
Preferred Learning Styles: The Case of Students at a Satellite Campus in the Middle East

Paul Barron, Jane Ali-Knight and Marcus L. Stephenson

Correspondence

Dr. Paul Barron
School of Marketing, Tourism and
Languages
Napier University
Craiglockhart Campus
Edinburgh EH14 1DJ
Scotland, UK
Tel: +1314554381
Fax: +1314554540
E-mail: p.barron@napier.ac.uk

Dr. Marcus L. Stephenson
Middlesex University Dubai
PO Box 500697
Dubai, U.A.E
Tel: +9714 361 6252
Fax: +9714 367 2956
E-mail: m.stephenson@mdx.ac

Jane Ali-Knight,
School of Marketing, Tourism and
Languages
Napier University
PO Box 71908
UAE
Tel: +971 55 943 1281
E-mail: j.ali-knight@napier.ac.uk

Abstract

The education of international students has long been a focus for universities in the major English speaking destination (MESD) countries of the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Studying for and successfully completing a qualification from a university in an MESD country is viewed positively by international students, and universities in such countries have shown a significant increase in the number of enrolled international students. The provision of education by MESD universities is not confined by national borders and increasingly universities are developing satellite campuses in a number of locations. These satellite campuses provide an MESD country university qualification to two distinct groups of students. Firstly, local students are attracted to study an international qualification in their home country as this eliminates the costly experience and personal upheaval of studying overseas. Secondly, the creation of a satellite campus of a university based in an MESD country will attract expatriate students and also other international students from the immediate area. This research is focused on international students studying undergraduate programmes at a satellite campus of a United Kingdom university located in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in the Middle East. The study is set within the context of those students' preferred learning styles and experiences. Focusing on issues of pedagogy, the study is based on the suggestion that international students will experience a

range of new and unfamiliar teaching and assessment methods and consequently have to make a substantial adjustment in terms of their learning styles in order to succeed in a Western university. This paper examines the individual and collective preferred learning style of a sample of international students studying tourism and hospitality in the Middle East. The work analyses the links between ethnic origins and preferred learning style, suggesting that preferred learning styles should be taken into consideration when developing curriculum which is accessed by international students.

Keywords: Learning Styles, Hospitality and Tourism Education.

Introduction

Understanding how individuals learn has been of academic interest for a number of years. However, with current attention focusing on the importance of the knowledge society, the understanding of learning becomes more critical. Gold and Smith (2003:1) argue that learning is the key factor for survival, sustainability and competitive advantage at the level of the individual, the organization and the nation. Nevertheless, understanding learning is not a straightforward process. Merriam (2001:38) emphasize that the knowledge base of learning comprises a myriad of theories, models, sets of principles and explanations. This paper explores one aspect of learning from a cognitive perspective, by examining differences in the student learning process.

The context for the study is tourism and hospitality students studying at a satellite

campus of a UK university in the Middle East. This context was deemed to be of interest for several reasons. Firstly, tourism and hospitality programmes appear to be becoming more popular and continue to attract a large number of diverse students. Secondly, the Middle East is held to be a region of growth in both tourism arrivals and tourism and hospitality education. In the first six months of 2008, for example, the Middle East experienced the world's highest hotel occupancy rate of 75.3 per cent (TTN, 2008). Thirdly, it is a maturing field of study in developed countries. Finally, attention is being focused on improving efficiency and effectiveness of tourism and hospitality educational programmes.

The research aim is to identify the preferred learning styles of a cohort of students studying tourism and hospitality management at a satellite campus of a UK university situated in the Middle East. Specifically, the paper will:

- Explain the context of the study
- Provide a brief overview of learning theory perspectives, prior to examining different learning styles theories
- Explain the research process
- Explore the learning style preferences of tourism and hospitality management students in the Middle East
- Analyse differences in learning preferences on the basis of gender, nationality and year level of study
- Discuss the implications for students and academic staff

Context of the Study

Since the early 1970s, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of hospitality and tourism programs offered by universities in Western nations. For example, a rudimentary search of the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training website (<http://www.dest.gov.au/highered/ausunis.htm>) found that of the 43 publicly funded universities in Australia, 29 offered hospitality and/or tourism programs at either undergraduate or postgraduate level. Added to this are at least five private providers who specialize in hospitality and tourism education at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Undergraduate hospitality and tourism education in the UK commenced slightly earlier with the first hotel and catering degrees being launched in the mid-1960s and by 1997 the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (1998) found that some 28 universities in England offered hospitality management programs. In the UK, the Council for Hospitality Management Education (CHME) indicated that they represent 27 universities offering degree level qualifications in hospitality management. The Hospitality Training Foundation (2002) indicated that around 3,500 students graduate from UK higher education establishments, with hotel and catering degrees each year (1998-2000). The Learning Teaching Support Network (Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism) (2004) published data, provided by the University and College Admission Service, indicates that the number of accepted students on Hospitality courses has remained fairly stable for the last 3 years at around 1,500 students. In Scotland, there are currently seven universities offering

programmes in the field of tourism and hospitality management (SHEFC, 2005). In terms of tourism education parallels can be drawn with huge growth being experienced since the first programmes were developed in the 70s and 80s. A recent search (31/05/09) on the UCAS website found that over 90 universities in the UK are currently offering over 800 courses in all aspects of tourism (<http://search.ucas.com>).

While the majority of students studying tourism and hospitality management at publicly funded universities in Western nations continue to be domestic, there is evidence that the student body is becoming more diverse (Hsu, 1996). Tourism and hospitality management studies appear attractive to international students, drawing a higher than average number of such students (Khwaja and Bosselman, 1990; Malfroy and Daruwalla, 2000). This popularity perhaps is due to the maturing of tourism and hospitality management as an area of study. In addition, the notion of a career in the hospitality and tourism industry is no longer seen as demeaning for international students (Zhao, 1991). This factor, together with the rapid growth of the hotel and tourism industry in such countries as mainland China (Huyton, 1997; Yu, 1998) and Eastern Europe, has encouraged students from countries with developing service economies to pursue hospitality and tourism education in Western universities.

In addition, educational providers are facing a number of key changes that are focusing attention on efficiency in relation to delivery methods. New opportunities offered by information technology could facilitate a major change in the delivery of education, providing greater flexibility for learning

(Littlejohn and Watson, 2004). At the same time attention is being drawn to improving the quality of student experiences by quality assurance agencies, with more attention being given to student centered learning (Rogers 2004). In relation to tourism and hospitality programmes, there is an ongoing discussion concerning the balance between generic business knowledge and sector specific skills in the curriculum at undergraduate level (Littlejohn and Watson, 2004). Other social changes relating to tourism and hospitality education include changing government funding policies that have influenced the nature of the student experience. It is generally recognized that currently, many more students than in the past take on part-time job commitments (Barron and Anastasiadou - forthcoming). It might be suggested that working during term time as well as during holidays, might influence their approach to learning. Thus it is contended that in light of these different influences affecting students' educational experience, it is considered that this environment is an interesting and relevant context in which to examine student learning. However, as previously stated, there are different perspectives that can be taken when researching learning. The next section of the paper summarizes different learning styles and introduces the Learning Styles Questionnaire (Honey and Mumford, 1986 and 2000) used in this study.

Different Types of Learning Styles

The experiential learning cycle involves four learning stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. Concrete experience involves the individual partaking in a new activity from which learning can occur.

Reflective observation entails a process of watching or observing others and/or reflecting on one's own experiences of the activity. Abstract conceptualization engages the individual in developing a theory to explain the observations and/or activity experienced. Finally, active experimentation involves the testing of such theories in a new situation. The model also acknowledges the important role played by different types of learning styles. Sadler-Smith *et al.*, (2000) notes that Honey and Mumford's (1986) learning styles questionnaire arose directly from Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle. The four learning styles identified are: 'activist', 'reflector', 'theorist' and 'pragmatist'. Activists like to involve themselves in new practices and enjoy tackling problems by brainstorming. They appear to be easily bored and prefer to move from one task to the next as the excitement fades. Reflectors are more cautious and thoughtful and prefer to consider all possible avenues of action before making any decisions. Reflectors prefer to learn through observation and benefit from the opportunity to think before acting. They appreciate the opportunity to undertake research before an activity and think about what they have learned. Reflectors find it more difficult to learn from activities where they are forced into the limelight, for example through peer presentations or role-playing. Similarly, methods of learning such as case studies may prove problematic for these students as they are not keen on undertaking a task without prior notice or sufficient information (Honey and Mumford, 2000). Theorists like to integrate their observations into logical models based on analysis and objectivity. They appear to enjoy the structure associated with sound theoretical

frameworks. Pragmatists are practical, hands on people who like to apply new ideas immediately. They often get impatient with an over emphasis on reflection.

Several criticisms have been leveled at experiential learning theory. Reynolds (1998) argues that it promotes an individualized perspective, neglecting the sometimes collectivist nature of learning. Wilson and Beard (2002) argue that by locating itself within the cognitive psychology tradition, experiential learning overlooks or mechanically explains and thus divorces people from the social, historical and cultural aspects of self, thinking and action. A third criticism by Thagard (1996) maintains that cognitive and experiential approaches neglect the role of emotion, reducing learning to a calculating, functional process.

It has been noted that there are at least 32 commercially published instruments being used by researchers and educators to assess the different dimensions of learning styles (Campbell 1991). When determining the appropriateness of choosing the Learning Styles Questionnaire over another tool that measures learning style preferences, it is useful to reflect upon Curry's (1987) 'onion simile'. On analysis of all the available learning style questionnaires, she placed each in one layer of a three-layer system. She suggests that the three layers are like an onion. The first layer (or core) presents learning behavior as controlled at a fundamental level by the central personality dimension. The middle layer centers on a theme of information processing dimensions. The outermost layer, influenced by the interaction of the environment, is based on the theme of instructional preferences. This model is built

on further by the work of Sadler-Smith (1996) who argues for a holistic approach to learning styles, which encompasses learning preferences and cognitive styles. Learning preferences (autonomous, dependent, and collaborative) are similar to the outer layer in the onion, while cognitive style relates to the core of the onion.

The Learning Style Questionnaire fits neatly into the middle layer of Curry's (1987) onion model. Marshall (1987) agrees with Curry's (1987) analogy and places the Kolb (1984) Learning Styles Inventory and the Honey and Mumford (1986) Learning Styles Questionnaire firmly in the information processing preference layer of the model. While there has been some criticism regarding the use of the Learning Styles Questionnaire for managers (Duff, 2000), it has been found that this tool is most appropriate to determine the learning style preferences of students, particularly those from diverse backgrounds (Anderson, 1995).

As recipients and participants in the learning process, individuals are in a key position to question, challenge and critique the principles and assumptions underpinning learning. It might be concluded that the learning approach adopted by students depends on both the socio-cultural setting as well as the school milieu (Biggs, 1987). Students' approaches reflect their own attitudes, habits, abilities and personality, but also the demands made by the learning environment (Kember and Gow, 1990). Each student, normally, has a preference for a particular approach to learning but will modify or abandon that approach if an alternative approach is more suited to the learning task (Gow, *et al.*, 1996). Course

syllabi, teaching methods and assessment all place constraints on the student and affect and influence the approach to learning taken (Sims and Sims, 1995).

Learning Style Preferences of Tourism and Hospitality Management Students

Several studies have been undertaken that attempt to identify the learning preferences of hospitality, tourism and travel management students in the UK, Asia and Australia. The majority of these studies have utilized Honey and Mumford's (2000) Learning Style Questionnaire and the results of these studies will be summarized below.

In his study in the UK, Lashley (1999) found that the vast majority of students who were attracted onto hospitality management programmes display preferred learning styles that indicate that they enjoy practical activity, but who are less comfortable with theorizing and reflection. As such, these students display preferences for activist learning styles (Lashley, 1999). Indeed, it would have appeared that these students thrived on the challenges associated with new experiences and they were described as tending to 'act first and consider the consequences later' (Lashley, 1999:181). Not surprisingly, students with activist learning style preferences learn most easily from activities involving group work that is exciting, challenging and quick to change. On the other hand, activists find it more difficult to learn when they have to take a passive role, not become involved or undertake solitary work. They are not keen on practicing and do not enjoy the constraints of having to follow precise instructions (Honey and Mumford, 2000).

Indeed, such was the propensity for these students to adopt activist learning styles that strategies had to be designed and implemented in order to develop students studying hospitality and tourism programmes in the host universities into more reflective practitioners. In contrast, it would appear that domestic students studying hospitality management, hotel and catering management, tourism management and travel and tourism studies at Higher Diploma level and above in various colleges and universities in Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan display preferences for reflector learning styles (Wong *et al.*, 2000). Differing cultural approaches to education could seemingly influence the learning style. This is supported by Chan's (1999) enquiry which contends that Chinese history and Confucius philosophy has a major impact on learning styles of Chinese students. In more recent studies concerning the learning style preferences of hospitality management students, Barron and Arcodia (2002), Barron (2002), Barron (2004), and Barron and Watson (2005) found differences between domestic students and international students studying at Western universities, with domestic students appearing to adopt an activist learning style and international students tending to prefer a reflector learning style.

Hospitality and Tourism Management Education in the United Arab Emirates

A rapid increase in the population of the United Arab Emirates has augmented a proliferation of private and public educational institutions. UAE citizens are eligible for free education at such government backed institutions as the United Arab Emirates University, Zayed University and Higher Colleges of

Technology. However, there is also an extensive range of private sector provision in the higher education sector. Examples of UAE private institutions include the American Universities of Sharjah and Dubai, Sharjah University and the Ajman University of Science and Technology. A range of universities from various countries (e.g., India - Manipal University; UK - Middlesex University; Australia – Wollongong University) have also established themselves in the UAE, catering for an accelerated demand for university degrees from the expanding expatriate communities (as well as the local market). According to Hijazi *et al.*, (2008: 72):

This diversity of the private higher education sector in the UAE reflects a new trend in world trade where higher education has increasingly become a commercial product subject to the regulations and free trade agreements of the World Trade Organization.

In addition to those higher education institutions outlined above, the UAE has several vocational and technical educational centers for students seeking practical training in their chosen careers (e.g., Emirates Institute for Banking and Finance, Dubai School of Government, and the Emirates Aviation College for Aerospace and Academic Studies).

The emirate of Dubai has moved away from being an oil-based economy to one where tourism is of prime importance and relevance to the state. The Department for Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM) has ambitious plans for tourism with projected figures for visitor numbers hoping to reach 15 million per year by 2015.

Dubai has invested significantly in the infrastructural development of luxury hotels and the attraction sector, and thus has been developing into a globally recognized tourism destination (Henderson, 2006; Sharpley, 2008). Dubai has made concerted attempt to expand its teaching and learning sectors, illustrated through the development of Knowledge Village (KV) which opened in 2003 in the Dubai Free Zone for Technology and Media. KV houses more than 200 companies and institutes for training and education, offering a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. In addition to this development, a larger project has taken place in the creation of Dubai International Academic City; formally launched in 2007. On full completion, it is anticipated that academic city will accommodate 20 to 30 universities and house between 30,000 and 40,000 students. Several universities have started to locate themselves at Academic City (e.g., Heriot-Watt University, UK), which should be fully completed within the next six years.

The Emiratisation of the workforce is being encouraged by the federal government of the UAE, especially in the private sector where nationals account for a much smaller percentage of the total workforce than expatriate workers. Some progress has already been made in banking, insurance and human resources, particularly in terms of encouraging indigenous labor representation at senior and managerial level (Rees, 2007; Al-Ali, 2008). Nonetheless, there is significant potential in terms of hospitality and tourism education and training but this has yet to develop in a comprehensive and systematic manner. The Maharat Hospitality Training Program, however, does illustrate that there are some

attempts towards encouraging UAE nationals to pursue career-progression pathways in the hotel and hospitality industry. The nine-week training program was orchestrated by the Emiratisation Task Force for Tourism (ETFT), which functions under the aegis of the Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing. The program attracted over 700 UAE nationals, including a significant number of females, helping them to become employed in five-star properties managed mostly by global hotel chains (Express Hospitality, 2008).

Tourism and hospitality management education has started to become institutionalized in terms of undergraduate degree provision in the UAE. However, this provision is not as prominent as other undergraduate business and management programmes (e.g., business administration; management information systems, human resource management, and finance and accounting), which are all widely available in the UAE. Nonetheless, in terms of hospitality management education there are two main institutions: the European International College of Hotel Management and Tourism (Abu Dhabi) (EIC) and the Emirates Academy of Hospitality Management (Dubai) (EAHM). EIC offers post-secondary, college-level education in the UAE, specializing in diplomas in Hotel Management and providing students with the opportunity to move onto the BA program in International Business in Hotel and Tourism Management, operating at César Ritz Colleges Switzerland. Bespoke programmes are also being designed for the hotel and hospitality sector. EAHM forms part of the Dubai-based hotel and hospitality management company, the Jumeirah Group. EAHM specializes in hospitality management and operations, and

works in association with the Ecole Hôtelière de Lausanne, a prominent Swiss School of Hotel Management.

Middlesex University Dubai (UK) has a recent history in the provision of both international tourism management and hospitality management education. The Dubai Campus of Middlesex University (UK) opened in 2004 with the intention of delivering UK-based education in a focal location. Middlesex University places significant emphasis on work-based learning and problem-solving, establishing a global strategy to meet the needs and ambitions of a culturally and internationally diverse range of students. At the Dubai Campus, there are five tourism and hospitality programmes running at undergraduate level: BA (Hons) International Tourism Management and Marketing; BA (Hons) International Tourism Management with Human Resource Management; BA (Hons) International Tourism Management with Business; BA (Hons) Hospitality Management (a third year top-up degree); and BA (Hons) Hospitality Management with Tourism (a third year top-up degree). The tourism programmes were revalidated and renamed as 'International Tourism Management' at the start of the 2006-7 academic sessions. The focus of the subject area is largely on international and global aspects, with a solid foundation in the business specialisms of marketing and human resource management. The growth and changes of the international tourism industry have been paralleled by opportunities to study both its academic and applied aspects. The suite of tourism degrees features curricula that incorporate management theory and practices, and social scientific models and approaches.

Although the programmes have only been running for the past three years, there are promising signs in terms of the growth of interest in studying tourism management at undergraduate level; which is still a relatively uncharted field of study in the UAE compared to the initial developments that have taken place in establishing hospitality management education.

Research Methodology

A variation of the Learning Styles Questionnaire designed by Honey and Mumford (2000) was used in this study to investigate the learning styles of students studying hospitality and tourism management at a Middle East satellite campus of a UK university. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first section asked respondents to answer questions concerning age, gender, nationality, ethnicity and number of dependents. This section also asked questions that attempted to determine motivations for current area of study and reasons for choosing the particular university. The second section consisted of 80 questions relating to the four different types of learning styles as identified by Honey and Mumford (1986), namely 'activists', 'reflectors', 'theorists' and 'pragmatists'. Respondents were asked to identify on a six-point scale (0 = Strongly Disagree; 1 = Disagree; 2 = Disagree on Balance; 3 = Agree on Balance; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree) their strength of feeling for each statement. This means of response differs from the original Honey and Mumford (2000) method of responding which involved respondents merely placing a tick to indicate if they agreed with a statement, or a cross to indicate that they disagreed with a statement. The

employment of a scale adds to the sophistication of the responses as it allows respondents to present a more accurate measure of their feelings concerning each question (Lashley and Shaw, 2002). The imposition of an ordinal Likert scale on the previous Honey and Mumford yes/no type measurement will enhance the reliability of the data collected. By employing equal interval measurement, Goodwin (1995) argues that Likert scales allow respondents to express varying degrees of favorability towards a particular item, thus providing enhancing the accuracy of the overall measurement.

In order to achieve an optimum response, and to answer questions students may have had during the completion of the questionnaire, the questionnaire was administered in the controlled environment of formal class time and under the supervision of a tutor. Ticehurst and Veal (1999:138) describe this approach to a questionnaire survey as a 'captive group survey' and suggest that this method of questionnaire administration is expeditious and less problematic than in less controlled situations. It must, however, be stated that students' participation in this research study was entirely voluntary and respondents were drawn from normal university classrooms and thus are representative of the cultural diversity that exists in the particular institutions.

The data collected from the second part of the questionnaire, which contained 80 questions on learning styles, were analyzed, using SPSS, by the score mean of each type of learning style. This allowed the researchers to develop frequency tables and undertake cross tabulations. Due to the use of the Likert scale, an indication of likes

and dislikes relating to learning style preferences was able to be determined for this group of students. In total, 34 students from a larger group of students studying tourism and hospitality management in Dubai took part in the study. Respondents comprised 60% male and there was a fairly even mix of the number of respondents in years one, two and three. The average age of respondents was just over 21 years.

Results

Results from this survey would suggest that this group of students might be considered as reasonably well balanced with regard to their preferred learning styles (see Chart 1 below). These results would, therefore, indicate that this group of students are relatively comfortable adapting to a range of teaching methods and styles. It can, however, be seen that this cohort of students actually scored lowest for 'activist' and highest for 'reflector' learning styles. This result is significant in light of Barron's (2002) findings that indicated that the preference of hospitality and tourism students is largely for an activist learning style. Indeed, this result goes some way toward Lashley's (1999:185) assertion for the development of more 'reflective approaches to study and management tasks' amongst students studying hospitality and tourism.

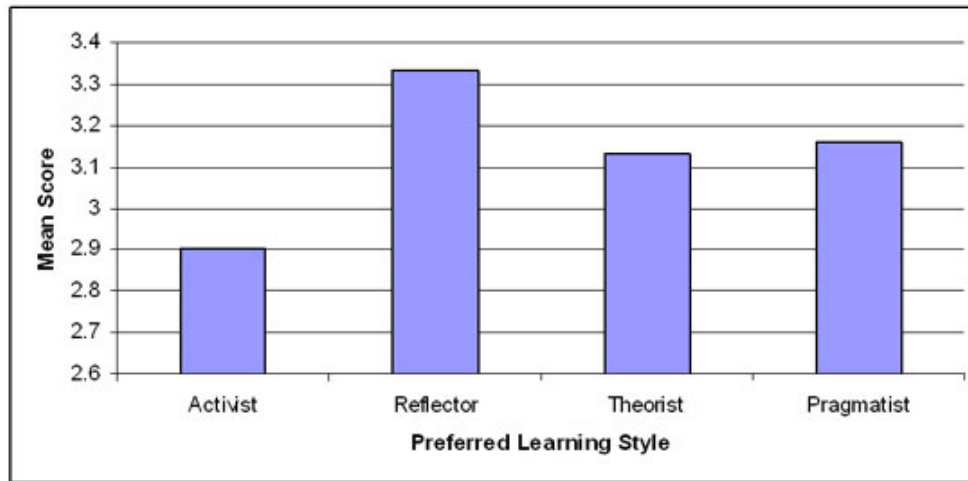


Chart 1: Learning Style Preferences of Cohort

Nonetheless, it has been noted (see for example Barron, 2004) that it is unwise to treat a cohort of students as being one homogenous group. Indeed there is a danger in assuming that the preferred learning style of a group of students is representative of all major and minor sub groups within the cohort. For example, Chart 2 (below) presents an indication of the differences in learning styles of females and males of this sample. This chart indicates that analysis by gender does not appear to highlight any significant differences from the overall cohort results. However, it can be seen that the males in this cohort were less inclined to indicate a preference for 'activist' and 'reflector' learning styles than females, but more likely to indicate a preference for a 'theorist' learning style.

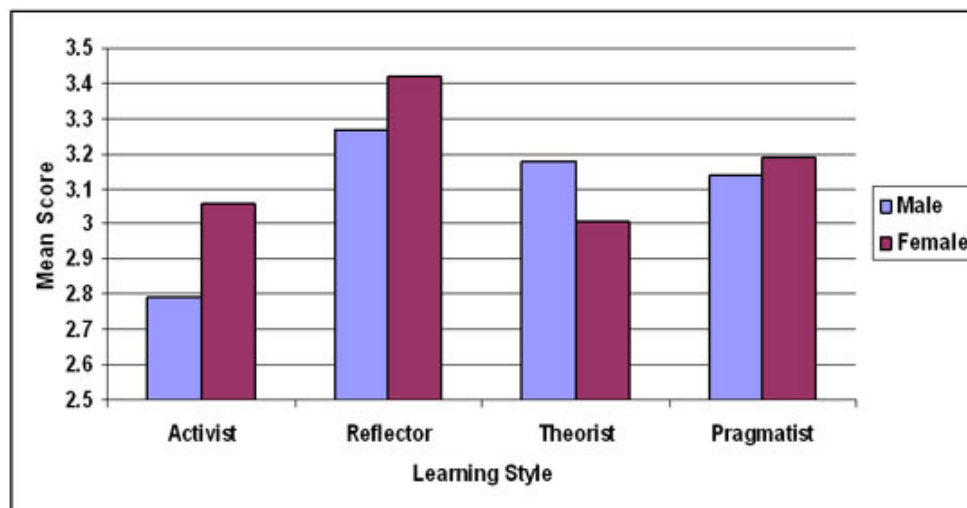


Chart 2: Learning Style Preferences by Gender

Previous studies (Barron and Watson, 2004) have examined how students' learning style preferences change as they progress through a program. Data from this study were analyzed as a means of presenting learning style preferences from each of the years of study. Chart 3 (below) indicates that, in general, the preference for 'activist' and 'pragmatist' learning styles appeared to decline as students progressed whilst 'reflector' learning styles increased slightly.

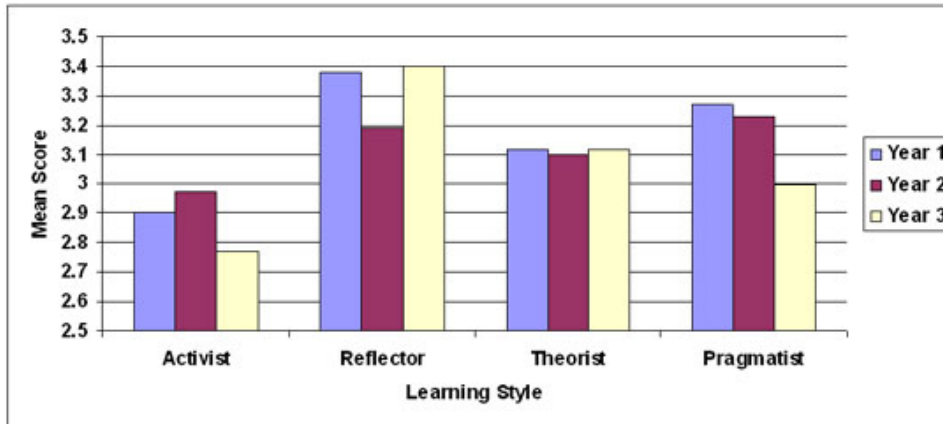


Chart 3: Learning Style Preferences by Year Level

It was felt that an analysis of learning style preferences by nationality would further enrich the results of this study. Chart 4 (below) indicates the learning style preferences for each of the major represented nationalities in this study. It can be seen that students from the UAE possessed well rounded learning style preferences with the exception of 'activist' which was clearly the least preferred learning style. Those from Iran demonstrated an equal preference for 'activist' and 'reflector' learning styles, with theorist and pragmatist learning style appearing less popular. Indian students score generally lower across all four learning style preferences, with 'reflector' emerging as the more preferred learning style. Students from Pakistan appeared to possess the most even learning style preferences with only 'theorist' learning style preference indicating a weaker preference.

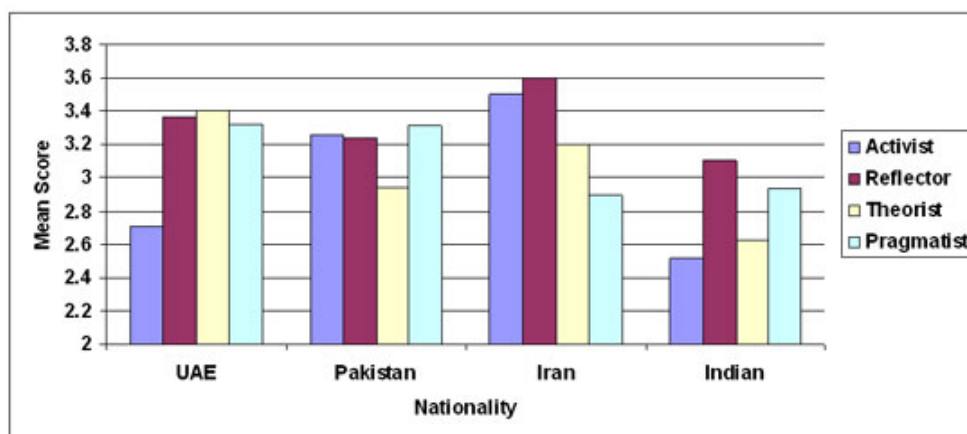


Chart 4: Learning Style Preferences by Nationality

Conclusions and Research Implications

In summary, there are a number of significant issues which might challenge current models of effective teaching in tourism and hospitality management programmes in universities that have implications for teaching and learning methods, curricula design and assessment strategies. Firstly, it is important to understand the learning style preferences of students studying tourism and hospitality management and to attempt initiatives that encourage students to adopt a more reflective, critical approach to their studies. Secondly, it is important to recognize the diversity that is currently common in university classrooms and the attempt to recognize the preferred learning styles of students from different backgrounds. Equally, it is essential to nurture and encourage the use of more critical reflective learning, as opposed to developing academic, administrative and structural constraints that appear to discourage more reflective approaches and reward a more short-term, activist approach.

The study was composed of a fairly small sample size, so in many ways the work should be perceived as a preliminary investigation - with a view of extending the sample range in future follow-up enquiries. The sample is reflective, however, of the diversity of students in terms of international background and seemingly gives sound insights into the learning preferences of this cohort of international students. Its importance also lies in the fact that it is one of the first studies concerning the delivery of tourism and hospitality education in the region.

It would have been purposeful for the study to have systematically utilized focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews, helping to affirm a value-oriented approach to learning. As tourism and hospitality programs expand in the region, there should be ample opportunity to engage with larger study samples and comparative studies of higher education institutions; thereby encouraging more significant variables and thematic elements to emerge from the data. The importance of understanding the determinants of preferred learning styles and experiences is indeed pertinent. Accordingly, research could focus on evaluating students on other key programs in the UAE, yielding interesting comparisons in relation to particular student nationalities. Research could also perhaps be conducted in other Middle Eastern countries that deliver tourism and hospitality programmes. Issues such as ethnic and religious origins, preferred learning styles, curriculum development and teaching and assessment methods could then be explored, providing intriguing comparisons drawn with the current research.

Importantly, studies concerning critical forms of learning arguably lead to the improvement of courses and programmes, and could perhaps have a positive impact on the employability of graduates. Therefore, empirically developed studies which implicitly focus on ways in which students can have a proactive role in their own learning and academic development can only be fruitful and constructive.

References

Al-Ali, J. (2008) Emiratisation: Drawing UAE nationals into their surging economy, *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 28 (9/10), 365-79.

Anderson, J.A. (1995) Toward a framework for matching teaching and learning styles for diverse populations, in R.J. Sims and S.J. Sims (eds.), *The Importance of Learning Styles: Understanding the Implications for Learning, Course Design and Education*, pp 69-78, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.

Barron, P.E. (2004) *An evaluation of learning styles, learning issues and learning problems of Confucian heritage culture students studying hospitality and tourism management in Australia*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Brisbane: The University of Queensland.

Barron, P.E. (2002) Providing a more successful education experience for Asian hospitality management students studying in Australia: a focus on learning styles, *Journal of Teaching in Travel and Tourism*, 2(2) 63-88.

Barron, P.E. and Arcodia, C. (2002) Linking learning style preferences and ethnicity: international students studying hospitality and tourism management in Australia, *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism Education*, 1(2) 1-13.

Barron, P. and Anastasiadou C. (In press) Studying full-time and working part-time: The case of hospitality and tourism management students at a Scottish university. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*.

Barron, P.E. and Watson, S. (2005) *Coping with Change in Hospitality Education: Understanding Student Learning Styles*. Paper presented at the 23rd Euro CHRIE Conference, Paris, France, 26th – 30th October.

Biggs, J.B. (1987) *Student Approaches to Learning and Studying*, Hawthorn Victoria: Council for Educational Research.

Campbell, B.J. (1991) Planning for a student learning style, *Journal for Education for Business*, July/August, pp. 356-358.

Chan, S. (1999) The Chinese learner - a question of style, *Education and Training*, 41 (6/7) 204-305.

Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (2002) Higher Education Institutions in Australia, <http://www.dest.gov.au/highered/ausunis.htm> (accessed 6/5/03).

Curry, C.R., (1987) *Integrating Concepts of Cognitive or Learning Style: A Review with Attention to Psychometric Standards*, Canadian College of Health Service Executives, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

Duff, A. (2000) Learning styles of UK higher education students: four studies of the reliability and replicability of the learning styles questionnaire, *Bristol Business School Teaching and Research Review*, Issue 3, Summer 2000, pp 1-16.

Express Hospitality (2008) Dubai's Maharat hospitality training program moves to next level, 16-29 February, 2008, <http://www.expresshospitality.com> (accessed 25/5/08).

- Gow, L. Balla, J. Kember, D. and Hau, K.T. (1996) The learning approaches of Chinese people: a function of socialization processes and the context of learning? In M.H. Bond (ed.), *The Handbook of Chinese Psychology*, pp 109-123, Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.
- Gold, J. and Smith, V. (2003) Advances towards a learning movement: translations at work, *Human Resource Development International*, 6(2) 139 - 154.
- Goodwin, C.J. (1995) *Research in Psychology: Methods and Design*, New York: Wiley.
- Hajazi, R. Zoubeidi, T. Abdalla, I, Al-Waqfi, M. and Harb, N. (2008) A study of the UAE higher education sector in light of Dubai's strategic objectives, *Journal of Economic and Administrative Sciences*, 24(1) 68-81.
- Henderson, J.C. (2006) Tourism in Dubai: overcoming barriers to destination development, *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 8, 87-99.
- Higher Education Funding Council for England, (1998) *Review of Hospitality Management*, HEFCE.
- Honey, P. and Mumford, A. (1986) *The Manual of Learning Styles (2nd Edition)*, Maidenhead, Berkshire: Peter Honey Publications Ltd.
- Honey, P. and Mumford, A. (2000) *The Learning Styles Questionnaire: 80 Item Version*, Maidenhead, Berkshire: Peter Honey Publications Ltd.
- Hospitality Training Foundation (2002) *Labour Market Review 2002*, London: Hospitality Training Foundation.
- Hsu, C.H.C. (1996) Needs and concerns of international students: what can educators do? *Hospitality and Tourism Educator*, 8 (2/3) 68-75.
- Huyton, J.R. (1997) *The Implications of Cross-Cultural Communication in the Hotel Industry: A Chinese Case*, Proceedings from the National Tourism and Hospitality Research Conference, Sydney: Bureau of Tourism Research, 158-165.
- Kember, D. and Gow, L. (1990) Cultural specificity of approaches to study, *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 60, 356-363.
- Khwaja, H.S. and Bosselman, R.H. (1990) Cultural adjustment of international graduate students in American hospitality and tourism programs, *Hospitality Research Journal*, 14 (2) 75-82.
- Kolb, D. (1984) *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall: Engelwood Cliffs.
- Kumar, H.M. (2007) Abu Dhabi Targets 3m visitors a year by 2015, *Gulf News*.
- Lashley, C. (1999) On making silk purses: Developing reflective practitioners in hospitality management education, *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 11 (4) 180-185.
- Lashley, C. and Shaw, M. (2002) *The Effects of Learning Styles on Student Development in HE and the Implications for Curriculum Design, Development and Delivery*. Paper presented at the European Learning Styles Information Network Conference, Ghent, Belgium.

Learning and Teaching Support Network (2004) *Accepted students and applicants 1996-2003 in hospitality, leisure, sport and tourism. Based on data provided by UCAS, Learning and Teaching Support Network.* <http://www.hlst.ltsn.ac.uk/resources/ucas.pdf> (accessed 20/12/2008).

Litteljohn, D. and Watson, S. (2004) Developing graduate managers for hospitality and tourism, *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 16(7), 408-414.

Malfroy, J. and Daruwalla, P. (2000) Culture and communication in a postgraduate hospitality program, *Australian Journal of Hospitality Management*, 7(1) 27-34.

Marshall, J.C., (1987) The examination of a learning style topology, *Research in Higher Education*, 26(4) 417-429.

Merriam, S.B. (2001) Andragogy and self-directed learning: pillars of adult learning theory. In S.B. Merriam (Ed.), *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* (Vol. 89), San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Rees, C.J. Mamman, A. Bin Braik, A. (2007) Emiratization as a strategic HRM change initiative: case study evidence from a UAE petroleum company, *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 18 (1) 33-53.

Reynolds, M. (1998) Reflection and critical reflection in management learning, *Management Learning*, 29 (2) 183 - 200.

Rogers, G. (2004) History, learning technology and student achievement: Making the difference? *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 5 (3) 232-245.

Sadler-Smith, E. (1996) Learning styles: a holistic approach, *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 20(7) 29-36.

Sadler-Smith, E. Allinson, C.W., and Hayes, J. (2000) Learning preferences and cognitive style: some implications for continuing professional development, *Management Learning*, 31(2) 239 - 256.

Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (2004) <http://www.shefc.ac.uk>

Sharpley, R. (2008) Planning for tourism: The case of Dubai, *Tourism and Hospitality Planning and Development*, 5(1) 13-30.

Sims, R.R. and Sims, J.J., (1995) Learning enhancement in higher education, in R.R. Sims and J.J. Sims (eds.) *The Importance of Learning Styles: Understanding the Implications of Learning, Course Design and Education*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Ticehurst, G.W. and Veal, A.J. (1999) *Business Research Methods: A Managerial Approach*, Australia: Longman.

Thagard, P. (1996) *Mind: Introduction to Cognitive Sciences*. Cambridge, M.A.: MIT Press.

TTN, 2008, Middle East has World's highest hotel occupancy, *Travel and Tourism News Middle East*, 26(9).

Wilson, J.P. and Beard, C. (2002) *Experiential Learning: Linking Theory and Practice*. Paper presented at the conference on Human Resource Development: Research and Practice

across Europe: Creativity and Innovation in Learning, Edinburgh, 22-26 January.

Wong, K.K.F, Pine, R.J. and Tsang, N. (2000) Learning style preferences and implications for training programs in the hospitality and tourism industry, *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Education*, 12(2) 32-40.

Yu, L. (1998). China's hotel industry: assessment and prospects, *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 4 (4) 368-380.

Zhao, J.L. (1991) A current look at hospitality and tourism education in China's colleges and universities, *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 10(4) 357-367.