Are There Culture Differences among Business Students’ Learning Orientations in Higher Education – USA vs. China

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ABSTRACT

In today’s globalized economy, competition is not only based upon traditional economic indicators, but also the talent that contributes to the growth and development of a nation’s economy. College graduates are one of the main sources of human capital that help move globe business forward. As such, institutions of higher education world-wide should focus on how to create the best learning environments for their students. To meet this goal, it is essential to understand students’ cultural differences and learning orientations, and to examine the relationship between them. This study examines whether there are cultural differences among students’ learning orientations, comparing business school students in the US and China. Students raised in different countries have varied cultural backgrounds with potential influence upon their learning orientations towards higher education. As cultural polar opposites, the US representing the Western extreme, and China, its Eastern counterpart, provide strongly differing traditions. Whether those cultural differences would impact students’ learning orientation poses a question with potential impact upon economic success. The results from this study propose to reveal the answer to this question.

Keywords: Student learning orientation, business education, higher education, LOGO

INTRODUCTION

In today’s globalized economy, competition is not only based upon traditional economic indicators, but also the talent that contributes to the growth and development of a nation’s economy. College graduates are one of the main sources of human capital that help move globe business forward. Students from different education and cultural backgrounds may have different perceptions towards higher education, particularly expectations related to teaching and learning. Students’ approach and orientation to education may further affect their academic decisions, expectations, and performance and is important in preparing the next generation of global business leaders. This research investigates the learning orientation and perceptions about university education by college students from business schools in the United States and China.

Higher education institutions world-wide should strive to create the optimal learning environments for their students. To meet this goal, it is essential to understand students’ cultural differences and learning orientations, and to examine the relationship between them. Students raised in different countries have varied cultural backgrounds with potential influence upon their learning orientations towards higher education. As cultural polar opposites, the US representing the Western extreme, and China, its Eastern counterpart, provide strongly differing traditions that lend themselves to contrasting analysis.
BACKGROUND

Asian students have higher achievement compare to Western students in standardized achievement tests. A host of underlying factors may give rise to this disparity; however, research performed to establish what the most dominant factor or factors may be indicated that higher achievement of Asian students than Western students might be impacted by cultural values (Harold W. Stevenson et al., 1990), beliefs (Hess, Chang, & McDevitt, 1987; Holloway & Hess, 1990), and practices (Hess & Azuma, 1991; F. Salili, 1995; H. W. Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). The differences in culture values and practices could influence student motivation and achievement (Farideh Salili, Chiu, & Lai, 2001).

Chinese Culture vs. Western Culture

Per a study into the comparative advantage among Chinese students found that their cultural influence correlated with increased pragmatic goals for learning, a desire for structured knowledge, and increased trust in traditional beliefs as guides to truth. Western cultural influence was associated with increased questioning of material presented by the instructors, rating ideas presented in class, generating alternatives to ideas presented in class, looking to the self as the evaluator of validity, and having concerns about determining the best means of evaluating truth (Tweed, 2000).

Goal Theory

Goal theories vary in type. Goals in an academic setting for students are cognitive representations of student’s purposes and motivating forces for learnings and achievement (McInerney, 1995; Volet & Chalmers, 1992). Research in some of those theories utilized students’ goal orientations in explaining students’ academic achievement behavior (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). Goal orientation refers to the integrated pattern of beliefs that would lead to different methods of approaching and engaging with achievement, as well as the standards implemented to judge the success or failure of the result (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996).

LOGO

In order to measure the learning and grade orientation of students in an academic setting, researchers established a set of measurements in the instrument called LOGO (Learning Orientation, Grade Orientation). The initial LOGO instrument was developed by Eison (Eison, 1980, 1981, 1982) and derived, through psychometric analysis and interviews, that there are two generalized types of educational orientation among students: a learning-oriented type and a grade-oriented type. Continued development of the instrument led to LOGO II (Eison, Pollio, & Milton, 1986) – the instrument used for this study. The LOGO II instrument measures both the attitude and behavior of the learning aspects of students. In Part I of the instrument, there are eight attitude questions on learning-orientation and eight attitude questions for grade-orientation. In Part II of the instrument, there are eight behavioral questions on learning-orientation and eight behavioral questions on grade-orientation. Part III of the instrument has questions related to the purpose of a university. See Eison, Pollio, & Milton (1986) for details of the instrument.

The learning-oriented type student focuses primarily on values such as harmony, personal growth, the process of learning and intellectual competence, and student intrinsic values. The grade-oriented student primarily focuses on concerns such as grades, status, competition, and recognition, and they are more interested in extrinsic values (Rich, 1990; Stark, 1991). Researchers found that learning-oriented
students reported the highest grades, and also showed the greatest degree of satisfaction with their university experience (Alexitch, 1994). Therefore, students could improve the quality of their learning experience in universities if they could move their perspective towards higher education in the direction of a more learning-oriented approach.

**RESEARCH QUESTION AND HYPOTHESES**

This study examines whether there are cultural differences among students’ learning orientations related to the East/West cultural nexus, comparing business school students in the US and China. The study employed the LOGO II instrument to help measure the students’ learning orientation. Therefore, the research question for the study is whether there is a difference in learning-orientation (LO), grade-orientation (GO) of business students from universities in the United States and China. The hypotheses is used to address the research question.

**H1:** The Chinese university business students are more learning-oriented than the U.S. students.

**H2:** The U.S. university business students are more grade-oriented than the Chinese students.

The combined learning oriented and grade-oriented scales (include both attitude and behavior variables) is used to test these hypotheses.

**METHODOLOGY**

This study used a survey questionnaire to collect data. The major part of the survey was for student study orientations that used LOGO-II, which has 32 items designed to obtain students’ learning-orientation and grade-orientations for both attitude and behavior. The LOGO II instrument also has been used with subscales—the attitude and behavior portions of the overall LO and GO scales. These subscales were used in this study. All items were measured by the 5likertscale with endpoints defined as strongly disagree and strongly agree for attitude items and never and always for behavior items. It was used to assess students’ level of learning orientation and grade orientation and students’ general views and perspectives towards higher education. The participants of this study were business students from a university in the United States and business students from a university in China. The instrument consists of the following sections:

1. Demographic questions
2. Perceptions of university education
   a. Purpose of university
   b. Perceptions of the university environment
   c. General academic and career goals
3. LOGO-II (32 items)

Survey questionnaires were distributed to business students from a doctoral granting US university and a doctoral granting Chinese university. All of the students were from school / college of business of the university. Those universities are mostly consist of traditional undergraduate college students, i.e., students finish high school and enter into the university directly. The survey participants we selected were undergraduate students, since at traditional universities, they are at a very similar age group, which make more sense to the comparisons research such as this study.
RESULTS

LOGO Groups

In order to show the students’ LOGO orientation results, we use the following table to help readers to understand the meaning, abbreviations and group # assigned for each of the LOGO group. We divided students LOGO orientations into 4 groups. Group 1 is HLHG, which are for the students have both high learning-orientation and high grade-orientation. Group 2 is HLLG, which are for high learning-orientation, and low grade-orientation. Group 3 is LLHG, which are for low learning-orientation, and high grade-orientation. Last, group 4 is LLLG, which are for those students have both low learning-orientation and low grade-orientation.

Table 1: LOGO (learning-orientation, grade-orientation) groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOGO meaning</th>
<th>High LO / High GO</th>
<th>High LO / Low GO</th>
<th>Low LO / High GO</th>
<th>Low LO / Low GO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviations</td>
<td>HLHG</td>
<td>HLLG</td>
<td>LLHG</td>
<td>LLLG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group # assigned</td>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>Group 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LOGO Results – Chinese Students

The following table shows the results of Chinese university business student LOGO results for the 4 LOGO groups.

Table 2: LOGO results – Chinese Business Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOGO group name</th>
<th>LOGO group #</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HLHG</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HLLG</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LLHG</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LLLG</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50.99%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the table you can see that slightly more than half, 50.99%, of the Chinese students in survey were LLLG. This is quite alarming as it indicates that half of the students have little interest in learning and grades. This might be because of the rigorous Chinese university entry exam system, which may cause students' lack of interests in college education in general. In China, the college entry exam is highly competitive; high school students nearly spend the entire last year of school to prepare for the college entry exam. However, once students are admitted into the university, it is very easy to stay and graduate. This might explain why large percent of the Chinese business students from the survey do not focus on learning nor grades. Since after they get into the university, they do not need to work very hard to stay in.

It is also interesting to see that nearly no students are in the LLHG group (0.66%). Which means there are effectively no students with a low learning-orientation, and interested only in grades.

The group that has the highest percept is HLLG with 21.81%, which represents students that are only interested in learning, but with little regard for grades. Another group that has a similar percentage is HLHG, with 20.53%, which are those students both learning-oriented and grade-oriented.

LOGO Results – US Students

The following table shows the survey results of the US university business students’ LOGO groups.
Table 3: LOGO results – US Business Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOGO group name</th>
<th>LOGO group #</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HLHG</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HLLG</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LLHG</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LLLG</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 4 groups, the group that has the highest percept is LLHG with 30.9%. This means that of the surveyed US business students, a third of them are only interested in getting good grades, and do not care for learning as much. The second highest group is HLLG, with 28.3%, also close to a third of the US business students are interested in learning, with not much concern for grades.

The rest of little over a third of the total participants belongs to the two other LOGO groups: HLHG (22.4%) and LLLG (15.7%).

LOGO Comparisons – China vs. US

Next, we exam the overall learning-orientation, grade-orientation comparisons between Chinese and US business college students.

Table 4: LOGO comparisons – China vs. US

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business school students</th>
<th>Learning – oriented</th>
<th>Grade – oriented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>48.34%</td>
<td>21.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>50.7%</td>
<td>53.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this comparison table, we combined 2 high LO groups (HLHG and HLLG) for all the learning-oriented students into 1 learning-oriented HL group; and then combined 2 high GO groups (HLHG and LLHG) into 1 grade-oriented HG group.

From the table you can see that Chinese and US students had similar learning-orientation percentage. Both US and Chinese students group had close to half of them belong to the HL learning-oriented group, with US (50.7%) a little higher than China (48.34). For the grade-orientation, however, US had much higher percept than Chinese business students. More than half (53.3%) of the US business students focus on grade, which only 21.19% of Chinese business students are grade-oriented.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the research data, one can conclude that in general, US business students are more grade-oriented than their counterparts in China. In regard to learning-orientation, students from the US and China are similar. As for the hypotheses proposed for this study, H1: The Chinese university business students are more learning-oriented than the U.S. students, is rejected. Because the data showed that Chinese students are not more learning-oriented than US students. The fact is that for both Chinese and US students, around half of them are learning-oriented. The second hypothesis of H2: The U.S. university business students are more grade-oriented than the Chinese students, is supported by the research results. The study showed that US business students are much more likely to be grade-oriented than Chinese students.

Students from different cultures have different values, practices, believes, and perceptions of education. Particularly, China and US are two countries that represent western and eastern cultures. This
study attempted to investigate whether there is culture differences amount business students from Chinese and US universities. It is a surprise and quite interesting to learn from the results of this study that there is no difference about learning-orientation for college business students from the two countries. The difference is for the grade-orientation, US business students focus on grades much more than Chinese students. This should not come as a surprise for those who have had experiences with the US higher education system, as grade inflation have become more and more a serious issues in US higher education now. This culture of grade-oriented mind set does not just happen at the college level, it starts from the K-12 system, goes into colleges, and all the way to past-graduate studies. This issue needs to be addressed by higher education institutes, the school administrations, and educators together. US students’ high grade-orientation can only be changed by shifting the culture in the overall US education system of grade driving to more learning focused.

REFERENCES

Alexitch, L. R. (1994). Undergraduate student expectations and perceptions of a university education in the 1990s. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), University of Windsor, Windsor, ON.


