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East versus West: Effectiveness of Knowledge Acquisition and Impact of Cultural Dislocation Issues for Mainland Chinese Students Across Ten Commonly Used Instructional Techniques

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Keywords

Knowledge Transfer, Comfort, Familiarity, Instructional Techniques, Chinese cultural values

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KNOWLEDGE ACQUISITION AND IMPACT OF
CULTURAL DISLOCATION ISSUES FOR
MAINLAND CHINESE STUDENTS ACROSS TEN COMMONLY USED
INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNIQUES**

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Abstract

The research analyses the new trend of training culturally diverse students in western style business education in Singapore where a substantial number of mainland Chinese students enroll in business courses. Building on ideas by Hofstede (1984), Morey and Frangioso (1998) and Rodrigues (2004), 402 mainland Chinese students who were enrolled in Singaporean business training programs provided differential ratings of the learning effectiveness, familiarity, comfort and ease of knowledge transfer for each of the ten commonly used instructional strategies previously investigated by Rodrigues (2004) based on a questionnaire. Both “active” and “passive” instructional techniques facilitate effective learning and acquiring of knowledge for these Chinese mainland students, although the literature reports that lectures are the most preferred technique for these students.

Key Words: Knowledge Transfer, Comfort, Familiarity, Instructional Techniques, Chinese cultural values

INTRODUCTION

Singapore is a knowledge-based economy endeavouring to be a global educational hub. International students view Singapore as an excellent academic location where they can have the best of both worlds, having the western-based educational experience delivered in the Asian context (Rajaram & Bordia, 2011). The emergence of a knowledge-based economy has resulted in two key educational changes—the growth of investment in education and a rise in educational capital. Singapore is also promoted as an ‘intelligent island’, with comprehensive development of information technology infrastructure. Students are attracted to Singapore as a place for pursuing higher education due to its branding and image as a well-recognized country which offers world-accredited qualifications (Tsang, 2001). Moreover, Singapore also serves as an exemplary icon to all the neighbouring countries for its western-based education.

According to the Ministry of Education’s annual statistical 2009–2011 report, business education attracts the largest pool of international students to Singapore. From this cluster, the students enrolled in undergraduate studies are the largest cohort. This was highlighted in the annual economic review analysis report for the year 2006 (*Straits Times*, Dec. 2006, pp.15–18), where the total revenue generated was one of the secondary contributing factors to the economic growth of Singapore. Among these international undergraduate students, the biggest cohort was mainland Chinese students (Tsang, 2001). With China’s growing economic and social progression, the mainland Chinese have started to explore opportunities outside their country. Private international schools are taken as the focal platform because this is an up-and-coming group, which attracts a reasonably large percentage of foreign students, with a rising trend (Ministry of Education for Singapore, 2007–2011). The yearly growth in enrolment of

international students in business courses is a clear indication of its continuously growing popularity.

This paper explores the varying instructional delivery methodologies (“active” and “passive”) for mainland Chinese students across cultural dislocation factors such as comfort, familiarity and knowledge transfer that facilitates optimal learning effectiveness. Foreign students view Singapore as an excellent academic platform where they can have the ‘best of both worlds’, which is to pursue a western-based education in an Asian context. The way these students learn will significantly influence the working styles and learning techniques adopted in the organizations that employ them in the future. It is essential to facilitate an appropriate platform for them to learn information optimally and, importantly, to adapt to the learning environment (Rajaram, 2010). The instructional methodologies have to be appropriately employed in accordance with the diverse cultural influences of these foreign students. These foreign students must be adaptable to the western-based educational approaches in order to assist them to transition and work effectively in western countries as future managers of global multinational corporations. It becomes essential to facilitate a versatile learning atmosphere for these students to develop themselves to be comfortable with the knowledge transfer in their future workplace. Organizational performance is intertwined with and related to these students’ learning effectiveness. The effective instructional strategies examined are relevant and applicable to all educators teaching international students as the discussion enables critical reflection on the dislocation issues and how these can be incorporated in their own teaching, cultural and assessment-related context.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Culture, communication and learning are intertwined and mutually dependent (Lum, 2006). It is apparent that to successfully maintain their international academic reputation, the international schools must strive to achieve current and future cultural fit in all of their offshore operations. As migrants abroad, the mainland Chinese believe that the only way to provide a better start in life for their children is through education, with many maintaining high expectations about the quality of education provided by host countries such as Britain and America (Pieke, 1991; Chan, 1997). In the new knowledge-based economy (KBE), how these mainland Chinese students perceive foreign education would be the key determinant of success, with a collective focus on the critical issues such as cultural factors, family influences, individual personality type, English language competence, motivation for migration, and so on (Selvarajah, 2006). Thus, it is critical for the international institutions to appreciate the cultural aspects in terms of their challenges and diversity, so that they can better address these relevant issues. This will then enable the international students—in our case, mainland Chinese students—to acquire knowledge in the most effective manner, which will eventually give them satisfaction in terms of quality education.

Based on research conducted across 50 countries, consisting of a good mix of both western and Asian countries, Hofstede (1980) developed a typology consisting of four cultural dimensions by which a society may be classified: individualism-collectivism (relates to interpersonal ties),

power distance (relates to inequality), uncertainty avoidance (relates to dealing with the unknown and unfamiliar), and masculinity-femininity (relates to the emotional gender roles). Hofstede and Bond (1988) subsequently described another cultural dimension, Confucianism, which is prevalent mainly in some Asian countries like Singapore, China, South Korea, Japan and Taiwan. “Despite the criticisms that have been voiced against his work (see McSweeney 2002; Oyserman, Coon & Kemmelmeier 2002), Hofstede’s influence on the fields of International business and management is undeniable: according to Harzing’s “Publish and Perish” citation index, as of June 2010, there were over 54,000 citations to his work” (Tung and Verbeke, 2010). Hofstede framework is adopted to measure the specific cultural dislocation effects due to the dramatic changes to the Chinese culture over time as a result of demographic, institutional and economic changes. The understanding of Confucian philosophical concepts is important, as Chinese students from mainland China are deeply rooted in Confucian values. Although these students have fairly similar social value systems to those in Singapore, the values of Confucianism may cause conflicts and challenges in their pursuit of a western-based education with a different curriculum.

The varying cultural dynamics are expected to have an influence on the students’ learning effectiveness. Basically, the three carefully identified cultural dimensions—namely, power distance, uncertainty avoidance and the philosophy of Confucianism—are very relevant in measuring the cultural diversity in an internationally based educational environment. It has to be acknowledged that the influence of the issues regarding mainland Chinese students’ learning effectiveness in terms of acquisition of knowledge through western-based education measuring across specific cultural dislocation aspects has not been explicitly researched.

One of the key challenges in today’s international business education is the ability to implement appropriate cultural strategies that facilitate student education. Offering quality education for international students entails a good understanding of the cultural aspects and effective methods of knowledge transfer, integrated with optimal learning processes. Thus, the key issue here is an explicit understanding of effective teaching/learning techniques which are suitable for these mainland Chinese students. In this context, this research serves to address the prevailing issues surrounding the influence of cultural values on students’ learning effectiveness via the most suitable educational learning platform.

Learning effectiveness frameworks for educating mainland Chinese students

There is an extensive body of literature that addresses the teaching techniques preferred by mainland Chinese students. However, the literature lacks a holistic approach integrating the influencing aspects of cultural dislocation values and perceived effective learning styles rather than their preferred teaching/learning approaches, which contributes to the development of effective learning strategies for the pursuit of a western-based education. Historically, Chinese learning comes from Confucius (Yang, 2009; Biggs 1996; Bond, 2010 and Chan, 1999). For mainland Chinese students, education today still focuses on the acquisition of a vast store of knowledge through rote memorization, at the expense of creativity (Chow, 1995 and Chan, 1999). Chinese learners are largely perceived as passive rote learners among western scholars (Chow,1995; Biggs, 1996; Chan, 1999; Liu, 2006). The complex and complicated nature of these Chinese learners’ cannot be oversimplified from a stereotypical generalization based from a

solely cultural based nature of learning. However, the understanding of Confucian philosophical concepts is important to enable the Chinese students from mainland China who are deeply rooted in such values to transit and adapt to new learning environments. Although mainland Chinese students have fairly similar social value systems to those in Singapore, certain principles and values of Confucianism may cause conflicts and challenges in a Western-based curriculum because different instructional techniques are variously adapted to a western based approach. Stereotyped descriptions of instructional and learning approaches by mainland Chinese students cannot be generalized and based on scholars' reports decades ago due to rapid and profound shifts in social, cultural and economic conditions in China (Ryan and Slethaug, 2010; Chan and Rao, 2009; Hu, 2003; Jin and Cortazzi, 2006; Shi, 2006; Watkins and Biggs, 2001; Yang, 2009; Bond, 2010). The behavioral aspects of learning approaches and types of instructional techniques preferred (as they are linked to the assessment context) are intertwined by cultural values and norms. But this may add to more complexity if these mainland Chinese students are studying in a western-based education course program coupled with cultural dislocation issues in a different proximity level of "Confucian heritage culture" (CHC) country (in this case - Singapore). Although Shi (2006) reported that the study in Shanghai shows that students "show little difference from their western counterparts by being active learners and preferring a more interactive relationship with their teachers" (Shi, 2006, pp. 122) but this cannot be generalized, as the study is conducted in China with only a certain cluster type of students, hence the factors such as comfort (power distance) and familiarity (uncertainty avoidance) tends to be different when students are pursuing a foreign-based program in another country. There are also other studies (Chan and Rao, 2009; Littlewood, 2009; Ryan and Louie, 2007; Yang, 2009; Bond, 2010; Watkins and Biggs, 2001; Jin and Cortazzi, 2006; Hu, 2003; McNaught 2012) which reported about the teaching and learning practices, however, the explicit issues on a western-based curriculum where differing instructional approaches to be undertaken in a culturally differing Asian country (despite the "Confucian-heritage" similarities), has not been examined to my best knowledge. Although the mode of assessment shapes the general students' learning preferences but varying explicit cultural dynamics (rooted values, norms, culturally inclined behaviors, cultural dislocation issues) will still influence the teaching and learning approaches customised (example, varying level of proximity of guidance and directions for the same instructional approach for culturally diverse students) may also be expected to have differing influences on perceived learning effectiveness. This is especially essential at least until the prolonged exposure for them to adapt to their preferred or perceived styles of learning in accordance to the assessment modes adopted in different universities and their course programs. Mainland Chinese students' preferred teaching techniques and their learning styles have been explored by many scholars, for example, by Chan (1999), Nakamura (1964), Redding (1990), Martinsons & Martinsons (1996); Bond (1992) and Biggs (1994). There are also other studies (Chan and Rao, 2009; Littlewood, 2009; Ryan and Louie, 2007; Yang, 2009; Watkins and Biggs, 2001; Jin and Cortazzi, 2006; Hu, 2003) which reported about the teaching and learning practices, however, the explicit issues on a western-based curriculum where differing instructional approaches to be undertaken in a culturally differing Asian country (despite the "Confucian-heritage" similarities), has not been examined to my best knowledge. There has been no clear indication of the measure of effectiveness of students' learning via their preferred teaching/learning techniques. It should be emphasized that students' preference for a particular technique does not necessarily equate to their most effective mode of learning.

Active/Passive Techniques

Mainland Chinese students prefer to learn by rote-learning (Chan, 1999; Chow, 1995). Lecture—categorized as a passive (P-like) technique by Rodrigues (2004)—was the predominantly used instructional technique that the students had been most familiar with since their high school days. Being nurtured in a Confucian culture, they were generally not used to learning in a participative mode but, rather, from a more directed and guided approach. This supporting evidence and rationale were embedded in the research question: ‘*Do Chinese mainland students rate the passive (P-like) techniques differently from the active (A-like) techniques in terms of learning effectiveness?*’, which facilitated the formulation of the first hypothesis (H1):

H1: P-like techniques are rated higher in importance than A-like techniques in terms of learning effectiveness in pursuing a western-style education

Comfort

Individuals from a high power distance culture and a collectivist mindset generally prefer to be in a fairly comfortable and conducive learning environment which enables them to acquire knowledge effectively (Hofstede, 1991). Applying this, it is apparent that the Chinese culture has a very high power distance, which can obviously be seen in the students’ behaviour towards their teachers. They seldom challenge their inputs and they conform to those in an authoritative or designated higher position in the hierarchy. This can be further supported by Shi (2006)’s report, where he claims mainland Chinese students “did not think having their own opinions was important for a good learner” (p. 138). However, due to the cultural dislocation aspect, the comfort level of these students acquiring knowledge from a western-based education is to be questioned. The correlations between learning effectiveness and comfort is demonstrated in the research second question: ‘*Is comfort positively related to learning effectiveness according to mainland Chinese students?*’ This allowed the design of the second hypothesis (H2).

H2: Comfort is positively related to learning effectiveness

Familiarity

Mainland Chinese students prefer the lecture technique because they have been principally exposed to it since their high school days (Chan, 1999). There should also be a positive association with how effectively they acquire knowledge when their familiarity point is high. Participative, interactive and competitive activities may not be compatible with Chinese social values (Kumaravadivelu 2003; Chan 1991; Carson and Nelson 1996; Nelson 1995 and Oxford 1995). However, Shi’s (2006) study of 400 middle school students in Shanghai reported that students prefer a more interactive relationship with teachers. With this diversity of changing perspectives, the students’ effective learning can be questioned to its level of familiarity. So, due to the shift in the students’ experience of learning in China, this aspect of familiarity is to be questioned of how it relates to learning effectiveness. The correlation between learning effectiveness and familiarity is demonstrated in the research third question: ‘*Is familiarity positively related to learning effectiveness according to mainland Chinese students?*’ This logical reasoning with supporting evidence led to the development of the third hypothesis (H3).

H3: Familiarity is positively related to learning effectiveness.

Knowledge Transfer

The approaches in which knowledge is disseminated to individuals generally have varying impacts on the effectiveness of students' learning (Morey & Frangioso, 1998). Applying this to the Chinese culture, it can be reported that there has been a shift in the uncertainty avoidance level due to the rapid changes over the last decade on China from varying dimensions (Chan 1999; Chow 1995; Newell 1999; Oxford 1995) reported that mainland Chinese students need to be closely guided and directed to carry out their assigned academic tasks. Moreover, (Chan 2006; Wen and Clement 2003) emphasised that they prefer the more passive way of learning, where a higher level of supervision is provided, and they are very unlikely to be on their own and independent. In contrary, other scholars (Ryan and Slethaug 2010; Chan and Rao 2009; Shi 2006 and Yang 2009) reported that Chinese students prefer a student-centered approach to a teacher-centered approach and they are willing to participate in interactive and cooperative learning activities. With this diversity of changing perspectives, the students' effective learning can be questioned to how the students' perceived and actually acquired knowledge easily. The correlation between learning effectiveness and ease of knowledge transfer is demonstrated in the research fourth question: *'Is ease of knowledge transfer positively related to learning effectiveness according to mainland Chinese students?'* This rationale allowed the design of the last hypothesis (H4).

H4: Ease of knowledge transfer is positively related to learning effectiveness.

In reference to the four hypotheses, the learning effectiveness principles were adapted in reference to Morey and Frangioso (1998), comprising the measurement constructs of understanding, skills, processes and inferred learning effectiveness elements (self-reported). The cultural dislocation constructs—comfort (in terms of power distance), familiarity (in terms of uncertainty avoidance) and knowledge transfer (based on the philosophy of Confucianism)—were based on Hofstede's (1980) and Hofstede and Bond's (1988) cultural dimensions.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

A total sample of 402 (from 447 returned questionnaire materials that contained no missing data and were otherwise complete) from seven large private institutions that conducts undergraduate programmes was identified. These students included a mixture (approximately 25%) from each of the four major regions of China: north, south, east and west. The sample was also referenced to several studies of similar dynamics performed on mainland Chinese students in Singapore (for example, Selmer & Leon, 1993; The Chinese Culture Connection, 1987).

Seven large private institutions which are Singapore Quality Class and "Edu-Trusted" accredited and conduct western-based undergraduate business course programs in Singapore were clustered generally based on: a) good recognition and relevant quality accreditations; b) the student population size; c) only those classified as large private schools with their own physical campus equipped with all necessary resources and facilities to accommodate at least a few thousand students. These seven private institutions were selected to ensure that all the ten teaching/learning techniques were frequently used by the business faculty, particularly in all the

courses in which these students were enrolled. All seven institutions had set a high standard of entry requirements (for example, relevant pre-requisite academic qualifications, high level of critical thinking skills, good verbal communication and written competency) for their courses, which ensured only qualified students with the right abilities were recruited. These institutions were good representations of typical private institutions in Singapore, especially in facilitating the teaching delivery and curriculum to mainland Chinese students.

Procedure

The study was conducted in two phases: a pilot study followed by the main round of questionnaire administration. The questionnaire was pilot-tested by 20 selected students from the institutions, as well as 20 experienced practitioners in the tertiary education sector, in order to ensure appropriate design, usage and reliability of the research instrument (questionnaire). The selection of the students for the pilot-test was carried out using the same criteria as those who qualified to attempt the actual questionnaire. This assisted in understanding the challenges or issues faced, which facilitated the better design and structuring of the questions to attain higher accuracy in data collection. The questionnaire was designed by reference to a similar research study by Rodrigues (2004). Based on the feedback of the pilot test, the questionnaire was refined and revised. The questionnaire was further modified after the conduct of interviews to develop the final version of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was designed in the English language as all the students pursuing the business courses had to have a minimum IELTS score of at least six (which means having a good proficiency level in the English language) and they were in a tertiary educational institution where the main mode of delivery was in English. However, to address the issues of language proficiency and competency due to their limited exposure to the English language, the entire questionnaire was also translated into Chinese so that the answers were accurate in terms of interpreting and understanding the questions. The students were given a choice in selecting the type of questionnaire: the English version or the version with both English and the Chinese translation. However, all participants (100%) choose the questionnaire version with both English and the Chinese translation. Furthermore, there were also translators present during the conduct of surveys to help students to translate or to clear up any ambiguity, should the need arise.

The distribution of the questionnaire was carried out through three distribution modes—face-to-face (93%), email (3%), and surface mail (2%)—and the survey was carried out over the telephone (2%) as the fourth approach. A structured questionnaire method was adopted using closed-ended questions. A total of 400 students were used as the representative sample size. The students were from the Business faculty. There was a sample of 42% males and 58% females. The language proficiency of the students was also set as a criterion for selection so that they must have had a minimum IELTS score of six. The recommended sample size of 400 was derived using Roasoft's (2004) sample calculator. To increase the participation rate, students who completed and returned the questionnaires distributed either by hand, by email or by surface mail were informed of their chance of winning the 'lucky draw' book vouchers. To address the issue of anonymity, respondents did not write their names on the questionnaires, but a serial number was tagged to each questionnaire that was distributed.

16 varying concepts on learning effectiveness were identified by pilot participants. 24 interrelated questions were developed from these 16 concepts and each was measured as a 5-point Likert item. The items were added up collectively to yield a scale of learning effectiveness with an overall alpha reliability of 0.91. Three further questions operationalized comfort, familiarity and ease of knowledge transfer also as 5-point Likert-like items with one item each per instructional technique. For convenience, all scale totals were divided by the number of items comprising each so that learning effectiveness, comfort, familiarity, and ease of knowledge transfer are all represented as 1-to-5 scales.

The method of data analysis was similar to Rodrigues (2004), who examined the impact of national culture on the importance students placed on the instructional techniques. The data analyses were performed based on the students' responses regarding learning effectiveness, comfort, familiarity and knowledge transfer of the ten instructional techniques. The data collected from the participants were organized and keyed into the *Excel* database system with the related coding prepared. Several statistical analysis methods were used in this study: Means reports the average responses of the construct based on the dimensional aspects of the Likert-type scale developed. '1' indicates 'strongly disagree', '3' indicates 'neutral' and '5' indicates 'strongly agree'. Alpha reliabilities helped establish construct validity to determine how well each of the constructs was implemented. Even though the main study students were presented with a 5-point scale to report their agreement or disagreement about the learning effectiveness of each instructional technique, their mean ratings subtended only about a 10% fraction of that range (3.35 to 3.77). Each technique received occasional extreme ratings (strongly disagree or strongly agree) by at least a few students, but their overall means clustered in the third quartile of the scale and all ten techniques were rated above its "neutral" mid-point. No one instructional technique should be claimed as "most effective" or "best" for mainland Chinese students, although there is more inclination towards the directed and guided learning approaches. Regression analysis was used to examine the constructs of learning effectiveness, comfort, familiarity and knowledge transfer that influenced the preferred instructional techniques for effective learning. The learning effectiveness was measured separately across each of the ten instructional techniques to identify the most effective instructional technique. The ratings of each technique were also used to predict the overall learning effectiveness. For statistical analyses, SPSS was used to compute the means, standard deviations, correlations and multiple regressions for this study.

RESULTS

The process of the implementation and validation of the study measures were examined. 4 key areas are reported mainly: a) Learning Effectiveness ratings versus instructional techniques; b) Learning Effectiveness from Comfort dimension; c) Learning Effectiveness from Familiarity dimension; d) Learning Effectiveness from knowledge transfer dimension.

Learning Effectiveness versus Instructional Techniques

H1, *Passive techniques are rated higher in importance than Active techniques in terms of learning effectiveness in pursuing a western-style education*, is partially supported. The general principle is illustrated by certain passive techniques—but not all of them—across the ten

instructional techniques. Table 1 reports the students' self-reported learning effectiveness ratings across ten instructional techniques.

Table 1: Learning effectiveness across ten instructional techniques

Ten instructional techniques ^a	Overall students' self-reported learning effectiveness ratings ^b
Case studies (<i>A</i>)	3.77
Lectures by instructor (<i>P</i>)	3.77
Group projects (<i>A</i>)	3.67
Videos (<i>P</i>)	3.63
Guest speakers (<i>P</i>)	3.56
Classroom presentations (<i>P</i>)	3.53
Classroom discussions (<i>A</i>)	3.46
Individual research projects (<i>A</i>)	3.46
Computerised learning (<i>P</i>)	3.36
Reading textbooks (<i>P</i>)	3.35

^a:A = Active, P= Passive; ^b: Ratings are computed on the average of: 'Strongly disagree' = 1; 'Disagree' = 2; 'Neutral' = 3; 'Agree' = 4; 'Strongly Agree' = 5;)

Lectures, videos, guest speakers and classroom presentations, are rated higher than two of the active techniques (classroom discussions and individual research projects). As the hypothesis (H1) supports only four out of six passive techniques, the relationship does not operate at all instances. This is evident from two of the four active techniques, case study and group project, that were rated as effective instructional techniques. The highest rated techniques are from an active cluster (case study), as well as from a passive cluster (lecture) scoring a mean score of 3.77. The second highest ranked is group project, with a score of 3.67. This emphasises clearly that the hypothesis (H1) is not supported for these two active techniques that are rated higher than the passive techniques. The hypothesis (H1) is not valid at all times but, rather, is only partially supported by fulfilling some specific aspects of the relationship.

The active techniques of case study and group projects are rated as most effective, with only the passive technique of lecture being ranked in the most effective category. Nield (2004) reports that mainland Chinese students prefer passive teaching methods such as lectures, demonstrations, handouts, displays, films and videos. Experiential exercises, case studies, role-play and simulations belong to the participative teaching methods and are least preferred (Chow, 1995). This is largely due to the cultural influence and students' prolonged exposure to the non-active and non-participative style of educational system since beginning high school. The active techniques of case studies and group projects are among the highest rated techniques. Perhaps one of the reasons could be because these students have had more exposure to Singapore and a western-based educational system and are accustomed to these techniques.

Learning Effectiveness from Comfort dimension

H2, *comfort is positively related to self-reported learning effectiveness*, is supported [correlation=0.61**, where ** (P<0.01)]. The general principle is illustrated by certain techniques better than others. From **Table 2**, it is evident that the general principle is illustrated by all ten of the instructional techniques, more so for lectures, case study, group projects and less so for classroom discussions, computerized learning and reading textbooks; but nevertheless, all ten shows that the relationship operates. Lecture was rated as the most comfortable technique, which relates equally well as the highest rated technique for learning effectiveness. Case study was ranked the second most comfortable technique, which shows a positive association with learning effectiveness as it was ranked the highest in terms of learning effectiveness. Group project was the next most comfortable technique, which was also ranked the second most effective technique in terms of learning effectiveness. The ranking order of the instructional techniques that were rated in the mid-range categories, classroom presentations, videos and guest speakers, makes it evident that these are positively associated with learning effectiveness. The last three techniques, classroom discussions, computerized learning and reading textbooks, were rated as the least comfortable as well as least effective in terms of learning.

Table 2: Learning effectiveness variable from comfort dimension ratings across ten instructional techniques

Ten instructional techniques	Learning effectiveness variable from comfort dimension ratings
	COM (n = 400)
Lectures by instructor (<i>P</i>)	4.12
Case studies (<i>A</i>)	3.61
Group projects (<i>A</i>)	3.54
Classroom presentations (<i>A</i>)	3.38
Videos (<i>P</i>)	3.35
Guest speakers (<i>P</i>)	3.33
Reading textbooks (<i>P</i>)	3.30
Classroom discussions (<i>P</i>)	3.25
Computerised learning (<i>P</i>)	3.25
Individual research projects (<i>A</i>)	3.15

^a:A = Active, P= Passive; ^b: Ratings are computed on the average of: ‘Strongly disagree’ = 1; ‘Disagree’ = 2; ‘Neutral’ = 3; ‘Agree’ = 4; ‘Strongly Agree’ = 5; ; ^b ‘COM’ = Comfort;)

Learning Effectiveness from Familiarity dimension

H3, *familiarity is positively related to learning effectiveness*, is supported [correlation=0.56**, where ** (P<0.01)]. The general principle is illustrated by certain techniques better than others. **Table 3** presents how the general principle is illustrated by all ten of the instructional techniques, more so for lectures, group projects, case studies and less so for classroom discussions, guest speakers, videos and reading textbooks; but nevertheless, all ten show that the relationship operates. The three techniques of lectures, group projects and case studies were rated as the most

familiar techniques as well as being rated highest in terms of learning effectiveness. However, the classroom presentation, guest speakers and videos techniques were rated in the mid-range category for learning effectiveness, whereas these three techniques were rated as the least familiar techniques. Reading textbooks was rated as the lowest in learning effectiveness, but it was ranked fourth in terms of familiarity. Thus, in this case, the general principle of familiarity related to learning effectiveness is weaker for these four instructional techniques.

Table 3: Learning effectiveness variable from familiarity dimension ratings across ten instructional techniques

Ten instructional techniques	Learning effectiveness variable from familiarity dimension ratings
	FAM (n = 400)
Lectures by instructor (<i>P</i>)	4.03
Case studies (<i>A</i>)	3.65
Group projects (<i>A</i>)	3.48
Classroom presentations (<i>P</i>)	3.45
Videos (<i>P</i>)	3.32
Guest speakers (<i>P</i>)	3.25
Classroom discussions (<i>P</i>)	3.23
Computerised learning (<i>P</i>)	3.12
Reading textbooks (<i>P</i>)	3.09
Individual research projects (<i>A</i>)	3.06

(^a:A = Active, P= Passive; ^b: Ratings are computed on the average of: ‘Strongly disagree’ = 1; ‘Disagree’ = 2; ‘Neutral’ = 3; ‘Agree’ = 4; ‘Strongly Agree’ = 5; ^b ‘FAM’ = Familiarity;)

Learning Effectiveness from knowledge transfer dimension

H4, *knowledge transfer is positively related to learning effectiveness*, is supported [correlation=0.53**, where ** (P<0.01)]. Certain techniques demonstrate the general principle better than others. **Table 4** presents how the general principle is illustrated by all ten of the instructional techniques, more so for lectures, case study, group projects and less so for individual projects, classroom presentations, classroom discussions and computerized learning; but nevertheless, all ten show that the relationship operates. Ease of knowledge transfer refers to how easily the information is acquired, whereas the learning effectiveness is associated with all the elements (for example, quality, efficiency, quantity of contents coverage, understanding of contents delivered, and so on) that lead to effectiveness of one’s learning. Generally, these two aspects are different because ease of knowledge transfer does not necessarily imply that students learn effectively. The concept of ease of knowledge transfer only addresses how quickly and easily information is acquired, whereas the aspect of understanding should be viewed as a totally separate element. The general principle of ease of knowledge transfer being related to learning effectiveness is fairly weak for two of the active and passive techniques. Two passive techniques, classroom discussions and computerized learning, were reported as teaching modes that enabled

the students to acquire knowledge with reasonable ease, but were not effective in terms of learning and enhancing quality. From the qualitative results, it was reported that students felt that it deterred them from improving the quality of the contents acquired. However, the active techniques of individual research project and classroom presentation were classified as the least effective in terms of ease of knowledge transfer but ranked in the mid-range category for overall learning effectiveness. Perhaps other contributing factors to learning effectiveness, such as the instructor's style of delivery, the level of autonomy given to students, other composites coupled with the structural aspect of the techniques and the instructors' cultural background should be explored in future research. This emphasizes the point that how easily knowledge is acquired by students does not only depend on the type of instructional techniques, but there are much more specific contributing elements embedded within it. These factors must be scrutinized with much more depth to appreciate the overall students' effectiveness in learning.

Table 4: Learning effectiveness variable from knowledge transfer dimension ratings across ten instructional techniques

Ten instructional techniques	Learning effectiveness variable from knowledge transfer dimension ratings
	KT (n = 400)
Lectures by instructor (<i>P</i>)	3.87
Case studies (<i>A</i>)	3.58
Group projects (<i>A</i>)	3.42
Classroom presentations (<i>P</i>)	3.41
Videos (<i>P</i>)	3.41
Guest speakers (<i>P</i>)	3.40
Classroom discussions (<i>A</i>)	3.39
Computerised learning (<i>P</i>)	3.25
Reading textbooks (<i>P</i>)	3.21
Individual research projects (<i>A</i>)	3.15

(^a:A = Active, P= Passive; ^b: Ratings are computed on the average of: 'Strongly disagree' = 1; 'Disagree' = 2; 'Neutral' = 3; 'Agree' = 4; 'Strongly Agree' = 5; ; ^b 'KT' = Knowledge transfer;)

DISCUSSION

The key findings contribute to the academic literature and emerge as practical solutions offering valuable inputs for implementation across all private institutions in Singapore. Active instructional techniques are reported as much better in terms of learning effectiveness for mainland Chinese students. The outcomes were benchmarked against the lecture mode of

instructional, to which these students had been well-accustomed since their high school days. When measured across the combined score of the cultural dislocation variables (namely, comfort, familiarity and knowledge transfer), it was discovered that the active instructional techniques were once again rated much higher than the passive instructional techniques. When these variables were measured in an individual context, again, all three cultural dislocation elements (comfort, familiarity and knowledge transfer) scored highly when measured across the active instructional techniques. It has always been reported that lectures are the most preferred technique for mainland Chinese students (Chan, 1999). In this sample, it appears that this might not be the instructional technique that represents the best possible way of acquiring knowledge.

Students reported that they learned more effectively by active instructional techniques, particularly by case studies and group projects, with the exception of lectures as the passive technique. This may be due to the increasing trend and exposure to western values and lifestyles in the learning and teaching actions of courses back in China. As China globalizes there is bound to be an increase of western exposure influencing the country's educational approach in terms of teaching and learning styles. Lecture, as the passive technique, was rated on the same scale as case studies as a mode of effective learning. Thus, the results were not consistent with Rodrigues (2004). The inconsistencies were accounted for as being largely due to the differences in the student pool used, where these respondents may have had differing experiences with these instructional techniques. Some students may have experienced the case study technique in the passive style (predominantly lectures), while others experienced it in the active style (relatively autonomous or alone). In relation to the group projects, some students may have experienced high levels of guidance and direction, while others experienced assignments with low guidance and direction. This is especially so for group projects, as the amount of supervision, assistance and guidance provided varies largely depending on the instructors' style of managing them. If the students were subjected to closer supervision, obviously, there was a much higher possibility of expecting a different outcome compared to those given much less supervision.

Also, perhaps a lot of time had passed since these models were developed, so things may have changed. Thus, the respondents from a stronger uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 1991) group within the Chinese culture, for instance, may not actually be so, and would therefore respond differently. For example, the mainland Chinese students in this study who came from what Hofstede (1991) calls a generally strong uncertainty avoidance society, if measured, may actually measure weak uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 1991)—after all, they did take a risk coming to study in a foreign country like Singapore. Furthermore, Singapore measures weak uncertainty avoidance (Rodrigues, 2004). Thus, Chinese students who pursue their education in Singapore tend to be highly influenced by the cultural values and lifestyles in Singapore. This sheds some light on the interesting result of active techniques that emerged as much more effective techniques (where a large majority of respondents had been in their course programs for a minimum of two years). This prolonged exposure had a large contributing part to play in influencing their learning values and styles. Even though foreign students are accustomed to learning mainly through the lecture technique (Ladd & Ruby, 1999; Jarrah, 1998), they adjust to these new techniques after some prolonged exposure during their stay in Singapore (Jarrah, 1998; Cornett, 1983). A majority of the respondents had been in the course programs for at least

two years of their undergraduate studies. Thus, it is very likely that the participants in this survey had now adjusted, at least to a certain extent, to the new instructional techniques. This helps to explain the closeness of the ratings, especially between the active and passive techniques which fall in the mid-range category. This sets forth a critical advantage for the multinational corporations. These mainland Chinese students, being the future managers, must be able to be more interactive and critical thinkers. Their aptitude to learn effectively, thus being equipped with critical and analytical thinking abilities, is required to perform well in their jobs in the near future.

These mainland Chinese students were accustomed to learning through the lecture technique (Ladd & Ruby, 1999; Jarrah, 1998), which may be an influencing element and help to explain why lecture, as a passive technique, was also rated as high in terms of learning effectiveness. The active techniques of case studies and group projects were rated in the top three positions in terms of comfort. This was explained by the common features like group sharing of views/opinions, a secure feeling provided by being in groups, and assistance provided by instructors/peers being present. The mainland Chinese students still learned effectively from those techniques which allowed them to be interactive, thus making them think and reflect, but with very limited independence. They reported that they still learned best in the environment which provided a secure feeling where guidance and assistance was provided by fellow classmates or instructors. This was well-justified as two other active techniques, individual research projects and classroom discussions were rated much lower than the three other passive techniques of videos, guest speakers and classroom presentations. Mainland Chinese students reported that they did not acquire optimal knowledge when they were left independent with minimal guidance and where the main learning platform became exchange and critique of information through verbal communication and presentation.

In relation to the proxies of cultural dislocation dimensions: a) comfort is positively related to learning effectiveness (H2); b) familiarity is positively related to learning effectiveness (H3); and c) knowledge transfer is positively related to learning effectiveness (H4) are supported. The results show that the more comfortable the mainland Chinese students were with the techniques, the better they learned, with a higher level of effectiveness. This was justified by the results, which reported that ‘lectures by instructors’ as a passive technique came across as the most comfortable instructional technique. Lecture being ranked as the most comfortable instructional technique is not much of a surprise, as this was fairly evident in the academic literature (Chow, 1995; Chan, 1999).

Students’ preference for an effective instruction technique largely depended on their comfort in the learning style. Chow (1995) reports that mainland Chinese students usually prefer passive teaching methods. Maxwell et al. (2000) report that these students largely acquire knowledge from passive styles and content-based learning, with which they are more comfortable. The ratings between lectures and the next most comfortable techniques of case study and group projects (active techniques) had a difference of 0.51. One possible explanation could be that case study and group projects were structured and delivered with extra guidance from the lecturers.

Thus, mainland Chinese students with large uncertainty avoidance will generally find comfort in the guided processes involved in the abovementioned instructional deliveries.

Crookes and Thomas (1998) state that problem-solving techniques may be adopted for use with mainland Chinese students. Tang (1996) says that mainland Chinese students will work collaboratively but may prefer to do so informally outside of class as part of their learning process. Nield (2004) reports that group work can work well with mainland Chinese students but may need to be structured differently than it would be for foreign students. Another explanation could be that these mainland Chinese students might have adjusted to the more participative techniques over their minimum of two years of study which had thus increased their awareness. The other four passive techniques—classroom presentations, videos, guest speakers and computerised learning—fell in the mid-range category. Individual research project and reading textbooks were rated as the least effective. Individual research project made the students feel insecure and uncomfortable as the structure of this technique left the students independent.

H3 (familiarity is positively related to learning effectiveness) is supported. The more familiar the students were with the instructional techniques, the higher the positive influence of the learning effectiveness on these students. All three of the techniques which were rated to be the most familiar were rated the same for the optimal learning effectiveness measure, as well. Lecture was also rated as the most familiar technique. The next two highest techniques in rank were the group project and case study. This finding supports the academic literature, where it is reported that lecture is the predominantly used technique in China as a medium of delivery. Nield (2004) reports that lectures, tutorials and seminars are far more popular than any other teaching styles. This is largely related to the way the mainland Chinese have been taught since their high school days. One rationalization of why case studies and group projects emerged as the other familiar techniques was because of the students' minimum of two years of exposure to the western-based methodologies. Ladd and Ruby (1999) indicate that mainland Chinese students are accustomed to learning mainly through the lecture techniques but over time they do adjust to new techniques (Jarrah, 1998; Cornett, 1983). Techniques such as reading textbooks, classroom discussions, individual research projects, computerized learning and classroom presentations fell in the mid-range category of familiarity. Guest speakers and videos were the two techniques which were identified as the least familiar techniques. One explanation could be that these instructional techniques might not have been integrated with much emphasis during their high school days back in China.

H4 (ease of knowledge transfer is positively related to learning effectiveness) is supported. The easier it is to gain and learn the knowledge from an instructional technique, the better will be the impact of learning effectiveness for its students. The lecture technique was rated the most effective in terms of students' ease of learning and gaining knowledge. One explanation could be due to the higher level of specific instructions and closer guidance provided. Thus, this explains why these students distinguished the gaining of knowledge with greater ease via this mode. The high level of familiarity and exposure to the lecture technique since their high school days might be another influencing factor where the processes involved were appreciated much more easily. Thus, this assists in the accelerated process in gaining of knowledge.

The next two techniques which were rated as most effective were case studies and group projects, which are categorized as active techniques. This serves as a reminder that mainland Chinese students also learn effectively via teaching techniques that require them to think critically and relate the contents to the practical context. Watkins (2000) mentions that when responding to questionnaires about their educational preferences, mainland Chinese students do not appear to be rote-learners. Nield (2004) reports that there is other research which indicates that it is a mistake to assume that mainland Chinese students are rote-learners. Memorising and understanding are not separate parts but are one connected and interlocking procedure. Chinese students rely on memorization as a part of the learning process (Kontoulis & Williams, 2000; Watkins, 2000). The Chinese system of learning is to become familiar with the text, to understand it, to reflect on it and then to question it (On, 1996). Nield (2004) reports that there is a cross-cultural difference in learning in that western students see understanding as a sudden insight, while mainland Chinese students see understanding as a long process that requires considerable mental effort. One explanation could be that the processes involved in the case studies and group projects consist of elements which contribute to their easier gaining and learning of knowledge. Some common aspects are avenues to perform critical thinking, exchange of views and being explorative but still having a certain degree of secure feeling of guidance and support offered either by their peers, group mates or instructors. Techniques such as videos, classroom discussions, computerized learning, guest speakers and reading textbooks fell in the mid-range category with scores from 3.25 to 3.41. The results showed that individual research projects and classroom presentations were rated as the least effective in terms of transfer of knowledge. One explanation was linked to the independence and minimal guidance provided. From the literature, it is reported that mainland Chinese students prefer to be in a more collective than an individualistic learning environment. Another explanation might be that the common features in these two techniques require students to be very explorative, independent and work within limited instructions and guidance. Therefore, techniques which encompass the aspects discussed above are prone to limit the ease of knowledge transfer for mainland Chinese students.

Nevertheless, the research study provides a useful conception for cross-cultural instructors, corporate trainers and, very importantly, the curriculum developer as a starting point of analysis. The understanding of the detailed course of action depending on how a specific cultural group of learners learn effectively when measured across various instructional techniques is essential. It provides a reminder that mainland Chinese students do learn best by active techniques, as well, depending on how well they are structured and customized, understanding their fundamental cultural instinct of being in a collective setting in general. Moreover, the framework can help to explain the lack of motivation and resulting frustration in terms of using inappropriate learning techniques, thus resulting in poor performance. The research study also shows evidence that students do change their preferred style after prolonged exposure. A vast majority of the mainland Chinese students preferred a less guided teaching/learning technique after prolonged exposure to western education and in the preference of their future instructional techniques in their course of study.

The findings provide a link to close the gap of understanding mainland Chinese students' learning behaviour examined from the perspective of comfort, familiarity and knowledge transfer

(proxies of cultural dislocation perspectives). The actual processes embedded within the activities in the learning settings and the behavioural aspects arising from the cultural dislocation proxies were examined. This was rationalized via a framework leading to the research findings that facilitate mainland Chinese students to learn and acquire knowledge most effectively with good quality and contents information delivery. The research assists in comprehending the appropriate instructional techniques that have to be used to enable mainland Chinese students to learn effectively. Moreover, the behavioural impact on students from three key perspectives—comfort, familiarity and knowledge transfer—allows an in-depth understanding of their learning and knowledge-acquisition styles, which impacts their learning effectiveness. This enables customization of the academic curriculum and instructional methodology to be adopted for this group of students' optimal learning abilities based on key learning effectiveness features, their cultural values, backgrounds, and aspects associated with proxies of cultural dislocation.

Some of the limitations of the research study are: (a) The research study is only conducted in Singapore, may be different in other Asian locations that attract other Asian students for western style business education. Moreover, it was only explored with mainland Chinese students. (b) This is a cross sectional study and measurement over time may be needed to see if changes in student perception happens over time. (c) Only student responses were gathered, future studies should include perceptions of teachers, course coordinators and administrators. Thorough and relevant recommendations for a review of the academic curricula of the course programs of private institutions in partnership with western universities in Singapore will be proposed. This will be a nation-wide initiative to help all the private institutions in Singapore to better understand and incorporate these findings into their design of curricula and teaching approaches targeted at delivering quality students who are optimised in their abilities to learn and acquire knowledge.

This study has promulgated aspects to be explored and embarked upon in future research. These are: (a) To replicate the current study with other clusters of mainland Chinese students—for example, with MBA, postgraduate and diploma students. This could also be done with other foreign students—for example, those from Indonesia, Vietnam, India or Thailand—and it could also be done with the inclusion or exclusion of other public tertiary institutions, as the dynamics of their characteristics differ; (b) To include other learning effectiveness variables (for example, students' learning abilities, learning strategies, receptiveness, conflict resolution skills, resilience) in terms of the cultural dislocation dimensions. Moreover, other cultural dimensional aspects—namely, masculinity-femininity and individualism—could be included to further diversify and explore the research study in many different perspectives; (c) To examine using differing learning effectiveness principles which are more inclined towards cultural aspects—for example, the ability to present ideas and thoughts in various manners, level of receptiveness and ability to challenge ideas; (d) To replicate the study with mainland Chinese students from exclusively different provinces of China and compare the findings with those taken from a mixed sampling; (e) To investigate the differences in learning effectiveness in terms of the various teaching/learning techniques after prolonged exposure based on different demographic factors and personality characteristics.

CONCLUSION

This study contributes towards enhancing the teaching delivery in terms of using the most appropriate instructional methodologies for mainland Chinese students. These findings can be appreciated from the perspective of the curriculum design and development of an effective business educational framework to sustain profitability by offering tailor-made, superior quality course programs. Every student's standard of quality in terms of learning effectiveness influences their roles as future managers, which is intertwined with their future performance in organizations, thus eventually influencing the organizational growth. The level of every organization's growth is also a secondary contributing factor to the economy of the country. The students' ability to perform and deliver tangible results in organizations fundamentally depends on how well the knowledge has been transferred and acquired by the student from their learning processes and outcomes.

A positive contribution to Singapore's economy is made as by offering customized (good 'cultural dislocation fit') and quality courses, it will undoubtedly attract a larger pool of students to Singapore for their pursuit of higher education. Quality educational experience is essential in sustaining the reputation of an institution as well as Singapore as an educational hub for higher learning. The instructional techniques adopted and practiced in Singapore's business education definitely vary from those of other countries. Educators who come from Singapore, a multi-racial country, have differing styles of teaching approaches, which do influence the effectiveness of the delivery of lessons. Thus, implementing a standard framework will help to enhance the quality and effectiveness of the lessons facilitated, which will eventually contribute to the business growth of these private tertiary institutions.

Private tertiary institutions collaborating with overseas western universities will benefit enabling them to further enhance the curricula to be focused on effective learning. By incorporating the findings of how students learn effectively in order to improvise and implement 'tailor-made' courses, this will eventually contribute to sound educational management strategies in the private institutions offering western-based education. There will be influence on the design and development of course curricula, particularly regarding the instructional methodologies adopted for business programs which are offered in conjunction with western universities. A better understanding of the cultural aspects will assist in delivering the contents using appropriate instructional techniques. This will enable the course programs to be tailor-made to better orientate the contents to different students' needs. This will lead to a higher standard in learning effectiveness in the course program contents, addressing the quality aspect of nurturing mainland Chinese students. Moulding a quality pool of students will eventually lead to developing successful business managers in the future.

The implications of the study will be associated with the activities and policies to be implemented for the development of the business educational curriculum and delivery methodologies for mainland Chinese students, specifically in the undergraduate business education cluster. The findings would certainly be useful and value-adding inline to Singapore's aspiration to be a world-class quality education hub. This is certainly timely, especially with the recent launch of the Council for Private Education, Singapore, the authority that governs the certification of the course programmes and Private Institutions' operations.

Moreover, the findings contributes even more holistically as follows: a) Enable all educators who facilitate international students to better reflect on these cultural dislocation issues to be applied within their own teaching and learning context; b) Provide insights to the numerous institutions and Universities (around the world) collaborating that provide such western-based programs to an rising number of international students; c) Allow Course managers and staff either managing or directly dealing with these International students to appreciate the issues that are interrelated with these student's effective learning; d) Create awareness to enable educators to reflect on their own styles of teaching approaches and keep abreast with key intervening issues that affect the learning outcomes of international students.

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