

## A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF STUDENT LEARNING STYLES IN HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM MANAGEMENT IN UTTARAKHAND

---

*Dr. S.K.Singh\**

*Mr. Prashant Sharma\*\**

### ABSTRACT

The findings of tourism statistics reveals that both domestic and foreign tourism are on a robust growth path in India. This growth opens up doors for substantial increase in infrastructure, including air-road, rail connectivity as well as hotels and restaurants. This growth has resulted in increased demand of manpower requirement in the field, thus resulting in more institution being established in the area of Tourism and Hospitality education. Within the context of the hospitality and tourism educational environment in Garhwal and the Kumaun region of Uttarakhand, this paper provides a comparative analysis of the preferred learning styles of students studying hospitality and tourism programmes. Specifically, it compares the learning styles of students studying in two regions of Uttarakhand depending on the year level of study and as such it highlights the learning style preferences displayed by students at different stages of their educational experience. The paper concludes with a discussion regarding the importance of recognising the potential changes in learning style preferences as student's progress in their studies. The paper further concludes with discussion regarding the implications of such changes for academic staff.

**Key Words:** Comparative, Learning styles, Hospitality and Tourism Education, Kumaun and Garhwal

---

\* C.O.O., Amrapali Institute of Hotel Management, Haldwani, Nainital  
Email: coo@amrapali.ac.in; Mob: +91- 8171170007

\*\* Dean Academics, Amrapali Institute of Hotel Management, Haldwani, Nainital  
Email: psharma@amrapali.ac.in; Mob: +91-9927041565

## **Introduction**

Uttarakhand is primarily a mountainous state with only about ten percent of its total geographical area in the plains. Of the thirteen districts, Haridwar, Udham Singh Nagar and some parts of Dehradun and Nainital districts are in the plains, while the remaining areas of the state are hilly. Further, with more than three-fourths (78 percent) of its total population dependent on agriculture for livelihood, the economy of Uttarakhand is predominantly dependent on mountain agriculture. However, the scope for 'agricultural policies based on modern input-intensive agriculture is severely constrained in the hilly regions of this state due to various physical, geographical and environmental problems.

This has resulted in the majority of the rural population in the hills either surviving on subsistence agriculture or migrating to other parts of the country for employment. In the face of such economic backwardness in the rural mountainous areas of the state, generating remunerative livelihoods in these areas is the only way to fulfil the objective of pursuing an inclusive growth strategy in Uttarakhand.

A policy framework to generate inclusive growth for a state like Uttarakhand has to be consistent with the geography of the area. In other words, policies that might give successful results for any other state in India situated in the plains, may not prove to be fruitful in this hilly state. Moreover, the peculiarity of the geography implies that only a few specific sectors have growth potential in these backward areas and the policy framework has to focus on these sectors primarily. For example, sectors like horticulture (both fruit and vegetable cultivation) have a comparative advantage in the region due to its agro-climatic conditions. Similarly, given its natural resources and scenic beauty, the hilly regions are ideally suited for the development of the tourism sector. Most importantly however, the chances of success in these specific sectors will depend on the development of physical and social infrastructure. Thus the inclusive growth policies must emphasize the development of these sectors in the hilly regions of the state.

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 organisation and the nation. However understanding learning is not a straightforward process. Merriam (2001: 38) argues 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 hospitality and tourism students studying in Garhwal and Kumaun. This context was deemed to be of interest for several reasons.

The first being the observation that hospitality and tourism programmes in recent time are becoming more popular and continue to attract a large number of domestic students; secondly the student body is becoming more diverse in terms of age, ethnicity and background of students; thirdly it is a maturing field of study in both regions of Uttarakhand; and finally attention is being focused on improving efficiency and effectiveness of hospitality and tourism educational programmes.

The research aim is to highlight the changes in preferred learning styles depending on year level of two groups of students. Specifically, the paper will:

- describe the context of the study;
- provide a brief overview of learning theory perspectives, prior to examining different learning styles theories;
- brief the research process;
- explore the learning style preferences of hospitality and/or tourism management students in the Kumaun and Garhwal;
- analyse differences in learning preferences on the basis of year level of study;
- Focus on the implications for students and academic staff.

### **Context of the Study**

Since the early 1980's there has been a dramatic increase in the number of hospitality and tourism programmes offered by universities in the India and in Uttarakhand same was evident from 2000 onwards but the growth is not much due to limitations and the major being the poor marketing of the field of study. Indeed a preliminary search of the website of affiliating universities- HNB Garhwal, Uttarakhand Technical University and Kumaun University found that of the 2 publicly funded Institutes in Garhwal and Kumaun, 3 Private AICTE approved Institutes offering 4 year Degree programme in Hospitality and 13 Private affiliated colleges with universities in Garhwal and Kumaun offering 3 year degree programmes along with it there is 1 Institute of Hotel Management affiliated to National Council of Hotel Management and Catering Technology.

Only Garhwal and Kumaun university campus offered tourism programmes at either undergraduate or postgraduate level. Added to this are at least 40 private providers who provide diploma, degrees and certificates in hospitality and tourism education at undergraduate levels and these are affiliated to some foreign university or are study centre's of some open universities. Undergraduate hospitality and tourism education in the India commenced slightly earlier with the first Hotel and Catering degrees being launched in the mid 1960's and by 2011 it is found that some 102 AICTE approved institutions offered hospitality management programmes. In India the National Council for Hotel Management and Catering Technology

(NCHMCT) is offering 3 year degree level qualifications in Hospitality Management. The NCHMCT has 53 affiliated Institutes and have around 7,693 students graduating from them, with hotel and catering degrees each year.

While the majority of students studying hospitality and tourism management at publicly funded Institutes and self financed institutes in the Kumaun and Garhwal continue to be domestic; there is evidence that the student body is becoming more diverse. As disciplines, hospitality and tourism management appear attractive to students and draw a higher than average number of such students. This popularity perhaps is due to the maturing of hospitality and tourism management as an area of study.

It is also evident that, educational providers are facing a number of key changes that has direct impact on efficiency in relation to delivery methods. New opportunities are opening up due to the implementation of information technology and could facilitate major change in delivery of education, providing greater flexibility for learning (Little John and Watson, 2004). It is being recognised at international markets, many students take on part time job commitments along with their studies, whereas in context of Indian sector the same is not evident. 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 tries to summarise different paradigms of learning theories, prior to exploring and examining various learning styles.

### **Learning Theory Paradigms**

A study by Lee's (2004:82; 1996:83) identifies cognitivism, behaviourism, and humanism as three key learning theories. In the it's mentioned that cognitive learning can be linked with education and concentrates upon learning at the head level; behavioural learning can be linked with training and concentrates at the hands level and humanistic learning can be linked with development and concentrates at the heart level. To this structure, a fourth theory is added: Critical approaches to learning. While critical approaches do not describe mechanisms and processes by which people learn, they perform a valuable role in surfacing motives and the foundation ground for learning.

Cognitivist theory focus on the processes involved in learning, with an emphasis on how knowledge is acquired, stored, constructed and transferred. A central feature of cognitivist theory is that individuals are seen as active players in the learning process. In contrast, the Behavioural paradigm focuses on establishing learning process through behaviour. Behaviourist learning theorists assume that learning is the product of experience of and within physical and

social settings with responsibility for learning being with the teacher. The Humanistic paradigm is concerned with learning through interaction with society. Humanistic approaches to learning trace their roots to the field of humanistic psychology and emphasizing the importance of self-esteem, motivation and self-development (McGuire, 2004:88; Knowles, 1998:89). The main assumption of the humanistic approach is that learning occurs primarily through reflection on personal experience. An appreciation of individualism and difference is central to humanistic learning approaches. Humanist approaches to learning place the learner at the centre of all educational activities.

In the critical theory paradigm, learning is seen as a subtle process for encouraging commitment to existing systems of production and control. It recognises the existence of powerful interest groups and sees learning as an important tool for advocating specific values and ideals in furtherance of economic exploitation. Individuals are encouraged to subscribe to current ideas and thinking, with differences in views being discouraged and suppressed. Learning is relevant to the degree that it is related to the primary process of the organisation (Poell & Van der Krogt, 2003). Learning is interpreted as a vehicle for manipulating employees and persuading them to achieve organisational aims (Lahteenmaki, Toivonen, & Mattila, 2001). Within this paradigm individuals need to engage in critical reflection and examine underlying motives of learning.

As the main topic of this paper is to explore learning styles of students studying hospitality and tourism management, the cognitive paradigm has been adopted as being the most appropriate, although some discussion is given to the other paradigms in the concluding sections of this paper.

### **Cognitive Learning Theories and Different Types of Learning Styles**

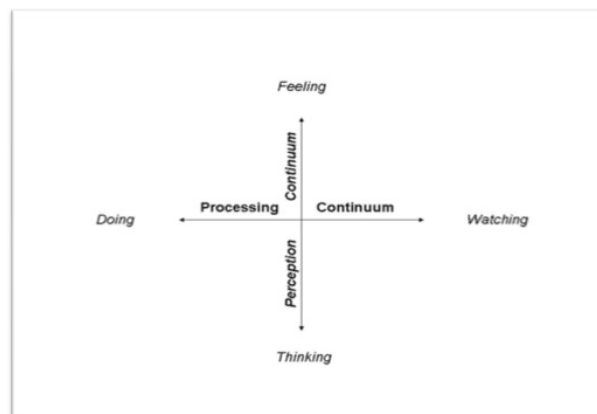
The Cognitivist Theories of Learning focuses on the processes involved in learning, rather than the products or outcomes of learning. Both Harrison (2000) and Von Krogh et al. (1994) argue that traditional cognitivist approaches adopt a rationalist stance, viewing cognition as the processing of information and the rule-manipulation of symbols. In agreement, Good (1990) argues that cognitivists view learning as a re-organisation of the cognitive structure in which individuals store information.

The Cognitive process represents a mechanism by which individuals adapt to their environment. In order to deal with and process the large volume of information and arrive at meaningful decisions, individuals develop highly structured cognitive schema. Daniels *et al.* (1995) argue that schema act as simplifications, helping managers to overcome the limitations of short-term memory, when they search long-term memory for relevant information. Similarly, Sparrow (2000) maintains that cognitive schema serve as top-down or theory-driven aids, generated from experience and affecting a manager's ability to attend to, encode and make intelligent inferences from collected information.

In various studies it is found that Experiential learning theory also concerns itself with the cognitive processing of experience involving in particular the elements of action, reflection and transfer. Experiential approaches are based on the premise that learning can be made more meaningful if it is grounded in the experience and context of the learner and that individuals learn more easily when engaged in active problem-solving (Holman, 2000). Similarly, Wilson and Beard (2003) argue that experience is the integrated process by which action and thought are brought together, creating an organic whole of continuity, process and situation.

“Experiential” means relating to or resulting from experience while “experimental” means relating to or based on experiment. Kolb uses the term “experiential” as his theory is based more on reflection of experiences. While others use “experimental” when referencing experimental-inquiry techniques that require learners to test hypothesis (experiment) about content knowledge.

Kolb’s learning model is based on two continuums that form a quadrant:

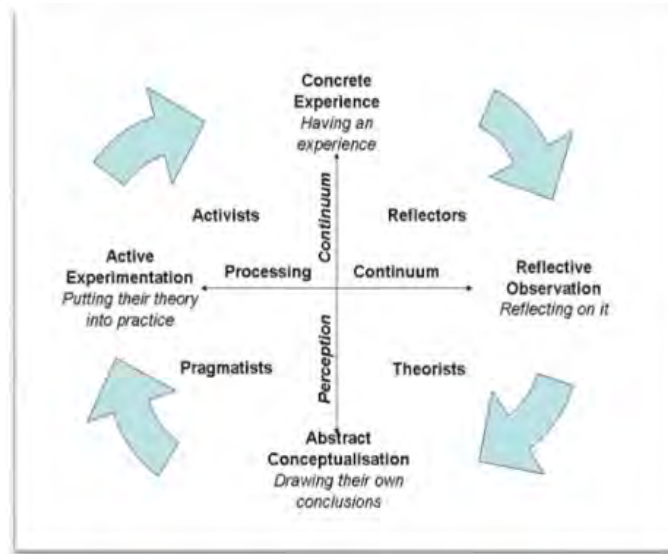


- **Processing Continuum:** Learners approach to a task, such as preferring to learn by doing or watching.
- **Perception Continuum:** Learners emotional response, such as preferring to learn by thinking or feeling.

It is said that the experiential learning cycle involves four learning stages: *concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation*. Concrete experience involves the individual partially taking a new activity from which learning can occur. Reflective observation involves watching or observing others and/or reflecting on one’s own experiences of the activity. Abstract conceptualisation involves 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. The four learning styles identified are: *Activist, Reflector, Theorist and Pragmatist*.

The model looks similar to this:



- **Reflector:** Prefers to learn from activities that allow them to watch, think, and review (time to think things over) what has happened. Likes to use journals and brainstorming. Lectures are helpful if they provide expert explanations and analysis.
- **Theorist:** Prefer to think problems through in a step-by-step manner. Likes lectures, analogies, systems, case studies, models, and readings. Talking with experts is normally not helpful.
- **Pragmatist:** Prefers to apply new learning's to actual practice to see if they work. Likes laboratories, field work, and observations. Likes feedback, coaching, and obvious links between the task-on-hand and a problem.
- **Activist:** Prefers the challenges of new experiences, involvement with others, assimilation and role-playing. Likes anything new, problem solving, and small group discussions.

It is argued that a wholly effective learner is proficient in all four styles. Listed below is an example which illustrates the theory:

### **Learning to Ride a Bicycle:**

- **Reflective observation:** Thinking about riding and watching another person ride a bike.

- **Abstract conceptualization:** Understanding the theory and having a clear grasp of the biking concept.
- **Concrete experience:** Receiving practical tips and techniques from a biking expert.
- **Active experimentation:** Leaping on the bike and have a go at it.

It can be 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 behaviour as controlled at a fundamental level by the central personality dimension. The middle layer centres 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.

Students are the recipients and participants in the learning process, and 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 surroundings as well as the school environment (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 discard that approach if an alternative approach is more suited to the learning task (Gow, Balla, Kember and Hau, 1996). Course syllabi, teaching methods and assessment all place constraints on the student and affect and influence the approach to learning within an environment.

In addition, the role of educationalists and course providers in the learning process is also important. While acknowledging that learning is ultimately the responsibility of the student, Dehler, Welsh, & Lewis (2001) argue that the task of the educator is to create a space in which learning can occur. Giroux (1997) maintains that educational courses reproduce the values, social practices and skills needed for perpetuating the dominant social order.

Grey & Mitev (1995) argue that students are resisting learning anything, which they perceive as theoretical, impractical or irrelevant, preferring to learn specific techniques, which they see as useful, and mainstream management readily serves up a diet of such techniques. Both Linstead et al. (2004) and Salaman and Butler (1994) contend that many management schools have tended to propagate a view that managers value most practical techniques or methods that have direct or immediate application leading to a dumping down the management theory to suit practitioners. Likewise, Cavanagh (2004) views the role of modern management

education as to fill the mind of the student, without altering it and to arm them with a portfolio of self-help theories and prescriptive management guides.

### **Learning Style Preferences of Hospitality and Tourism Management Students**

Various studies have been undertaken to identify the learning preferences of hospitality, tourism and travel Management students in the UK, Asia and Europe. The majority of these studies have utilised Honey and Mumford's Learning Style Questionnaire and the results of these studies will be summarised below.

In one of such study in the UK, Lashley (1999) found that the majority of students who were enrolled in hospitality management have preferred learning styles that indicate that they enjoy practical activity, but who are less comfortable with theorising 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). 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 in work. They are not keen on practising and do not enjoy the constraints of having to follow precise instructions (Honey and Mumford, 2000).

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 East Asia display preferences for Reflector learning styles (Wong, Pine and Tsang, 2000). It is contended that a reason that could influenced the learning style is the differing cultural approaches to education.

If we summarise it could be said that there are number of significant issues which might challenge current models of effective teaching in hospitality and tourism management programmes in universities that have implications for teaching and learning methods, curriculum design and assessment strategies. *First*, it is important to understand the learning style preferences of students studying hospitality and tourism management and to attempt initiatives that encourage students to adopt a more reflective, critical approach to their studies. *Secondly*, it is important to recognise the diversity that is common in classrooms and attempt to recognise 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.

## Research Methodology

A Learning Styles Questionnaire with little variation to the one designed by Honey and Mumford (2000) was used for this study to investigate the learning styles of domestic and other State students studying hospitality and tourism management at a variety of professional education institutions in Garhwal and Kumaun. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first section asked respondents to answer questions concerning age, gender, nationality, ethnicity and name of programme enrolled. This section also asked questions that attempted to determine motivations for current area of study and reasons for choosing the particular Institute/University. The second section consisted of questions relating to the four different types of learning styles 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. 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 Likert scale on the previous Honey and Mumford yes/no type measurement will enhance the reliability of the data collected.

To obtain 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 teacher. This makes the method of questionnaire administration fast and less problematic. It must however be noted that students participation in this research study in both Garhwal and Kumaun was entirely voluntary and respondents were drawn from normal institutes classrooms and thus are representative of the cultural diversity that exists in contemporary Garhwal and Kumaun higher education institutions.

The data collected from the second part of the questionnaire, which contained 40 questions on learning styles, were analysed, 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 styles was determined for each group of students. A purposive method of selection was used to determine the higher education providers in the Garhwal aspect of this study and a selection of both private and public universities were chosen.

## Respondent Profiles

The number of hotel management student who provided useable return of questionnaires in the institutions of Uttarakhand is as follows:

- A.I.H.M, Haldwani: 161 students (Including Diploma and Degree programme)
- G.I.H.M Dehradun: 105 students

- K.I.H.M Dehradun: 95 students
- R.I.H.M Dehradun: 41 students
- G.I.H.M Almora: 70 students
- IHM Kothdwara: 65 students

Therefore, the total number of students who provided useable returns as set by this study is 537 from Garhwal 306 and from Kumaun 231 students.

The same is illustrated in detail in table 1.

The composition of the respondents was broadly similar in that male respondents outnumbered their female counterparts. There was a fairly even mix of the number of respondents in years one, two and three at undergraduate level; respondents studying at masters level comprised only 5% of the total number of respondents. The average age of both the Garhwal and Kumaun sample was just over 22 years. The table below gives an overview of the institutions that took part in this study along with an indication of response rates:

TABLE 1

Garhwal				Kumaun			
Institutes	Estimate Student Enrolment	Issued Q's	Useable Returns	Institutes	Estimate Student Enrolment	Issued Q's	Useable Returns
G.I.H.M Dehradun	220	120	105	G.I.H.M Almora	200	100	70
K.I.H.M, Dehradun	208	150	95	Amrapali Group, Haldwani	680	200	161
R.I.H.M, Dehradun	156	90	41				
I.H.M's Kothdwara	158	100	65				
Total	762	460	306		880	300	231

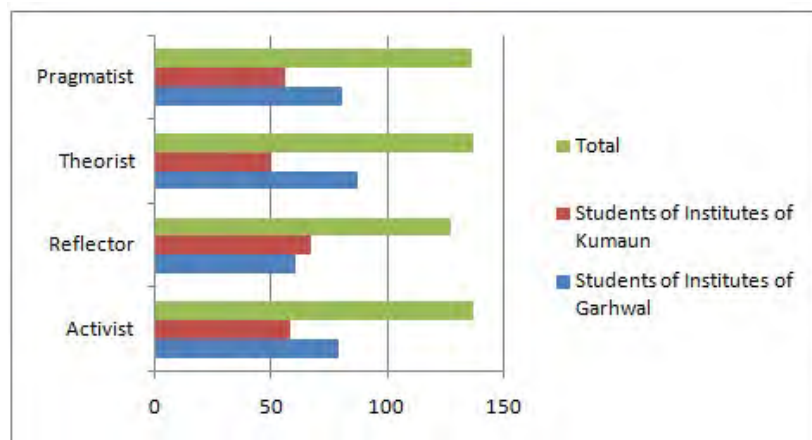
## Results

Initial analysis of the results from this survey suggests that both groups of students might be considered as reasonably well balanced with regard to their preferred learning styles (see Table 2). The results indicate that both groups of students are relatively comfortable adapting to a range of teaching methods and styles. It can be seen that the learning style preference with the most identical between the groups is that of Reflector. Indeed, from initial analysis it can

be seen that the Reflector learning style preference is the most preferred learning style Kumaun, and the Theorist is the preferred learning style in group for the Garhwal students. This result is important if one considers Lashley's (1999:185) assertion for the development of more "reflective approaches to study and management tasks" amongst students studying hospitality and tourism. As a result this might indicate a reflective teaching culture evident in Garhwal institutes from which Garhwal educators might note and react accordingly.

*Table 2: Mean Scores for all Respondents' Learning Style Preferences*

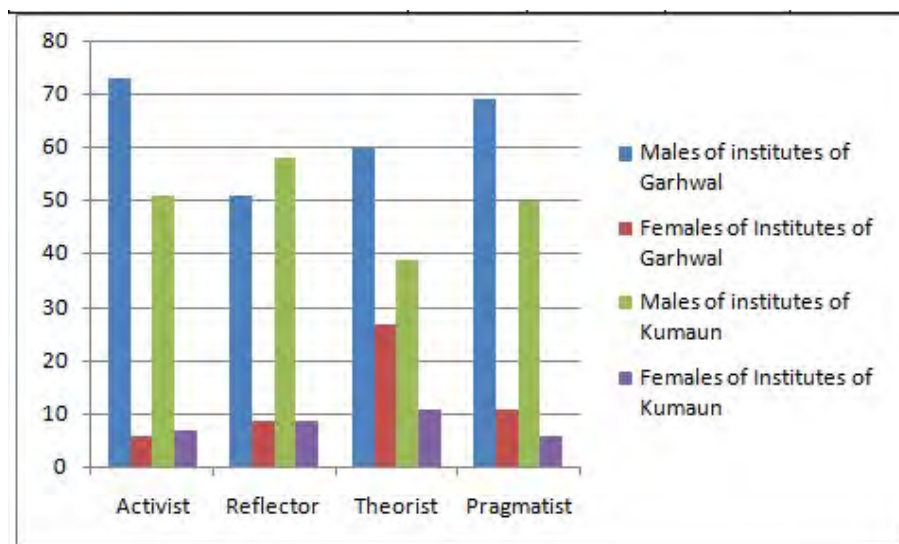
Students	Activist	Reflector	Theorist	Pragmatist	
Students of Institutes of Garhwal	79	60	87	80	306
Students of Institutes of Kumaun	58	67	50	56	231
Total	137	127	137	136	537



It has however, been noted (Barron, 2004) that it is unwise to treat a group 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 group. For example, Chart 3 below presents an indication of the differences in learning styles of females and males in both the Garhwal and Kumaun institutes' samples. This chart clearly indicates that within these major subgroups, there are differences in preferred learning styles. For instance it can be seen that among Garhwal males, the most preferred learning style is that of activist and among Kumaun males it is reflector. Due to the small group of female respondents it is hard to predict on findings but in both female group theorist seems to be the preferred learning style.

Chart 3: Learning style preferences by gender

Learning style scores of students	Activist	Reflector	Theorist	Pragmatist	
Males of institutes of Garhwal	73	51	60	69	253
Females of Institutes of Garhwal	6	9	27	11	53
Males of institutes of Kumaun	51	58	39	50	198
Females of Institutes of Kumaun	7	9	11	6	33
Total	137	127	137	136	



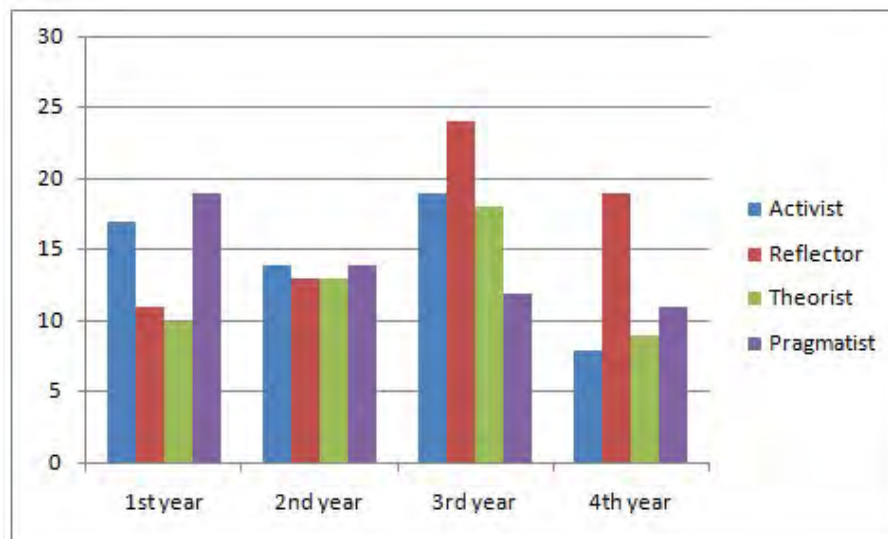
Further analysis of the data comparing the preferred learning styles on the basis of year of study reveals that there is a developing reflector style learning preference through the four years of undergraduate programmes. The preference for activist style learning would appear to decrease as students move through the levels of programme of study. These results may not be surprising as students are likely to be exposed to more opportunities to reflect in their studies, through for example, differing assessment instruments, greater use of case studies and opportunities to relate theory to practice. In addition, exposure to industry practice through work placements could also further develop reflection opportunities. With a decreasing emphasis on practical skills and more theoretical input into problem-solving situations, there is likely to be fewer opportunities for students to use and develop their activist learning abilities.

The chart below also indicates that theorising as a preferred learning style increases from first to second year, remaining virtually the same level thereafter decreasing in third year, but again slightly increasing in year four students. Although it is only possible to speculate reasons for the increase in theorising, possible influences include teaching methods and content that

includes greater exposure to, and use of theory. A similar pattern of increased preference for pragmatic learning style, as students move through the four years of study can also be seen below in the Garhwal group. This increase in the preference for pragmatic learning makes for an interesting balance in relation to the reported preference for reflective learning. This could be related to teaching schedules, or assessment expectations, or it could be reflective of the students attracted to hospitality and tourism programmes. Without further analysis of the sample, it is difficult to put forward substantial reasons for this pattern.

**Chart 3:** Garhwal Student's preferred learning styles depending on year level

Year wise Learning style scores of students	Activist	Reflector	Theorist	Pragmatist
1st year	31	6	23	17
2nd year	24	11	28	20
3rd year	15	19	17	21
4th year	9	24	19	22
Total	79	60	87	80



A different configuration emerges from the Kumaun results. Although reflector learning is the most often reported preferred learning style within each level of study, the increase is between year one to year three, with a decline to the similar level as year one in year four. These results can be seen to be contrast to Lashley's (1999) work, which found that hospitality management students had a preference for activist learning, but were less comfortable with theorising and reflection.

It can be seen that there is a slight increase in the preference for theorist learning moving from year one to year three, there is a subsequent decline in year four. The year four results could indicate an area of concern for Kumaun institutions in relation to a perceived lack of preference for a theorising style of learning. It appears that current students either do not like, or are not given the opportunity, or are not able to demonstrate theorising learning skills. It might be expected that a theorising preference would be evidenced as students progress through a degree level programme, however this does not appear to be the case for the Kumaun based students. These results could support the views expressed by Linstead et al (2004) concerning a focus on practical techniques, although the result merely highlights a lack of preference for learning through theorising, rather than a lack of theory underpinning their learning. The preference for pragmatic learning also increases between years one to three, but declines to its lowest level in year four.

The preference for activist learning style is reported to be relatively popular across year one and two. It is particularly high with year three students, but declines for year four students. It is unclear why the degree of preference for activist style learning is so high in year three, of the Kumaun based students but this could be related to work placement activities (which are often scheduled within last semester of year two or at the beginning of year three of programmes of study), teaching and assessment methods that encourage activist learning, like group work, presentations or problem solving.

*Chart 4: Kumaun student's preferred learning styles depending on year level*

Year wise Learning style scores of students	Activist	Reflector	Theorist	Pragmatist
1st year	17	11	10	19
2nd year	14	13	13	14
3rd year	19	24	18	12
4th year	8	19	9	11
Total	58	67	50	56

In comparing the results of the Kumaun and Garhwal samples, some interesting observations can be discussed. At the undergraduate level, the Kumaun results indicate a lower preference for activist, theorising and pragmatism than their Garhwal counterparts, but there is a greater preference for reflector learning. This supports the initial analysis of the two groups taken as a whole entity, which reported a higher preference for reflection, by the Kumaun students. These results contradict Lashley's (1999) findings and could be as a consequence of programme design issues, student profiles, learning environment and content issues discussed earlier. In relation to theorising and pragmatic learning styles, again the Kumaun group reports less emphasis on these as preferred learning styles than the Garhwal results.

## **Conclusion**

This research has tried to address and achieve the overall research aim of this study; certainly some limitations have to be taken into account. Firstly, there is a requirement for more detailed statistical analysis of the data which will allow more concrete conclusions to be drawn. Similarly, this research has highlighted the need for the undertaking of a detailed analysis of the difference in content and process of hospitality education in Garhwal and Kumaun. Finally, it is recognised that this research merely presents a snapshot of students' learning styles and the results cannot be seen to be indicative of learning style preferences in general.

The research has highlighted that while there are some general similarities between students studying hospitality and tourism in Kumaun and Garhwal, the composition of both groups presents a more complex picture. Through analysing the data based on gender and year of study, an understanding of the complex nature of student preferred learning styles emerge. This work tries to highlight the understanding of preferred learning styles and suggest that it might be taken into consideration when developing new subjects and programmes, considering and implementing new teaching methods and, planning assessment strategies. To sight as an example if educators are looking forward to produce graduates who have measured decision making process and who take the opportunity to reflect on a range of options, then effort should be concentrated in developing a more reflective approach.

The evidence of diversity amongst students preferred learning styles presents teachers with a number of challenges, especially in Kumaun where the students dislike learning through theorising. A teacher has to address these challenges and has to learn the ability to cope with such a variety of styles during the delivery and assessment of subjects. It might be suggested that the different learning style preferences as evident within the two groups of students is an advantage and should be looked positively. The preference for reflector learning style by the Kumaun and upto some extent by Garhwal groups, contrasts Lashley's (1999) work in this area. This result would indicate that students would be receptive to learning and assessment strategies that encourage a more reflective approach to their studies. With the Garhwal results indicating that students also enjoy theorising, this would support the introduction of a more critical focus for their studies. This might be difficult to introduce in the Kumaun institutions.

In context of above findings it's suggested that hospitality and tourism educators should use these identified differences to the advantage of all students. This might be achieved by using alternative means of programme delivery that encourage students to theorise, including encouraging students to present summaries of theories, highlighting inconsistencies, greater use of case studies to develop critical and analytical abilities. Practicing assessment strategies to develop a more reflective approach in students who display activist preferences or presenting more rigorously structured subjects to students who have reflector preferences. Apart of this

the today's educators must note that where learning style preferences are concerned, students learn from each other for example, group exercises will result in the development of more rounded approaches to learning.

## REFERENCES

- AICTE Approval Process handbook 2011-12.
- Anderson, J.A., (1995). Toward a Framework for Matching Teaching and Learning Styles for Diverse Populations, in Sims, R.J. and Sims, S.J. (Eds.) *The Importance of Learning Styles: Understanding the Implications for Learning, Course Design and Education*, pp 69-78, Greenwood Press, Connecticut.
- Barron, P.E. (2004). An evaluation of learning styles, learning issues and learning problems of Confucian heritage culture students studying hospitality and tourism management. Unpublished PhD Thesis. The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Barron, P. E. (2002). Providing a more successful education experience for Asian hospitality management students: A focus on learning styles, *Journal of Teaching in Travel and Tourism*, 2, 2, 63-88.
- Campbell, B. J. (1991). Planning for a Student Learning Style, *Journal for Education for Business*, July/August, pp. 356-358.
- Cavanagh, J. M. (2004). Head Games: Introducing Tomorrow's Business Elites to Institutionalised Inequality. In C. Grey & E. Antonacopoulou (Eds.), *Essential Readings in Management Learning*. London: Sage
- 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.
- Daniels, K., De Chernatony, L., & Johnson, G. (1995). Validating a Method of Mapping Managers Mental Models of Competitive Industry Structures. *Human Relations*, 48(8), 975 - 991.
- Dehler, G. E., Welsh, A., & Lewis, M. W. (2001). Critical Pedagogy in the "New Paradigm". *Management Learning*, 32(4), 493 - 511
- Gow, L., Balla, J., Kember, D. and Hau, K.T. (1996). The Learning Approaches of Chinese People: A Function of Socialisation Processes and the Context of Learning?, in Bond, M.H., (Ed), *The Handbook of Chinese Psychology*, pp 109-123, Oxford University Press, Hong Kong.
- Gold, J., & Smith, V. (2003). Advances towards a learning movement: Translations at work. *Human Resource Development International*, 6(2), 139-154.
- Good, T. L., & Brophy, J. E. (1990). *Educational Psychology: A Realistic Approach*. White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Grey, C., & Mitev, N. (1995). Management Education: A Polemic. *Management Learning*, 26(1), 73-90.

- Harrison, R. (2000). Learning, Knowledge, Productivity and Strategic Progress. *International Journal of Training and Development*, 4(4), 244 - 258.
- Holman, D. (2000). Contemporary Models of Management Education in the UK. *Management Learning*, 31(2), 197 - 217.
- Honey, P. and Mumford, A. (2000). *The Learning Styles Questionnaire: 80 Item Version*. Maidenhead, Berkshire UK, Peter Honey Publications Ltd.
- Kember, D. and Gow, L., (1990), Cultural Specificity of Approaches to Study, *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol. 60, pp 356-363.
- Kolb, D. (1984). *Experiential Learning. Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*: Engelwood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall.
- 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.
- Lahteenmaki, G., Toivonen, J., & Mattila, M. (2001). Critical Aspects of Organisational Learning Research and Proposals for its measurement. *British Journal of Management*, 12, 113-129.
- Lee, M. (1996). Holistic Learning in the New Central Europe. In M. Lee, H. Letiche, R. Crawshaw & N. Thomas (Eds.), *Management Education in the New Europe: Boundaries and Complexity* (pp. 249-266). London: Routledge.
- Lee, M., & Smith, A. (2004, 27-28th May 2004). *The National Agenda, Incidental Learning and Television as a Learning Medium: The Case of the Professional Development Channel*. Paper presented at the Proceedings of the Fifth UFHRD/AHRD Conference, University of Limerick, Ireland.
- Littel John, D and Watson, S. (2004). Developing graduate managers for hospitality and tourism *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* Vol 16 No7 pp. 408-414.
- Linstead, S., Folup, L., & Lilley, S. (2004). *Management and Organisation: A Critical Text*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- 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.
- Poell, R. F., & Van der Krogt, F. J. (2003). Learning-Program Creation in Work Organisations. *Human Resource Development Review*, 2(3), 252 - 272.

- Sparrow, P. (2000). Strategic Management in a World Turned Upside Down: The Role of Cognition, Intuition & Emotional Intelligence. In P. C. Flood, T. Dromgoole, S. J. Carroll & L. Gorman (Eds.), *Managing Strategy Implementation*. Oxford: Blackwell
- Wong, K,K,F, Pine, R,J, and Tsang, N, (2000). Learning Style Preferences and Implications for Training Programmes in The Hospitality and Tourism Industry, *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Education*, 12, 2, 32-40.
- [www.nchmct.org](http://www.nchmct.org), National Council of Hotel Management details.