

A PROPOSAL FOR THE EFFECTIVE STYLES OF LEARNING PROFESSIONAL ENGLISH AT FACULTY OF TOURISM – HANOI OPEN UNIVERSITY

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Abstract: *The purpose of the study is to provide the basis for the students at Faculty of Tourism, Hanoi Open University (FOT-HOU) to identify their individual learning styles, thereby finding appropriate directions to improve their styles of learning professional English for tourism. The subjects of the study were 205 students of K25 and K26, divided into three groups of academic performance: excellent, good and average. Via a survey based on the questionnaire of Honey & Mumford (2000) and the self-esteem scale of Bloom (2001), the main learning styles of students in all three groups were analyzed and the effectiveness of those styles was also measured. The results have determined that the effective style for learning tourism English at FOT-HOU is the combined transformation of all four learning styles (theory, practice, reflection, and reality). A number of solutions to help the students approach and improve their self-study capacity for learning tourism English in the most effective way have been proposed as well.*

Keywords: *learning styles, professional English for tourism, academic performance, effectiveness, self-study capacity*

I. Introduction

Nowadays, foreign languages are an important tool for many industries, especially the tourism industry involving the tasks of serving customers from all over the world. The proficiency in a foreign language is a necessary factor to help increase job opportunities or salary for graduates. At FOT-HOU, there has been a change in the form of training from an annual basis to a credit, which reduces the interaction time in class;

therefore, the students have to increase their self-study. However, many students do not know how to study or cannot find an effective learning style to improve their professional English (SE). If there is a suitable learning style, the acquisition of knowledge will become easier and more effective.

II. Theoretical basis on learning styles

2.1. Definition of learning style

According to Rose (1998), learning styles can be considered as learning

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methods that each individual chooses to acquire information; it is related to each learner's preferences for different types of learning activities. Learners who know their own learning styles can find out their strengths and weaknesses, thereby choosing appropriate learning methods to promote their strengths as well as overcome their weaknesses.

2.2. Characteristics of learning styles

According to Witkin (1962), the learning style has the following characteristics:

Each group of learners will have a different learning style: with the same image or an activity, each group of learners will have a learning style.

The learning style is affected by external factors: the learning style is based on physical factors and is influenced by heredity.

The existing learning style of each individual is the foundation to form new ones: Through the existing learning styles, learners can choose their preferred learning strategies, thereby forming new suitable ones for themselves.

The learning style is different for each individual: A group of students who have the same gender, age or common cultural, social, economic, and educational levels will have different learning styles because of differences in cognitive levels and the choice of different learning strategies.

In summary, the learning style is a category that can be changed depending on the external factors and the development of each individual. The learning style has different manifestations in each individual and in each group. It can be seen that the learning style is very diverse.

2.3. Styles of learning professional English

Dudley and Evans (1998) argued that English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is designed to meet the specific needs of learners. It applies the methods and language operations of the related major, focusing on the type of language that fits its activities in terms of grammar, vocabulary, lexicon, study skills, and style. Those authors also believed that determining the learning style is one of the essential elements to ESP learners. The learning style will help ESP learners understand their own learning preferences, thereby finding the most suitable learning strategies for themselves. The SE learning style can be referred as the application of learners' learning styles to teaching and learning, helping learners apply their own styles to maximize their strengths as well as overcome their weaknesses.

2.4. Models of learning style

a) David Kolb's experiential learning theory

In the 1970s, the American psychologist David Kolb together with Roger Fry developed the "Experiential learning" model. This model is also known as the four-stage learning model: Concrete experience, Reflective observation, Abstract conceptualization, and Active Experimentation. Based on this learning model, Kolb has developed an experiential learning cycle consisting of four stages and four related learning styles, helping learners shape and recognize their own learning styles and each person might have one or more than one learning style. Each person can transform from one type of learning style to another, or combine many types to suit their majors and the need to receive professional knowledge and skills.

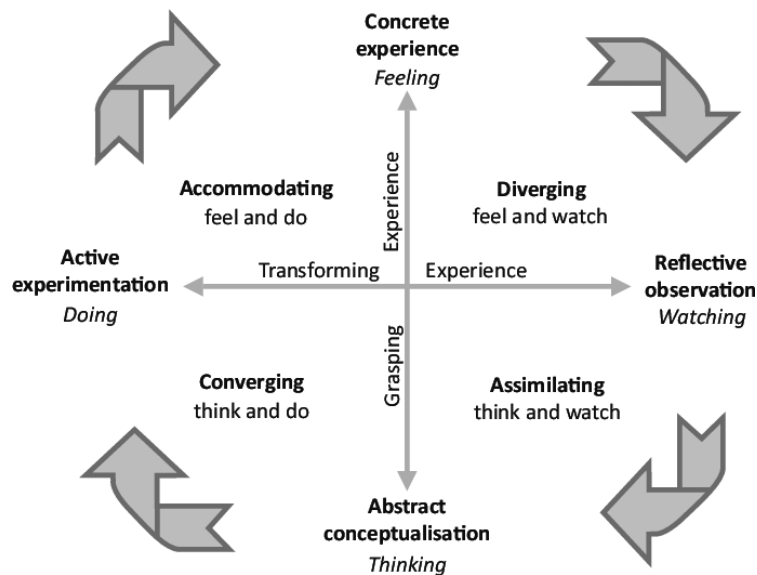


Figure 1: The experiential learning cycle by Kolb

(Source: www.simplypsychology.org)

b) Honey and Mumford's learning style mode

Applying the theory of Kolb's experiential learning and questionnaire on learning styles to discover how individuals learn, Peter Honey and Alan Mumford spent four years experimenting different approaches to assess individual differences in prevailed learning styles, then gave out the Learning Styles Questionnaire (LSQ) in 1982. The questionnaire provided questions to probe general trends in behavior rather than direct questions

about how learners learn as in Kolb's toolkit. Honey and Mumford's new tool was designed based on understanding attitudes and behaviors to identify learning interests, thereby improving their learning proficiency while taking the most of their strengths for their holistic development.

In this model, the learning style is defined as "the description of attitudes and behaviors which determines an individual's preferred learning style" (Honey & Mumford, 1992). This learning style is divided into four categories: activist, reflector, theorist, and pragmatist.

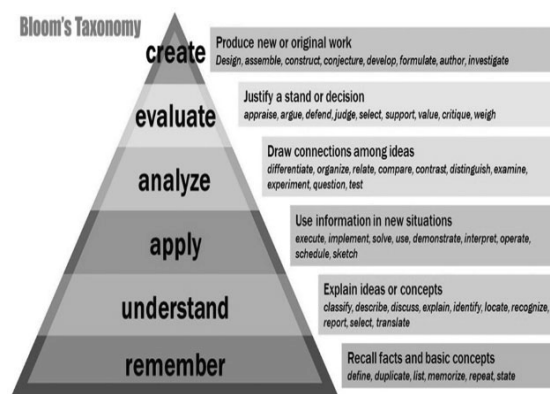


Figure 2: The relationship between Kolb's learning style model with Honey and Mumford's

(Source: www.icti.org.uk)

2.5 A scale measuring the effectiveness of SE learning styles - Bloom scale

Bloom's Revised Taxonomy is an effective tool to assess the effectiveness of learning styles in general and SE learning styles in particular. As Foreman (2010) analyzed, one of the effective applications of Bloom's scale is "providing a clear and concise vision of learners' thinking,

cognitive levels, and styles through learning activities and educational goals". The cognitive levels of the Bloom scale have a close relationship with the SE learning style through expressions, thinking characteristics and the perception of learners. The learning style directly affects the level of learners' knowledge acquisition and thinking. In other words, the Bloom scale is capable of assessing the effectiveness of the SE learning style.

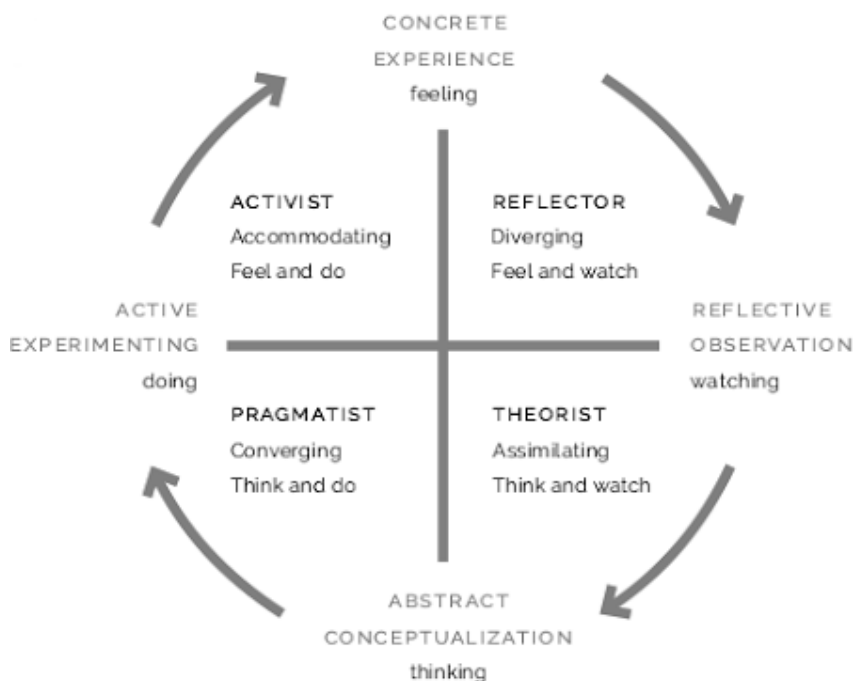


Figure 3: BLOOM's Taxonomy

(Source: VNECONOMICS)

Bloom's scale of 6 levels, divided specifically and scientifically, has clearly shown the difference of each cognitive level of learners. Thereby, the scale confirms an important role in assessing the effectiveness of the SE learning style.

In summary, the SE learning style plays an important role to each individual who has a need to learn English for a specific purpose. The SE learning style will help English learners shape their

thinking and perception as well as identify learning goals for effective application in each necessary professional field. The effectiveness of the SE learning style is evaluated scientifically and specifically through the Bloom's scale.

III. Methodology

- **Aims of the study:** The main purpose of the study is to make suggestions to improve the SE learning style of the students at FOT-HOU.

- **The object and the scope of study** The object of the study is the SE learning style. The subjects of the study are 205 students of K25 and K26 from FOT-HOU, divided into three groups of academic performance: excellent, good, and average. The content of the study is to survey the learning situation, learning styles of student groups and the effectiveness of those styles.

- **Research methods and data collection:**

+ Quantitative method: the study used the sampling survey method to collect and classify the learning styles of students at FOT-HOU, involving the questions about the situation of learning English, the SE learning styles and their effectiveness in different groups.

+ The method of desk research was carried out for the purpose of giving an overview of the learning style, its characteristics, the scales of learning styles' effectiveness.

+ Quantitative method was used based on the Excel software.

- **Research tool:** The research tool is a survey/questionnaire with the purpose of surveying the situation of English learning and styles of learning tourism English. The survey form includes 44 questions, of which three questions are about students' personal information, three questions about their general knowledge of tourism English, 36 questions about their learning styles and two questions about the effectiveness of their learning styles. The questions about the learning styles are based on Honey's questionnaire with the items selected to suit the context

of SE learning. The questions to evaluate the effectiveness of the learning styles are based on BLOOM's taxonomy.

IV. Results and discussions

4.1 The current situation of SE learning styles at FOT-HOU

The results show that the students mainly use the self-study form. In particular, the students in all three groups have a variety in the combination of learning styles and the highest percentage is the combination of all four styles (theory, action, reflection, reality). However, the learning efficiency in those three groups is completely different: the excellent group reaches Level 6, the good group reaches Level 5 and the average group only reaches Level 3. Thus, it can be seen that the students of good and average groups do not know how to make the most of the strengths of each existing learning style and have not created the harmony of the 4 learning styles to achieve the best results.

4.2 Proposing an effective English learning style at FOT-HOU

Based on the survey results, the authors suggest that the effective SE learning style at FOT-HOU is a skillful combination of four learning styles. We propose both the main solutions and the additional ones. For each solution group, we give the reasons for our selection, the content, the instructions for application and specific examples. First of all, for the main solutions, we propose two activities to transform, combining four learning styles, which are the project-based learning and the debate.

Main solutions

Project – based learning

According to the author Pham Dieu Ly in “Sample filling research and the role of Project-based learning method in teaching English at Faculty of Tourism - Hanoi Open University” (2018), for those three groups of students, doing the project helps improve their confidence and their language ability and thereby increase their learning results in the

courses of tourism English. In addition, according to the diagram of Gomez (2016), the project-based learning is a combination of “knowledge and learning ability, knowledge and application ability, problem-solving skills”. In other words, going through this method is the result of a skillful combination of four learning styles (theory + action + reflection + reality). Below is a table detailing the steps of the project-based learning and the corresponding learning style for each step:

Table 1: Steps of doing a project

(Source: Phạm Diệu Ly, 2018)

No	Contents	Learning styles
1	<i>Making directional questions on their own</i> Making questions on their own helps students create excitement and challenge for themselves, and at the same time helps self-direct tasks and goals. Good directional questions stimulate their own curiosity and thinking, assumes their role in society, or leads to the creativity. <i>Example: As a tourist coming to Hoi An, how do you feel about its culture?</i>	Reflection
2	<i>Developing a plan for the project</i> Plan the resources needed for the project (knowledge, skills, equipment, etc.), the sources for general knowledge related to the project before proceeding with the project (experts, speakers, researchers, engineers with in-depth knowledge, etc.) and invite experts to share their knowledge about tourist psychology, history of the country, etc.	<i>Reality</i>
3	<i>Making a timetable for each step</i> In order to ensure the progress of the project, it is necessary to draw up a specific timetable for each step based on the directional questions posed in the first step and possibly give new directions for the goal achievement.	<i>Theory</i>
4	<i>Self-controlling the project’s implementation and products</i> Do the tasks as scheduled. During the implementation, it is necessary to pay attention to the progress of the project via the reports of the results in each phase. In addition, it is important to develop a framework for evaluating individuals in the group and a project evaluation framework for a good control.	<i>Action</i>
5	<i>Self-assessing the results of the project</i> Self-assess the entire project using the criteria table provided by the teacher	Reflection

Above is a table of the steps corresponding to each learning style. It shows the transformation combining four learning styles. The students in the group with excellent academic performance

can easily follow the steps to get the transformation, combining styles and bringing the highest efficiency in the SE. However, the groups of good and average students need help and guidance from

teachers and excellent students. **Debate**

Debating is a useful method to improve speaking skills by developing students' own critical thinking to make a convincing argument about an issue in an argument. According to Vietyouthtodebate - an organization researching the debate for Vietnamese youth - debates can help students learn English effectively through training and harmoniously applying the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing as well as thinking, analyzing

(reflection) the information and knowledge acquired (theory) to form a coherent argument and arrange it to create a point of view on a specific issue; also increasing interactions by group discussion (action), communicating and expressing opinions directly (reality) with others in English.

The table below details the steps of the debate method and at the same time shows the harmonious transformation of the four learning styles corresponding to each step.

Table 2: Steps for debating

(Source: m.busyteacher.org)

No	Steps	Learning styles
1	Choosing your own debate topic Students choose issues related to the lesson to create an interesting topic that stimulates their curiosity and desire for presenting their opinions. A good topic will keep students interested and motivated to express their views. <i>Example: Tourism students should work part-time in restaurants, hotels or travel agencies.</i>	Reflection
2	Analyzing and pointing out two sides of the debate topic After choosing a debate topic, students conduct an analysis and divide the topic into two negative and positive viewpoints so that they can group the members for the debate.	Reflection
3	Finding information and knowledge to add to the group's viewpoints Debating groups will have time to research relevant information and knowledge to support the group's viewpoints.	Theory
4	Discussing in groups Discuss with group members to come up with appropriate arguments to support the group's viewpoints.	Action
5	Presenting viewpoints and forming the debate process The groups will have time to make arguments to support their viewpoints and counter the opposing side of the other group according to a predetermined process. + Group 1 presents the opening views. + Group 2 presents the opening argument + Group 1 has a chance to counter Group 2's argument + Group 2 has a chance to counter Group 1's argument + Group 1 has a second chance to counter Group 2's argument + Group 2 has a second chance to counter Group 2's argument + Group 1 needs time to conclude. + Group 2 needs time to conclude.	Reality
6	Rating the viewpoints After the groups have presented their views, the listeners will vote based on the persuasiveness of the arguments (logic, communication, ability to counter the opponent's point of view, etc.) to determine winning group.	Reflection

The table includes the steps to create a debate, helping students have clear directions to build their own debate process while still incorporating all four learning styles. In each debate group, there should be the students with excellent, good, and average academic performance. The excellent students can promote their own capacity, and good and average students can learn knowledge and skills to improve learning efficiency.

Additional solutions

When students understand the nature of learning activities, it is possible to achieve the transformation combining four learning styles in any activity. However, in order to harmoniously combine all

four learning styles, they also need to know how to learn effectively to promote the strengths of each style. Referring to the theory of the expression of learning styles in Honey and Mumford's research, the authors have built a list of additional solutions presented in the table of activities to improve the effectiveness of each learning style. This is a new combination between Honey and Mumford's learning style model and Bloom's Taxonomy. Based on the expressions, each learning style matches a specific skill. For each style, the authors illustrate with exercises in the coursebooks for tourism English at FOT-HOU. The difficulty of the exercises will increase gradually according to 6 levels.

Table 3: Activities for improving the effectiveness of each style in learning tourism English

Level	Theory (Reading)	Action (Speaking)	Reflection (Writing)	Reality (Professional skills)
1. Remember	<p>- List new concepts related to tourism in the reading passage <i>Example: The definitions of inbound tourism, outbound tourism, domestic tourism... (Pet1/p8)</i></p> <p>- Fill in the blanks with words/phrases related to the content of the reading passage <i>Example: Fill in the blanks with the word/phrase to complete a person's job information sheet based on the reading passage describing the job (Pet 1/p18)</i></p>	<p>- Point out the sentence patterns and words needed to talk about a topic in tourism <i>Example: Memorize words/phrases used to show directions (Pet 2/p69)</i></p> <p>- Answer basic questions <i>Example: What is the marketing mix? (Pet3/p12)</i></p>	<p>- Point out the appropriate vocabulary to write about a topic in tourism. <i>Example: List adjectives used to describe food (Pet 2/p56)</i></p> <p>- Point out the necessary grammatical structures and sentence patterns about a topic in tourism <i>Example: Use the present tense to write a cover letter (Pet1/27)</i></p>	<p>- State the sequence of steps and principles to implement task related to professional skills in tourism. <i>Example: Steps for doing the check-out (Pet 2/p81)</i></p> <p>- Memorize the tourism terms. <i>Example: Names of fabrics in a hotel (Pet 2/p77)</i></p>

<p>2. Understand</p>	<p>-Understand the characteristics and functions of tourism-related concepts in the reading passage, then compare the similarities and differences between them. <i>Example: Compare an all-inclusive package and a tailored package to find out their similarities and differences (Pet1/p35)</i></p>	<p>- Practise asking and answering the questions available in the travel-related reading passage <i>Example: Name the services that the hotel can provide for each type of guest (Pet1/p43)</i> - Express your opinion on a tourism topic <i>Example: In your opinion, what services should be included in a 5-star hotel (Pet1/p42)</i></p>	<p>- Do the exercises of putting the verbs in a correct form and rewriting sentences, correct mistakes to improve writing skill and deepen the understanding of travel issues <i>Example: Rewrite the sentences so that the meaning remains the same, arrange the words to make a complete sentence.</i></p>	<p>- Describe, give examples for each procedure of professional skills in tourism <i>Example: Describe and give examples of the steps for handling customers' complaints (Pet1/p45)</i></p>
<p>3. Apply</p>	<p>-Apply the tourism knowledge in the reading passage to a specific tourism environment to solve existing problems <i>Example: Applying niche tourism model to tourism in Vietnam</i></p>	<p>- Develop role-playing conversations about situations related to a tourism topic <i>Example: Build up a conversation about a situation when a customer booked a tour through a travel agent</i></p>	<p>- Write compositions/ letters/ emails to resolve and confirm travel problems <i>Example: Write a response letter to a guest complaint</i></p>	<p>- Do the role-play performing the procedure of tourism professional skills <i>Example: Play the role of the receptionist and the customer performing the check-in procedure</i></p>
<p>4. Analyze</p>	<p>- Analyze the strengths and weaknesses of a particular tourism environment based on the theoretical knowledge <i>Example: Analyze the strengths and weaknesses of niche tourism in Vietnam</i></p>	<p>- Analyze the factors of the studied tourism topic associated with the specific tourism environment (market, locality, restaurant, hotel, etc.)</p>	<p>- Analyze the opportunities to write a development description for a specific type of tourism (business tourism, culinary tourism, health tourism, etc.)</p>	<p>- Analyze a specific situation or problem and consider using the learned professional skills to solve it <i>Example: Use the professional skills to deal with complaints and give the most appropriate solution</i></p>

5. Evaluate	- Give arguments to demonstrate the effectiveness of the tourism knowledge in the reading passage for a particular tourism environment <i>Example: Assess the feasibility and effectiveness of applying the 4P model to promote local tourism</i>	- Discuss in groups, give out viewpoints to analyze, evaluate, and prove a tourism issue <i>Example: Discuss in groups to give out the most reasonable choice to reward employees</i>	- Write a review on a travel issue <i>Example: Assess the human impact on a tourist destination</i> - Compare two or more than two travel problems <i>Example: Compare the development of marine tourism of Vietnam and Thailand</i>	- Give out your own argument to assess a tourism issue <i>Example: Evaluate the options to organize an event to find the most viable solution (formal meal or buffet)</i>
6. Create	- Design a model, propose criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of the tourism knowledge in the reading passage for a specific tourism environment	- Design a multimedia presentation on a travel topic	- Design tours, plan events, or improve the quality of travel services, etc.	- Learn and find out new directions and solutions to common complaints or future customer complaints.

V. Conclusion and recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

Based on the actual learning situation of students at FOT-HOU, the article “A proposal for the effective styles of learning professional English at the Faculty of Tourism, Hanoi Open University” has provided a theoretical basis for learning styles and the scale for measuring their effectiveness, and proposed the groups of solutions to help students identify their own learning styles and improve their capacity of learning professional English for tourism at FOT-HOU.

5.2 Recommendations

For the lecturers teaching English courses for tourism majors: They can refer to suggested activities and methods to develop teaching materials and design appropriate lessons as well as organize

games, practical experiential activities suitable to the interests of each group of students belonging to certain learning styles, focusing on activities to help students transform combining different learning styles to improve the effectiveness of learning professional English for tourism.

For the students at FOT-HOU: They can identify their own learning styles, then find suitable activities to improve their performance for the given levels. Besides, they should have the initiative to create learning activities based on the solutions proposed by the study. Moreover, they can refer to the sample design of the learning process at each level of thinking to build their own appropriate learning process to improve their own capacity of learning professional English for tourism.

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