inevitably be enhanced and maintained. Sternberg (1994), states that individuals have diverse learning styles and a learning style is a preferred way of their abilities. Reid (1995: p. 8), highlights that each individual definitely differs in his/or her preferred way of grabbing, absorbing, and processing new information and skills although this individual may have some strong style preferences and tendencies. Learning styles cannot always be fixed modes of behaviour, but they are based on different situations and tasks. Hence, learning styles can be extended and modified and varied sometimes so as to suit a particular situation. (Reid, 1987; Oxford, 2011; Ehrman, 1996). Griffiths (2012) asserts that the concept of the learning style concept has been recognized since at least the mid-1970s. Then many various dimensions of learning styles have been investigated both conceptually and empirically. Later, there have been different attempts of numerous theories and multiple taxonomies for describing how individuals think and learn and classifying individuals into distinct groups (for example visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, and verbal (linguistic). (Coffield, Moseley, Hall, and Ecclestone, 2004). According to Sternberg, there are three main motivations for the interest in the study of styles: 'providing a link between cognition and personality; understanding, predicting, and improving educational achievement; and improving vocational selection, guidance, and possibly, placement'. Proponent scholars of learning styles assessment in instruction believe that learning styles can be measured and used as a valuable teaching tool inside the classroom. These scholars state that the process of learning can be highly enhanced and boosted up by recognising students' learning styles and matching them to teaching methods (for example for a 'visual learner', presenting information through pictorial illustrations; an 'auditory learner', presenting information through aural illustrations; a 'kinaesthetic learner', presenting information through physical illustration; and a 'verbal learner', presenting information through linguistic illustrations. These styles are applied and used as a valuable teaching tool inside the classroom. (Sternberg, Grigorenko, and Zhang 2008; Pashler, McDaniel, Rohrer, and Bjork 2009).

There are various types of learning styles which are used by individuals. They are:

- Visual (spatial): the learner here prefers using pictures, symbols, flashcards, and creating charts and graphics.
- Auditory (aural- musical): the learner, in this respect, prefers using sounds and music.
- Kinaesthetic (physical): the learner prefers using body, hands, and sense of touch. This type supports students to retain and process information in a different way.
- Verbal (linguistic): the learner, in this kind, prefers using words whether in speech or writing.
(<http://blog.advancementcourses.com>)

3. The Brain Work

There are some main parts of the brain which are active while we are thinking and learning.

These parts are:

- The Brainstem
- The Neo Cortex
- The Limbic System
-

3. 1. The Brainstem

It is the most primitive part of the brain which is responsible for the flow of the messages between the brain and the other parts of the body. It controls our basic functions such as: reactions and movements. When we are stressed, the brainstem will directly slow down thinking and learning. (Brian, 2020)

3. 2. The Neo Cortex

It is the main top and outer layer of the brain which is responsible for thinking. It controls the higher functions of the brain such as: commands, conscious thought, sensory perception, speech, memory, and thinking. (Wolf, Terrence, Sejnowski, and Pasko, 2019)

3. 3. The Limbic System

It is responsible for the emotions, attention, concentration, memory, motivation, organisation of ideas, and learning. It controls our speech (expressive language). It is called CNS which the acronyms standing for: "The Center Nervous System." (Adey and Tokizane, 1967).

The Skill of teaching English

In all developed countries, education becomes their priority concern and ensures esteem and veneration for the human side. (Wang, 2005). Unfortunately the education, in Iraq, has been badly affected for the last two decades as a sequence of wars and sanctions severely damaged its education system. Due to the invasion by the U.S troops in 2003 and till the time being, approximately most of the of the infrastructure in Iraqi higher education institutions has been burnt, looted or severely destroyed in some form. Besides, the assassinations campaign which harvested hundreds of Iraqi academics' and teachers' lives and the ongoing daily threats represented the situation in Iraq's today. Iraq enjoyed a long and proud reputation for its distinguished schools and the quality of its education. Hoffman (2006), states that because of the deteriorating security situation, a curfew is imposed by the government lasting for days on some occasions in the year. Hence, many students are prevented from attending school for many days and that leads to the suspension of school attendance which affects education and the school curriculum cannot be completed. Most of the students, if not all, have suffered a lot from the bad traditional method of teaching English as they couldn't develop their level and skill of learning English and the way teachers present English inside the classroom does not attract students to learn it as they do not use it in daily life (Rashid, 2016: 28). Hence, Iraqi Ministry of Education has begun a renewal movement to develop the skill teaching English language for Iraqi students as a result of weak performance of students in English (Majeed & Hussein, 2017: 71). This process is continuous and every several years, new syllabi are prepared to replace the traditional ones with which students used the native language (Arabic) inside the classroom more than English, focusing on grammar rather than other skills like: vocabularies, etc. Therefore the Ministry of Education explored the communicative method with which students focused on vocabularies rather than grammar. The students welcomed this method as it met their needs and they could develop their level and speak English easily. They learnt a lot of vocabularies and they could easily communicate with each other through English.

Chapter two: The Study

2. Methodology

We use in this case study an analytical method to analyse the results of the questionnaire. 100 students (All of them are boys); (50 third class students ranging from 10-12) and 50 first class students ranging from 13-15 years old) from schools of the distinguished in the Iraqi capital (Baghdad), Al-Karkh District were selected to conduct this study.

The questionnaire consisted of 30 questions that focused mainly on how thinking and learning styles improve the level of most Iraqi students and enhance the quality of their education beyond Literacy. The following results are divided according to the 30 points of the questionnaire. Here are the results:

Important Note: (30-17) for example, indicates that there are 22 Third class students and 17 First class ones.

1. Name (Optional): (Total: 90 mentioned their names, 10 did not), Third class students: (85-8) and First class ones: (5-2).

2. Grade & Gender: First and Third Intermediate classes. Both are Male.

3. Age (optional): 92 reported their age, 8 did not, (Third class students: 80-6, First class ones, 12- 2)

4. Do you think that Literacy is the basic knowledge and skills needed by all in our changing world? Yes 85 (84 - 4), No 5 (1-1). Here, most students believe that Literacy is really the basic knowledge and skills needed by all of us. They form 99% as a whole.

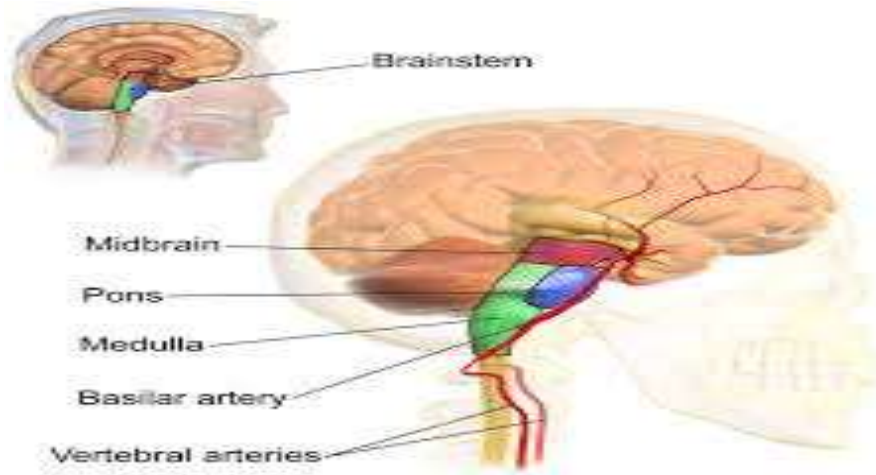
5. Do you think before learning anything, namely, is thinking prior to learning? Yes 70 (50-0), No 5 (20-5). It seems that Third class students fully assert the process of thinking as a prior to the process of learning; while some of First class students believe that the process of learning is prior to the thinking one. However, on the other side, there were only five students who did not provide any answer (they were all First class students).

6. Do you think that thinking and learning activate the parts of the brain?

Yes 100 (50-50), No 0 (Zero!). All students agree with the idea that thinking and learning styles do definitely activate the parts of the brain.

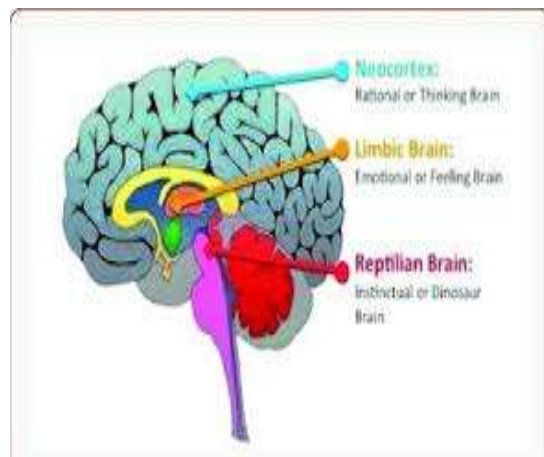
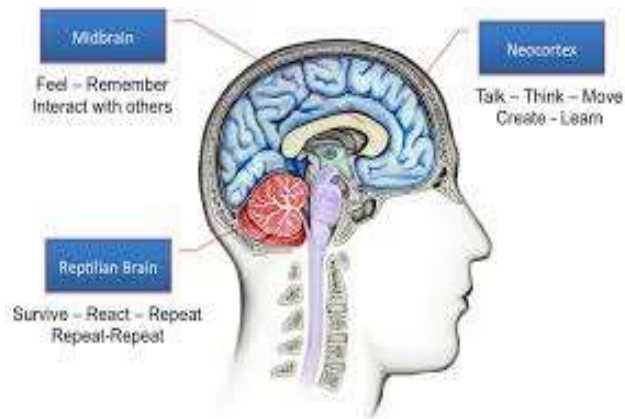
7. Can you think and learn while you feel stress being the Brain Stem is responsible for boosting our learning down or up?

(a) Strongly Agree: 90 (48- 42); (b) Agree: 7 (1-6); (c) Neutral: 1 (0-1); (d) Disagree: 2 (1-1); (e) Strongly Disagree: 0 (Zero!). Approximately most of the students strongly agreed with the notion that while being stressed, one cannot think and learn properly and effectively whereas only one of them was neutral and did not answer directly. We conclude that stress highly affects the parts of the brain which are responsible about the process of thinking and learning.

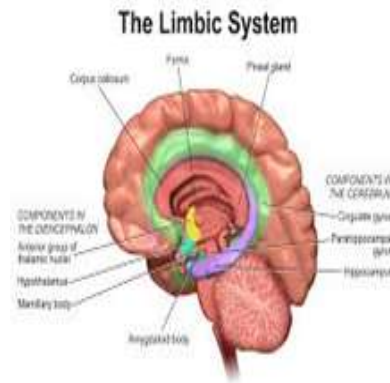
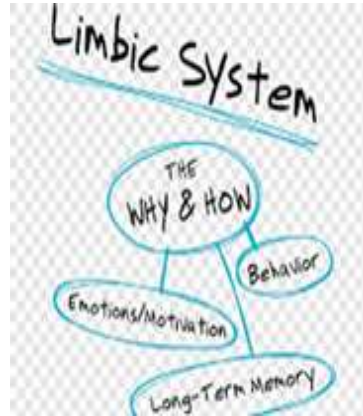


8. How would you respond to the following statement: “We achieve higher levels of thinking using ‘The Neo Cortex’ which is the top layers of our brain.”

(a) Strongly Agree: 100 (50- 50); (b) Agree: 0 (Zero!); (c) Neutral: 0 (Zero!); (d) Disagree: 0 (Zero!); (e) Strongly Disagree: 0 (Zero!). All of the students strongly agreed with the statement since scientifically speaking the Neo Cortex part which is the upper or/ top layer of the brain is the centre of thinking for the human beings.



9. How would you respond to the following statement: “‘The Limbic System’, which is the emotional and the long-term memory part of our brain, helps us remember things well while learning.” (a) Strongly Agree: 100 (50- 50); (b) Agree: 0 (Zero!); (c) Neutral: 0 (Zero!); (d) Disagree: 0 (Zero!); (e) Strongly Disagree: 0 (Zero!). All of the students strongly agreed with the statement as it is a matter of fact that the Limbic system, namely, the emotional brain which is in middle of the brain is responsible for our long- term memory. This indicates that we can remember everything we learn only by this part of the brain.



10. Does thinking support students to be able to judge, analyse and think clearly and creatively? Yes 100 (50-50), No 0 (Zero!). All students agree with the idea that thinking does definitely support us to be able to analyse and judge properly.

11. Does “Mind mapping,” which is a powerful thinking tool invented by Tony Buzan, helps make thinking process visible and make learning fun? Note: Mind mapping is a graphical technique that mirrors the way the brain works. It uses radiant thinking to maximize your Brain untapped Potential. Yes 90 (47-43), No 10 (3-7). The majority of students assert that Mind Mapping enhances their way of thinking and learning and demonstrates their understanding of any subject as whenever they want to study or learn something, they carry out a mind map, for example, by taking notes, planning for revision or for writing and solving any problem. It indicates that this technique helps learners organise their thoughts and ideas. Moreover it radiates out the main subject, chosen to be learned, from the central image on various branches related to that subject. Hence, it is really worth mentioning that this technique radiates thinking out in a way to maximise our Brain Untapped Potential.



12. Are you interested in Learning?

Yes 95(48-42), No 5 (2-3). It seems that most of the students like learning. Concerning the five students whom their answer is No, they explain that they are not interested in Learning while they are nervous, stressed or out of temper.

13. What is your favourite style of Learning?

(a) Visual: 35 (20- 15); (b) Auditory: 45 (25- 20); (c) Kinaesthetic: 10 (2-8); (d) Verbal (Linguistic): 10 (3- 7). Most of the students prefer two kinds of learning which are: visual and auditory styles. They prefer using pictures and images as well as using sounds and music.

14. Do you think your favourite style or/ styles useful?(a) Yes: 100 (50- 50); (b): 0 (Zero!). This refers that all of the students' favourite styles are of a great interest to them.

15. What is your preferred way of auditory learning? (a) Aural: 75 (35- 40); (b) Musical: 25 (15- 10). Most students indicated that they prefer using aural way.

16. What is your favourite way of visual learning?(a) Using symbol and pictures: 15 (10- 5), (b) Using flashcards: 10 (4- 6), (c) Creating charts and graphs: 15 (3- 12), (d) Making outlines: 60 (33- 27). The majority of students like making outlines in their visual learning. They think this way organise the amount of information by using headings, subheadings, and bullet point. They add that this way is a good tool for structuring their learning.

17. What is your preferred way of kinaesthetic learning?(a) Moving while studying: 60 (34- 26); (b) Using your sense of touch: 10 (5- 5); (c) Using your body and hands: 30 (11- 19). This result reflects the interest of students in moving while learning.

18. What is your favourite way of verbal learning?(a) Written materials: 70 (40- 30), (b) Spoken materials: 30 (20- 10). Here written material seems to be their favourite way of learning.

19. If you are auditory learner, what device do you use to grab the information? (You can choose more than one option).(a) Smart phone: 45 (25- 20), (b) Tablet: 20 (14- 6), (c) Laptop: 35 (22- 13). The result here shows that students prefer smart phone and laptop more than tablet.

20. Do you follow any certain accounts, channels, pages or groups which offer help in learning English? Yes 85 (45- 40), No 15 (5- 10). Most students indicated that they follow certain accounts, channels, pages or groups in enhancing their way of learning.

21. If your answer is yes, do you find them useful?

Yes 80 (48- 32), No 20 (2- 18). Most students found them to be useful.

22. Do you think that following these accounts, channels, pages, or groups helps you improve your English?

Yes 80 (48- 32), No 20 (2- 18). This result refers that most students think that these accounts, pages, or groups definitely improve their English.

23. How would you respond to the following statement: "Types of learning help me improve my English?"

(a) Strongly Agree: 90 (49- 41); (b) Agree: 10 (1- 9); (c) Neutral: 0 (Zero!); (d): Disagree 0 (Zero!); (e) Strongly Disagree: 0 (Zero!). To put it in a nutshell, all students agree with the statement that all types of learning do really improve their English.

24. Do you [refer Arabic or English accounts, channels, pages, or groups?

Arabic Pages: 25 (15- 10); English Pages: 75 (35- 40). The majority of students prefer English pages as they offer more chances to learn English.

25. Do you download any material related to these accounts, channels, pages, or groups?

Yes 75 (42- 33); No 25 (18- 17). This result shows that 75% of students downloaded English material from these accounts, pages, channels, or groups. Most students do really improve their skill of surfing the internet to get and download any valuable information related to English.

26. What type of material do you download from these accounts, channels, pages, or groups?

(a) Handouts: 10 (4- 6); (b) Questions & Answers: 20 (12- 8); (c) Other: 70 (34- 36). The result shows that approximately 70% of students downloaded English Material from "Other."

27. Is your teacher using your favourite style in teaching you?

Yes: 100 (50- 50); No: 0 (Zero!). All students approved that their teacher does use their favourite style of learning.

28. Do you think that your teacher has to use diverse auditory, visual, kinaesthetic, or verbal learning styles to suit all students' levels?

Yes: 100 (50-50), No: 0 (Zero!). This result indicates that all students think that their teacher has to use different style so as to fit every student's favourite style.

29. Does your teacher use some devices in your classroom like: Loud speaker or audio set if you are an auditory learner?

Yes: 100 (50- 50); No: 0 (Zero!). All students said that their teacher used these devices while teaching us.

30. Do you think generally that learning and thinking styles are effective styles to facilitate learning English and are good ways to improve the students' skills?

Yes: 100 (50- 50); No: 0 (Zero!). It is obvious that all students think that all thinking and learning style facilitate their understanding and learning English and these styles are really good ways to enhancing their level of learning and thinking.

Conclusion

Results show that Thinking and Learning Styles are powerful tools for assisting students in developing their English language skill. Thinking Styles help students to have an equal opportunity to benefit from teachers' instructions. Moreover, they played an important role in students' achievement. Thinking Styles contributed to achievement. Various Learning Styles like visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, and verbal which all can be invested to create digital learning platforms in the future that are more appealing to students than the traditional and dull ones used in classrooms.

In terms of age, third class students seem to be spending more time on using thinking and learning styles than first class students. Third class students are more active than first class students. This, perhaps, is due to the fact that elder students are more focused on their study than their younger counterparts and they are more experienced in their study for the fact that they accomplished many and various subjects.

We recommend expanding this study in future to cover more and more students as well as teachers from different cultural and social backgrounds to cover other styles like: The Authority Style, The Delegator Style, The Facilitator Style, The Demonstrator Style, and The Hybrid style as they are used in contemporary classrooms by modern teachers.

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THE QUESTIONNAIRE Appendix I

| | | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Name (Optional): | | | |
| 2. : Grade & Gender: | First Intermediate class (Male/ Female) | Third Intermediate Class(Male/ Female) | |
| 3. Age (Optional): | | | |
| 4. Do you think that Literacy is the basic knowledge and skills needed by all in our changing world? | | Yes | No |
| 5. Do you think before learning anything, namely, is thinking prior to learning? | | Yes | No |
| 6. Do you think that thinking and learning activate the parts of the brain? | | Yes | No |
| 7. Can you think and learn while you feel stress being the Brain Stem is responsible for boosting our learning down or up? | (a) Strongly Agree | (b) Agree | (c) Neutral (d) Disagree (e) Strongly Disagree |
| 8. How would you respond to the following statement: "We achieve higher levels of thinking using 'The Neo Cortex' which is the top layers of our brain." | (a) Strongly Agree | (b) Agree | (c) Neutral (d) Disagree (e) Strongly Disagree |
| 9. How would you respond to the following statement: "The Limbic System', which is the emotional and the long-term memory part of our brain, helps us remember things well while learning." | (a) Strongly Agree | (b) Agree | (c) Neutral (d) Disagree (e) Strongly Disagree |
| 10. Does thinking support students to be able to judge, analyse and think clearly and creatively? | | Yes | No |
| 11. . Does "Mind mapping," which is a powerful thinking tool invented by Tony Buzan, helps make thinking process visible and make learning fun? Note: Mind mapping is a graphical technique that mirrors the way the brain works. It uses radiant thinking to maximize your Brain untapped Potential. | | Yes | No |
| 12. Are you interested in Learning? | | Yes | No |
| 13. What is your favourite style of Learning? | | (a) Visual (b) Auditory | (c) Kinaesthetic (d) Verbal (Linguistic) |
| 14. Do you think your favourite style or/ styles useful? | | Yes | No |

| 15. What is your preferred way of auditory learning? | (a) Aural | (b) Musical |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| 16. What is your favourite way of visual learning? | (a) Using symbol and pictures (b) Using flashcards | (c) Creating charts and graphs (d) Making outlines |
| 17. What is your preferred way of kinaesthetic learning? | (a) Moving while studying | (b) Using your sense of touch (c) Using your body and hands |
| 18. What is your favourite way of verbal learning? | (a) Written material | (b) Spoken material |
| 19. If you are auditory learner, what device do you use to grab the information? (You can choose more than one option) | (a) Smart phone (b) Tablet | (c) Laptop |
| 20. Do you follow any certain accounts, channels, pages or groups which offer help in learning English? | Yes | No |
| 21. If your answer is yes, do you find them useful? | Yes | No |
| 22. Do you think that following these accounts, channels, pages, or groups helps you improve your English? | Yes | No |
| 23. How would you respond to the following statement: "Types of learning help me improve my English?" | (a) Strongly Agree (b) Agree | (c) Neutral (d) Disagree (e) Strongly Disagree |
| 24. Do you [refer Arabic or English accounts, channels, pages, or groups? | Arabic Pages | English Pages |
| 25. Do you download any material related to these accounts, channels, pages, or groups? | Yes | No |
| 26. What type of material do you download from these accounts, channels, pages, or groups? | (a) Handouts | (b) Questions & Answers (c) Other |
| 27. Is your teacher using your favourite style in teaching you? | Yes | No |
| 28. Do you think that your teacher has to use diverse auditory, visual, kinaesthetic, or verbal learning styles to suit all students' levels? | Yes | No |
| 29. Do you think that your teacher has to use diverse auditory, visual, kinaesthetic, or verbal learning styles to suit all students' levels? | Yes | No |
| 30. Do you think generally that learning and thinking styles are effective styles to facilitate learning English and are good ways to improve the students' skills? | Yes | No |