

## UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL DIFFERENCES & THEIR PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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### Abstract

Despite research efforts to understand and enhance students' intercultural competence in higher education, only few focus on cultural values and their implications on classroom practices. This article aimed to examine the effects of cultural values on international students' intercultural competence and their academic adjustments. Chinese and Saudi students (N = 20) focus group revealed the means by which international students navigate their cultural values and adapt in US higher education classroom. Hofstede's cultural dimensions of power distance and individualism/collectivism were utilized to explain the findings. The results reveal that cultural variations stem from a high-power collectivist culture dominated by pedagogical traditional classroom practices. International students face intercultural and academic adjustments to ease their transition into andragogical teaching approaches in western higher education institutions. The study proposes an instructional three-step approach that utilize pedagogical and andragogical practices to promote international students' intercultural competence. This approach offers teachers, researchers, and policy makers a new direction in the area of higher education teaching and learning.

**Key words:** Adult Education, Higher Education, Pedagogy, Andragogy, Intercultural Competence, Active Learning.

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## Introduction

The rapid growth of globalization, the increase in migration, and the continuous interaction between cultures continue to challenge intercultural frameworks placing higher education at the forefront of this debate. Higher education institutions continue to engage in innovative programs to globalize their institutions and prepare globally inclined graduates. According to Jurtikova (2013), universities are converting into “microcosm of society” (p.697). This is considered a pronounced opportunity for innovative approaches to “deconstruct social stereotypes” (Jurtikova, p.697).

International students’ enrollment has been dramatically increasing in recent years. Many higher education institutions have stepped up their efforts boosting international student enrollment and reaping big rewards. This trend has been used as a measure of globalization in these institutions. Since 2000, international students’ enrollment has been steadily growing (US News, 2014). According to Witherell (2016), the Power of International Education (IIE) report revealed that the total number of international students’ enrollment reached a record high of 1,078,822 in 2016-2017. According to the report in the academic year 2015/2016, Chinese students ranked number one in US international student enrollment (31.5%) followed by India (15.9%), and Saudi Arabia (5.9%). In 2016-2017, China sustained the first rank (32.5%) followed by India (17.3%), south Korea (5.4%), then Saudi Arabia (4.9%).

The present study sought to expand the scope of intercultural competence to educational practices. The study examined the academic barriers related to culture and challenges students face in the new value system. The study explored international students’ intercultural competence related to their academic adjustments and classroom practices in western higher education.

This study focused on the following questions:

- What are the effects of cultural values on international students’ intercultural competence?
- What are international students’ perceptions of higher education classrooms in their home country?
- What are international students’ perceptions of higher education classrooms in the United States?
- What are the effects of the western education system on Chinese and Saudi international students and their academic adjustments?

Classrooms have become a nexus of diverse cultures in which teachers play an instrumental role in developing students’ understanding and openness to other cultures. In the past decade, many approaches proposed frameworks for developing students’ intercultural competence (IC) (Deardorff, 2006 & Fantini, 1997). Despite various frameworks that address approaches to developing IC, promoting intercultural competence in the classroom remain a struggle (Young & Sachdev, 2011). Instructors included intercultural competence in their course learning outcomes, but that was only steered by course content and design (McKiernan, Leahy & Brereton, 2013). Bergh (NA) argues that many factors play a role in hindering IC teaching such as lack of time and concern about students’ opinions. Examining classroom practices from an international student perspective will help identify difficulties they face and procedures required to address students’ intercultural and academic competence.

## Literature Review

Culture has been widely studied by anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists, linguists, and educators. Hundreds of definitions have been advanced to depict the rich and complex meaning of this expression. Psychologist Geert Hofstede (2011), considers culture as the collective programming of the mind which differentiates one society from another. These cultural values are mentally inherent and may fail if infringed by cross cultural interactions (Hofstede, 2001). Intercultural competence is explained as one's intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes (Deardorff, 2006). Hunter et al. (2006) suggest critical steps in developing what he referred to as global competence to include internal awareness and acceptance of a person's cultural norms and beliefs. Empathy to others, identifying interconnections and emotional distinctions, and reflecting on an individual's culture are regarded as essential competencies in this globalized world (Wallenberg-Lerner, 2013).

Dooley (2006) states that if intercultural competence is about skills, then the development of these skills will empower the teacher to deal with diversity constructively. One common component in almost all the characterizations of intercultural competence is the role of values. Bennett (2004), suggests that individuals are conditioned to their particular culture and its predispositions. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, homogenous perceptions of cultural values are strongly present (Awaida-Nachabe, 2017). Hence, coherent national and regional ideologies are strongest when it comes to cultural values. Yet, while cultural and social systems coexist, they are far from being integrated (Vallaster, 2005). Advancing our understanding of intercultural competence is unviable without integration of elements of culture.

The study of Wu, Garza, and Guzman (2015) revealed a series of academic and cultural difficulties that international students studying in the US face. International students indicated taking a passive role until discovering different strategies for getting involved in classroom practices.

The findings of McKierman, Leahy, & Brereton (2013) study, reaffirm the opportunities of teaching intercultural competence from a student perspective. Dooly affirms that intercultural competence requires revitalization of one's own beliefs particularly through experiential learning (2006). Koutlaki & Eslami suggested a number of pedagogical activities to promote students' intercultural competence such as student-centered tasks and communicative strategies (2018). Education today is about student empowerment. Pedagogy is not just about teaching and learning of content, pedagogy is a culture broker and a system of social frames and distinctions (Zyngier, 2016).

## Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded within the theory of Hofstede Cultural Dimensions,

Hofstede (2001). Hofstede's theory describes the effects of culture on individuals. The cultural dimensions offer a basis to quantify culture and its variations. Six dimensions explain the causes of societal and cultural differences. Table 1 lists Hofstede's six national cultural dimensions.

Individualism versus collectivism refers to the strength, loyalty, and bonds people have to others in their community. Uncertainty avoidance refers to how people cope with the predictability of their life events. People with high uncertainty avoidance attempt to control and predict their life while the others on the other side of the spectrum tend to be relaxed, unrestricted, and believe that life events are a matter of fate. The third dimension is power distance, it refers to the level of inequality that exists and is accepted by the people. Masculine versus feminine dimension refers to the distribution of responsibilities between females and males. In masculine societies, men are expected to be successful, assertive, and strong. Men and women roles are distinct and do not coincide. The fifth

dimension is short-term versus long-term orientation. This dimension refers to the people's outlook on their future, long-term planning, and preservation of values as opposed to focusing on the present and the immediate. The last dimension is indulgence versus restraint (IVR), this signifies the degree in which societies regulate people's behavior and impose social norms. Countries with high IVR score allow free gratifications while countries with low IVR score control peoples' behavior through firmer societal norms.

In this study, the researchers decided to focus on two cultural dimensions relevant to higher education: power distance and individualism versus collectivism. These two dimensions will be applied on both China and Saudi Arabia cultures.

**Table 1.** Hofstede National Cultural Dimensions

Hofstede's Dimensions	Cultural Implication
Individualism/Collectivism	The degree personal needs and goals are prioritized versus the needs of the group.
Uncertainty Avoidance	The degree people are comfortable with changing their lifestyle.
Power-Distance	The degree of inequality in power perceived by the less powerful and accepting of inequality.
Masculine/ Feminine	The degree of dominance of masculine values in a country.
Short term/ Long term Orientation	The degree to which a culture focuses on future while others focus on the past and present.
Indulgence/ Restraint (added in 1991)	The degree to which a culture allows gratification of basic drives versus regulating it through strict social norms.

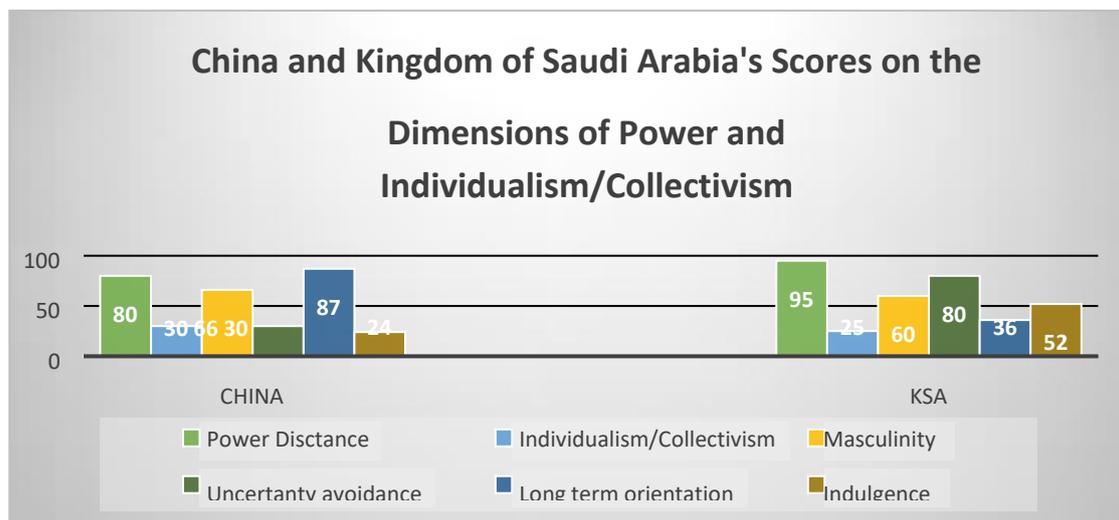
### China and Saudi Arabia's Score on Power distance

Chinese and Saudi cultures share similar patterns portrayed in figure 1. China and Saudi Arabia share high scores on power distance implying hierarchy. Power distance (PD) dimension refers to inequalities in societies and the degree to which individuals recognize this reality. Hofstede defines power distance as the "extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally" (HofstedInsights.com). China's score of 80 places the country on the higher end of PD. Chinese accept inequalities, establish superior-subordinate connections, and they are influenced by formal power. Chinese are expectant about people's ability for supremacy. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's (KSA) score of 95, 15 points higher than Chinese score, reflects people's acceptance of hierarchy. Hierarchy induces core disparities, centralization of power, and subordination. Saudis believe that everybody has a place in

society; the superior being compassionate and sovereign while the subordinate remains a follower who needs to be told what to do.

**China and Saudi Arabia’s Score on Individualism versus Collectivism**

Both cultures score low on Individualism denoting pledge and loyalty to the group. Individualism (I) versus Collectivism (C) is “the degree of interdependence a society maintains among its members” (HofstedeInsights.com). This dimension differentiates between collectivist societies in which individuals look after each other and loosely knit societies where people look after themselves and their direct family. China’s low score of 20 reflects a highly collectivist culture. Chinese act in the interest of the group. Decisions are affected by group concerns especially within a close group dynamic such as family. Personal relations overcome given tasks and corporation. Loyalty and commitment to an organization is low but high for individuals within the organization. KSA’s score of 25, five points higher than China, echoes fervent pledge and loyalty to the group, immediate family, extended family and associations. This loyalty overrules societal regulations. Employer/employee relationship is recognized in moral terms; it is considered similar to a family. In KSA, any wrongdoing results in societal shame and embarrassment.



**Figure 1. Adapted from Hofstede-Insights.com (2018).**

**Methods**

This study sought to explore international students’ intercultural competence as they relate to their academic adjustments and classroom practices in western higher education. This qualitative study employed multiple category focus group design with participants from two different nationalities. Multiple focus groups were planned until saturation was reached, this allowed between and within group comparisons (Krueger and Casey, 2015).

Twenty Chinese and Saudi students (N = 20), were interviewed in a focus group format. Participants’ ages ranged from 19 to 27 years old and consisted of ten females (5 Saudis and 5 Chinese), and ten males (5 Saudis and 5 Chinese). Participants were students enrolled in higher education institutions in the United States. Participants were either studying English as a second language, pursuing their undergraduate or graduate degree. All Saudi participants had Saudi government scholarships. Participants’ prior working experience varied from no experience to engineering, programming, aviation, teaching, and laboratory.

Target population was identified as individuals who met the criteria for participating in this study. These individuals were Chinese and Saudi students who are 18 years of age or older who have been in the United States for over three months. Participants were recruited from higher education institutions through personal and professional contacts. Interested individuals were emailed information about the study. Once the number of participants (N = 20) was reached, participants were invited for a focus group discussion.

Two nationality- centered (n = 10 Saudi, and n = 10 Chinese) focus groups were organized. The focus group discussion enabled the researchers to collect comprehensive accounts of students' viewpoints and experiences. After a brief introduction using pseudo-names, a brief demographic questionnaire was distributed. Then, a systematic questioning route addressed areas of cultural values, intercultural competence, classroom instruction and interaction in the United States and their home country. Discussions were recorded and later transcribed for accuracy and analysis.

### Data Analysis

The analysis was carried out using the methods suggested by Krueger and Casey (2015). The purpose of this study was the guide to the direction and depth of the analysis. Analysis of the data was "systematic, verifiable, sequential, and consequential" (Krueger and Casey, 2015, p. 139). A systematic analysis focusing on clustering of concepts and constant comparative was utilized to describe the findings. Data analysis focused on a coding process. The researchers read the transcripts, identified similar categories, and created labels that explained the narratives. This process was repeated with all the responses until the data was exhausted. The process was conducted repeatedly to identify primary themes across all transcripts.

### Findings

The findings presented in this section emerged from two focus groups that yielded clusters of concepts. Two themes emerged associated with pedagogy and classroom interaction. Table 2 summarizes the findings based on these two categories.

Table 2. Implications of Culture for Classroom Pedagogy and Classroom Environment

	<b>High Distance</b>	<b>Power</b>	<b>Collectivism</b>
Pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher as expert</li> <li>• Content knowledge</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive association</li> <li>• Accommodating others</li> </ul>
Classroom Interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discipline</li> <li>• Prestige</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harmony</li> <li>• Selflessness</li> </ul>

### **High Power & Pedagogy**

Participants' responses revolved around the ideas of teacher as an expert and importance of content knowledge or skill development. In high power cultures, learning is a one-way channel; it is banking of information. The teacher leads learning. Students listen

and take notes. Learners expect the teacher to initiate discussion. Students never volunteer information. Students would never contradict the teacher. Participants' experiences reveal presumed perceptions that are heavily influenced by their culture. Like many students from high power cultures, the teacher is viewed as an authoritative figure and a superior. Power is centralized in the role of the teacher. The teacher is expected to know everything; to carry the lecture, to set the lesson objectives, and to tell the students what to do. Students expect to place little or no input during instruction. The central role of the teacher was the foundation for the theme "content knowledge". Participant responses supported this theme. The data from the focus group showed that the teacher is expected to have content knowledge and transmit it to students as some participants indicated

**Teacher as expert.** Participants regarded the teacher as the "leader" and "advisor". In China, the teacher is called "laoshi which means old teacher...know everything". The teacher is someone that students entrust in providing students the best knowledge "I trust my teacher"; "our teacher teach us grammar rules"; In China, the teacher tell us what to do"; "he knows a lot of information" and "my teacher knows everything". Almost all participants expressed initial disbelief in the teacher's role in the U.S. classroom. The idea that the teacher is a facilitator was new and one that took time to get conditioned to. This realization of self-directed learning is novel and took the greatest effort to acquire.

**Content Knowledge.** Participants valued skill development whether listening or speaking "I like when we practice listening to recording in class" or computation "I am learning new methods in solving equations". For other participants, the instruction they were receiving was not enough. In China, teaching is "very specific with a lot of details and if you ask a question the teacher gives you way more info, but in US, the teacher doesn't give you that much info; here we should do a lot of study by ourselves". Another participant added, "In the beginning, I didn't know what to do...I sit quiet...I didn't talk. I didn't know what do homework". "Getting used to doing research without help from teacher was very difficult". "We struggled with all projects...we had no clue how to start". After a few months of exposure to communicative and student-centered instruction, students gradually acquired the courage to participate. As one participant explained, "in US teacher wants students to create and have own experience, own opinion so Chinese have more knowledge than American students – we cannot choose subjects before high school but we have no creativity unlike American students". On the concepts of teacher as expert and content knowledge, below are some additional quotes:

*"My teacher knows what is best for us. Back home the teacher direct lesson and choose best activities that help us learn. She gives us best information cause she know what is best for us."*

*"In Saudi Arabia, the students can not disagree with the teacher; the teachers spend a lot of time and dedicate their life to learn knowledge and give it back to their students."*

*"After getting used to the courses assignments and activities, I felt empowered and started seeing the value of the new settings. At my home country it was all spoon feeding, and the instructors were leading us with the information they think we should know."*

### **High Power & Classroom Interaction**

Discipline and prestige were two common concepts that participants described. In high-power cultures, classroom environment is viewed as disciplined, assertive, structured, and competitive where working hard and following instructions are an obligation. Teachers are the sole managers of the classroom and they are the ones that set classroom rules. These rules regulate students' behavior. Rewards and punishments are preset.

Competition is promoted and only high achievers are praised. Students avoid conflicts, abide by classroom rules, and will not confront the teacher or any authoritative school figure. Education in high power cultures is that of social acceptance, prestige and a pathway to betterment of social and economic status. Instruction is highly regarded and is taken seriously. Teachers are highly regarded and respected. Individuals who pursue education especially abroad are respected within ones social environment.

**Discipline.** Participants in this study explained that any form of disagreement with the teacher regarding the content, classroom activity, or homework assignment is not possible. The teacher “should always be respected” as most participants said. Respect is exhibited by paying attention, never speaking unless asked, and certainly not eating or drinking in the classroom. In fact, participants were surprised by other students’ “have no discipline when they make trouble in class”. Both groups expressed their “shock” when students bring drinks and food into the classroom as this is “not allowed back home”. Students also expressed their disbelief when students questioned the teacher “I was surprised to see student asking the teacher to take out homework” and “one time, the teacher asked one student to leave because he kept on talking back to her”. “I was shocked to see teachers smile in the classroom”. “We could actually walk up and speak to the teacher after class”. Participants revealed their unshared silent struggles fearing potential conflicts with the teacher.

**Prestige.** Both Chinese and Saudi participants emphasized the value of the education they are receiving. “My parent pay for me to get my education...it means a lot to them”; “I want to make my family proud”; “my friends in China envy me...education in US superior”. Saudi participants revealed loyalty to their country by completing their education. One participant expressed that “finishing my graduate studies will help my country” and “I want to go back to make a difference in my society and family”. On the concepts of discipline and prestige, below are some additional quotes:

*“My parents pay a lot of money for me to come and learn in the States; I am proud; It is a unique opportunity to be here because the education I am receiving will be valuable back home; everyone will be happy and proud.”*

*“One surprising thing in classroom in States is no discipline because students do not behave same back home, students talk free and I never see a relaxed classroom bring food and drinks teacher ok, but home students expected to be quiet and listen to lecture”*

*“Students in Saudi Arabia obey the rules, they are not allowed to talk if not asked, we can never work in groups, we can never talk discuss together, it’s hard to talk in class especially all the class”*

### **Collectivism & Pedagogy**

Positive association with what is known and accommodating others were shared beliefs of participants in this study. Education in collectivist cultures is that of social acceptance, prestige and a pathway to betterment of social and economic status. Instruction is highly regarded and is taken seriously. Commitment to the group is key. Students are loyal to others from similar background, they would be more loyal to teachers with similar background. Nonetheless, none of the students indicated any preference for substituting their teachers with others from similar cultural background. Loyalty to the teacher is imminent.

**Positive association.** Most participants expressed open-mindedness to new teaching methodologies. Almost all non-graduate participants expressed challenge they face is in the method of instruction. “I don’t like many classroom activities”; “Different teachers have

different styles - presentations need creativity that's challenging but if you give me a test I can do well"; "at first, I did not like the homework and group discussion, but now I am used to it". Almost all participants expressed their dislike for presentations "I still do not like to present in class...I record my part when I can." and "I am not comfortable presenting in class...I do it with a lot of difficulty." The majority expressed their preference to traditional classroom instruction. "I like to read in class and teacher give answers"; "I prefer to complete activities in class" and "I am better at exams." Others participants expressed their preference to "work alone... I am more productive". Most of participants except graduate students preferred working with students from similar cultural backgrounds. "Working with friends like me helped me" and "whenever I can, I always ask my friends for their help". Students were excited by the idea of a syllabus. To some students, this was viewed as a "contract" that they had to uphold part of respecting the teacher and duty. This syllabus provided a concrete association and assurance regarding classroom practices, expectations, and grades.

**Accommodating others.** Some participants expressed acceptance in the new teaching methodology. "I do not like working in groups and talking about my ideas", "It is very difficult to express my ideas to others but I have to do it" and "I have to do my role. It is my duty". Students appreciated classroom examples that utilized elements of their culture. Participants expressed their joy in sharing information about their background. "I like it when I share about my country" and "it feels good...when I know the content makes me proud". On the concepts of positive association and accommodating others, below are some additional quotes:

*"Even though I am not comfortable working in groups, it is a challenge, but I do it for my group, a lot of stress to do group work and presentations but we have to get used to this, cannot fail group, never used to work in groups until I came to the States; I taught me responsibility towards my teacher and class."*

*"My least favorite classwork is research, I like when I know what to study, I can memorize, I prefer multiple choice exam and not research or presentation"*

*"I was asked to make a poster as an assignment for one of my graduate courses, I never did one at my home country, I talked with my professor, and she helped me understand what I have to do."*

### **Collectivism & Classroom Interaction**

Harmony and selflessness were shared beliefs of participants in this study. In collectivist societies, being part of a group is key. Harmony and coherence in class is an obligation. Education is a mean for improving social status. Parents, family or government supported many participants to complete their studies. International students immediately look for similar groups. The classroom is considered their cultural microcosm. Therefore, individuals from collectivist societies maintain group spirit and embrace selflessness.

**Harmony.** In collectivist societies, gaining prestige is important while losing face is detrimental. According to Hodkinson & Poropat, this is achieved by exhibiting knowledge and studios behavior (2014). Loss of face involves embarrassment by either asking or answering too many questions in the classroom. In this study, several participants expressed fear of participating in class. As one student put it "scared of being mocked" which leads to shame. All participants agreed that feeling accepted in the classroom is crucial. Participants expressed challenging transition time from "the new student" to getting to know the others. "First weeks, I felt like a stranger". Acculturation happened after friendships and relationships are established. In both groups, participants managed to make friends from different cultures. However, almost all participants agreed that the majority of close friendships were from the same culture. This had a positive impact on

their school performance. Almost all participants expressed that working with individuals from other cultures helped them learn new things although most still “prefer to work and study alone.” Hodkinson & Poropat report that the “silent Chinese student” maybe be more knowledgeable than they appear which leads to difficulties for Western educators (2014).

**Selflessness.** In collectivist cultures, the classroom is a microcosm in which individuals maintain a cooperative and considerate spirit. This spirit is reflected in students’ willingness to work with others despite nervousness when working with groups and expressed fear of being shamed if they do not perform well. Preference remains to studying “by myself, but in class I don’t mind groups”. Others expressed that “working with American students make me uncomfortable” but “I will do my best to make group work successful”. Despite participants’ feelings that “American students have much advantage especially the language” and “I feel inferior when we work together in class and we have to present together”, most participants felt that they are more concerned with accomplishing their goal of learning English or attaining their degrees. This educational experience was “especially difficult due to being away from my family”; “I have to finish and go back home to my family”; “whatever situation I have to continue and be patient”. All participants expressed the need to have group support. On the concepts of harmony and selflessness, below are some additional quotes:

*“Grading the homework and assignments were very different from where I am, I was always told that I have correct answers but they are short answers, I had to go to the library to seek help and learn the US way”*

*“The first months were tough, I felt that everyone looked at me down just because my country of origin, one colleague even said to me, I am impressed with your quality, I thought people over there don’t go to graduate schools”*

*“At the beginning of the semester I was overwhelmed with the assignments and the use of all the technologies. But with advancement in technology learning became more of a partnership between the professor and students.”*

## Discussion

The study aimed to explore international students’ intercultural competence of Saudi and Chinese students and describe how their perceived cultural differences impact their learning experiences in relation to pedagogical approaches and classroom interaction in western higher education. The results of the focus group revealed that students from high power collectivist societies face major challenges in the classroom related to pedagogy and classroom interaction. Teacher expertise, importance of content knowledge, positive association and accommodating others, discipline, prestige, harmony, and selflessness were concepts were the notions uncovered.

The study revealed traditional pedagogical methods these two cultures implement. Due to hierarchical and collectivist values, individuals are conditioned to accept and expect these pedagogical approaches. In such culture, these approaches turn into values. International students in western higher education institutions must acclimate not only to new value system but to a new andragogical approach. According to Knowles (1984, p. 43), andragogy is “the art and science of helping adults learn”.

Andragogy is an adult centered teaching approach that takes into account adults’ experiences, self-directedness, motivation, and totality of the learning experience. In adult education classroom, the teacher is not the ultimate authority. The student is. The teacher does not control the content. The student partakes in topic selection. The students is active and interactive. Classroom environment is cooperative and collaborative. Students are expected to be autonomous learners.

International students from China and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia confront inconsistencies in teaching approaches. Students implicitly learn to become self-directed, interactive, and cooperative. They learn to rely on each other. They learn to speak out, share ideas, and communicate openly. Life-long learning, self-directedness, group projects, in-class discussions, peer teaching, presentations become welcomed proficiencies.

The focus group yielded constructive views regarding student adaptation in a culturally distinct teaching space. All participants agreed that studying in the United States helped them improve their lives. Awareness of cultural differences increased their open-mindedness which promoted academic and cultural adjustments. Participants expressed appreciation of learning as a process and not just a purpose.

Participants from Saudi Arabia expressed great motivation and willingness to adapt to western teaching methods. Despite Saudi Arabia's great respect for established beliefs and behavior, Saudi students exhibited perseverance in unfamiliar teachings. Saudi students revealed interest in undertaking new challenges. Saudi males seemed to show more flexibility than females when it comes to cultural adjustments. All males explained how they tend to "act more modern with their foreign classmates" nonetheless "traditional" with their Saudi friends. Saudi males are open to work in groups, but female Saudi participants are more reserved. They prefer to work individually and feel they would still conduct themselves the same way with all their classmates.

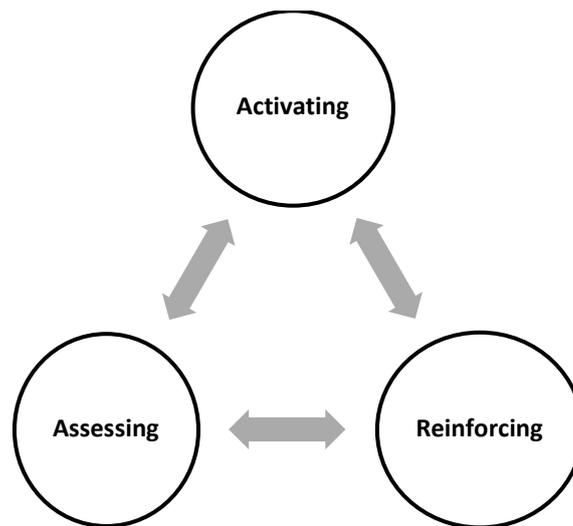
Chinese students conveyed openness and willingness to modern learning methodologies. They displayed pragmatic willingness to adapt to new conditions while maintaining result-oriented goals. Chinese students emphasized realization of cultural variations in "flipped classroom roles". Both female and male Chinese participants expressed difficulty in being self-directed. Communication and creativity were identified as the two skills that need to be enhanced the most. All participants consider working alone improves performance and avoids distraction.

### **Implications**

The findings of this study highlighted cross-cultural gaps in two distinct cultures and education systems. The findings offer teachers, researchers, and policy makers a new direction in tackling international students' intercultural competence and classroom practices. The findings echo Vallaster (2005) and Larkey (1996) calling for a cross-cultural sharing of perceptions and frames of reference. This frame includes instructional teaching methods and classroom interaction. Integrating cultural awareness into the classroom necessitate instructional strategies grounded in pedagogical and andragogical approaches.

### **Three-Step Approach**

This three-step approach, shown in figure 2, aims to promote cultural awareness utilizing pedagogical and andragogical methods and practices. It facilitates students' academic and cultural adjustments while enhancing student intercultural competence. The three-step approach comprises common instructional strategies: activating, reinforcing, and assessing.



**Figure 2. Three-step approach for promoting cultural awareness in the classroom.**

**Activating** prior cultural knowledge. Activating students' prior cultural knowledge help students link past experiences with new information. In this case past experiences with new classroom culture. This process supports values of collectivism, harmony and selflessness. It enhances students' self-awareness and encourages respect and tolerance. The following is an example.

**A classroom concept visualization:** A whole-class activity that takes place at the beginning of the semester. Students and teacher brainstorm classroom expectations. The teacher utilizes this opportunity to discuss student role and teacher role in the classroom. Students are encouraged to offer ideas. International students would share ideas from their culture. This activity bridge cultural differences.

It is important to students to recognize their customary values in order to understand the new culture. Deardorff (2006) refers to them as internal and external outcomes. Knowledge of the unknown achieves sound transitions between pre-existing and forthcoming mental programming. It is crucial to implement culture related preliminary activities in the classroom. These activities enhance the cultural knowledge and skills of the students and sets the right attitude. These activities should translate into customary classroom practices.

**Reinforcing** cultural awareness through active learning. Learning takes place through social interactions. The socio-cultural theory emphasizes the importance of learning through interaction. Cultural knowledge is best learned when students work together. This activity supports values of hierarchy, collectivism, positive association and accommodating others. The following is an example.

**Project-Based learning:** Students work together to develop knowledge, skills, and solve problems. Students work together and seek each other's experience to achieve one goal. This strategy may be solely used to promote intercultural competence or may be embedded in authentic learning experiences relevant to culture.

In high power cultures, course objectives are righteous and regarded with great respect. Individuals from high power cultures will not question the teacher (authority). Although optimistic about guidance, they are expecting inequality. Hence, instructors should consider classroom, assignment, and/or syllabus instructions as an agreement that sets clear expectations of equality and puts both the teacher and the student on equal footing. Since, individuals from high power societies will not question nor initiate a dialogue, the teacher must explicitly explain the instructions and provide examples and

rubrics.

**Assessing** intercultural growth. Assessment is a crucial element in the teaching and learning cycle. It can be formative or summative. It is crucial to assess students' cultural awareness.

***Reflections:*** Reflections can be used to build stronger learning experiences. Reflections assess students learning and promote self-actualization and provide feedback. Reflecting on culturally related assignments, topics, classroom events, teaching and practices allow students to analyze their learning and relate it to their daily lives.

Integrating cross-cultural elements into course objectives and learning outcomes are achieved by considering students' cultural background as well as learning traditions. Education institutions strive to provide students with opportunities to explore cross-cultural topics, friendships, and engage in authentic cross-cultural experiences. Educators must account students' pedagogical practices and facilitate their journey towards embracing the andragogical model of learning.

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