Original Article

Relationship between Learning Style Preferences and Nationality Background: A Case Study of Iranian and Iraqi University EFL Students

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between learning style preferences and the nationality background of Iranian and Iraqi University EFL students. A total number of 40 male and female participants, 20 Iraqi and 20 Iranian, majoring in EFL, took part in this study. Based on a qualitative-quantitative design, data-gathering instruments included a refined and validated questionnaire (Cohen et al., 2011) and a semi-structured interview. Associated descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. The results revealed that there was a relationship between learning style preferences and nationality background and the learning styles of students from these two nationalities were different from each other. From a quantitative standpoint, Iranian learners were more open-oriented learners, while Iraqi participants were more closure-oriented in their learning process. The results also revealed that not only were the learning style preferences different across groups, but they were also varied for individuals in each group.

The results of this study offer valuable insights for teachers and instructors who are working with learners from diverse nationalities.

Keywords: Iranian Students, Iraqi Students, Learning Processes, Learning Style Preference, Nationality Background

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1. Introduction

Learning a foreign language, especially English as a lingua franca, is among the most challenging tasks for many people, especially the young generation (Tabatabaei & Mashayekhi, 2012). Language learning has become one of the most important needs in people's lives (Ahmadi, 2017). With the popularity of the English language as an international language and a common means of communication among non-native speakers worldwide, English language teaching has been improving rapidly (Al-Khaza'leh & Mohammed, 2020). According to an old-fashioned perspective, language learning consisted only of passing information from teacher to student, and there was no room for meaningful learning (Akbarzadeh & Fatemipour, 2014). The one-size-fits-all teaching method is not applicable for many reasons, including the fact that learners have different personality traits and prefer different learning styles. It would not be feasible to prescribe a teaching approach to a group of diverse learners since every learner is different and unique (Bahrami Maleki & Seifoori, 2021). The notion of culture can be defined as a set of shared motives, values, beliefs, identities, and interpretations or meanings derived from shared experiences that are passed from generation to generation (House et al., 2004). There are several reasons why understanding the preferences of the learning styles of individuals from different cultural backgrounds is of growing importance in higher education. In the last decade, there has been an increase in the number of international students enrolling in universities in many countries (Holtbrugge & Mohr, 2010). It is becoming increasingly clear to educators that to improve engagement in the classroom, they need to make room for different learning styles, especially for multicultural students (Budeva et al., 2015).

Taking a cultural background into account, Pratt (1992) argues that learning styles may vary by culture (Auyeung & Sands, 1996). To create a learning environment where all students can meet their learning objectives, universities must rethink learning support services, modify curriculums, and adopt teaching approaches (Holtbrugge & Mohr, 2010). In the past few decades, disciplines such as psychology and psycholinguistics have undergone huge changes in the teaching and learning of languages (Akbarzadeh & Fatemipour, 2014). Shabani (2012) noted that many individual differences, such as motivation, introversion, extroversion, field-dependence, field-independence, learning style preferences (LSPs), and other individual differences, have become the focus of attention in different language learning research projects. Al-Seghayer (2021) noted that several factors

contribute to successful language learning, including learning style preferences and language learning strategies. Therefore, when the teacher is aware of these differences, language learning and achievement are more effective. Due to this awareness of learners' learning styles and preferences, teachers and instructors can adjust their teaching approaches accordingly (Naimie et al., 2010).

The scope of LSPs has been extensively investigated in Iran. A variety of comparisons, such as LSPs and gender, LSPs and proficiency, LSPs and age, LSPs and second language achievement, and many other investigations, have been undertaken. In the learning process, nationality background can be a determining factor. To the researchers' best knowledge, not many studies have been conducted on the relationship between nationality background and LSPs, especially in the context of Iran. In Iran, English is an independent field of study, such as English translation and English literature (Naimie et al., 2010). Moreover, until now, in Iraq, no research has been conducted regarding nationality background and its relationship with LSPs, and in the context of Iraq, language learning is based on EFL, as is the case in Iran. It is worth noting that in both Iran and Iraq, EFL is the basis for language learning; therefore, their learning styles can be compared with each other. It is important to note that learners' learning styles differ in English language classrooms. As a new variable, nationality backgrounds seem likely to have an impact on learning styles and how learners learn. The purpose of this study is to investigate the LSPs of Iranian and Iraqi M.A students majoring in TEFL.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Background of Learning Style Preferences

The issue of LSPs is not a new phenomenon in educational settings, as many researchers have found that there are many differences among learners, and individualism has also emerged as a concern. The importance of LSPs in teaching and learning is clearly stated in the following definitions. According to Ellis (2001), the learning style of an individual can be described as the consistent manner in which he or she approaches educational experiences. According to Alqunayeer and Zamir (2015), during the learning process, students' characteristics can be classified as learning styles. Essentially, learning styles are a set of characteristics that students usually display when learning. When it comes to foreign language learning, Bailey et al., (2000) believe that studying the role of learning styles in

foreign language achievement could result in significant improvements in the study habits, flexibility, and performance of students in foreign languages or second languages.

According to Reid (1998), rather than what students learn, learning styles address how they choose to learn. It might be better to complement rather than compete between the different styles. According to Keefe (1979), language learning style is defined as students' perceptions, interactions, and responses to the learning environment which are based on their cognitive and affective traits.

Reid (1995) proposed some fundamental characteristics of LSPs;

- Every person possesses a learning style
- Learning styles are in wide continuums
- They are value-neutral
- Students must be encouraged to "stretch" their learning styles
- Often, students' strategies are linked to their LSPs
- Students need to be aware of their learning strengths and weaknesses

Reid (1987) noted that to learn better and meaningfully, teachers and learners need to be aware of LSPs. Pashler et al. (2008), assert that one's perceptive, emotional, social, and psychological aspects are linked to learning style preferences.

2.2. LSPs Classifications

There are different classifications for LSPs. According to Nunan (1999), LSPs of learners are classified into four main categories: 1) Concrete learners, 2) Analytical learners, 3) Authority-oriented learners, and 4) Communicative learners.

As it is clear, concrete learners are those who employ very direct means of taking in and processing information. Analytical learners, as is clear from its name, are those whose cognitive strengths lead them not only to analyze carefully and demonstrate great interest in structures but to put a great deal of value on revealing their independence by performing these things autonomously. The authority-oriented learners are those who are probably not predisposed to actively organize information; they would like their teacher to explain everything to them, tend to have their textbooks, write everything in a notebook, study grammatical rules, learn by reading, and learn new words by looking at them. Communicative learners are those who have a desire for a communicative and social learning

approach, probably because they feel that this would be most helpful to their needs concerning language learning.

In Kolb's classification of LSPs which is known as David Kolb's learning style model (1984), the learners are classified into four types: 1) Diverger learners, 2) Converger learners, 3) Assimilator learners, and 4) Accommodator learners. According to Kolb's classification, Diverger learners prefer to view situations from some of different perspectives, while Converger learners like to apply practical ideas to problems and perform at their best when there is only one answer. Assimilator learners are competent at understanding a wide variety of information, putting it into a concise, logical order, and excel at creating theories. On the other hand, Accommodator learners enjoy hands-on experience and thrive in new and challenging situations.

In this study, the learning styles will be classified using Reid's (1995) learning style model. According to Reid (1995), learning style is classified into six main types: 1) visual, 2) tactile, 3) auditory, 4) group, 5) kinesthetic, and 6) individual. In this study, the participants will be analyzed according to 23 learning styles divided into 11 categories. A comprehensive assessment of learners' learning styles will be done according to this classification, based on which it will measure in-depth learners' learning preferences.

2.3. Empirical Studies

Researchers have conducted many studies to examine the relationships among learners' learning styles and various variables such as gender, proficiency level, and age, and also, the match and mismatch between the learners' learning styles and teaching approaches were investigated. In a case study by Naimie et al. (2010), the teaching/learning styles matched and mismatched were investigated. This study examined how teaching approaches and learning processes may influence learners' achievement and whether they are matched or mismatched. Moreover, an observational and interview-based data collection method was used. In this study, 310 English major students were enrolled. Based on the results, achievement and improvement occur much better as long as a consistent teaching approach is used and is matched to the learners' learning styles and whenever a teacher's teaching style matches the learners' learning style, achievement and improvement occur considerably more rapidly.

In some other studies, the cultural background as a determinant factor in LSPs was examined. For instance, in a case study by Mohr (2010), the cultural determinants of learning style preferences were investigated. A total of 939 university students from Germany, the UK, the USA, Russia, Ireland, Spain, the Netherlands, Poland, China, and the United Arab Emirates participated in this study. In order to gather the data, Kolb's (1984) model of learning style preferences was used. Results showed that individual cultural values differed in terms of learning style preferences. According to the results, undergraduate students preferred accommodation over convergence, divergence, and assimilation when studying for their undergraduate degrees.

Learning style preference studies provided insights into some low-English proficiency learners. For example, in an investigation by Ahmad (2011), the learning style preferences of low English proficient students were examined. A study of 252 Low English Proficiency students was conducted at a local university to determine their learning style preferences. Furthermore, it explored the role that gender played in determining this particular group's preferred learning style. As a method for collecting data, Reid's (1987) Perceptual Learning Style Preferences Questionnaires were used to assess students' learning styles (Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic, Tactile, Group, or Individual. In order to categorize the learning styles, major, minor, and negative were used. The results revealed that no major or minor learning style preferences were found among the learners. As a matter of fact, there was no preference for any other learning style among learners except for negative learning. Additionally, males and females were distinguished from a gender perspective. Comparing the results of female and male students, visual and auditory learning styles were higher for female students.

In terms of LSPs and their relationship with the cultural backgrounds of diverse learners in an online learning environment, some studies have been conducted. For instance, in a case study by Song and Oh (2011), the learning styles based on the different cultural background of Korean Foreign Language learners in online learning was investigated. In this study, 65 participants from six different cultural backgrounds were enrolled which consisted of China, Japan, the Middle East, Asia, America, and Europe. In this study, Felder and Silverman's Learning Style Model, due to its popularity, was adopted. In order to measure learning styles, some dependent variables such as verbal/visual, active/reflective, sensing/intuitive, and sequential/global were examined. The results revealed that the

relationship between cultural background and LSPs was meaningful. According to the results, the active/reflective style of learning in some practices was influenced by cultural backgrounds. Moreover, some other learning styles, such as sensing/intuitive in vocabulary practices, visual/verbal learning style in grammar practices, and sequential/global learning style in the culture section, were influenced by cultural backgrounds. According to the results of this study, learners from different nationalities or cultural backgrounds have different learning styles; in other words, the relationship between LSPs and cultural backgrounds was meaningful.

In some studies, the relationship between LSPs and nationality background has been examined. For instance, in a case study by Budeva et al., (2015), nationality as a determinant of learning styles for Bulgaria and USA marketing students was investigated. The study examined two samples of undergraduate marketing students from the USA and Bulgaria to determine how they adopt certain learning styles. A total of 187 Bulgarian marketing students and 109 US marketing students participated voluntarily based on Kolb's Learning Styles Inventory. While the two samples differ in terms of Kolb's learning styles dimensions, only one of the dimensions was different, and the majority of students in the two countries preferred the assimilation and convergence learning styles.

It is important to note that from a nationality point of view, it makes sense to work on LSPs and explore the relationship between nationality backgrounds and learning styles for EFL learners. Until now, many studies have been conducted on LSPs and the cultural backgrounds of marketing students, IT students, accounting students, business administration students, and so on. It has been found that, until now, not many studies have been conducted on LSPs and nationality backgrounds. Therefore, in this study, nationality and its influence on LSPs will be assessed, and the following research questions are addressed:

1. What LSP types are characteristic of Iranian and Iraqi university EFL learners?

2. Which type(s) of LSPs have the highest percentage among Iranian and Iraqi university EFL learners?

3. Is there any relationship between the Iranian and Iraqi EFL learners' nationality background and their LSPs?

3. Methodology

Here the research methodology of the present study in four main sections was provided. In part one, a description of the research design is provided, and it explains the nature and method of research. Part two gives information about the demographic background of the participants. The next part stands for the data gathering and instruments of the study and explains what instruments were used. In the last part, the procedure for data collection and data analysis procedure is provided.

3.1. Design and Context of the Study

A mixed method approach (quantitative and qualitative) was followed, and the data analysis was done quantitatively and qualitatively; the main purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between LSPs and the nationality background of Iranian and Iraqi M.A TEFL students of Shahid Chamran University. The data collection instrumentation included a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview.

3.2. Participants

Two groups of Iranian and Iraqi M.A TEFL students from the English department at Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz participated in the study. They were selected through a convenient sampling method. The sample population consisted of 20 Iranian and 20 Iraqi learners. The participants were 19 males and 21 females, and their ages ranged from 23 to 35. Both groups of participants were informed about the importance of the study and its specific purpose.

Table 1.
Demographic Background of the Participants

No. of Students	40 (Graduate)
Gender	21 Females & 19 Males
Native Language	Persian & Arabic
Major	TEFL
Universities	SCU. Shahid Chamran University
Academic Years	2021-2022

3.3. Instruments

The data collection in this study was done through two instruments. First of all, the participants' preferred learning styles information were collected through the use of Cohen et al., (2001) online learning style survey questionnaire. Also, a semi-structured interview was conducted to support the data gathered through the LSP questionnaire.

3.3.1. Learning Style Survey Questionnaire

The data collection in this study was done through two instruments. First of all, the participants' preferred learning styles information were collected through the use of Cohen, Oxford, and Chi's (2001) online learning style survey questionnaire in which the electronic version was used, and it consisted of 110 multiple-choice questions.

3.3.2. Semi-Structured Interview

Also, a semi-structured interview which consisted of 5 questions, was conducted to support the data gathered through the LSP questionnaire. The purpose of this semi-structured interview was to cover other aspects of the participants' learning style preferences not included in the questionnaire. Participants in each group were selected based on how active they were in answering the questionnaire since a semi-structured interview requires a lot of attention on the part of the participants.

3.4. Data Collection Procedure

In this study, the data collection was conducted using a Learning Style Survey questionnaire (close-ended) and a semi-structured interview (open-ended) with EFL students. Upon starting the study, participants were informed of the purpose of the study and how long it would take them to complete the questionnaire and semi-structured interview. The participants were also informed that their responses would have a significant impact on the outcome.

In the first step, the reliability and validity of the questionnaire were checked. The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed by Composite reliability. Based on the nature of the questionnaire, which is divided into 11 parts of different learning styles, the Composite reliability was the most appropriate statistical formula. Before conducting the main study, a pilot study was conducted to refine and confirm the validity of the questionnaire. In this pilot

study, 65 Iranian and 13 Iraqi students participated. At this stage, the online questionnaire survey was sent to the participants, and the validity of the questionnaire by Confirmatory Factor Analysis was assessed. Based on the gathered data, some of the sub-parts of the questionnaire did not confirm the required validity; therefore, the factor load of those questions was removed from the questionnaire. After checking the reliability and validity of the questionnaire, the Online Learning Style Survey Questionnaire was sent to both groups via social media which took about 30 minutes. The number of participants was 20 Iranian and 20 Iraqi M.A students (19 males and 21 females). Following the completion of the questionnaire, the next step was to interview the participants. The purpose of the semi-structured interview was to cover major topics or areas of interest not addressed by the questionnaire, including general opinions about language learning and teachers' teaching approach. In the semi-structured interview, some predetermined questions were provided to the participants to make up their minds about the interview questions, such as their general idea and familiarity with LSPs which took time about 20 minutes to answer all five questions completely. The participants were 10 Iranian and 10 Iraqi students of Shahid Chamran University (14 females and 6 males). It is worth noting that the interview was conducted in English for both Iranian and Iraqi students.

3.5. Data Analysis Procedure

The next step entailed analyzing the collected data from a quantitative and qualitative perspective using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27 and thematic analysis, respectively. The statistical procedures for the first and second research questions were descriptive statistics which consisted of Mean, Skewness, Kurtosis, and Standard Deviation. As for the third research question, the Chi-square, Cramer's V, and T value were used to analyze the collected data.

4. Results

Here, the results of the data analysis in response to study research questions were provided. First of all, the reliability and validity results of the questionnaire were provided. Then the results of the questionnaire and numerical data from a quantitative standpoint were presented. Afterwards, the qualitative results of the semi-structured interview were presented in detail.

4.1. The Reliability of the Questionnaire

The reliability of the questionnaire was calculated by Composition Reliability. The value of this criterion must be higher than 0.70 to be accepted. The Composition Reliability (Delvin p – Goldstein) for all 11 parts of the questionnaire related to the components was higher than the criterion mentioned, which was 0.70. This confirms that the measurement model is reliable for all 11 parts.

4.2. The Validity of the Questionnaire

The results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis and their t-scores were analyzed. In Confirmatory Factor Analysis, if the factor of each indicator with its structure has a t-value higher than 1.96 at the 0.05 level and 2.58 at the 0.01 level is positive, then this indicator has the necessary accuracy for measurement. All of the items except items 4, 16, 17, 18, and 20 in the first part and question 5 in the 5th part had appropriate factor loads, and according to the t-score, they were significant at the significance level (Sig).

4.3. The Results of the First Research Question

To answer the first research question which seeks the relationship between LSPs of Iranian and Iraqi EFL learners, descriptive statistics, including Mean, Standard Deviation, Skewness, and Kurtosis were performed.

Table 2.
Descriptive Statistics of LSPs for Iranian Participants

LSPs	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Visual	34.71	5.01	0.34	-0.46
Auditory	31.20	4.91	-0.29	0.17
Tactile	28.51	6.56	0.26	0.44
Extraverted	18.02	4.28	0.15	-0.06
Introverted	20.75	3.44	0.21	0.11
Concrete Sequential	21.40	3.34	-0.08	-0.46
Random Intuitive	22.16	3.45	0.14	-0.24
Closure Oriented	15.04	3.00	-0.11	-0.75
Open	12.25	2.79	0.17	0.35
Global	17.55	3.18	-0.42	1.09
Particular	16.93	2.85	-0.21	1.23
Analytic	16.00	3.10	0.13	0.84
Synthesizing	18.72	3.50	0.03	-0.68
Sharpener	10.66	2.05	0.08	-0.05
Leveler	9.32	1.68	0.17	0.13
Inductive	9.99	2.05	0.25	0.12

Deductive	10.40	2.38	0.30	-0.25
Field Independent	11.05	2.04	-0.20	-0.17
Field Dependent	9.21	2.36	-0.15	-0.18
Reflective	10.76	2.04	0.30	-0.99
Impulsive	10.21	2.16	0.33	0.01
Metaphoric	6.71	1.79	-0.46	0.27
Literal	6.29	1.76	0.40	-0.00

According to Table 2, the highest Mean score for Iranian students was related to the Visual learning style, (34.71) with an SD of 5.01; furthermore, the lowest Mean score and SD (6.29 and 1.76) was related to the literal learning style. Most of the Iranian participants learn better when they rely on their visual senses and through visual means such as diagrams, graphs, charts, and so on. Therefore, their focus on the learning process was based on the visual style of learning. On the other hand, based on the obtained Mean score, the literal style of learning was the least preferred learning style among Iranian participants. Most of them did not prefer to learn through representations and explanations of concepts in a literal manner. It seems that, in their opinion, the literal learning style was not enough for them in the learning process and did not meet their needs of them appropriately.

Table 3.

The Results of Descriptive Statistics of Iraqi Students for Each of Their LSPs

LSPs	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Visual	37.94	5.12	-0.05	1.12
Auditory	33.84	6.03	0.18	0.82
Tactile	31.91	5.85	-0.10	0.51
Extraverted	21.16	4.43	-0.44	-0.32
Introverted	21.94	4.08	-0.34	0.64
Concrete Sequential	22.97	3.49	-0.04	0.47
Random Intuitive	24.78	3.85	-1.35	2.43
Closure Oriented	17.03	2.49	-0.59	-1.04
Open	11.81	2.50	-0.15	-0.53
Global	18.72	3.28	-0.01	-0.48
Particular	18.72	3.19	-0.43	0.41
Analytic	17.50	3.03	-0.35	-0.03
Synthesizing	19.66	3.28	-0.73	0.89
Sharpener	11.19	2.37	-1.25	3.50
Leveler	9.81	2.02	-0.67	4.09
Inductive	10.44	1.86	0.35	0.18
Deductive	10.84	2.15	-0.01	-0.11
Field Independent	10.78	1.80	0.34	-1.01

Field Dependent	10.59	2.01	0.37	-0.18
Reflective	11.94	1.99	-0.60	1.22
Impulsive	11.19	1.87	-0.16	0.99
Metaphoric	7.44	1.64	-0.16	-0.27
Literal	6.75	1.72	0.21	-0.18

According to Table 3, the results of Iraqi academic learners were shown in each of the learning styles, and as can be seen, the highest Mean score was related to the visual style of learning which was obtained at 37.94 with a Standard Deviation of 5.12 and based on the obtained results, the majority of Iraqi participants same as Iranian academic learners, learn best through visual means. On the other hand, their lowest preferred learning style referred to the literal style of learning with a Mean score and Standard Deviation of 6.75 and 1.72, respectively.

4.4. The Results of the Second Research Question

To answer the second research question which seeks the highest percentage of LSPs of each group of learners, frequency distribution and frequency were used. The status of each learning style on the spectrum was divided into three parts: Low, Average, and High.

Table 4.
The Results of Both Iranian and Iraqi Responses to Each LSPs Based on Frequency Distribution and Frequency

	Iraq			Iran		
Style	Low	Average	High	Low	Average	High
Visual	40	47	113	15	52	133
%	20	23.5	56.5	7.5	26	66.5
Auditory	88	34	78	50	42	108
%	44	17	39	25	21	54
Tactile	95	46	59	30	67	103
%	47.5	23	29.5	15	33.5	51.5
Extraverted	52	40	108	18	62	120
%	26	20	54	9	31	60
Introverted	45	45	110	15	42	143
%	22.5	22.5	55	7.5	21	71.5
Concrete Sequential	90	51	59	66	59	75
%	45	25.5	29.5	33	29.5	37.5
Random Intuitive	41	59	100	80	42	78
%	20.5	29.5	50	40	21	39
Closure Oriented	88	34	78	53	45	102
%	44	17	39	26.5	22.5	51
Open	15	52	133	47	52	101
%	7.5	26	66.5	23.5	26	50.5
Global	25	123	52	94	70	36
%	12.5	61.5	26	47	35	18

Particular	40	89	71	58	12	130
%	20	44.5	35.5	29	6	65
Analytic	23	49	128	16	25	159
%	11.5	24.5	64	8	12.5	79.5
Synthesizing	13	23	164	9	48	53
%	6.5	11.5	82	4.5	24	26.5
Sharpener	17	55	128	16	71	113
%	8.5	27.5	64	8	35.5	
Leveler	26	89	85	125	52	23
%	13	44.5	42.5	62.5	26	11.5
Inductive	29	12	159	90	51	59
%	14.5	6	79.5	45	25.5	29.5
Deductive	54	66	80	15	52	133
%	27	33	40	7.5	26	66.5
Field Independent	85	64	51	41	46	113
%	42.5	32	25.5	20.5	23	56.5
Field Dependent	35	65	100	13	23	164
%	17.5	32.5	50	6.5	11.5	82
Reflective	43	58	101	58	64	78
%	21.5	29	50.5	29	32	39
Impulsive	21	61	118	20	60	120
%	10.5	30.5	59	10	30	60
Metaphoric	18	62	120	45	45	110
%	9	31	60	22.5	22.5	55
Literal	16	40	144	14	25	161
%	8	20	72	7	12.5	80.5

According to Table 4, the most preferred learning style of Iraqi learners was the synthesizing style of learning, with 82% in the high spectrum, 11.5% in the middle or average spectrum, and 6.5% in the low spectrum obtained. It means that the majority number of Iraqi academic learners learn best through summarizing materials, synthesizing them, and guessing the outcomes. Regarding Iranian LSPs, most of them tended to the field-dependent style of learning. According to the frequency and percent distribution, 82% of respondents were in the high spectrum, 11.5 in the middle, and 6.5 in the low spectrum. Based on the results, they learn better when they deal with information holistically, and they can work best without distractions.

4.5. The Results of the Third Research Question

To answer the third research question, which seeks the relationship between LSPs and nationality backgrounds, the Chi-Square test was used, and since the intensity of the relationship was not known, Cramer's V test was used.

Table 5.

The Results of the Relationship between Nationality Background and Lsps

LSPs	Chi-Square	Sig	Cramer's V	Sig	T value	Sig	Nationality
Visual	13.24	0.00	0.18	0.00	-3.08	0.00	Iraq
Auditory	16.14	0.00	0.20	0.00	-2.43	0.01	Iraq
Tactile	49.65	0.00	0.35	0.00	-2.57	0.01	Iraq
Extraverted	21.89	0.00	0.23	0.00	-3.49	0.00	Iraq
Introverted	19.40	0.00	0.22	0.00	-3.35	0.00	Iraq
Concrete Sequential	6.18	0.04	0.12	0.04	-2.23	0.02	Iraq
Random Intuitive	18.15	0.00	0.21	0.00	-2.81	0.00	Iraq
Closure Oriented	13.42	0.00	0.18	0.00	-2.78	0.00	Iraq
Open	20.89	0.00	0.22	0.00	-3.15	0.00	Iran
Global	57.47	0.00	0.37	0.00	-2.93	0.00	Iraq
Particular	79.32	0.00	0.44	0.00	-2.00	0.04	Iraq
Analytic	10.96	0.00	0.16	0.00	-3.77	0.00	Iraq
Synthesizing	12.38	0.00	0.17	0.00	-2.34	0.21	Iraq
Sharpener	2.99	0.22	0.08	0.22	-1.57	0.11	Iraq
Leveler	110.20	0.00	0.52	0.00	-2.92	0.00	Iraq
Inductive	101.28	0.00	0.50	0.00	-3.49	0.00	Iraq
Deductive	31.53	0.00	0.28	0.00	-2.81	0.00	Iraq
Field Independent	41.75	0.00	0.32	0.00	-2.23	0.02	Iran
Field Dependent	50.72	0.00	0.35	0.00	-2.36	0.02	Iraq
Reflective	5.01	0.08	0.11	0.08	-1.19	0.23	Iraq
Impulsive	0.04	0.97	0.01	0.97	-1.45	0.15	Iraq
Metaphoric	14.70	0.00	0.19	0.00	-2.34	0.02	Iraq
Literal	4.54	0.10	0.10	0.10	-1.35	0.18	Iraq

According to Table 5, the estimated highest Chi-Square value for the Leveler learning style (0.525) and its significance value (Sig) was less than 0.05 (Sig < 0.05); this points to a relationship between participants' learning styles and their nationality background. It should be noted that Cramer's V was used to determine the intensity of the relationship between nationality background and learning style. This coefficient in the Leveler learning style was estimated to be equal to 0.525, and to find out whether the intensity of the relationship is meaningful or not, the value of 0.05 was used as a criterion for comparison. If this estimated value is less than 0.05, the intensity of the relationship will be meaningful. As can be seen in all learning styles, except for Sharpener, Reflective, Impulsive, and Literal learning styles (which were estimated more than Sig > 0.05), the intensity of a significant relationship had been reported.

4.6. The Results of the Semi-Structured Interview

According to Figure 1, the majority of Iranian participants (66.07 %) preferred to learn through a visual style of learning. In their view, whenever they are provided with visual materials in university such as Power Points, they can learn better. The second highest

percentage belonged to the auditory learning style (20.00%). They preferred to be presented with podcasts and audio files. Based on the above results, 6.07% of respondents were interested in the kinesthetic style of learning. They asserted that they learn better when in their learning process, they start writing or doing some other activities. In the last group of respondents (6.07%), the preferred learning style was the inductive style of learning.
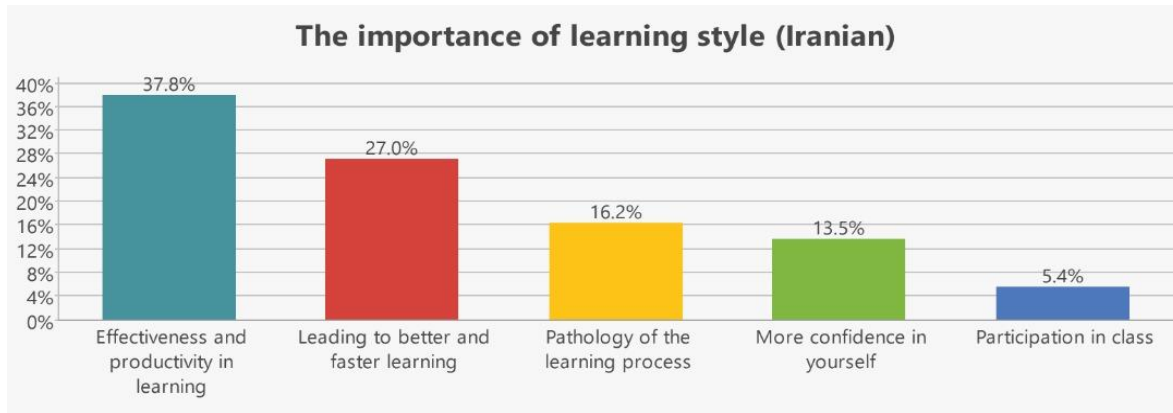
Figure 1.

The Iranian Learning Style Preferences
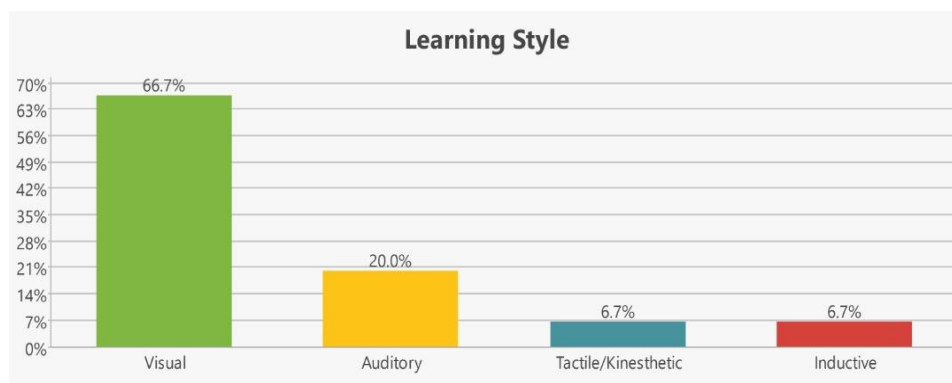
According to Figure 2, most of the participants (37.08%) stated that the importance of LSPs and their awareness promotes productivity in the learning process. As can be seen, the second highest percentage (27%) belonged to participants who believed that the awareness and importance of LSPs lead to better and faster learning. The next group of respondents (16.02%) were in agreement that awareness, as well as the importance of LSPs, can be useful in diagnostic aspects of the learning process. The fourth group of respondents (13.05%) asserted that the importance and awareness of LSPs improve their self-confidence which means that by awareness of learning styles on the part of the instructors, the university materials are learned better. The lowest percent of participants (5.04%) asserted that the awareness and importance of learning styles cause success in the learning process, and the least number of obstacles are created in the learning process which in both situations, learners find the spirit to participate in class activities.
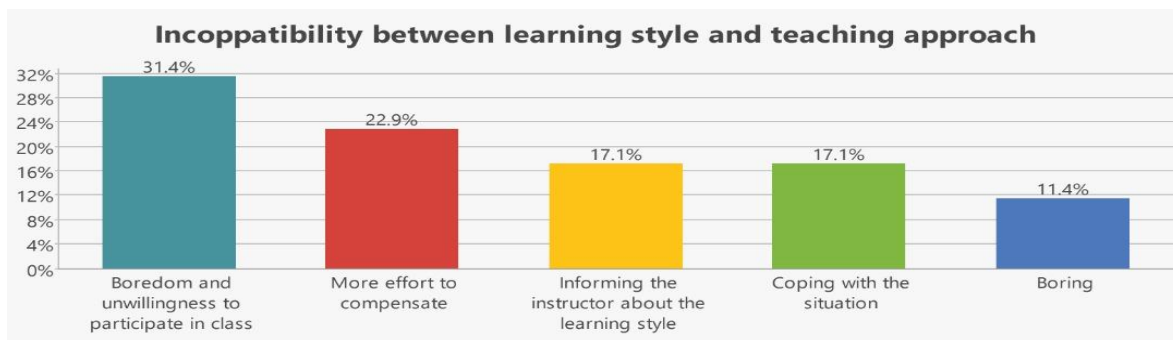
Figure 2.

The Importance of Learning Style and Its Awareness from Iranian Participants' Viewpoint

As the figure 3 indicates, some of the Iranian participants (31.04%) reported boredom and diminished motivation to learn. The next highest percentage (22.09%) belonged to participants who believed that more effort should be made to overcome such educational obstacles. They would try to apply new styles outside until they came up with an appropriate solution. The next percentage belonged to 17.01% of respondents who believed that in such situations, they should inform the instructor about their learning styles. On the other hand, some of the participants, 17.01%, preferred to cope with the situation without any effort. They stated that trying to change the situation by either changing teacher approaches or adjusting their learning styles to match the teacher's approach was pointless and time-consuming. According to the results, 11.04% of respondents say nothing can be done if their learning styles and teachers' approaches are mismatched.

Figure 3.

The Act of Iranian Participants in Incompatibility between Their Learning Styles and Teaching Approach

According to Figure 4, some of the participants (36.08%) were in agreement that the learning styles can be changed through instruction and believed that they are not fixed at all. Several of other participants (31.06%) stated that only by repetition the related learning style could be changed, and they believed in the changeability of learning style preferences in the learning process. As can be seen, the next highest percentage of participants (21.01%) were in agreement that the learning style could be changed over time, and they believed in the changeability of learning style preferences. Few of the respondents (10.05%) stated that learning styles never change and are innate. They believed in the un-changeability of learning style preferences.

Figure 4.

The Idea of Iranian Participants Regarding Learning Styles' Changeability
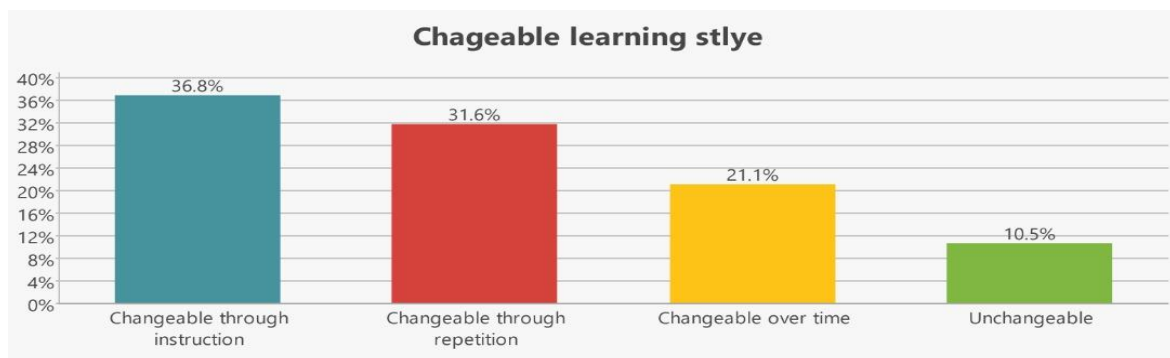
According to Figure 5, half of the Iraqi participants (50%) learn best through the visual style of learning. When their learning process is accompanied by visual materials such as PowerPoint files, charts, and diagrams, their learning process occurs successfully. Several other respondents (21.04%) preferred an auditory learning style. They stated that when the classroom is provided with podcasts, they can focus on materials and learn best. As can be seen in Figure 5, 14.03% of respondents preferred the learning style as an inductive style of learning. They asserted that in the Inductive learning style, they could have a better focus on learning materials as well as the learning process that occurs best for them. Another group of respondents (7.01%) favored the kinesthetic style of learning. They asserted that in the kinesthetic learning style, their learning process occurs best as well as with the lowest barriers in their learning process. The lowest percentage of the above display belonged to the deductive style of learning. As can be seen, some of respondents (7.01%) preferred to learn deductively.
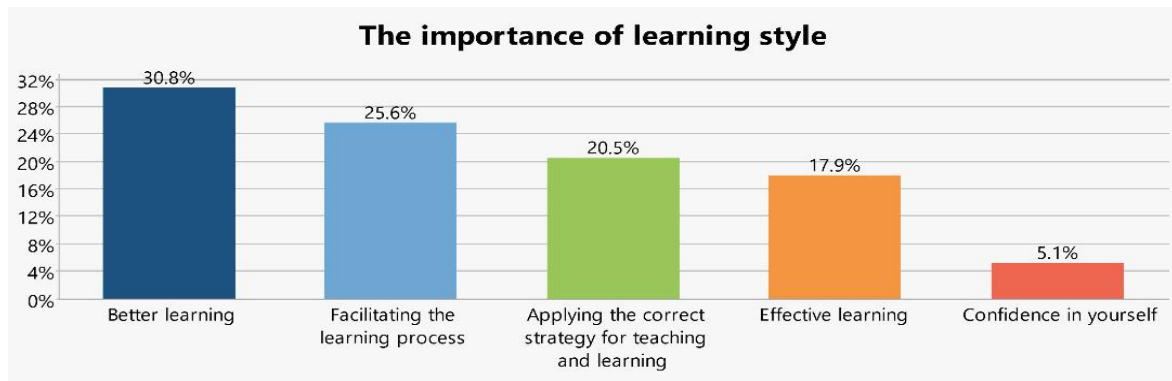
Figure 5.

The Learning Style Preferences of Iraqi Participants
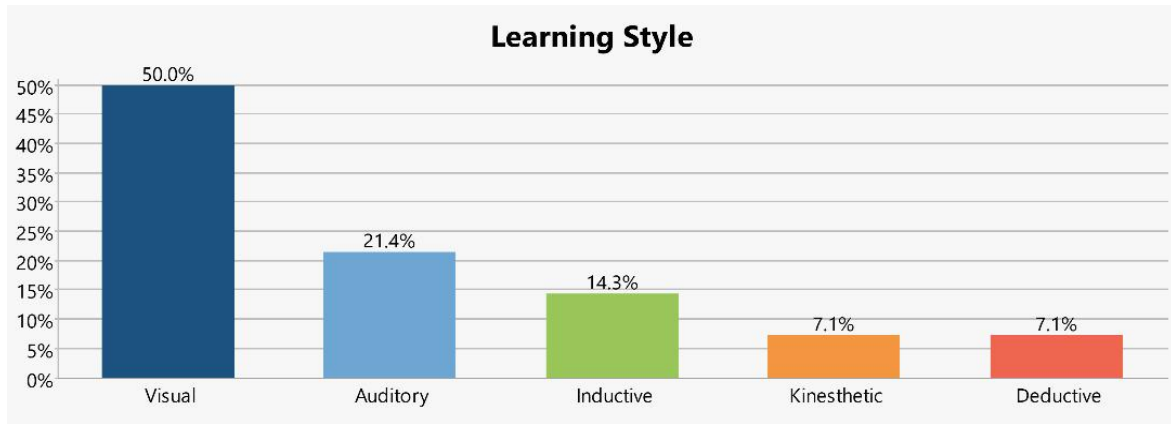
According to Figure 6, the Iraqi respondents (30.08%), regarding the importance and awareness of learning style preferences, believed that it causes better learning, it would be beneficial, and also the barriers to learning removed. Some of respondents (25.06%) believed that it entails facilitating the process of learning, and most of the problems in the learning process, teaching approaches, and also the ineffectiveness of teaching methods in classrooms are the results of unawareness of learning styles. As can be seen, 20.05% of respondents believed that the awareness and importance of learning styles result in applying the right strategy for teaching and learning. They stated that the success in teaching approaches for teachers and the learning process are all the results of the awareness of LSPs. Another group of respondents (17.09%) was in agreement with the awareness of learning styles and their importance in effective learning. They believed that when the learning styles took series in the educational settings, the learning process happened, and as a result, success in final exams occurred. According to Figure 6.6, the least number of respondents (5.01%) stated that the awareness of learning styles results in self-confidence.
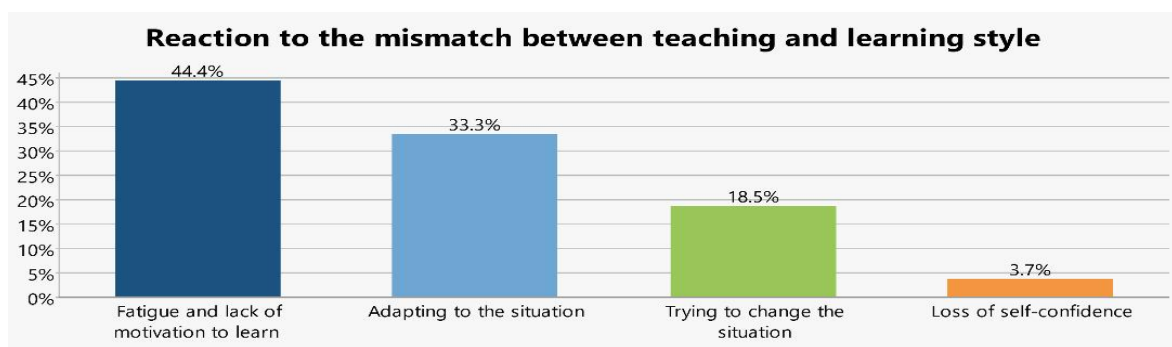
Figure 6.

The Importance of Learning Style and Its Awareness from Iraqi Participants' Viewpoint

According to Figure 7, some of the respondents (44.04%) stated that when they were faced with a mismatch between their learning style and teaching approach, they lost their motivation completely which caused a breakdown in the learning process. As can be seen, 33.03% of respondents tried to adapt themselves to the situation. They believed that it would be impossible to expect teachers to be aware of all students' LSPs, and that's because the best way in such a situation would be an adaptation. According to the next group of respondents, 18.05% of them believed that when they were faced with incompatibility between a teacher's teaching approach and their learning style, they preferred to change the situation either by informing the teacher about their learning styles or by searching for other options to cope with such problem. The lowest percentage of respondents (3.07%) lost their confidence and stated that they did not know what to do in such situations. In such situations, they left themselves with no appropriate solutions.

Figure 7.

The Act of Iraqi Participants in Incompatibility between Their Learning Styles and Teaching Approach

According to Figure 8, approximately half of the respondents (42.09%) believed that learning styles could be changed by instruction. They believed in the changeability of learning style preferences in the learning process. 35.07% of respondents believed that learning styles could be changed only through time. They were in agreement that the learning style preferences are not fixed and can be changed over time. The next group of learners (21.04%) stated that their learning styles could be changed by social media. According to the results, none of them believed in the un-changeability of learning style preferences.

Figure 8.

The Idea of Iranian Participants Regarding Learning Styles' Changeability
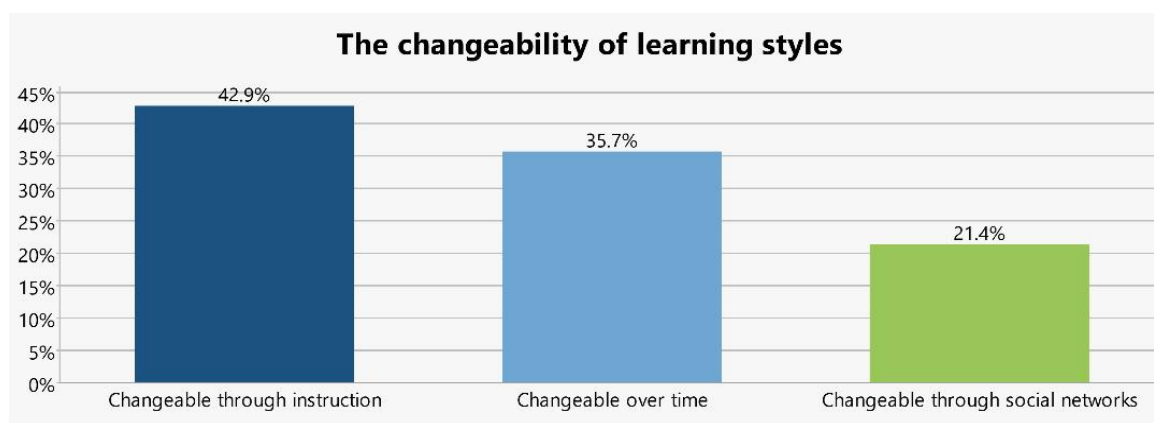
5. Discussion

In this study, three research questions were designed and investigated. The first one seeks to explore the LSPs of Iranian and Iraqi EFL learners. By answering the questionnaire, the participants' tendency toward that learning style was demonstrated. According to the gathered data and findings of the questionnaire, a total of 11 parts of different learning styles were selected by participants, and they were examined from the highest to the lowest selected percentage.

The first part of the questionnaire dealt with physical senses which contained three learning styles; visual, auditory, and kinesthetic/tactile learning style. According to the results, both groups of Iranian and Iraqi participants preferred the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles. According to Reid's (1987) Perceptual Learning Style model, visual learners benefit from seeing information on a whiteboard or in a project presented in front of them. In Reid and Erhman's Classification (1995, 1996), the oral-aural learning

channel is more appealing to auditory learners. Therefore, auditory learners seek out conversations, discussions, and group activities and typically prefer to be presented with oral directions. The participants who preferred the tactile/kinesthetic learning style, in Reid's (1987) Perceptual Learning Style model, learn successfully when they are actively involved in classroom activities, taking part in field trips and role-playing. The next preferred learning style by both groups referred to the second part of the questionnaire which dealt with the exposition of the learning situations. This part divided learners into two groups; extroverted and introverted learners. According to Reid and Erhman's Classification (1995, 1996), the main interests of extroverted learners are concrete experiences, interacting with people outside their learning circle, and forming relationships with them. On the other hand, learning occurs best when introverted learners are allowed to work independently. This means that they are capable of working on their own. According to the results, as mentioned before, all of the learning styles were chosen by both groups of participants from the highest to the lowest percentage, and none of the categories of different learning styles were abandoned by the two groups of participants. According to the results of the first research question, all participants were not inclined toward one or more specific learning styles because each learner is different from another. Following Anggrawan (2021), learners have different learning style preferences as well as different ways of processing information. It is a preference of some to learn alone, while it is a preference of others to interact with their peers. Lectures are enjoyable to some, but experiments are more enjoyable to others (Pariafsai et al., 2015).

The second research question seeks to answer the highest percentage of the learning styles of each group of learners. From a quantitative standpoint, the findings of the study revealed that in the Iranian group of participants, the highest percentage belonged to field-dependent groups (82%) who were more dependent on their learning preferences (Cohen et al., 2002). According to Brown's Classification (2000), an individual who is field-dependent prefers to see a problem or idea holistically or in a general perspective and to perceive the whole picture. On the other hand, the most preferred learning style among Iraqi participants belonged to the synthesizing style (82%), which, by summarizing and guessing the meaning from the context of its use, learns best. So, when the teaching activities are more based on summarizing lessons, predicting the outcomes, and challenging activities, this group of learners learn better which coincides with their style of learning (Cohen et al., 2002). From

a qualitative standpoint, the findings of the interview revealed some other preferred learning styles for both groups of learners. In response to the first question of the semi-structured interview, which was about the participants' preferred learning style, 50% of Iraqi participants and 66.7 % of Iranian participants preferred the visual learning style. They asserted that most of the time, when the teaching approaches are accompanied by visual means such as pictures, diagrams, photos, and PowerPoint files, their learning process occurs successfully because when their sight senses are combined with learning materials, they can internalize, learn, and memorize much better. The second place, the auditory style of learning, was their preferred learning style. They asserted that when they listen to audio files and podcasts, especially in language learning, they can focus more on materials and learn better. Furthermore, they asserted that when they are provided with listening, and speaking activities, such as free discussions and role plays, their learning process occurs best. The findings of this research question are in line with Asadipiran's (2016) findings. In her study, the young learners' learning styles among Iranian EFL learners were investigated. In this study, some learning styles, such as visual learning style, auditory learning style, individual learning style, tactile learning style and group learning style were investigated. The findings revealed that most of the participants' preferred learning style was visual style learning. According to Asadipiran (2016), there are differences in students' preferences regarding how they perceive, process, absorb, and comprehend information.

The third research question dealt with finding out whether there is a relationship between LSPs and nationality background or not. As the results specified, the relationship between all of the learning styles except for sharpener, reflective, impulsive, and literal, and nationality background was meaningful. According to the results, all of the learning styles' meaningfulness and intensity were shown. Among them, the leveler style of learning had the most intense relationship with nationality background for Iraqi learners, which means that this learning style is based on the person's nationality. According to Cohen et al., (2002), the leveler groups' learning styles prefer to bundle materials together to remember better. Furthermore, they like to eliminate and reduce the differences and focus more on similarities. The second place, the Inductive groups' learning style is examined as meaningful. According to the results, the inductive style of learning was preferred by Iraqi learners. According to Cohen et al. (2002), in the Inductive groups' learning style, the participants do not pay attention to the rules and theories; rather, they prefer to go from specific to general.

Moreover, they learn best when the instructors begin with sample answers or examples; therefore, when the teaching approach is accompanied by samples or examples, these kinds of learners benefit a lot (Cohen et al., 2002). Based on the results, the third highest extent of Chi-square and its intensity of LSPs and their relationship with nationality background referred to particular groups of learning that belong to the Iraqi learners. According to Reid and Erhman's Classification (1995, 1996), a particular learner tends to remember specific details about a topic well and concentrates more on details. At the next level, the Global groups of learners are placed.

The participants from both groups of Iranian and Iraqi nationality background preferred different learning styles. There was a meaningful relationship between their LSPs and nationality backgrounds. The results were similar to the findings of Song and Oh (2011). The learners from six diverse nationalities and different cultural backgrounds had different LSPs. Moreover, the findings are consistent with Mohr's (2010) findings, which examined the cultural determinants of learning style preferences. Based on the results, students from 10 nations differ in their cultural values. The obtained results showed that a learning style that suits one group of nations was not beneficial to another group. Additionally, the results are in line with Budeva et al., (2015) findings. As measured by Kolb's Learning Styles Inventory, marketing students from two nations, USA and Bulgarian, had different learning styles, and learning style preferences between the two nations were different. These findings are in line with Reid's claim that supported the difference in learning styles in various cultural backgrounds. According to Reid (1987), there are differences in perceptual styles among students from different cultural backgrounds. It is worth noting that the results of this study contradict Saad's (2017) investigation which sheds light on the relationship between LSPs, gender, and ethnicity. According to the obtained results, the relationship between LSPs and gender was meaningful, whereas no meaningfulness was detected between LSPs and ethnic backgrounds.

According to another phase of the study, the first question of the semi-structured interview, which asked about the LSPs of participants, among the learning styles preferred by the participants, visual, auditory, kinesthetic, inductive, and deductive were the most prominent ones (except for the deductive style in the case of Iranian participants). Iraqi learners preferred all of the mentioned learning styles; however, Iranian learners did not prefer the deductive style of learning. According to the findings of the interview, the

deductive style of learning was preferred by Iraqi participants only; therefore, it can be concluded that the deductive style of learning is based on nationality background. Regarding the importance and awareness of LSPs in education, both groups of learners expressed their self-confidence, because they feel comfortable that the learning styles are taken seriously by the instructors, and as a result, they trust that the teaching approaches are based on their learning style. Both groups were in agreement that awareness as well as the importance of learning style not only on the part of instructors but also on the part of learners are undeniable and cannot be overlooked. Irrespective of building self-confidence for both groups of learners, the Iranian participants also asserted that the awareness and importance of LSPs, cause effective and productive learning, better and faster learning, more participation in class, and so on. In line with Iranian participants, the Iraqi participants reported that the awareness of LSPs in educational settings can have positive outcomes, such as facilitating the learning process and effective learning. From their point of view, the priority in teaching approaches is detecting the learners' learning styles; otherwise, a lot of time and energy will be wasted due to the use of inappropriate approaches by instructors.

Regarding the next question, the incompatibility between participants' learning styles and teachers' teaching approach, some of the Iranian participants expressed that in such a situation, they get bored and unwilling to participate in class and cope with the situation, while some others believed in fixing the situation by compensating and finding other ways to learn better, or informing the instructor about their style of learning. The former case was not hopeful about changing the situation to a better mode which is matching the teaching approach to their LSPs, whereas the latter case believed in problem-solving. The Iraqi participants were divided into two groups coping with the situation, loss of self-confidence, lack of motivation in class, and trying to change the situation. Based on the results, the former participants believed that coping with the situation would be the only way because there were many students in class with different personalities and learning styles. None of them are similar to each other, and they are different in learning, so the instructor cannot manage all of the LSPs in class. They expressed that due to the number of students with various learning styles, it would be unfair to expect the teachers to meet all the needs of the students. On the other hand, the latter case believed that they should change the situation and solve the mismatch. They asserted that in such a situation, the learning process works slowly, and more importantly, the learning does not occur successfully. Therefore, trying to change

the situation and removing the obstacles from the learning process is obligatory and undeniable. The last question of the interview dealt with the changeability of LSPs and the impact of instruction on them. According to the obtained results of the interview, all of the Iraqi participants believed in the changeability of learning styles. Regarding this question, they divided into three groups; the first group expressed that the learning styles can change by instruction. They asserted that learning styles are not fixed and absolute; therefore, by exercising and with the help of instructions, they can be changed. The second group stated that learning styles can change over time; no one has his or her learning style that is appropriate for his/her kindergarten classrooms. The third group expressed that the variety of learning styles is great. In social networks such as different language learning sites, they can look for the learning styles that best suit them. Regarding Iranian participants, they are divided into four groups. The first two groups expressed that the learning styles can change through instruction and repetition, respectively. According to their answers, with useful instructions, the old learning styles give way to new learning styles, and when someone finds a learning style that is more useful than his learning style, the process of changing occurs easily. According to the obtained results of the other group, by repeating and exercising, the learning styles can be changed successfully. According to them, learning styles are relative, and with time, energy, and practice, they can be changed. In line with Iraqi students, the third group of participants asserted that learning styles could change over time. They expressed that it would be irrational to expect that learning styles cannot be changed to any degree. The last group of Iranian participants was against the changeability of learning styles. According to them, the learning styles are not relative, and even if someone tries to change his or her learning style, the learning process does not occur successfully, and in the end, he or she comes back to his/her learning style. According to the expressed ideas about the changeability of LSPs, only Iranian participants believed that the learning styles cannot be changed, while Iraqi participants asserted that learning styles are not absolute and can be changed whether over time, by instruction social networks, and education sites.

6. Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, learners with different nationality backgrounds had different learning styles; in other words, the relationship between their LSPs and nationality

background was meaningful. Culture affects how learners process information, relate to other people and interact in the classroom (De Vita, 2001).

According to the findings, the relationship between learning styles and nationality backgrounds was meaningful. In other words, both groups of participants preferred different learning styles. For instance, according to the findings of the semi-structured interview, in both groups of learners in response to their preferred learning styles, the deductive style of learning was not preferred by Iranian learners. The deductive style of learning was preferred only by Iraqi learners. There were many other learning styles that were most preferred by one of the groups, such as the field-dependent style of learning which was most preferred by Iranian learners, and the least of the Iraqi learners preferred this style of learning. On the other hand, most of the Iraqi learners' preferred learning style was the synthesizing style of learning, while the least of the Iranian learners preferred it. So, it can be concluded that learners from diverse nationality backgrounds have different learning style preferences.

The results of this study can help teachers and instructors to be more aware of learning style differences, especially for international students in face-to-face or online classes. Nowadays, because of the emergence of technological tools, language-learning websites, and computer-based language learning, many learners from diverse nationalities can participate in such classes. According to Liegle and Janicki (2006), the popularity of online learning has grown exponentially. Nevertheless, most current online learning designers and instructors use the same pattern and process across a variety of learning classrooms. Therefore, as much as the teachers and instructors are aware of learning style preferences, the challenges for teachers and learning style obstacles in the learning process of learners are solved. The number of participants in this research was 20 Iranians and 20 Iraqi EFL learners, and due to the limitation of the number of Iraqi students and the necessity of equal numbers of two groups in this study, it was not possible to increase the number of participants to make the results of this research more general. Based on the area of this study, many other studies can be conducted, such as the relationship between learning style preferences and anxiety or the relationship between learning style preferences and the place of study that can be referred as the effect of environment on learning style preferences.

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