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DOES THE STUDENTS' PREFERRED PEDAGOGY RELATE TO THEIR ETHNICITY : UK AND ASIAN EXPERIENCE

ABSTRACT

An increasing number of international students, whose culture of teaching and learning practices are very different from UK students, are studying at British universities. This study investigates multicultural students' preferences using two different teaching approaches in the 2009/2010 academic year, which is explained in the framework of this study. The study sample was two groups, a total of 34 students who were studying Japanese as a non-credited module. Quantitative and qualitative data was collected using questionnaires. The results showed that students' preferences in teaching and learning appeared to be altered and influenced by the British educational culture regardless of students' previous educational culture. In addition, the sample participants' preference of teaching and learning are categorised into three types based on the framework of the study. Those who are in the teaching profession in a multicultural learning environment are encouraged to take consideration of students' previous educational culture. It is suggested to incorporate teaching and learning practices from non-Anglophone countries to the Anglophone originated teaching approach to capture different preferences of multicultural students, reflecting global international characteristics of teaching and learning environments.

Key words: *culture, Communicative Language Teaching, Individual Index, Japanese language teaching approach, multicultural.*

INTRODUCTION

British universities have a high percentage of international students from all over the world and language teaching classrooms are part of globalisation. Language teaching and learning at a British university is also a significant part of internationalisation.

In a pilot study before this study, less than half of the Japanese language classrooms were British students in the UK. The remainder were Chinese, Egyptian, Latvian, Greek, French, Malaysian, Polish and Russian. Two contrasting teaching approaches, i.e. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Japanisation, were applied to two groups of multicultural students. It was unclear why CLT would not work well for all students in the pilot study as some of the non-British students did not appear to respond very enthusiastically in response to CLT compared to the British students. According to a previous language study, it is claimed that different preferences of teaching approaches exist among American and Asian students. Traditional and CLT approaches were applied to a sample of American students. A preference for CLT was confirmed among the American students, whereas Asian students preferred the traditional method (Furuhata, 2002).

THE AIM OF THE STUDY

The previous study examined the preference of CLT between American and Asian students. However, this study deals with the impact of two pedagogies (CLT and Japanese

teaching approach) on British university context. The aim of this study is to examine closer on students' ethnicity for both British and non-British students. The specific research question of this study is if students' preferred pedagogy relates to their ethnicity. This research question was investigated by using questionnaires, which provide quantitative and qualitative data. The next section discusses the details of the two teaching approaches, followed by the methodology and results before the conclusions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODS

Individualist *vs.* collectivist dimensions in Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov's (2010) cultural taxonomy is used as the basis of this study. The individualist culture focuses on each individual's requirement whereas the collectivist cultures focus on requirements of the group. Based on this categorisation, every country may be broadly aligned to be either an individualist or collectivist country.

According to Hofstede *et al*. (2010), the UK is ranked third place out of 76 countries in the Individual Index (INV) (Hofstede *et al*., 2010). The UK prefers individualism and sensitivity to the individual is considered of paramount importance in the society. Individualist educational values are demonstrated by pair work, tutoring system and student-centred approach, which allows one-to-one interaction. One of the characteristics of CLT is student-centred class, which is ideal for individualist educational culture. CLT is the common language teaching approach, which originates from the Western teaching environments (Hu, 2002,) and characterised by a strong ethos for individualism. However, after globalisation in education, CLT may face a challenge from students coming from collectivist societies which is directly opposite from Western individualist educational culture.

On the other hand, Japan is ranked at 35–37th place out of 76 countries in the INV (Hofstede *et al*., 2010). Although Japan does not appear to be a collectivist country, 'Japan's school management system as well as Japan's society are deeply group-oriented system' (Shields, 1989). There is a group concept originated in the study of the Japanese car manufacturing industry called Japanisation, more specifically, Quality Control (QC) groups. QC groups make use of all staff of very different experiences and skills over an extended period of time in order to improve quality. The equivalence of QC group is known as Han groups in the school context and this group concept was used in this study. Benjamin maintains: 'the values and interaction patterns fostered in Han groups in the classroom are among those carried over into adult situations' (Benjamin, 1997). Han groups are regular working groups used in Japanese classrooms (Dimmock & Walker, 2002; Tsuneyoshi, 2001). 'Each Han [group] includes five to eight children' (Benjamin, 1997) and 'comprise a mixture of different academic abilities' (Okano & Tsuchiya, 1999), which resembles 'very different experience and skills of QC groups. In contrast, Anglophone group formations tend to form with those of similar academic abilities. Furthermore, this Han groups only 'change the groupings at the beginning of each term of the school year' (Benjamin, 1997), which resembles QC group's extended period of time. In contrast, Anglophone group formations are 'informal groups' which are usually of an *ad hoc* formation and 'occur primarily for social purposes whenever people interact' (Brumfit, 1985).

This study was conducted during the first semester of the 2009/2010 academic year. Japanisation was applied to Group 2 (21 students) and Group 3 (13 students) respectively. The CLT class was achieved by exposing the sample students through speaking activities using pair work allowing one-to-one interaction. The Japanisation class was achieved by exposing the sample students using Han groups and turn-taking. 'Taking turns in group activities is a habit which exists in many collective cultures' (Hofstede,

1991) and turn-taking is a common teaching practice in Japan. Turn-taking ensures all students have an equal opportunity to participate in the class. So, students who are shy or are not confident enough to answer questions spontaneously will benefit from turn-taking.

The participants are a mixture of multicultural undergraduate and postgraduate students who were studying Stage 1 Japanese (with no previous knowledge of the language) at a university in the South of England. Students were randomly assigned. The Group 2 consisted of Australian, British, British-Chinese, Chinese, Egyptian, Greek, Hong Kong-Chinese, Korean and Malaysian. The dominant ethnic group in Group 2 was British. Group 3 consisted of British, British-Chinese, British Indian, Bulgarian, Chinese, Indonesian, Malaysian and New Zealand-Chinese. The dominant ethnic group in Group 3 was Chinese. Although the Chinese heritage students (Chinese, NZ-Chinese and British-Chinese) were the dominant group ethnicity in Group 3, Group 3 contained an almost equal number of students of other nationalities, which were different from Group 2. Group 2 had 8 cultures among 13 students whereas Group 3 had 9 cultures among 21 students. It should be noted that one of limitations of this study was the small sample size and the non-equivalence of the groups. However, it was not feasible to increase the number of participants and equalising the ratios between the groups was not possible as this was the maximum number of students. Nonetheless, the two groups constitute a variety of nationalities and it is possible to draw conclusions about the specific sample population.

Just like some studies look closely at gender as a variable, students' ethnicity is chosen as a focus in this study as ethnicity could create different group dynamics within a group. Student's ethnicity was usually decided by their mother tongue. However, there were cases in the study where students' mother tongue and nationality did not match. These cases were Chinese heritage British students (British-Chinese), a Chinese heritage NZ student (NZ-Chinese), a Chinese heritage Hong Kong student (Hong Kong-Chinese) and a Indian heritage British student (British-Indian). Heritage is defined as being a parentage or parental culture and nationality was defined as the country where students were raised. Specific action was taken to take account of students whose culture has been influenced by more than two countries and two cultures. For example, even though a British-Chinese student whose heritage is Chinese and who was studying at a British school, he/she would also still be influenced by his/her mother who is Chinese. British-Chinese students are also different from the mainland Chinese students who were born and educated in China. Therefore, they needed to be categorised separately and separate entries were created for British-Chinese, British-Indian, Hong Kong-Chinese and NZ-Chinese students. This research paid attention to these subtle differences in educational cultures as the study involved various international students.

The questionnaire was administered and collected during the class on 19/01/2010 in Week 11. Two versions of the questionnaire were prepared to reflect the two different teaching methods experienced by each group: One was answered by Group 3 who experienced Japanisation and the other by Group 2, who experienced CLT. The format of the questionnaire mostly consisted of closed questions with some open-ended questions, and respondents were asked to tick the box against the applicable response. There were nine statements that reflected collectivism *versus* individualism, and students were asked to tick the boxes for the answers most relevant to them. Students also had the option of more widely expressing their opinions by answering open-ended questions, if they gave certain responses to the closed questions.

In analysing the questionnaire, students were grouped by ethnicity and compared in each group in depth. This allowed analysing each ethnic group's preference and

examining which end of the spectrum in the collectivist-individualist dimension the student prefers. Firstly, the results of the Chinese and British students' preferences are presented (i) and then the findings from other nationalities (ii) follow. The Chinese and British students were highlighted in particular in this study because that they have contrasting perceptions and expectations in teaching and learning regarding good teachers and good students as follows:

'… conceptions of the 'good student' and the 'good teacher' also vary cross culturally. A good student in the UK is seen as one who pays attention to the teacher and does what he or she is told. In China, however, this is the expectation of all students… Likewise, students see the good teacher in the UK as one who raises students' interest and uses an array of effective teaching methods. In contrast, the perception of an effective teacher held by Chinese students' centres on warm, caring, friendly relations combined with deep subject knowledge and ability to model a strong set of morals' (Dimmock & Walker, 2005).

RESULTS

Chinese and British students

Mainland-Chinese student seemed to have a preference for collectivist and individualist educational culture. They ticked the box 'hesitated to ask questions during the class', 'asking questions after class' and they prefer teachers to address a particular student in the class, which indicate collectivist characteristics. There was a mixture of preferences for turn-taking. Only one Mainland-Chinese student ticked 'questions should be asked during classes', which indicates an individualist culture.

A British-Chinese student also showed a preference for a mixture of collectivist and individualists' educational culture. They ticked *ad hoc* group formation, which indicates an individualist culture, but also preferred the teacher addressing a particular student, 'asking questions after class' and ticked preference for turn-taking in the class, which indicates a collectivist preference.

British-Chinese students and Mainland-Chinese students agreed on two collectivists' statements: 'if the teacher wants students to speak up, the teacher should address a particular student personally' and turn-taking.

British-Chinese students and British students agreed on two individualists' values: 'group formation should be *ad hoc*; and 'Questions should be asked during classes'. The British-Chinese students and British students also agreed on turn-taking, which is collectivist value. The boxes that the British-Chinese students ticked seemed to mirror a similar pattern to those ticked by British students rather than those of the Mainland-Chinese students.

There seemed to be no disagreement with the preference of turn-taking among British-Chinese, Mainland-Chinese and British students. The British-Chinese student gave a reason for a preference for asking questions after class as 'teacher has more time to answer questions'.

British students showed a mixture of collectivist and individualist educational culture. Five British students (out of 7) ticked 'questions should be asked during class', which shows an individualist educational culture. However, they also ticked collectivist's statement 'hesitated to ask questions during the classes'. Two British students provided reasons for ticking this box as follows: 'shyness, not wanting to be wrong'; 'I felt my knowledge was below the other students so didn't want to look stupid'.

One British student ticked both 'group formation should be *ad hoc*' and 'group formation should be the same people' because 'it is good to mix with different people

sometimes (not always)' and 'sometimes working and learning with the same people encourages them to be friendly and get to know each other'.

Other nationalities

A mixture of individualist and collectivist cultural values was exhibited. One Malaysian-Chinese student in the Japanisation class ticked that 'questions should be asked during classes' and *ad hoc* group formation, which shows an individualist educational culture. The other Malaysian-Chinese student in the Japanisation class ticked 'asking questions after class' and turn-taking, which are values of a collectivist educational culture. The Bulgarian student in the Japanisation class indicated a preference for a mixture of individualist and collectivist cultures. He preferred turn-taking and the regular group formation (the Han group). He also ticked the statement that the teacher should address a particular student in class. These are collectivists' values. However, he believed that questions should be asked during the class, which is indicative of an individualist educational culture. The NZ-Chinese student in Japanisation class only ticked one box and as far as this box is concerned, he showed his preference for a collectivist educational culture as he ticked turn-taking.

The Korean student in the CLT class indicated a preference for a mixture of individualist and collectivist educational cultural values. The preferred *ad hoc* group formation, which means her preference is for an individualist educational culture and she also ticked the statement 'teacher should address a particular student personally'.

The Egyptian student showed a preference for collectivist culture as she did not tick any individualist statements but ticked values of collectivist culture. In particular, she is the only student in the two groups who ticked 'giving up opinions to maintain harmony'. She explained her preference for 'asking questions after the classes' with 'so I do not slow the class down'. She may have felt fairly comfortable learning in the Japanisation class although she was in the CLT class. The Greek student showed a preference for collectivist educational culture as she preferred turn-taking and she also believed that the teacher should address a particular student in class. The Australian student who was in the CLT class only ticked two boxes, and as far as these two boxes are concerned, she showed a preference for an individualist educational culture, which favours *ad hoc* group formation.

Discussion

The research question asked whether students' preferences of teaching approaches relate to their ethnicity. The majority of students showed a mixture of preference for Japanisation and CLT, which can be interpreted in two ways: firstly, it means that both individualist and collectivist preferences in learning exists regardless of educational culture in any culture; secondly, it means that university students who appeared to establish their preferences of teaching and learning do not have particular learning preferences after all. If this is the case, this suggests two implications for a) international students and b) teachers in the hosting educational establishments: as for implication a), the majority of students are open to the hosting educational culture. Some international students' preference for CLT was not reflected by their ethnicity, where one would have anticipated a preference for Japanisation. The learning preferences of international students appeared to be influenced and conformed to the British educational culture, as it is claimed that 'a framework of cultural expectations about learning will probably be modified or supplemented in relation to the expectation of teachers and students in the host culture' (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006). With regards to implication b), teachers are in a very influential position in learning to influence students' learning preferences. If students experienced different teaching and learning

environment and felt that they enhanced their learning experiences, students may decide to alter their learning preferences to the opposite educational culture.

In addition, studying in a multicultural learning environment also may influence students' learning preferences as the multicultural learning environment usually includes students from both individualist and collectivist educational cultures. Multicultural learning environment offers different perspectives generating creativity and innovation. Individual's prior learning preferences may also be altered and replaced to the opposite culture by the multicultural learning environment. However, misunderstandings may also easily arise not only among students but also between teachers and students in the multicultural learning environments. Teachers cannot simply assume that their teaching pedagogy will match with those of the students.

From the above, two factors are related in the preferences of students' teaching and learning: firstly, the students' prior educational culture where they received in their previous education; secondly, their current educational culture where they are presently studying. Taking this into consideration and referring to the collectivist-individualist dimensions, it is possible to categorise this study's multicultural students into the following three types: Type 1 consisted of students who came from a collectivist educational cultural background and were now studying in an individualist educational culture. Type 2 covered students from an individualist educational cultural background continuing to study in an individualist educational culture. Type 3 comprised students from an individualist educational cultural background but who were also subject to a degree of collectivist influence (this was often the case where their parents are from a collectivist educational cultural background) studying in an individualist educational culture.

CONCLUSIONS

So, this study has compared some of the Anglophone and Japanese pedagogies. Each country has its own pedagogy and the Anglophone pedagogy has been widely studied and disseminated. Although the study of non-Anglophone countries' culture pedagogy has increased in the recent years due to globalisation, there are many other non-Anglophone pedagogies that are still in use which are virtually unknown to other countries. Therefore, it is suggested to disseminate more of the pedagogy of non-Anglophone countries, which may be of potential to benefit some learners across the world.

Considering the current multicultural learning environment, combining both collectivist and individualist teaching approaches may seem to be more appealing and suitable to students of various cultural backgrounds, who may have diverse preferences and requirements of teaching and learning.

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