East versus West:
The Descendants of Confucianism vs. Evidence-Based Learning Mainland Chinese Learners in Pursuit of Western-Based Education in Singapore

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Abstract

Purpose – To understand on the effects of cultural dislocation aspects of mainland Chinese students in their pursuit of western-based education and their influence on the students' learning styles and, ultimately, their perceived learning effectiveness.

Design/Methodology/Approach - Building on ideas by Hofstede (1984), Hofstede and Bond (1988) and Rodrigues (2004), an analysis was performed on mainland Chinese students who were enrolled in Singapore business educational programs in terms of their learning styles due to cultural dislocation issues which influence their optimal perceived learning effectiveness.

Findings – The effects of cultural dislocation characteristics measuring against cultural dimensions (power distance, uncertainty avoidance and philosophy of Confucianism) by Hofstede (1984) and Hosfstde and Bond (1988) on the effective learning styles via the preferred instructional techniques adopted are reported. Lectures emerged as the most perceived effective technique preferred (self-reported by students) when measured across the cultural dimensions of power distance and uncertainty avoidance. Case-studies surfaced as the preferred instructional technique in terms of perceived learning effectiveness and acquiring knowledge (examined based on the philosophy of Confucianism) most effectively. The results address a preliminary scope on how cultural aspects influence students' preference of instructional techniques in terms of perceived learning effectiveness.

Research Limitations/Implications – Research studies conducted in Singapore may differ from other Asian countries that attract Asian students for western business education. Moreover, this study included only mainland Chinese students.

Practical Implications – The study presents strategies and practices for facilitating effective learning for mainland Chinese students in western-based education – choice of instructional techniques. These are essential in providing quality and effective knowledge acquisition in bridging cultural distances between eastern and western-based education

Originality/Value – The findings allow the academic faculty and management of universities and employers of organisations to have a better appreciation and understanding on the cultural dislocation issues that influence mainland Chinese students' learning.

Key Words: Mainland Chinese Students, Business Education, Learning Styles, Learning/Teaching Techniques, Cultural Values and Cultural Dislocation

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1. Introduction

Culture, communication and learning are intertwined and mutually dependent (Lum, 2006). The institutions of higher education must strive to achieve current and future cultural fit in all of their offshore operations to successfully maintain their international academic reputation (Bodycott and Lai, 2012). Much of academic success for students is dependent on the educational and cultural congruence between themselves and the institution they study in (Rajaram & Bordia, 2011). In the new knowledge-based economy (KBE), it is how these mainland Chinese students perceive foreign education that would be the key determinant of success for both the institutions and themselves. To be specific, this can be viewed 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). 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 (Tan, 2011).

This paper performs an explorative study on the preference of varying instructional delivery methodologies ("active" and "passive") for mainland Chinese students across three key dimensions, power distance, uncertainty avoidance and knowledge transfer in Confucianism that facilitates perceived optimal learning effectiveness.

Singapore is viewed as an exemplary academic platform by foreign students where they can have the 'best of both worlds', which is to pursue a western-based education in an Asian context. It is crucial to understand the appropriateness of the instructional methodologies to be adopted in line with the diverse cultural influences of these foreign students (Rajaram and Bordia, 2013). The right fit of adoption of the effective instructional approaches examined are pertinent to all educators teaching international students as the discussion enables critical reflection on the cultural issues that influences on instructional preferences and how these can be incorporated in students' teaching, cultural and assessment-related context.

2.   Theoretical Perspectives

Culture is complex and multidimensional (Fan, 2000). One of the earliest and most widely cited definitions, by Tylor (1871), defines 'culture' as that complex whole which comprises knowledge, belief, morals, custom, law, art, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. Hofstede (1980) defines 'culture' as the interactive aggregate of common traits that impact upon a group's response to its environment. A society's culture presents its members with solutions to predicaments of external adaptation and internal integration. Culture offers good reference and guidance in terms of how people should relate to each other and react to varying situations so that relationships among humans are nurtured in a positive way (Rajaram, 2010).

2.1.   Cultural Values

Society or the cultural group, rather than the individual person, is the appropriate unit of analysis for assessing the validity of culture-level dimensions (Hofstede, 1980, 1991; Schwartz, 1992). A national culture is best embodied in the values its people embrace (Fan, 2000). Cultural values shape people's attitudes and beliefs, which guide their behaviour. One's behaviour is affected and moulded by the values of the culture, which instill certain expectations. Schwartz (1999) defines 'values' as conceptions of the desirable that direct the way social actors (for example, organisational leaders, policy-makers, individual persons) decide on actions, evaluate people and events, and explicate their actions and evaluations (Kluckhohn,1951; Rokeach, 1979; Schwartz, 1992). A 'value system' is viewed as a relatively permanent perceptual framework that impacts upon an individual's behaviour (England, 1978).

Cultural values establish the norms or standards by which everything in society is accessed. The ways in which the institutions of society (for example, the family; education; economic, political and religious systems) function, their goals and their models of operation express cultural value priorities (Schwartz, 1999). Thus, in a holistic view, a value system can be seen to represent what is expected or hoped for in a society. Several theorists (Hofstede, 1980; Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961; Rokeach, 1979; Schwartz, 1999) postulate that cultural dimensions of values reflect the basic issues or challenges that societies must deal with in order to regulate human activity. These discussions help understand why there is a relationship effect between cultural values and how students learn and acquire knowledge effectively via the various instructional/teaching/learning modes available.

2.2. Chinese Culture

The cultural values that are specifically held by the mainland Chinese are investigated, thus examining how these will then impact the way in which they acquire knowledge effectively. In the past two decades, one of the major frameworks for understanding and measuring culture has been Hofstede's (1980, 1984) typology of cultural dimensions. 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. Hofstede's (1980) original work mainly described four cultural dimensions— individualism/collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity/femininity—and later included long-/short-term orientation (Hofstede, 1991). These terms can be explained thus:

- "Individualism/collectivism refers to a country's cultural position with respect to the importance of the individual or group" (Chan, 2006, p. 126). The Chinese culture inclines towards collectivism. This is largely evident from the students' team-centered behavioral aspects although scholars (Rajaram, 2010; Ryan and Slethaug 2010; Rajaram and Bordia 2011, Littlewood 2009; Rajaram and Bordia, 2013) argues that there is a shift towards their preference of learning approaches due to the shift is china's rapid progress and changes over the years.

- "Power distance captures the desire within a society for hierarchy versus egalitarianism" (Chan, 2006, p. 126). It refers to the amount of authority one person has over others and is linked to the importance given to hierarchy in a particular society. 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).

- Chan (2006) reports that 'uncertainty avoidance' is related to a society's ambiguity. Uncertainty Avoidance refers to the measure of the level of comfort to handle conflicts and aggression in terms of ambiguous situations. There has been a shift in the uncertainty avoidance level due to the rapid changes over the last decade on China from varying dimensions. Mainland Chinese students need to be closely guided and directed to carry out their assigned academic tasks (Chan 1999; Chow 1995; Newell 1999; Oxford 1995). Moreover, (Chan 2006; Wen and Clement 2003) emphasised that mainland Chinese students 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; Rajaram, 2010; Chan and Rao 2009; Shi 2006 and Yang 2009) reports 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.

- While 'masculinity' stands for a preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material success, 'femininity' refers to a preference for relationships, modesty, caring for the weak, and quality of life (Hofstede, 1983). This can be seen as a measure of whether a culture is oriented more towards materialistic aspects or, rather, inclined towards nurturing the relationship aspects. Chinese culture can be seen as neither masculine nor feminine, but the unity of both is emphasised.

Wu (2002) points out that China is a typical example of a long-term oriented and collective culture. Fan (2000) re-examined the 40 cultural values which surfaced from the study by the Chinese Cultural Collection (1987) and fully amended to produce a new list of 31 Chinese Culture Values (CCVs).

The revision is essential as the total number of values is increased by 78 per cent from 40 to 71, with 31 values newly added (44%) (Fan, 2000). **Table 1** below shows a tentative comparison of Fan's (2000) revised cultural values with Hofstede's VSM.

Table 1: Comparison of cultural values [Fan (2000) versus Hofstede (1984)]

Hosfede (1984)	Individualism/ Collectivism	Uncertainty Avoidance	Power Distance	Masculinity/ Femininity
Fan (2000)	29 conformity	41 prudence	28 hierarchy	71 unity of yin and yang
	35 collectivism	49 conservative	27 deference to authority	8 moderation

(Adapted from Fan, 2000)

From the table above, it may seem to be clear that the matching values of CCVs indicate that Chinese culture is more collective rather than individualistic, with high uncertainty avoidance and large power distance. However, recent studies (Rajaram, 2010; Ryan and Slethaug 2010; Yang 2009; Clarke and Gieve, 2006; Rajaram and Bordia, 2013, Chan and Rao 2009 and Littlewood 2009) have reported that there is a shift in the uncertainty avoidance and power distance towards the lower side of the scale due to extended exposure of China to varying globalization issues and higher intensity of western influences. However, Chinese culture can be clustered as neither masculine nor feminine but, rather, emphasises the unity of both. Chan (2006) emphasize that culture is not a stagnant system, although traditional Chinese culture has its own distinct dimensions. Communistic education and modernisation shaped contemporary Chinese cultural values (Zhao, 1997). The continuous interaction with other cultural systems makes tremendous and continuous changes in the nature of Chinese cultural values. Lu (2002) describes China as being characterised by a tension of traditional and modern, idealistic and pragmatic values, and a struggle between an authoritarian state and market economy. Although certain values have been ingrained in Chinese culture during the past, these are affected by different changes as China is undergoing controlled changes in terms of its economic market development and Western influences due to globalisation.

2.3. Confucianism

K'ung-fu-tzu or Master Kung was renamed Confucius by Jesuit missionaries (Chan, 1999). Confucius, who was born in 551 BC, was a high-office civil servant in China. In contrast to Taoism and Buddhism, Confucius teachings did not commence as a religion as such but the lessons in practical ethics or set of pragmatic rules for daily life are extracted from the learning of Chinese history (Hofstede & Bond, 1988).

Confucius developed an ethical element in government by insisting that all rulers must 'govern with benevolence and justice' and that people 'obey and respect their leaders' in return. He trusted that the best possible way forward in a hierarchical Chinese society was to develop a morally motivated bureaucracy. The imperial rulers began to broaden the accessibility of power to commoners so that it was no longer restricted to the elite. This power dilution was achieved by introducing the world's first examination system during the Han dynasty which lasted from 206BC to 220AD. In fact, Confucian philosophy had such a great influence over the basic values of Chinese civilization that it is frequently perceived as the new religion of China (Oh, 1991), 'particularly during the thirteenth century when the social philosophy of Confucianism became intertwined with Taoism and Buddhism, creating Neo-Confucianism' (Chan, 1999, p. 298). The basic Chinese value system today is permeated by the resultant association with ancestor worship and a godly state.

Confucianism is basically the behavioural or moral doctrine that relies on the teaching of Confucius regarding human relationships, virtuous behaviour, social structures and work ethics. In Confucianism, rules are spelled out for an individual's social behaviour, governing the entire range of human interactions in society. According to Oh (1991), Confucianism, at present, is all about the correct observation of human relationships within a hierarchically oriented society. In particular, the key emphasis on the family is manifested in the five constant virtues and corresponding cardinal relationships as: Constant virtues (1. Filial Piety; 2. Faithfulness; 3. Brotherhood; 4. Loyalty; 5. Sincerity) and Cardinal Relationships (1. Father and Son; 2. Husband and Wife; 3. Elder and Younger Brother; 4. Monarch and Subject; 5. Between Friends) (Oh, 1991).

Confucianism is undisputedly the most influential thought structure which shapes the underpinning aspects of the Chinese cultural tradition and still provides the basis for the norms of Chinese interpersonal behaviour.

Confucianism has gone through five stages in accordance to Yao's (2000) historical perspectives, which are 'Confucianism in formation', 'Confucianism in adaption', 'Confucianism in transformation', 'Confucianism in variation' and 'Confucianism in renovation'. Hence, Yao (2000) reports that Confucianism is "more a tradition generally rooted in Chinese culture and nurtured by Confucius and Confucians" (p. 17).

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Chen (1986) asserts that the basic teaching of Confucius is distilled in the Five Constant Virtues: humanity, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and faithfulness. Confucius further characterised the five basic human relations and principles for each relation, called 'Wu Lun' (Fan, 2000). **Table 2**, below, summarises the key aspects as follows:

Table 2: Basic human relations versus principles

Basic human relations	Principles
Sovereign and subject (or master and follower)	Loyalty and duty
Father and son	Love and obedience
Husband and wife	Obligation and submission
Elder and younger brothers	Seniority and modelling subject
Friend and friend	Trust

(Adapted from Fan, 2000)

Of those five basic human relations: a) three are family relations, which clearly show the importance of family in Chinese society and account for its paternalism; b) the first two relations, filial piety and loyalty, are generally deemed the most important; c) when they are applied to management, the first and last relations stand out, leading to the birth of a paternalistic management style in both China and Japan (Hsiao et al., 1990); d) Confucius always used only the male versions of language to define family relations; e) Confucianism emphasises the 'value of harmony, urging individuals to adapt to the collectivity, to control their emotions, to avoid conflict, and to maintain inner harmony' (Kirkbride & Tang, 1992, p. 60).

3. Theoretical Models of Culture

Based on research conducted across 50 countries, Hofstede (1980) developed a typology consisting of four cultural dimensions by which a society may be classified: individualism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity-femininity.

Hofstede and Bond (1988) thereafter developed another cultural dimension, Confucianism, which is generally prevalent in Asian countries.

Slethaug (2010) reported that the cultural framework of Hofstede (1980) charts the general characteristics of societies, hence should not generalize and stereotype the findings. But it can be argued that the five cultural dimensions of Hofstede and associates are applicable if the context is used appropriately with explicit measurement variables and not generalizing it. The changes in China influence and shift the traditional cultural norms and values which affects the learning behavior. But it can be argued that although the levels of the five dimensions may be shifted more or less but it is the range of shift that needs to be appreciated rather than stating that the complex cultural influences are now totally irrelevant which is similar to mention that the traditional cultural values that forms this framework has been totally erased. Many scholars (Rajaram and Bordia, 2011; Ryan and Slethaug, 2010; Winslade and Monk, 1999; Rajaram, 2010; Clark and Gieve, 2006; Gumingyuan, 2001; Nisbett, 2003) highlighted that students should not be labeled and confined into boundaries which causes to generate myths about the groups of students and create false "reputations".

However, explicit behavioral values and norms which influences can be studied through various aspects, for example, in terms of comfort (power distance), familiarity (uncertainty avoidance) and ease of knowledge transfer (philosophy of Confucianism). Due to the diversity of the scope, only three most relevant out of five cultural dimensions (power distance, uncertainty avoidance and philosophy of Confucianism) from Hofstede's (1991) and Hofstede and Bond's (1988) cultural frameworks are considered. Moreover, when these cultural dimensions are evaluated in relevance to mainland Chinese students pursuing business education in Singapore, in comparison with the other cultural dimension frameworks, the rest come across as having much less impact on their cultural dislocation aspects. Basically, the three carefully identified cultural dimensions—namely, power distance, uncertainty avoidance and philosophy of Confucianism—are very relevant to measuring the cultural diversity in an internationally based educational and cultural environment.

3.1. Power Distance

'Power distance' concerns how people perceive and cope with the inherent inequities involved in the distribution of power; that is, how the culture institutionalises inequity (Rodrigues, 2004). In societies with small power distance, as is common in western countries, inequity is treated as undesirable and efforts are made to reduce it wherever possible. In high power distance societies, such inequities are accepted as natural and legitimized in customary and institutional policies (Walker, Bridges and Chan, 1996). Thus, people in high power distance cultures tend to accept the unequal distribution of power.

Hofstede (1980) classified the culture of many of the countries included in his study as large power distance. According to him, individuals dominated by this cultural dimension tend to accept centralised power and rely heavily on superiors for structure and direction. The rules and laws, which differ for superiors and subordinates, are accepted. When making their own decisions, students from this cultural orientation probably require relatively strong direction. These learners will be frustrated with an assignment that expects them to make independent decisions. On the other hand, Hofstede (1980) classified the culture of some nations as small power distance. Such individuals do not put up with highly centralised power and at least expect to be consulted in decision-making. Due to their relatively low tolerance for dictatorship, students from this cultural orientation may show some resentment towards an instructor who dictates specifically what should be done (Rodrigues, 2004). Unlike learners with a large power distance orientation, these students probably prefer an assignment which instructs them to look for an article on their own and then decide on which theory or concept in the book best applies. They probably require less direction compared to students from large power distance cultures.

The trainer's authority, coupled with status and credibility, is essential in a high power distance society. The knowledge, wisdom and expertise of their seniors are respected by Chinese learners as this is an essential part of their upbringing (Wen and Clement, 2003). The teacher is regarded as the "provider" of knowledge, and so must provide rigid structure and precise information). These learners are mostly uncomfortable and unwilling to challenge the authority figures (Wen and Clement, 2003). It is very unlikely that students will pose challenging questions to their teacher. In comparison with their Western counterparts, Chinese students rarely ask questions, particularly questions that challenge or contradict the teacher's viewpoint as well as publicly criticise them (Chow, 1995; Chan 1999 and Shi 2006).

This emphasises that a high power distance exists between teacher and students. Students are hesitant to ask questions because they assume it is rude to do so during a lecture and do not want to disrupt the lecture. However, these students frequently come up with questions or comments on an individual basis during the breaks and after the lecture ends (Chow 1995; Shi 2006 and Wen and Clement 2003). They feel more comfortable and secure when teachers can handle their questions face-to-face with more privacy—for instance, during individual consultation hours (Liu, 2006). However, Rajaram and Bordia (2011) reports that "the cultural dislocation variable of comfort does not affect the optimal learning effectiveness of mainland Chinese students" (pp.80).

The correlations between power distance and perceived learning effectiveness is demonstrated in the research question: *'Is the perceived learning effectiveness in terms of passive instructional techniques positively related to high power distance according to mainland Chinese students?'* This allowed the design of the hypothesis (H1).

H1: Perceived learning effectiveness in terms of passive instructional techniques is positively related to high power distance

3.2. Uncertainty Avoidance

Hofstede (1980) classified the culture of many nations as having a strong uncertainty avoidance constituent. Individuals in these cultures feel uneasy in situations of uncertainty and ambiguity and prefer structure. Hofstede (1984) proposes that improving the quality of life for employees in these societies implies offering more security and perhaps more task structure on the job. People in countries whose culture is classified as weak uncertainty tend to be relatively tolerant of uncertainty and ambiguity. They usually require considerable autonomy and low structure. In the case of large power distance and strong uncertainty avoidance, students are likely to prefer strong direction, whereas in the case of small power distance and weak uncertainty avoidance, minimal direction is preferred.

The teacher's role in the Asian context is to teach, set the rules, and work out thorough and complex examples (Chow, 1995). Based on this context, students rely largely on the teacher and look for more definite instructions .They expect their teacher to take the initiative, to lead and lay clear directions and paths for the student to follow .The teachers are expected to deliver inflexible and highly-structured lectures.

Asian cultures place high emphasis on conformity and orderliness (Chow 1995 and Carson 1992). Participative, interactive and competitive activities may not be compatible with Chinese social values (Kumaravadivelu 2003; Chan 1991; Nelson 1995; Carson and Nelson 1996 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. However, this may not be generalized due to the varying variables involved as Shi's (2006) study argues we need to be mindful of "their national, regional, economic class and cultural background, as well as age, religion and gender" (pp.139).

According to Chow's (1995) teaching experience, mainland Chinese students prefer structured lectures, supplemented with detailed lecture notes. Nevertheless, students' participation in exercises, small group problem-solving, in-basket activities, and so on, will assist them to emphasise what they have learned from passive note-taking and provide confidence in active involvement. Ritualised behaviour, withdrawal and resentment on the part of the participants are often the outcomes of providing and receiving feedback (Chow 1995 and Newell 1999). Confrontational decision-making creates a tension quite destructive to the learning process (Chan, 1996). Any form of positive learning is precluded as the group creates a high level of discomfort. In contrary, recent studies by scholars (Ryan and Slethaug 2010; Yang 2009; Chan and Rao 2009; Rajaram, 2010 and Shi 2006) reports that Chinese learners are active; monitor their own studies; learning from their mistakes or linking past experiences to their studies; prefer a less teacher directed learning approach and willing to participate in interactive learning activities. However, Rajaram and Bordia (2011) reports that "..Chinese students' learning effectiveness is not directly affected by the active or passive style of teaching approaches rather it is the process of knowledge transfer involved in these instructional techniques at large.." (p.79).

The correlation between uncertainty avoidance and perceived learning effectiveness is demonstrated in the research question: *'Is the perceived learning effectiveness in terms of passive instructional techniques positively related to high uncertainty avoidance according to mainland Chinese students?'* This allowed the design of the hypothesis (H2).

H2:   Perceived learning effectiveness in terms of passive instructional techniques is positively related to high uncertainty avoidance

3.3. Philosophy of Confucianism

The behaviours and their influence on individuals are examined when they are studied from the perspective of Confucian culture. Rodrigues (2004) states that the uncertainty avoidance measure developed by Hofstede is not perfect. This can be closely associated with how people within a particular culture react to and manage uncertainty in social situations (Walker, Bridges and Chan, 1996). The acceptance of uncertainty without undue stress is taught in some societies. In weak uncertainty avoidance cultures, people tend to be tolerant of different opinions and are not excessively threatened by unpredictability. On the contrary, uncertainty is viewed as disruptive and psychologically uncomfortable in strong uncertainty avoidance cultures. Thus, 'people seek to reduce uncertainty and limit risk by imposing order and structure through rules and dogmas that breed coherence' (Walker, Bridges and Chan, 1996, p. 18).

Rodrigues (2004, p. 613) further illustrates that:

> The measure for some countries does not appear to reflect the commonly known cultural traits of those countries. For example, Singapore measures weak uncertainty avoidance, yet the country functions under a governance system which provides high regimentation and stability for its citizens, a system which tends to be more prevalent in strong uncertainty avoidance cultures (e.g. France's code law, mechanistic system) than in weak uncertainty avoidance cultures (e.g. the UK's common law, organic system).

Moreover, Hofstede and Bond (1988) acknowledge that the uncertainty avoidance dimension is less applicable in Confucian-based cultures, such as the People's Republic of China, South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore. Cultures that are based on the Confucian philosophy develop stability-generating systems that are significantly different from those generated in religion-based cultures (Rodrigues, 2004).

South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore were classified as large power distance societies in Hofstede's (1980) study (the People's Republic of China was not included in the study). Thus, as in the case of large power distance and strong uncertainty avoidance societies, individuals in countries where culture is based on the Confucian philosophy are likely to prefer strong direction and stability (Jarrah, 1998).

Much support for this proposition is available in the literature. 'For example, a Western university professor concluded that: The impression is [that] they [Asian students] learn by reproducing and are less able to apply their knowledge to practical situations [compared with Western students]' (Watkins et al., 1991, p. 22). In addressing the effectiveness of projects as a learning instrument for Chinese managerial trainees, Pun (1989a) observes that Chinese learners, in selecting the project topic, are often guided more by the accessibility of reference books than by the practical importance of the potential solutions, and they prefer learning through concrete facts, precedents and procedures. Also, there is a prevalent belief among Western academics that Asian learners tend to rely on rote-based learning to a greater extent than their Western counterparts (Watkins et al., 1991). Anecdotes abound that learner-centred, active learning methods used extensively in Western business education, such as case studies and projects, are not well accepted in many Asian countries (Pun, 1989a, Murphy, 1987; Rigby, 1986; Staw, 1982; Rodrigues, 2004).

In addition, Westerners pride themselves on their ability to hold individual views and express them candidly (Chow, 1995). The mainland Chinese are more reserved (Shi 2006), as open and outspoken expression is not generally encouraged (Chan 1999; Newell 1999 and Fox 1994). Asian students tend not to express their feelings openly, mainly due to their culture and training. 'However, things are changing. Inhibition in the expression of feelings is somewhat fading as younger Asian generations are more outspoken' (Chow, 1995, p. 13). Recent studies (Littlewood 2009; Ninnes, Aitchison and Kalso 1999) have argued that these perceptions have often been based on partial knowledge or misunderstandings of Chinese students but have given rise to negative stereotypes. As Kumaran Rajaram, a PhD student from Singapore reported in his *PhD Thesis*, in 2010, stated:

The mainland Chinese students generally reported that they learned more effectively active instructional techniques, with the exception of lectures as the passive instructional 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 progresses to become internationally recognised by opening its doors to other countries, there is bound to be an increase of Western exposure influencing the country's educational approach and, importantly, influencing how mainland Chinese students are being taught and their learning styles, as well. (Rajaram, 2010, p. 298).

The correlation between cultural dimension of Confucianism and knowledge transfer is demonstrated in the third research question: *'Is cultural dimension of Confucianism positively related to knowledge transfer according to mainland Chinese students?'* This allowed the design of the third hypothesis (H3).

H3: cultural dimension of Confucianism is positively related to knowledge transfer

4. Instructional techniques

Effectiveness of instructional techniques varies for students that come from different cultures (Johnson, 1991; Warner, 1991). Primary differences in learning styles lead to differing pedagogical preferences, and cultures develop differing learning styles (Kemp, 2010, Holland, 1989; Kolb & Fry, 1975; Witkins et al., 1977). This is critical to acknowledge as Western-based business education in Singapore is facilitated largely by multi-racial faculty. Hence, instructional approaches with inherent active/passive differences do have impacts in terms of cultural perspective. Therefore, the approach adopted for Chinese instruction using these techniques is not always identical to their delivery in Singapore.

5. Active vs. passive learning

Rodrigues categorized these ten instructional techniques as follows:

- Four active techniques: Case studies, Individual research projects, Classroom discussions and Group projects.
- Six passive techniques: Lectures by instructor, Reading textbooks, Guest speakers, Videos shown in the classroom, Classroom presentations by students, Computerised learning assignments.

Rodrigues (2004) noted that student frustration may be one of the outcomes if inappropriate instructional techniques are used. Rajaram (2010) proposed that to be effective in cross-cultural teaching, instructors need to apply correct techniques by which the students learn best and gain optimal knowledge and that the selection of techniques depends on where the instructors will be teaching or the country or countries from which the foreign students came and what subject matter instructors will be teaching. Mainland Chinese students bring certain distinctive values from their cultural backgrounds but there are noticeable differences in the teaching/learning methodologies used between China and Singapore.

6. Methodology

6.1. Participants

From a total of 402 participants, a self-selected sample of 23 represents mainland Chinese students, from the eastern (5), western (6), northern (6) and southern (6) regions. A self-selection sample allows participants to be individually interviewed to verify whether they have experienced all the ten instructional techniques. The students should have experienced these instructional approaches in at least four common core business modules, in a combination of both qualitative and quantitative subjects. From each of the four identified regions, five to six students were included (Male=12; Female=11). Participants represented the ages of majority of students enrolled in similar courses in Singapore, where they were between 19 and 29 years of age (average age=23). The participants involved are those who were in the last six months of their course (12) and had been pursuing the program for more than two years (11). These participants were from seven private public higher education institutions in Singapore who are four-year edutrusted (certifying as high quality higher educational institutions in terms academic standards and processes in placed) collaborating with overseas University partners from Australia and United Kingdom.

6.2. Procedure

Once the ethics approval was obtained, leaflets stating the registration details for the interviews were placed on notice boards in the seven institutions (that facilitates western-based business undergraduate educational programs) to engage prospective participants. An external consultant who is fluent in both English and Chinese conducts the interview sessions. Short descriptions of what is typically involved in the different instructional techniques were briefed prior to the interviews conducted to ensure the participants were providing inputs with the same instructional experience.

A digital-recorder was used to record all interviews conducted. A period of approximately six months was taken to individually transcribe all 23 interviews. The interviews were transcribed with the help of a research assistant. The accuracy and consistency of all interviews transcribed are ensured with the re-vetting process by the principal researcher and another research assistant. The interview questions were designed and adapted by customising the context and type of questions to similar research done by Rodrigues (2004). This was done to reference the existing design of questions for examining students' learning preferences. The facilitation of a coding process enabled annominity for individuals interviewed.

All transcribed interviews were categorised into common themes that surfaced under each of the sections (instructional techniques and cultural dislocation dimensional aspects). Thereafter, the classification of these main themes facilitated the broader clusters to be grouped together. For the ten instructional techniques, three key clusters emerged —namely, 'communication styles and approaches (power distance)' 'Feeling of mind and behavioral aspects' (uncertainty avoidance)' and 'effectiveness of knowledge transfer (philosophy of Confucianism)'. Under each of these sections, many other secondary issues emerged associated with the key theme. This approach was carried out for all 23 interviews to compile the raw data contributed by the participants. From the compiled inputs in the data sheet a careful examination of each question helped validate the 23 participants' responses and the emergent key themes from specific questions.

7. Analysis

The data is qualitatively analysed with the use of consensual qualitative research (CQR; Hill, Thompson and Williams, 1997). CQR incorporates elements from phenomenological (Giorgi, 1985), grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), and comprehensive process analysis (Elliott, 1989). The raw data is examined by creating domains or topic areas based on responses, which are summarised into core segments for each interview conducted. Consensus, an integral part of the CQR method (Hill et al., 1997), 'relies on mutual respect, equal involvement, and shared power' (p. 523). In fact, the quality of decision-making is enhanced by the use of the consensus approach (Michaelsen, Watson & Black, 1989; Sundstrom, Busby & Bobrow, 1997), by taking into account both commonly held and minority views (Miller, 1989). The different experiences and viewpoints among the team members may help to unravel the ambiguities and complexities of the data, where subtle meanings may be conveyed through the interview process in CQR (Hill, Thompson & Hess, 2005).

The CQR team consisted of two primary researchers and one external auditor. The culturally diverse team formation facilitated the data analysis with extensively varying and diverse perspectives. Consultation with the auditor enabled the assessability on the appropriateness of the interview protocol. In the later stage, he also evaluated samples of each level of analysis—namely, on the domains (cultural dimensions), core ideas (sub-themes that emerge from the domains) and cross-analysis (any common themes among the domains and sub-themes).

The team meets to have consensual agreement by giving due consideration to any discrepancies in domain and core idea development. In general, the external auditor's role is to review core ideas, domains and cross-analysis. However, Hill et al. (2005) distinctively specify that the external auditor is to review the research instrument (in this case, the semi-structured interview protocol). Finally, to ensure the stability of the analysis, at least two cases should be revisited, which are withheld from the analytic process, after reaching the team's consensus for all other cases. The data set is deemed stable only if these two cases have similar domain and core ideas. Additional data should be gathered and re-analysis performed to stabilise the data set if this similarity is not attained. In other words, the consultant thoroughly audited the interview protocols and samples of the interview transcripts. The primary researchers then met and attained consensus on the analysis. Three main themes were identified: a) 'communication styles and approaches (power distance) ; b) 'Feeling of mind and behavioral aspects (uncertainty avoidance) ; c) 'Effectiveness of knowledge transfer (based Confucian culture); Finally, two random cases were analysed based on the final themes and were found to have similar domain and core ideas as the other cases. Therefore, the data set showed stability.

8. Findings and Discussions

Three key cultural dimension aspects of power distance, uncertainty avoidance and philosophy of Confucianism are measured across ten instructional techniques by examining the students' perferred choice in terms of their perceived learning effectiveness.

Table 3 reports the participants' responses in terms of cultural dimensions measured across the four "active" instructional techniques.

Table 3: Participants' responses—cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance, power distance and philosophy of Confucianism across four "active" instructional techniques

Teaching Technique	Participants' responses across cultural dimensions of uncertainty avoidance, power distance and philosophy of Confucianism		
	Uncertainty avoidance	**Power distance**	**Knowledge transfer in Confucianism**
Active			
Case-study	Comfortable *(18 students agreed)*	Sharing of views and experiences *(4 students agreed); (1 student disagreed)*	Reiterate, refresh and facilitate to remember the information *(15 students agreed)*
	Learning Environment a) Facilitate own thinking *(2 students agreed)*	Listen to and learn from others' views/opinions *(6 students agreed)*	Ability to relate ad apply in a practical context *(15 students agreed)*
	b) Allow to challenge assumptions *(2 students agreed)*	Facilitate to ask questions and challenge assumptions *(6 students agreed)*	Quality of learning in terms of optimal knowledge acquisition *(9 students agreed)*
	c) Require to read more *(1 student agreed)*		Easier to understand *(9 students agreed)*
	d) Ability to remember things much better *(3 students agreed)*		Learn from current knowledge and others *(6 students agreed)*
			In-depth and diverse coverage of information *(5 students agreed)*
			Facilitate to apply from one's own and others' perspectives *(4 students agreed)*
			Easier to visualise and picture *(4 students agreed)*
			Learn from varying opinions/views *(2 students agreed)*
			Ability to challenge the norm *(2 students agreed)*
			Subjectivity to personality *(1 student agreed)*
Individual research project	Confidence level *(20 students disagreed)* (not confident)	Sharing of information *(1 student agreed - on occasional basis); (10 students disagreed)*	Effectiveness in terms of acquisition of knowledge *(14 students agreed); (4 students disagreed)*
	Learning environment *(3 students agreed - conducive); (12 students disagreed - not conducive)*	Allow students to have own views/opinions *(7 students agreed); (1 student disagreed)*	Application of the knowledge acquired *(9 students agreed); (2 students disagreed)*
	Sense of comfort *(13 students disagreed - uncomfortable and insecure feeling)*	Listen to others' views *(7 students disagreed)*	Reinforcing of information *(7 students agreed); (6 students disagreed)*
	Level of independence *(10 students agreed)*	Allows one to be independent *(5 students agreed)*	Allows one to think in varying modes *(8 students agreed)*
	Learning effectiveness in terms of acquisition of knowledge *(8 students agreed)*		Quality of spoken language and written skills *(5 students agreed)*
			Understanding the flow *(5 students agreed)*

			Thinking diversely *(4 students agreed)*
			Independent learning *(3 students agreed)*
			Efficiency in knowledge acquisition *(2 students disagreed)*
			Allows one to express views and opinions *(2 students agreed)*
Group projects	Comfort (*13 students agreed*) (comfortable) (*2 students disagreed*) (not comfortable - uneasy and awkward)	Learning effectiveness in terms of acquisition of knowledge (*12 students agreed*)	Clarify and share ideas with group mates *(13 students agreed)*; *(2 students disagreed)* (due to minimal knowledge and exposure)
	Feeling of security (11 students agreed)	Sharing of opinions / views (*11 students agreed*)	Facilitate learning (12 students agreed)
	Decision-making *(9 students agreed)*	Expression of opinions/views (*1 student agreed*) (facilitates expression of ideas and opinions); (*3 students disagreed*) (due to shyness and lack of confidence)	Able to refresh and reinforce learned information *(5 students agreed)*; *(3 students disagreed)*; (very minimal reinforcement)
	Familiarity *(5 students agreed)* (when they are with people in the group with whom they are familiar); *(2 students disagreed)* (when they have never been exposed to a new and unique concept)	Better bonding *(4 students agreed)*	Quality of learning (7 students agreed)
	Expression of their thoughts *(6 students disagreed)* (not able to express their views)		Ability to apply *(3 students agreed)*; *(3 students disagreed)*
	Acquisition of knowledge *(4 students agreed)*		
Classroom discussions	Comfort *(2 students agreed)* (after prolonged exposure to the teaching/learning technique); (*17 students disagreed*) (not comfortable)	Sharing of views and opinions (*5 students agreed*)	Knowledge Transfer *(7 students agreed)*; *(3 students disagreed)*
	Level of participation *(14 students agreed)* (not participative and proactive)		Reinforces and refreshes learning *(6 students agreed)*
	Confidence *(11 students disagreed)* (not confident)		Enhancing understanding *(5 students agreed)*
	Acquisition of knowledge *(6 students agreed)* (valuable platform) *(3 students disagreed)* (due to the limited exposure to practical knowledge and their involvement)		Greater control in the learning process *(5 students agreed)*
	Level of enjoyment *(2 students agreed)* (after prolonged exposure); *(4 students disagreed)* (did not enjoy due to their level of exposure over the preceding years)		Application of knowledge *(3 students agreed)*

There are mixed views in the literature on the preference of teaching/learning approaches by the Chinese learners although in the recent studies scholars (Ryan and Slethaug 2010; Chan and Rao 2009; Littlewood 2009 and Yang 2009) argue that there is a shift from the "passive" to "active" approaches, although no studies has explicitly examine the types of instructional approaches that are perceived to be effective by the PRC students and importantly in a modernized, highly developed and influenced by westernized values yet classified as a 'Confucian Heritage Culture' country (Singapore). (Nield, 2004, p. 190) reports "Mainland Chinese students prefer passive teaching methods such as lectures, demonstrations, handouts, displays, films and videos". Experimental exercises, case studies, role-playing and simulations belong to participative teaching methods and are least preferred (Chow, 1995). Thompson and Gui (2000) claims that problem-solving, explorative teaching methods employed in the West would not fit with the Confucian-derived preference for repetitive-learning. On the contrary, the four active instructional techniques: case study, individual research project, group project and classroom discussions—are reported to be excellent avenues for quality learning in terms of knowledge and information acquisition for mainland Chinese students.

Case study emerged as a platform for effective perceived learning in terms of optimal knowledge acquisition as it facilitated avenues for critical and analytical thinking. Similarly, both group and individual research projects enabled students to acquire knowledge and apply it effectively. Classroom discussion also scored a relatively high positive response from seven students in terms of knowledge transfer and acquisition of information taught. Fifteen students agreed that case study facilitated the ability to relate and apply in a practical context. Moreover, students reported that the information delivered via the case study approach was much easier to comprehend. Apart from that, enabling them to listen and learn from others' views, thus facilitating them to ask questions and challenge assumptions, was clustered for case study and group projects. Six students reported that those students who asked and challenged assumptions had been in the course of study for more than two years. There was a significant influence on the students' behavioural characteristics brought about by the process of this active learning approach of case study.

As for the individual research project technique, ten students reported that individual research project facilitated limited avenues in sharing information. However, seven of them indicated that it did allow them to present their ideas, to a certain extent, in writing the report, thus allowing them to think independently.

Three negative issues were emphasised—namely, their discomfort and insecure feeling, lack of confidence to deal with the project assignment on their own and having a less guided learning environment. This is not surprising as it is well-supported by the literature that mainland Chinese learners prefer to be guided and directed. For example, Wen and Clement (2003) reports Chinese students are willing to submit to authority and characterize their learning behaviour as passive. Chan (1999) highlights that the problem-solving ability is principally neglected as the students' accomplishment is evaluated through written examinations that may not necessarily be designed to examine ability to access teamwork and solve practical problems. Mainland Chinese students may be concrete and pragmatic in evaluating ideas but also suffer from a lack of creativity, as well as a decreased likelihood of exploring new directions to which they have been unaccustomed (Chan, 1999). Crookes and Thomas (1998) state that problem-solving techniques may be adapted to be applied to mainland Chinese students.

This has been proven, with 18 students' responses highlighting that they felt comfortable with the case study mode of instructional approach. Eleven students reported that they felt comfortable and secure with the group project instructional technique. Neild (2004) indicates that group work can work well with mainland Chinese students but may need to be structured differently from the one designed for Western students. Scholars (Shi 2006 and Yang 2009) claim that Chinese learners are willing to participate in interactive and cooperative learning activities. Tang (1996) points out those mainland Chinese students will work collaboratively but prefer to do it informally outside of class as part of their learning process. Thirteen of them indicated that group projects enabled them to share and exchange ideas with their group mates, which allowed them to learn from others' perspectives. Typically, Chinese classroom activities are dominated by lectures with limited questioning or discussions since students prefer not to express their opinions in public (Chan, 1999).

This is further emphasised by Shi (2006) who reports "Chinese students did not think that having their own opinions was important for a good learner" (p. 138). This aspect is validated by the interview results, with seven of them reporting that students in the classroom did not participate spontaneously to share their views, and 14 agreeing that the pro-activeness was rather low within a classroom context. Chan (1999) emphasises that the classroom culture discourages active and critical enquiry, with the mainland Chinese students typically behaving according to the social expectations of their roles.

"Many would feel that ineffective teaching is taking place if they are continually asked in the class to express their opinions or to solve a problem by themselves" (Chan, 1999, p. 301). Wen and Clement (2003) states that Chinese students are generally unwilling to participate and share their perspectives in class. This was proven to be correct by the interview results as a majority reported that the classroom discussion approach was uncomfortable and they were not confident in learning via this instructional methodology.

Table 4 reports the participants' responses in terms of cultural dimensions measured across the six "passive" instructional techniques.

Table 4: Participants' responses—cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance, power distance and philosophy of Confucianism across six "passive" instructional techniques

Teaching Technique	Uncertainty avoidance	Power distance	Knowledge transfer in Confucianism
Passive			
Lectures	Comfort *(10 students agreed)*; *(3 students disagreed)* (depends on how much they know about the topic and have digested)	Application of information acquired *(18 students disagreed)* (allows very minimal opportunity to apply and learn)	Limited participation *(16 students agreed)*
	Learning effectiveness *(5 students agreed)*(able to acquire knowledge); *(8 students disagreed)* (limits opportunities to apply knowledge)	Sharing of views/thoughts *(4 students agreed)* (limited); *(10 students disagreed)*	Application of knowledge *(13 students disagreed)* (not many opportunities)
	Accuracy of contents *(12 students agreed)* (as information is from qualified lecturers)	Knowledge Transfer *(8 students agreed)*; *(5 students disagreed)*	Knowledge Transfer *(5 students agreed)* (enable to understand and learn); *(2 students disagreed)* (not the fastest way to acquire information, does not allow one to refresh information, and no opportunity to apply)
	Asking questions *(6 students disagreed)* (not respectful, and prefer to ask after the lecture session)		Greater sense of security *(7 students agreed)*
	Level of guidance *(4 students agreed)* (feel secure)		
Reading Textbooks	Preference for a face-to-face context (12 students agreed) (preferred mode)	Unable to share and limited discussion *(18 students agreed)*	Practical application of knowledge *(9 students disagreed)*
	Comfort *(7 students agreed)* (comfortable); *(4 students disagreed)* (not comfortable)	One-way information flow *(8 students agreed)*	Quality of learning *(8 students disagreed)*

	Passive mode of acquiring knowledge *(7 students agreed)*	Avenues for application of knowledge *(5 students disagreed)* (not many avenues to apply in a practical context)	Effectiveness and efficiency in learning *(5 students disagreed)*
	Limited understanding *(6 students agreed)*		Sharing of information *(4 students disagreed)* (minimal sharing)
	Language a problem *(5 students agreed)*		Preferred face-to-face context *(3 students agreed)*
	Directions provided - independent mode *(5 students disagreed)* (no specific direction given)		Comfort *(2 students disagreed)*
	Contents are more credible *(3 students agreed)*		
	Application of practical knowledge *(3 students disagreed)* (difficult to apply)		
	Not interesting (3 students agreed)		
	Hinders keenness (1 student agreed)		
Guest Speakers	Comfort *(14 students disagreed)* (uncomfortable)	Learning environment *(13 students agreed)* (facilitates a dynamic learning platform) *(1 student disagreed)* (depends on the speaker)	Learning effectiveness - acquisition of knowledge *(16 students agreed); (1 student disagreed)* (depending on the effectiveness of information that is shared)
	Learning environment *(10 students agreed)*(attractive and interesting learning environment)		Reinforce and refresh knowledge *(11 students agreed)*
	Increase in confidence level *(4 students agreed)*		Relate and link to the theoretical concepts - application of knowledge acquired *(7 students agreed)*
			Critical thinking *(6 students agreed)*
Videos	Comfort (14 students agreed)	Avenues of knowledge sharing and exchange *(12 students agreed); (7 students disagreed)* (depends on the instructor's delivery style)	Effectiveness and relevance *(6 students agreed); (3 students agreed* - depending on the duration of the video); (*2 students disagreed)*
	Ability to visualise and relate (6 students agreed)	Knowledge Transfer *(7 students agreed)*	Level of understanding *(8 students disagreed)* (too difficult or lengthy);
	Level of understanding *(5 students disagreed)* (due to difficulty level of the language and contents covered)	Not many opportunities for direct engagement *(2 students agreed)*	Application of learned knowledge *(8 students agreed)*
	Alternative mode of learning *(4 students agreed)*		Quality of learning *(5 students agreed)*

Classroom Presentations	Comfort and confidence level *(2 students agreed); (8 students disagreed)*(initially not comfortable and confident but this changed for the better after prolonged exposure)	Allows learning from sharing and self-expression of views *(11 students agreed)*	Improves quality of learning (16 students agreed)
	Good learning environment *(6 students agreed)*	Increased interaction *(7 students agreed)*	Allows learning - effective application of theoretical concepts *(9 students agreed)*
			Personal self-improvement *(9 students agreed)*
			Opportunity to express opinions *(7 students agreed)*
			Vibrant learning environment *(7 students agreed)*
			Presentation skills *(6 students agreed)*
			Critical thinking skills *(6 students agreed)*
Computerised Learning	Comfort *(18 students disagreed)*(not comfortable)	Sharing of ideas and views *(10 students agreed)* (via online platforms); *(6 students disagreed)*	Comfort (18 students disagreed) (not comfortable)
	Quality of learning *(7 students disagreed)* (negative impact)	No face-to-face communication *(15 students agreed*) (not effective)	Quality of learning *(13 students disagreed)* (not effective)
	Flexibility *(7 students agreed)*	Flexibility *(9 students agreed)*	Application of learned knowledge *(9 students disagreed)* (due to written language proficiency)
		Opportunities for networking *(3 students agreed)*	Learning efficiency *(6 students disagreed)*
			Sharing and reinforcement of knowledge *(6 students disagreed)* (limited effective sharing)
			Self-directed learning - not much guidance *(5 students agreed)*

The other six passive instructional techniques—namely, lectures by instructors, reading textbooks, guest speakers, videos shown in class, classroom presentations by students and computerised learning assignments—surfaced some new findings. The general view in Asia is that the teacher's role is to teach and to set rules, especially for the undergraduate level students. Students rely heavily on the teacher and seek specific instructions. The teacher must lay down clear directions that the student must follow.

Hence, "lectures, tutorials and seminars are far more popular than any other teaching style" (Nield, 2004, p. 190).

A recent study by Shi (2006) re-iterates this point of Chinese students still holding high regard for information facilitated by lecturers as it reports "for most students being knowledgeable was still the most important criterion for good teachers" (p. 137). This issue in the literature came across clearly in the interview results, with the students displaying a greater sense of security and comfort via the lecture approach. Chan (1999) mentions that the teacher is regarded as all-knowing and is the one and only source of knowledge. Chinese learners have been raised to respect knowledge and wisdom as part of their cultural upbringing and to respect teachers and those who equip them with knowledge. Twelve students reported that they felt secure due to the high level of accuracy of contents provided by qualified lecturers. Due to high power distance, the teacher was held in high respect, with students regarding it as disrespectful to ask questions in class. These authoritative relationships between the students and lecturers reflect the high power distance in Chinese culture (Wen and Clement 2003; Chan, 1999; Dimmock and Walker 1998; Shi 2006). This was apparent as the majority agreed that it was disrespectful to ask questions during the class sessions and they preferred to clarify their doubts after their lecture sessions. This was validated by 18 students on the aspects of limited participation and opportunities to apply and learn knowledge during the lecture sessions.

Reading textbooks and computerised learning were rated as the two most unpopular and ineffective modes of instructional approaches for the mainland Chinese students. Reading textbooks and computerised learning approaches were unable to facilitate the practical portion of the knowledge learned as they were more of a one-way information flow, with minimal face-to-face contact. The students also highlighted that they felt more secure with closer guidance and supervision. Thus, this made them uncomfortable. Moreover, due to the high reliance on their independent reading, it limited their understanding due to their lack of language proficiency.

Thus, these issues had a negative influence on the quality of their learning via these two passive approaches. As for the other two passive techniques—namely, guest speakers and video teaching approaches—they emerged as more effective in terms of knowledge transfer for the students. For the guest speakers, seven students reported that they were able to relate and link the information shared to the theoretical concepts learned, which reinforced and refreshed the knowledge acquired. Sixteen students also reported that this approach certainly assisted in enhancing their learning effectiveness.

Thirteen of the participants emphasised that the attractive, dynamic and interesting learning environment were key causes in their ability to learn and be comfortable in acquiring the relevant knowledge. Similarly, videos allowed the students to visualise; hence, they were able to relate and apply the information taught.

Thus, it helped them in understanding and making them feel more comfortable in acquiring the knowledge. Students reported that the video mode of teaching/learning offered avenues to share and exchange information. However, seven of them specifically highlighted that it largely depended on the instructor's delivery approach, and the information sharing was rather limited by the students' lack of industrial experience. Students reported that classroom presentations allowed them to improve their quality of learning by creating avenues for them to effectively apply the theoretical concepts. Moreover, it facilitated them to improve their critical and analytical thinking skills. Typically, "Chinese classroom activities are dominated by lectures with limited questioning or discussions since students prefer not to express their opinions in public" (Chan, 1999, p. 301). This point was well-supported as a majority of the students highlighted that they were uncomfortable and not confident initially, but this changed for the better after prolonged exposure to the Western-based curriculum.

9. Implications and Recommendations

Cultural dimension variables cannot be ignored totally as these aspects are intertwined between students' preference and effective styles of learning at least until a prolonged phase when they are eventually expected to learn by a specific manner, probably by the type of assessments being incorporated. Scholars (Chow 1995; Carson 1992; Fox 1994; Newell 1999; Nelson 1995; Oxford 1995) reported that Chinese people were generally regarded to be repetitive-learners and usually learn by rote and memory. Typically, in the Western context, Chinese learners were regarded as tape recorders or, in other words, learners who were good at reciting the contents word-for-word (Biggs, 1996). The myths about Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) learners being passive, rote learners have been effectively debunked (Watkins and Biggs 1996, 2001) and many others (Chalmers and Volet 1997; Littlewood 2009; Chan and Drover 1997; Hellmundt 2001; Ryan and Slethaug 2010; Rajaram and Bordia, 2011).

In the interview results, from the measures of: a) cultural dimension of power distance; and b) cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance, varying explicit responses (both positive and negative) across the ten instructional techniques are reported.

There is evidence of a shift in students' learning preferences in having positive responses in the "active" as well as "passive" instructional techniques. This emphasizes that suitable "active" techniques customerised will be able to engage and effectively transfer knowledge inline to these students' preferred way of facilitation. Mainland Chinese students do not appear to be rote-learners when responding to questionnaires about their educational preferences (Watkins, 2000).

Other research 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. Mainland Chinese students rely on memorisation as part of the learning process (Watkins, 2000). The Chinese system of learning is to become well-versed with the text, to comprehend it, to reflect on it and then to question it (On, 1996). "There is a cross cultural difference in learning in that western students view understanding as a sudden insight, while Chinese students see understanding as a long process that requires considerable mental effort" (Neild, 2004, p. 191). Case study surfaced as the mainland Chinese students' selected choice in the measure of perceived effective acquisition of knowledge. Despite understanding that the active techniques are also perceived as effective by the students, it is essential to use a correct mixture of appropriate instructional techniques by calibrating each of these instructional techniques to best fit these mainland Chinese students in terms learning styles, personality types, learners' prior knowledge, practical experiences, maturity level and cultural values/beliefs.

After analysis and interpretation, the following recommendations in Table 5 illustrate ways to have these ten instructional techniques be delivered in a customised manner to best fit mainland Chinese students pursing western-based education in Singapore.

Table 5: Recommendations – customised approach in using the ten instructional techniques

Teaching Technique	Recommendations to be incorporated in customising the teaching deliveries
Case-study	**a)** To provide more guidance (example: to have the case-study interpreted and have it explained to the students' understanding. This allows students to build up their confidence and ensuring them that there are specific directions provided by the tutor. **b)** To incorporate case-study which students are able to relate their experiences and past learned knowledge. (example: A case-study on western based organisation needs to be discussed from these students' localised perspective.

	It can be linking the possible effects, implications to China or South East Asia at large. This assists the students to appreciate and relate to issues from their own cultural context, thereafter expanding the discussions to the western context to show the differences, effects and intertwined aspects, as deemed appropriate. **c)** Form groups and appoint a leader within that group to facilitate the case-study group discussion. Ensure students are equipped with resources - for example, relevant supporting articles, internet resources (at least 1-2 team members having access to search relevant materials from the internet), reference textbooks, journal articles, newspaper articles for a fruitful discussion. **d)** The groups are to be organised in a conducive manner which facilitate all team members to easily integrate and exchange their thoughts. **e)** Allow them to form their own groups which will enable them to get their own team members who are more comfortable and familiar with. This will help to smoothen the team synergy and cohesiveness faster which then allows them to concentrate on more fruitful and productive discussion. Tutors can always break this monotony much later in phases to add some new diversity of thoughts and challenges progressively.
Individual Research Project	a) Specific directions in terms of guiding them to comprehend the expectations, assessment criteria of the assignment. This allows the students to have a clear understanding and scope of what they are expected of. b) Coaching and mentoring need to be incorporated in phases - probably in the form of reviews and feedback. This is very necessary to reinforce the students that they are provided with sufficient directions from the "guru", in this case the subject matter expert – the subject instructor/tutor. c) Encourage interaction with the tutor and fellow peers but emphasis the importance of independent thinking and analysis.
Group Projects	a) Allow the students to form their own groups - this allows them to work with individuals that they are comfortable with. However, the tutor can then examine how the students could be dispersed if the general concern is to address the issue of diversity in terms of differences of personality and type of learners. b) Emphasis the importance of identifying a group leader and the responsibilities of each of the team members. Encourage them to devise their own meeting schedule and how they intend to progress with their work systematically. c) Highlight the negative effects and outcomes of having similar points and concepts incorporated, which may led to issues like plagiarism and collusion. d) Monitor and ensure the group size is moderated where the number of members must be equally distributed. For example, a general guideline of 3-4 in a group for a 3-month assignment project which requires 3000 words is acceptable. Again, the key objective is to have an effective size allocated which allows all members in the team to participate and get involved on the tasks effectively.
Class Discussions	a) Ask for volunteers and let the more vocal students to express their opinions first. This allows the break of silence and facilitates the momentum of participation.

	b) Get students formed in small groups which allow them to be comfortable with the group setting and feels secured with their peer support. Thereafter, assign them questions to brainstorm before initiating the class discussions. c) Encourage and give appropriate praises for taking courage to share their thoughts and making an attempt even if the answers are not correct. This makes them want to contribute spontaneously and share more forthcomingly as the discussion progresses. Do not to ridicule their sharing which will make them lose face and make them shy away even more as they will not want to contribute anymore.
Lectures	a) Students expect more of a one way direction of information from the tutors. But to incorporate reflective and critical thinking, instructors should apply interactive lectures approach which requires students' participation and sharing of thoughts in various short phases between the lectures. This also facilitates a break in between and enables students' engagement. Instead of asking open ended questions, ask direct and easier questions that may just require them to recap or reiterate what have been taught a few slides before. This allows them to direct to the notes for reference and answer the questions asked. These successful attempts enhance their confidence. b) Conduct lectures in a slow pace and articulate the sentences in a clear manner for them to comprehend. Most students may find it challenging to keep up with the fast pace and the manner in which the sentences are presented.
Reading Textbooks	a) Tutors are to assist in identifying the key parts which requires their specific reading. b) Some of the more complex and challenging parts are to be discussed and to be guided by the tutors during class discussions. c) To recommend reference textbooks which are simpler and easier to read and understand in terms of language interpretation. This ensures that the language does not become a key issue in interpreting and digesting the contents covered. d) Textbooks are to be also carefully selected in terms of the context, for example, if there is an Asia perspective version, adopting this may allow easier relating and connecting to the issues. But again, to add diversity, the supplementary readings can be those that cover the western examples as well.
Guest Speakers	a) Ensure the guest speaker is able to relate and connect to this group of students' learning behavioural characteristics and their challenges. b) To have someone who is inspiring and has the ability to engage the students with not only practical experiences and contents knowledge but enable to relate to these students in a fun approach as what they perceived it to be.
Videos	a) The videos are to be selected in such that the level of contents and language are not too difficult to comprehend. b) There should be a guided class discussion after the video screening to ensure that the students are able to understand, relate and interpret to achieve the learning outcomes. c) The relevance, currency and the localised context (the effectiveness of video contents) are to be examined carefully so that it helps to engage the students at the appropriate level of depth of thinking.

	d) The duration of video has to be moderately short and not very lengthy as this may not be effective in terms of having the students' engaged. Short video clips with the good level of discussion and reflective interaction with the students are recommended.
Classroom Presentations	a) To have short informal presentations progressively to get the students familiar with the correct presentation techniques. This will help to assist them to develop and build on their confidence level.
	b) Tutors need to be tolerant and patience adopting the nurturing approaches to guide them to improve progressively. Initially, the students may be totally unwilling or even refuse to participate by showing poor attitude and behaviour. This is largely due to the deep rooted values and norms that they are cultivated from, but prolonged, encouraging and friendly environment allows them to progressively build on their confidence and develop them to their fullest potential in terms of presentation skills and the ability to be critical and reflective thinkers that facilitate easier verbal articulation of thoughts.
Computerised Learning	a) Tutors need to create a platform of community or peer grouped atmosphere which encourages students to feel more secured and confident.
	b) Tutors are to leverage on students' inclination and ability to be more technology savvy but enabling them to relate and make this computerised learning effectively in terms of easier knowledge transfer and learning. This can be addressed by ensuring the online or computerised learning system are tailor-made to address the common challenges faced by these mainland Chinese students (for example, to address the language proficiency issues, the automated voice embedded that may need to be articulated slowly and clearly; more visuals for easier understanding of phrases).
	c) This approach should be more guided and directed where the involvement of the tutor may be essential for students to perceive that they are being guided.
	d) Although these students may be technology savvy in general, but may only be exposed to this type of learning to a limited level, hence tutors need to help students to move towards their "comfort" zone of learning progressively by making them enjoy this computerised learning. Some strategies include, creating awareness, highlighting some very interesting and engaging aspects within the learning system, reinforcing the key message that they is always help rendered and directed and they are not left alone to acquire the contents to be covered.

10. Conclusion

The study aimed in understanding the cross-cultural issues that influences the adoption of ten commonly used instructional techniques in Business education. Culture is an important aspect which continuously revolutionises and influences people in a particular cluster of society. Culture leads to rationalising the differences in the management behaviour, organisation system, learning styles, and preference of instructional techniques which influence the optimal learning outcomes.

The findings could be used to enhance the teaching delivery in terms of using the most appropriate instructional methodologies for mainland Chinese students. These findings can also be appreciated from the perspective of the curriculum design and development of an effective business educational framework to offer tailor-made, superior quality course programs. Although the main focus is on the learning effectiveness, the contribution can be acknowledged from a larger perspective. 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.

Business education today provides the global perspectives and skill sets required by future managers.

Education—particularly obtaining a global degree today—provides more than just an academic qualification, it facilitates real-life experiences and expands the diversity of thoughts. It equips students with the relevant industrial exposure and facilitates an international networking platform for them to further enhance their capabilities. These future managers will be the workforce in the multinational corporations, statutory boards and government organizations. The theoretical contribution will further add to the evolving and unique but significant sector of business education. The study has practical implications in terms of enhancing the learning effectiveness of students, thus contributing to the standard of quality of business education providers. To be precise, these explorative findings could further improve the quality of academic curricula, teaching/learning methods used and market position with other Asian clients in terms of effective delivery of contents and services provided to students. Business institutions collaborating with overseas Western universities could 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 business institutions offering Western-based education.

The way these students learn will significantly influence the working styles and learning techniques adopted in the organizations that employ them in the future. Therefore, it is essential to facilitate an appropriate platform for them to learn information optimally and, importantly, to adapt to the learning environment. By being able to understand the instructional techniques that enable these students to learn effectively and comfortably, these students can be nurtured and equipped with the necessary skills for their future.

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