

# FACULTY ADAPTATION TO FOREIGN STUDENT LEARNING STYLES AND EXPECTATIONS

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## Introduction

The internationalization of the business curriculum and academic content has been occurring for many decades. However, the widespread internationalization of faculty and content delivery is a much more recent phenomenon. Europeans recognized and stressed the importance the internationalization of faculty and delivery early. European faculty are encouraged, sometimes demanded, to become more international in teaching through the EQUIS accreditation standards (Voices and Vision: 30 Years of International Education 2009), as well as through well-funded programs like Erasmus Exchanges. In addition to the Europeans, the U.S. government also led the charge to increase the internationalization of faculty through the Fulbright programs. The AACSB has recently begun to recognize the importance of globalization with the push to encourage more applications from foreign schools. However, there are no specific standards or policies with regard to the internationalization of faculty or delivery, yet.

While it is widely recognized that the internationalization of business faculty and content delivery is important, there is a relative paucity of information relating to how these faculty deal with the practical issues involved in teaching in a foreign institution, or for that matter in a multi-cultural classroom. Yet this practice is becoming more prevalent. Specifically, students are studying on exchange or visiting status in increasing numbers (EQUIS Standards and Criteria, 2010). Additionally, foreign visiting faculty or exchange faculty rates are also dramatically increasing (EQUIS Standards and Criteria, 2010). The rapid global expansion of visiting positions, exchange positions and interim sessions (Summer Sessions, Winter Interims etc.), have led to a high likelihood that faculty will need to deal with foreign students, often en masse. As a practical issue, faculty (especially faculty new to teaching in international environments) is at a loss to deal with the question of adaptation to the environment and students. In fact, some may hold the opinion that adaptation is both unnecessary and undesirable.

An empirical analysis of the cross cultural expectations of students on several learning issues is presented. It is not assumed that the discussion of the desirability of adaptation is concluded, but rather the empirical analysis is to address: (1) whether adaptation is at all necessary (i.e., are the

expectations across cultures roughly the same), and (2) for faculty choosing to adapt to local student learning styles, can these be predicted a priori based on some cultural dimensions.

## Methodology

An exploratory survey was developed as part of a larger collaborative cross cultural data collection effort. Each survey was carefully translated from English to the native language (except that India and Philippines were both collected in English) and administered by a faculty member with expertise in cross cultural survey development and execution.

The sample consists of 7089 college business students from 25 countries. Countries were chosen specifically for cultural, historical, and economic diversity. Given the size of the multi-study survey, each dimension of student educational preference was limited to a single item measure. These dimensions included student educational preferences for: (1) objective vs. subjective content and grading; (2) amount of structure desired; (3) rewards for creative thinking; (4) importance of communication; and (5) importance of teamwork.

In addition, the overall survey collected information on several cultural dimensions, including Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Hofstede 2001) of Uncertainty Avoidance (UA) and Collectivism (COL), and Hall's concept of Cultural Context (Hall 1976). The cultural dimension measures were developed using standard survey development procedures (Churchill 1979, Douglas and Craig 2006, Douglas and Craig 2007) and extensively tested for reliability, validity (i.e., Content, Convergent, Discriminatory), unidimensionality (Gerbing and Anderson 1988) and cross-cultural configural/metric invariance (Horn, McArdle, and Mason 1983). The scales showed very good psychometric properties.

## Results

### Educational Preferences

The results indicated that there is a significant deviation across countries in student educational preferences, even though most of the means were above the midpoint of the seven point scale.

In general, it can be deduced that students tended to prefer well-defined classes and structure (average 5.24/7 for objective content/grading; average 5.62/7 for need for structure), but wanted rewards for their creativity (average 5.35/7). While overall important, but of lesser importance, was the educational preferences for communication (average 4.56/7) and teamwork (4.63/7).

When examining the ranges between countries on the seven point scale, they tended to be more than two points, or near 30 percent within any given variable. Interestingly, teamwork had one of the highest deviations between countries. A further examination of the data suggests that responses to the question about teamwork tended to be less normally distributed and more bi-modal. This suggests that students either tended to like or dislike teamwork, with little ambivalence.

### Culture and Educational Preferences

Given cross national deviation in educational preferences, two questions seem particularly relevant for this analysis: (1) why does this occur, and, (2) can we predict it a priori so that we can adapt for culturally mixed classes during our course preparation. Thus, there is a need to further examine the interconnection between culture and educational preferences/expectations.

Concepts of culture and specifically cultural dimensions are significantly related to attitudes and preferences, just like they are in Theory of Reasoned Action and consumer models. The results indicate that the educational preferences of students are also highly interrelated with cultural dimensions. It is hardly surprising that students whom highly prefer objective content and clear guidelines/structure for studying also desire to avoid uncertainty and ambiguity (UA). However, it is more interesting that students who prefer to be rewarded for creativity and feel that communication and teamwork are more important also desire to avoid uncertainty and ambiguity (UA). The results also indicate that the collectivist students (COL) also prefer more objectivity, structure, and teamwork, but more difficult to understand are the positive connections between collectivism (COL) and the importance of communication and creativity. As to cultural context (CNTX), the skills of creativity, communication, and teamwork were highly correlated, while the preference for objectivity and structure were not.

### Discussion and Conclusions

In this study, the authors' primary purpose for this research was to determine if culture has an effect on student educational preferences. The results indicate this to be true. A more difficult task and a secondary purpose is to make pedagogical recommendations based on these differences.

In conclusion, the data analyzed in this paper reveal that student preferences across cultures do exist and suggests that adaption to these students educational preferences are sometimes needed as dependent upon time and institutional expectations. Additional data analysis and research is needed to determine what specific pedagogical tools or methods (e.g., case studies, team projects, essay exams, etc.) are a best fit for use with these cultural differences. Additional considerations, perhaps even a mix of pedagogical techniques with choice options, are needed when

faced with teaching a class with a very culturally diverse mix of foreign students from numerous countries.

References Available Upon Request