

Examining Culture's Impact on the Learning Behaviors of International Students from Confucius Culture Studying in Western Online Learning Context

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ABSTRACT

There is a lack of shared understanding of how culture impacts learning in online environment. Utilizing document analysis, the authors in this research study culture's impact on the learning behaviors of student sojourners from Confucius culture studying in Western online learning context. The shared understandings of Confucius culture and Western culture are compared, contrasted, and synthesized through Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory. The learning behaviors of student sojourners from Confucius culture are examined from the following three dimensions: teacher-student relationship, curriculum development, and teaching and learning pedagogy. Practical implications of the findings are discussed.

Keywords: Confucius culture, cultural dimensions theory, Western culture, online learning behaviors

Due to the rapid development of Information Communication Technology (ICT) and increased competitions worldwide, more and more education institutions are making efforts to globalize their student recruitment strategies and to develop online distance education programs. The direct outcomes include continued growth of international student population in countries such as U.S., U.K., Australia, and Canada (Choudaha & Chang, 2012) and the fast growing of online distance learning (ODL) market. This

international education development trend has posed great challenges to educators working with international students.

The need to examine how culture impacts ODL is well documented in the literature (Mclsaac & Gunawardena, 1996; Moore, 1994; Phuong-Mai, Terlouw, & Pilot, 2005; Pincas, 2001; Rogers, Graham, & Mayes, 2007; Tan, 2009; Wong, 2007). Overlooking the critical role culture plays in online learning will lead to “detrimental educational and psychological consequences” (Chen & Bennett, 2012, p. 677) and students will experience feelings of isolation, frustration, alienation, helpless, upset, anxious, or depressed (Chen & Bennett, 2012). Szilagyi (2013) further indicates, “the deeper cultural layers that affect their [students’] learning process, such as communicative attitudes in class, relationship with the instructor and classmates remain tacit” (p. 594).

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to explore culture’s impact on student sojourners’ learning behaviors in Western online learning context. In this study, culture is defined as a set of beliefs and values shared by a group of individuals that guide each group member’s behaviors (Bennett, 1993). People travelling to different cultures for a short period of time and then return home are considered as sojourners (Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987). As four of the eight top origin countries are influenced by Confucius culture and the major learning destination countries represent Western culture (Choudaha & Chang, 2012), this study is specifically designed to examine culture’s impact on the learning behaviors of student sojourners from Confucius culture studying in Western online learning context.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research question decides research method. Document analysis was employed in this study and peer reviewed journal articles were analyzed as primary research data. Focusing on understanding Confucius culture and its impact on online learning behaviors, we began our search by exploring popular education research databases, including ProQuest database, EBSCO, and ERIC. The following key words were used to collect useful research articles: culture, Confucius culture, online learning, e-learning, and distance education. The search results were carefully examined and only those that treated culture and online learning as the main focus of the study were included in the next stage analysis. At the second phase of data collection, only those research studies studying Confucius culture and its impact on student sojourners’ learning in ODL environment dominated by Western cultures were included. The reference lists of the articles collected through the second phase of data collection were examined as well to identify more related research studies. Our keyword search yielded 86

articles from the above databases and majority utilized qualitative research methods (i.e., interview, document analysis, etc.).

“Keywords-in-context” technique was employed in data analysis (Onwuegbuzie, Leech & Collins, 2012). This technique is useful when studying research literature because context matters. In our data collection process, it was noticed that culture means different things in different contexts. Unless the surrounding words are examined to understand in which context the published study is situated, it is difficult to find appropriate research studies to include in final data analysis. In other words, linking keywords used by the author to the surrounding words and the context, one can truly understand the underlying meaning the author wants to convey to the readers. After themes were developed using the “keywords-in-context” technique, further analysis was done and relationships between themes were explored.

RESULTS

The results are organized into three sections. In the first section, the shared understanding of Confucius culture and the education beliefs and behaviors of student sojourners from Confucius culture are reviewed. In the second section, the shared understanding of Western culture and the dominant Western teaching pedagogy influencing online teaching are discussed. The third section focuses on the learning behaviors of student sojourners from Confucius culture when they are engaged in online learning dominated by Western teaching pedagogy. The results reported in each section are further classified into subthemes to provide a detailed account for culture’s impact on the learning behaviors of student sojourners from Confucius culture when they study in Western online learning environment.

Shared Understanding of Confucius Culture

Confucius culture grows out of the teachings of Confucius and is documented in Confucius’ seminal works including *Confucian Analects*, *Mencius*, *The Great Learning*, and *The Doctrine of the Mean* (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007). Confucius culture represents a system of philosophical, ethical and political thought used to regulate the thinking and behaviors of people from countries such as Mainland China, Taiwan, Korea, Japan, Singapore, among others (Biggs, 1996; Wang, 2004; Watkins & Biggs, 2001). Confucius culture emphasizes the ties among individuals in a society, social hierarchy, and social harmony. Interests of family members and community surpass individual’s interests and it is the community and family that the life of an individual acquires its meaning or significance from. Parents have the highest authority in the family and the elders are highly respected following the virtue of filial piety.

Applying Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010), Confucius culture fits the description of collectivism and feminism, exhibits high power distance and strong uncertainty avoidance, fosters "normative virtues related to the past and present such as national pride, respect for tradition, preservation of 'face', and fulfilling social obligations", and is characterized as a restraint culture that "suppresses gratification of needs and regulates it by means of strict social norms" (Hofstede & Hofstede, n.d.). The examples provided below illustrate the shared understanding of the basic principles of Confucius culture in the literature:

- Be modest and respect peers. Example: 子曰：“三人行，必有我師焉。擇其善者而從之，其不善者而改之。” (English translation: The Master said, "When I walk along with two others, they may serve me as my teachers. I will select their good qualities and follow them, their bad qualities and avoid them.) (Legge, 1893a)
- Reverence to authority. Example: 齊景公問政於孔子。孔子對曰：“君君，臣臣，父父，子子。” (English translation: The duke Ching, of Ch'i, asked Confucius about government. Confucius replied, "There is government, when the prince is prince, and the minister is minister; when the father is father, and the son is son." (Legge, 1893b)

Applications to the Learning Behaviors of Student Sojourners from Confucius Culture

Confucius culture's impact on the education beliefs of student sojourners from Confucius culture is three folds. First, the role a teacher plays in an individual's growth is instrumental. In Confucius culture, teacher is more than just a lecturer. Teacher also has the moral role as a 'parent' who has a collective obligation to instruct students to strictly follow social norms and behave within the socially accepted ways (Watkins & Biggs, 2001). This aspect of Confucius culture clearly exhibits the high power distance dimension of Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory. Students take it for granted that the teacher has the absolute authority and is the source of the truth and correct answers (Liang & McQueen, 1999; Liu, Hodgson, & Lord, 2010; Thompson & Ku, 2005). In a recent study of students from Confucius culture studying in Australia, Tran (2013) found out that today's younger generation aged from 19 to 24 years old, influenced by the globalization and information technology development, have started to challenge this traditional belief of teacher being the absolute authority but still believe respecting teacher is a classroom norm. Therefore, students from Confucius culture feel uncomfortable to challenge their teacher and are always found to

be on the receptive side of learning. Yarosz and Fountain (2003) considers this aspect of Confucius culture's impact on learning as "take culture".

Second, conflict is seen as an undesirable and ineffective learning behavior and should be avoided with the greatest efforts (Chang, 2000; Chiu, 2009; Williams, Watkins, Daly, & Courtney, 2001). The higher the level of uncertainty and ambiguity in learning, the higher the chance of conflict between students, the less comfortable students from Confucius culture will be with their learning. This is why Confucius culture exhibits strong uncertainty avoidance. Collectivism aspect of Confucius culture offers a solution by surrendering individual's learning needs to the group's collective learning interests. If a potential conflict is sensed, individual learning need is to be sacrificed to satisfy the group's collective learning interests that, in most cases, are determined by the teacher. This reaffirms Chen & Bennett's findings (2012) that the instructors from Confucius culture tend to cater to the class as a group so that they can cover all the content they deem as the most important to the entire learning group. As noted by one student participant of their study that students from Confucius culture learned "not to disturb the class [by asking too many questions], [because] even if their questions are brilliant, the teacher still might not answer them because he/she wants to teach something else first" (p. 684).

Third, the femininity aspect of Confucius culture stresses the value collectivism places in each individual student's learning. It emphasizes the importance of individual's diligence in academic pursuits and instills the belief that all students regardless of what innate ability they have can do well through the exertion of effort (Chen & Bennett, 2012; Rao & Chan, 2009; Watkins & Biggs, 1996). Fang's study of twenty Singaporean Chinese engineering students' online learning experiences (2007), for example, indicates that students from Confucius culture focus mainly on learning achievement and success. They do so by focusing their attention on those tasks directly related to their learning achievement and caring less for fun and exciting but learning-irrelevant activities. The "nail that sticks up" (Uzuner, 2009) and "showing off or trying to appear smart" (Al-Harhi, 2005) types of learning behaviors are discouraged in Confucius culture.

Chen and Bennett (2012) and Liu, Liu, Lee, and Magjuka (2010) summarize the learning preferences of student sojourners from Confucius culture that: (1) The types of curriculum that these students value are those that are heavy loaded with content knowledge; (2) these students are more comfortable to learn in a learning environment that is well structured and transparent with learning pre-sequenced by the teacher; (3) these students perceive the assigned textbooks and required learning materials are the main sources to all learning activities and assessments; and, (4) these students expect the teacher to provide explicit criteria against which they can measure their own learning progress and they see examinations as the

essential way to define their learning performances and help them compete for higher social status. As one student participant of Chen and Bennett's (2012) study reflected:

A good lecture is very systematic and attractive. The content of the lecture is to the point, very concise, easy to be digested by students, easy for them to remember without even having to take notes. ...The teacher highlights the main points for students. (p. 684).

Shared Understanding of Western Culture

“Personal freedom, individuality, and objective thought” are highly valued in Western culture (Nisbett, as cited in Merriam et al., 2007, p. 222). This focus on individual has been extensively discussed and documented in the literature (Bassegy, 1999; Beckloff, 2008; Chen & Mashhadi, 1998; Gunawardena, Nolla, Wilson, & Lopez-Isias, 2001; Hofstede, 1986; McGee, 2002; Walker-Fernandez, 1999). The relationships between individuals within a society are weak and individuals are expected to look after themselves and their immediate families (Tylee, 2007). Personal interests are valued above that of a group. If there is a conflict, it is left to the individual to decide whose interests to meet first. Similar to Confucius culture, Western culture values personal achievements as well but the essential interest is still placed on individual. To accomplish personal achievements, Western culture appreciates assertive behaviors and attempts at excelling. Not all individuals living in Western culture represent Western views, however. Euro-Americans and minorities with a high degree of acculturation from Western European and North American seem to be the ones mostly possess Western cultural values (Anderson, 1988; Sanchez & Gunawardena, 1998; Szilagyi (2013)).

Applying Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010), Western culture fits the description of individualism and masculinity, exhibits low power distance and weak uncertainty avoidance, fosters “pragmatic virtues oriented towards future rewards”, and is characterized as an indulgence culture that “allows relatively free gratification of basic and natural human drives related to enjoying life and having fun” (Hofstede & Hofstede, n.d.). Sanchez and Gunawardena, in their study of culturally diverse distance learners, highlighted the fundamental dimensions of Western culture as follows (1998, p. 5): “Emphasize individual competition; Achievement for the individual; Must master and control nature; Adhere to rigid time schedule; Limit affective expression; Nuclear family; Dualistic thinking; Religion is distinct from other parts of culture; Feel their world view is superior; and Task-oriented.

Applications to Western Teaching Pedagogy

Western culture's impact on teaching pedagogy is two folds. First, learning is considered as an important component of personal growth. Individual students are expected to be self-directed and to take great responsibility to their own learning (Rogers, 1969). To accomplish this, dialogue and interaction are highly encouraged, and pragmatism that emphasizes real life, practical and problem-solving skills is promoted in Western classroom (James, 1907). These teaching principles are clearly exhibited in Western adult learning theories such as Malcolm Knowles' Andragogy, Howard McClusky's Margin Theory, and Jarvis's Learning Process Theory (Beckloff, 2008; Merriam et al., 2007; Ntseane, 2006). Asking questions and challenging the teacher and peers are seen as signs of good learning interests that will lead to group construction of knowledge (Al-Harathi, 2005; Liang & McQueen, 1999; Liu et al., 2010; Thompson & Ku, 2005). Yarosz and Fountain (2003) considers this as a challenge culture that leads to transformative learning experience (Gabriel 2004; Milhauser 2006).

Second, Western challenge culture is understood as constructive rather than destructive. It focuses on collaboration-based constructivism and offers the potential to foster critical and reflective thinking skills (Barah, Hay, & Duffy, 1998; Chen & Bennett, 2012; Chiu, 2009; Dewey, 1938; Herrington, Reeves, Oliver, 2005; Huang 2002; Palloff and Pratt 2001; Taylor 1998). Immersed in this challenging and collaborative learning environment, "learners could learn actively and construct new knowledge based on their prior knowledge [and] construct knowledge through social interaction with others" (Huang, 2002, p. 28). In a pedagogical context of this kind, both teacher and students make efforts to create learning community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The instructor's role is discussion facilitator and is seen as just one source of information among several (Crooks, 1998; Liu & Schwen, 2006; Lock, 2006; Wilson, Ludwid-Hardman, Thornam, & Dunlap, 2004).

Several studies show benefits of this teaching pedagogy to online learning (Stacey & Wiesenberg, 2007; Liu et al., 2010; Baskin, 2001) and Al-Harathi (2005), Liu and Schwen (2006), Liu, et al. (2010), and Robinson (1999) summarize the characteristics of the courses dominated by Western teaching pedagogy: (1) courses designed and delivered by Western teachers tend to have open curriculum that include multiple sources for course content and include several ideologies & perspectives to present balanced view; (2) student-centered learning design dominates the entire course and individual learner's learning needs are prioritized by allowing high learner autonomy over course content and methods; (3) learning assessments mainly focus on evaluating learning process and learning skills (i.e., analytical and critical thinking skills are valued over rote memorization and repetition); (4)

learning is meant to fulfill individualism and self-development. As one research participant of Chen and Bennett's (2012) study reflected:

You don't simply lecture to students at every opportunity. What you try to do is get them more active in their learning so you get them collaborating, working in groups, solving problems. Now you can't do this lecturing. (Teacher E). (p. 685)

Online Learning: The Encounter of Confucius Culture with Western Culture

The above findings classify Confucius culture and Western culture to the two opposite ends of Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory spectrum. To reveal "the deeper cultural layers that ... remains tacit" in online learning (Szilagy, 2013, p. 594) and to exemplify how online learning practices are influenced by cultural beliefs of the people involved (Collis, 1999; Hiltz & Goldman, 2005; Liu, et al., 2010; McLoughlin & Oliver, 1999; Uzuner, 2009; Wong, 2007), understanding the learning behaviors of student sojourners from Confucius culture studying in ODL environment dominated by Western teaching pedagogy is necessary.

Student-teacher relationship in online learning. Because of their beliefs in high power distance and the virtue of reverence to authority, student sojourners from Confucius culture appreciate every opportunity to imitate "the conduct of the sages" (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 226). They value feedbacks from the teacher more than those from their peers and they rarely voluntarily raise questions and challenge the teacher's authority (Fang, 2007; Liang & McQueen, 1999; Liu, et al., 2010; Thompson & Ku, 2005). When they disagree with what the teacher says, instead of directly confronting the teacher and presenting his/her own view in front of the class, students from Confucius culture prefer to find alternative and more indirect or soft ways to express their different opinions. This approach to learning "may not be as strong, straightforward and critical as Western students' ways [of learning]" (Tran, 2013, p.60) but does show these students' respect to the teacher and their hope to maintain good student-teacher relationship.

Therefore, lack of teacher presence in online classes often times makes student sojourners from Confucius culture uncomfortable and unconfident with their own online learning (Morse, 2003; Zhang & Kenny, 2010). A Chinese student participant in Thompson and Ku's study (2005) reflected on his online learning experience with an American university that:

It is like students are exploring an unknown territory in a forest. The instructor eventually comes out and leads us to the right path. Because we think the teacher is an authority figure, we want to

know what his thoughts are instead of discussing among ourselves blindly. (p. 42)

In Bing and Ping's study (2008a), this cultural virtue was evidenced through increased interaction between students and the online teacher. In Wang's study (2007), however, students from Confucius culture reported low levels of comfort in approaching their teacher in online learning environment. When being asked to reflect on Western teacher's approach to online learning, participants of Chen and Bennett's study (2012) indicated, "It's up to you. If you want to have a look at some spot, go for it. If you want to learn, do so. And if you don't, so be it. (Jennifer, Interview 5)" (p. 687).

Western online learning curriculum. Influenced by strong uncertainty avoidance and instilled with restraint culture, students from Confucius culture are used to following strict social norms and expect to have the similar experience in online learning. They look for highly structured programs, transparent course structure, clear rules from the instructor to guide their learning behaviors, and detailed assessment criteria for them to concentrate (Smith & Smith, 1999; Wang, 2007). They will feel threatened and get lost if any of these necessary learning components are missing in online learning environment (Al-Harathi, 2005; Bing & Ping, 2008b; Chen & Bennett, 2012; Ku & Lohr, 2003; Smith & Smith, 1999; Smith, Coldwell, Smith, & Murphy, 2005; Wang, 2007).

In reality, what students from Confucius culture experience in online learning dominated by Western teaching pedagogy include absence of lectures, solitary reading, learner-controlled discussions and team works, and the nonlinear nature of learning. They feel very nervous studying in a loosely structured pedagogical context of this kind because they are uncertain whether their understanding and interpretations of the content are correct (Chen & Bennett, 2012). In particular, the learning habit of refraining themselves from giving personal opinions that might conflict with the correct answers and make them lose marks puts them in a disadvantage position when subjective assignments with lack of clear objective assessment criteria are given in Western online learning environment.

Western online teaching pedagogy. Influenced by the virtues of collectivism, femininity, and normative orientation, students from Confucius culture are taught to value group effort, maintain harmony, and avoid conflicts (Chiu, 2009; Fang, 2007). Therefore, if being asked to conduct team collaboration and group discussion, these students tend to exhibit modest and face-saving characteristics (Liu et al., 2010). They are found to be less critical and opinionated (Kim & Bonk, 2002; Seo, Schmidt, Sowa, & Miller, 2008; Thompson & Ku, 2005), are less likely to post anything that

conflict with the instructor and peers' views (Wang, 2007; Zhao & McDougall, 2008), and are ambiguous and indirect when expressing their positions. Their purpose of participating in group works is more of contributing to the development of a consensus than creating dissonance among the groups (Chen, Hsu, & Caropreso, 2006; Seo, et al., 2008).

Research studies show mixed results with regards to the performances of students from Confucius culture on group-based online learning activities. Biesenbach-Lucas (2003), Ku and Lohr (2003), and Wang (2007), for example, indicate that students from Confucius culture accept the idea of collaboration-based group learning because this type of learning activities help build online community among peers, develop a locus of mutual support, and offer opportunities to examine topics from various angles. Zhang's (2013) study of Chinese students' experience with online group discussion activities indicates that many Chinese students enjoy online discussions because of the "decrease of power asymmetries in the text-based online discussion"(p.250) and they are given equal opportunities to express themselves. Some students prefer online group discussions in writing than speaking because of language and culture barriers. As Ben from Zhang's study shared:

I felt more confident participating in online discussion because I can take as much time as I need. In the online discussion, I do not need to worry about if I have any accent, if I fully understand the question, or if I remember all the terms. Writing is not easy, but I have more time to prepare (p.245).

However, not all student sojourners from Confucius culture enjoy online group-based learning. Bing and Ping (2008a), Chen and Bennett (2012), Chen et al. (2006), Liang and McQueen (2000), Lim (2004), Tan (2009), Thompson and Ku (2005), Zhao and McDougall (2008), and Zhang and Kenny (2010) indicate that many students from Confucius culture find it hard to adapt to group-based online learning activities and therefore, choose to be passive and quiet. As one student participant in Zhang and Kenny's study (2010) reflected:

In this online setting, you say something, either you get some responses and you don't know what are the emotions behind it, or you do not get any response, and what does that mean? ... so I sometimes decided to have less contributions, because I was scared, if I say something and these people think that "She's an idiot." (Mitra, face-to-face interview) (p. 27).

Particularly when being assigned to discuss controversial topics that disturb or conflict with what they believe, many student sojourners from Confucius culture choose to avoid heated debate by giving acceptable answers or answers that at least will not escalate conflict (Zhang, 2013).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

We often assume connection of learning to culture but it was unclear how culture impacts learning in ODL environment. Focusing on the differences between Confucius culture and Western culture, this study examined how Confucius culture impacts students' learning behaviors when they study in Western online learning context. The results affirm the assumption that online learning is never a value-free transaction and self-referenced learning event. As a matter of fact, culture affects online learning in various ways and the complex nature of humans as socio-cultural agents should not be separated from individual learners' online learning behaviors. In this study, the impacts of Confucius culture on online learning dominated by Western teaching pedagogy are reflected in student-teacher relationship, online curriculum development, and online teaching and learning pedagogy.

The implication of the findings of this study is that special efforts have to be made to help international student sojourners with their study in Western online learning context (see Table 1). Paralejas (2013) recommended some online teaching and learning strategies to specifically support learners from collectivistic culture with high uncertainty avoidance and feminine culture. Examples include developing collaborative team projects and eliminating competition that is against cooperation; providing more structured learning environment "with well-defined learning objectives, detailed assignments, and adherence to a well-defined schedule" (pp.150-151); and, designing activities that encourage mutual cooperation, exchange and relationship support. Sadykova (2014) believes instructors should be trained on how to develop and facilitate collaboration-based group and pair projects, incorporate everyday culture into course design, and enhance peer-to-peer interactions to help international students familiarize themselves with Western teaching pedagogy in online learning environment. Students from collectivistic high-context cultures need more for togetherness than their peers from individualistic low-context cultures. Small-group activities can create such a closer relationship and a sense of family. Zhang (2013) further indicates that student sojourners from Confucius culture are more comfortable with seeking help from their peers when they are faced with difficulties and this is particularly true when the peers assigned to their groups are from similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Table 1: Culture’s Impact on The Online Learning Behaviors of Student Sojourners from Confucius Culture Studying in Western Online Learning Context and Strategies

	Confucius culture	Western culture	Strategies to help students from Confucius culture study in Western ODL environment
General ideas	Social hierarchy, social harmony, and interests of family members and community.	Equality, personal freedom, individuality, and objective thought.	Provide collaborative team projects and eliminating competition
Interpretation from the Hofstede’s cultural dimensions theory	Collectivism and feminism, high power distance, strong uncertainty avoidance, normative virtues, social obligations, suppressing gratification of needs.	Individualism and masculinity, low power distance and weak uncertainty avoidance, pragmatic virtues, relatively free gratification of basic and natural human drives.	Provide well-defined learning objectives, detailed assignments, a well-defined schedule Provide activities that encourage mutual cooperation, exchange and relationship support
Impact on the learning beliefs and behaviors of student sojourners from Confucius culture	See instructor as the absolute authority or a “parent” Younger generation views instructors differently Students avoid conflict and uncertainty Group’s interests and needs are prioritized Value well-structured and transparent learning environment, appreciate learning that is pre-sequenced by the teacher Value detailed feedbacks, explicit grading criteria and specific reading materials from the teacher	See instructor as facilitator. Students as self-directed learners and construct knowledge by challenging the teacher and peers Open curriculum that includes multiple sources and perspectives Encourage dialogue and interaction Emphasize pragmatism, real life, practical and problem-solving skills Value activities that foster critical and reflective thinking skills rather than rote memorization and repetition	Incorporate everyday culture into the course content design, and enhance peer-to-peer interactions Support high-context learners who favor personal communication and relationship by using multiple nonverbal and visual forms of communication methods Encourage students include personal experience cultural differences in reflection and discussions Provide guidance and accommodation in the areas of language, life, and learning environment to help student sojourners complete cultural transition

Further, it is critical to accurately interpret culture and the role it plays in online learning. As noted above, the fact that most student sojourners from Confucius culture see respecting teacher as a standard classroom norm can be understood through two separate dimensions of Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory. Some students may respect teacher because they see teacher as a "parent" who has the absolute authority but others may respect teacher only because they want to maintain a good student-teacher relationship. Through which dimension to interpret an individual student's learning behavior affects how to appropriately address this student's learning needs. Westbrook (2014) indicates that learners from low-context culture background communicate with each other with a level of openness through verbal format, which is different from high-context learners who rely heavily on non-verbal communication and relationship to convey the meanings embedded in the tradition. Understanding this difference, the teacher will recognize the limitations of having low-context verbal communications with high-context students. The teacher can either use multiple forms of communication methods to help high-context students better receive and process information or create opportunities for these students to draw their personal experience and cultural differences in reflection and discussions. Such strategies of balancing nonverbal and visual communications and purposefully integrating cultural variables into course instruction and activity will add personal touch to the instruction and create a social system of support for high-context students including student sojourners from Confucius culture.

It is also noteworthy that overestimating or stereotyping is as harmful as underestimating culture's impact on online learning and can create 'behavioural shifts' and 'acculturative stress' (Berry et al, 1987) in international student sojourners. Wang's (2013) discussion of Confucius culture dichotomy is an example of how the same culture leads to completely opposite interpretations. She argues that operating Confucius culture from a "deficit" perspective will stereotype students from Confucius culture as passive and dependent learners, which can only "magnify the negative effects on these learners who accordingly tend to internalize these values and view themselves as passive" (p. 105).

Although popular publication databases were utilized to identify research studies studying Confucius culture's impact on student sojourners' learning in Western online learning context, this study's contribution to the field is still limited by the availability of resources and the employed research design. Further research is encouraged to explore other data sources (i.e., conference proceedings and social media) other than journal publications to validate the findings of this study. More empirical and quantitative research studies are encouraged to provide more meaningful findings to further our understanding of culture's impact on online learning.

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