Chapter Five Discussion

This chapter, composed of four sections, discusses the results of the present study. First, the results of the Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire and Motivational Intensity Questionnaire are discussed. Second, the researcher discusses and compares students' and teachers' preferences for textbook activities. Then, the relationship between the participants' perceptual learning style preference and their preference for textbook activities, and the relationship between motivational intensity and their preference for textbook activities are presented. Finally, the researcher discusses the relationships of textbook activity preference to student background variables, including English achievement and gender.

Learning Style Preference

Results of the Perceptual Learning Style Questionnaire and the motivational intensity Questionnaire are discussed in this section.

Perceptual Learning Style Preference

The results of the Perceptual Learning Style Questionnaire (PLSPQ) show that the percentage of students that had auditory learning style is the most, followed by group style, kinesthetic style, visual style, individual style, and tactile style the least. Except for students that belong to each learning style category, the results also reveal that there are 17.6 percent of students that had multiple styles, which means that they had more than one major learning style preferences. Different from Chen's (1999) study, the highest percentage of students' learning style preferences fell into visual learning style while the lowest is multiple learning style preference.

Among the six perceptual learning styles, the participants preferred auditory learning the most (M=3.46), which corresponds to the findings in Reid's (1987), Cheng's (2001), Tseng's (2001), and Tso's (2002) study. Cheng (2001) explored the preferred learning styles of students at an institute of medical technology in Taiwan and found that most students perceived auditory style as their most preferred learning styles. Similarly, the subjects in Tseng's (2001) study preferred auditory style the most. Reid (1987) also found that the Chinese subjects in the study preferred auditory learning the most compared with the other eight ethnic groups. These findings are also similar to those of Price's (1980) study. According to Price, elementary school students' perceptual learning styles developed as follows. Their preference for kinesthetic/tactile modality develop first, followed by visual preference in the middle elementary years, and then by auditory modality in the late elementary and early secondary school years. In the present study, the student participants in junior high school in Taiwan also showed a similar tendency. Many of the participants preferred to retain information through the auditory sense, they would learn better when being told how to do something in class, and they can understand better when the teacher tells them the instructions (Reid, 1995). Besides biological development, most teachers in junior high school in Taiwan usually give lectures in class; in this way, classroom instruction is often delivered in an auditory fashion. The student participants' preference for auditory learning style may result from such common instruction practice (O'Brien, 1989; Kinsella, 1995; Cheng, 1997).

In addition to auditory learning style, the student participants also expressed strong preference for group and kinesthetic learning styles. Group learning is preferred second to the auditory style (M=3.36), which means that the junior high school students in the present study prefer to learn in a group, and they would learn best and get more work done when working with others (Reid, 1995). The result

corresponds to the findings in some previous studies. Rossi-Le (1995) found that Chinese adult immigrant students had strong preference for group learning, and so did the Chinese students in Cheng's (1997) study. Similarly, the subjects in Tseng's (2001) study preferred group-learning style second to the auditory style, and Tso (2002) found that the senior high school students in her study also expressed a strong preference for group learning. Results of Chen's (2004) study also showed that most subjects preferred a style of learning in collaborative work. The reason why these subjects preferred group learning style may be due to the fact that Chinese society as a whole places high premium on group cohesiveness (Stebbins, 1995) and collectivism (Nelson, 1995), which means that Chinese students are often encouraged to concern and work for the group instead of for themselves.

Kinesthetic learning style, like auditory and group learning styles, also produced a mean higher than 3 on a five-point scale (M=3.33). This indicates that kinesthetic learning style is the third most preferred learning mode and that the junior high school students in the study prefer to learn by doing something in class or by being actively involved physically in classroom activities (Reid, 1995). The result is similar to Reid's (1987), Rossie-Li's (1995), Tso's (2002), and Chen's (2004) findings. Reid (1987) found that compared with eight other ethnic groups, Chinese students expressed stronger preference for kinesthetic learning. In Rossi-Le's (1995) study, although there were no clear explanations as to how she defined one's level of preference for a particular learning style, the Chinese subjects did show strong preference for kinesthetic learning. Similarly, Tso (2002) found that the senior high school students in her study expressed more than moderate preference for kinesthetic learning style while most subjects in Chen's (2004) preferred kinesthetic learning style.

On the other hand, the junior high school students in this study did not show strong preference for visual, tactile, and individual learning styles. To be specific, students' preference for visual learning is at a medium degree (M=3.02), which means they did not prefer to learn through the eyes, such as reading texts, handouts or having visual aids (Reid, 1995). In line with the result in the present study, the subjects in Reid's (1987), Tso's (2002), Ko's (2002), and Chen's (2004) studies did not show strong preference for visual learning style. However, these findings are in contrast with the results in some previous studies that most Chinese language learners tended to display visual preference (Rossi-Le's, 1995; Oxford, 1995; Reid, 1995; Cheng, 1997). Keefe (1987) pointed out that as individuals mature and learn to read, they gradually shift from tactile/kinesthetic to the visual mode. Similarly, in Rossi-Le's (1995) study, visual learning was preferred by older students and by students with higher language proficiency, which implied that the more the language learner has exposure to the written words, the more he or she feels comfortable learning visually. In the present study, the students' preference for visual learning may be related to their English achievement level. For example, low achievers showed significantly lower visual preference than high-achievers (p= .01). Similarly, Tso (2002) claimed in her study that the participants' not showing strong preference for visual learning might be related to their low English proficiency.

Tactile learning style received a mean lower than 3 on a five-point scale (M=2.96), and is preferred second to the least in the present study. This indicates that students in the study did not like to learn through hands-on activities, such as handling and building models, touching and working with materials (Reid, 1995). The result contradicts many previous studies (Reid, 1987; Rossi-Le, 1995; Cheng, 1997; Ko, 2002, Chen, 2004). Reid (1987) found that Chinese students had a strong preference for tactile learning when compared with the other eight ethnic groups in her study,

and results in Rossi-Le's (1995) study showed that Chinese students expressed a strong preference for tactile learning. In Cheng's (1997) and Chen's (2004) studies, tactile learning is the most preferred perceptual learning mode. Different from the present study, Ko (2002) also claimed that the students in her study preferred tactile learning mode while learning a subject. The result obtained in this study may be due to the fact that teachers in this junior high school seldom adopted hands-on English learning activities. According to the teacher questionnaire, many teachers would spare such learning activities when they had to find more time to give students more practice to prepare for the monthly exams.

Individual learning style received the lowest mean (M=2.78), and is the least preferred mode in the present study. This means that the students did not like to work alone. Findings in many previous studies showed that most Chinese students did not prefer individual learning style (Cheng, 1997; Cheng, 2001; Tseng, 2001; Tso, 2002; Chen, 2004). Nelson (1995) claimed that the Confucian philosophical tradition that does not place great emphasis on individualism might have an effect on students' preferred learning style. Besides, Chinese parents or teachers tend to make plans for their children or students, so they themselves may expose their children or students to few opportunities of solving problems or making decisions, which eventually makes these children or students not used to learning alone. Likewise, Reid (1987) maintained that students' previous educational experience might play an important role in student learning style preference.

Motivational Intensity

The results from the Motivational Intensity Questionnaire (MIQ) reveal that the participants' motivational intensity for English learning was just slightly above the average (M=3.11, within the range of one and five), which indicates that the junior

high school students in the present study did not seem to be highly motivated to learn English. The result is similar to Chang and Huang's (1999) study, in which the Chinese graduate and undergraduate students' motivational intensity was just more than moderate (M=2.15, within the range of one and three), and Peng's (2002) study, where the senior high school participants' motivational intensity was slightly above the average (M=3.28, within the range of one and five).

Motivational intensity has been assessed by determining the amount of effort the individual expends in order to learn a second language (Gardner, 1985) and can be defined as the degree to which a learner makes an effort in learning English (Chang & Huang, 1999). The Motivational Intensity Questionnaire (MIQ) in this study focuses on questions dealing with the amount of effort spent on homework, willingness to take on special assignments, activity spent on improving level of knowledge, and intentions about using available opportunities to improve English.

The results of the mean and frequency distribution of each MIQ item display that many students did not like to look for as many opportunities to use English as they could, try to use English in daily life, or spend extra time to improve their English knowledge. In other words, many of the participants in the present study would not learn or practice English, especially when they are out of school environment. The reason why the junior high school students in this study displayed passive attitude toward English learning may be that English is a foreign language in Taiwan. Most students do not have the needs to use English in their daily life, and English is primarily learned in the formal instruction (Ellis, 1994). Crookes and Schmidt (1991) pointed out that relevance, which involves personal needs, is one important factor to affect students' motivation. Because there is no urgent need to learn English, some students may lack the desire to learn English or study it just as a school subject.

The results also show that many students would not volunteer to do extra English assignment or try to do their best when learning English, To be specific, these students were not very active in learning English. Gardner (1985) claimed that positive feeling toward learning English is an important element of motivation. Crookes and Schmidt (1991) also asserted that interest is one of the internal, attitudinal factors affecting learners' motivation. If students lack interest in English or have negative feelings toward English, such as frustration, difficulties, and troubles, they may lose the motivation to participate actively in classroom learning activities (Liao, 2000).

Students' and Teachers' Textbook Activity Preference

Results from the TAPQ for both students and teachers reveal that the teacher participants displayed significantly stronger preference for textbook activities than the student participants. To be specific, the student participants did not express strong preference for the overall textbook activities while the teacher participants displayed quite strong preference for the overall textbook activities. The fact that teachers are the decision-makers in the selection of textbook may in part result in students' and teachers' different attitudes towards textbook activities.

As to the specific activities preferred by students and teachers, results from students' and teachers' first ten preferred activities reveal that based on perceptual learning mode, both the student and teacher participants preferred auditory activities most. In Taiwan, classroom instruction is often delivered in an auditory fashion; most teachers in junior high school usually give lectures in class. Thus, the student participants' preference for auditory activities may result from such common instruction practice (O'Brien, 1989; Kinsella, 1995; Cheng, 1997). Regarding social learning mode, the students showed higher preference for group activities than the

teachers. Some teachers mentioned in the questionnaire that they did not like to do group activities because they were afraid that the class might be too noisy during students' group discussion. As to the difficulty level, there are not any difficult activities in their first ten preferred activities, which means that students liked to do activities that are easy for them to complete and so did the teachers.

By comparing students' and teachers' top ten preferred activities, it is found that although both the student and teacher participants preferred auditory activities the most, half of the top ten activities preferred by them are different. By nature, four of the activities preferred by the student participants belong to those that they do not have to make much effort to complete and that do not make them feel pressured. For example, some students mentioned in the questionnaire that they liked to do crossword games because they felt them easy and they did not have to spell the words by themselves. Similarly, students just need to listen and repeat when they practice word conjugation or English intonation together after CD. And with provided sentences, students just have to choose the correct sentence out of five choices and copy it down. Besides, learning grammar through graphic illustration seems more preferable to students than through sentence pattern practice.

One the other hand, the teacher participants preferred closed and well-controlled activities, which means that in these activities, there is a precise, single right answer defined in advance. For example, they prefer to have their students do different kinds of sentence pattern practice or reading comprehension questions, or read aloud the text together after CD. Many teachers claimed in the questionnaire that these activities are important because in this way, they can control the time and the students' response well, and they think students have to be familiar with the content of the lesson in order to perform well on the monthly exam.

As to students' and teachers' bottom ten preferred activities, in terms of the perceptual learning mode, the results reveal that both students and teachers least preferred composite activities, which requires them to read and write or to see and speak at the same time. Concerning social learning mode, neither students nor teachers demonstrate high preference for individual activities, which may result from the Confucian philosophical tradition that does not place great emphasis on individualism (Nelson, 1995).

Different from the top ten preferred activities, there appears only a little difference in the activities least preferred by the student and teacher participants. To be specific, eight items are the same in the teachers' and students' last ten preferred activities. However, students and teachers may least prefer these activities for different reasons. For example, the activities such as writing a paragraph, telling a story either by themselves or with partners, and doing oral presentation demand the students' higher English writing or speaking competence and students may feel it difficult to complete these activities. Some students at the end of the TAPQ mentioned that it was hard for them to write a paragraph in English and some said that they dared not to speak in front of the class because they are afraid of being laughed at. On the other hand, the teachers did not show high preference for the same kind of activities because they thought not many students in their class were able to complete the activities and it might take too much time for students to finish their writing or oral presentation. As mentioned at the end of the teacher questionnaire, more than half of the teachers have even skipped these activities in order to get more time for students to do tests or grammar practice when the monthly exam is coming.

As to the other two activities least preferred by the students participants, one of them is an aural activity which asks students to introduce their favorite singer or movie in English, and the other one is a tactile activity in which students may write a

Christmas card when the holiday is coming. The fact that the students did not express high preference for making a Christmas card surprised the researcher because many students in the researcher's classes like to send cards to each other or their teachers before Christmas. The result may be due to students' perceptual learning style. Reid (1987) pointed out that tactile students preferred to do hands-on activities, such as touching and working with materials and writing notes. However, in the present study, the student participants displayed negative preference for tactile learning style (M=2.96, within the range of one and five), which may explain why the student participants disliked making a Christmas card when the holiday is coming.

For the other two activities least preferred by the teacher participants, one is a writing activity, which requires students to respond to questions with provided sentences, and the other one is a kinesthetic activity, in which students play English games together. As to the former activity, some teachers did not have high preference for it because it is too easy to students; in this activity, students just have to choose a correct response out of five choices and copy it down. Nearly half of the teacher participants did not like their students to play games in class because the time is limited or they are afraid that students may be too noisy or even get out of control. Similarly, at the end of the teacher questionnaire, more than half of the teacher participants admitted that they skipped some of the activities in the textbook because of the pressure of the coming monthly exam. And it should be noted that there are also not many students that like to play games in class. Some students mentioned at the end of the questionnaire that they did not like to play games in class because there was usually a mess and they learned nothing from the game.

Comparison of Students' and Teachers' Top Ten and Bottom Ten Preferred Activities

Concerning the perceptual learning mode, the researcher found by comparing students' and teachers' top ten preferred activities with their bottom ten preferred activities that the attributes of them were quite different. For the top ten preferred activities, there are more auditory activities. Most of the activities are just listening or repeating, and students do not have to make much effort to complete these activities. On the contrary, the auditory activities included in the students' and teachers' bottom ten preferred activities are difficult for students because they require students to have better English speaking ability. As to the bottom ten preferred activities, in terms of perceptual learning mode, there appears to be more combinations of visual and tactile, and visual and auditory activities than in the top ten preferred ones. Both students and teachers showed lower preference for these six activities, and it should be noted that these activities all belong to difficult activities (see Appendix F) because students have to possess better English writing or speaking ability in order to complete these activities. This indicates that the difficulty level of the activities may have an effect on students' and teachers' attitudes towards textbook activities. As mentioned earlier, students and teachers may show lower preference for the same activities for different reasons. Students may not show high preference for these activities because they are not able or are afraid to speak English in front of others or because they think it difficult or boring to spending time writing a paragraph in English. On the other hand, many teachers thought it time-consuming to allow students to finish a paragraph or to prepare oral presentation in class, and that many of their students may not be able to participate actively in these activities because they do not have enough English competence. This indicates that when teachers exert the textbook activities in class, they often take into consideration their students' English competence, the classroom management and the time limit (45 minutes a period, three periods a week).

In terms of social learning mode, it seems that the student participants expressed higher preference for group activities, and both students and teachers expressed lower preference for individual activities. The results are not surprising since findings from the PLSPQ in the present study show that the student participants displayed stronger preference for group learning style (M=3.36), which means that the junior high school students in the present study prefer to learn in a group, and they would learn best and get more work done when working with others (Reid, 1995). And individual learning style received the lowest mean (M=2.78), and is the least preferred mode in the present study, which indicates that the students did not like to work alone. According to Nelson (1995), the Confucian philosophical tradition that does not place great emphasis on individualism might have an effect on students' learning preference. Stebbins (1995) also maintained that Chinese society as a whole places high premium on group cohesiveness, which means that Chinese students are often encouraged to concern and work for the group instead of for themselves. Due to this tradition, Chinese parents or teachers also tend to make plans for their children or students, so they themselves may expose their children or students to few opportunities of solving problems or making decisions, which eventually makes these children or students not used to learning alone. This may explain why teachers in the present study also expressed lower preference for individual activities.

Moreover, it should be noted that except the last three preferred activities, the mean scores of the teacher participants' preferences for all the other textbook activities are much higher than the average (3.0, within the range of one and five). However, this does not mean that the teachers had very positive attitude toward those activities. Since most English teachers are well aware of the language teaching pedagogy, they would exert the activities that they think are necessary for students to practice and develop their language skills even though the teachers themselves might

not like the activity. For instance, one teacher said that although he often asked students to do listen-and-repeat activities in order to let students get more familiar with the language components or texts, he himself though it was boring to do this kind of repetitive mechanical activity (see Appendix G). On the contrary, although many of the teacher participants did not like their students to make up a story or write a paragraph in English because they are time-consuming, three teachers (in Appendix G) admitted that if most of the students in their classes had enough English proficiency, they would like to exert these activities more often because they thought this kind of activity could get students more involved in the learning process and it would be interesting to appreciate students' various works.

In a word, there appears to be more difference in the top ten activities preferred by students and teachers than in the bottom ten activities. Students preferred easy listening activities while teachers preferred well-controlled, closed activities. Besides, the junior high school students and teachers in the present study preferred auditory activities to the combinations of visual and tactile (writing) activities. They also prefer group activities to individual activities. However, if the activity seems difficult and demands more effort, they would not like to do it either by oneself or with partners.

Perceptual Learning Style and Textbook Activity Preference

The Top Ten Preferred Activities by Learning Style

Results in the current study reveal that students' overall preference for textbook activities is related to their perceptual learning style. Besides, there exists more than 50 percent congruity between students' activity preference and their learning style except tactile learning style. This corresponds to the findings of earlier research. According to Jonassen and Grabowski (1993), leaning styles may refer to learner preferences for different types of learning and instructional activities. Dunn and Dunn

(1972) and Reid (1987) also claimed that students might prefer different types of activities depending on their learning styles. For example, visual learners enjoy reading, prefer a quiet learning environment, like to work alone, and need visual support to oral input; auditory students are comfortable without visual input and often like multiple sources of aural stimulation; kinesthetic students need movement, tactile students want to manipulate real objects in the classroom; group students like to work in pairs or in groups; and individual students like to finish something by themselves. Thus, the results in the present study confirm that students' learning style may be congruent with their textbook activity preference.

However, tactile students in the present study only preferred four tactile (40%) activities among their top ten preferred activities. Although there are 13 tactile activities among all the textbook activities, most of them are writing activities which require students to fill in answers or make sentences. The tactile activities that tactile students preferred, such as playing cross-word games, classifying words based on phonics, writing a Christmas card, and doing cloze practice after reading, do not belong to the activities that put emphasis on students' writing skill, which indicates that tactile students in the study did not prefer tactile activities that require writing. One the other hand, visual students also showed high preference for individual activities (73%) and among the other activities preferred by kinesthetic students, 70 percent are auditory activities. Reid (1987) indicated that visual students liked to learn through their eyes and they can often learn alone, with a book, which may explain why visual students in the present study also preferred individual activities. For kinesthetic students, the phenomenon that they preferred auditory activities more than kinesthetic activities may be due to the fact that in the textbook used in the researcher's school, there are only two kinesthetic activities for these kinesthetic

students to choose; therefore, the unequal numbers of different types of activities in the textbook may affect students' decision.

Moreover, students of different styles were found to prefer the same activities. This does not contradict earlier finding that students' learning style preference is congruent with their activity preference in that some activities may be the combination of different style nature. For example, doing sentence pattern practice by imitating the examples on the textbook requires students not only to look at the examples carefully (seeing), but also to write down the words (tactile) by themselves (individually). In other words, if teachers can design or implement activities that combine different styles, they may be able to cater to the needs of students of different styles at the same time. On the other hand, four activities are preferred by more than five learner types. For instance, students of six different learning styles all liked to play crossword games and repeat the pronunciation of words after CD or the teacher; and students of five different learning style preferences liked to learn by graphic illustration of grammar and intonation practice together after CD. These four activities, however, do not seem to have common attributes; therefore, it may need further investigation to find the commonality of the activities that can be suitable for different learner types.

The Bottom Ten Preferred Activities by Learning Style

Regarding the bottom ten activities preferred by students of different learning styles, results in the present study show that there also appears to be less congruity between students' style preference and their activity preference because among the bottom ten activities, none (0%) of the activities reported by kinesthetic students are kinesthetic, only four (40%) of them reported by tactile students are tactile, and only three (30%) of them reported by group students are group activities.

Different from kinesthetic, tactile, and group students, visual, auditory, and individual students showed lower preference for the types of activities that correspond to their style preferences. For example, 50 percent of the bottom ten activities reported by visual and auditory students are visual and auditory respectively, and 70 percent of the bottom activities reported by individual students are individual. This indicates that there must be some factor that could override the effect of learning style on students' activity preference. According to the results, most of the activities that are least preferred by students of the same style nature belong to difficult activities. For example, visual students did not preferred the activities that demands better writing or speaking ability, and neither did auditory, and individual students. This indicates that compared with learning style, the difficulty level of activities may have more decisive effect on students' activity preference. Similarly, students of all learning style modes are found to show lower preference for the same five activities; three of them are also classified as difficult activities by teachers (see Appendix F). In these activities, students have to write beyond sentence level, to tell a story, or to do oral presentation, which may seem difficult for students to complete. Besides, students of all learning styles did not like to read aloud alone and they did not like to spend extra time surveying and filling in tables either. The result may imply again that students in the present study would lose their interest in the activities that seem difficult for them and that students in the present study did not like to spend extra time doing an assignment or to speak alone in class no matter what learning style they had.

Motivational Intensity and Textbook Activity Preference

The student participants in the present study were divided into three groups according to their motivational intensity level. In the high-MI group there are 108 students whose motivational intensity is above 3.5 (M + ½ SD), in the mid-MI group,

there are 125 students whose motivational intensity is above 2.6 (M - ½ SD) and below 3.6 (M + ½ SD), and in the low-MI group, there are 103 students whose motivational intensity is below 2.7 (M - ½ SD). Results in the present study display that the high-MI group expressed significantly higher preference for the overall textbook activities than mid- and low-MI groups, and the mid-MI group had significantly higher preference than the low-MI group.

Top Ten Activities Preferred by High-, Mid, and Low MI Students

Concerning the top ten activities preferred by students of different motivational intensity levels, the results show that the activity type in terms of perceptual learning mode is not crucial in students' activity preference since high-, mid-, and low-MI students all seem to have higher preference for auditory activities. 50% of the first ten preferred activities reported by high-MI students, 70% by mid-MI students, and 70% by low-MI students are auditory activities. In terms of social learning mode, low-MI students are found to have higher preference for group activities because 70 percent of the top ten activities preferred by them students are group activities. Moreover, it should be noted that all of the top ten activities preferred by low-MI students received means under the average (3.0, within the range of one and five), which indicates that students that had low motivational intensity in the present study did not have positive attitude toward any of the textbook activities. Results of the current study correspond to the findings of McDonough (2002) that motivation may affect students' willingness to engage in a learning activity and Brown (1981) that motivation is probably the most frequently used term for explaining the success or failure of nearly any complex task. Jacques (2001) also found that in the actual learning environment, learners' motivation continuously interacts with the environment, controlling and directing the progress of the learning/teaching activities.

As to the specific activities preferred by students with different degree of motivational intensity, there appears to be some difference among the top ten activities preferred by students of different motivational intensity levels. By nature, high-MI students preferred more tactile/writing activities because they are highly motivated and would like to succeed in their learning. Mid- and low-MI students showed preference for more simple listening activities or activities that they do not have do make much effort to complete because they are not willing to engage in a learning activity (McDonough, 2002). For example, high-MI students preferred to respond to questions with provided sentences, read word conjugation together after CD, do oral presentation of one's favorites, make a sentence following examples, and answer questions after reading. On the other hand, both mid- and low-MI students preferred true or false listening practice and reading aloud together

Bottom Ten Activities Preferred by High-, Mid, and Low MI Students

Regarding the bottom ten activities preferred by students of different motivational intensity levels, activity type based on perceptual learning mode does not seem to have an effect on students' activity preference because there appears to be similarity among the types of activities least preferred by high-, mid-, and low-MI students. As to the social learning mode, all of the three groups seem to have lower preference for individual activities because 60 percent of the bottom activities preferred by high-MI students and 70 percent preferred by mid- and low-MI students are individual activities. The students' negative attitude toward individual activities may be also owing to the Confucian philosophical tradition that does not place great emphasis on individualism (Nelson, 1995). Since Chinese students are often encouraged to concern and work for the group instead of for themselves and teachers also take students in a class as a whole, students are not used to solving problems or

learning alone.

In addition to the types of activities preferred by students of different motivational intensity, there appears to be less difference in the bottom ten activities preferred by students of different MI groups than in the top ten activities. For example, only one of the bottom ten activities preferred by high-MI students is different from that preferred by mid-MI students; high-MI students showed lower preference for games in groups while mid-MI students had lower preference for oral presentation of one's favorites. For the activities least preferred by high- and low-MI students, there are only two different activities; high-MI students did not show high preference for games in groups and hands-on activities while low-MI students showed lower preference for oral presentation of one's favorites and sentence making with pictures. As to the activities least preferred by mid- and low-MI students, there is only one different activity; mid-MI students expressed lower preference for hands-on activities while low-MI students showed lower preference for sentence making with pictures. Moreover, it should be noted that high- and low-MI students expressed very different preferences for Item 23 (games in groups). High-MI students may not prefer games in groups because they thought the class was usually a mess in games while low-MI students may prefer games in groups because it is fun and would not make them feel pressured. Besides, high-MI students and mid- and low-MI students also had quite different preference for oral presentation of one's favorite. Low- and mid-MI students may show lower preference for this activity because it is difficult for them to complete while high-MI students may like it because oral presentation of their favorite is close to their personal experience and their high motivational intensity makes them participate in the activity more actively. Brown (1994) also emphasized that motivation is probably the most frequently used term for explaining the success or failure of nearly any complex task.

As to the difficulty level, all of the seven difficulty activities marked out by teachers in Appendix F appeared in the bottom ten activities reported by mid- and low-MI students, and six of the seven difficult activities also appeared in the bottom ten activities reported by high-MI students. This may indicate that the difficulty level of activities may override the effect of motivational intensity on students' activity preference. In other words, no matter what motivational intensity level students have, they may not like to do difficult activities, especially writing and oral presentation.

Relationships of Textbook Activity Preference to Background Variables

This section discusses the results concerning the relationships of textbook activity preference to background variables. It is further divided into 2 parts. The first part discusses the relationship between students' textbook activity preference and their English achievement. The second part is concerned with gender differences in textbook activity preference.

Textbook Activity Preference and English Achievement

Results in the present study reveal that there are statistically significant differences among high-, mid-, and low achievers; that is, high-achievers had significantly higher preference for textbook activities than mid- and low achievers. This implies that high-achievers' activity preference may be closer to their teachers' choice.

As to the top ten activities preferred by high-, mid-, and low achievers, there appears to be more difference in the top ten and bottom ten activities reported by high- and low achievers than by high- and mid-achievers and by mid- and low achievers. Half of the top ten activities preferred by low achievers are different from those preferred by high-achievers. High-achievers preferred more writing activities,

mainly designed for sentence pattern practice. In junior high school in Taiwan, English course grades were mostly based on written tests and assignments or exercises usually require them to memorize new vocabulary or to do grammar practice. Therefore, high-achievers may prefer writing tasks more because they want to get more practice in order to get better grades. Different from high-achievers, three of the five different activities preferred by low achievers are simple auditory activities, one is a kinesthetic activity in which students can play games, and one is a visual activity in which students just have to classify word based on phonics. All of them are very easy for low achievers to complete and they would not make students feel pressured. As mentioned earlier, low achievers usually have low learning motivation; thus, they may prefer simple and easy-to-complete activities to writing activities, which may require deeper understanding of English structures.

On the other hand, the results also show that there appears to be some similarity in the top ten activities preferred by students of different achievement levels. For example, five of the top ten activities are preferred by students of all achievement levels. All of them preferred to learn by graphic illustration of grammar, listening to English songs together after CD, singing English songs together, playing crossword games, and practicing intonation together after CD. This indicates auditory activities, such as listening and singing English songs and intonation practice after CD; and visual activities, such as learning grammar by graphic illustration and crossword games may be suitable or motivating for students with different motivational intensity.

Moreover, among the top ten activities, low achievers in the current study only showed high preference for two activities with the means slightly above the average (within the range of one and five), including pronunciation practice (listening to CD) and reading aloud together. Instead of doing other pronunciation practice, such as tongue twister or grouping word having the same pronunciation, low achievers

preferred this listening and repeating activity because it was easy for them to imitate the pronunciation. Similarly, low achievers preferred to read aloud with their classmates rather than read aloud alone for they "would not easily be noticed by the teacher even if they could not read well," mentioned one student at the end of the TAPQ. Earlier research showed that students' language achievement would affect their learning motivation, and thus, might affect their attitude toward language learning (Gardner, 1985; Belmechri & Hummel, 1998). This may explain why low achievers in the present study demonstrated negative attitude toward most of the textbook activities.

Concerning the bottom ten activities preferred by students of different achievement levels, there seems to be more similarity in the bottom ten activities preferred by students of different achievement levels than in the top ten preferred activities. For instance, in terms of social learning mode, students with different achievement levels all seem to have lower preference for individual activities; 60 percent of the bottom ten activities preferred by high-achievers, 80 percent preferred by mid-achievers, and 70 percent preferred by low achievers are individual activities. As to the difficulty level, six of the bottom preferred activities are reported by students of all achievement levels; high-, mid-, and low achievers all showed lower preference for reading aloud alone, surveying after class and filling in tables, story telling in groups based on pictures, story telling based on pictures, paragraph writing in groups about pictures, and writing a passage by a picture alone. Four of them are classified as difficult activities by teachers (see Appendix F). This indicates that all of students in the present study did not express high preference for writing beyond sentence level, story-telling either in groups or by oneself, and they did not show high preference for doing an oral activity alone in class or spending extra time on an assignment, either. As mentioned above, there are seven activities that are classified

as difficult by teachers in the researcher's school; except for the above four activities, high- and mid-achievers showed lower preference for another one in which they had to do tongue twisters, high- and low achievers had lower preference for still another one that requires them to write a paragraph in groups following examples, and mid- and low achievers had lower preference for the other one that asks them to do oral presentation of their favorites. The results reveal that the difficulty level of an activity may have an effect on students' learning motivation, which corresponds to Liao's (2000) findings that the students' motivational intensity got weaker and weaker as the teaching materials became more and more difficult. Kinsella (1995) also pointed out that students who had gone through activities that made them feel uncomfortable and inadequate would often get frustrated and helpless, and thus lost their motivation to learn.

Textbook Activity Preference and Gender

Results in the current study show that there are statistically significant differences in the textbook activity preferences between male and female students; that is, female students had significantly higher preference for textbook activities than male ones. According to Pajares and Valiante (2001), female students usually expressed stronger self-beliefs in learning languages, received higher grades, and therefore had more positive attitude towards language learning than male students.

As to the top ten activities preferred by male and female students, there seems to be much similarity in the top ten and bottom ten activities preferred by male and female students. First, activity type in terms of learning mode is not important here for the types of activities preferred by male and female students are the same. Both of them preferred three visual activities and seven auditory activities. Besides, regarding the social learning preference, both of them showed high preference for group

activities; 60 percent of the top ten activities preferred by them are group activities. Furthermore, nine of the top ten activities preferred by male and female students are the same, which indicates that there is only a little difference between them. Male students liked reading aloud after CD while female ones preferred to sing English songs together.

However, although the types and items of activities preferred by male and female students are mostly the same, male students did not show strong preference for half of their top ten preferred activities with the mean scores slightly over the average, which indicates that in fact, male students did not prefer the activities in the textbook currently in use because they only show high preference for five activities among 34 in total. Different from female students, male students preferred listening to English songs to singing them, and they liked to learn by graphic illustration of grammar, crossword games, repeating words after CD or the teacher, reading aloud together, and listening to English songs together after CD.

Similar to the top ten activities, based on perceptual learning mode, the activity types of the bottom ten activities preferred by male and female students are almost the same. Regarding social learning preference, both male and female students showed negative attitude toward individual activities; 70 percent of their bottom ten preferred activities are individual activities.

Besides, 90 percent of the bottom activities preferred by male and female students are the same, which indicates that there is no apparent difference between the bottom ten activities they preferred. Seven of the activities least preferred by both male and female students are classified as difficult activities in the TAPQ while one requires students to do an oral activity alone and the other one asks students to spend extra time surveying and filling in tables. This indicates that the difficulty level of activities may override the effect of gender on students' activity preference. On the

other hands, only one of the bottom ten activities preferred by male students is different from that preferred by female ones. Male students show negative attitude toward taking part in hands-on activities, such as writing a Christmas card while female students had negative attitude toward sentence making with pictures and reading aloud.