

The adaptation of Chinese split-site business students to British classrooms: a cross-cultural perspective.

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Abstract Chinese business education differs from British business education in many respects. On the whole, it focuses on the acquisition of theoretical knowledge, whereas British business education places far more emphasis on soft management skills and team-work. This paper examines a two-site business degree program offered by a Chinese international school and a British business school, and explores the attitudes and expectations of the Chinese participants and their Chinese and British lecturers from an “English for specific purposes” perspective. The study identifies areas of difficulty for Chinese business students in the UK, in particular regarding their beliefs about teacher and student roles, their learning priorities and learning strategies, and their “goal-oriented” approach to discussion, which is at odds with the more collaborative and exploratory Western discussion strategies. The findings have implications for pre-sessional and in-sessional English course design, the management of split-site business degree programs, the teaching of Chinese students, and the enhancement of learning experiences generally in international business programs.

Keywords Chinese students, business education, cross-cultural issues in teaching and learning

Introduction

Cultures of Learning in China and the West

It is a commonly held view that there is a gulf between Chinese and Western teaching and learning styles, and that this causes problems when Chinese students come to study in the West. Chinese culture is generally described as Confucian and collectivist, placing emphasis on harmony, hierarchical order, and the avoidance of uncertainty (Bordia, Bordia, & Restubog, 2015; Hofstede, 2001). This world-view is associated with “high-context” communication patterns (as described by Hall, 1976), with communications in China believed to be more likely to carry implicit meanings which can only be understood in terms of the physical environment and the shared knowledge and values of the community. Anglophone Western societies, on the other hand, are thought to place greater emphasis on individual, self-directed learning, and people are supposed to enjoy competition and be more explicit and direct.

These differences may influence the behaviour of Chinese students studying abroad. Tran (2013, p. 57), for example, refers to a commonly-held Western view that Chinese students are “typically passive, unwilling to ask questions or speak up in class,” and Remedios, Clarke, and Hawthorne (2008) characterize Asian undergraduates in mixed classes in Australia as “silent participants” in group discussion. Holmes (2006) writes of Chinese and New Zealand students’ contrasting approaches to communication, finding that her Chinese students expected to be led by the lecturer, an approach she believed to be incompatible with the Western dialogic mode of learning which requires students to co-construct meaning through questioning and critical thinking.

Increasingly, however, researchers are questioning the ways in which Chinese cultural heritage influences contemporary Chinese students, and are challenging the implication in some prior studies that cultures are homogenous, mutually exclusive, and crucial to character formation (Grimshaw, 2010, p. 244). Confucian values may allow for more individuality than is recognized in the Western literature (O’Dwyer, 2017), but there are also other, possibly conflicting factors affecting Chinese students’ attitudes and expectations. The tendencies that are often associated with a Confucian cultural heritage may actually be influenced by new political and economic situations (Saravanamuthu, 2008), or “situation-specific factors of teaching methodologies, learning requirements, learning habits and language proficiency” (Tran, 2013, p. 57).

In what follows, we will argue that there is a further complicating factor: The growing awareness, in China, of the need for Chinese learners to conform to Western expectations when they study abroad. In an attempt to prepare their students for degree programs in the West, lecturers in China may be encouraging their students to display “Western” cultural characteristics in a rather simplistic way, leading to misunderstanding and disappointment on all sides.

Business Education in China and the UK

The Internationalisation of Business Education in China

Since China entered the World Trade Organization in 2001, increasing numbers of Chinese university students have chosen

to study business. Almost every Chinese university runs business and management undergraduate programs, generally offered within Schools of International Trade, Economics, or Business Administration (Shu & Jing, 2010; Le, 2010), but Chinese companies are particularly interested in employing graduates who have studied in both Chinese and Western higher education systems (Chen, 2010; Xu, 2010), so in recent years the Chinese Ministry of Education has founded nine semi-independent international schools at prestigious Chinese universities, intended to prepare students to pursue foreign degrees, especially in subjects relating to business and management. One of the study sites for our research is an international school of this sort, the other is a British university with which it operates a split-site degree program. After studying for two years at the international school in China, students study for a final year at the university in the UK before being awarded an undergraduate degree in International Business.

Undergraduate Business Teaching and Learning in China

Most Chinese business undergraduates start to study business at university without any basic business knowledge, since Chinese secondary schools offer courses in Marxist politics and economics rather than business-related disciplines (Yang, 2004). Once at university, business undergraduates are taught business theory, business law, accounting, finance and trade, assessed mainly by examination (Wan, Huang, & Dai, 2010). Any management training is oriented towards the field of management science, a quantitative natural science which treats management as a systematic procedure, requiring much the same skills as project management in engineering (Zhang & Zhuang, 2006). Soft skills in management are expected to be acquired at a later stage in the student's career, through professional practice, possibly enhanced by MBA study. This is in contrast to British and American business degrees, which include management as a major component.

Although the Chinese educational expansion policy has enabled many more Chinese middle school graduates to go to colleges and universities, it has placed great pressure on the internal job market (Yang, 2008) so that most Chinese business programs now lead to relatively low-level jobs, rather than executive posts (Zhou, 2001). Rather than skills in leadership, strategic management and entrepreneurship, Chinese undergraduate business education therefore aims to develop *shiying* (适应), a response to one's environment which entails obedience, acceptance, and the efficient implementation of orders (Le, 2010). According to Zimmerman and Fey (2001), Chinese business culture does not see a great need for strategic planning and motivational skills, as only a few people are thought to have leadership potential.

In a study by Branine (2005), Chinese mid-level managers from state-owned enterprises reported that their career development was not in management, as such, but rather in the performance of obedience. This concept of *shiying* is also evident in cases where Chinese business lecturers nominate group leaders—those they believe to have innate leadership skills—rather than letting students choose leaders for themselves (Song, Yang, & Ma, 2010). In such cases group members are expected to follow the leader, whatever he or she decides.

The phenomenon of *yanxue* (厌学), a psychosomatic syndrome of weariness and depression which leads students to resist study, is often reported by Chinese lecturers and is supposed to be especially common among business students (Chen, 1998; Gu & Guo, 2005). *Yanxue* in business studies is sometimes blamed on students' indifference to business as a discipline (Yang, 2004; Yang, 2008); many business students are encouraged by their parents to choose this subject, and start their studies without knowing what the course entails (Zhu, 2009). This suggests a breach in the "psychological contract" formed between the student and the course provider; Bordia et al. (2015) argue that psychological contract fulfillment is one of the keys to high attendance and participation. It should be noted, however, that sufferers from *yanxue* are unlikely to fail their degree programs in China; once admitted to a Chinese university they are almost bound to graduate, regardless of the quality of their work.

Chinese university lecturers tend to regard themselves as knowledge providers (Xie, 2010), and lecturing is the dominant teaching method. Lecturers evaluate business problems from an academic rather than a practical perspective, distancing themselves and their students from the business cases they are studying, and arriving at their own pre-planned conclusions (Zheng, 2007; Luo, 2010). Any relevant ideas contributed by students are likely to be appropriated by the lecturer and elaborated for the benefit of the class as a whole, while student-initiated ideas that the lecturer considers irrelevant are swiftly rejected. Interaction is thus tightly controlled by the lecturer and students do not participate in extended dialogue; Xie (2010) argues that this deprives them of the opportunity to practise sharing their thoughts with others.

Chinese university business lecturers are well-qualified academically but do not usually have professional experience (Gu & Guo, 2005); they do not seek to simulate real business environments, and business cases are usually simplified to highlight the key aspects of a phenomenon or theory (Li, 2005; Luo, 2010). The intended learning outcome is an

understanding of the meaning of the theory, and the cases themselves are often quickly forgotten by the students (Luo, 2010). Unlike in Western business education, the case method is rarely combined with other learning approaches such as group work, presentations or projects.

One Chinese learning method is particularly worthy of note. *Fanxing* (反省) draws on the saying of Confucius that “When we see men of worth, we should think of equalling them; when we see men of a contrary character, we should turn inwards and examine ourselves” (Confucius, Legge trans. 1893, 4.17). Rather than being teacher-led, this is actually a way for students to act autonomously, by comparing their own behaviour with that of others, reflecting on the differences, and then adjusting their own behaviour accordingly (Chen, 2010).

Undergraduate Business Teaching and Learning in the UK

Business education in the UK started in the 1940s and thus has had a longer history than in China. Compared to Chinese business education, which tends to treat management as a “hard” discipline, modern British business education tends to develop soft and applied management skills (Ivory et al., 2006; Perriton & Reynolds, 2004). Holman (2000) identifies four business education models that have been followed in the UK: “academic liberalism,” “experiential vocationalism,” “experiential liberalism,” and the “experiential/critical school.” The first two of these models aim at providing students with the generic principles, theories, and hard skills needed by organizations. The second two pay more attention to developing soft skills such as critical insight, personal autonomy, situated reflexivity and interpersonal skills, and are based on the belief that it is possible for business students to construct knowledge in simulated learning environments. Holman (2000) describes how the earlier models were supplanted by the more experiential models in the mid-1980s. This was in accordance with a general trend towards experiential pedagogies, but also reflected the fact that British organisational structures were becoming flatter, requiring the managerial participation of all members (Rugman & Collinson, 2009).

In British business programs, students are expected to learn how to encourage participation, coordinate effort, provide feedback, manage conflict, and facilitate team decisions (Hess, 2007). In the modern British business world, managerial decisions are often made collectively (Schyns, Kiefer, Kerschreiter, & Tymon, 2011), and in British business schools, team leadership, where every member plays a complementary role, is given more importance than solo leadership. Belbin’s Team Role Theory and Test (1993) are widely used to help students recognize their own personal qualities and adopt appropriate group roles (Bryant & Albring, 2006; Gammie, Gammie, & Cargill, 2002).

British students are generally expected to work independently and take responsibility for their own study. Although Yang (2004), Yang, X. (2008) and Lao & Roffey (2002) all complain that Chinese business courses leave students with a great deal of free time, British business students generally have far less contact with their lecturers than business students in China. British business lecturers often assign coursework well in advance of the submission date, and students then have the freedom to either follow the lecturers’ instructional pace or learn on their own.

Nearly one third of British lecturers in business enter academia later in life, having previously worked in industry (Ivory et al., 2006), so in contrast to many Chinese business lecturers they can refer to their personal experiences in industry as a means of introducing students to the profession. British business lecturers are also able to draw on the work experience of their students, as according to a survey conducted by Crawford and Cribb (2012) for the UK Department for Education, a “significant proportion” of young people in the UK (perhaps 20%) take a gap year before starting college or university. Moreover many British students are employed part-time in commerce or industry whilst studying. The National Centre for Universities and Business strongly advocates work experience for university undergraduates, as a means of gaining transferable employability skills (Wilson, 2016). Chinese business students are unlikely to have ever taken up paid employment.

In contrast to the Chinese teaching and learning system, where before the final year internship students mainly acquire business knowledge by attending lectures, reading textbooks and preparing for exams, Western business education is more self-directed, and involves students in a wider range of integrated activities. Moreover in UK degree courses content and assessment schemes are often developed in close collaboration with relevant professional, statutory and regulatory bodies with a view to preparing students for their professional working lives. Some business learning activities are thus intended to simulate, at least to some extent, the real business world and working environment, and thus one of the main teaching techniques involves the examination of authentic business cases in order to make managerial decisions (Currie & Tempest, 2008; Foster & Carboni, 2008). Because case content is related to real business contexts, the issues that arise in case study discussions are complex, interwoven, and displayed without any single “correct” solution (Barnes, Christensen, & Hansen, 1994). Business lecturers may choose to limit how much case information they provide, requiring their students to gather

further details by themselves, but typically the main focus of the task is not on the presentation of information (although this is important) but on the analysis, intended to lead to deeper understanding of the issues.

The experiential, social constructivist approach taken in British business education centers around peer collaboration, in accordance with the belief that learning is primarily achieved through “processing, creating and shaping knowledge” in dialogic interaction (Basturkmen, 2016, p. 154), rather than by absorbing information provided by a lecturer or a textbook. This belief in the importance of group work and spoken communication is also shared by leading UK employers. According to the *Global Graduates into Global Leaders* report from the National Centre for Universities and Business (Diamond et al., 2011), top employers consider the ability to work collaboratively and communicate effectively (through both speaking and listening) to be the most important “global competencies” for graduates entering the workforce. “An ability to embrace multiple perspectives and challenge thinking” was also rated highly by these employers.

Basturkmen (2002) used the “Initiation, Response, Follow-up” (IRF) exchange structure model which was initially proposed by Sinclair and Coulthard (1992) to examine how students worked together to construct meaning during MBA seminars at a British university, finding that complex interactional patterns drove information exchange and enabled ideas to emerge and be negotiated. Using the same IRF schema, Li & Nesi (2004) compared discussion patterns in an all-British and an all-Chinese group conversing in their own first languages. There was greater evidence of negotiation of meaning in the British group, who took more than three times more turns than the Chinese group and gave far more feedback to other group members, within roughly the same length of recording time. Similar results were also found by Wang (2014) who analysed two group discussions involving Chinese and non-Chinese students at a British business school. In this case, each new turn taken by the Chinese students tended to return to the initial topic, thus preventing topic development.

Research Questions

The study set out to address the following research questions:

1. How did the culture of learning in the international school in China compare with that in the business school in the UK?
2. What were the beliefs and expectations of students at the two learning sites, and how well did they adapt to the transition in their final year of study?

By addressing these questions, the study aims to inform the development of greater cultural awareness on the part of international students and their lecturers, possibly leading to adjustments in the way international business is taught in both phases of the program, and to the pre-departure advice provided in China.

Methodology

Data Collection Methods

The methods used for this study were inspired by various forms of needs analysis in the English for Specific Purposes research tradition, including “means analysis” (Holliday & Cooke, 1982), and the investigation of different parties’ perceptions of need (see e.g., Ferris, 1998).

The behaviour and attitudes of the Chinese students were investigated via semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire, with findings triangulated with those gathered from the analysis of non-participant observations and recordings of peer interactions. Data was considered from both an etic and an emic perspective, as the first author is Chinese, and was a student herself at the time the data was collected. A number of complementary analytical approaches were employed on the grounds that no one approach would provide a full picture, but that “taken together they create a broader understanding of the challenges facing students and teachers” (Green & Dixon, 2002, p. 400).

The Research Site: A “2 + 1” Business Program

The “2+1” undergraduate business program discussed in this paper consists of a two-year Part I run by an international school in China, and a one-year Part II offered by a university in the UK. On successful completion of the program, students are awarded a bachelor’s degree in international business. Data was gathered on site at the two institutions, in China and in the UK.

The program was first launched in 2007, and 120 students were enrolled in the newest cohort under study. Part I

includes intensive English language training, alongside classes in economics, statistics, management, marketing, financial investment, organisational behaviour, human resource management, and the international business environment. Admittance to Part II of the program requires successful completion of Part I and an English language proficiency score equivalent to IELTS 6.5. In Part II, undertaken in the British business school, the “2+1” students join other students enrolled on the undergraduate program in international business. The assessment instruments are oral presentations, written exams, and written coursework produced individually and in groups. The “2+1” program was chosen because lecturers at the British institution reported that they had difficulty conducting seminars with the Chinese students, and that fewer upper second or first-class degrees were being awarded to them.

Methodology and Data Collection

We collected our data over a nine-month period, via classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and a questionnaire survey. The procedures are summarised in Table 1. Part II observations and interviews (February to April) were carried out with one cohort of students, and subsequent data collection was carried out with the next cohort of students.

Table 1 Data Collection Procedures

Phase	Month/2017	Data Collection Instruments		
		from lecturers	from students	
UK Part II	February to April	five interviews	one cohort of students	-classroom observation (two lectures and 30 seminars) -13 interviews
China Part I	May	six interviews informal contact	another cohort of students	-classroom observation (two business classes, five English classes) -four interviews (2nd-year students) -informal contact
UK Part II	October	N/A		-questionnaire survey (34 respondents)

From February to April we observed lectures and seminars involving Part II students in the UK. The seminars generally consisted of 30 minutes of lecturer instruction and 30 minutes of small group discussion. During our observations, we audio-recorded ten discussions, and collected copies of the lecturers’ handouts and the students’ assignments for reference. We also interviewed 13 “2+1” students regarding their study expectations, wants and needs, and five business lecturers regarding the “2+1” students.

In May, one of the authors paid a three-week visit to the international school at the Chinese university. She observed and recorded seven classes (two business classes taught by Chinese lecturers and five English classes taught by both British and Chinese lecturers). Also, drawing on what we had already learnt from the analysis of earlier data, she interviewed four 2nd-year students, two subject lecturers (one British and one Chinese), and four English lecturers (all Chinese). The interviews with students focused on their approach to learning and what they wanted to achieve during their first two years of study. The interviews with lecturers focused on their choice of teaching methods, particularly the use of business case studies. Other lecturers and students also provided relevant information during casual conversations with the researcher. Copies of the lecturers’ handouts and the students’ class notes were collected for reference.

Most of these interviews were conducted using synchronous instant messaging, for logistical reasons. Face-to-face interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The interviews with the Chinese participants were conducted in Chinese.

In October we administered a questionnaire at the British business school with students who we had already observed in May when they were completing Part I. The students were asked why they had chosen the “2+1” program, and were questioned about their learning goals and strategies, and their perceptions of their lecturers’ roles.

All the data was uploaded to NVivo 8 and analyzed to identify salient themes.

Findings and Discussion: Part I of the Program (in China)

Timetabling and Assessment Practices

Students received about 25 hours of face-to-face instruction per week, leaving little time for independent learning outside class. Just under half of course marks (40%) were awarded for classroom behaviour, and during the interviews some lecturers implied that students who simply attended every class would be awarded the full 40%. The remaining marks were awarded for performance in examinations at the end of each semester. The business examinations mostly required the students to define terms and describe theories; they seemed to be designed to check whether the majority had acquired a basic understanding of the subject rather than to differentiate between students at different levels of ability. This is in accordance with the general practice in Chinese universities, where all students are expected to reach a required standard, but do not benefit from receiving higher marks unless they are competing for scholarship funding (international schools in China do not offer scholarships).

Classroom Practice

In interviews and informally, the British lecturers working in China reported that they encouraged discussions and oral presentations in their classes, but the Chinese lecturers said that they did not. In one discussion observed in one of the English classes taught by a British lecturer, the students were allowed to decide on the make-up of their groups and were all encouraged to contribute. Once formed, however, the groups chose to elect one student as their leader and to offer their opinions to this student, who reported them back to the whole class. Students who were interviewed said that in group work they tended to negotiate which parts of the question each member would undertake, and then worked separately, handing their finished work to the leader to synthesize.

In the English classes taught by Chinese lecturers the students were more strictly controlled. The lecturers only asked questions to check understanding and to remind the students about exam-taking skills. The Chinese lecturers in the business classes used similar teaching methods to those used in most Chinese universities, as described by Xie (2010). They delivered lectures, emphasizing focal points by repeating them and writing them on the blackboard. The students' role was to highlight key words in their textbooks, and in some cases to check with the lecturer whether specific lecture content was important. The lecturers also set tasks which were carried out individually in class. They checked the work of individual students on a one-to-one basis, and provided the correct answers to the whole class at the end of the session. Groups of students were observed sitting together and exchanging notes and answers; this may be interpreted as *fanxing* behaviour—a way of monitoring peer progress and achievements—and is also in accordance with the collectivist cultural practice of “paying... attention to others in everyday judgments and decision making” (Bordia et al., 2015, p. 223).

Lecturers' Perceptions of Students' Needs

The British lecturer we interviewed was aware that the “2+1” students would be expected to work independently once they got to the UK. The Chinese lecturers, however, thought that their students would need help from lecturers in Part II, and that building close ties with them to enlist their support would be an effective strategy. They considered their students to have particularly good interpersonal skills, and they admired the way they had actively sought the help of lecturers when planning their studies in Part I.

The business lecturers thought that their students needed to acquire the fundamentals of business theory rather than analytical skills. In the two business classes observed in May, the lecturers dedicated most of the time to introducing theories, using examples with single “correct” solutions. By the end of each class the students had made detailed notes about theories and concepts. In interview, subject lecturers said that this theoretical knowledge would be a good basis for the final year of study in the UK, and a way of compensating for any English language problems. One lecturer pointed out that basic business theories were unlikely to differ from one country to another.

Students' Attitudes and Learning Goals

The students who were interviewed expressed great interest in business as an academic subject, and there was no sign that their parents had forced them to choose this program. However the program had a high drop-out rate in both Year One and Year Two, suggesting that some of those who enrolled suffered from *yanxue*, the learning burnout reported by Yang (2004) and Yang (2008). Students dropped out because they had lost interest in the program, not because they had failed a course.

In May when the interviews were conducted, the students regarded IELTS preparation as their highest priority, and said that they only expected to obtain passing scores on their subject courses. When reflecting on Part I of the program in October they had a more balanced view of their learning targets, but still prioritized English language skills over subject knowledge (see Table 2). This reflects the fact that Chinese universities do not distinguish between high-achieving and low-achieving students, as long as they reach a minimum acceptable standard. The students thought it relatively easy to reach this standard in their business modules, but many struggled to reach the required level of English language proficiency.

Table 2 Students' Learning Priorities in Part I of the Program (N=34)

Learning Priorities	Mean	Std. Deviation
Improving general spoken English	4.32	.806
Improving academic English skills	4.09	.830
Preparing for IELTS	3.97	1.243
Acquiring more business knowledge	3.76	.987

In the October questionnaire survey, students were asked to rate the importance of various learning activities undertaken during Part I of the program, using the scale: 1 = not at all important, to 5= very important. The results are shown in Table 2.

Improving their general spoken English was their highest priority, in accordance with the belief held by the Chinese lecturers that interpersonal skills would be very important for success in their final year. The kind of peer interaction expected of them in Part 2 of the program had not been practiced in Part 1, however.

Students' Learning Methods

The questionnaire asked students how often on a scale from 1 to 5 they had used 10 pre-identified learning strategies. This strategy list had been developed with reference to earlier interviews with lecturers and students. Findings are listed in Table 3.

Table 3 Students' Learning Strategies in Part I

Learning Strategies	Never/Seldom	Often/Very Often
Reading online business resources in Chinese	11.7 %	70.6 %
Using translation tools	11.7 %	67.7 %
Preparing work to give to the group leader	8.8 %	64.7 %
Using a dictionary	14.7 %	50.0 %
Predicting exam questions	26.5 %	47.0 %
Choosing to be the leader of the group	14.7 %	38.2 %
Using the library	35.3 %	23.5 %
Reviewing own language errors	55.8 %	17.7 %
Reciting	35.3 %	11.7 %
Practicing English with peers	47.1 %	8.8 %

Five of the strategies investigated in the questionnaire involved seeking help from published sources or from fellow students. In the interviews and informal conversations, several students had reported that, rather than using library resources (including e-resources) they preferred learning about business issues from blogs and online encyclopaedias written in Chinese. All the interviewees reported that when they prepared for speaking and writing tasks they often made use of text taken from Chinese websites, processing it through an online translation tool. These interview findings concur with the questionnaire responses, indicating heavy reliance on internet resources and less use of the library, peer support, or revision. The word "dictionary" in Chinese (字典) refers specifically to the book form, so e-dictionaries were counted as "translation tools."

Bordia et al. (2015) claim that individuals from strong uncertainty-avoidance cultures "feel the need to clarify tasks and goals, ideally before they start the task" (p. 222), and we found that "predicting exam questions" was reported as a popular strategy by questionnaire respondents. Likewise in class, students were observed checking with their lecturers whether a point was particularly important and worth learning. Miller and Partlett (1974) noted this type of "cue seeking"

strategy being exhibited by British students, but it did not seem to be one that the British lecturers in our study readily responded to. Some of the Chinese students said that they were disappointed that the British lecturers did not help them prepare for exams by highlighting important content.

Three group strategies were listed in the questionnaire: Preparing work to give to a group leader, choosing to be the leader of a group, and practicing English with peers. The first of these strategies was by far the most popular, suggesting that students preferred to follow rather than to take responsibility for group output or the exchange of knowledge.

Students' Perceptions of the Teacher's Role

Classroom observation and interviews had revealed very close personal relationships between students and their Part I lecturers; the questionnaire probed student attitudes further with reference to three well-known Chinese proverbs (see Table 4). The students responded particularly positively to the idea that lecturers provided moral and personal guidance.

Table 4 Students' Responses to Three Chinese Proverbs

How Much do you Agree with the Following Statements?	Strongly Disagree / Disagree	Strongly Agree / Agree
There are no bad students in the world, only poor teachers (没有教不好的学生, 只有不会教的老师)	35.3 %	29.4 %
A teacher for a day is a father for a lifetime (一日为师终身为父)	32.3 %	38.2 %
Teachers should convey moral discipline, instructing one's life and career and answering questions (师者, 所以传道授业解惑也)	2.9 %	79.4 %

Findings and Discussion: Part II of the Program (in the UK)

Timetabling and Assessment Practices

During Part II of the program, students received five hours of lectures and six hours of seminars each week, leaving a great deal of time for independent learning outside class. They were assessed continuously throughout their final year, and their coursework marks greatly affected their degree classification. Case studies were extensively used for teaching and assessment, and students were required to find and critically analyze authentic sources relating to these cases. Examination questions tended to be open-ended, prompting critical discussion of business phenomena, and were designed to give students the scope to demonstrate the full range of their knowledge and abilities.

Classroom Methods

The main educational objectives of Part II of the program were to improve students' linguistic proficiency pertinent to the business environment, and their ability to discover and solve problems related to contemporary transnational issues. Active oral participation was expected of every student, and they were also expected to monitor their own progress and aim for high marks. A mere pass mark would not usually constitute success in the eyes of the teaching staff, because they had experience of British employers who tend to refer to degree classifications when recruiting new graduates.

The lecturers we observed made extensive use of questioning strategies in their lectures, to prompt the students to reflect on their understanding and their prior work experience.

In the seminars, the students formed their own groups, although the lecturers split and re-organized groups if they contained too many Chinese students in proportion to those of other nationalities. During discussions, the lecturer acted

as a facilitator, prompting student contributions rather than imparting knowledge. This was a very different teaching strategy from the Chinese method of providing model answers.



Student Conduct

Discussions across four groups containing equal numbers of Chinese and non-Chinese students were analyzed in terms of their IRF structure (Sinclair & Coulthard 1992, used for the analysis of group discussions by Basturkmen 2002, Li & Nesi, 2004, and Wang, 2014). It was found that the Chinese students took longer turns, but in each discussion only contributed about 60 turns out of an average of 300, considerably fewer than their non-Chinese peers. They seemed to consider it obligatory to respond to questions, but not to the ideas expressed by others, thus the majority of their turns were responses rather than initiations or follow-up comments. Similar behaviour by Chinese discussants was reported by Li and Nesi (2004), and suggests that the Chinese participants were displaying knowledge that they had already constructed and internalized, and were not developing their ideas as they went along. In other words, rather than co-constructing knowledge and “speaking to learn” (Basturkmen, 2016, p. 154), they were delivering short speeches in the manner Barnes (2008) describes as “presentational talk.”

Many of the “2+1” students spoke little, and relied on a few more active Chinese peers, who they expected to integrate their contributions into the ongoing discussion as their group leaders had done in China. Some hid behind their friends and played with their smart phones, not speaking a word throughout. Absenteeism was also a problem in a small number of cases, perhaps indicative of *yanxue* and a sense of a breach of psychological contract (Bordia et al., 2015).

Lecturer and Student Expectations

The primary aim of most student interviewees was simply to pass the course, and the concept of *shiyong* (obedience, acceptance, and the implementation of orders) was sometimes invoked, as in student interview below:

I came here to pursue a degree. I did everything I have to do. I accept the rules of the game. *Shiyong* is very important. (personal communication) CS12-Part II, Feb. 2017

There was some evidence that the students regarded the lecturer as the principal evaluator of their work, not other students. This may explain why, in group discussions, they only tended to comment on other students’ opinions in response to elicitation from more active group members. From the lecturers’ perspective, one of the main problems with the “2+1” students was that they tended to avoid in-depth analysis. An oral presentation by a “2+1” group was criticized by the lecturer in the following way, for example:

They offered a large amount of description rather than critically discussing the points in depth. In order to achieve a higher mark they must demonstrate that they are comparing critically rather than merely being descriptive. (personal communication) CS5-Part II, Feb. 2017

Informants struggled with the concept of critical thinking, even towards the end of their final year. In the student interview below, the meaning of “critical” is still equated with negative criticism, for example:

I think being critical probably means *zhiyi* (置疑) or *pipan* (批判) in Chinese. You do not say what the others said. You have to criticize, to analyze shortcomings, maybe. (personal communication) CS7-Part II, Feb. 2017

Overall, the “2+1” students seemed to aim for solutions to problems, rather than appreciate the process of discussing the topic. Many of them perceived group discussions as an opportunity to practice oral English, and they liked to hold the floor and stick to their prepared opinions because they thought this strategy would give them more chance to speak. We would argue that their unwillingness to build on each other’s contributions was also influenced by their expectations of British academic culture. It is a commonplace that Western “individualist” cultures enjoy peer-competition (see for example Bordia et al., 2015, p. 216), and the students had been taught in China that they should argue competitively when taking part in discussions in the UK. Consequently they were rather surprised when the British participants talked around the topic in more collaborative, less confrontational ways, supposedly more typical of collectivist cultures. This is apparent from the following two interviews:

British students and most of my English-speaking classmates do not discuss in the way I expected. I thought people in

the West were open-minded and had a strong sense of self. However I found they often spend a lot of time discussing one aspect. Their thinking is not comprehensive in terms of perspectives but linear and monotonous. (personal communication) CS11-Part II, Feb. 2017

I got lost, to be honest. She expressed so much uncertainty.... I was told that native English speakers tend to clearly demonstrate their opinions at the very beginning in their writing. I supposed they were very direct but sometimes it is a torture to discuss with British or the other European students. I mean for most of the time it's not because of English language problems because they always slow down their speaking speed. I just couldn't understand what they wanted to say, what was their point. (personal communication) CS10-Part II, Feb. 2017

The concept of the group discussion as a means of gathering different ideas for a final, teacher-evaluated report is expressed in the following two interviews:

I really did not think that [name] had expressed her own ideas clearly.... most of the time she asked questions and synthesized opinions.... But I was told in China that when we speak English we should be brave and not worry about losing face. I hoped everyone would propose an opinion and give us appropriate reasons. And finally we could decide together on our final answer which would be the final group decision. (personal communication) CS9-Part II, Feb. 2017

When I was expressing my own opinion, I expected others to ask me to explain or to allow me some time to offer reasons. I hoped they would really consider my opinion and write it down. I contributed my opinion in order to make our final answer more valid, to be correct. I mean all of our opinions will be integrated at the end of the discussion. They will be presented on the poster ... I don't like to reformulate or build on other people's opinions. It shows that I'm not an independent person. I hope they could also give their answers. (personal communication) CS1-Part II, Feb. 2017

Nevertheless the British habit of sharing ideas impressed some students favorably. One argued that although it saved time to follow the Chinese method of dividing the task up and working individually, this method prevented the students from learning from each other. Another, quoted in the following interview, liked the idea of mutual group support:

I had not heard about team spirit until I came here. I used to do group work in China but we did not need team spirit then because each member was responsible for one part (Actually we often do group work in the same way here especially when there are many Chinese in a group.) British lecturers always emphasize team spirit when they assign group work. I agree with them very much. (personal communication) CS8-Part II, Feb. 2017

Moreover, although our interviewees reported difficulty communicating with non-Chinese participants they all acknowledged the benefit of observing and emulating effective behaviour, a strategy encapsulated by the Chinese concept of *fanxing*, and clearly expressed in this interview:

I like to observe my British lecturers and peers in lectures and seminars to see how they behave in class, how they take notes, how they think, and how they speak. (personal communication) CS3-Part II, Feb. 2017

Conclusions

This study explores some of the differences in the approach to studying international business in China and in the UK. It compares business education systems in China and the UK as described in the prior literature, and examines data collected from the two program sites relating to the perceptions and expectations of students and staff. We conclude that the Chinese students were transferring learning strategies appropriate to a teacher-centered, exam-oriented system which focuses on whole-class acquisition of basic theoretical and factual knowledge, to a British context where far more emphasis is placed on team-work, analysis, and the fulfillment of individual potential. We also conclude that concepts of "Western" directness, face-threatening confrontation, and individualism had been over-simplified and overstated by the lecturers in China, so that the students were ill-prepared for the more collaborative approach that was actually expected of

them in discussion classes in the UK.

The two discussion styles observed in Part II of the program, and commented on by interviewees, are indicative of the differences between the two educational cultures. The Chinese students tended to favor a “goal-oriented,” “presentational” style which allowed each speaker to make their own unique contribution to the debate, but required them to ignore or reject any views that had previously been expressed. These students were frustrated by the British and European students’ more exploratory style, which they found meandering, purposeless, and lacking in strong independent claims.

Clearly there is scope to help students in Part I of the program gain a better understanding of the demands that will be placed on them in Part II. They might be led to expect a different relationship with their lecturers and their peers, with less personal support and guidance from staff, more knowledge construction with fellow students, and more independent, library-based research. Individuals are certainly capable of crossing over from one discursive practice to another, as Grimshaw (2010) points out, and in their final year some of our Chinese informants were prepared to consider the benefits of peer collaboration.

It might be useful to establish a peer mentoring or “buddy” system in In Part II of the program, as this could build on the existing cultural practice of *fanxing* as a means of self-improvement. Peer mentoring systems are famously difficult to establish and maintain, but could benefit all the students, from both East and West.

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