

An Analysis on Sino-UK Cultural Differences in Education from the Perspective of Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory (A Case Study of Are Our Kids Tough Enough?)

Zhang Wenxin¹, Wang Yue²

^{1,2} Guangxi Normal University College of Foreign Studies, Department of English Teaching Education
01 Yanzhong road, Yanshan District, Guilin, Guangxi, China 541006
573133245@qq.com

Abstract

Based on the Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, the paper aims to analyze the cultural difference in education between China and the UK on a documentary Are Our Kids Tough Enough? Which was made by BBC. Comparative study method was undertaken for illustrating the date of culture dimensions difference of the UK's and China's. The result shows that the obvious difference lies on Collectivism and Individualism, Power distance, as well as long-time orientation and short-time orientation. The documentary was thus analyzed from these three perspectives. The conclusion was that 1) Chinese teachers wanted to utilize power to control British students, but students refused to obey them for their low power distance. 2) Many activities were held in the whole class by Chinese teachers for their collectivism, but the British students could not accept them and pursue their own right. 3) Chinese teachers took the the final exam seriously because of long-term orientation but the British students were reverse for their short-term orientation. 4) The date of uncertainty avoidance and Masculinity are almost the same in these two countries, but they were reflected in different ways. And with the conclusion, the effective strategies to overcome culture conflict will be offered to Chinese teachers and all other teachers in the cross-culture communication context.

Keywords: Documentary, Education, Cultural dimensions theory, Culture conflict

Abstrak

Berdasarkan teori dimensi budaya Hofstede, makalah ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis perbedaan budaya dalam pendidikan antara Cina dan Inggris dalam sebuah film dokumenter Are Our Kids Tough Enough? Yang dibuat oleh BBC. Metode studi banding dilakukan untuk menggambarkan tanggal perbedaan dimensi budaya Inggris dan Cina. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa perbedaan yang nyata terletak pada Kolektivisme dan Individualisme, Jarak kekuasaan, serta orientasi jangka panjang dan orientasi waktu pendek. Dengan demikian, film dokumenter dianalisis dari ketiga perspektif ini. Kesimpulannya adalah 1) Guru Cina ingin menggunakan kekuasaan untuk mengontrol siswa Inggris, tetapi siswa menolak untuk mematuhi mereka karena jarak kekuasaan mereka yang rendah. 2) Banyak kegiatan yang diadakan di seluruh kelas oleh guru Cina untuk kolektivisme mereka, tetapi siswa Inggris tidak dapat menerima mereka dan mengejar hak mereka sendiri. 3) Guru-guru Cina mengambil ujian akhir dengan serius karena orientasi jangka panjang tetapi siswa Inggris sebaliknya untuk orientasi jangka pendek mereka. 4) Tanggal penghindaran ketidakpastian dan Maskulinitas hampir sama di kedua negara ini, tetapi direfleksikan dengan cara yang berbeda. Dan dengan kesimpulan, strategi yang efektif untuk mengatasi konflik budaya akan ditawarkan kepada guru Cina dan semua guru lainnya dalam konteks komunikasi lintas budaya.

Kata kunci: Dokumenter, Pendidikan, Teori dimensi budaya, Konflik budaya

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Corresponding author: Wang Yue

Email Address: 573133245@qq.com (Yanzhong road, Yanshan District, Guilin, Guangxi, China)

Received 10 January 2022, Accepted 20 January 2022, Published 20 January 2022

INTRODUCTION

Are Our Kids Tough Enough? Is a documentary which reflects the cultural differences between China and the UK in education. The three-episode documentary shows five Chinese teachers adopting Chinese teaching style for four weeks with 50 Grade-nine students from Bohunt High School in the UK. In the end, final exams would be held at the same time with the class adopted Chinese education

and the other not in order to see which education was better. Since its release, the film has attracted much attention worldwide (Zhemin, 2017) . Foreign scholars viewed the strict Chinese education with suspicion, and Chinese scholars argued that the liberal British education made it difficult for students to acquire knowledge and improve their abilities (Jenkins, 2015). In experiments, the Chinese education, with its emphasis on discipline, repetitive rote and copying, was once hard to be accepted with British students and led them to resistance. They blatantly shouted at teachers in class, making noise to disrupt exams, wearing make-up in class and even missing class. These seemingly uncooperative behaviors in fact reflected the significant cultural differences and conflicts between China and the UK. Based on Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions, this paper attempts to analyse the cultural differences and conflicts between Chinese and British teachers and students from a cross-cultural perspective and proposes strategies to mitigate them.

The Dutch sociologist Hofstede in order to investigate the cultural values differences of the employees from different countries in the multinational company IBM, distributed 116,000 questionnaires to employees from 72 countries between 1967 and 1973. He thus proposed four cultural dimensions of cultural differences between countries: (1) power distance, (2) uncertainty avoidance, (3) individualism versus collectivism, and (4) masculinity versus femininity. Subsequently, the Canadian scholar Mike Pang also conducted research on cultural values based on the four cultural dimensions in 23 countries where Chinese people live there, he proposed a long-term orientation and a short-term orientation, which Hofstede added as a fifth dimension to complete his theoretical framework (Hofstede, 1980). Westwood (1992) called it "the standard theory for the study of management and organisational behaviour in a cross-cultural context".

Power distance

Power distance refers to people's perceptions of the fairness of rights and has been defined by Hofstede (2001) as "the extent to which disadvantaged members of a country's institutions and organizations expect and accept an unequal distribution of rights. Institutions refer to the basic units of society, such as the family, the school, the community. Organizations are the places where people work." (Triandis 1993)The Power Distance Index (PDI: Power Distance Index) is often used to describe differences in power distance, with people in high power societies generally accepting hierarchy and people in low power distance emphasizing equality of status.

Individualism and collectivism

This dimension reflects the individual's perception of his or her own sense of belonging. According to Hofstede (2001), "Individualism refers to a loosely knit social framework in a society in which people are supposed to take care of themselves and their immediate families only, while collectivist refers to societies in which people are united into strong and solid in groups, which during people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty." (Triandis 1993)This dimension reflects a society's preference for individualism or collectivism through the

Individualism Index (IDV: Individual Index). The higher a country holds on this index, the more individualistic its people are, while the lower a country holds on this index, the more collectivism its people are.

Masculinity and femininity

This dimension emphasizes the characteristics embodied in gender roles. According to Hofstede (2007), men are assertive, bold, and seek material success, while women represent characteristics such as tenderness, consideration, and valuing quality of life. When people in a society exhibit strong masculine characteristics, that society has a masculine temperament. Similarly, a society has a feminine temperament when it exhibits femininity. The Masculinity Index (MAS: Masculinity Index) is used to describe the masculinity or femininity of a society, with a high index indicating that the society tends to be masculine and a low index indicating that it tends to be feminine.

Uncertainty avoidance

Hofstede (2001) defines this dimension as "the degree to which members of a culture feel threatened in the face of uncertainty or the unknown." This dimension is expressed through the Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI: Uncertainty Avoidance Index). People in high index societies prefer organization with clear plans, rules, and systems, and are brave enough to adopt change in response to the threat of uncertainty. People in low index societies fear change, are reluctant to make changes and dislike structured rules and regulations and prefer to live in the status quo.

Long-term versus short-term orientation

This dimension describes the values that people hold in the time dimension of their work and life. Hofstede (2010) defines long-term orientation as "the cultivation of virtues based on future rewards, especially fortitude and frugality." Short-term orientation is seen as "the cultivation of virtues related to the past and the present, especially respect for tradition, preservation of face and compliance with social obligations." This dimension can also be expressed as an index of how strongly a society holds these values, known as the LTO (Long Term Orientation Index), where a higher index indicates a stronger long-term orientation, and a lower index indicates a stronger short-term orientation.

Research Objectives and Problem

With the comparative method, the purpose of this study is to analyze the culture difference on education between China and the UK, and further discuss the reasons for the difference in these two countries. In the end, some effective strategies will be provided according to the result for teachers whose work involve in cross-culture teaching. Four questions were raised for further discussion according to the research method.

- a. What are the Chinese culture dimensions like?
- b. What are the UK culture dimensions like?
- c. What are the difference of culture dimensions between these two countries?

- d. What difference can be reflected on education according to the culture dimensions difference of the two countries?

RESEARCH METHOD

In order to meet the objectives of this study, the comparative study method was undertaken. The data of the research was collected from the website of Intercultural Management consultancy Company which provided the latest research on the cultural dimension of each country based on the theory of Hofstede's. Data can reflect the intensity of the cultural dimension a country possesses. Five culture dimensions of the UK's and China's was targeted and recorded respectively in the Excel. Diagram was made accordingly to clearly demonstrate the difference.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the Hofstede Insights survey on the Cultural Dimensions Index for each country, we can obtain values above five dimensions for both China and the UK. This is shown in Figure 1.

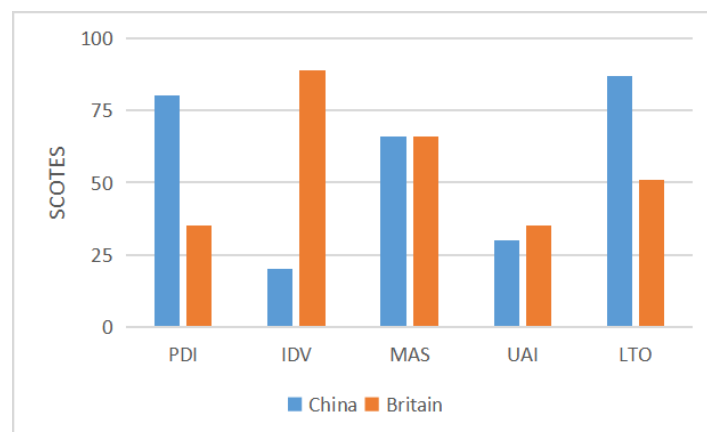


Figure 1 Hofstede's five cultural dimensions theory

From figure 1, it can be seen that the values of masculinity and femininity and uncertainty avoidance in the cultural dimensions are relatively close between China and Britain, while the values presented in the three dimensions of power distance, individualism and collectivism, as well as long-term orientation and short-term orientation are more different. Therefore, this paper will analyze the cultural difference roots of the Sino-British teacher-student conflict that appears in *Are Our Kids Tough Enough?* from the above three dimensions.

Power distance

According to the statistical results in the table above regarding the cultural dimension, China's PDI is 80 compared to the UK's 35, indicating that China is a high entitlement distance country, while the UK has a lower entitlement distance dimension. According to Hofstede, people in high power distance societies can accept the fact that hierarchy is not equal and therefore the idea of hierarchy

permeates all aspects of people's lives and work. Respect for superiors is a prominent feature of a hierarchy in which subordinates are subordinate to their superiors and are not allowed to question them. In a state of low power distance, people are on an equal footing with each other and, although there are hierarchical differences, there is no absolute obedience or total trust. In such a society, people dare to challenge authority and question views.

The traditional Chinese Confucian culture has been shaped for thousands of years by the ritual of respecting the teacher and valuing the way (Ma et al; 2016). Teachers have enjoyed a high status and prestige in society since ancient times, being respected and having a privilege of decision making. People thus obey the orders given by teachers and do not dare to resist. Questioning or challenging authority is seen as disrespectful in the eyes of teachers. However, hierarchy does not seem to be so prevalent in the UK, where equality of status is important, and if one speaker tries to ask the other to do something they do not want, this is likely to provoke resistance from the other and conflict will arise. In a society with such a low power distance, people are welcome to hold different opinions or to question them, and the equality of status between the two parties does not bother them with a sense of hierarchical oppression.

In *Are Our Kids Tough Enough?*, one of the great difficulties facing Chinese teachers was the inability to establish teacher authority as they did in China. Teachers tried to establish strict classroom discipline to restrain students from distracting. As chemistry teacher Mrs. Yang pointed out that she spent half of her class time on maintaining discipline, and Mrs. Li tried to threaten students with a glance for small talk. Math's teacher Mr. Zou confiscated students' electronic bottle for hitting water. In addition to this, students were convinced the hierarchical notion that "everything the teacher said was right and everything the parents said was also right". Undoubtedly, these behaviors reflected the cultural values of high power distance held by Chinese teachers. In China, they enjoy supreme status and authority, and students respect their teachers by listening carefully in class. In the UK, however, as Mr Zou said, "students are used to questioning their teachers and challenging them in every way". The strict discipline has led many British students to rebel, ignoring their teachers, daring to put on make-up in class and using their mobile phones. Sophie was one of the most troublesome students for the Chinese teachers, as she continued to distract in class and talk to her desk mates despite the teacher's warning. In her eyes, the harsher the teacher was, the more she tried to resist. These phenomena reflect the cultural values of low power distance held by British students. They believe that teachers and students should be treated as equals, that their needs should be respected and acknowledged by the teacher, and that they have the right to question what the teacher is doing wrong and that there is no absolute obedience.

Collectivism versus individualism

According to the statistics in Table 1, the IDV in China is 20, while the IDV in the UK is 89, which clearly shows that there is a significant difference in the cultural dimension between China and

the UK. China reflects a distinctly collectivist cultural, while the UK reflects a distinctly individualist profile. Hofstede pointed out that in a collectivist society, people have a strong sense of belonging, and they consider themselves to be subordinate to a group and will act according to the rules of that group. In a collective society, the collective interest outweighs the individual interest, and the individual puts the achievement of the collective's goals ahead of their own. In an individualist society, on the other hand, people do not see themselves as belonging to an organization, but as individuals, and therefore act or make decisions according to their inner will. It is a society of independent individuals, where people's minds are not bound, where individuality is unique and where the human rights of the individual are emphasized.

China has been a collectivist country since ancient times. People in the ancient times lived in groups in the Yellow River basin, and the king of Qin Shi Huang in Qin dynasty burnt books and buried Confucian scholars alive in order to realize centralization. These are evident that the collectivism is deeply rooted in Chinese people's minds (Ho&Chiu, 1994). In modern society, the sense of interdependence between people is even more pronounced (Jie&Han, 2021). For example, in some traditional festivals, people like to have family reunions and cherish family success and harmony. On the contrary, Britain, as a typical Western country, developed its culture from classical liberalism. The idea of people's gifted is from god embodies the strong concept of individualism in Western which place great significance of inviolability and supremacy of human rights, so people are self-centred and focus on their own growth and development.

The conflict between collectivism and individualism is particularly evident in *Are Our Kids Tough Enough?* where the Chinese teachers asked the British students to dress in uniform to show the signs of a collective, and they organized morning exercises where all did the same thing at the same time to increase individual pride in being part of a collective. On Monday mornings, they lead a flag-raising ceremony to reinforce a sense of belonging to the country and to promote a sense of national identity. The teaching style of the teachers also showed a strong collectivist streak, with Mrs. Yang in Chemistry teaching a large class in board and verbal form, asking all students to learn by memorizing the chemical equations in the blackboard. This was also the case with Mr. Zou in Mathematics, whose teaching was teacher-centered, and the class moved at his pace. These teaching methods were difficult for the British students to adapt to, who emphasized individualism and disliked the uniform style as a reflection of a lack of unique personality, and they did not see the flag-raising ceremony as a sacred event red to explore and express they failed to appreciate the collective spirit. In chemistry classes, they preferring on their own rather than memorize by copying from the board, and even in math's classes they felt discouraged and because they could not keep up with the teacher as their math ability was not up to teacher's expectation. When Mr. Zou confiscated a student's hot water bottle, the student saw this as a violation of his human rights. Contrast this with mathematics lessons in the UK, where teachers taught students according to their ability, taking full account of their individual characteristics and motivating them to learn. These phenomena reflected students' individualistic

perceptions that each individual has unique personality traits, was self-centred and that human rights are crucial.

Long-term versus short-term orientation

According to the statistics in figure 1, China's LTO is 87 compared to the UK's 57, which shows that there is still a more obvious difference between the two countries on this cultural dimension. China has a more pronounced tendency towards long-term orientation, while the UK tends towards short-term orientation. According to Hofstede (2010), societies with long-term orientation values are persistent, striving, persevering and striving to achieve their goals. People are influenced in their decision making by traditional beliefs and what has happened in the past. People with a short-term orientation tend to look at immediate benefits and are influenced by current and future factors in making decisions.

China is typically a long-term oriented culture where people look at long-term plans and move steadily forward without rushing to achieve their goals (Buck&Liu, 2010). In the process of achieving their goals, they are able to endure hardships and overcome all difficulties and obstacles to achieve their goals. The UK, on the other hand, is a country with a short-term oriented culture (Hofstede& Minkov, 2010), where short-term benefits are more important, and they tend to refine their long-term goals in order to achieve each small goal in order to achieve their long-term goals.

This dimension of culture conflict was reflected in the attitude of the British students and the Chinese teachers towards the exams in *Are Our Kids Tough Enough?*. The Chinese teachers cared the results of the exam after four weeks so much, and they wanted their achievement of Chinese teaching to be better than their British teaching, so they constantly stressed to the British students the importance of this exam and asked them to take their studies seriously. When British student Lucas wanted to give up studying, his Chinese teacher advised him, "Maybe in the future you will regret not taking your studies seriously now, and maybe what you learn now is what you need to know in the future". In terms of time allocation, students in the Chinese class start their day at 7.30 am and stay for another two hours of self-study when other British students are free to play after school. For Chinese students, this pattern of study has become the norm and only by doubling their effort and hard work will they be able to go on to a good school. All of this reflected the long-term oriented culture of China. For British students in a short-term oriented culture, they do not recognize the importance of weekly exam results. They feel physically and mentally exhausted in the face of intense study. Angelina, a British student, thought that she could not imagine how Chinese students manage to keep up with such a work schedule and she believed that this way of studying, although it would lead to more success, was not a healthy practice. In addition, British students have also expressed their resistance to learning complex and difficult trigonometric functions, which they do not find useful in their lives. This reflects the short-term oriented values of the students, who did not recognize the long-term benefits and only looked at what was good for them in the present.

Uncertainty avoidance

The UAI of China's and the UK's shown in the figure 1 are 35 and 30 respectively. Although the culture difference is not obvious on education according to the data result, it is also worthwhile discussing the Uncertainty avoidance reflected in this documentary. Hofstede (2001) suggests that uncertainty avoidance reflects the degree to which members of a culture are comfortable in unfamiliar situations and "the degree to which a society tries to control the uncontrollable situation". Specifically, cultures with high uncertainty avoidance are uncomfortable with non-institutionalized situations they favor structure and feel threatened by the unknown and ambiguous, whereas cultures with low uncertainty avoidance are more willing to accept risk.

Three features of uncertainty avoidance are raised by Hofstede (2010) that are anxiety, competition and standard. The UAI in China is in a low level which means that Chinese people hold an open mind when facing risks. For example, Competition is rather fierce in China. It is common to see in many important issues, such as the College Entrance Examination, job seeking markets. Chinese people have been accustomed to competition in which the best one will be selected to have some privileges, and they commonly accept that exam is a fair way to select talents (Min&Xiuwen, 2001) The UK also possesses a low UAI compared with the other four dimensions. For Westerners, they found of challenge other's opinions and share their own opinions. Teachers in the UK are called to encourage students' critical thinking skills, making students "thinking like a scientist" (Thomason, 2016)

This culture dimension also can be seen in the documentary. The fierce competition faced by Chinese students has been mentioned many times in the documentary. We can see that Mr. Zou use English in his math class for Chinese students to improve their competition for their future. Chinese students also clearly aware that only hard working can help them stand out and go to their dream school. Thus, they can accept their teachers' rule and view it as ways to help them in study. In such a large population country like China, competition is inevitable with the development of economy. For the UK, the uncertainty avoidance is displayed in another way that students are found of raising their own opinions and challenging teachers. In some of their interviews, they had special and expected reasons when they were asked to explain their behaviors. For examples, Luca wanted to disturb others focusing on exams by making noisy. They decided to skip the class when they could not get the teacher's understanding. All these behaviors can reflect that China and the UK has low uncertainty avoidance but in different ways

Masculinity and femininity

In the figure 1, the MAS culture dimension in China and the UK's are the same accounted for 85 which means that both of them are a high masculinity society. By Hofstede (2007), the terms "masculinity" and "femininity" do not refer to male and female, but rather to the extent to which a society possesses masculine and feminine characteristics. In a society with masculinity, men are

considered to be superior in social status, and they are eager to material success, while women are supposed to be inferior status and they have more tender.

China is a country which shows typical feature of masculinity. In a traditional family, Chinese men occupy an important position in the family, and they are often the ones who make the decisions. What is more, from the emperor to the normal people, most important positions have been taken by man since the ancient times. It is similar with the UK. The domination of men was generally accepted by people in the Victor era. Even things got better with several revolts by feminines, it is also easy to see that men take charge for important things in the UK society. In a masculinity society, perseverance is seen as one of the obvious characteristics.

In *Are Our Kids Tough Enough?*, masculinity could be seen that the Chinese teachers showed the persevere spirit to deal with all kinds of problems happened in the class. They held many meetings after class at their apartment to try to find out the ways to improve teaching. We can see that their voices were hoarse and their bodies were exhausted, but they didn't care. They spent all effort in teaching in order to achieve success in the final exams. In the English school, the masculinity could be seen as the domination of female in the position of leaders. The head teacher was a female, and the teacher who was responsible for discipline was also a female. Both of them were seemed as of superior in the school. The British students feared to be supervised by them during the class, so none of them dared to distract or make noise in the class with the appearance of them. For the Chinese teachers, they would choose to turn to the leaders in the school when the class were out of control. All these things can reflect that both China and the UK have high masculinity.

STRATEGIES FOR MEDIATING CULTURAL CONFLICTS

Improving and changing evaluation methods

Educational evaluation is the description and judgment of the educational process and results (Yanbing 2013). It is not comprehensive and systematic to rely solely on students' examination results to evaluate the effectiveness of education between teachers and students. Chinese teachers should therefore improve their 'score-based' approach and look at British students through a developmental lens. For example, teachers should present students with assessment scores that include both process results and quantitative test scores, so as to combine qualitative and quantitative aspects. Although Angelina was not good at mathematics, she did her best to keep up with the teacher and to ask questions. For example, for students who did well academically but not well in PE, teachers may weaken the requirement for their PE scores and focus more on their PE process performance in order not to frustrate their learning emotions. Evaluating students' learning too much on the basis of one-sided grades can lead to the utilitarian of students' learning and dampen their enthusiasm for learning. Harmonious development of personality should be the value orientation of modern teaching evaluation, which should be based on the knowledge economy, point to the humanistic spirit, focus on lifelong education and achieve the unity of the subject and object of evaluation(Xudong 2001).

Teaching students in accordance with their aptitude

Confucius, a famous educator in ancient China, proposed to teach students according to their individual characteristics, level of intellectual development, learning ability and cognitive level in a targeted manner so as to promote students' strengths, compensate for their weaknesses and enhance their interest and confidence in learning. For Chinese teachers, a good analysis of British students' learning is a fundamental way of teaching them according to their needs. The term "learning situation analysis" refers to the teacher's analysis of the students' learning. When preparing lessons, teachers should consider the students' foundation and design teaching to understand the students from their actual situation (Xie Chen and Hu Huimin 2015). In conjunction with the British culture of individualism, teachers' teaching should also be individually designed. Math's teacher Mr. Zou should be aware that the various levels of his students in his class classes. Some students like Angelina, Lucas and Sophie who were not good at maths should be received with more care and attention. As a teacher, he should also provide tutorials and help after class. However, for some students like Joe and other higher achievers, he can offer more challenging tasks to them. Chemistry teacher Mrs. Yang should combine the form of teaching in large class with that of individual lab drills. For students who prefer to memorize knowledge, teachers should provide more written materials for them, while for students like Josh who tend to learn by doing experiment, teachers can create opportunities for them to do experiments in front of class as demonstration. Only in this way can students build on their strengths and personalize their development.

Learning from each other and complementing each other's strengths

The differences in education between China and the UK stem from the respective national contexts of the two countries and reflect the more significant differences in social backgrounds. Learning from each other's strengths and weaknesses is the best way for both countries to develop their education. Chinese teachers should recognize that challenge and questioning are not a sign of disrespect for the teachers in the low power distance culture in Britain, but a reflection of their critical spirit. In this way, teacher should therefore encourage students to put forward their different views in the classroom so that teachers and students can learn from each other. An active mind and a unique spirit of innovation are qualities that Chinese students need to improve in a long-term perspective. As Professor Lin Chongde said, we should focus on developing students' analytical and problem-solving skills (Lin Chongde 2016). For students at Bohunt, it is important that they understand that the Chinese model of learning in a long-term oriented culture is conducive to improved performance and goal attainment. Therefore, if they want to achieve self-improvement in the future, they can learn from the persistent and persevering learning attitude and work hard as Chinese students.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the documentary *Are Our Kids Tough Enough?* Not only presents the debate on the differences between Chinese and British education, but also leaves people in the world with many discussions, and inspirations. When teaching across cultures, teachers in China and the UK should recognize the differences in cultural dimensions between the two countries and adopt neutral means to deal with the conflict, while being good at taking advantage of the strengths and complementing the weaknesses to achieve improvement in their teaching abilities.

ACKNOWLEDGE

The Authors would like to Thank to 2019 Guangxi Higher Education Undergraduate Teaching Reform Project (2019JGB135)

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