

## Does Andragogy Work in Taiwan? An Analysis from Eastern Cultural Perspective

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*This study was to examine the teaching styles and the student preferences for teaching styles of adult educators in Taiwan. This research is a case study utilizing statistical analysis, interviews, and classroom observation. The findings indicated that although the instructors tended toward the andragogical, there was still a significant difference between the teaching styles practiced and the students' preference for teaching style. The researchers believe that Eastern cultural influence contributes to this gap.*

Key words: Andragogy, Eastern culture, Teaching styles

### Introduction

As a country, Taiwan has recognized the importance of access to education and training in remaining competitive. IN 1996, the Ministry of Education (MOE) proposed a policy titled the "Middle Term Plan for the Development of Adult Education towards Lifelong Learning," and the Council for Culture Planning and Development, Executive Yuan, has connected lifelong learning with community reform, as an essential means for developing and transforming Taiwan society (Chen, 1996). One of the most sweeping changes in educational reform took place in 1998 when the government issued the "Twelve Education Reform Mandates." These sweeping changes brought about greater access to education at all levels, especially at the university level, with the sixth mandate again advocating lifelong learning projects through continuing education and extension programs as well as vocational and in-service training (BICER, 2001).

The Ministry of Education enacted the "College Extension Education Implementation" statute in 1998. This regulation set forth the guidelines that are necessary for colleges and universities interested in establishing extension programs in Taiwan. Since this time there has been an increase of extension programs offered throughout Taiwan. According to the most recent statistics from the Ministry of Education, there are 151 universities and colleges in Taiwan offering extension programs with 346,830 students in the year 2004, compared to 61 schools with 115,712 extension students in the year 2000, 52 schools with 101,761 students in 1999, and only 40 schools with 91,048 students in 1998 (Department of Higher Education, 2004). The current rate of growth and population of extension students indicate awareness in Taiwan of the special needs for educating adults in today's ever changing and competitive international environment.

While recognizing adults' need for greater access to higher educational programs, however, the MOE makes no specific recommendations for modification of such programs according to adult learning needs nor for special training of teachers in addressing adult learners' needs. The program regulations are based on the same qualifying factors that are used for accreditation of the traditional undergraduate programs, specifically stating that more than one-third of the extension teaching staff must come from within the universities traditional undergraduate programs. Additional professors and instructors must meet the same hiring qualifications according to regulations set forth for the posts of traditional undergraduate programs (Department of Higher Education, 2001).

According to the literature, a nontraditional/adult student is best defined in contrast to the traditional student. They tend to be achievement oriented, highly motivated, and relatively independent. They have special needs for flexible schedules and instruction appropriate for their developmental level (Cross, 1980). They prefer more active approaches to learning and value opportunities to integrate academic learning with their life and work experiences (Benshoff, 1991). They also have a deep need to be self-directing and to be responsible for their lives and decisions. Experience plays an important role on adult learning. Adult learners may withdraw from learning if their experiences are devalued or ignored. Therefore, facilitators should recognize the characteristics of adult learners and remove barriers for them by setting a good climate and by building mutual involvement with adult learners to maximize the learning (Knowles, 1973; Lindeman, 1926).

Therefore, this leads us to question whether or not, aside from greater access to education, the extension programs in Taiwan actually fulfill the needs of adults as non-traditional students and whether or not these students

are satisfied with the learning environment of extension programs that are taught primarily by professors versed in traditional university teaching methods.

### **Theoretical/Conceptual Framework**

The framework of the study is the andragogical principles of adult education. The term Andragogy can be defined generally as the art and science of helping adults learn (Knowles, 1990; Davenport 1997). The primary thrust of andragogy is the assumption that teaching adults is different from teaching children. The pedagogical methods place the instructor in the role of expert and the students into the role of passive vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge. The teacher directs everything from what will be learned, to when it will be learned, how it will be learned, and evaluates whether or not learning has taken place (Knowles, 1990). The andragogical model, on the other hand, places the instructor into the role of facilitator. As a facilitator, the instructor takes into account the students' needs and involves them, to various degrees, in deciding what will be learned, when it will be learned, how it will be learned, and whether or not learning has taken place.

### **Cultural Influences in the Eastern Classroom**

According to Hofstede (1986), cultures such as those in Asia that have a higher tolerance of power distance, tend towards collectivism, are higher in uncertainty avoidance, tend toward femininity, and are high in Confucian Dynamism will have a propensity toward the more traditional teacher-centered classroom environment.

This teacher-student relationship stems from the Confucian heritage which emphasizes that humankind exists through, and is defined by, their relationships to others. These relationships are structured hierarchically and the social order is ensured through each party's honoring the requirements of the relationship role (Chang, 1997). These role relationships are dyadic and tend to be domineering-subservient in nature. Children, students, younger siblings, and employees are expected to show respect and obedience to their dyadic counterparts (parents, teachers, elder brother, and superiors). In return, the senior counterparts—by rank, age, or social status—lead and guide from a position of authority tempered with benevolence, wisdom, propriety, and trustworthiness (Tan, 1998).

The expectations, then, for both teacher and student attitudes in Taiwan's educational setting should tend toward the pedagogical rather than the andragogical. Taiwan, as are most Asian countries, is firmly rooted in the Confucian tradition where students respect teachers as ultimate authority figures whose opinions are not challenged while students sit quietly and learn (Cifuentes & Shih, 2001).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to identify the teaching styles used at the UEC Extension Center and the students' preferred teaching styles and to examine whether there is a difference between the teaching styles used and the students' preference toward teaching style. Another purpose of the study was trying to find out the role of eastern culture playing in adult classrooms.

### **Significance of the Study**

The information gained from this study will contribute to the extension program by informing the institution of its adult learner clientele and whether or not their classroom needs are met. It will also give their institution insight into its teachers' teaching styles and its students' preference for teaching style. It will provide valuable information and insight to those involved in similar extension programs throughout Taiwan. This study will further add to the body of knowledge concerning the principles of Andragogy and adult education and its applicability to Eastern countries.

### **Research Questions**

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. Is there a difference between the operational teaching style and the students' preferred teaching style?
2. What are the adult students' preferences for teaching style?
3. What is the predominant teaching style in the extension programs?
4. How would faculty members describe their own teaching styles?
5. Is there a difference between the instructor's espoused teaching style and their operational teaching style?
6. What role does eastern culture play in adult classrooms in Taiwan?

## Limitations of the Study

The study is to 309 adult learners in one university extension programs in Kaohsiung City, Taiwan and is therefore not statistically generalizable. This study is limited by reflexivity interview responses, that is, respondents may say what they think the interviewer wants to hear and, consciously or unconsciously, may be less than truthful for a variety of reasons.

## Methodology

This research is a case study method. The case study method is appropriate for this situation since it is an examination of a contemporary event where the relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated (Yin, 1994). The research questions will be addressed via a mixed method of both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques primarily through observation, interviews, and a Likert scale survey instrument (Yin, 1994).

To enhance the degree of trustworthiness of this case study the following methods were employed: triangulation, repeated observations, peer debriefing, member checks, and audit trail (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 1994; Merriam, 1998).

### *Population and Samples*

For the quantitative aspect of this research, the population of the study was 309 adult learners in the extension programs at UEC Extension Center in Kaohsiung, Taiwan. The within case sampling for the qualitative aspect was based on a random selection from a list of student and teacher volunteers. Most of the students involved in this program were full-time working adults, many of whom live from one to three hours' drive from the university. A random selection of five teachers from the list of volunteers was the basis for both the teacher interviews and observation of their classes. Thirteen students were selected for interviews. These same classes were observed at six hours each for a total of thirty classroom hours.

Nearly 60% of the respondents were female (58.1%). The greater part of the participants was between 25 and 44 years of age, nearly 80 percent (78.6%). Of the 248 respondents, 57.3% were single. The largest percentage of respondents was from the educational sector (43.1%), with respondents from the business and industrial sector being the second largest (26.2%). In the category of job positions the largest percentage was teachers (38.7%). Management and administrative positions accounted for the second largest group (38.3%). The largest percentage of respondents had University degrees (95.6%), with 80.2% attaining a Bachelor's degree. The majority of the respondents were enrolled in the certification programs (59.6%), with 38.7% enrolled in the general teacher certification program. 17.7% taking the bachelor's level courses, and 9.2% taking the master's level courses.

### *Data Collection*

The data were collected through survey questionnaire, observations, interviews, and researchers' documents. The survey questionnaire, "Adult Education Teaching Styles and Preferences", was designed based on an extensive review of andragogical and adult education literature. There are two main parts to the survey instrument. The first part is the demographic items, and the second part of the survey instrument included questions about teaching styles used and students' preferred teaching styles. It consists of 40 items, 20 items measuring the current teaching style and 20 items measuring the students' preferred teaching style. The purpose of administering the questionnaire to the instructors, only the second 20 questions of this part of the survey was modified and re-titled as "Instructors' preferred teaching style." The 20 questions for each section were categorized according to three constructs: 1) climate setting; 2) methods; 3) and processes. Responses were interval variables on a five point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree, and strongly agree.

To ensure reliability and content validity, five non-traditional students were selected to perform a "pilot test." Four subjects-related experts, including one American and three Taiwanese – all of whom were educated in America – reviewed the survey questionnaire and gave feedback to the researchers. The survey questionnaire was modified accordingly. A reliability analysis on the data for this research resulted in a coefficient Alpha of .926. The data gained from survey were statistically tested by utilizing SPSS 10.0.

Observational data represents a firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest rather than a secondhand account as obtained through documents, survey instruments, and interviews (Merriam, 1998). The physical setting, activities and interactions, subtle factors – i.e. unplanned activities, nonverbal communication, symbolic gestures, and what does not happen, and the effects of the research own behaviors (Merriam, 1998).

The purpose of interviews is to obtain data that cannot be collected through observations or documents (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990). Both instructors and students were interviewed. The primary interview was a semi-structured interview, and was similar for both sets of respondents.

Researcher's documents consisted of researcher notes, contact summary journal, observation journal, memos, and data analysis tools.

#### *Qualitative Data Analysis*

Qualitative data analysis requires organizing data into manageable units and then searching for emerging themes or patterns, making sense of the data, and drawing conclusions (Baptiste, 2001). Organizing and analyzing raw data involves the handling, and sense-making, of a multitude of pages of interview transcripts, observation field notes, memos, and data reduction and analysis documents. An appropriate method of coding and analysis is necessary for making sense out of large quantities of information. Coding is a systematic process for labeling and managing data.

It is important to note that while these are levels of coding, this is not a sequential process. The data may filter up through the levels sequentially, but the analysis is simultaneous, working at each level throughout the data gathering process as well as after.

### **Findings**

#### *Student Survey*

The results of the statistical analysis of the main survey questionnaire indicate that the teaching styles of the UEC extension center instructors tend toward the andragogical along the pedagogical/andragogical spectrum with a mean of 3.82. Among the separate constructs of climate setting, methods, and processes, the construct of climate setting accounted for the greater tendency toward the andragogical with a mean of 4.07 and  $p < .05$  at .000. The construct of processes accounted for the lesser part, just breaking the three-point median at 3.32 with significance slightly under .05 at .048.

The results also indicated that student preferences tended toward the andragogical along the pedagogical/andragogical spectrum with a composite mean score of 4.17. Among the separate constructs of climate setting, methods, and processes, the construct of climate setting accounted for the greater tendency toward the andragogical with a mean of 4.29, methods at 4.10, and processes at 3.94—each with a probability  $< .05$ .

The results also indicated that overall, there was a difference in the composite means between the operational teaching style at UEC extension center and the student's preference for teaching style. Examining the constructs found significance among all three with the greater difference being accounted for by the construct of processes, with a mean difference of .62, and the construct of climate setting accounting for the lesser difference, with a mean difference of only .22. The differences were in the direction of the andragogical.

From the findings of paired t-test, In the area of climate setting, two pairs, stood out from the others. First, Pair two, concerning the desire to share opinions and ideas in the open classroom, found significance in the opposite direction of the other pairs. That is, the student's indicated a preference toward a less andragogical approach than the operational teaching style, indicating that the students prefer not to speak out as much as the instructor would like. Second, pair 10, indicating student preference for more opportunities to get to know their classmates better, had the largest mean difference in the area of climate setting.

Four pairs stood out in the area of methods. Three of these had the highest mean differences of that group and among the highest of all groups. First, pair 11 indicated a greater preference for instructors to make clear why the class is important for their life and work situations. Next, pair 14 and pair 15 indicated a greater preference for the instructor to adapt activities and assignments that connect learning to their personal and work life and to structure activities that allow students to share and discuss relevant experiences with each other.

#### *Student Interviews*

The student interviews informed research questions three, four, and six. For the purpose of this study, interviews were transcribed into a Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet and grouped according to the semi-structured interview questions.

In keeping with the student survey, the student interviews indicated a reluctance of students to speak out in class. The interviews also supported the findings that the instructors tended toward the andragogical in the area of climate setting. Student interviews indicated overwhelmingly that the instructors treated them as peers and established an easy-going climate conducive to students speaking out—even if those opinions were opposite to the instructors. They also indicated that the instructor's actively solicit, other than short answer responses, opinions and comments from the students. However, the students show reluctance to take advantage of this climate even though the students were unanimous in their desire to have other students speak out more in class. Some of the reasons for the reluctance were individual preferences and respect for the teacher's position of authority.

#### *Instructor Survey*

The instructors were similar in age ranging from 38 to 41 with one instructor at 31. Most instructors were at the doctorate level and received their higher degrees in the United States. One instructor has attained the master's level

and is currently at the dissertation stage of the doctoral degree, receiving all of his education in Taiwan. Three of the instructors are from the field of education and two from business.

With one exception, the instructors have teaching experience at different levels in the educational system—elementary, high school, and college. Three of the teachers had high school experience of two to three years, with one instructor having teaching experience of six years at the elementary level. At the college level, the number of years teaching ranged from two to five. This experience would include traditional classes and non-traditional classes for each of the instructors. The total number of years teaching ranged from 4 to 7.5.

The number of years of teaching adults included teaching in any setting –university, extension programs, continuing ed., seminars, training, or the like. None of the teachers are full-time adult educators. With the exception of the full-time elementary school teacher, the remaining teachers are full-time professors whose duties include teaching both traditional students and non-traditional students. The longest number of years for teaching adults was five, with the remaining four instructors split evenly between two and three years.

The instructors unanimously consider it of highest importance that an instructor should encourage students to share opinions and ideas in class and should give a lot of positive feedback in class. Second in importance, the instructors generally agreed that it is important to interact with students in a way that will build their self-confidence that an instructor should not mind if students disagree with him/her when expressing their own opinions and instructors should adapt activities and assignments in order to connect the students' learning with their personal or work life.

The third highest grouped rankings indicated that it is important for an instructor to respect the students as knowledgeable and competent adults and to adapt activities and assignments that allow students to share and discuss their relevant experiences with each other. The final grouped ranking of importance indicated that it is important for instructors to give classmates opportunities to know each other better and involve students in assessing their learning needs. With the exception of only one instructor, instructors indicated that it is important to engage students in informal conversation or instructor-student dialog.

The instructors were only moderately concerned about being lenient in attendance and in using a lot of group activities and discussions. There was little agreement and low scores concerning the need for instructors to involve students in setting course objectives, planning course activities, and establishing the criteria for evaluation purposes.

The greatest disparity among instructors was the importance of being flexible in assignment deadlines, respecting students as peers, and indicating to students the importance of the course in improving their life or work situations. The degree of time an instructor should spend on lecture was the variable with the greatest amount of disparity.

#### *Instructor's Interviews*

Overall, the instructor's preferences tended toward the andragogical. Instructors were unanimous in recognition of the importance of students expressing their ideas or opinions in class and would prefer that students speak out more. However, in each of these cases, the instructors expressed difficulty in getting students to speak out or become involved in class.

Another unanimous opinion indicated that the most important responsibility of an instructor is helping students to become better learners and to be prepared for lifelong learning. The importance of recognizing and capitalizing on student's life and work experience received the most frequent citations. All of the instructors also indicated a desire to design assignments that would draw from, or relate to, life or work experience. As alternatives to lecture, presentations and group projects emerged as the favored teaching methods.

Climate setting emerged as an important issue for these instructors. The instructors indicated that they make efforts to establish a trusting, open, and relaxed atmosphere that encourage students to speak up and also to help them build their self-confidence. All but one instructor indicated that tardiness, even occasional tardiness, would merit the student some degree of discount on their attendance grade.

Concerning processes, at least three instructors claimed that they attempted to involve their students in each of the areas of assessing learning needs, setting course objectives, planning activities and assignments, and establishing evaluation criteria. However, the instructors indicated a lack of willingness on the part of the students to be involved in this process.

#### *Class Observations*

The classes were arranged according to the most common, forward facing, traditional settings. There were basically two class formats observed. Two instructors conducted student presentations while the other three engaged in instructor lecture/presentation.

The atmosphere in each of the classes, with some varying degree, was congenial, relaxed, and sociable. There was a lot of laughter in the socializing, and a great deal of humor in the lectures and presentations. All of the

instructors exhibited characteristics of approachableness. None of the classes observed exhibited any real form of discourse, dialogue, or in-depth discussion.

### **Summary**

According to the literature review, one would expect the instructors' teaching styles in Taiwan to tend toward the pedagogical. Because students have been acculturated into a Confucian environment that ranks high in power distance and uncertainty avoidance, the expectations for both teacher and student attitudes in Taiwan's educational setting should tend toward the pedagogical rather than the andragogical.

Contrary to the literature, however, the results of this study indicated that the teaching styles of adult educators at the extension center tended toward the andragogical. Student preference for teaching styles also tended toward the andragogical. However, using a Likert scale survey instrument, statistical analysis indicated that although the instructors tended toward the andragogical in their teaching style, there was still a significant difference between the teaching styles practiced and the students' preference for teaching style. This held true for every variable in the survey instrument.

The survey instrument divided the teaching styles into the constructs of climate setting, methods, and processes. Among the several constructs, the construct of processes accounted for the largest gap between the teaching styles in practice and the students' preference for teaching style.

Patterns emerged from the data that indicated that the students did not prefer to speak out in the open classroom, this in spite of the fact that students felt their instructors established an environment that was non-threatening and easy-going. Students also expressed a desire for more open classroom discussion and participation from the other students, yet, on the other hand, were not willing to be the ones individually to do so.

Another pattern indicated that the most important characteristic of an instructor was that of content expert. Instructor interviews in answer to the same question, however, did not exhibit such a concern. Finally, in contrast to the literature, the instructor interviews indicated that this particular set of instructors placed a great amount of importance on teaching students how-to-learn rather than over emphasizing the how-to-do in a learning endeavor.

### **Conclusions**

The study results indicated that there was a gap between the teacher's operational teaching style and the student preferences for teaching styles for all variables and constructs of the survey. This gap was in the direction of student preferences for the andragogical. Contrary to the literature, however, we find that despite this gap, there is a tendency of the instructors' teaching styles toward the andragogical. The largest gap between the teacher's teaching styles and student's preference for teaching style was found in the area of processes (assessment, objective setting, course planning, and evaluation).

This study found that students were individually reluctant to speak out in the classroom or become more involved in the processes of the course. This result is in spite of the fact that the instructors attempted to establish an easy-going and non-threatening climate that would encourage students to be more actively involved and to speak out more in class. Students themselves indicated a preference for more open classroom discussion and involvement from other students; however, as noted above, students indicated that individually, they were reluctant to do so.

Students also indicated the amount of time an instructor spends on lecture as the lowest ranking concern among all the other preferences, tending toward the pedagogical rather than the andragogical. A pattern emerged from the observations that identified the "engaging lecture" as the most prominent style of lecture. This type of lecture is filled with humor and short answer questions that engage and hold the students attention. These types of questions, however, did not elicit in-depth or lengthy discussions, only short and simple answers that were often answered in chorus by the students. A common desire among all teachers was to enhance open classroom discussion. Instructors also indicated that they are interested in teaching students how-to-learn as part of a lifelong learning process. In the area of methods, the importance of recognizing and capitalizing on student's life and work experience received the highest agreement among the instructors. Most teachers (with only one exception) indicated that it is important to involve students in the processes of the course. The data that stood out among all instructors was the lack of willingness on the part of the students to become more active in class participation as far as speaking out in front of the group. They also indicated a lack of willingness on the part of the students to become involved in the processes of the course.

## Implications for Practice

The findings of this study show that even under these conditions where instructors encourage students to participate and establish open, trusting, and easy-going environment, students are reluctant to speak out in the open classroom or become involved in the processes of the course. Students themselves express a desire to be more involved in the processes and indicate a desire for other students to speak out more in the open classroom, yet individually they show a reluctance to do so.

Consideration should be given to cultural barriers that prevent this desired condition from taking place. These conditions could be either a fear of authority or perhaps a fear of uncertainty from students who are asked to speak individually when they have been acculturated to seek harmony and follow the collective. In open classroom discussions, students may not be comfortable expressing their own ideas from a fear that their ideas are too different from the collective, which may cause them embarrassment or a loss of face. Having been acculturated to a structured environment, students may see a more democratic and open environment as one of inefficiency and confusion. Other students may see speaking out as disrespectful of the instructor.

Despite what may be some underlying cultural influences acting as barriers to certain aspects of andragogical practice, the results overall indicate a preference by students for more andragogical teaching styles than what is being practiced. It is suggested that instructors should be involved in some form of training or seminar to enhance their understanding of andragogical principles. This may help to give more coherence and direction to their practice. Instructors should also be made aware of the findings of this study and should keep in touch with the expectations of their current adult students.

More particular attention should be given to the area of processes, which represents the greatest gap between the operational teaching style and the preferred teaching style. Instructors should decide how they would like to involve the students in the processes, give due consideration as to how the students would like to be involved, and more particularly, be very clear in communicating this to their students.

This could also apply to the problem of student reluctance to speak out and be involved in the open classroom. Communication and expectations of both instructors and students would be the key to overcoming this gap. Much of this problem could be dealt with at that beginning of the semester if the instructors would take the time to address these issues before getting into the content for the course. If students are reluctant to speak out in addressing this issue, instructors could give students the ability to express themselves in writing or via an electronic forum or a survey designed specifically for that class.

## Contributions to HRD

Important contributions of this present study to HRD are as follow:

1. Both students' preference of teaching styles and the operational teaching styles tend to andragogy.
2. There is a gap between students' preference of teaching styles and the operational teaching styles that students' preference tends to be more andragogical than the operational teaching styles except the dimension of teaching process.
3. The findings indicates that students were reluctant to express ideas and opinions themselves in front of other classmates, yet hoping others can talk more so that they can learn from others' experience.
4. Eastern culture (especially Confucius influences) plays an important role contributing to the described situation.

## Recommendations for Further Study

This research should be expanded to include more institutions in Taiwan, which would give some indication as to the uniqueness or similarity of the particular institution under study. A broader study, or group of studies, could shed more light on the cultural aspects of the study. If the results tend to be similar across Taiwan, greater is the likelihood that the conditions influencing the instructors' practice and students' preference are cultural rather than individual or institutional.

More particularly, further research concerning the cultural barriers to student participation in the open classroom should be conducted, distinguishing between which particular aspects of a Confucian environment—power distance, collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, social harmony, fear of losing face, or the like—offer the greatest hindrance to more classroom participation by students. Identifying the source of this discrepancy between what both instructors and students prefer, but seem unable to achieve, is the key to overcoming the lack of participation.

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