



Chinese Students' Cultural and Behavioural Differences among Domestic and Internationally Oriented Educational Institutions.

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ABSTRACT

Research has found a link between active student participation in the classroom and memory retention. Participation can encompass many aspects, including asking questions in class and partaking in classroom activities. Extensive studies have been conducted on Chinese students concerning their overall involvement in class. When compared to their Western counterparts, Chinese students are often regarded as silent passive learners (i.e. not active), hence negatively affecting their ability to learn in the classroom environment. The changeability of education together with ongoing globalization has led to an increase in Chinese students going abroad. As a result, there has been an increase in demand for international high schools and other educational training centres that prepare Chinese students for tertiary education in the West. This research investigates classroom behaviours and the value of saving face (i.e. retaining respect or avoiding humiliation) of students attending a Chinese international high school and compares them with students attending a conventional Chinese public high school. A MANOVA is used to assess these differences based on a questionnaire submitted to 349 students from Taiyuan, Shanxi province in China. Results show that students following an international program ask more questions in class, but no difference is found in regards to the Chinese cultural value of face. Subsequently, auxiliary qualitative research was performed to clarify quantitative outcomes. These outcomes showed that efforts to save face, academic pressure, classroom environment, and pre-existing individual factors contribute to this found difference.



International Schools are on the rise in China

- There is a large increase of Chinese students studying abroad (ICEF Monitor, 2015).
- When students from China attend schools in the West they are faced with big differences in terms of educational culture. This has led to an increase in demand for International preparatory high schools.
- The role of Chinese International high schools is to provide appropriate preparation to make the transition to college abroad easier. Using an international style curriculum and appointing foreign teachers to deliver some or many of the courses, Chinese international schools try to simulate classes similar to those of Western countries (Clark, 2014).



Differences in Educational Culture

- Chinese education has been greatly influenced by Confucian values of respect for authority and seniority. Western education has been influenced by the Socratic method of questioning (Lehman and Tweed, 2002).
- Using Hofstede's factors of cultural diversity (1985), educational differences between cultures can be examined. Particularly relevant factors in China's education system are *Collectivism & Power Distance*.
- *Collectivism* in cultures relates to identifying in-groups and out-groups, working on tasks together, and focusing on commonalities within a group (Basu-Zharku, 2011).
- When *Power Distance* is large it leads to strong feelings of respect for age and hierarchical positions (Hofstede, 1985).



Cultural aspects to classroom behaviour

- Collectivism and power distance are universally applicable concepts in terms of human behaviour. These factors of cultural diversity contribute to an ideological value which is distinct to Chinese society and is often referred to as *Face*. *Face* can be defined as “the need to be respected by others and not be embarrassed in social situations” (Hwang, 1987).
- The value of *Face* is related to certain classroom behaviours;
 - Avoidance of answering difficult questions posed in public
 - Avoidance to asking questions, since not understanding something might be considered a lack of diligence or knowledge on the student’s part.
 - Avoidance of discussions with the teacher. It might give the impression the students is questioning the expertise of the teacher, which violates the cultural aspect of power distance.
- The cultural aspect of *Face* can lead to a problem in adjustment when attending western based educational institutions, where there is a stronger emphasis on questioning and discussion. Interactions between teachers and students are expected and encouraged. One important reason for this relates to studies investigating the value of classroom participation in relation to academic performance.
- Active classroom behaviour is positively related to multifarious cognitive aspects, such as critical thinking (Smith, 1977), motivation (Karabenick & Knapp, 1991), and intellectual development (Belensky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986).



Current study

- In this paper the researchers assessed *Face* values and classroom behaviours of high school students in mainland China.
- A comparison was made between Chinese students attending an international program and students that followed the regular Chinese program.
- It was hypothesized that students who have been exposed to foreign teachers and their Western methods do not differ in *Face* values but do differ in their classroom behaviour, compared to students that follow the domestic Chinese education.



Method

- Sequential explanatory mixed methods approach
- Quantitative results are discussed in a focus group setting



Methods

Quantitative Inferential Analysis

- N= 349
- Grades 7-12
- 46% Male 54% Female
- Participants attending Subsidiary High School of Taiyuan Normal University located in Shanxi Province, China.
- Chinese National Program N= 254
- International Program N=95

Qualitative Focus groups (4x)

1.International students		N= 4
2.Public school students		N= 5
3.Mixed	Chinese International school Students	N= 3
	Chinese school Students	N= 2
4. Teachers		N= 7
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Total		N=21



Instruments

- Questionnaire to assess cultural values and classroom behaviours specifically for Chinese students. Psychometrically proven to be of good quality (Hwang, Ang, & Francesco, 2002). Translated into Chinese using forward and backward translation by three bilingual experts. Afterwards a pre-test was done using cognitive interviews (Su & Parham, 2002).

Measuring 5 factors;

- INask, questions are related to feedback seeking behaviour in class.
 - Facegain, consisting of statements related to the importance of gaining *Face*.
 - Faceloss, about the perceived importance of losing *Face*.
 - Outcheck, related to feedback seeking behaviour outside of class with other students.
 - Outask, related to feedback seeking behaviour outside of class with the teacher
- Focusgroup discussions were used to collect qualitative data. Discussions focused on exploring factors that could explain quantitative outcomes.



Analysis

QUANTITATIVE

MANOVA

- IV School type (public high school, international school, public middle school)
- DV Scores on Cultural values and classroom behaviour (Inask, Outcheck, Incheck, Facegain, Faceloss).

The MANOVA was followed by ANOVA's for each dependent variable.

QUALITATIVE

Thematic Analysis using Nvivo for coding.



Results

Quantitative MANOVA;

Adjusting omnibus criterion of significance calculated through the Holm-Bonferroni Sequential Correction shows significant differences for two variables:

1. OUTcheck ($F(2, 341) = 8.67, p = \mathbf{0.000}$ ($\alpha'=0.01$))
2. INask ($F(2, 344) = 6.46, p = \mathbf{0.002}$ ($\alpha'=0.0125$)).



OUTcheck

Games-Howell Post-hoc test

	(I) School	(J) School	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Games-Howell	International High School	Public High School	-2.148*	.474	.000	-3.27	-1.03
		Public Middle School	-1.512*	.536	.014	-2.78	-.25

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Due to violation of the homoscedasticity assumption the Games-Howell test was used



Inask

Tukey HSD Post hoc test

	(I) School	(J) School	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
	International High School	Public High School	2.190*	.646	.002	.67	3.71
		Public Middle School	1.903*	.648	.010	.38	3.43

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.



Qualitative Results;

Identified Themes that explain the Quantitative differences:

- *Face* and pressure
- Class environment
- Individual factors



Face and pressure

- Analysis showed that students' behaviours are greatly dependent on the concept of *Face* and perceived pressure. In other words, the students' willingness to participate depends on either fear of losing *Face* or pressure from the teacher and the over all academic environment. Both the Chinese international students and public school students said they feared other students would laugh at them if they asked a low-level question.
- This is inline with the quantitative results, showing that deeply rooted cultural values do not vary across the different educational settings.



Class environment

- Focus group discussions found class environment to be a significant factor in students' classroom behaviour. Students and teachers discussed issues like overall atmosphere (e.g. stressful, quiet, lively, etc.), classroom topic, teaching style of teacher, and classroom size.
- The teaching style has a big influence on the class environment. According to one teacher: "If the teacher encourages the students to express their opinions freely, they will be more confident to do so, but if the teacher is strict and temperamental, students will not open their mouth". One of the students shared a similar sentiment: "I will feel nervous if the teacher criticizes me".
- Students and teachers agreed that differences in teaching style are apparent when comparing western teachers and Chinese teachers. That difference usually included Chinese teachers being stricter while foreigners were open and active.
- Moreover, results show that class pressure can affect the behaviour of students. All groups stated that the pressures in the public high school are greater due to the Gaokao (Centralized Chinese University Entrance Exam).



Individual factors

- Individual factors, such as home situation and personality traits, were also discussed during focus groups.
- Results show that personality differences play a big role in the students' behaviour. These differences exist between international and public high school students. According to one of the teachers: “Students from the public high school tend to be conservative and, you know, very typical in Chinese traditional culture. But for the international school students, they are more open-minded, more free-wheeling”. It is argued that this influences their feedback seeking behaviour and increases their willingness to ask questions in class.
- Another difference the teachers see is the attitude towards education. According to them, the international students and parents see themselves as “customers” and they believe the school should serve them well without any consideration.



Conclusion

- This investigation strongly indicates that classroom environment and teacher relationships can reduce “silent student” behaviour.
- On a theoretical level it is clear that the cultural values and classroom behaviour can be distinguished from each other. Deeply rooted cultural beliefs will not be changed due to classroom environment, but classroom behaviour will.
- International schools, in China, are proving to be effective at preparing students for overseas universities by challenging the rigid assumptions of state education. Smaller class size and improved transparency have impacts on class interactions. Overseas educators further shift the permissible behaviours and are in high demand precisely because of their ability to engender new behaviours in Chinese students by breaking the existing educational paradigm.
- The findings are valuable to educational institutions that want to enhance students’ deep learning, considering the factors mentioned above. An especially eminent point of focus coming from these results is concatenated to the understanding of classroom behaviour and how it is impacted by the environment (*Face*, Pressure, Teaching style, & Individual differences).



Limitations/Future research

- Generalisation of found results should be limited to a similar socio-economic grouped population. The Subsidiary High School of Taiyuan Normal University is a relatively affluent high school located within the city boundaries
- Due to the descriptive nature of the used research methodology a causal interpretation is not justified. Findings suggest that pre-existing differences might have contributed to the found significant effect. For example, students in the international school are described as more open, this personality type could contribute to differences in feedback seeking behaviour, as has been suggested in other contexts (Krasman, 2012).
- To further show the influence of *Face* on classroom participation, students from the Chinese countryside with no exposure to Western methods can be compared to Chinese high school students already living abroad. Furthermore, other variables that could influence classroom behaviour should be examined in more depth. Examples include: class size, teaching styles, and personality traits.



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