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A Case Study of the Learning Preferences of Chinese Distance Learners

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Abstract

This study is primarily concerned with two overarching "how" questions. The first question is "how are the teaching, learning and assessment preferences of Chinese Hong Kong learners met by the distance learning courses offered?" Specifically it concerns the feasibility of transferring a western course to the Hong Kong market. The second question interrogates the usefulness of models that measure learning style in categorising learners and making recommendations from them regarding their learning preferences. To enable these questions to be answered six research propositions concerning the learning preferences of Chinese learners were identified.

A comprehensive literature review was undertaken. This was founded upon two theoretical building blocks of national culture and learning style theory. This exploration of cultural theory is extended to an examination of differences in Chinese culture that may impact upon educational preferences. To investigate the second building block of learning style theory, certain theories of learning style that attempt to measure learning style are critically examined in depth.

To bring cultural differences and learning style theory together a capstone is used. This capstone is six learning preferences of the Chinese learner. These preferences are founded upon application of cultural and learning style theory and other, mainly western perceptions, of the Chinese learner. This section of the literature provides a bridge between cultural and learning style theory and the research.

The research questions are answered by using a single case study. The case study focuses upon the teaching, learning and assessment preferences of twenty-five Hong Kong Chinese students studying for two UK Higher Education awards by distance learning.

The study makes three contributions to knowledge. First, the study concludes that in transferring the courses from the British culture to the Hong Kong Chinese culture that the study materials in a western context may be appropriate but the method of delivery may not. Second, applying measurements of learning style to national groups is challenged as inappropriate methods of teaching and learning may be advocated and appropriate methods may be ignored. Finally, of the theoretical propositions, only two are supported. These are that this group of learners dislikes classroom discussion and that the role of the teacher/lecturer is didactic.

Acknowledgements

Over the course of this Doctorate in Education, many people have helped, encouraged and inspired me to complete this work. I send my heartfelt thanks to all of you.

I particularly wish to acknowledge three groups of people.

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Next, I would like to thank my Ed. D. colleagues and friends, Stephen Ball, Susan Horner and Peter Spencer. It is my belief that we kept each other going. Together, we have helped each other to achieve our collective ambition.

Last I wish to give great thanks to all of my family and friends. Principally, I wish to send my love to my loving wife, Christine and my beautiful daughters, Lucie and Katie. Thank you for your help, encouragement and forbearance. Please accept my apologies for abandoning you to your own devices while I wrote the dissertation.

Dedication

I wish to dedicate this dissertation to the loving memory of my parents, Ken and Irene. They would have been so proud.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Understanding culture, particularly the cultures of others is thought to be one of the major attributes of twenty-first century management (Moran and Riesenberger, 1996). With this and with the increasing number of Chinese students who are being educated by United Kingdom Universities in mind I wish to investigate the learning preferences of a specific group of Chinese students. In doing this I seek to gain a level of understanding that is beyond that of our nineteenth century forefathers described by Stella Dong.

"As for the Chinese, they were baffled at the inordinate amounts of time and energy westerners devoted to games, chalking it up to another foreign devil eccentricity. That white men paid servants to do their cooking, cleaning and laundering but spent a day swatting a ball back and forth in the sun seemed the height of absurdity to Chinese. "Belong foreign man custom," they would mutter upon these occasions.

Needless to say Westerners similarly regarded most Chinese customs as bizarre."

Dong (2000), page 31

Aims and Objectives

The aim of this dissertation is to investigate the preferred learning, teaching and assessment styles of Hong Kong Chinese students studying for School of Sport and Leisure Management courses by distance learning in Hong Kong. In doing this I shall examine whether the teaching, learning and assessment strategies used take account of these preferences and are suitable for these students. Furthermore because of the nature of the courses I will be exploring teaching, learning and assessment styles within a distance learning context and a cross-cultural context.

Objectives

The objectives of the dissertation are to:

1. Investigate whether preferences for specific teaching, learning and assessment strategies differ with national culture.

2. Examine the major work on the different learning styles that exist.

3. Analyse, from the literature, whether certain teaching, learning and assessment styles and strategies are preferred by Chinese students.

4. Investigate whether the preferences highlighted in 3 above apply to students undertaking SLM's course in Hong Kong.

5. Evaluate the distance learning provision as operated by SLM in terms of it meeting the learning needs of its Chinese students in Hong Kong. If it does not meet these needs to suggest how its provision may be improved for the good of the learner.

I will seek to make an original contribution to cross-cultural teaching, learning and assessment. I will do this in the specific context of distance learning courses operated outside of the host country. This is a growing area of provision that is insufficiently researched.

Previous work has been defined in a western culture and has concerned direct classroom-based teaching, learning and assessment. Some small scale work has been done with regard to concepts of learning style and culture. However, most of this has merely transferred instruments for "measuring" learning styles and preferences from one culture to another. The applicability of neither the instrument nor the concept were considered. Very little of this has been researched in a distance learning context.

Context

The accelerating globalisation of trade in goods and services has been met with an increasing internationalisation of Higher Education (H. E). That the H. E. sector has become more internationalised is hardly surprising, as it has had an international dimension for some time. For many years British and American universities have sought to educate international students The openings brought about by new technologies such as the Internet for alternative forms of provision such as distance learning have made it such that opportunities for further internationalisation of H.E. have never been better. Changes in funding and the lack of opportunity in domestic markets have brought about further impetus for internationalisation. When these factors are coupled with the premium fees paid by overseas students this means that for some universities internationalisation has become an economic necessity (Craft et al, 1998).

It is within this context that the School of Sport and Leisure Management has invested heavily in distance learning education at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Initially the courses were offered within the UK only. However, in 1996 the decision was taken to offer the courses in Hong Kong. The reasons for this movement included a reaction to a possible decline in the British market, perceived opportunities in Hong Kong and a “push” from a potential agent (Jones and Pizam, 1992).

Distance learning courses offered by the School of Sport and Leisure Management in Hong Kong

The focus of the research in this proposal is the distance learning courses offered by the School of Sport and Leisure Management in Hong Kong. These are a M. Sc. Management and a B.Sc. both in Hospitality Management. The postgraduate courses have been offered in Hong Kong from 1996. The number of new students has averaged six per year. These numbers were bolstered by the addition of the top-up degree in 2001 – 2002 when 22 students were recruited to this route. In total 36 postgraduate students have been educated in Hong Kong and one cohort of undergraduate students.

The postgraduate course comprises four generic management units, four hospitality specific units and a dissertation. The undergraduate course is a "top-up" degree offered to students who have a Higher National Diploma or equivalent. The course comprises six hospitality modules and a short dissertation. All units are written to the same template and are assembled in the form of a study pack. All learning materials are written and devised by the School's teaching staff. In addition to the study packs the students are provided with all textbooks, journal articles and other source materials. Additional arrangements have been made that allow students to use the library offered the School's agent in Hong Kong and to access other libraries in Hong Kong.

In addition to the study packs, learning also takes place at study schools that are held in Hong Kong on three occasions each year. The purpose of the study schools is to introduce students to studying at master's or undergraduate levels, the individual units and to the assessment package for the taught units. The study schools take place in the evenings and at weekends. Each member of staff will have a "slot" for their subject of approximately six hours. Aside from the study schools contact between students and tutors takes place by e-mail, fax and telephone on a need basis. There is, as yet, no policy of offering the course via the Internet although undergraduate Strategic Management is offered in electronic and paper forms.

All assessment is by coursework. Typically the assessments should include essays, projects, reports and case studies and a dissertation. In practice reports and essays are used to assess most units.

The model of distance learning used in the study packs is the "teacher" model (Simpson, 2001). In this model the teacher aims to reduce the distance in distance

learning by writing the text as if a class was taking place. Express teaching objectives are given. The text is structured as if they were a class. Clarity comes from self–test questions and exercises. This is very similar to the structure of the study packs in which the materials are written as though the student is present; the student is guided through the chapters. Each chapter should be read in sequence and self help tests and other activities are provided to help the student to check her/his understanding.
At the study schools teaching is conventional in that it is face to face and takes place in classrooms.

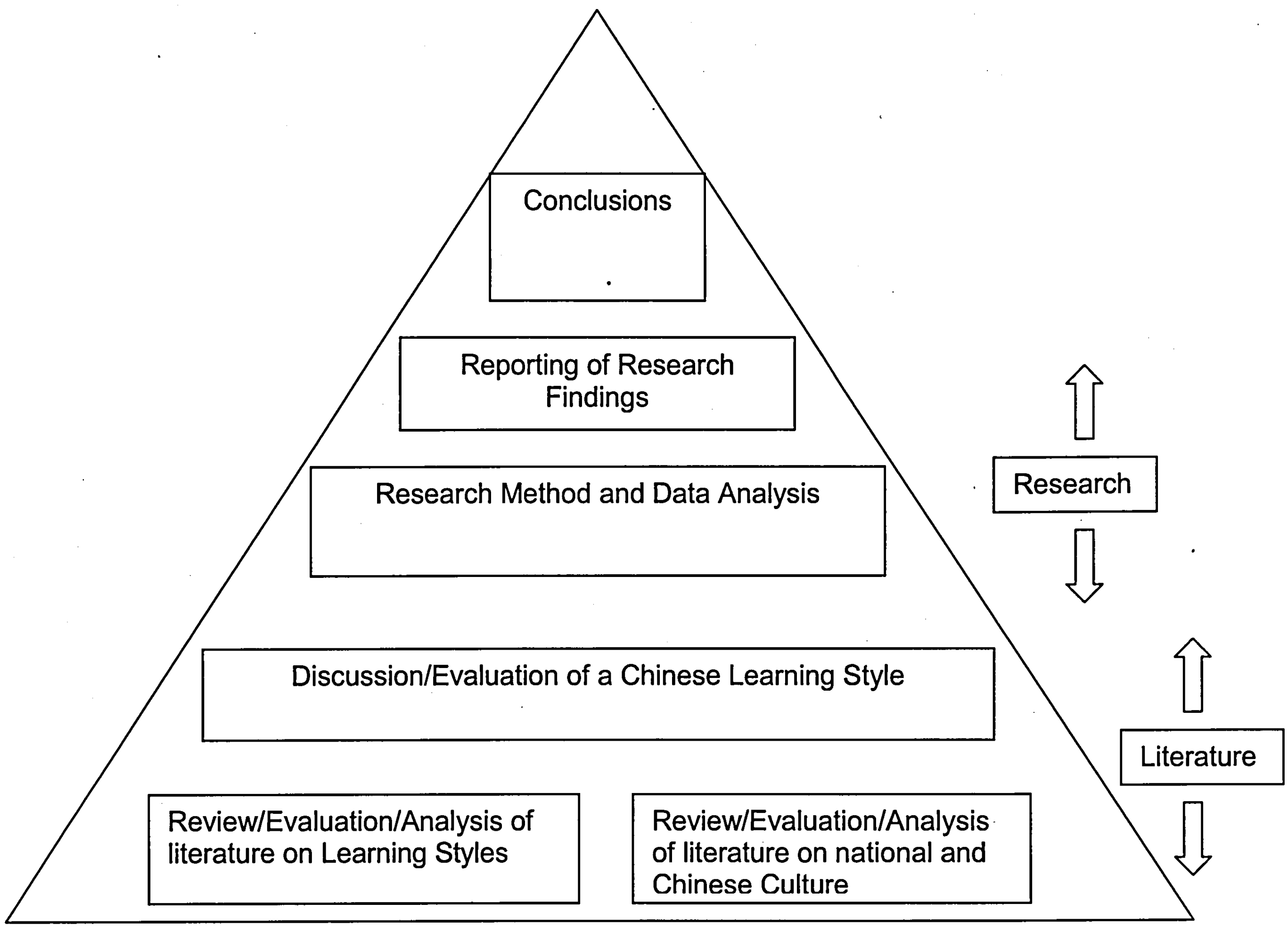
From the outset the move in to the Hong Kong market has made no recognition of national culture in terms of changes to teaching materials or learning, teaching and assessment. No member of staff has had any culture awareness training. National culture of other potential markets and students has not been considered within course and unit planning or teaching, learning and assessment. This is contrary to the limited literature regarding international distance learning provision. In this literature the general advice is that the cultural implications of materials, teacher-student interaction and language should be a consideration (McPhee and Nohn, 2000; Thompson and Gui, 2000a; Maxwell et al, 2000). It is also contrary to business advice and advice now stemming from educational research that western systems cannot be simply transferred to other cultures and that one "McDonaldised" product cannot be offered in any market place (Ritzer, 1996). Within the hospitality industry an appreciation and understanding of national cultures is now regarded as important to survival and to product quality (Nield, 1995; Kozak and Nield, 1998).

Ignorance of national culture may appear to be inappropriate. However, this omission is by no means solely confined to Sheffield Hallam University. Craft et al (1998) report that western courses offered in Hong Kong are purely and simply western. The language of delivery is English; the materials are western and the examples are western. If a programme is to be approved by the Hong Kong government the only criterion is that it is of a comparable standard with that in the home country. There is no requirement that the course is culturally or country specific. This omission has in part given rise to my study question.

Structure of the Dissertation

The dissertation is in eight chapters. For purposes of clarity it is my intention that the chapters follow on from each other in a logical and sequential manner. As a consequence of this thinking the dissertation is structured as pyramid shown in figure 1.1 below. At the base of the pyramid are the two bodies of theory reflecting upon national and Chinese culture and learning styles. These two bodies of theory are the building blocks of the dissertation. From this literature a picture of a possible Chinese learning style is posited. This learning style allows six theoretical propositions to be put forward, with these propositions being tested by case study research. The results of this research are described and analysed leading to conclusions and recommendations that are the end point or top of the pyramid.

Figure 1.1: Structure of dissertation



Underpinnings of the Dissertation

This dissertation is primarily concerned with investigating the issues of transferring an academic course without modification that has been designed and delivered in the UK to Hong Kong. The dissertation investigates the issues and problems that arise when one transfers a course from one culture to another without making any changes for the new students. To do this I considered it was necessary to examine national culture and learning styles.

The starting point for the dissertation will be to examine national culture in order to identify how, if at all, national cultures differ. If national cultures are found to be different the dissertation will proceed by examining how Chinese culture may be different and how this may impact upon preferences for learning and teaching implied in the course delivery as developed.

Next, learning style literature will be examined in order to comprehend the meaning and usage of learning styles, and to establish how, if at all, they are applied to national groups. Currently, learning styles are of significant interest in education and there are many debates (Reynolds, 1998; Uttley, 2004) concerning the usefulness of measures that purport to measure learning styles. Some of these measures have been used to measure the learning styles of Chinese students as a national group. The dissertation will consider whether measuring the learning styles of this national group may lead to a stereotypical view of the Chinese learner.

Culture is a complex notion that could be approached from a number of standpoints that include anthropological, sociological and psychological views. Whilst acknowledging these perspectives, it is my intention in this dissertation to examine national culture from the managerial perspective concentrating mainly upon Hofstede's model of national culture.

There are two main reasons for choosing to use Hofstede's model. The first of these is the constraints of this study. These constraints include distance and the need to respect a time limit. Specifically, this means that I have to conduct the research at a distance and the research can take no longer than the length of the taught component of the top-up course being examined. This time constraint is one academic year.

The second reason is, the need for tools and a framework for analysis of data. Hofstede provides a framework as his analysis is concerned specifically with national culture and dimensions of culture that may be at the root of differences in national cultures. Given the nature of the courses and the learners, the managerial perspective is appropriate for this dissertation. Hofstede's and other managerial models of national culture will be examined in depth in Chapter 2.

Similarly, the construct of learning styles is also complex. Over twenty-one models of learning style have been identified (Curry, 1983). In many cases these models appear to conflict with and contradict each other. They are confused and confusing in that all of the models have the term "learning style" attached to them. Yet they measure different things, have different dimensions and different outcomes. Within this dissertation it will not be possible to study all of the models. As most of the models of learning styles were developed in the west, they may therefore be culturally specific. For this reason only those models that have been used wholly or in part with Chinese learners will be examined. Models of learning style are examined in Chapter 4.

Chapter Contents.

Chapter 1 Introduction

This gives the aims and objectives, context, structure and research method of the dissertation. It sets the scene for dissertation.

Chapter 2 National Culture and Chapter 3 Chinese Culture

Chapters 2 and 3 draw upon theory to answer the question "do national cultures differ?" Having explored the generic theory in chapter 2, the question is extended to Chinese culture.

Chapter 4 Learning Styles

Chapter 4 examines learning style theory, in doing this it gives the second set of theoretical underpinnings of the dissertation. The purpose of this chapter is to consider different theories of how people learn and how teaching, learning and assessment preferences may be different for different people.

This chapter is divided into four groups of learning styles.

Grouping 1 evaluates models of learning styles based upon the learning process. It focuses on the models of Kolb (1976; 2000) and Honey and Mumford (1986a; 1986b; 1992).

Grouping 2 evaluates models grounded in orientation to study. It focuses on the models of deep, surface and strategic learning.

Groupings 3 and 4 evaluate models of instructional preference and cognitive style development.

Chapter 5: A Chinese Learning Style?

This chapter brings together the two theoretical underpinnings of the dissertation. This chapter brings together national culture and learning styles and asks if there are specific Chinese preferences for teaching, learning and assessment. Using a combination of theory and observation it asks if there is a generic Chinese learning style.

Chapter 6 Research

Research is divided into four sections.

Section 1 introduces and explains the research philosophy of the dissertation.

Section 2 introduces case study as the research method to be used in this dissertation. It gives a rationale for using case study research and explains how this research method developed over the course of this study.

Section 3 explains the process of research design within the dissertation. It explains how the research has been designed and the research propositions formulated.

Section 4 outlines and develops the principles of data collection used in the study. It pays particular attention to the development of data collection methods used in the study.

Section 5 introduces and explains data analysis and the techniques that were used to analyse data in this dissertation.

Chapter 7: Research Findings

The research findings are divided in to six sections. They are presented against the six research propositions used within the dissertation. These propositions are analysed using and taking in turn multiple sources of evidence against each of them.

The six sections are curriculum content; teaching and learning strategies; the role of the teacher/lecturer; the Chinese as rote learners and classroom discussion and learning.

Chapter 8: Conclusions, Recommendations and Limitations

This final chapter gives the conclusion, recommendations and limitations of the study. Along with the conclusions of the study it critiques the research and its findings. It features the impact of the study on professional practice and its contributions to knowledge.

Positionality and Research Method

Positionality Statement

Before outlining the research method that will used in this dissertation it will be beneficial if I were to give a positionality statement. My first degree is in econometrics and my second is in management. In the course of these two degrees the research methodology taught and used was almost solely positivist.

In my career I have been involved in several large-scale research projects, principally in the areas of tourism satisfaction and quality systems. The research instruments used in these research projects have been large-scale questionnaires (3000 respondents in one case).

As a consequence the research training on the Ed. D. has been to open my mind to other methods. I have now come to understand the merits and demerits of qualitative research.. It is this new understanding that has helped to move my research position and to conduct a case study in this research.

Research Method

The research method for this dissertation is that of an intrinsic case study, i.e., that the issues are discussed through the study of the particular case of Chinese learners in Hong Kong. The case in question is that of a distinct group of Hong Kong students undertaking two Sheffield Hallam University's distance-learning courses in Hong Kong. The proposed research is essentially explanatory. There is a need to develop knowledge about these ideas in a different cultural context (in this case Hong Kong Chinese) and a different learning context (distance learning). The use of case study will allow different methods and depths of investigation to be used in constructing the case study.

Data Collection

One of the particular attractions of a case study for this research is that the data collection can rely on varied and different sources of evidence (Yin, 2003; Hammersley and Gomm, 2000; Johns and Lee-Ross, 1998: Stake, 1998; Feagan et al, 1991). None of these sources preclude any others. In this case study the following sources of evidence have been used:

i. A self-completed questionnaire that includes closed and open-ended questions. This questionnaire was delivered in Hong Kong in January 2003, its purpose was to elicit from the students what their preferences are in terms of teaching, learning and assessment. This purpose of the questionnaire is to give a rich source of data and to give a picture of this group of students' preferences with regard to teaching, learning and assessment.

ii. E-mail interviews with students. These were completed from May to July 2003. The intention of these was to triangulate with the other sources of evidence and take further any matters arising from the questionnaire analysis and, specifically to corroborate other sources and to help make recommendations with regard to teaching, learning and assessment of Chinese students.

iii. Interviews with staff. Seven staff who have taught study schools in Hong Kong were interviewed in October 2002. The intention of the interviews was to gain staff's opinions with regard to Chinese students, specifically, to elicit their opinion of Chinese students and to attempt to discover what teaching methods and strategies have been employed. Further to find out whether staff have altered their teaching styles to fit a perceived differences in the learning styles of Chinese students.

iv. Archive sources. Assessment instruments used with the Hong Kong students over the past two years have been investigated with regard to the demands that place upon the students in terms of analysis and structure. Assignment marks of both Hong Kong and non-Hong Kong students have been averaged to compare outcomes of the different student groups with regard to different assignment types and academic subjects.

These research methods are particularly appropriate to this case study as it concerns human affairs. The combination of interviews, archive analysis and a content analysis based on a form of interview provide valuable insights into the learning styles and learning, teaching and assessment preferences of the students in this case study (Yin, 2003).

Chinese Culture

This dissertation concerns culture and learning preferences. It concentrates upon Chinese culture. In the literature, Chinese culture is used as a term to encompass all cultural values held by Chinese people regardless of where they live, that is, people from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and Mainland China all share the same culture (Fan, 2000). The notion of one Chinese culture being applicable to the case study group may be incorrect as this case study group are Hong Kong Chinese who as a consequence of social, political and economic differences be culturally different from the mainland Chinese. Their educational backgrounds and social status may also be such that they are not representative of Hong Kong Chinese and the consequence of this would be that this work would not be generalisable to the Chinese population.

Although Hong Kong has been a Special Administrative Region of China from 1997 the two nations are socially very different. For example, 92% of Mainland China's population are described as Han Chinese, the country is officially atheist, and the standard language is Mandarin. By contrast, Hong Kong's population is described as 95% Chinese, religion is a mix of "local religion" and Christianity and the official languages are Cantonese and English (C. I. A., 2003)

Hong Kong and China are politically different. China is a communist state with no substantial opposition parties. Its judicial system is a complicated amalgam of custom and statute. Hong Kong on the other hand is a limited democracy that has direct elections. Its judicial system is founded on British common law and until 1997 had been a British dependency for 100 years.

Economically, the two areas are dissimilar Ten per cent of China's population live below the poverty line. The average Gross Domestic Product per head is $4400 and 50% of employment is in agriculture. Hong Kong has no-one officially below the poverty line, Gross Domestic Product per capita is five times that of China at $26,000; economically the majority of the population are engaged in the service sector (C. I. A., 2003). As a consequence of these differences it may be that Chinese and Hong Kong Chinese cultures are different.

While the social, political and economic differences between the Chinese nations are acknowledged there is a view that all Chinese have core values that are unique and consistent that have been shaped by 4000 years of history. It is these core values that determine Chinese national culture (Fan, 2000). This view is fairly consistent throughout the literature; little or no attempt is made to differentiate the different Chinese nationalities. Barron and Arcodia (2002) also subscribe to this view when they describe the enduring significance of Confucianism to East Asian countries.

The case study group may also be culturally different to other Hong Kong Chinese as a consequence of their occupations and social positions. The students taking the course are all self-financing. They are hospitality professionals and are in middle to senior management positions. They are quite wealthy; this is evidenced by their ability to pay the course fees of £7000 for a postgraduate course and £4200 for the undergraduate course. All of the students have been educated to at least the equivalent of Higher National Diploma level.

The differences between Hong Kong and mainland China and those between the case study group and other Hong Kong citizens are of utmost importance to this study as the majority of the literature assumes one Chinese culture regardless of economic, political or social background.

CHAPTER 2

NATIONAL CULTURE

The purpose of this chapter is to examine national culture. Specifically I will seek to establish whether there is evidence that different national cultures differ from one another. This is important to this dissertation as if national cultures are different these differences may impact upon preferences for teaching, learning and assessment that are at the heart of this dissertation.

The major works that will be examined in this chapter will be single and multi-dimension models of national culture. All of these models stem from the managerial models of culture. The reason for this choice is that these models unlike those from other disciplines deal specifically with the issue of **national** culture. Importantly, for this research, they attempt to identify dimensions that make national cultures different from each other.

Moran and Riesenberger (1996) believe that in the world of business and management culture in its general sense has become accepted as an important and constitutive element. This importance was given further impetus in survey in which understanding culture and the national cultures of others accounted for 3 of the 12 key competencies for the twenty-first century manager (Thunderbird's World Business Advisory).

Arriving at a commonly accepted definition of culture is fraught with difficulties. Williams (1983) warns that 'culture' is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language. As early as 1952 Kroeber and Kluckhohn collected and analysed 164 definitions and well over one hundred statements about culture. As Groeschl and Doherty (2000) point out the importance of culture is recognised by researchers in many different fields yet there is no agreement as to its definition.

Instead of discussing diverse and contrasting definitions of culture it is more productive to turn immediately to national culture and the work of Pizam (1993). He notes the abundance of definitions of national culture and their apparent lack of consensus. He points out that the definitions have commonality in that national culture is a social mechanism that guides and shapes people's thoughts, values and beliefs, and finally controls their behaviour. This fits quite neatly with Hofstede (1980; 1991; 2001) who is possibly the most quoted authority on national culture. He suggests that national culture is a collective mental, programming of the people of a nationality. He further suggests that people share a collective national character that shapes their values, attitudes, competencies, behaviour and perceptions of priority. In short, people of a nation have a cultural mental programming. This will be used as the working definition of culture within this dissertation.

Models of National Culture

To answer the question – "do national cultures differ?" It is appropriate to consider the models of national culture and to relate them to Chinese and western cultures. If national cultures are similar then distance learning courses offered in Hong Kong should encounter less problems than if national cultures are different.

Two types of model of national culture can be found in the management literature. These are single dimensional models where countries are classified culturally on the basis of one variable and multi-dimensional models where nationalities are classified on the basis of more than one variable.

Single dimension models of national culture

Three single dimension models of national culture have been identified. The first model focuses upon the dimension of context. Context refers to how individuals in any society find information and knowledge (Hall, 1976; Hall and Hall 1990). People from high context cultures are thought to obtain information from personal networks, that is, they discuss the matter with friends, acquaintances and relatives. In doing this they ask questions and listen to gossip. People from low context cultures will listen to the views of others but make decisions on the basis of research. The research will involve general reading, reports, databases, the Internet and other information sources. From Hall's research Chinese people was the second highest context culture while British people were the 5th lowest low context culture. A consequence of this research may be that taking methods of investigation from one culture to another may be inappropriate. In education this may have implications for research methodology. This context theory is untested in an educational perspective.

The second single dimension model distinguishes between monochronic and polychronic cultures (Lewis, 1992). People from monochronic cultures act in a focused manner, they concentrate on one thing at a time and in a set time span. On the other hand people from polychronic cultures are flexible; they are able to do many things at the same time. They are opportunistic and do not work to set times. It is argued that in a management setting a mixture of monochronic and polychronic cultures will lead to culture clashes and disagreement (Morden, 1995). In this research British people were the 5th ranked monochronic culture while the Chinese people were the 12th ranked monochronic. This difference between the British and Chinese may mean that western management practices would not be easily transferred to a Chinese culture.

The final single dimension model distinguishes between low and high trust societies (Fukuyama, 1995). High trust societies organise the workplace on a more flexible group oriented basis, responsibility is delegated to lower levels of the organisation. Countries classified as high trust include the United States, Japan and to a lesser extent the United Kingdom. In contrast, low trust societies are bound by bureaucratic rules, they tend to fence in and isolate workers. They are familistic; they have strong family bonds but have little trust of others. Countries classified as low trust include the Latin Catholic countries, China and Russia.

Critique

The main criticism of single dimension models is that they focus on one dimension. National culture is complicated. It is too simplistic to assume that nationalities may be classified using only one dimension (Fan, 2000). While the researchers themselves may acknowledge this shortcoming, comparison along single dimension leads to contradictions between the findings of the models. As an example, on the basis of the high and low trust model, the United States and Japan are almost identical. In the other models they are cultural opposites.

Similarly, in one context the British and Chinese people are ranked reasonably closely together which may indicate that culturally they are alike, facilitating course transfer. Yet in another context they may be far enough apart in other areas to indicate cultural problems, suggesting difficulties in course transfer.

With these criticisms in mind, I shall not use these models within this dissertation. However, while I do not intend to use these models I believe that their significance lies in the fact that they indicate that national cultures are different. Furthermore, there are cultural differences or gaps between British and Chinese people. This may mean that distance learning courses taken from the UK to Hong Kong may experience cultural difficulties.

Given this, we can now turn to more complex models.

Multiple dimension models

There are two most frequently cited multiple dimension models of national culture. These models are normally referred to by the names of their researchers. These models are Trompenaars (1993); Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) and Hofstede (1980; 1991; 2001). These models will be dealt with out of chronological order and greater attention will be paid to Hofstede's work. The rationale for this is that although both models are concerned with management. Hofstede's model has, in my opinion, wider applications, is more widely quoted and appears to have a wider acceptance.

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner

This model identifies seven dimensions of national culture that are used for understanding diversity in business (Trompenaars, 1993; Hofstede, 1996; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner; 1997 and Morden, 1999). The first five of these dimensions concern relationships with others and are known as value orientations. Trompenaars describes these dimensions as abstract. The translations of these dimensions are given in parentheses. The value orientations are universalism versus particularism (rules versus relationships); individualism versus collectivism (individual versus the group); neutral versus the emotional (range of emotions expressed); specific versus diffuse (the range of involvement) and achievement versus ascription (how status is accorded). The remaining two dimensions are “orientation in time” and “attitude to the environment”.

Responses by different nationalities to questions related to the seven dimensions showed significant differences between national cultures. From these responses "advice" on dealing with cultural diversity is given.

Although this model has been attacked as flawed in terms of sample size, commercialism and the construct of the dimensions (Hofstede, 1996) it does as with the single dimension models indicate significant differences between national cultures and western and Chinese cultures.

Hofstede

Hofstede's classification of national cultures is the more famous and has more citations than any other work in the social sciences (Boonghee and Donthu, 2002). It is regarded as a classic book and a "super classic" in relation to its impressive citation record. It has averaged ninety-four citations per annum over the last two decades (Baskerville, 2003; Schneider and Barsoux, 2003). After 30 years it was updated as a second edition in 2001. Little was changed from the earlier work (Hofstede, 2001). Much of the new edition is concerned with adding in later research and defending against earlier criticisms (Boonghee and Donthu, 2002).

In his original study, Hofstede administered over 116,000 questionnaires in twenty different languages to IBM employees in 40 countries. This he called a "Morale Survey". Each questionnaire contained 150 questions based on the individual's values and beliefs about motivation, hierarchy and leadership. Upon analysis of the responses of the individuals from different countries, Hofstede identified four variables (later extended to five) with which he was able to classify all of the countries within the study into eight distinct national categories.

The four variables identified by Hofstede are:

1. *Power Distance* - the extent to which society will accept differences between the lowest and the highest. High levels of power distance i.e., where large differences are acceptable were found to exist in the Arab countries and in Malaysia, low levels were found in the West.

2. *Individualism* - the extent to which society is concerned about the individual as opposed to the group. The extent to which individuals "stand on their own two feet". In this area the US was the most individualistic whilst some South American countries were the most collectivist.

3. *Masculinity/Femininity* - the extent to which society defines roles in terms of gender e.g. men are lorry drivers; engineers etc. and women stay at home and bring up the children. In this area Japan was found to be the most masculine while Sweden and Norway were the most feminine.

4. Uncertainty Avoidance - this measures the extent to which people feel threatened by uncertain situations i.e. the extent to which they need to establish formal rules, accept absolute truths etc. Greece was found to have high uncertainty avoidance, while the UK and Eire scored relatively low in this area. In general terms it would appear that societies which have a tradition of one job for life have high uncertainty avoidance.

When these four dimensions were analysed, Hofstede was able to classify countries into one of eight national cultural types depending on the degree of the four dimensions. While not wishing to go into all of the nationality types, two are important to this study. The first is "Less Developed Asian". This classification includes Hong Kong along with Taiwan, India and Pakistan. These countries are similar as they have low uncertainty avoidance and individualism, medium masculinity and high power distance. The second is "Anglo"; this includes the United Kingdom along with Canada, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and the United States. These countries were found to have low to medium uncertainty avoidance, high individualism and masculinity and low power distance.

The significant point to note with regard to this dissertation is that the United Kingdom and Hong Kong differ in each of the dimensions. The impact that this may have on preferences for learning, teaching and assessment will be addressed in the research

One of the early criticisms of Hofstede's original work was that the questionnaires and the cultural dimensions that resulted from it were derived from the western cultural tradition. As a result of this it may be that Hofstede's work was culturally biased and that some important results were missed. A group of academics specialising in Chinese culture put together what they called the Chinese Value Survey. This work concluded that there was a direct correlation with three of Hofstede's dimensions but that another oriental dimension - Confucian Work Dynamism had been missed, indicating cultural bias in Hofstede's early work (The Chinese Culture Connection, 1987). This dimension included concepts that although stemming from Confucius would be understood by westerners but would not be given any real importance by them, for example, thrift, perseverance and persistence. This dimension which is also called long-term orientation was believed to the reason for the rise of the Asian "tiger" economies in the 1980's (Schneider and Barsoux, 2003).

Hofstede worked with the main author of the Chinese value survey, Michael Bond to add this fifth dimension - Confucian Dynamism to his model (Hofstede and Bond, 1988). This dimension applies mainly to China, Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore and Japan. In practical terms it is long term versus short-term orientation to life (Hofstede, 1991; Rodrigues, 1999; Schneider and Barsoux, 2003). This fifth dimension was added in Hofstede's work (Hofstede, 2001).

Criticisms of Hofstede's work

As would be expected work on such a scale and with such dramatic conclusions has had its share of criticism. As Hofstede (2001) later admitted his work produced reviews that were a mixture of good and bad. The major criticisms of the work were and still are:

1. The representativeness of the sample.

The sample only covers IBM employees who were at relatively high levels within the organisation. Hofstede (2001) answered some of this criticism by saying that he was measuring differences between national cultures. His assertion is that those populations were "functionally equivalent" (Hofstede, 2001 page 73). This functional equivalence can supply information about differences in national culture. The representativeness of the sample is further criticised as the numbers within it were not geographically equally spread. The sample was not representative of the nation therefore any conclusions based on the sample are dangerous. Further, the IBM employees in western nations may have represented an "average" person those in developing countries would not. The reason for this is that these respondents would have been part of an elite and therefore not representative (Boonghee and Donthu, 2002). Hofstede defended himself against this criticism by making a point of noting how well matched his samples from each nation were (Hofstede, 2001).

2. Hofstede may have confused national culture and business culture.

The questionnaire was carried out with IBM employees and was based specifically upon people's preferences in terms of management styles and the working environment (Schneider and Barsoux, 2003). These concepts and the context in which they were asked were mainly connected to employment. Therefore the answers that the respondents gave may represent a business or industry culture, not a national culture.

3. Four or five variables remains too simplistic to attempt to classify something as complicated as culture.

By dividing all national cultures on the basis of four variables may make a concept that has difficulty in even being defined too simple. By way of contrast, in the Chinese culture seventy-one variables that impact on national culture has been identified (Fan, 2000). This criticism is acknowledged by Hofstede and is rather brusquely dealt with when he writes that any additional dimensions may be added if validated, candidates "are welcome to apply" (Hofstede, 2001, page 73).

4. Equal weighting is given to all five of the variables.

The five variables may be of a lower or higher order, no attempt has been made to weight them. If a weighting scale was applied this would most probably result in different national groupings.

5. The research takes no account of regional differences.

Hofstede assumes that there is one national culture that is constant over what can be large areas both in terms of geography and diversity. This is particularly relevant with regard to China and countries that have a Confucian tradition where the culture is often assumed to be the same over an enormous population (see Chapters 1 and 3). Baskerville (2003) adds to this when she says that it may be a false assumption to equate a nation state with a culture. She reinforce her point she uses the example of Australia that has over five hundred societies, all of which may be described as cultures.

6. There are methodological problems in the original analysis.

The main problem is that after thirty years the reliability of the culture scale is unknown. Although Hofstede (2001) has defended his work he has not added to any of the statistics. As a consequence the small sample size for many of the nations included may indicate that the results are not reliable and could have arisen by statistical chance (Boonghee and Donthu, 2002).

7. The analysis is incomplete as many countries are omitted

The research omitted countries three decades ago because they did not have an IBM subsidiary. As a result there are some significant omissions that include China, Russia and other parts of the former USSR, Poland and Vietnam. African and Arabic countries are grouped together in three regions and are not given individual scores (Boonghee and Donthu, 2002).

8. Cultural variation should not be measured by statistical surveys

Hofstede (2001) cites this criticism. He acknowledges that surveys should not be the only methods used but fails to elaborate on what should be added to them.

9. Hofstede's data is now out of date and is obsolete as a consequence

The rejoinder to this is that the work has been replicated and has been validated against many different external measures. Further the dimensions that resulted from the research are centuries old. Only those dimensions that remained after two later surveys were retained (Hofstede, 2001)

Summary

The criticism of Hofstede's work may be summarised under two themes. The first theme is the sample. It is said that the original sample cannot be considered to be representative as it had no respondents from some major nationalities, e.g., the USSR; relatively few respondents from some nationalities and all of the respondents were IBM employees. The study may also be also culturally biased as the questionnaire is based on western working practices

The second theme is the analysis of the sample. Those who criticise Hofstede's work have denied that a concept that is as complex as culture may be broken down in to four or five dimensions that are given equal weighting. And that from this, national cultural types may be broken down into eight groupings. In other studies Chinese culture has had over seventy dimensions ascribed to it (Fan, 2000). Critics have seen this as essentialist and reductionist of the real diversity of the Chinese population and diaspora. As was demonstrated in Chapter 1 there are considerable economic, social, political and religious differences between mainland China and Hong Kong that make the idea of one Chinese culture improbable. Nevertheless, Chinese centralism and

Confucian influence are widely viewed as centripetal influences for Chinese culture (see Chapter 3).

Notwithstanding the criticisms, Hofstede's research has been added to and defended for over thirty years (Hofstede, 2001) by researchers other than Hofstede. Over the past three decades, other researchers have added to it, extended it and corroborated its findings. For example, Nicholson and Stepina (1998) added "another" fifth dimension to Hofstede's original four. This was paternalism, which is the extent to which managers taking a personal interest in their workers. Van Oudenhoven (2001) tested the original four dimensions in ten countries and found considerable support for them. This is very important for management studies and this study is of that discipline.

Hofstede's work is widely cited to the point where Schneider and Barsoux (2003) have referred to it as a classic and Baskerville (2003) refers to it as a super classic. Moreover it is cited in a number of very different disciplines that include the humanities, business, management and education. It is certainly the most quoted piece of research on the subject of culture and has been cited in almost every paper that I have read on the subject of culture. Hofstede (2001) claims that his work has become part of training programmes dealing with cultural issues. Indeed, it remains a model that has survived criticism and continues to be used in the management domain.

Given the criticisms both for and against Hofstede's model. What does Hofstede's model offer to this dissertation? Why should it be used as the theoretical underpinnings in this dissertation? The answer to these questions is that Hofstede provides a useful analytic tool to me for approaching national culture. This work is of crucial importance to this dissertation for several reasons.

First, Hofstede's treatment of national culture is a systematic, large scale, documented investigation into dimensions within cultures. It gives a useful introduction to dimensions in national culture and is the basis of the vehicle for analysis within this dissertation. This dissertation is essentially considering and investigating the existence of dimensions (preferences) within the Chinese culture for teaching, learning and assessment (see Chapter 5).

Second, a major criticism that would be expected of the use of this analysis within this dissertation would be its inapplicability in that Hofstede's original work had no Chinese respondents. However, Hofstede's work has been updated and the addition of the fifth dimension of Confucian Dynamism compensates for this omission (Hofstede, 2001).

The concept of Confucian Dynamism is very important to this dissertation as it tells us that culturally Chinese people are very different to those of the west. Words associated with Confucianism such as thrift, perseverance and persistence would be understood by westerners but would not be given any real importance by them. This dimension gives insights in to the idea of cultural differences. Further to this the fact that Hofstede had added Confucianism to his analysis is important to this dissertation as Confucianism is believed to exert a great influence over Chinese education and practice today (see Chapter 3).

Third, Hofstede's model is rooted in the business environment. The students who will be investigated in this dissertation are part-time learners whose working environment is similar to that of Hofstede's sample.

The primary purpose of this chapter was to address the question "Do National Cultures differ?" As has been shown, different authors propose different dimensions of national culture. However, whether we agree with Hofstede's findings or any other model of national culture what these works indicate is that national cultures are different. This gives the rise to the first part of the analysis in this dissertation. Hofstede's work may give the first indication that moving a course from one culture to another without paying attention to culture may be flawed. In my opinion it may be that the real importance of Hofstede is not the original work but the fact that he has opened our eyes to differences in national culture and has made us aware of them. Morden (1995) although writing about management practice states that the crucial aspect of the work of Hofstede and others in this area is that cultural adaptation and interpretation are prerequisites to understanding markets.

The last reason for using Hofstede's analysis is that what I required for this work was a relatively straightforward model that would enable me to develop an analytic tool. Hofstede's model, particularly his use of dimensions provided this.

In conclusion, the notion of culture is both difficult and problematic. Culture could have been approached from an anthropological, sociologically or psychological view. This dissertation is not centrally focussing upon a study of culture, rather it examines whether broad differences in culture imply the need for a different approach to course design and delivery in a different culture from that which has been to successful in another. Hence, the analysis of dimensions of cultural difference articulated by Hofstede and others form a useful basis for enquiry into learning and teaching models. Although Hofstede's work has flaws and as a consequence may not offer a full explanation of national culture it does give an analytical framework that is used within this dissertation.

The dissertation will now proceed to examine Chinese culture to seek to understand how Chinese culture is different and how this may impact upon education.

CHAPTER 3

CHINESE CULTURE

As was stated in Chapter 2, Hofstede's original analysis did not include any respondents from mainland China. Later work carried out by the Chinese Culture Connection (1987) found that a fifth dimension, Confucian Work Dynamism was specific to Chinese people and should be added to Hofstede's analysis. In this chapter I will specifically consider Chinese Culture and Confucianism in order to ask how Confucianism impacts upon Chinese Culture and how this may affect learning preferences.

Chinese culture is used as a term to encompass all cultural values held by Chinese people regardless of where they live, that is, people from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and Mainland China all share the same culture (Fan, 2000). On the face of it, this statement would appear to be a major generalisation. Fan does acknowledge that there are great social, political and economic differences between the Chinese nations. She states that there are core values that are unique and consistent that have been shaped by 4000 years of history. It is these core values that determine Chinese national culture. This view is fairly consistent throughout the literature, with little or no attempt made to differentiate the different Chinese nationalities. Barron and Arcodia (2002) also subscribe to this view when they describe the enduring significance of Confucianism to East Asian countries.

Traditional Chinese culture stems from a mix of Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism and many regional cultures. However, Confucianism is undisputedly the most influential and is at the heart of the core values mentioned above (Fan, 2000). Confucianism is a behavioural and moral doctrine that is based on the teachings of Confucius. Confucianism spells out rules for each level of the human interaction. It is argued that these rules of behaviour are instilled into Chinese children even though there may be no direct reference to a Confucian text (Crooks and Thomas, 1998). This view is succinctly summarised by a Wuhan headteacher who said that: -

"All Chinese education is actually based on Confucian teachings even though the teachers or the students may not be fully aware of it."

(Jin and Cortazzi, 1998)

The important dimensions in the rules of behaviour referred to above are social harmony and structural harmony. Social harmony is achieved through the Jen and the Li. Jen implies human heartedness, i.e. acting towards others as one would wish to be acted towards. The Li concerns behaviour in any situation, it shapes and maintains relationships and it gives order in hierarchies (Westwood, 1992).

There are two aspects that control social harmony. These are "face" and "shame" that have been likened to opposite sides of the same coin. Face (mien-tsu) means that one should act in ways that do not lose face for oneself, one's family or one's superiors. In this situation one would be expected to agree with a superior's decision and not to make one's own views known. Shame would be felt if the rules of social norms were broken, e.g., if a superior's opinion was disagreed with.

In ancient China scholars spoke of the ta wo or "greater self," this is distinguished from the hsiao wo or "smaller self". The smaller self relates to a person's own ambitions and desires. The larger self relates to the wider society or humankind as a whole. The expectation would be that the smaller self is sacrificed for the greater self (Hsu, 1985). It is the belief in the precedence of the greater self together with a belief in hierarchy configuration - the state in which everyone is born into a certain position and is expected to be conscious of that position and behave accordingly. As a result of this Chinese people do not simply react to overt codes of society. Instead their behaviour is governed by self-control according to internalised social norms.

Structural harmony is achieved through the management of key relationships. There are five key human relationships in which an individual is defined; these are the love between father and son; the duty between ruler and subject; the distinction between husband-and-wife; the precedence of the old over the young and the faith between friends. Within relationships the individual is always the least important. The smaller self must always be sacrificed for the largest self. These relationships are the Wu Lan - the duties of hierarchical social relationships. The result of the Wu Lan is that superiors can expect respect and obedience from subordinates but in turn must care for and protect them. The roles of each person are clear, each person must stay in role and the Li governs role behaviour. In the Confucian tradition individuals are identified only in social relationships. The aim of life is to put the world in order the aim of education is to train the character, to learn to be conscientious and to be altruistic (Cheng and Wong, 1996). Education is perceived as central in forming the person (Barron and Arcodia, 2002).

Research into the psychology of Chinese people finds them to be conflict avoiding, others-centred and searching for harmony. Their personality tends towards introversion, conformity and submissiveness (Bond 1986). As a result of this Chinese people tend to be conservative and cautious.

The Confucian principles that govern social relationships also impact upon education. These Confucian approaches to education have been honoured as a blend of "secular rationalism and ethical mindfulness" (Barron and Arcodia, 2002, page 16). Cheng and Wong (1996) state that there are three aspects of Chinese culture that make it distinctly different from other national cultures and that in turn impact upon education in Chinese communities and the education system.

These aspects are the individual-community dimension, the effort-ability dichotomy and the holistic-idealistic tendency.

The effect of the individual-community dimension is that the individual submits to the will of the community. The consequences of this are that firstly there is conformity and uniformity. The whole of society conforms to what is advantageous for the majority. In the Chinese education system uniformity may be found in syllabi, textbooks and teaching styles. (If students have only experienced one teaching style any other style will be difficult to operate)

The second consequence concerns the prime importance of human relations, specifically, the importance of the community as opposed to the individual. This may explain some observed phenomena in Confucian education systems (Cheng and Wong, 1996). These phenomena are the importance of moral education in Chinese education; the discipline in Chinese schools and those extrinsic motivations to learn prevails over intrinsic motivations. The motivation to learn is a result of social expectations or incentives not personal rewards. Intrinsic motivation for learning may be considered more desirable by Western educators. In the case of Western students intrinsic motivation may be a precursor for deep learning strategies (Biggs, 1987 in Watkins, 2000). In contrast a mixture of personal ambition, family face, peer support and plain interest may bring about deep learning strategies for Chinese students.

The pressure to succeed and to achieve is there for everyone regardless of their parents' educational attainment. Achievement in education is not for the self but for the family face.

In Chinese culture there is a tendency to play down genetic abilities and to give a higher regard to effort. This gives rise to the effort-ability dichotomy. Simply put this means that according to traditional Confucian philosophy everyone can succeed. There is no limit to one's ability; instead emphasis is placed upon effort (Wong, 2001). This belief in effort to is rooted in a culture that is closely related to social structure. Chinese society is hierarchical but there is movement within that structure. In ancient China government officials were selected through public examination and much play was made of people attaining these positions from relatively low classes. Confucius believed that everyone could be educated. He opened education to everyone and would not reject anyone who wanted to learn regardless of intellectual capacity (Wong, 2001). Education and learning are always associated with effort (On, 1996). Success comes with hard work, there is a Chinese proverb that sums this up it says that hard work can "grind an iron bar in to a needle" (Tang and Biggs, 1996).

The holistic-idealistic tendency has also been called Chinese systems thinking. This system of thinking tends to be holistic, for example, schools do not stop at knowledge, and they look to the whole idealistic person. Students should not merely excel in learning they should also excel in their conduct and physical fitness. As a result of this indiscipline and poor conduct of Chinese students are not be a problem. These problems will not arise. In a survey of British and Chinese students the British students gave a greater priority to the role of the teacher in keeping discipline. One explanation of this could be that Chinese students are unruly. The other explanation is that discipline is so steeped in the Chinese educational culture that it is not considered (Jin and Cortazzi, 1998).

Summary

It is apparent that some of these Confucian concepts of education differ from western views. These could lead to differences in preferences for learning and subsequent learning styles.

The first of these concepts is the purpose of education that is to perfect the person through self-cultivation, everyone is capable of being educated. Second, education is right of everyone regardless of his or her class or societal status (Lam, 1990). Third, Confucian teaching places emphasis on reflection as part of the learning process (Baumgart and Halse, 1999). Next, a teacher is someone who not only imparts knowledge but is also a moral leader and a role model (Wong, 2001). Finally, the responsibility for learning lies with the students. Each student is encouraged do his or her best. Intellect is important but is not enough on its own, to achieve in education effort and diligence are important commodities. Asian cultures attribute success to effort. Effort is a characteristic that is under the control of the individual and is related to feelings of self-esteem and worth (Baumgart and Halse (1999).

Implications for the dissertation

From the preceding discussion and Barron and Arcodia's (2002) summary it is evident that Chinese culture rooted in Confucian philosophy is very different to that of the West. A consequence of this culture is that the education experience of Chinese learners is different to that of western students. It also very different to that provided by the School of Sport and Leisure Management for its learners in Hong Kong. Chinese culture impacts upon what is taught, how it is taught and what is expected of and by the learner in the Chinese system. This has high value in Chinese culture, not in the UK. Many of these differences would not be encountered with western learners and as such may be expected to cause western teachers some difficulty when educating Chinese learners. One of the main implications of this study is differences in Chinese educational culture may mean that a "western course" that is transplanted in to a Chinese setting without modification may be beset with educational cultural problems. These problems may be encountered in curriculum design, and teaching, learning and assessment.

To enable me to further examine this the next chapters will consider different learning styles and their implications for Chinese learners. A more in-depth analysis of the perceived differences in the learning preferences of Chinese learners will be carried out in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 4

LEARNING STYLES

Introduction

As was stated in Chapter 1, the construct of learning styles is currently a major issue in education. At one extreme teachers are encouraged to understand their students' learning styles and adapt their teaching accordingly. At the other extreme the whole concept of learning styles as useful instruments to help improve teaching and learning are under attack (Utley, 2004)

The concept of learning styles is not new, Fatt (2000) attributes the term "learning style" to Thelan (1954). Over this time learning style has received a good deal of attention from a variety of disciplines including management, education and psychology. Educators have known for some time that some students prefer different methods of learning to those of others. These dispositions are known as learning styles; they refer to individual differences that are important to both skills and knowledge acquisition (Diaz and Carnal, 1999).

What is apparent within the literature is that the term learning styles is applied to many different theories, models and instruments of learning. Curry (1983) identified over twenty-one different models of learning style. Hoeffler (2001) states that different learning style researchers define learning styles in different ways. Zhang (2002) believes that research in the area has become preoccupied with style labels. As a term learning style is widely used and can refer to anything from an instructional preference to a cognitive style (Sadler-Smith, 2001). Further to this within the literature, learning style is also used to describe various combinations of instructional preferences and cognitive style. Moran (1991) believes that one of the main difficulties related to this as a field of study is the over extension of learning styles and the semantic confusion that is associated with it.

Some researchers believe that problems associated with learning styles have hindered the development of any meaningful of learning style theory and its application to education (Sadler-Smith et al, 2000; Riding and Rayner, 1998: Sadler-Smith, 1996). These problems include the preoccupation with labels, the lack of a common framework for understanding learning styles caused by the number of learning styles and the sheer plethora of styles. The difficulties with the number of competing styles is evident within the literature where there is often an inclination to refer to or utilise one theory or model of learning styles to the exclusion of others.

This absolute volume of competing models, theories and instruments of learning style has led to debates about the validity and usefulness of the different models and theories. Reynolds (1998) has called for an end to the use of labels such as learning styles; he particularly dislikes the readiness of professionals to accept measurements of learning style.

I will now concentrate upon models and theories of learning styles that will be used in this dissertation. To enable me to do this I will use Riding and Rayner's (1998) classification of learning style that is taken from what they describe as "the learning-centred tradition of learning style". This definition is well suited to this study as it attempts to rationalise the different models of learning style and the use of learning styles. In doing this they have produced a definition of learning styles that seeks to encompass all of the models.

Within this definition learning style is said: -

"To refer to an individual set of differences that include not only a stated personal preference for instruction or an association with a particular form of learning activity but also individual differences found in intellectual or personal psychology".

(Riding and Rayner, 1998 page 51)

The four groupings that Riding and Rayner identified are

1. Styles based on the learning process.
2. Styles based on orientation to study.
3. Styles based on instructional preference.
4. Styles based on cognitive skills.

The first three groups are concerned with the process of learning and its context. They concentrate on individual differences in the learning process rather than on the learner. In these groupings the learning style is based upon the individual's ability to learn in a particular way (Riding and Rayner, 1998). The fourth grouping is concerned with an individual's cognitive ability and her/his repertoire of cognitive skills alongside the ability to learn. Together with related behavioural characteristics they form an individual learner's learning profile.

Apart from the congruence of my study with Riding and Rayner's classification, there are three reasons for concentrating on these theories and models and paying less attention to the others. First, the models under consideration are among the mostly widely cited in the literature. Next, they have measurements of style ascribed to them and last, they have been used (at least in part) to measure the learning styles of Chinese learners (see sections on the learning styles later in this Chapter).

For these reasons and for other reasons already outlined concerning the sheer volume of learning styles, other, measures or models of learning styles such as Multiple Intelligences, Canfield and Myers-Briggs are not made use of within this study.

The dissertation will proceed by examining the four groupings of learning style separately.

Group One: Learning Styles based on the Learning Process

Several models and instruments have been developed that classify learning style based on the learning process. Probably the best known and most widely cited proponents of this type of learning style are Kolb (1976) and Honey and Mumford (1986; 1992).

Kolb

Kolb's theory drew on a legacy of perspectives including Dewey, Lewin, Piaget and Jung (Beard and Wilson, 2002). Kolb's theory draws upon earlier work of Jung (1923) with regard to personality types. It incorporates the need for learning to be based on life experiences (Dewey, 1938), the active involvement of the learner (Lewin, (1951) and Piaget (1950). From these works Kolb synthesised several key themes (Schlesinger, 1996a; Riding and Rayner, 1998)

Kolb's model is grounded in the theory of experiential learning, specifically the experiential learning cycle. The learning cycle was developed from early work from Dewey (1938) with regard to the learning process and Lewin on the feedback process (1951). Kolb noted the similarities between these two processes and from them developed the learning cycle (Beard and Wilson, 2002). The concept of the experiential learning cycle involves several key propositions that are concerned with learning. These are that learning: -

1. Is a process through which ideas are shaped and changed through experience.
2. Is a process grounded in experience. This may be a conscious feeling or something more concrete.
3. Is a process that requires that conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world are resolved. Coping with issues requires an anticipation and reaction across a range of issues and learning styles.
4. Is a holistic process of adaptation to the world. Learning is treated in the person as a whole rather than merely considering the learner's system.
5. Involves transactions between the individual and the environment.
6. Is the process of creating knowledge.
7. A development. Life itself is a journey of learning.

This is summed up by Kolb as "learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 1984. Page 38).

Kolb's model is based upon two orthogonal dimensions, prehension and transformation (Sadler-Smith, 2000). Prehension is the grasping of knowledge and can be described as the mode of thinking or taking hold of the experience (Sheehan and Kearns, 1995). This may be by either apprehension – concrete experience or comprehension – or by abstract experience. Transformation refers to the way in which experience is manipulated and information is processed which is in this model may be either active through active experimentation or reflective through reflective observation (Kolb, 1984, Riding and Rayner, 1998; Sadler-Smith, 2000). In Kolb's model concrete experience provided the opportunity for reflective observation that after abstract conceptualisation allowed for active experimentation. Alongside this his learning style inventory measures learning style on two bipolar dimensions. It is based on "information-perception" orientations and preferences for "information processing". With regard to information perception his belief is that over time learners develop a preference for either concrete experience or more abstract and conceptual analysis when acquiring skills and knowledge. Similarly information is processed on the basis of a preference for either action or reflection.

Application of Kolb's model results in four types of learner. These learners are

1. Divergers - divergers learn through concrete observation and reflective observation
2. Convergers - the preferences of convergers are abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation.
3. Assimilators - assimilators learn by abstract conceptualisation and reflective observation
4. Accommodators - the preferences of accommodators are concrete experience and active experimentation.

Kolb's theory of learning takes in the idea that individual's progress through several stages of human growth. Throughout this growth there is a deliberate refinement of style-based learning (Riding and Rayner, 1998). Kolb believes that although individuals have a preferred way of learning this preference will change and evolve over time. Eventually the learners will be capable of learning in any learning style.

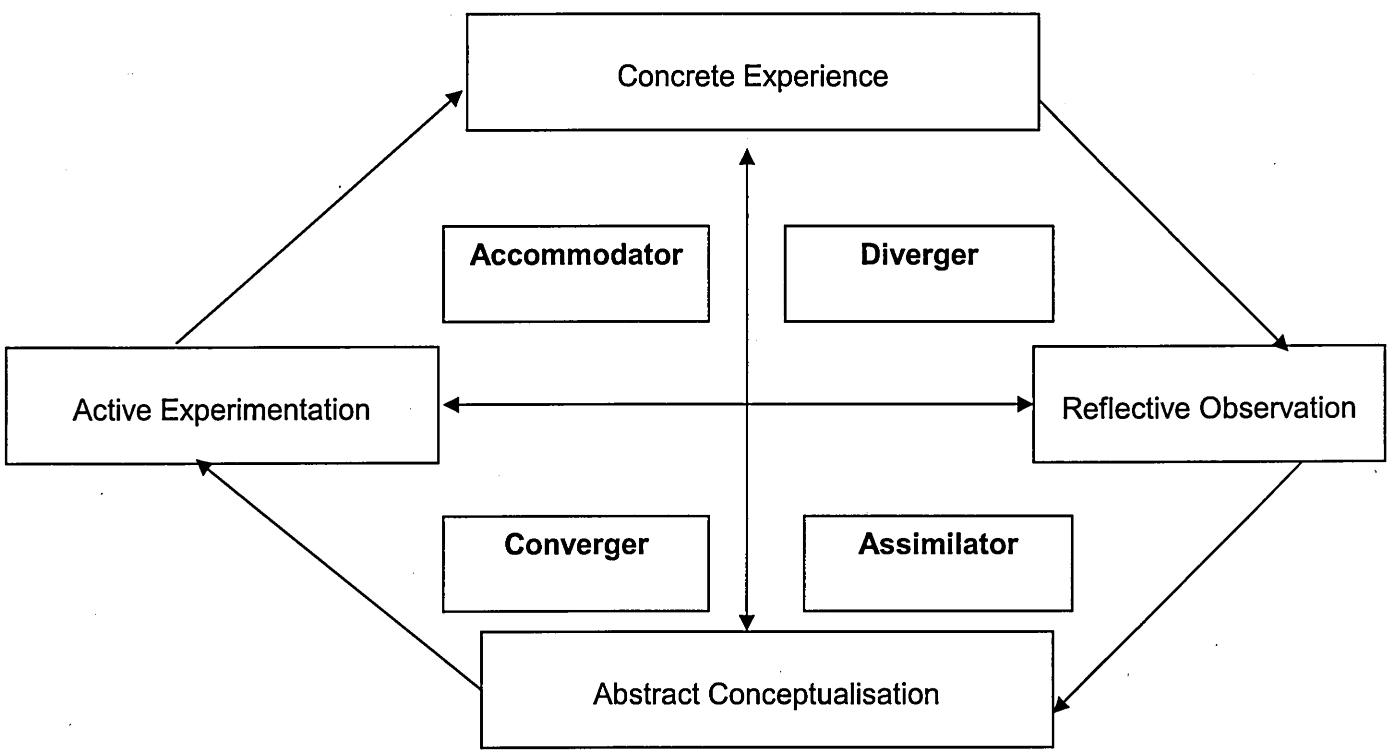
Measurement

To measure or assess an individual's learning style Kolb developed the Learning Styles Inventory (LSI). The LSI calculated two scores. The first score calculates the preference for abstract conceptualisation or concrete experience. This indicates where an individual's style is biased. The second is for reflective observation or abstract experimentation that gives the degree to which style is inclined towards either reflection or experimentation. Questions within the inventory have four answers that each corresponds with the four learning styles (Geiger et al, 1992)

The original questionnaire was criticised as being highly abstract and was updated in 1985 to improve its psychometric properties (Beard and Wilson, 2002).

The placing of the two scores will give the individual's learning style. The four styles are the result of combining adjacent pairs in the learning cycle (Talbot, 1985). This is illustrated in Figure 4.1 below.

Figure 4.1: Kolb's Experiential Model and Learning Types



For each of the individual learning styles, Kolb (1976; 1982) gave a list of preferred learning experiences for each type of learner. These preferences impact upon the way in which students can be taught and learn (see tables 8.1 and 8.2 for actual learning preferences).

Criticisms of Kolb's model

The criticisms of Kolb's model can be classified in to two broad areas. The first is in the development of the theory and the second is the validity and reliability of the Learning Style Inventory.

With regard to the development of the theory Garner (2000) points out its theoretical limitations. He says that Kolb cites Jung's personality typologies. Kolb acknowledges that that there are differences between personality types and learning style but that they draw on the same basic differences in personality. So Jung's sensing personality type is Kolb's accommodator, intuitive is the assimilator, feeling is the diverger and thinking is the converger. Garner believes that these are not the same things and that the comparison should not be made. As a result of this, he questions the rigour of Kolb's work. While admitting that there is a body of work that supports Kolb, Garner (2000) has misgivings about the theoretical underpinning of the work and says that it should be treated with caution. Other criticism, that is not aimed directly at Kolb but nevertheless is important, casts some doubt upon the very concept of the learning cycle (Caple and Martin, 1994; Schlesinger, 1996a; Schlesinger, 1996b)

With regard to the Learning Styles Inventory several studies have criticised its psychometric properties. In their study Cornwell et al (1991) found support for only 2 of the individual ability dimensions and little support for either of the bi-polar dimensions. In similar research into Kolb's revised inventory Geiger et al (1992) found support for 2 bi-polar dimensions but not the dimensions postulated by Kolb. They also found support for only one of the learning styles. Cornwell and Manfredo (1994) are more scathing, they found no support for the validity of the learning types. Sadler-Smith (2001) writes that the Learning Styles Inventory has had mixed results and that his research produced mixed findings. Loo (2002) sums this position up, he reports that several researchers have failed to find support for either the two dimensions or the four styles. In their research Sims et al (1986) rejected the Learning Styles Inventory criticising it for both its validity and its reliability. Further to this Smith (2002) states that the four stages in the learning process are not substantiated by empirical research.

Notwithstanding these criticisms there remains considerable support for Kolb's work. Educationalists are using it to inform practice in such diverse areas as geography and journalism education and workplace training and cross-cultural management (Chi-Ching and Noi, 1993; Healey and Jenkins, 2000; Brandon, 2002; Buch and Bartley, 2002). In research undertaken by Kolb and Kolb (2000) over one thousand citations of Kolb's work were found. Even the critics of Kolb's work such as Garner (2000) have conceded that there is a body of opinion in support of it. Another critic, Loo (1999) found that there was no statistical support for the Learning Style Inventory but concluded that there was support for it as a pedagogic tool.

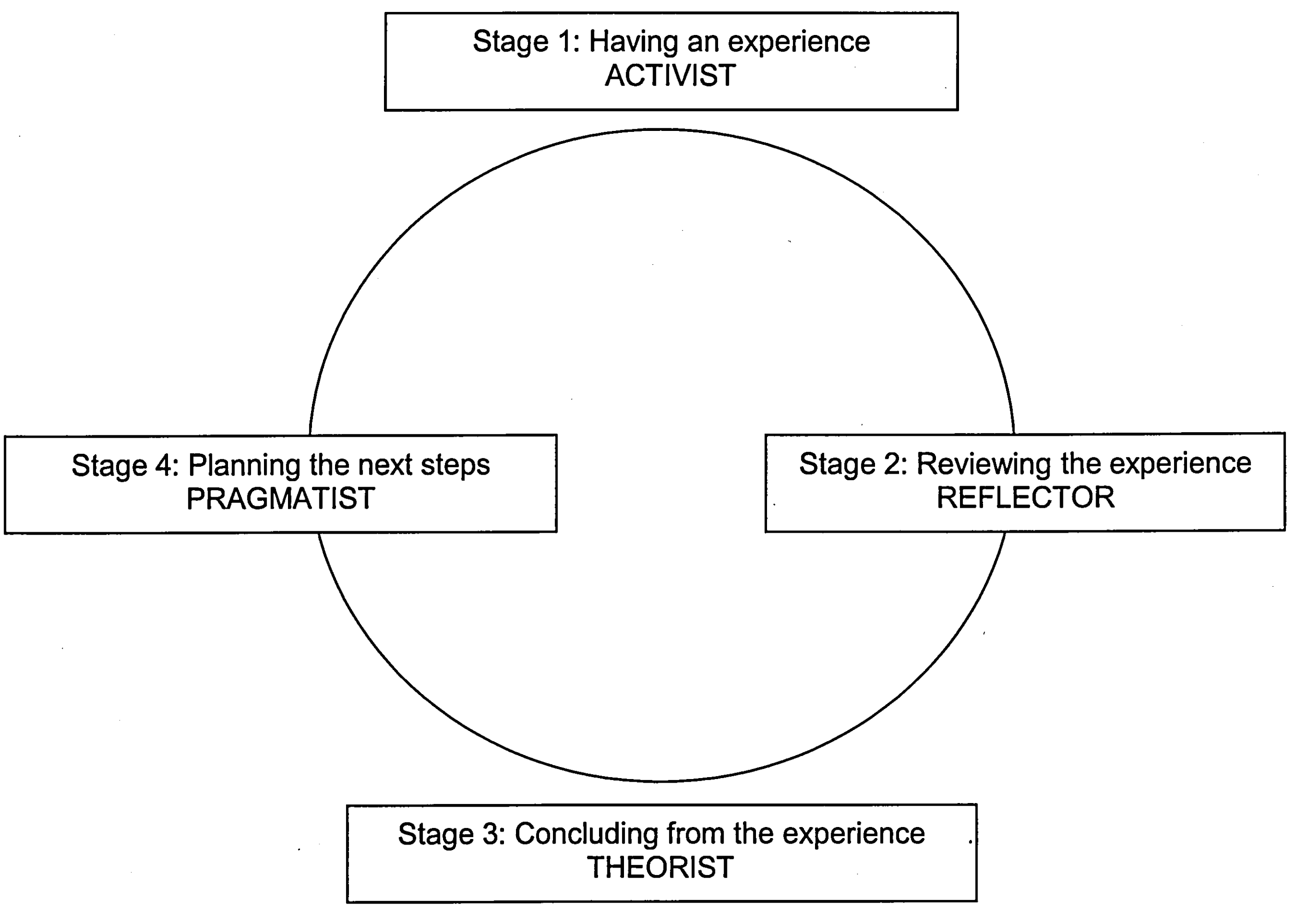
This discussion is carried on further later in this chapter (see implications of this study)

Honey and Mumford

Kolb's model has generated a great deal of interest and has influenced the development of new and other models of learning style (Ridings and Rayner, 1998). Honey and Mumford (1986a; 1992) accepted the work of Kolb but were dissatisfied with both its validity and its predictive accuracy (DeVita, 2000). They acknowledged the work of Kolb and said that there were more similarities in their work than there were differences (Honey and Mumford 1986a; 1992).

Following on from Kolb their research relied on experiential learning and the learning cycle. They saw learning as a sequential, total process that builds upon experience. Learning is never finished; it involves skills and behaviour that may be developed. As they saw it people are not born with or without the ability to learn effectively (Mumford, 1995b). Learning style and the learning cycle are just one of the many influences upon learning but learning styles are important as they can be directly influenced. Learning is continuous and may be described as either a loop or a circle or even as a spiral. Honey and Mumford's learning cycle is shown in figure 4.2 below.

Figure 4.2. Honey and Mumford's Learning Cycle and Associated Learning Styles



Honey and Mumford (1986a; 1992) believe that the learner may join the cycle at any stage but the important point is that they must complete the learning cycle, without completing the cycle learning cannot be achieved. As with Kolb's model each of the four stages of the cycle has a learning style that is associated with it. These four learning styles are shown in figure 4.2 in block capitals.

The four learning styles are:

1. Activists – activists are those learners who prefer to operate in the here and now. They will try anything once and having a liking for short-term crises and fire fighting. Students with this type of preferred learning style are thought likely to benefit from hands-on experience. (Mumford, 1997). They are open-minded and prefer brainstorming. They thrive on the challenge of new experience but may be bored by its implementation and the longer term (Honey and Mumford, 1986a; 1992; Mumford, 1997). This type of learning style has been identified as the preference of some hospitality students and could apply to hospitality students in Hong Kong (Lashley, 1999).

2. Reflectors – these are people who prefer to observe and evaluate situations from a range of angles and perspectives before reaching a definite conclusion. They are cautious and wish to seek observations of their own and others. They prefer to stand back and review evidence from different perspectives before making any conclusions or taking action. They will take a back seat in meetings and discussions preferring to reflect upon the debates (Honey and Mumford, 1986a; 1992; Mumford, 1997).

3 Theorists – people who exhibit this learning style wish to integrate observations into complicated theories. They think problems through in a systematic manner and will bring together disparate facts into coherent theories. In particular they like theories and assumptions. They have an inclination to dislike subjectivity and ambiguity and a tendency towards detachment. Their preference is to maximise certainty, they feel uncomfortable with subjective judgements, lateral thinking and anything they consider to be flippant (Honey and Mumford, 1986a; 1992; Mumford, 1997)

4. Pragmatists - pragmatists are people who enjoy trying out new ideas and theories and testing how they can be applied in practice. Mumford (1997) says that their preference is have a clear purpose and to get on with things. They are essentially practical and down to earth; they like to make practical decisions. The philosophy of pragmatists is "if it works it's good" (Honey and Mumford, 1992, page 6).

Each of these styles connects with a stage on the learning cycle as depicted in figure 4.2 above.

Although Honey and Mumford (1986a, 1992) provide the four learning styles they do not perceive them as fixed in the learner's lifetime. They believe that a learner is able to use different learning styles and that the learning style that is used may be determined by context.

Assessment of Learning Style

To answer some of the criticisms of Kolb's work, Honey and Mumford replicated Kolb's theory for use in the commercial sectors (Riding and Rayner, 1998). To do this they composed a learning style questionnaire that applied learning styles to the workplace. One of the main criticisms of Kolb's work had been the form of the questions used in the Learning Style Inventory. Honey and Mumford said that their instrument the Learning Styles Questionnaire had greater face validity, as unlike Kolb they did not ask direct questions about how people learn but based it instead upon what professional people do. From this they emphasised the practical application of their work (Honey and Mumford, 1986a; 1992; Mumford, 1995). The learner's style is assessed by the use of an eighty-item questionnaire (originally sixty-three). Advice is then given as to how to calculate style and how to improve learning by utilising it (Honey and Mumford, 1986b).

Criticism

The work of Honey and Mumford is not without its critics and has probably been subject to more criticism in the literature than the original work of Kolb. Honey and Mumford have been criticised for both the theory that underpins their model and for the Learning Styles Questionnaire (Cartney, 2000).

Caple and Martin (1994) and Schlesinger (1996a, 1996b) have made some of the most vigorous and vitriolic criticism of the model. Caple and Martin (1994, page 17) acknowledged that Honey and Mumford's model has a "superficial coherence and attraction" but say "that parts of it are in need of further analysis and investigation". They particularly point to the following five areas that I shall use as the basis for this critique.

1. Experience

Honey and Mumford's argument is that if learning is to be effective that we must learn from experience. Caple and Martin (1994) contend that the precise meaning of experience is unclear. This leads on to raising questions about the nature of experience, e.g., are all experiences of equal value? What do we learn from experience? Are skills and knowledge equally acquired from experience? Can activities associated with a reflector be an experience for a pragmatist? They claim that these questions are not semantic differences, but that if we are unclear or uncertain about the meaning of experience and what we may learn from it, why then would decide to opt for experience as a the means of meeting our learning needs?

2. The Learning Cycle

The claim that there is a four part learning cycle comprising experience – review – conclude – plan is itself both questionable and contentious (Caple and Martin, 1994). In Honey and Mumford's learning cycle everything starts from experience, this assumes that experience just happens. Caple and Martin argue that individuals may choose to have exposure to certain activities before we experience them, i.e., that in this case the cycle starts not with experience but with planning. They use the rather extreme analogy of a surgeon stating that it would be harmful for a surgeon to start from an activist point without substantial planning, observation and theorising before operating! To add further weight to their viewpoint they cite the role of theory on scientific training saying that it would be naïve for scientific enquiry to begin with data collection without first developing the scientific theory.

Mumford (1994) rebuffed this attack he said that it is correct that some learning experience are planned in advance but that what appears to be different point of entry into the learning cycle still requires that the learning cycle has been completed. He claims that entering at what appears to be the planning stage requires experience that after reflection it would be good idea to undergo further learning activity.

Schlesinger (1996a, 1996b) launched a further attack on the concept of the learning cycle. In his opinion a learning cycle is too neat as a model for explaining human behaviour whereas in reality the world is messy. As he sees it people do not go around the learning circle in an orderly fashion; instead many people may be "butterfly learners" using the style that suits them or is appropriate at the time. Further, learners may not have a preference for one style but may instead have a bias for two styles.

He continues by criticising the separation of theorising and experiencing within the learning cycle. Stating that these are not two actions but one. Schlesinger (1996a; 1996b) sees people as practical theorists, i.e., they will use the learning elements of Kolb and Honey and Mumford not in orderly fashion but in varying sequences. The result of this is that there is not a cycle of learning but rather rich and complex patterns of learning,

3. Situational Features, Influences and Abilities

The situation that a learner finds her/himself in will determine the learning style that is used in that situation (Caple and Martin, 1994). If the situation is perceived to be subject to a tight time constraint then action will be necessary, if it is complex then reflection and planning will be required. Similarly, perception of ability or inability will decide the learning style, e.g., from the learning style questionnaire an individual could be found to be an activist but may not have the motor skills to enable her/him to learn specific manual skills.

4. The Number of Learning Styles

Caple and Martin (1994) raise doubts about the four learning styles themselves. They say that with imagination they are able to imagine extreme activists, extreme reflectors and extreme theorists, i.e., those who learn solely in this way but that they cannot easily see a pragmatist - someone who learns only by applying practical skills. They see pragmatism as the application of learning not a learning style in itself. They appear to be saying that in their view there is a little evidence for three learning styles but none for four. Therefore the corollary of this is that Honey and Mumford's theory and questionnaire are unusable.

Additionally they raise questions about the meaning of learning styles. They point out that there are different definitions of learning styles. They say that if learning style is about the way an individual gathers information then this fits both the reflector and the theorist. Conversely if learning styles concerns an attitude to a particular activity then this fits both the activist and the pragmatist. This leads to confusion and asks what are the learning styles that Honey and Mumford are describing?

5. The Learning Styles Questionnaire

In the opinion of Caple and Martin (1994) the questions that are used in the learning styles questionnaire are assessing personality type. This assumes that there is a link between personality type and learning preference. According to Caple and Martin (1994) this cannot be inferred from the questions used, e.g., one question asks if the respondent is insensitive to the feelings of others. If the answer to this is affirmative then the respondent is categorised as a pragmatist and the insensitivity of the respondent confers on her or him the ability to acquire and apply practical skills. Mumford (1994) responded to this stating that Caple and Martin had used an early version of the questionnaire and as a consequence their criticism was unfounded.

The learning styles questionnaire has come under further criticism from other writers. Sadler-Smith (1996) says that care needs to be taken with what may be construed from the learning styles questionnaire. The reason for this is that the studies on which it was based are said to have consisted predominantly of male managers and no information was given of a number of respondents from ethnic minority groups. This has implications for this research, as it is almost certain that the number of Chinese within the empirical research was low or non-existent. Conclusions based upon this work could be flawed as a result.

Honey and Mumford's work has been further questioned in terms of its four-factor structure and the applicability of the questionnaire to students in general and to business studies students in particular (Sadler-Smith, 1996). From a statistical standpoint, Van Zwanenberg et al (2000) found that the learning style questionnaire was not reliable to normal standards of psychometric instruments and did not show promise as a predictive instrument.

Notwithstanding all of these criticisms, both Kolb and Honey and Mumford continue to be used and are widely cited in the literature. A further discussion of this may be found in the summary of this chapter.

Implications for this study

Kolb

The original work of Kolb plus the continuing acceptance of it and the extension of it are important to this study. For example, much of Kolb's work has been added to and may be of relevance for distance and open learning modules and courses. In their replication of Kolb's work, Buch and Bartley (2002) found that convergers shared a preference for computer-based delivery while assimilators preferred their learning materials to be print-based. In both cases the overall preference for classroom delivered activity. Divergers enjoy brainstorming, lectures and reflective activity (Blackmoore, 1996: Motter-Hodgson, 1998) while accommodators enjoy on-line group work (Motter-Hodgson, 1998). Assimilators prefer to work on their own; they find that group exercises, simulations and sharing of experiences may be a hindrance to their learning (O'Conner, 1998). Federico (2000) found that students with assimilating and accommodating learning styles were significantly more agreeable network instruction than convergers and divergers.

Dille and Mazack (1991) used Kolb's learning style inventory to identify high-risk students on a "telecourse. They concluded that students who had a lower preference for concrete experience were more successful. If this translated to distance learning where students tend to be isolated and require independent study skills then successful students should be those who prefer abstract experiences. Similarly, Gee (1990) found that successful distance learning requires a more independent and conceptual learning style.

The importance of Kolb's to this study is almost self-evident. It may be that only people with certain learning styles benefit from the course on offer. For example, as yet the distance learning courses provided by the School of Sport and Leisure Management have materials that are print based, only one module is delivered via e-learning. If the work of Kolb and others hold true then the course may cater for assimilators in as much of the courses are designed for students to work on their own. If on the other hand the students were accommodators or convergers the course would not meet their need for on-line learning. Aside from the method of delivery it may also be that the assignments to test learning do not suit some learning styles.

Honey and Mumford

As with Kolb, Honey and Mumford associated each learning style with learning activities from which each type of learners would learn most or least. Mumford (1995a) states that activists learn best from here and now activities such as business games and competitive team games. They learn least from lectures, reading or statements that they see as theoretical. Reflectors on the other hand learn best where they can stand back from the activity, listening and observing and where they will be asked to produce carefully considered analysis. Honey and Mumford's work is backed by the F.E.U. (1995) who advise that those assessed as reflectors should be encouraged by pair and small group work. Pragmatists should be allowed skills acquisition.

Theorists prefer activities in which they are given part of a system, model or theory and which allows them to use their intellectual capabilities. They learn least when they the activities are ambiguous or uncertain or where they are asked to work with other participants, with whom they are out of touch, e.g., those with a lower intellectual capacity. Pragmatists prefer exercises where there is an obvious link between theory and their job or a job. As may be expected they learn least where the event that they are considering is distant from reality.

As with Kolb, the relevance of Honey and Mumford's work lies in the learning, teaching and assessment preferences of the students. Activists may find the course to be particularly unsuitable if there are no competitive games. Similarly reflectors have nothing as such to observe and reflect upon. Pragmatists on the other hand should be well cared for as the vocational courses on offer should link between theory and their jobs.

Learning Process Styles and the Chinese Learner

A further complication exists when examining learning styles that neither Kolb nor Honey and Mumford dealt with. This is the question of national culture, and specifically whether learning styles relate to national culture. Hill et al (2000) extrapolating from Hofstede suggested that people from cultures such as China and Hong Kong might be expected to be analytical and reflective. They thought that this might accord with high power distance and uncertainty avoidance leading to a wish to leave decision making to others. If this were true and Chinese people are reflectors then the distance learning course would not suit the market that it is aimed at.

Other research in to learning styles of Chinese learners has been small scale and because of its proximity to China and Hong Kong has often been carried out in Australia. It has drawn upon the learning style models of Kolb and Honey and Mumford. For example, in research among students from Hong Kong studying in Australia, Ayeung and Sands (1996) found that these students showed an assimilator style. They had a preference for abstract and reflective learning.

In a study carried out in Switzerland the majority of Chinese learners were found to be reflectors, they learned best when they were able to stand back, observe, reflect and think (Howarth, 2003). Barron and Arcodia (2002) found that Asian students who were studying hospitality and tourism tended to prefer reflective methods in their home country but developed a preference for activist learning when studying in Australia. This apparently surprising change could have been the result of a short, intensive semester system that Barron and Arcodia (2002) thought might militate against reflective learning.

The research into Chinese students and learning style is small scale and limited so little may be extrapolated from it. However, the concept of the Chinese student as a reflector is a recurring theme. It is found in literature relating to Confucianism (see Chapter Three) and in the application of measurements of learning style to Chinese students.

It will be necessary within the research to consider preferences for different types of teaching, learning and assessment in order to evaluate the appropriateness of the courses on offer. The outcomes of this may be found in Chapter Seven.

Group two - Models Grounded in Orientation to Study

Curry (1987) and Grigerenko and Sternberg (1995) have commented upon the similarities and close relationship between a group of psychologists who were interested in learning processes and learning style. This common interest was in the form of learning style that is now widely cited in the literature as deep and surface learning.

The first use of the terms deep and surface learning has been attributed to Craik and Lockhart (1972). The terms refer to two extreme approaches to learning. At one extreme are learners who use the deep approach to learning in order to understand. They would be expected to understand and critique what they have learned. In doing this they would relate ideas to previous knowledge; analyse the logic of argument and relate what they have learned to the conclusion (Beattie et al, 1997).

At the other extreme, where the surface approach to learning is utilised students merely memorise facts that they accept without question. They memorise without attempting to understand any underlying pattern. Their main motivation in learning in this fashion is the assessment requirement (Entwhistle and Ramsden, 1983; Marton et al, 1984).

Beattie et al (1997) believe that the waters with regard to learning styles in this context of orientation to study have been muddied by different researchers who have used different terms for the same phenomena. To clarify the position they have produced a chronology of deep and surface learning which they have based around four schools of research that they have identified. All of these groups worked on deep and surface approaches to learning, although they did not all use the same terms in their original research. Each of them had its own leader and built upon the work of its predecessor. The groups identified by Beattie et al (1997) are the Lancaster, the Australian, the Swedish and the Richmond.

Lancaster Group 1 (Entwhistle)

The objective of these studies was to seek to identify the attributes or qualities of students that would enable researchers to predict academic success. The study used quantitative methods to investigate study attributes. The study attributes included personality, motivation and study method. An inventory was developed that measured motivation and study method. From this the study was able to identify four student types. These were -

Group 1 – this group was outstandingly successful, motivated by ambition, emotionally stable with good study methods. The group had neither active social or sporting life nor any developed aesthetic interest.

Group 2 – was moderately successful but suffered from self-doubt and a fear of failure. This group had an active social life with limited aesthetic interests. Although this group suffered from poor study methods and low motivation levels they achieved above average academic success through working long hours and keeping to the syllabus requirements.

Group 3 – like group 2 were moderately successful but differed in that they were highly motivated and had good study methods. They had high aesthetic values and radical ideals.

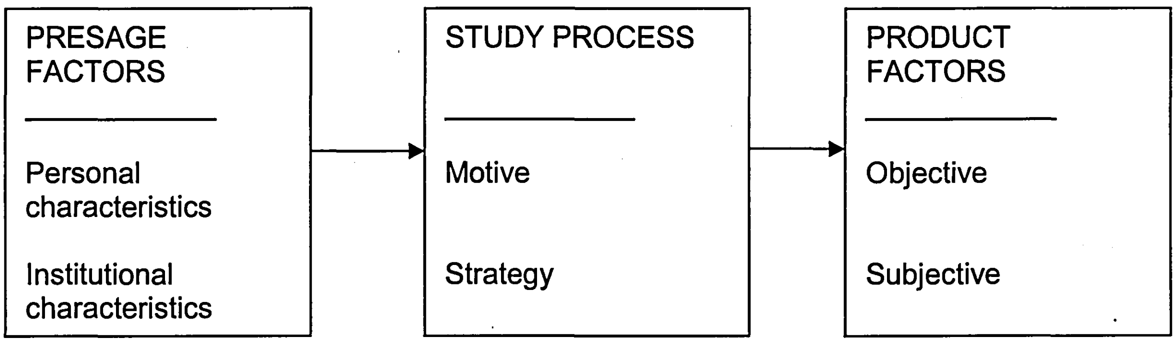
Group 4 – were the least successful, they were poorly motivated with poor study skills. This group had active social and sporting lives, and possibly as a consequence, very few hours were devoted to study.

In summary, the study appears to show a link between motivation and study skill, and academic success. The main criticism of this study was that it did not explicitly examine either the processes or strategies that these groups of students used in carrying on their everyday academic work. It points out the impact of motivation upon success but infers that study skills were either good or poor (Beattie et al, 1997).

Australian Group (Biggs)

Biggs (1978, 1979, 1985, 1987) extended the work of Entwhistle by identifying three motivational factors or approaches to learning and developing the study process model that enabled learning style in this context to be measured (Riding and Rayner, 1998).

Figure 4.3: Biggs study process model



Source: Adapted from Beattie et al (1997).

Biggs's (1978) model of study process goes between what he calls presage factors and product factors. Presage factors are learning characteristics of a student that exist before s/he enters any learning situation. They consist of personal characteristics (cognitive style, IQ and personality) and institutional characteristics (subject area, teaching method, assessment method and course structure). The product factors are the outputs and are defined in terms of academic outcomes. These may be objective factors, e.g., marks and grades or subjective factors; e.g., satisfaction levels with one's own performance.

Biggs (1978) believed that the presage factors influence academic factors by affecting the student's motivation and the strategies adopted for learning. This process is summarised in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: Study Process		
Motive	Strategy	Approach to learning
Meet minimum requirement. Achieve a balance between working too hard and failure.	Reproductive: limit target to bare essentials and reproduce through rote learning	SURFACE (Utilising)
Studies to realise interest and competence in particular academic subjects	Reads widely with previous relevant knowledge.	DEEP (internalising)
Competitive: tries to obtain highest grades.	This is the model student – organises time and work	ACHIEVING

Source: Beattie et al (1997)

Table 4.1 illustrates that the different combinations of motives and strategies produce different types of learner. Each combination is capable of being successful in higher education. Biggs (1978) originally named his types of learner utilising, internalising and achieving but changed them to surface, deep and achieving in order to be consistent with other writers (Beattie et al, 1997). With each approach to learning he identified prior motivations that directed the choice of working strategy. The motive for surface learning would be a pass only strategy. This strategy is achieved with minimum effort; the learning method could be rote. The motivation for deep learning is study for study's sake. The learner would read widely and aim for a breadth and depth of understanding; effectively this is a deep working strategy. Learners who wish to achieve are reliant on ego-enhancement and competition. The choice of strategy is flexible and can be a combination of deep and surface.

To test his model in Higher Education Biggs developed the Study Process Questionnaire. The questionnaire contained 42 questions that were constructed in order to discover the student's normal approach to learning. The rationale to the Study Process Questionnaire was that approach to study is a function of both motive and strategy. Biggs's studies provided evidence of reliability, internal consistency and construct validity of its constituent scales (Biggs, 1982; Biggs and Kirby, 1983).

Biggs (1987) moved on from his study process model to develop a model of student learning that is based upon metacognition. Metacognition is the individual's awareness of her or his cognitive resources. Biggs proposed the term metalearning for the application of metacognition to the area of student learning. He produced evidence that subject to constraints of cognitive ability students choose approaches to learning that are most likely to help them achieve their desired outcome. To achieve this metalearning requires an awareness of the available options and the ability to control them. Biggs (1987) argued that as the range and power of the student's ability increases then more options in the learning process are identified. As a consequence metalearning increases in line with increases in general cognitive ability.

The other important factor that goes along with this is locus of control, i.e., the extent to which students believe that they have some control over learning (internal type) contrasted with when they believe that it is governed by external forces. Biggs (1987) presented evidence that supports the view that approaches to learning vary with the level of metalearning. Deep and achieving approaches can interact with ability and locus of control to affect examination performance in ways that suggest that metalearning is present. These interactions may explain why approaches to learning and performance are weak in some students, as a specific approach may be effective for some and ineffective for others.

The main criticism of Biggs's works stems not from the study process model but from the Study Process Questionnaire that is used to measure learning style. This criticism is that empirical evidence indicates that the factor loadings have a low reliability (Christensen et al, 1991). On the other hand, Murray-Harvey (1994) supports the instrument saying that it supports Biggs's contention that while motives and strategies may change over time they are fairly stable indicators of a general approach to learning.

Swedish Group

Through a series of qualitative studies Marton (1975) attempted to identify the relationship between a student's learning intention and the level of outcome. The studies examined the learning approaches to and the learning outcomes of reading academic articles. The reason for this was that reading academic articles was seen as one of the main types of learning activity that is demanded of students in higher education. The instructions on how to go about the activity were kept deliberately vague. After the activity, thirty students were interviewed. The purpose of the interviews was for the students to give their intention, their approach to learning, their understanding of the task and what they remembered and understood.

Analysis of the interviews indicated that there was a fundamental distinction between students' approaches to learning. In summary, deep learners demonstrated a full understanding and remembered what they learnt more effectively. Surface learners on the other hand saw the task presented to them as a matter of reproduction and learning was short and ineffective.

The main contribution of this research was to place emphasis on the intention of the student (Beattie et al, 1998). Put simply what the student intends determines the approach that will be used. The approach determines level of performance and ultimate achievement. This distinction between intention and approach closely parallels that of Biggs with regard to both motive and strategy.

This work is important as it stressed that the individual selects a study approach in response to the type of task and a specific context. The implication of this is that an individual's study approach is likely to be flexible not fixed. This and corroborated what was indicated by the work of the Lancaster group.

From this the Swedish group took their research further and proceeded to consider the way in which the approach to learning is affected by context. In particular they focused on the type of question asked and the level of student interest. They concluded that lack of interest on the part of the students and a perceived lack of relevance and the type of question asked could lead to a surface approach (Saljö, 1975; Marton and Saljö, 1976).

Richmond Group (Pask)

Pask and others investigated how students learn complex new areas of knowledge, how they master new and unfamiliar ideas in an article or a textbook. Pask and Scott (1972) conducted experiments in which students had to reach an explicit level of understanding (contrast this with the Swedish group).

From their experiments two general categories of learner were identified. These were the serialist and holist. They concluded that the serialist learns step-by-step by reading the text. Essentially the student makes notes moving on from one simple hypothesis to another. By contrast the holist has a more complex method of achieving understanding. He or she will read whatever comes to their attention. They will go from topic to topic, backwards and forwards. The intention is to obtain the gist without reading every word.

Pask (1976b) suggests that serialism and holism are extremes. The tendency to take on a particular strategy is termed a learning style. The holist adopts a style named "comprehensive learning", building descriptions of what is known. The serialist adopts operational learning and masters procedural details (Pask, 1977). Learners who can adapt to either style are termed versatile. Differences in learning style explain how understanding is and is not reached. Failure to reach understanding is known as pathology.

A consequence of pathologies is that neither holist or serialist style will always be successful as Pask (1996a) identified pathologies associated with each learning style. A condition in the holist he called globetrotting. This is a holist tendency to make vacuous analogies and to generalise from insufficient evidence. Improvidence is a serialist tendency to not make valid analogies and not to build upon an overall framework linking key elements of the topic.

Lancaster Group – Project 2

This second project brought together the work of the Swedish group and the Richmond group. Entwhistle (1979, 1981) was originally interested in the duality of levels of processing in an approach to learning (Riding and Rayner, 1998). He noticed that noticed that the deep and surface approaches overlapped with holist and serialist learning strategies and comprehension and operational learning styles. The project extended the quantitative and qualitative work and acknowledges external influences on study approaches. From the original work the Lancaster group no longer saw study approach as an inherent characteristic.

Entwhistle developed the Approaches to Study Inventory (ASI) to measure approaches to and styles of study and to relate it to cognitive styles and skills and personality; students perceptions of the department's academic climate, task and academic discipline.

A third pilot of the ASI found that there were four very distinctive study orientations that consistently came to the fore. These are represented in table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Lancaster Group Study Orientations

Study orientation	Description
Meaning Orientation	Deep approaches, comprehensive learning, interrelating ideas, use of evidence and intrinsic motivation.
Reproducing	Surface approach, operation learning, improvidence, fear of failure, syllabus boundness and extrinsic motivation.
Achieving	Achievement motivation, intrinsic motivation and strategic approach.
Non-academic	Disorganised study methods, negative attitudes to studying and low intrinsic motivation.

Source: Beattie et al (1997)

This model is remarkable in that there is relatively little criticism of it and the principles upon which it is founded, Riding and Rayner (1998) state that the Approaches to Study Inventory has more support than other studies of this nature found in the literature. Empirical studies of the inventory confirmed its predictive value (Newstead, 1982) and its high levels of reliability and good levels of validity (Curry, 1987). Other studies have supported its factor structure and the item scales (Sadler-Smith, 1996).

Summary – Styles Based on Orientation to Study

From the four strands of research that have been outlined several points can be made. First the distinction between deep and surface learning is complex. Deep and surface learning may be seen, as the extremes In fact, there are shades of grey between them that may give a more accurate picture of learners. Most notably these are achieving and strategic learners.

Second, there has been an evolutionary development of the deep and surface learning model. This evolution has seen a shift from input/output models demonstrated in Lancaster 1 to focusing on the learning process (Biggs). To this was added the bringing together of motivation and contextual factors (Swedish group) to distinguishing a student's personal learning style from the specific approaches adopted (Pask) to a generic model that links metalearning to a students task and desired outcome (Lancaster 2).

Third, the literature demonstrates that a student's approach to learning is only partly a function of his/her general characteristics, and that learning can be altered to fit a specific learning situation. The student's perception of the relevance of a task, the attitude of the teacher/lecturer and the expected form of assessment influence students' learning. The extent to which any particular approach may be altered depends upon the student's metalearning capability.

Next, the convergence of findings between Marton and Biggs and others (Tickle, 2001) has encouraged confidence in the deep and surface learning distinction. However, as with other research in this area care should be taken, the findings may be an over-simplification. It cannot be assumed that a deep learner will always achieve good results. It may also be assumed that a surface learning strategy such as rote is merely a step on the way to deep learning. Learners with high ability may be able to adapt or adopt different strategies (Tickle, 2001).

Further, what is noticeable about the eventual development of the models outlined in this section is that there is relatively little criticism of them. Other models already outlined, e.g., Kolb and Honey and Mumford have been subject to very high levels of quite scathing criticism. In contrast, there appears to be an almost total acceptance of this work. As Beattie et al (1997) point out further research in this area has tended to focus on how to promote deep learning rather than research of a more fundamental nature in to the concepts of deep and surface learning.

Last, the models of deep and surface learning illustrate the wide and different uses of the term "learning styles". Deep and surface learning would appear to be much closer to learning strategies than learning styles. They are approaches to learning that describe how a student intends to learn giving her/his motives and methods of study.

Implications for this study

This model of learning strategy is probably the most significant in relation to this study and its aims. This work is centred on higher education and Chinese learners have long been identified (in Western eyes) as rote learners (see Chapter 5). If this is true then there should be evidence from the different inventories. However, beyond the assertions of the Chinese as rote learners, the majority of which appears to be Western observation and anecdotal there is some research that has been carried out with regard to these learning style models and Chinese culture. This research tends not to support the surface (rote) learning view. For example, Chinese students have been found to have higher deep and strategic inventory scores than Western students (Biggs, 1989, 1990, 1991; Kember and Gow, 1990, 1991). Ramburath and McCormick (2002) using the Study Process Questionnaire (Biggs, 1987) to investigate the learning styles of Asian and Australian students found that there was no significant difference in the overall approach to learning. However, Asian students made greater use of deep motivation, surface and achieving strategies while Australian students used deep and surface motivation strategies.

The concept of achieving strategies is important within this study as Hallam staff have considered for some time that distance learning students only engage with materials that are assignment specific; they do not engage with the whole.

Grouping Three - Models Based on Instructional Preference

Two models attempt to measure an individual's preference for a range of environmental and instructional factors that affect an individual's learning behaviour. These models are the Learning Style Inventory and the Style of Learning Interaction Questionnaire (Riding and Rayner, 1998).

Learning Style Inventory

This model was developed for American schools and was later extended in to higher education. It started from the idea that the diagnosis of learning style is the foundation upon which the modern approach to education is built (Dunn, 1985). In this model children are taught and learn through using their own unique characteristics.

Dunn and Dunn (1974) defined learning style as the way in which biological and personal characteristics make different methods of learning appropriate for some students and not others. Learning styles would reflect the way in which the five senses impact upon the way in which the learner is able to "perceive, interact and respond to the learning environment (Riding and Rayner, 1998, page 66). In this model learning style is a personal response to the factors that dictate an individual's preferred way of learning. In this construct learning style is not a constant it will change with environmental factors and with the method of instruction (Dunn et al, 1989).

The original model (Dunn and Dunn, 1972) had eighteen environmental, emotional, sociological and physical student characteristics that students had learned to respond to. These characteristics were drawn from Dunn and Dunn's work in New York schools. To the original work elements of cognitive style were added (Dunn et al, 1979), this was later revised to include hemispheric preferences (left brain/ right brain) and preferences for simultaneous and successive processing of information (Dunn et al, 1982). The learning style elements that were identified are shown in Table 4.3 below.

Table 4.3: Dunn et al's Learning Style Elements	
Environmental Stimulus	Light, sound, temperature, design
Emotional stimulus	Structure, persistence, motivation, responsibility
Sociological element	Preference for learning in groups, response to authority figures, typical response to adults, learning in varied ways.
Physical element	Modality preferences, e.g., kinaesthetic, tactile, auditory, visual and time of day, intake of food and fluids.
Psychological element	Global versus analytic, impulsive versus reflective and hemispheric dominance.

Source: Adapted from Riding, R. and S. Rayner, (1998)

Interestingly the Dunns acknowledged that they were not the only researchers in the field and that at the same time other researchers were investigating phenomena that ere both different and similar. In doing this they acknowledged the work of Kolb. (Dunn, 1985).

The original learning style questionnaire was developed in to the learning style inventory. A later, third version the Productivity Environmental Preference Survey (PEPS) for use with adults was devised. The Inventory used self report methods to measure factors that reflected key variables identified by the respondent as forming a typical response by the learner to the learning environment (Dunn and Dunn, 1978). From the answers either group or individual preferences for learning can be assessed. It is then gives guidance for planning teaching methods that are compatible with the style identified. From this Dunn et al (1989) sought to promote a teaching method that would take advantage of the student's favoured means of learning by matching the environmental factors to the learning style.

Grigg's (1985, 1991) took the work of Dunn and her fellow researchers further. She used the LSI for grade schools from 3 – 12 and PEPS for adults to look in to counselling programmes in America. She presented a case for improving and supporting academic performance by including style based assessment in teaching problems. To enable her to do this her approach involved first analysing the learner's needs and then developing a counselling programme that gave learning styles for both the students and the teacher. Along with this she advocated interventions aimed at being in line with the student's needs, e.g., if a student had a high need for structure she advised that formal contracts governing behaviour and outcomes were drawn up (Griggs, 1985).

The final phase of the programme was to evaluate the teaching and counselling performance to determine how far it had met its aims. Griggs (1991) believe that if the counselling and the learning style were compatible then the goals of the counselling would be achieved. Case study evidence for the success of the counselling programme was presented in support of this method (Riding and Rayner, 1998).

Jonassen and Grabowski (1993) report a larger number of studies that support both the reliability and validity of the learning style inventory but go on to point out that there is no independent verification of this. Grigerenko and Sternberg (1995) say that the main flaw with this theory is that it ignores learning process in its entirety and focuses only upon environmental factors that affect the ability to learn. They also criticise the instrument used in that it gives no indication of how the component parts interact. In doing this the learning style inventory actually asks more questions than it answers. In its defence Dunn, herself cites eight studies that confirm her opinion that when students are matched with their learning preferences their learning performance improves (Dunn, 1985). Griggs gives case study evidence for its success in educational counselling.

Other studies that investigated the reliability of the learning style inventory give mixed results. Curry (1987) found that there was a limited amount of data with which to assess its reliability or its validity. However, psychometric ratings said it was supported by good reliability and validity. Murray-Harvey (1994) analysed Productivity Environmental Preference Survey and stated that learning styles as measured by this devise were not as stable as the authors claimed.

Styles of Learning Interaction Questionnaire

This is similar to Dunn and Dunn (1974, 1976) and Dunn et al (1979) in that it focuses upon the learning preferences of the individual (Riding and Rayner, 1998). It was designed by Riechmann and Grasha (1974) and identifies three bi-polar dimensions that attempt to depict the characteristic approach of an individual to learning.

The three dimensions identified are participant – avoidant, e.g., someone who likes or dislikes classes; collaborative – competitive, e.g., someone who is either co-operative or dominated by self-interest and independent – dependent, e.g., someone who works on her/his own or is reliant on the lecturer for instruction and guidance.

The theory to this is that the personality of the learner is linked to how she or he learns (Riding and Rayner, 1998). Using a ninety-item inventory – the Student Learning Styles Scale (SLSS), discovered the style of the learner. The composite score gave the student's preferred learning style. The style may be for the individual or the class (Riechmann and Grasha, 1974). While it was expected that the style would be relatively stable, Riechmann and Grasha (1974) did expect that the style would change with different classes and subjects.

As with all of the learning styles that are measured by the use of questionnaires the weakness of this instrument lies in the questionnaire. Jonassen and Grabowski (1993) express some concern about the structure of the questionnaire. They claim that it is constructed in a way that may mean that respondents do not answer honestly. The psychometric rating of the questionnaire was only fair (Curry, 1987).

Relevance to this Study

These two measures of learning style are of limited relevance to this study as aside from the Productivity Environmental Preference Survey (PEPS) the models are aimed at schools, not higher education. Within the literature I have found no attempt to relate any of this to Chinese learners.

It would be difficult to use these models in a distance learning context where, aside from the study schools, it would not be possible, or extremely difficult to make interventions, with regard to environmental stimulus, emotional stimulus, and the sociological and physical elements. For this reason these models on their own will not be examined in the overarching research questions.

However, modality preferences will be investigated within the research for this dissertation as modality preferences do arise within the literature and are often used on their own to describe learning preferences (Fatt, 2000). These modality preferences are examined in greater detail in style models based on cognitive skills development below.

Group Four - Style Models Based on Cognitive Skills Development

These models are based on the notion that a learner is only successful in learning when her/his skills and method are developed. Learning style is this context is multi-modal and portrays intellectual functioning relating to a learning activity.

The model which influenced others in this area is the Edmonds Learning Style Identification Exercise (ELSIE) (Reinert, 1976). This model seeks to identify a learner's natural perceptual modality based upon four categories of learning modality i.e., visual, verbal, auditory or kinaesthetic (activity based). At the root of this is that people use the five senses to gather information and channel it through three routes or representation systems to make sense of it. The individual will have a strong or weak preference for each of these in the learning process, e.g., auditory learners prefer to learn by listening, visual by sight and kinaesthetic by touch (Fatt, 1993). These preferences lead in turn to preferences for teaching and assessment (Fatt, 2000; 1993; Park, 2000). For example kinaesthetic learners prefer task-oriented assignments, they prefer to learn by doing; visual learners prefer interpretation of items such as diagrams (Fatt, 2001).

Riding and Rayner (1998) believe that the real significance of this model is the conceptual concepts that have influenced other cognitive skills models. These models are Cognitive Style Delineators (Lettori, 1980) and Learning Style Profile.

Lettori's assessment of learning style produced three types of learner. Type one is reflective and analytic and is associated with school success. Type three is impulsive and global, is typically unfocused and meets with little or no academic success. Type two is somewhere in between the extremes and meets with moderate levels of success. Research led to the promotion of augmentation, i.e., teaching cognitive skills to bring about a change in cognitive style (Lettori, 1980).

Learning Style Profile was American inspired and an attempt to develop an integrated model of learning style that could be used in secondary schools (Keefe and Monk, 1986). The approach was based upon the idea that learning was dependent upon three basic routines of information processing, memory and cognitive skills. The style construct was based on twenty-four key elements of learning style grouped in to three areas. The areas are cognitive skills, related to information processing, analysis, discrimination and memory; perceptual responses to data including visual, auditory and emotive processing and study and instructional preferences.

A forty-two page questionnaire helps the teacher to elicit the student's style. Keefe (1987) believes that cognitive skills development is a prerequisite for learning. The work has been continued and guidelines for teachers wishing to pursue this have been produced (Keefe, 1998a, 1989b, 1990). There is little criticism of this work as yet. Ridings and Rayner (1998) attribute this to its fairly recent development. Further to this, the questionnaire is reported not to be user-friendly.

Relevance to this study

It should be noted that there is no use within the literature on Chinese learners of any of the specific models that have been dealt with here. Again these measures are aimed at schools and are not of any great relevance to higher education.

However, learning modality i.e., visual, tactile, auditory or kinaesthetic has been assessed with regard to Chinese learners. In the study that was carried out, Chinese learners showed a preference for visual modality (Park, 2000). This part of this work will be investigated in the overarching research question concerning learning modality. The concept of modality is important in this study, as at present there is no opportunity for hands-on experience preferred by kinaesthetic learners. The lack of any on-line programmes would disadvantage those learners who are visual.

Learning Styles: Conclusion

As was stated in the opening paragraph of this chapter, the construct of learning style is an area of education that is bound in argument and controversy. There are both proponents and opponents of learning styles. Some academics advocate adapting teaching to students' learning styles and adapting pedagogy to accommodate individual differences (Ebeling, 2000; Federico, 2000). Some proponents go as far as suggesting that different activities and assessments should be used within the same cohort or teaching groups.

With the exception of Entwhistle's Approaches to Study Inventory, the models that have been discussed in this chapter have been criticised for their reliability and the validity of the instruments that have been developed to measure their particular construct of learning styles. Statistical evidence for them says that they are unreliable and it is claimed that instruments for measuring learning style are constructed in such a way that they spuriously support their own theory. Some research claims that giving random answers generates the same level of validity (Freedman and Stumpf, 1980).

If, as has been stated, learning styles are under attack and they are controversial and are seen as contradictory, what do they tell us that may be useful to this dissertation? The key issue in this dissertation is that I wish to know if a course designed in the UK is appropriate in Hong Kong. To answer this I need to know whether students engage in teaching and learning in the same ways. Hence, I need a way of analysing this. Learning styles, despite the controversy and contradiction provide a way of doing this and at the same time highlight those issues about the usefulness of the concept of learning styles.

Furthermore, it is my contention that the weaknesses and strengths of learning style theory and the application of learning style instruments that are important to this dissertation. Most of the perceived weaknesses of learning style theory and application concern stereotyping, the number of learning styles and the applicability of the outcomes to groups (Ridings and Rayner, 1998; Reynolds, 1998; Stellwagen, 2001;Uttley, 2004). The strengths of learning styles theory are their sheer diversity and concentration upon the individual learner. All of these issues are at the heart of this dissertation.

To fully answer the question concerning the usefulness of learning styles to this dissertation I will now examine in detail the weaknesses and the strengths of the learning style theory and application that have been discussed in this chapter.

Weaknesses

Other than underpinning theory and the reliability of the instruments, the weaknesses are as follows: -

1. This chapter of the dissertation has concentrated upon four different classifications of learning style. From these classifications it seems that the term learning style is a source of confusion and that the learning styles and their recommendations conflict with and contradict each other.

However, upon closer examination, it is apparent that the different models are not investigating the same phenomena. One model of learning style may not exclude the others. For example, the models of Kolb and Honey and Mumford may give an indication of preferences for learning while the various models that have considered deep and surface learning may be more accurately described as giving indications of learning strategies or approaches to study. Models that consider cognitive skills development may not be describing a preference for learning but instructional and study preferences. Lastly models that consider instructional preferences are just that they are preferred methods of instruction either for groups and individuals.

2. All of the learning styles that have been discussed in this chapter were developed in the western culture. Although all of them have been applied to a greater or lesser extent in a Chinese context, it may be that using these instruments in these circumstances is inappropriate.

3. Ascribing a particular learning style to a national group may lead to stereotyping. For example, throughout the literature Chinese learners are frequently described as reflective learners and/or rote learners. This may lead to an assumption about learning styles of individuals or particular groups for which there is no real evidence. Although those who developed the instruments did not, in most cases, advocate that learning styles should be applied to national groups, many of the instruments have been adapted and used for this purpose. This again may cause groups of learners to be stereotyped as having one particular style. Using learning style inventories to measure

and then describe the learning preferences of national groups or cultures may result in inappropriate methods of teaching and learning being utilised.

This view is consistent with Stellwagen (2001) who believes that classifying students by learning style may lead to stereotyping and an apparent stasis while in fact education is a continuum.

4. Most of the learning style measures have descriptions of learners attached to them. These descriptions usually result in a limited number of learning styles, e.g., both Kolb and Honey and Mumford have four learning styles attached to their measures. This would appear to be an oversimplification of learning and may be, at least in part, a consequence of the two dimensional presentation. When the sheer diversity of learning styles discussed within this chapter is considered. It is improbable that a measure that results in a limited number of learning types is accurately describing all learning. It is possible that learners may lean towards more than one of the styles that are described. They would then be wrongly described if they were attached to one style only.

5. The literature on learning styles that has been examined in this chapter may have significant omissions. They appear to ignore the role of the teacher and the relationship of the teacher with the student. As such some of the preferences for learning and teaching said to be preferred by different types of learner have the appearance of mechanistic recommendations of which tactics or strategies to use. Interactive relationships between teachers and students and the role of good teaching are almost totally ignored.

Strengths

1. The diversity of learning styles investigated in this chapter indicates the complexity of learning and learning styles. It may be that the learning styles that have been outlined may be describing a range of strategies, behaviours and dimensions that describes how the individual relates with the learning procedure (Riding and Rayner, 1998).

2. It may be that the real strength of all learning style theories is that they tell us that learning styles are about the individual. Very few advocate measuring the learning styles of groups. This point is crucial to this dissertation for if learning styles are about individuals then applying a learning style theory or model to a national group could be taking learning styles in a direction where they should not go.

3. As learning styles are individual, it may be important that this is recognised by the teacher and that individual preferences are accounted for. This point is important for the research within this dissertation, as the role of the teacher with regard to Chinese learners will be investigated (see Chapters 5 and 7).

Summary

In summary, the theories about learning styles that have been presented here have several weaknesses and strengths. These strengths and weaknesses will be at the heart of this research and will be investigated within this dissertation.

Within the research for this study I intend to address the appropriateness of measures of learning style and the recommendations that are made from them within the context of the strengths and weaknesses identified above.

To achieve this I will consider styles based upon the learning process; deep, surface and achieving styles and learning modalities. Concepts of deep, surface and achieving learning will be addressed as a research proposition. Styles based upon the learning process and learning modalities will be examined as part of an overarching question that interrogates the appropriateness of measuring learning styles and the recommendations regarding teaching that are attached to them.

I will develop this and consider the role of relationships with the teacher and the appropriateness of assigning a learning style to a national group. To take this discussion further, I will proceed by drawing together the two bodies of work that I have looked at separately, that of National and Chinese Cultural difference, and that of Learning Styles and Approaches (see Chapter 5).

CHAPTER 5

A CHINESE LEARNING STYLE?

From the national and Chinese culture literature, it would appear possible that differences in Chinese culture would translate into cultural differences for preferred forms of teaching, learning, assessment and learning materials. The purpose of this chapter is to establish what the differences in preferences may be (as outlined in objective three) and to use them as the base for the case study of Chinese students in Hong Kong. After identifying the differences I will consider the learning styles identified in Chapter 4 in order to analyse where Chinese learners are on the learning styles spectrum.

The following are the main differences that I have identified from the literature. All of them have been attributed to a greater or lesser extent to differences in culture.

Curriculum Content

Different academic disciplines in the Chinese culture have been categorised as "hard" or "soft" (Corder, 1990). Hard subjects emphasise rigorous scientific thinking; soft subjects are intuitive and subjective. Asian management education tends to concentrate on hard subjects, for example Finance and Operational Management. Soft subjects such as Human Resource Management and Organisational Behaviour are regarded as much less relevant. They are common sense and down market from "useful" subjects such as Accounting and Marketing. Chow (1995) corroborates this; she states that Chinese students prefer practical subjects. They do not like lectures that are overly theoretical or theory or abstract models.

A consequence of this may be that aspects of Western curriculum content do not fit Chinese needs and culture, e.g., organisational behaviour may cause problems in the area of assertiveness training. Assertiveness is perceived as contrary to the Chinese culture and would conflict with concepts of face and power distance. Chinese learners may also reject western management ideas on topics such as leadership attributes. The Chinese would be expected to respect legitimate authority based on age and position and may discount concepts regarding attributes of leaders (Berrell et al, 2001).

If this view is valid, there may be delivery problems with the distance learning curriculum content.

Teaching and Learning Strategies

The predominant view in the literature is that Chinese students prefer passive teaching methods such as lectures, demonstrations, handouts, displays, films and videos. Experiential exercises, case studies, role-play and simulations belong to participative teaching methods and are said to be least preferred (Chow, 1995). Problem solving, explorative teaching methods employed in the West would not fit with a perceived Confucian derived preference for rote learning (Thompson and Gui, 2000a). Maxwell et al (2000) when researching the previous learning experiences of Chinese students found that this experience had been that of mainly passive and content based teaching. Martinsons and Martinsons (1996) say that Chinese people have little exposure to a variety of teaching methods.

While much of the literature supports the conventional view of Chinese preferred learning, it is contradictory. For example, Chow (1995) tells us not to use case studies but then proceeds to tell us that lectures backed by case studies may be preferred by Chinese students. Berrell et al (2001) state that case studies may be adapted for use in high context cultures such as Hong Kong. While it is generally agreed that more active learning may be difficult to employ, there are papers that explain how these techniques may be used.

Crookes and Thomas (1998) indicate that problem-solving techniques may be adapted for use with Chinese students. They suggest that group work can work well with Chinese students but may need to be structured differently than it would be with British students. They also propose that Chinese students would work together in group sizes of two and would come to the front of the class to explain what they have learnt. Other students and teachers would listen and pay attention. Tang (1996) advises that Chinese students will work collaboratively, but may prefer to do it informally outside of class as part of their learning process. Hill et al (2000) found that in an investigation of students of different nationalities, that the strongest difference between the nationalities was the Asian preference for group learning. Similarly Howarth (2003) found that Chinese students worked best in small groups. Bodycott and Walker (2000) say that Chinese students learn best in small groups and that this is the best method for eliciting openness and dealing with problems of face (see later).

An explanation of the "preference" for didactic teaching may be pragmatic. Jin and Cortazzi (1998) have noted that Chinese middle school class sizes are normally large. Figures for the Chinese City of Chongqing indicate that the class sizes average from 47.7 to 66.7 students. Chinese teachers do not regard large classes as a problem however by their nature they must make group and paired work difficult (Jin and Cortazzi, 1998).

For this reason Gilleard's (1998) interpretation may be correct. He says that teaching methods beyond the didactic can be successfully employed with Chinese students. However, as these other methods are unusual in their experience the students will require exposure to accustom them to these new methods.

Classroom Discussion and Learning

It is often said that Chinese students are unwilling to participate in open discussion. This statement is made regardless of age, educational level or gender. Chinese students are said to prefer to adopt a passive role in the classroom and to be quiet, listen and learn (Chow, 1995).

The general view is that open-ended questions are met with silence. Where answers are given in response to questions, it is by regurgitating text that is thought to best fit the question (Martinsons and Martinsons, 1996). Volunteering to answer questions is rare although occasionally open discussion may attract one or two outspoken individuals. The reason put forward to explain this is that discussion is against Confucian principles of modest behaviour. Open discussion is against the ethic of self-effacement. Expression of criticism is frowned upon and is severely limited by the social norm of the fear of loss of face (Redding, 1980). The perception of British teaching staff was that the Chinese students were unlikely to say anything in class and would queue up at the end of teaching sessions to ask questions (Maxwell et al, 2000). Unlike their Western counterparts, Chinese students are inhibited in expressing feelings and opinions. They tend not to reveal their feelings and being outspoken is not encouraged. Another reason that is given for this behaviour is that as a consequence of the collectivist nature of the Chinese culture a student who speaks or asks questions is doing this for her or his peers. Any loss of face resulting from a show of ignorance would be a loss of face not only for the students but also for the whole group (Kontoulis and Williams, 2000). Bodycott and Walker (2000) found that students were extremely reluctant to engage in whole class discussions and were also reluctant to comment on other students' opinions. They attributed this to the fear of loss of face. Similarly, in a group of Chinese educators, it was noted that teachers lower down the school hierarchy did not or would not question the views of more senior teachers (Bodycott and Walker, 2000).

While this behaviour has been observed the reason for it may be that Chinese students believe that it is rude to ask questions based on ignorance (Watkins, 2000). Where their Western students ask questions to fill gaps in learning Chinese students wait for all of the knowledge to be imparted and then ask questions. Volet and Renshaw (1996) observed in their research that Chinese students did participate in tutorials as much as their (in this case) Australian counterparts but that they were not the most or least voluble.

Research undertaken by Jin and Cortazzi (1998) asked British and Chinese University students to give reasons why they did not ask questions in class. The reasons and the score on a five point Likert scale where five is the highest score that can be given are shown in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Reasons why students do not ask questions in the classroom

Reason	Chinese Mean Score	British Mean Score
They are too shy	3.124	4.250
They are afraid others may laugh	3.194	4.188
Prevented by culture/tradition	3.031	3.289
They do not want to interrupt	2.969	3.158
They ask after the lesson	3.411	3.286
Students find the answer themselves	3.574	3.196

Source: Adapted from Jin and Cortazzi (1998)

The results in Table 5.1 are interesting in that British students are displaying the characteristics that would be expected of Chinese students, e.g., they are less likely to ask questions as they are too shy, are afraid of being laughed at or are prevented by culture. Jin and Cortazzi (1998) consider that the significant result of this research is that Chinese students ask questions after the class. This indicates that Chinese students ask questions on the basis of knowledge. Further evidence from Chinese students indicates that they consider British classmates who ask questions in class to be rude and their questions to be superficial (Jin and Cortazzi, 1998). The differences between British and Chinese learners in this respect are adequately summed up by the following quote.

> *"The Chinese ask after knowing, the British know by asking"*
>
> (Jin and Cortazzi, 1998, page 753)

Although Jin and Cortazzi (1998) make little of it, the other significant finding may be that Chinese students are more likely to find the answer themselves. This may be Confucian in that learning may come from effort. Finding the answer for oneself may demonstrate this effort.

Other explanations for not asking questions in the classroom have been postulated. One further, simpler reason for this behaviour may be language. Most of the evidence about Chinese learners supposed reluctance to answer question stems from Western observers. An alternative explanation of this behaviour may be that it is possible that the students are not confident of their language ability and as a consequence either do not answer or answer by regurgitating notes (Martinsons and Martinsons, 1996)

The Role of the Teacher/Lecturer

In Chinese culture the lecturer or teacher is regarded as all knowing and is the sole provider of knowledge. Chinese learners have been brought up to respect knowledge and wisdom; they have been socialised to respect teachers and those who provide them with knowledge (Chan, 1999). Due to high power distance the teacher is held in great respect: the student would not challenge the views of a lecturer. These authority relationships between students and lecturers reflect Confucianism and high power distance in Chinese culture. It would be expected to follow a superior without question (Chan, 1999: Dimmock and Walker, 1998; Martinsons and Martinsons, 1996). The relationship with the teacher is also of some importance. In studies relating to the "good teacher", references were made to the concept of the teacher as a friend (Cortazzi and Jin, 2001).

The general view is that the teacher's role is to teach and set rules. Students rely on the teacher and seek specific instructions. The teacher must lay down clear directions that the student must follow. In Hong Kong the teaching style is the didactic and teacher-centred. Lectures, tutorials and seminars are far more popular than any other teaching style (Chow, 1995; Berrell et al, 2001). Martinsons and Martinsons (1996) reinforce this view by stating that the teacher passes on knowledge to students who have little exposure to teaching methods beyond the didactic. They accept and expect knowledge transfer. In a small scale study of Hong Kong distance learning students the lecturer was expected to pass on knowledge and students did not expect to contradict him or her (Nield, 2002; Wu, 2002).

Further research by Jin and Cortazzi (1998) into what constitutes a good teacher indicates some major differences between British and Chinese students. Answers to the questions regarding student perceptions of a good teacher were again given a score on a five point Likert scale. On the scale five is the highest score that can be given and one is the lowest. The results are shown in Table 5.2 below.

Table 5.2: Student perceptions of a good teacher in China and Britain

A good teacher	Chinese Mean Score	British Mean Score
Has deep knowledge	4.535	3.548
Is patient	4.307	4.571
Is a good moral example	4.181	3.808
Teaches students about life	4.109	3.803
Has an answer to students' questions	3.984	3.327
Organises a variety of classroom activities	3.884	4.200
Is warm-hearted and understanding	4.341	4.088

From their research Jin and Cortazzi (1998) concluded that good teachers from a Chinese perspective have deep knowledge, answer students' questions and are moral examples. On the other hand, British teachers should arouse interest, organise a variety of classroom activities and explain everything clearly. The notion of Chinese teachers as being warm-hearted is Confucian and stems from the Confucian concept of "ren" which translates as "showing humanity, human-heartedness or love" (Jin and Cortazzi, 1998, page 757).

This view of the teacher, and the preference for knowledge transfer, is common throughout most of the literature. Rodrigues et al (2000) assert that countries whose culture is based on Confucianism, such as Hong Kong, produce learners who prefer a teacher-centred approach. Howarth (2003) found that Chinese students at a Swiss hotel school awarded her higher status than other students do and preferred a teacher-centred approach. As teacher centredness is not a major feature of the distance learning programmes offered in Hong Kong other than at the study schools, it may cause problems with this version of distance delivery studied in this dissertation.

There is, however, some evidence to the contrary. In an admittedly limited study of Chinese M.B.A. students the results of a Canfield inventory showed that although most of the sample had been taught mainly by lecture, their actual preference was for direct experience (Ladd and Ruby, 1999).

Wu (2002, p 390) adequately sums up the Chinese teacher. She says that the classical Chinese pedagogue is viewed as "remote, austere, highly-respected, strict, demanding, and parental." Importantly for this research she warns of problems associated with the culture clash that may be arise when students who have been educated by the Chinese pedagogue are faced with the more the more easy-going, liberal Western lecturer.

Assignments

There is little within the literature regarding preferences for different types of assignment. The conventional view in the literature is that Chinese students prefer examinations and questions that require a definite answer. Assignments that have a clear structure and a prescribed answer are preferred. As was stated earlier hard subjects are preferred to the soft. Disciplines such as Finance that require a precise answer would fit the perceived preference for subjects that require a structured solution. Similarly there is a preference for examinations that stems from the old Chinese public examination system (Maxwell et al, 2000). This is a view that may still carry on today as coveted positions in the civil service are gained by public examinations (Nei, 2001).

Again there is contradiction, some research suggests that Chinese students do achieve higher level cognitive leaning outcomes and outperform their Western counterparts (Biggs, 1996). Unfortunately nothing was said as to how these outcomes are assessed although it was said that Chinese classrooms are different places when not seen through Western eyes (Biggs, 1996: Marton et al, 1996: Tang, 1996).

The Chinese as Rote Learners

Chinese students are generally regarded within the literature as rote learners. They learn by rote and memory (Martinsons and Martinsons, 1996; Chow, 1995). Rote learning appears at all stages of education: Au and Entwhistle (1999) note that from early schooling Chinese children memorise and copy Chinese characters; Biggs (1996) noted that in universities Chinese students were prone to rote memorisation. Away from the world of education Hong Kong business people have been reported as bemoaning the lack of any original thought on the part of Hong Kong graduates. This lack of thought is attributed to their preference for rote learning and repetition (Wingrove, 1993). Typically in the Western literature Chinese learners are regarded as "tape recorders" (Biggs, 1996, page 47). Wingrove (1993) says that Chinese students memorise chunks of text and reproduce it in their assignment. What a Western student or educator would see as plagiarism is regarded as showing respect to the lecturer and so accords with Confucian values. Rote learning is seen by some as a result of the desire to do well and to excel academically leaves the students with very little choice than to learn by rote (Yee, 1989). In Confucian societies, where the belief is that educational achievement is greatly prized and academic success will come as a result of effort, committing substantial amounts of text to memory is part of that effort (Au and Entwhistle, 1999).

If this view of the Chinese as rote learners is correct then the result of this should be poor learning achievement and learning at the surface level. It should not produce the higher level outcomes that university courses are looking for. It should be a source of problems, specifically failure on the courses that Hallam offers in Hong Kong. However, there is now a growing body of opinion that while supporting the view of learning by memory gives a different explanation of it.

If Chinese students are rote or surface learners, then there should be evidence of this in that educationally they should perform badly. However, the evidence is to the contrary. From research it is apparent that Chinese students outperform their Western counterparts and do generate higher level learning outcomes (Biggs, 1996). Watkins and Biggs (1996, 2001) call this the "paradox of the Chinese learner". Further, when responding to questionnaires about their educational preferences, Chinese students did not give answers that indicated that they preferred to learn by rote (Watkins, 2000). Lee (1996) reports that in studies into deep and surface learning, Chinese students consistently indicate a preference for understanding rather than surface learning. This in itself is Confucian and based on the "zi de", the process of experiencing truth for oneself and gaining satisfaction from it.

Research indicates that it may be a mistake to assume that Chinese students are merely rote learning with no or little understanding. In Chinese culture, memorising and understanding are not separate parts of learning but are one connected and interlocking procedure. Chinese students rely on memorisation as a part of the learning process (Kontoulis and Williams, 2000: Watkins, 2000). The Chinese system of learning is to become familiar with the text, to understand it, to reflect upon it and then to question it (On, 1996). Chinese students see it has normal to combine memorisation with attempts to understand the material (Kember, 1990). In quantitative and qualitative research undertaken by Au and Entwhistle (1999) Chinese students were found to use memorisation not only as a revision tactic but also for understanding. This method of learning has been called "memorisation with understanding" (Marton et al, 1996).

Au and Entwhistle (1999) further observed that evidence that apparently suggests that Chinese students learn by rote, e.g., reproducing lecture notes and other study materials verbatim in assignments by Chinese students attending Western Universities could simply be due to their insecurity when writing in a second language. This may argue that there is a cross cultural difference in learning in that Western students see understanding as a sudden insight while Chinese students see it as a long process requiring considerable mental effort.

In summary, what this new evidence may indicate is that there is no paradox of the Chinese learner. It is possible that there is a Chinese method of learning by "memorising with understanding" that has been misunderstood by Western observers and could exemplify a lack of cultural understanding on the part of those observers (Baumgart and Halse, 1999). Notwithstanding this, the notion of Chinese students learning by rote remains prevalent in western literature as is witnessed in Howarth (2003). It will be important that the research carried out for this dissertation will test this idea.

Summary

There is a body of literature that exists in the areas of teaching, learning and assessment and national culture. This literature, although sometimes specific to Hong Kong mainly refers to the Chinese learners and culture as generalisations covering all people of Chinese origin. Usually, it does not attempt to make any distinction between Chinese learners from different countries. The view of one Chinese culture covering all Chinese people is prevalent in the literature. However, there is now a belief that research in to this notion is required. Chinese people may identify with the same values but may differ quite significantly on how they implement them (Fan, 2000).

As has already been noted much of the literature focuses on what may be a "stereotypical" view of the Chinese learner. This view portrays the Chinese student as a surface learner who learns by rote (Chow, 1995), is quiet in class and as a consequence of power distance and Confucian teaching regarding face the Chinese student is said to have a preference for didactic teaching and for instruction in "hard" subjects. For these reasons teaching and learning strategies that stray from the didactic are "reportedly ineffective" with Chinese students.

There is now an opposite and an increasingly more vocal viewpoint that says the stereotypical view may be unfounded. Studies have shown that Chinese learners can and do attain higher level learning outcomes often outperforming their Western counterparts. Further to this teaching methods beyond the didactic can be usefully employed with the Chinese learner.

These two viewpoints contradict and as a consequence give a picture of the Chinese learner that is both confused and confusing. It is these contradictions that are summed up as the "gap" between the two viewpoints and the considerable gap in the literature in the relationship between preferred teaching, learning and assessment strategies in the context of distance learning provided in Hong Kong that this dissertation will explore.

Link to the Research

The "gap" in the literature and the two viewpoints are explored by the use of a case study of Chinese learners undertaking distance learning courses of the School of Sport and Leisure Management in Hong Kong. The research methods that have been used in compiling the case study have sought to analyse the questions that have arisen from the literature on perceived differences in Chinese learners. The perceived differences in Chinese learners' preferences that I have outlined in this chapter will be used to form the basis of the research. These differences will be used as the basis for the case study.

In the research the six possible differences in teaching, learning and assessment identified here have been set up as theoretical propositions taking the stereotypical view. By taking these propositions in turn the intention is to build up a picture of the Hong Kong students who are studying on Sheffield Hallam's distance learning courses.

Data gathered against each of the six theoretical propositions will be used to conclude against the two overarching research questions. These questions concern transferring a course from a western culture to an eastern culture and the appropriateness of applying models that measure learning style across cultures (see Chapter 6 for full list of theoretical propositions and the overarching research questions).

Wu (2002) states that we should both acknowledge and understand the consequences of moving between pedagogic cultures. This dissertation aims to do this. The importance of this case study research is that it is seeking to challenge the stereotypical view of the Chinese learner while attempting to enhance professional practice with regard to these learners. In doing this I am seeking to understand how this group of learners prefers to be taught, learn and assessed.

CHAPTER 6

RESEARCH

Section 1: Research Philosophy

Saunders et al (2003) state that a researcher's choice of research philosophy depends upon her or his view of the development of knowledge. Three views are said to dominate the literature. These are positivism, interpretivism and realism (Saunders et al, 2003). Some authorities add a fourth philosophy; postpositivism to this (Guba and Lincoln, 1998). Whilst I wish to give a rationale for my personal research philosophy, I do not wish to become involved in what have been called the paradigm wars (Gage, 1989), effectively debating which philosophy is best. Instead I take the view that no construction of research is incontrovertibly right and that the researcher must rely on its persuasiveness and utility (Guba and Lincoln, 1998).

For the purposes of this dissertation, my research philosophy is that of positivism, or more particularly, postpositivism. Postpositivism is a movement on from positivism. It is an attempt to deal with the criticisms of positivism and is useful to me in that it goes beyond advocating quantitative methods and includes qualitative methods (Guba and Lincoln, 1998; Meriluoto, 2003). The advances on positivism that have been made by postpositivism go some way to countering the criticisms of positivism, particularly the internal/intraparadigm critiques of quantitative techniques (Guba and Lincoln, 1998).

Postpositivism is both useful and persuasive to me for a number of reasons:

First, the aim of postpositivistic inquiry is explanation. The research in this dissertation is primarily explanatory in that I am seeking to explain the learning, teaching and assessment preferences of Chinese learners. Explanation and understanding are appropriate to both the aims of this research and the case study method that I intend to use (von Wright, 1971).

Second, the epistemology (theory of knowledge), ontology (nature of being and relationship with perceived reality) and methodology of postpositivism are appropriate for the research.

The ontology of postpositivism is that of critical realism. It is called critical realism, as its proponents believe that claims about reality must be subjected to the widest possible critical examination in order to help us understand reality. Supporters of critical realism believe that there is a "real" reality but that we can only understand it only imperfectly and probabilistically. The ontology of critical realism sees reality as imperfectly apprehendable due to flawed human intellectual mechanisms and the intractable nature of reality (Guba and Lincoln, 1998). Critical realism is used to counter many of the criticisms of positivism.

The epistemology of postpositivism is from the objectivist critical tradition. In postpositivism objectivity is the ideal. Whilst recognising that objectivity can be difficult to attain. One technique that is suggested is that the research is opened up to the critical community of editors, peers and referees (Guba and Lincoln, 1998). This is particularly persuasive to me as I have used these techniques to seek to achieve objectivity in other research that I have carried out and have found them to be effective (see positionality statement chapter 1). This will be the case in this research where it is my intention to carry out this practice. As findings emerge they will be presented to peers within my own research community and at conferences to subject the findings to as deep a criticism as is possible and to help maintain objectivity (see Appendix 4 publications and conference presentations).

The methodology of postpositivism is that of critical multiplism (Guba and Lincoln, 1998). Critical multiplism is a form of triangulation that opens up the research to as many different sources of evidence as possible. The purpose of this methodology is rather than to show that a proposition is true is to show that it is not true, i.e., the intention is to falsify it. Within this research six research propositions will be postulated. Each of the propositions has several sources of evidence against it. The purpose of the triangulation of evidence will be to support or to not support a research proposition (see Figure 6.2: Formulation of General Analytic Strategy later in this chapter).

In postpositivism, knowledge consists of non-falsified hypotheses that are regarded as probable facts. In this dissertation I will not falsify the research hypotheses, instead, to create knowledge I will use pattern matching in which empirical patterns will be matched to predicted patterns (theoretical propositions). When all of the evidence has assembled and analysed, the theoretical propositions will be regarded as supported, having some support or having no support. While this stance is associated with positivism rather than postpositivism I believe that pattern matching will allow me to provide full answers to my research questions.

Accumulation of knowledge is accretion: the process by which each probable fact acts as a form of building block that adds to or builds knowledge (Lincoln and Guba, 1998). The number of sources of evidence used within this research is the building blocks that allow for accretion. Facts may take the form of generalisation that allows for prediction(s) that may be moved to a population. Within this dissertation principles of accretion will be adhered to. Multiple sources of evidence against theoretical propositions in order to allow knowledge to be built (see section 5 of this chapter).

Finally, the criteria for the quality and rigour of research design used in positivism/postpositivism agree with my own philosophy of research. These criteria are that research must have internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity. These criteria are described in table 6.2 in this chapter and are concluded against in chapter eight.

Section 2: Research Method

Introduction

Development of the Research Method

The research method and tools used in this dissertation have been developed over a period of time and in five distinct stages.

Stage 1

This stage comprised a thorough review of the literature with regard to national culture, learning styles and cultural differences and their impact, if any, upon pedagogy relating to Chinese learners. The literature review revealed that there are six possible differences in preferences for learning, teaching and assessment that are particularly relevant to Chinese learners. These differences are explained in great detail in Chapter 5. These six differences have been used as the basis for the research propositions that are described later in this chapter.

Stage 2

This was the design stage. In this stage involved formulating the case study and designing the instruments that were to be used in it. These issues are fully dealt with later in the data collection section of this chapter.

Stage 3

This stage was the development, planning and piloting of two research instruments based upon possible differences in preferences for teaching, learning and assessment of Chinese students. The first of these was the student questionnaire. This was piloted in Hong Kong in May 2002. The aims of the pilot were first; to rid the questionnaire of any ambiguity, specifically seek to ensure that the students understood all of the questions. Second, to identify issues that arose that may have been missed by the pilot questionnaire. This is discussed further in section 3 of this chapter.
The second instrument that was piloted was the staff interviews. The pilot staff interviews led to changes with regard to some of the questions that were asked and the order and formatting of them. This is discussed further in section 3 of this chapter.

After these instruments were successfully piloted it was decided that these instruments in their amended forms would be used a part of a case study investigation.

Stage 4

This was the implementation stage of the case study, specifically implementation of the research instruments used in the case study. The case study research was carried out between October 2002 and July 2003. The implementation was successful and with one exception was on time with the original time plans for research. The exception was that due to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak in China the University banned travel to Hong Kong. This caused a change in the research instrument that was planned for in the research protocol (see table 6.4 Research protocol). Paired interviews to be carried out in Hong Kong at that time were replaced with e-mail interviews with the same students.

Stage 5

This was the reflective stage and was the stage in which the data was analysed. This took place between December 2002 and November 2003. Analysis of data is described in further detail in this chapter.

Case Study as a Research Method

The research method used for this dissertation is a case study. Specifically the issues identified in Chapter 5 will be discussed through an intrinsic, explanatory case study (Stake, 1998; Yin, 2003). An intrinsic case study is particularly appropriate as the purpose of this investigation is not theory building, rather it is to give a better understanding or explanation of a particular case (Stake, 1998). The case in question is that of a distinct group of Hong Kong students undertaking a distance-learning course in Hong Kong. The research in this dissertation is essentially explanatory. The reason for this is that little work has been carried out directly with regard to teaching, learning and assessment and Chinese culture. Learning style literature and research is much westernised. Research in the context of Hong Kong Chinese learners and distance learning is almost non-existent. With global learning the issues of culture are key. The research will draw on various bodies of knowledge as constructed within this particular context and a western culture. There is a need to develop knowledge about these ideas in a different cultural context (in this case Hong Kong Chinese) and a different learning context (distance learning as offered by the School of Sport and Leisure Management).

Case study method has been chosen, as it is especially suited to the nature of the study in terms of its aims, its rationale, its advantages and the sources of evidence that may be used. (See rationale for the research method later in this chapter).

Definition of case study

Definitions of case studies vary. The technical definition of a case study proposed by Yin (2003) is that of an

"empirical inquiry that intends to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context especially when the boundaries between the phenomena and the context are not clearly evident"

(Yin, 2003, page 13)

As Yin sees it, the important strength of case study method is that it allows investigations to be undertaken of the phenomena in its own context (Rowley, 2002). This feature is important in this investigation, as the students who are the case study group will be researched in their own context, i.e., studying by distance learning in Hong Kong.

Further to Yin's definition, Hammersley and Gomm (2000) suggest that the aim of a case study is to capture data for its uniqueness rather than the ability to generalise. It is an in-depth investigation that uses different methods in order to understand the object that is being studied (Orum et al, 1993). A case study is an investigation of a small number of cases, frequently only one in which information is gathered about a large number of features (Hammersley and Gomm, 2000). This is particularly appropriate for this study as the case is singular i.e., one very specific group of students in Hong Kong but many features of the case will be investigated, e.g., performance in assessment, assessment preferences and learning preferences. Hammersley and Gomm (2000) suggest that in a case study there is frequently no wish to control the variables or the variables cannot be controlled. The main variables in this case will be age, gender, educational background, qualifications, workplace, and home circumstances. Controlling these variables would be impracticable but this is not the intention. Rather than controlling variables, I wish to investigate the learning preferences of this distinct group in their own environment.

Rationale for the research method

In deciding upon an appropriate research method, the first choice was should the research be qualitative or quantitative? Or should it be a mixed method combination of both quantitative and quantitative? As Yin (2003) says case study can be both quantitative and qualitative. Although this case study does contain some quantitative data, the available data would not allow large-scale quantitative analysis to be carried out. The reason for this is that the case study is examining one specific group of twenty-five students in a specific context. What is more appropriate to this research is that there is a deep and rich understanding and representation of this special group of students. The more appropriate procedure for this level of understanding is qualitative research (Stake, 1995).

Table 6.1: Relevant Situations for Different Research Strategies			
Strategy	Form of Research Question	Requires Control of behavioural Events?	Focuses on Contemporary Events
Experiment	How, why.	Yes	Yes
Survey	Who, what, where, how many, how much.	No	Yes
Archival analysis	Who, what, where, how many, how much.	No	Yes/No
History	How, why.	No	No
Case Study	How, why	No	Yes

Source: Yin (2003) page 5.

Having decided that the research would be predominantly qualitative, the next consideration concerned the selection of the research method. Yin (2003) advises that several types of qualitative methods are available; these include experiments, surveys, histories and archival information (see Figure 6.1 above). Each of these methods has its disadvantages and advantages. However, as can be seen from figure 6.1 the use of them depends upon three conditions. The first condition concerns the type of research question. The second focuses on the control that the researcher has over behavioural events and the third considers whether the focus of the research is on contemporary or historical phenomena.

With regard to the first condition, case studies generally focus on what Yin (1994) calls the how and why questions i.e., questions that are explanatory (Johns and Lee-Ross, 1998; Rowley, 2002: Yin, 2003). This is essentially the type of question that is being proposed in this research. My research question is essentially explanatory in that it will seek to explain and explore the impact of culture on preferences for different forms of teaching, learning and assessment. Case studies are one approach that help to enable a more detailed and deeper investigation of the "how" and "why" questions (Rowley, 2002; Yin, 2003).

While the research question is a useful starting point for deciding research method other qualitative strategies, e.g., experiments and history would enable the "how" and "why" questions to be answered. Notwithstanding this, the case for case study method is strengthened in situations where the researcher has little or no control over behavioural events. The research questions concern students and their preferences for learning. As the researcher of this phenomenon I have no control over any event, I cannot conduct an experiment as I have no control over any variable. Essentially I am seeking to understand the educational preferences of this particular group of students. As experiments by definition require control over variables, only the case study and history remain as possibilities for conducting this research.

Finally, case studies are particularly helpful when the researcher intends to focus on a contemporary phenomenon in a real-life context (Rowley, 2002; Yin, 2003). This condition fits my proposed research as I am studying the "now" all of the research took place between September 2002 and May 2003. The research with the students was in their real life settings, i.e. Hong Kong and the distance learning classroom. As history by definition studies the past, case study is the more appropriate choice of research method for this investigation.

In addition to the appropriateness of case study method to this dissertation, case studies also bring several benefits to this research that I wish to take advantage of. Simon et al (1996) identifies four such benefits, these are that case study research can:

- Offer rich insights.
- Allow multiple sources of information.
- Help identify further research needs.
- Identify new and fresh issues and insights for the research focus.

It was my intention throughout the research to seek rich insights in to the research group in order to gain a full understanding of their needs. Multiple sources of evidence were used (see research design) again to contribute to understanding but also to deal with issues of validity and reliability. Further research needs were identified (see recommendations) and new issues were added to the original focus of investigation (see issues arising in Chapter 8).

Summary

A research method should be used when it gives a distinct advantage over other methods (Yin, 2003). Case study method will give a distinct advantage when

"a "how" or "why" question is being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has little or no control."

Yin, (2003), page 8

The research method that is used in this dissertation of an intrinsic case study meets these conditions. It fits the "how" research question that I am asking. The study is concentrating on contemporary events and is consistent with the lack of control that I have over behavioural events.

Additionally, the nature of the phenomena to be researched is such that qualitative research will give me the richness of data that I require and a case study approach will fit the both the aims of my study and the research question. Further the additional benefits of case study research make it an attractive proposition as it allows for multiple sources of evidence. It may also allow new insights and be an inspiration for further research.

Section 3: Research Design

Yin (2003) contends that research design is the logic that connects the data to be collected and the conclusions that may be drawn from it to the original research questions. Alternatively it may be seen as an action plan that links questions to conclusions, the research design should give a clear view of what is investigated in the study (Rowley, 2002).

Components of Research Design

There is no one accepted research design for case study method. Meyer (2002) points out that there are no specific guidelines for case studies whatsoever. However, five components of research design are thought to be particularly important (Yin, 2003). These components are the research question(s), the propositions, the unit(s) of analysis, the logic linking data to the propositions (selecting the appropriate data collection) and the criteria for interpreting the findings (Rowley, 2002; Yin 2003). It should be noted that while there are five recommended components of research design what composes them is both fluid and debatable.

1. Research Questions

The aim of this dissertation has been to investigate the teaching, learning and assessment preferences of Chinese learners in order to understand whether or not their educational needs are met by the distance learning courses offered by the School of Sport and Leisure Management.

The study is primarily concerned with two overarching "how" questions that are taken from the research aim in Chapter 1. The first question is "how far are the teaching, learning and assessment preferences of Chinese Hong Kong learners met by the distance learning courses offered?" More specifically it concerns the feasibility of transferring a global product, i.e., a western course with no changes or alterations to the Hong Kong market.

The second question asks "how useful are models that measure learning style in classifying learners culturally and making recommendations concerning their learning preferences?"

The research questions are taken from and positioned within the literature (Darke et al, 1998).

2. Research Propositions

As Yin (2003) says the "how" questions do not themselves tell us what to investigate. They merely indicate the direction in which the research may go. To enable the research to be carried out the overarching question was broken down in to six key propositions that stem from the literature review. These are the differences in educational needs that may arise from Chinese culture (see Chapter 5).

The research propositions are as follows: -

a. Chinese learners have a preference for a curriculum content that concentrates on "hard" subjects.

b. Chinese students prefer teaching and learning strategies that are both passive and didactic.

c. Chinese students dislike classroom discussion. They will not ask questions in class preferring to remain silent taking notes.

d. The role of the teacher/lecturer is didactic. S/he is also considered to be a friend by the Chinese students and is seen as a figure that provides moral guidance.

e. Students prefer assignments that have definite answer. They have a preference for examinations.

f. The Chinese are rote learners.

These propositions have formed the basis of the research design and have been designed in to the research to enable triangulation.

The data collection and analysis has been ordered in such a way as to support or refute these propositions (Rowley, 2002).

Triangulation/Critical Multiplism

Triangulation and triangulation of evidence are terms that are used throughout this research. Triangulation is defined as

"The use of two or more independent sources of data or data collection methods within one study in order to ensure that the data are telling you what they think they are telling you."

(Saunders et al, 2003, page 492)

Triangulation has been kept in mind throughout the research design process. The intention of this to seek to ensure the validity of the research (see Figure 6.2 later in this chapter).

3. The unit of analysis

The unit of analysis is the basis of the case it identifies and sets the boundaries of the investigation (Rowley, 2002). The case in a case study can be fuzzy and is sometimes difficult to define. The case may be anything from an individual to a group of individuals, an organisation, an occurrence or an event. It is important to be clear about the case as this determines where and how far the investigation will go (Tellis, 1997).

To prevent any confusion concerning the definition of a case Yin (2003) recommends that the case and the questions that it attempts to answer be explained to a colleague. This practice was carried out on several occasions throughout the Ed. D. course with tutors, colleagues and friends. The result is a case that is singular, transparent and which has clearly demarcated boundaries.

In this case study the unit of analysis is the group of Hong Kong Chinese learners who have studied the distance learning courses offered in Hong Kong. The boundaries to it are clear. The boundaries are designed and demarcated by the students who were taught on the course in the academic year 2002/3 and the staff who have taught these students in Hong Kong (Stake, 1995).

4. The logic linking data to the propositions

The case study has been designed to allow the six propositions outlined above to be linked clearly to the data. Four sources of data have been used (see data collection). These sources have been designed to allow the propositions to be either supported or refuted. These sources are a student questionnaire containing both quantitative and qualitative data; interviews with staff: archive data and e-mail interviews with students (see data collection for further details).

These multiple sources should allow for pattern matching (Stake, 1995; Saunders et al, 2003) against the propositions (for further details see pattern matching in this chapter). To allow pattern matching to be carried out the sources of data were matched against the propositions as shown in Figure 6.1 below.

Figure 6.1: Strategy for linking data to propositions and triangulation of evidence

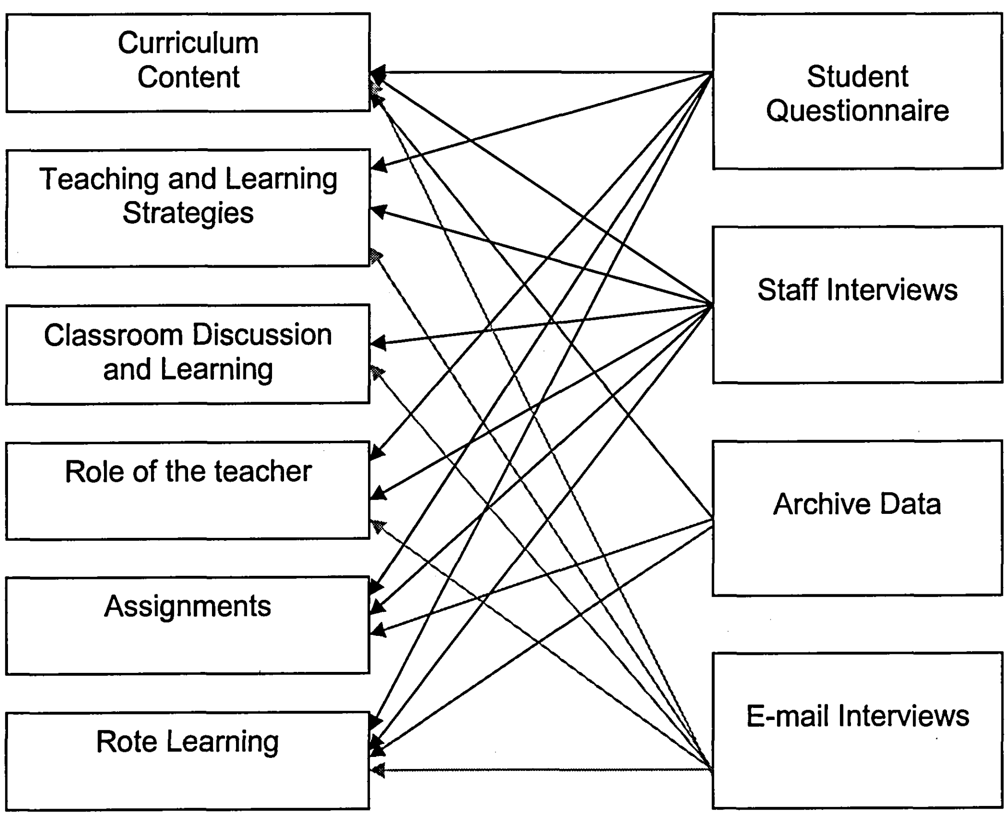


Figure 6.1 demonstrates how patterns will be matched and how triangulation will take place. Throughout the process of the research design care was taken to ensure that multiple sources of evidence covered each proposition. Figure 6.1 demonstrates that care has been taken to ensure that each proposition has multiple sources of evidence against it. This amount of data will allow patterns to be established and will give evidence with regard to each of the propositions.

5. Criteria for interpreting the findings

As no statistical tests can be used within the case study explanation building and pattern matching can be difficult. Yin (2003) asks the question as to how the close the patterns have to be establishing a match and therefore interpret the findings. His answer is that the researcher would hope that the patterns are sufficiently contrasting to enable comparisons with rival propositions to be made.

As no tests can be applied to the criteria to interpreting findings. My intention within this study is match the explanations and the patterns to the propositions where this is possible and to match them to contrasting propositions where it is not. Due to the complicated nature of the phenomena under study it may only be possible to match in part. Where no explanation can be given the proposition will be regarded as unsupported.

The process, as described earlier, is that knowledge will be accumulated via accretion. Each piece of evidence will be used as a building block by which explanation may be given and knowledge will be built.

Quality of Research Design

Yin (2003) asserts that research design represents a logical set of statements. Therefore it is possible to test the quality of research design by subjecting it to four tests that that are used in social research. These tests are construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability. Single case studies such as mine are particularly criticised for their lack of generalisability and reliability (Jensen and Rogers, 2001). Essentially the "tests" that Yin proposes are to counter these criticisms and are used to establish generalisation, validity and reliability. These are the three concepts upon which positivist/post-positivist researchers would regard a piece of research as knowledge (Zucker, 2001; Rowley, 2002).

The Four Design Tests

Construct Validity – comprises demonstrating that the operational procedures have been used within the study, e.g., using measures within the study that seek to remove subjectivity.

Internal Validity – requires a demonstration of causal relationships showing that certain things leads to another. Stuart et al (2002) recommend that where internal validity is a necessary criterion the researcher should demonstrate that actual patterns meet proposed patterns.

External Validity – concerns generalisation and establishing where a study's findings may be generalised.

Reliability – is essentially demonstrating that the operations of the studies can be repeated with the same results. This would include demonstrating data collection procedures.

It should be noted that Yin's approach to case study research is from the positivist tradition. On considering his tests and the fact that he is using mainly qualitative methods what he is advocating is actually closer to postpositivism. He is applying the same tests to research that would be required by more "scientific" researchers but is using qualitative methods. From the positivist point of view case study is designed and evaluated according natural science research. In positivism the stance of the researcher is detached and neutral; the inquiry is intended to be value free (Darke et al, 1998).

As was evidenced earlier there at least four competing research paradigms and as may be expected not everyone is in agreement with this view. Cavaye (1996) points out that case study has been used within both the positivist and interpretivist traditions. This case study is used within the positivist (post positivist) tradition.

Case study as a research method is subjected to enormous criticism due to its perceived lack of rigour. In order to demonstrate rigour much of the advice is that the case study should be reliable, valid and capable of generalisation. This is a theme that occurs in the literature on many occasions (Sofaer, 1999; Jensen and Rodgers, 2001; Stuart et al, 2002; Rowley, 2002; Voss et al, 2002). Sofaer (1999), for example, insists that qualitative research should draw upon the best traditions and techniques. As was stated in my research philosophy it is my intention to demonstrate rigour in my research and as I wish my findings to be tested for validity, reliability and generalisability. I will apply Yin's tests to my research design and findings.

To enable the tests to be carried out a set of tactics that correspond to each of the tests and the stage at the research when each of these should be executed. These tactics and research timings are shown in figure 6.2 overleaf.

Table 6.2: Case Study Tactics for the Four Design Tests

Tests	Case Study Tactic	Phase of research in which tactic occurs
Construct Validity	Use multiple sources of evidence	Data collection
	Establish chain of evidence	Data collection
	Have key informants review draft case study reporting	Composition
Internal Validity	Do pattern matching	Data analysis
	Do explanation building	Data analysis
	Address rival explanations	Data analysis
	Use logic models	Data analysis
External Validity	Use theory in single-case studies	Research design
	Use replication logic in multiple case studies	Research design
Reliability	Use case study protocol	Data collection
	Develop case study database	Data collection

Source: Yin (2003) page 34

These tests and tactics for ensuring reliability, validity and generalisation will be kept in mind throughout the research design process: they will form part of the conclusions in Chapter 8.

Case Study Design: Summary

Yin (2003) states that the case studies may be either single or multiple and embedded or holistic. This results in four types of case study design. The case study that I will use in this research is single-case embedded. It is single-case because it is investigating one group of Hong Kong Chinese learners. Several reasons are given for justifying the use single-case studies; in this instance a single-case study is appropriate, as the case is representative or typical. The group of Hong Kong Chinese learners should be typical of new cohorts undertaking the same course in future years. Further, there is no other case within the timeframe with which this case could be replicated (Tellis, 1997).

The case is embedded as it contains more than one unit of analysis. In this instance the case concerns analysis of student's opinions, materials archives and tutor perceptions. One of the major pitfalls of embedded analysis is that attention may be paid to one of the units of analysis. As figure 6.1 shows each of the propositions will be analysed from a minimum of two perspectives. This will be kept firmly mind at the research findings reporting stage where each perspective will be separately analysed before the proposition as a whole is analysed (see Chapter 7).

Section 4: Data Collection

The particular attraction of a case study for this research is that the data collection can rely on varied and different sources of evidence. As previously referred to the sources of evidence within a case study may be multiple (Yin, 2003; Rowley, 2002; Hammersley and Gomm, 2000; Johns and Lee-Ross, 1998: Stake, 1998; Orum et al, 1991). Further these multiple sources allow for triangulation. None of these sources preclude any others. There are six main sources of evidence for case studies. The sources are documents, interviews, archival records, participant observation, direct observation and physical artefacts (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003).

Case Study Evidence

In compiling this case study the following sources of evidence were used: -

Documentation

Documentation is thought to be relevant to every case study (Yin, 2003). Documentation is useful in that it can be used to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources. The documentation used in this study includes assignment marking sheets and the distance learning study materials. The purpose of this is to add to and corroborate evidence from other sources with regard to preferences for different forms of assessment and different types of assignment.

Archival records

These records are similar to documents and today often take the form of computer files and records (Yin, 2003). The archival records I used were the records of students' assessments over the past two years and the assignment briefs that corresponded to this. The Hong Kong Chinese students' performance over the past two years was compared with overall performance of all other students studying that module. Specifically, I scrutinised students' performance in subjects and assessments in which they are thought to perform badly. It was believed that the statistical data may indicate where Chinese students perform well or poorly and will corroborate or otherwise the findings of the other sources of data.

The assessments were analysed along with a senior colleague and the module tutor to assess the actual requirements of the assignment in terms of levels of analysis and evaluation. The purpose of this was to isolate assessments in which Hong Kong students may be expected to do well or badly according to the literature. Additionally, one unit, Hospitality Quality Management had individual marks against each component of the assessment. The marks for this were analysed to seek to understand the impact of a marking scheme that gave a greater proportion of marks for critical evaluation and analysis.

Interviews

Yin (2003) advises that the interviewer has two jobs. The first is to follow her/his line of enquiry, the second is to ask questions in an unbiased manner. In a case study where the researcher wishes to satisfy a line of enquiry while at the same time asking friendly and non-threatening questions. The result is that the case study case interview questions are normally open–ended. This is the case with the three sources of interview data that are used in this case study. The three sources are:

a. Interviews with the teaching staff. The intention of the interviews was to gain the staff's perceptions of teaching and assessing Chinese students and to attempt to discover which teaching methods and strategies have been employed. Furthermore, I wished to find out if the staff had altered their teaching styles to fit any perceived differences in the learning styles on the part of the Chinese students. Further to this, I also wished to elicit opinions of usefulness of the study materials and how the students use them. All staff who had taught at the study schools in Hong Kong and tutored the students in Sheffield were interviewed (these are the same people). The number of staff engaged in this and were interviewed is seven.

   The original pilot staff interviews were conducted by a combination of face-to-face interviews and e-mail. The interviews were structured; the staff answered a set number of questions. Follow up interviews and the use of e-mail indicated that other questions could have been usefully posed at the time of the original interview. For this reason the interviews were changed from structured to semi-structured. The original focus of the interviews was the study schools, answers to the pilot student questionnaire indicated that opinions concerning learning materials particularly the study packs should be added.

The interviews took place between October and November 2002. The interviews were semi-structured in that there was a set of questions that were answered by all of the interviewees. However, other questions were posed to allow staff to elaborate on their answers and to pursue new unexpected lines of enquiry. The interviewees were invited to broaden out or clarify their points. The interviews were recorded and transcribed at a later date. After transcription all of the staff were given a transcript of their interview and were allowed to make alterations to the transcription after reflection.

b. E-mail interviews with students. The intention of the original research was to conduct paired interviews with the students in Hong Kong. The SARS outbreak prevented travel to Hong Kong. For this reason e-mail interviews were conducted over a period of two months (May to July 2003) with four students who had volunteered to take part in the original paired interviews.

   The purposes of these interviews remained the same as that for the paired interviews. This purpose was to deal with new issues that arose from the other sources of evidence. Additionally the purpose was to triangulate and take further the findings of the archive analysis, specifically to corroborate other sources and to help make recommendations with regard to teaching, learning and assessment of Chinese students. The data from the interviews were also used to corroborate the findings of the archive analysis with regard to students' preferences for teaching, learning and assessment and the interviews with staff with regard to their experiences in teaching these students. The four students were chosen from a volunteer list of nine students as they were reliable in terms of responsiveness and more importantly were representative of the cohort.

   E-mail is a relatively new medium for qualitative research and because of its newness it is not mentioned in many textbooks. However it is being used in ethnography and in text based research (Silverman, 2001). After deep reflection, I believe that the e-mail interviews were successful in that they allowed time for full reflection one point at a time by the students. The answers that they gave were full and packed with detail. I believe that the time for reflection that this method allowed gave rich answers to the questions that were probably better than those that may have obtained by paired interviews in Hong Kong.

c. Student Questionnaire. This was a self-completed questionnaire that contained closed and open-ended questions.

At first sight a questionnaire may not be perceived as an interview. However, Yin (2003) says that structured questions on the same lines as a formal survey produce a structured interview. This is essentially what this questionnaire is. It is an interview where there are a combination of closed and open questions. Using this gave a good mix of quantitative and qualitative data.

This questionnaire was piloted with a different group of students in Hong Kong in May 2002. Although the format of the questionnaire did not change several questions were added to gain background information about the students and their previous learning experiences. For example, questions concerning the students' previous exposure to different forms of teaching, learning and assessment were asked.

The purpose of this questionnaire was to discover what the preferences of this particular group of Hong Kong students were in terms of teaching, learning and assessment. Further to this, the questionnaire sought to uncover something of the students' learning style with regard to rote learning and their perceptions of the role of the teacher and distance learning. The questionnaire was intended to give the initial rich source of data in addition to giving a picture of this group of students' preferences.

As some of the questions could be described as highly technical and were to be couched in a language that may not be easily understood by the layperson. The questionnaire contained some quantitative questions that were intended to give a "league table" of the students' preferences and to enable them to understand the exact meaning of the qualitative questions. For example the students were asked to place teaching and learning strategies in order. The intention of this was to investigate their preferences in quantitative form and to ensure that the students understood exactly what the term "teaching and learning strategy" meant.

To give as complete a picture as possible, all of the students who attended the study school in January 2003 were asked to complete the questionnaire. The number of questionnaires that were completed was twenty-five. These comprised 8 postgraduate and 17 undergraduate students. The questionnaire took an average of forty-five minutes to complete.

The quantitative analysis was carried out using SPSS for Windows. In order to allow full analysis of the quantitative data each answer was fully written up separately and later grouped under themes that emerged upon reflection. Taking the answers given to each of the questions and comparing responses was the basis of the qualitative analysis. This was the initial attempt to establish patterns and to begin explanation building analysis.

Reasons for the choice of this data

I chose to collect data using these techniques for two reasons. First I am confident that the possible differences that I have identified in Chinese learners can be fully explored by utilising the data that these techniques gave. Importantly these techniques are usable in the context of researching students in Hong Kong. Time and distance constraints would have rendered observational techniques impractical, e.g., observing classroom practice would not be practical as the new study schools involve only two to three members of staff who teach parallel sessions simultaneously. Questions concerning teaching style and assessment styles and preferences that may have been answered by this technique were answered instead through the staff and student interviews. Similarly, questions regarding prior experience were answered by general questions about the students themselves in the open–ended questions.

Second, in deciding upon this choice of data evidence, the strengths and weaknesses of the sources of evidence were taken in to account. These strengths and weaknesses are illustrated in table 6.3 below. I believe that the strengths that each technique brings the research add to its reliability and rigour. The weaknesses that may have undermined the research were recognised, taken account of and "designed" out.

Table 6.3 Strengths and Weaknesses of Some of the Data Collection Methods Used in this Case Study		
Method	Strength	Weakness
Documentation	Stable – can be reviewed repeatedly	Retrievability – can be low.
	Unobtrusive – not created as a result of the case study.	Biased selectivity – if collection is incomplete.
	Exact – contain exact names, references etc.	Reporting bias – of unknown author.
	Broad Coverage – long span of time, many events and settings.	Access – may be blocked.
Archival Records	As documentation.	As documentation.
	Precise and quantitative.	Accessibility – due to privacy reasons.
Interviews	Targeted – focuses directly on the case study topic.	Bias – due to poorly constructed questions.
	Insightful – provides perceived causal differences.	Response bias.
		Inaccuracies due to poor recall.
		Reflexivity – Interviewee gives what interviewer wants to hear.

Source: Adapted from Yin (2003) page 86.

Principles of Data Collection

Three principles of data collection should be kept in mind. These principles are using multiple sources of evidence, creating a case study database and maintaining a chain of evidence (Yin, 2003).

1. Using multiple sources of evidence

The use of multiple sources of evidence allows the researcher to tackle the problem of constrict validity throughout the course of the research. As stated earlier in this chapter, multiple sources of evidence allow data triangulation to take place and give the advantage of "converging lines of inquiry" (Yin, 2003, p98). In terms of reliability, case studies that use multiple sources of evidence and are properly triangulated are more highly rated than those that rely upon a unique source of evidence (Yin 2003) are. Multiple sources of evidence and triangulation have been kept in mind throughout the design and data collection stages of this research. (See figure 6.2 for triangulation strategy).

2. Creating a case study database

The documentation used in case study comprises data/evidentiary base and the report of the investigation. However, in case study research this distinction is not often made (Yin, 2003). In practice, the case study database is often the same or synonymous with the case report. The problem with this is that it does not allow the critical reader to investigate or inspect the raw data that led to the conclusions.

With this criticism in mind a database has been kept separate from the report throughout the course of this research. All of the raw data, the case study documents, the instruments used remain available in their raw states and in the forms in which they were tabulated and analysed.

3. Maintain a chain of evidence

The chain of evidence allows the reader of the case study to follow the evidence from the initial research question to final conclusions. In doing this construct validity is achieved and the case study is reliable (Yin, 2003).

In doing this I have sought to ensure the following:

1. The report gives sufficient citations to the different parts of the database. The research propositions and the evidence used to support or refute then are shown in figure 6.1. In the research findings chapter each of the portions of evidence have been written up separately and refer back to the database from which the evidence came.
2. The database produces actual evidence that indicates the specific circumstances of the research, e.g., places and times of data collection.
3. The circumstances are consistent with the procedures laid down in the case study protocol. The earlier part of this chapter states when the evidence was collected. This matches with the places and times that are given in the case study protocol (see Table 6.4 later in this chapter).

4. That the case study protocol links the content of the protocol to the initial study questions.

In summary what I have sought to ensure is that the external reader can move from one part of the study to another with sufficient cross-referencing to procedures and resulting evidence.

Other Possible Difficulties with the Data Collection

In undertaking this research four problems were considered. First, the Chinese respondents are from a culture that is not my own. To seek to ensure that I appropriately represent the case study group, the case study method was rigorously employed and triangulated to seek to ensure that the respondents' views are accurately depicted.

Second, although the students are fluent in English they are answering in a second language. It was essential that the research instruments used be understood by the respondents to enable full and rich responses. As was referred to earlier where technical language was used particularly in the questionnaire it was essential that the students understood the language so that their responses were meaningful. To seek to ensure these three tactics were used. First, the original questionnaire was read and commented upon by Chinese students at Sheffield Hallam. Second, the questionnaire was piloted with an earlier cohort of students in May 2002. The responses were analysed and adjustments were made. Lastly, to ensure that technical language was understood, students were given examples of the meaning of word and phrase within the questionnaire.

Finally, in this research I am known to both the students and staff either as a teacher or Deputy Division Head. I am aware of this position within the research and will adopt strategies that take account of this. My position as a teacher might bias answers that the students give. To seek to prevent this, open-ended questionnaires were administered on my behalf at the study school by other members of staff trained by me. The back up e-mail questionnaires were an ideal vehicle for establishing rapport with the students and for the answers that they provoked. To seek to ensure staff's trust I made it clear that the purpose of the research is to improve practice. Further I promised not to publish interview data unless staff have approved it.

Selection of Respondents

The intention of this research is to give as full a picture of the students as is possible. To do this it is essential that those who contribute to the research findings of this case study are representative of the study group and that as many opinions as possible are sought. The number of respondents for each of the data collection methods is as follows.

Staff Interviews.

In total seven members of staff were interviewed. This is a one hundred per cent sample in that it everyone who has taught both in Hong Kong and in Sheffield on the distance learning course.

Student interviews (questionnaires)

In total twenty-five students completed the questionnaire. This represents all of the students who were active on the course in January 2003.

E-mail Interviews

Four students were interviewed. These were selected from students who had volunteered in January 2003 to take further part in the research. In selecting these students gender, age, previous experience and course were taken in to account. The students are in ratios of 3:1 female to male; 3:1 undergraduate to postgraduate and representative of the age range and previous experiences of the students.

Case study protocol

Case study is thought by some authorities to be the most difficult form of research as there are no routine formulas attached to it (Tellis, 1997). To increase case study reliability Yin (2003) advocates the use of a case study protocol before starting out with data collection.

The case study protocol sets out how the case study is to be conducted. It is directed at collecting data and is a major way of increasing the reliability of a case study. The purpose of it is to guide the researcher in his or her collection of data. Essentially the case study protocol is a funnelling of information from the research question to the specifics of data analysis (Voss et al; 2002).

The case study protocol is illustrated in Table 6.4 below.

Table 6.4: Case Study Protocol

1. Introduction	
Research Question and Propositions	See earlier in this chapter for full details of the research question and the six propositions.
Theoretical framework	This is fully explained in this chapter and is the basis of the six propositions and the research question.
Role of the protocol	The protocol is the guide for the conduct of the case study.
2. Data Collection Procedures	
Sites visited	Hong Kong Study Schools May 2002 and January 2003.
Data Collection Plan	Archive Analysis – September 2002 – May 2003. Staff Interviews – October – November 2002 Students Questionnaires – January 2003. E-mail interviews – May – July 2003.
Role of the protocol	The protocol is the guide for the conduct of the case study.
Ethics	All research will be conducted to conform with ethical guidelines as explained in later in this chapter
3. Field Procedures	
Access to key informants/information	Access to students is via the January study school and e-mail interview. Staff will be informed in advance by e-mail of the dates and times of the interviews. Access to archive information will be sought in co-operation with administration staff immediately after examination boards.

Resources	All resources will be planned in accordance with the needs of the research to be undertaken. Equipment required for interviews, e.g., tape recorders will be ordered in advance of the dates of the research.
Providing for unanticipated events	The January 2003 study school was chosen as in the event of cancellation other study schools would become available. E-mail interviews will be used if travel to Hong Kong becomes impossible.
4. Level of Questions	
Level 1 Questions	These are the questions asked of the interviewee and may be found in the appendices. They have been designed to link to and cover the level 2 questions, i.e., the questions contained in the research propositions.
Level 2 Questions	These are the questions that are referred to in the six propositions.
5. Guide for the report	
Structure of the case study report	The case study will be structured around the six propositions. Multiple sources of evidence will be presented against each proposition a. To give and allow for triangulation. b. To allow for pattern matching and explanation building The report will give conclusions regarding the six propositions and make recommendations against theory and professional practice.

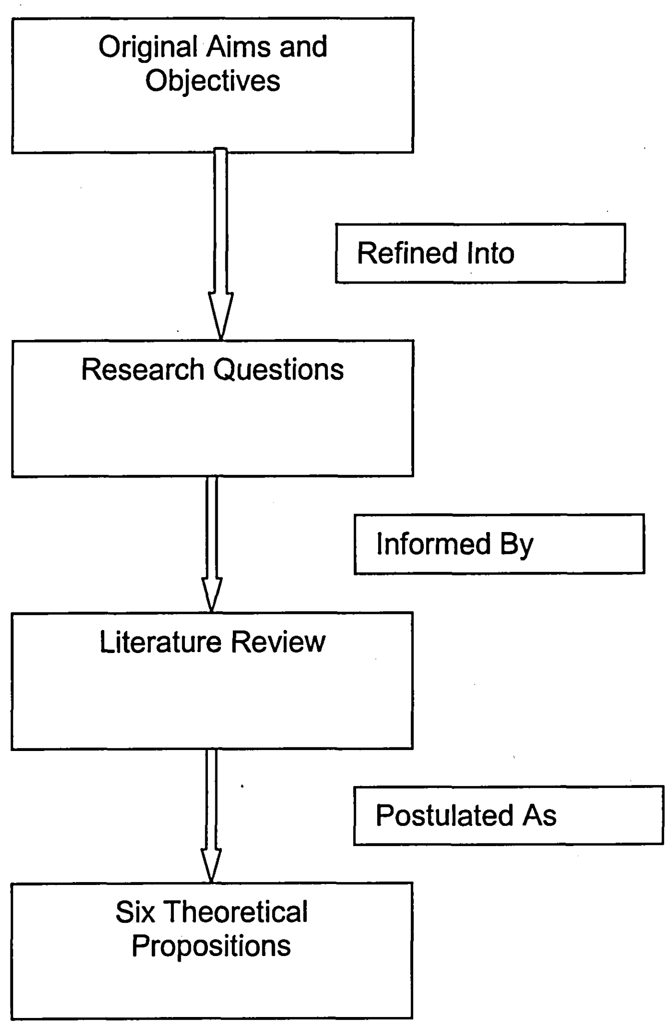
Source: Own extrapolation from Stake (1995) and Yin (2003)

Section 5: Data Analysis

Tellis (1997) points out that analysis is the least developed part of case study method and that it should be part of the case study protocol.

Yin (2003) states that the best preparation for analysis is to have a general analytic strategy. He cites three general strategies of analysis. The most preferred from Yin's point of view is a strategy that relies on theoretical propositions, i.e., the propositions that led to the case study. In this way the objectives and design that led to the case study should be reflected in research question, literature review and new hypotheses or propositions. This is the strategy used in this research and is shown in figure 6.5.

Figure 6.2: Formulation of General Analytic Strategy used in the Case Study



Source: Own Model

As demonstrated in figure 6.2 the general analytic strategy was refined throughout the research for this case study. The original aims and objectives (see Chapter 1) were refined into a general research question concerning investigating the learning, teaching and assessment needs of Chinese learners. As a result of the literature search this basic question was further refined into six theoretical propositions concerning the educational preferences of Chinese learners. (see earlier in this chapter).

These six propositions are used as the basis of the research. Each of them is taken in turn and tested against multiple sources of evidence gathered for the case study (see Figure 6.1).

Having put forward the general analytic strategy it is necessary to consider how each of the propositions will be analysed. With an explanatory case study such as this pattern matching is often seen as the preferred strategy (Saunders et al, 2003; Yin, 2003).

Pattern Matching

Pattern matching is a logic that compares and empirically based pattern with a predicted pattern (Saunders et al, 2003; Yin, 2003). In essence it compares the predicted outcome of research against the research findings. Campbell (1975) described "pattern matching" as a useful technique for linking data to the propositions. He said that pattern matching occurs where several pieces of information from the same case may be related to some theoretical proposition. This case study was specifically designed to place multiple sources of evidence against each of the theoretical propositions. The empirical evidence is the research findings from the multiple sources of evidence. As stated earlier there is no guidance regarding the extent to which patterns must match in order for a proposition to be supported. Within this research, I suggest that the pattern should be matched by all of the evidence if the proposition or a rival explanation is to be supported. In the conclusions the propositions will be described as fully supported, having some support or unsupported on the basis of the extent to which the pattern is matched.

This is consistent with Yin (2003) who suggests that if the initially predicted pattern is found without a rival explanation or alternative pattern that a strong causal inference may be made.

Rival Explanations

An important point to note is that throughout the analysis rival and credible alternative explanations have been sought. These rival explanations have been sought in three ways.

1. Each of the propositions has been questioned as a matter of procedure throughout the course of the research.

2. Possible explanations have been discussed with other academics.

3. Tentative findings of the research have been presented at academic conferences where they have been subjected to rigorous questioning and possible alternative explanations.

Where alternative or rival explanations have been suggested they have been taken on board.

General Principles of Data Analysis Used within the Dissertation

Saunders et al (2003) assert that there is no standardised approach to qualitative analysis. Different qualitative strategies may result in different strategies for dealing with qualitative data.

Tesch (1990) groups these strategies into four. These are: -

1. Understanding characteristics of language

2. Discovering regularities

3. Comprehending the meaning of text/actions

4. Reflection.

Within this study I am adopting strategy 2 as I am looking for regularity or consistency with the theoretical propositions. For this type of strategy Tesch (1990) asserts that greater structure is required than is necessary for the other strategies for analysis. The data categories and the codes are determined from theory and have a predetermined analytical framework. This is consistent with the approach that I have taken. The six theoretical propositions have been used as the analytical framework and have formed the data categories. The general processes involved in this research are as follows:

General processes

Throughout the course of the research three sets of processes have been utilised. These are categorisation of data, unitising data and recognising relationships/categorising data.

1. Categorisation

This is the process of classifying data in to meaningful and usable categorises (Saunders et al, 2003). Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest three main sources of names for the categories. These are terms that emerge from the data, terms used by participants and terms used in the literature or theory. In this research all three sources have been used in the process of categorisation (see Chapter 7).

2. Unitising Data

Units are relevant "bits or chunks of data" (Saunders et al, page 381). They may be words, phrases or sentences. Unitisation was achieved in the analysis by categorisation against the theoretical propositions and then by coding the responses under those propositions. Each of these was given a unique code to prepare the data for analysis (Denscombe, 1998). For examples of this in practice see student interviews/questionnaires below.

3. Recognising Relationships/Developing Categories

Generating categories and reorganising data accordingly is the process of analysis (Dey, 1993; Yin, 2003). The process of identifying themes and developing categories is reflective (Miles and Huberman, 1994). It includes identifying patterns, processes, commonalties and differences. Throughout the research process key themes have been sought. This in turn has led to subdivision of categories and unitisation. As is suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), this process has been repeated over and over again. The categories and their subdivisions have been through much iteration before they were finalised within the research findings section.

Analysis of the Different Sources of Evidence

In the research design care was taken to ensure that the questions asked matched the six research propositions. The six propositions became the different categories for analysis. All of the sources of evidence were analysed in the same systematic way.

Student Interviews/Questionnaires

The quantitative information was analysed using SPSS for Windows.

The qualitative information was analysed by comparing the responses of the students. Each qualitative response of the students was written out again verbatim and entered up in a log. When all of the responses were written up the individual data sets were analysed and coded against same or similar responses. This enabled the unitisation of the data. From these units patterns of answers were established.

Staff Interviews

As stated earlier the staff interviews were semi-structured in that all staff were asked the same initial questions, but were allowed to speak about each question for as long as they wished. Further questions arising from the responses that were not in the initial questions were followed up with other supplementary questions. The responses of the staff were assembled using the question headings and from there colour coded against each member of staff under the six proposition headings. Different themes that emerged under the six headings were broken down further and unitised. Where responses could fall under more than one heading the response was coded against both propositions.

When the evidence was assembled under each heading the responses were scrutinised for commonality and differences of opinion. Questions used in the staff interviews may be found in Appendix 2.

Students E-mail interviews

This was the smallest data set and as a consequence was possibly the easiest to analyse. All four students were sent the same questions individually. Only one question was sent at any one time. The students were asked to reply within 3 or 4 days. As the questions were single and arose from the findings they were coded separately under the proposition that they were being used as evidence for or against. They were then analysed for commonality or differences. Questions used in the e-mail interviews may be found in Appendix 3.

Archive Data

The archive data was mainly statistical consisting of past marks for all students, assessments and study pack materials. Marks were analysed against Hong Kong and non-Hong Kong students, academic subject and against types of assessment.

Ethics

Throughout the course of the study the ethical position of the researcher and the participants in this study have been considered. Ethics has been considered using four guiding principles. These principles are informed consent; trust; protecting participants from harm and anonymity (Fetterman; 1989; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Gratthorn, 1998; Silverman, 2001; Saunders et al, 2003).

Informed Consent

Ethical guidelines stress the importance of informed consent (Silverman, 2001). Informed consent means that all participants in the research have sufficient information about the research that they are able to give consent and they understand what they are consenting to. Essentially all participation within the research should be voluntary (Silverman, 2001). Permission was sought from all of those who took part in the research. All of the students who took part in the questionnaire were offered the option not to take part. The instruction on the questionnaire clearly stated the purpose of the research and the use it which it may be put. No students refused to take part in the research. Students who volunteered to take part in the e-mail interviews were again informed of the purpose before any questions were asked. They were all given the option to take no further part in the research. Again no one declined to take part.

Staff who took part in the interviews were clearly told the purpose of the interviews before the interviews commenced. Staff were again allowed not to take part if they wised. As with the students no one declined to take part. After the interviews were transcribed all of the staff were given their transcripts for comment and they were allowed to make changes or annotations.

Trust

The general rule is that researchers must be trusted by their subjects, this trust should be communicated through the actions and presentations of the researchers Fetterman, 1985; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) Results should be reported honestly and objectively (Gratthorn, 1998). Gratthorn (1998) believes that research should be conducted openly and honestly. To seek to ensure that trust was maintained throughout the course of the research I endeavoured to act openly and honestly.

All of the participants in the research were told what was going to happen and what my intentions were throughout the research. As stated earlier staff were given transcripts of their interviews to review and amend. They were also offered the opportunity of seeking their permission to use their quotes. This option was taken by one member of staff

Harm

In this research it is difficult in to imagine harm being done to the students. However, I do intend that the participants will have some ownership of the information. As I wish to represent the group properly it is my intention that they agree to the publication of the research. In doing this individuals and organisations should not be damaged.

The same cannot be said of the University or the members of staff who are interviewed. It is possible that reputations could be damaged by the research. To prevent any damage to reputations of individual members of staff anonymity is preserved (see below). With regard to the University the Director of School will agree publication.

Privacy

Saunders et al (2003) say that privacy is essential. In order to protect privacy no person in the research will be named. I have used pseudonyms or numbers to protect the identities of the respondents. For example, students who completed the questionnaire are known only by the number that was allocated to their questionnaire. Members of staff are referred to by the colour with which their particular questionnaire was coded. The font that was used to code their initial responses refers to students who took part in the e-mail questionnaire.

In this way neither numbers nor pseudonyms give any clue as to the true identity of the participants. Their privacy is protected.

CHAPTER 7

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

In this chapter I will give a brief description of the case study group of students. I will then proceed to test each of the research propositions by taking each of the propositions in turn. In keeping with the data analysis strategy discussed in Chapter 6 I will take each source of evidence gathered against the proposition and summarise the findings of each source of evidence I will use the summaries against each piece of evidence to establish patterns. I will then conclude against each of the propositions. Finally, I will then use the results of the research to conclude against the two research questions.

The Case Study Group

The case study group comprised 25 people. Of the group 17 were undergraduates and 8 were postgraduate. The gender split of the group was 15 female and 10 male. This figure is similar to equivalent courses in the UK. The average age of the group was 29.1 years. The entire group described themselves as Chinese in origin. All of the students had higher qualifications, undergraduates had obtained Higher National Diplomas or equivalent. Postgraduates possessed a first degree or equivalent. The majority of the students (17) had been solely educated in Hong Kong.

Section 1: Curriculum Content

In this section I will be testing the first research proposition that Chinese learners have a preference for a curriculum content that concentrates on "hard" subjects.

1. Student Questionnaires

The Hong Kong students were asked to rank five subjects: Operational Management (OM), Finance, Marketing, Human Resource Management (HRM) and Practical Food and Beverage Management (F & B) in order from 1 to 5. Where 1 was the most preferred subject and 5 was the least preferred subject. Table 7.1 shows the results. The reason for the choice of these five subjects was that Finance and Marketing were included as examples of "hard" subjects, Human Resource was used as an example of a soft subject. Operational Management and Practical Food and Beverage Management are examples of practical subjects that have definite outcomes and are believed to be preferred by Hong Kong Chinese students.

Table 7.1: Students' Perceptions of Selected Academic Subjects

Subject	OM	Marketing	Finance	H.R.M.	F & B
Mean Score	2.24	2.64	4.40	3.16	2.56
Ranking	1	3	5	4	2

Table 7.1 demonstrates that the two practical subjects Operational Management and Food and Beverage Management are the most preferred of the five subjects while the "hard" subject marketing is preferred to the "soft subject" Human Resource Management. Possibly surprising is that the second "hard" subject Finance was by far the least preferred subject. Of the twenty-five students who completed the questionnaire, twenty-one rated Finance as either a four or a five.

In addition to ranking the subjects in term of most and least preferred, the students were asked to give the reasons for their most preferred and least preferred choices. The reasoning for these choices was interesting. Operational Management and Food and Beverage Management were both preferred because they were job or work related, interesting and could be used to further a career. For example, Student 22 said that Operational Management was the *"subject most related to my job"*, while Student 11 reported that *"if you want to get to a higher level (management) you need to* *understand the basic operation of the industry first.*" No student rated Operational Management as his or her least preferred subject. Students who least preferred Food and Beverage Management did so for a pragmatic reason. This was that the subject was not directly related to their job, i.e., they did not work in either restaurants or kitchens.

Finance was least preferred for four main reasons. The most frequently quoted reason was that the students were themselves weak at calculations and mathematics. Comments such as that made by Student 2 that she or he was *"weak in Finance or subjects related to figures*" were common. Several students saw Finance as plainly boring. Others thought that it was not relevant to their employment or at its simplest found it to be hard. At first sight the figures may indicate that Finance is not a "hard" subject, however, the students were not questioned about the usefulness of the subject or its scientific rigour merely whether they liked it. As student 19 said "*Finance is too boring - but it is also a very important subject".*

Only three students least liked Human Resource Management, the "soft" subject on the list. None of the students quoted any rejection of western ideas instead they quoted a dislike of theory. Student 4 stated that *"Human resource is a very complex subject. There is a lot of theory to study.*" Student 15 found it to be *"theoretical"*. This reason to a small extent gives corroboration for a Chinese fondness for practical subjects (Chow, 1995)

Summary

The evidence provided by the students in relation to possible curriculum content is inconclusive. There does appear to be a preference for practical subjects and there is some evidence to suggest that theoretical subjects such as HRM are not well liked but this is not universal. Within this data there is nothing in favour or against the notion of hard and soft subjects. Marketing is reasonably well liked by the students but Finance is almost universally least preferred by the students albeit for highly pragmatic reasons. There is no evidence to suggest that we need to change the curriculum. However, we do need to consider how we teach the curriculum especially regarding Finance. The cultural issues surrounding HRM and Finance need to be explored

If some of the evidence regarding a preference for practical subjects and application is valid, there may be delivery problems with the distance learning curriculum content.

The main problem would be the lack of any practical work in the curriculum and a curriculum that is based upon a number of highly theoretical subjects.

2. Staff Interviews

As part of the interview schedule staff were asked how they thought that the Hong Kong students perceived their subjects and how the students performed within those subjects.

Perceptions

The general perception of all of the staff was that their subject was well received by the students. The concept of hard and soft subjects was not explained to any of the staff but staff were asked how students reacted to their subject. With regard to Marketing, one lecturer said that the students were "*.....very positive. They like it in Hong Kong. It's a very popular subject they appreciate all the marketing that goes on. Very positive. And many of them are working in a marketing related discipline, or you know, have seen that in a hotel, so they see it as being very practical, very positive.*" Interestingly the lecturer thought that part of the reason for Marketing's popularity is that it has practical application.

This notion of application was discussed by both by Magenta and Red. Magenta believed that what may be unusual was that subjects that are not the "normal" academic subjects taught by him/her such as small business and entrepreneurship were liked and seen as relevant by Chinese students. The reason for this is that the students could apply them to their own situation or to a future situation. As Magenta said "*People tend, it would seem from what I've read, that people tend to open small businesses, because they can't get employment somewhere else, or it's a family-type concern.*" Similarly Red said, *"I think they (Hong Kong students) do like the application to the hospitality industry."*

The tutor who taught most of the Human Resource Management and Organisational Behaviour did not see any cultural problems with either of the subjects. Her or his belief was that both of the subjects were well received by the students.

Student Performance

All of the staff who were interviewed thought that the students performed reasonably well in their assessments and that there is a mix of student ability. Typical of the replies was that of Green who said that the students performed "*Averagely. I do get some good ones, and I get some mediocre ones, but on the whole I would say they're average. I find it quite difficult to get really good work particularly at Masters level. A lot of the Masters work is very average. I mean it's fine, there's no problem with it....*"

Interestingly, none of the staff had any real evidence for their replies. As Magenta answered when asked how the students compared to other students taking the same module; "*I don't know. I mean I haven't checked to see how they are, how they perform against other people. But, they're good.*"

If a student from Hong Kong was to perform poorly the subject matter was not given as a reason. Only Red put forward any reason for poor performance and this was language. Red said the students were no different to any others "*The difficulty is how to treat (the) language problem, that's the big difficulty.*"

Summary

From the staff interviews there is little evidence to suggest that staff teaching the "hard" and "soft" subjects perceive any differences in students' perceptions of their subject. Brown, however, did believe that Marketing was a subject that was well liked within the students' context. Black, had similar thoughts about Human Resource Management and Organisational Behaviour. A pattern that has emerged is that staff appear to think that students like and do well in their subjects when what they are doing is applied to the hospitality industry. It may be that the application is related to a preference for practical subjects.

When questioned about students performance in their subject. All staff thought that the Hong Kong students' performance was at least acceptable. No one expressed an opinion that any good or poor performance was due to a cultural preference for his or her subject. The only reason that was advanced for the poor performance of any student that may be related culture was the issue of language competence.

3. Archive Analysis

All results for every assignment were analysed over the past three years for the postgraduate students and for the past two years for all undergraduate students. . The number of marks within each sample ranged from very high (88) in marketing to very low, only five in the case of Hospitality Entrepreneurship. Modules that have a low number of marks entered against them have been excluded from the later analysis.

Table 7.2: Postgraduate marks by subject and assignment 2000 – 2003			
	Average percentage per assignment		
	All students excluding Hong Kong	Hong Kong students only	Difference
Subject/Assignment			
Marketing 1	55.3	55.4	+0.1
Marketing 2	58.4	58.6	+0.2
Finance 1	51.4	44.4	-7.0
Finance 2	50.9	49.5	-1.4
HRM 1	61.5	53.3	-8.2
HRM 2	56.8	49.3	-7.5
Strategic Management*	63.8	51.5	-12.3
Hospitality Quality Management 1	55.7	50.4	-5.3
Hospitality Quality Management 2	54.8	47.7	-7.1
Hospitality Business Development 1	43.9	46.1	+2.2
Hospitality Business Development 2	51.2	47.1	-4.1
Topical Issues 1	59.9	53.3	-6.6
Topical Issues 2	59.3	56.5	-2.8
Hospitality Entrepreneurship 1*	59.5	48.0	-11.5
Hospitality Entrepreneurship 2*	65.5	43	-22.5
Dissertation*	56.6	45.3	-11.3

The marks shown in table 7.2 indicate that overall the Hong Kong Chinese students have underperformed when compared to other distance learning students taking the same course. However, if the Dissertation, Strategic Management and Hospitality Entrepreneurship are discounted on the basis of low numbers of Chinese completers the average percentages are quite close together with the exception of assignment 1 in Finance, and both assignments in Human Resource Management and Hospitality Quality Management.

The results with regard to "hard" and "soft" subjects are contradictory. The relatively poor performance in Human Resource and the outperformance (slightly) of other distance learners in Marketing would give some support to preference for Marketing and the dislike of the more theoretical Human Resource Management. The poor performance in Finance however partially contradicts this. It may be possible that this figure corroborates the finding from the student questionnaire that that these students find mathematics-based subjects difficult.

Figure 7.1 illustrates the average of the two scores for Marketing, Finance and Human Resource Management. These figures indicate that the Hong Kong Chinese student have an average score that is equal to that of other distance learners (ODL) in Marketing. The average when viewed in this way is slightly worse in Finance (-4%) and is decidedly worse (-10%) in Human Resource Management. These scores when looked at in this way may not indicate a preference for Finance but do indicate a very poor performance in Human Resource Management.

Figure 7.1: Comparison of module scores in "Hard" and "Soft" Subjects (Postgraduate)

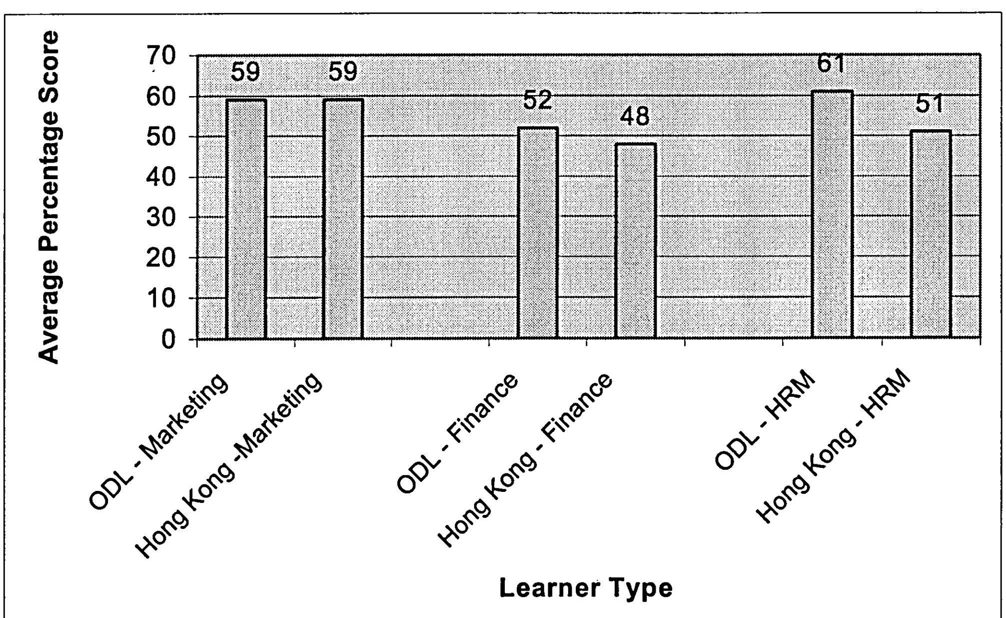


Table 7.3: Undergraduate Scores by Subject 2001 – 2003			
	Average percentage per assignment		
	All students excluding Hong Kong	Hong Kong students only	Average marks differences
Subject/Assignment			
Contemporary Hospitality Management 1	56.4	52.5	-3.9
Contemporary Hospitality Management 2	56.0	52.5	-3.5
International Marketing Planning 1	58.0	58.6	+0.6
International Marketing Planning 2	61.9	62.6	+0.7
Hospitality Facilities Planning and Design 1	59.8	61.2	+1.4
Hospitality Facilities Planning and Design 2	58.3	61.2	+2.9
Dissertation	54.2	-	Not Applicable.
Small Business Enterprise 1	56.4	47.7	-8.7
Small Business Enterprise 2	58.2	53.5	-4.7
Organisational Behaviour 1	58.6	56.4	-2.2
Organisational Behaviour 2	58.6	47.8	-10.8
Strategic Management 1	61.1	65	+3.9
Strategic Management 2	57.6	65	+7.4

The results in table 7.3 are mixed. The Hong Kong Chinese students underperform when compared to other distance learners in Contemporary Hospitality Management, Organisational Behaviour and Small Business Enterprise. They outperform other distance learners in Hospitality Facilities Planning and Design, Marketing and Strategic Management. As with the postgraduate course the Hong Kong students perform well in the "hard" subject Marketing. They also perform exceptionally badly in the "soft" subject Organisational Behaviour. The differences In performance are markedly different in both Small Business Enterprise and Organisational Behaviour, in which Chinese learners score badly compared to other distance learners, and Hospitality Facilities and Strategic Management, where Chinese students fare much better than the other learners.

One reason for the differences may be cultural; the Chinese students perform well in hard and practical subjects. A pattern indicating a preference for practical subjects does appear to be emerging. This is most noticeable with regard to the good performance in Hospitality Facilities Design and Management. This is essentially the one practical subject in the course. The assessments used are also closely related to many of the students' employment. This evidence agrees with the earlier questionnaire findings where students who expressed a preference for Food and Beverage Management did so because it was part of their daily work.

Organisational Behaviour, the one "soft" subject offered is an option against Small Business Management. These are two subjects in which Chinese students have performed badly. Interestingly, only five of the Hong Kong students chose to pursue Organisational Behaviour favouring instead Small Business Enterprise, a subject that was thought to fit the Hong Kong small business culture. The small numbers opting for Organisational Behaviour may also indicate a dislike of the "soft" subject.

From the tables there is also a very good performance by the Chinese students in Strategic Management. This is not in agreement with the limited postgraduate results and is subject that requires the application of theory. As such it may have been thought to be a subject that is disliked culturally by Chinese students. One reason for the surprising results may be that it is practical in its application as it is applied directly to a company chosen by the student. However, another reason for this performance may be the delivery of this particular module. It is the only module that has both paper and web-based delivery. The web-based delivery allows much more tutor contact in this module than in any of the others.

Summary

The archive analysis of the assessment results give some evidence in favour of the concept of "hard" and " soft" subjects. In Marketing the Hong Kong Chinese students slightly outperform other distance learning students at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. There also appears to be an underperformance in both Human Resource Management and Organisational Behaviour. Additionally the very small uptake of the option in Organisational Behaviour may indicate a dislike of this type of subject. Finance gives contrary evidence as it brings about equally poor performances by all students.

From the two results tables it appears that there may be a preference for practical subjects or subjects with a practical application. If subjects such Marketing and Strategic Management are considered to be practical in application and Hospitality Facilities is practical in its content these subjects compare favourably with theory driven subjects such as Hospitality Quality Management and Human Resource Management.

4. E-mail Interviews with students

The greatest contradiction within the research was that the research proposition held with regard to good performance in Marketing and poor performance in Organisational Behaviour and Human Resource Management. This was contradicted by the poor performance in and apparent dislike of Finance. To take this further the e-mail group were asked their opinion of this apparent contradictory behaviour.

Marketing

None of the students thought it unusual or odd that they performed well in Marketing. The themes that surfaced from their replies concerning Marketing were, first, that Marketing was part of the business culture of Hong Kong, and, second, Marketing is a discipline that they are engaged in as part of their working lives. Berlin summarised the group's feelings about Marketing and the Hong Kong's business culture when s/he wrote that *"the commercial environment of metropolitan city like Hong Kong has given Hong Kong people the sense and insight of marketing through their daily life experience such as multi-media e.g. TV and magazine ads."*

Baskerville believed that Hong Kong people understood the role of Marketing in making a profit. Arial added to this and contributed to the theme of people engaging in Marketing when writing, *"Marketing is a subject that closely links with our daily lives. As an international city, HK is under huge exposure of advertising and marketing campaigns. The concept of marketing is too familiar to everyone in Hong Kong. And HK students are used to understand the role of marketing and its implication in business."*

Organisational Behaviour and Human Resource Management

As with Marketing the students did not express any surprise about the relatively poor performances in Human Resource Management and Organisational Behaviour. The reasons given for this performance were the opposite of those given for good performance in Marketing. These were that "human" subjects were not part of the culture and that students did not engage in these activities in their working lives. Berlin wrote, *"On the other hand, the culture of HK Chinese is rather conservative and not able to express themselves well from perspective of HRM and Organisational Behaviour. Chinese esp (ecially) the Mainland China (ese) still believe "relationship" as one of the important element of HRM."*

Arial and Roman both referred to lack of importance that Hong Kong businesses give to Human Resource Management and as a consequence the lack of exposure that students have to it. Roman thought that the attitude of employers was that this function of business was not the domain of most employees. Arial added to this when s/he wrote, *"I think possibly because HK people are not giving much attention in employment relations and HRM. Almost 90% of HK companies are small and medium enterprises with staff number probably ranging from 5-20. Some of the company may not even have the HR department or professionals."*

Baskerville summed up the debate concerning the varying performances between Marketing and Human Management/Organisation Behaviour when writing, *"So HK people are more concentrate on marketing matters, and of course have more practise than HR matters. HK people tend to task oriented rather than human oriented".*

Finance

The general expectation is that Hong Kong students should excel in subjects such as Finance. This was also the perception of the Hong Kong students in the e-mail interviews. However, they did give explanations for the poor performance in this subject. The reasons that they gave were similar to those given for their dislike of Finance and mathematical subjects referred to earlier. These were that they were generally poor at mathematical subjects but more importantly students who entered the hospitality industry may have done so because they were poor at mathematical subjects.

Summary

The interesting point from the students' e-mail answers was that not one of them was surprised by the results of the earlier questionnaire. To some extent they reinforced the stereotype of being good at subjects such as Marketing and Finance and poor at the human subjects. The important point of note is that the students thought that they were exposed to Marketing and Marketing practises in aspects of their working and daily lived but were not exposed to the "human" subjects.

Conclusion

This proposition that Chinese students have a preference for hard and soft subjects was not fully supported by the research evidence. Of the four sources of evidence the archive analysis and e-mail interviews provide some evidence that may support a preference for "hard" or " soft" subjects. Although examples of "believed" hard and soft subjects were deliberately used within the questionnaire to test this, the results indicated that these students had a preference for practically based subjects such as Operations Management and Food and Beverage Management. Interviews with the staff gave no evidence in support of "hard" or "soft" subjects. No member of staff who taught these subjects had noticed any problem with regard to the nature of her or his subject. Although it would be true to say that no member of staff had analysed her or his results by cohort.

As many of the subjects taught on course such as hospitality management are both hybrid and derivative it is difficult to place some of them within categories of hard or soft. However what all staff did indicate was the practical nature of their subjects in relation to their application to the hospitality industry.

In summary, there is nothing in the evidence presented here that fully supports or denies the research proposition that there is a preference for "hard" and "soft" subjects. There is however, evidence to that suggests that these students favour subjects that are practical in their nature and/or application to their work. There is some evidence for the research proposition but it is not fully supported.

Section 2: Teaching and Learning Strategies

1. Student Questionnaires

Table 7.4: Comparison of Students' Perceptions of Selected Teaching and Learning Strategies and Exposure to Teaching and Learning Strategies at Secondary School					
Subject	Videos etc	Observing Practicals	Formal lecture and Notes	Working on one's own	Seminar and Role Play
Mean Score Like	2.72	1.96	3.16	4.16	2.96
Ranking	2	1	4	5	3
Mean Score Previous Exposure	3.13	3.00	1.04	4.00	3.57
Ranking	3	2	1	5	4

Table 7.4 compares students' preferences for five selected teaching and learning strategies. The five strategies were selected as they represented examples of the supposedly least preferred experiential methods and the more preferred passive methods (Chow, 1995). Students were asked to give a numerical ranking to the different strategies where 1 was the most preferred and five was the least preferred strategy. Additionally, the students were asked to demonstrate their exposure to the methods at their secondary schools by numerical ranking. In this case 1 was the strategy that was most used and 5 was awarded to the strategy that was least used at the students' secondary schools.

The table supports the view of Martinsons and Martinsons (1996) and Maxwell et al (2000) that the Chinese students' previous educational experience had been mainly passive. The students indicated that the main method by which they were taught was by the medium of formal lectures where notes were made. Students 2 said that *"It's the usual practice that I had and I have made it the best way to learn."* This teaching method was followed by other passive methods of observing practicals and watching videos and listening to audiotapes. More experiential and active methods such as seminars that included role-play were infrequently used as was working on one's own from study materials provided.

The ranking of student' preferences indicate that although the students had been exposed to formal lectures and note taking, it was the second least preferred method of learning. Only one reason was given for this - quite simply the students found it "*boring*". This agrees to some extent with the view of Ladd and Ruby (1999) that although the students had been taught mainly by lecture, their actual preference was for direct experience.

The two remaining passive methods of learning were the most preferred first and second choices. The reasons given for the choice of observing practicals were pedagogic and can be placed into four broad categories. These are that the students thought that this method of teaching promoted understanding; kept their attention; helped to put theory in to practice and was interactive. Student 4 best sums up the students' perceptions of this teaching method when s/he said *"The study is active and practical demonstration is easy to understanding and remembering. As I encounter problems and questions I can ask immediately."*

In a separate question answered by all twenty-five students, the students were asked to give their opinions of group working. This question was given this special status as group work is regarded as particularly disliked in the literature for reasons of face and power distance. The students' answers contradicted the view that there is a "cultural dislike" of group work. The majority (64%) of students liked group work for sound practical reasons. These reasons were that students are able to share the work; share ideas and learn from each other; work co-operatively and motivate each other. As student 16 said *"we can share different points of view from different people. Team work is important in group working."* Student 1 reported that s/he liked this method of working as *"not only does it enable students to share efforts to do the project but also gives them opportunities to establish friendship."*

Where students least preferred group working, no one, possibly unsurprisingly, gave any cultural reason such as face or power distance. Instead their reasons concerned group dynamics and past problems that they had encountered. Student 23 said that "*it (group work) takes a lot of time and sometimes makes thing not to be finished early.* Students 2 and 22 had had bad past experiences. Student 2 reported that "*most of the group members were not responsible or lazy";* similarly Student 22 found past group members to be *"rude", "unhelpful" and to have "a lack of knowledge".* To summarise in the students' opinions group work can be difficult in terms of time and meeting place, some members may be lazy, while others may have had their ideas discounted in past group working situations.

Against the cultural stereotype and as with group work, some of the students expressed a preference for role-play. Although seminars including role-play was only the middle ranked method of learning and teaching, 28% of the students rated it as their most preferred teaching and learning strategy. They were aware of the learning benefits that it could bring. Student 3 was particularly in favour of seminars that included role-play as *"role-play can enhance the knowledge of the subject/topic. When you (are) involve (d) you'll get interest in the subject."* In general, the students who were in favour of role-play felt that it promoted both their personal understanding and helped them to generate ideas and made the time spent in the classroom more interesting. Those against did not give any reason that could be said to relate directly to culture; instead they found role-play as a method to be either time-consuming or dull. Student 21 adequately summarised these responses when s/he wrote that role-play *"is not that interesting and wastes time."*

The worrying finding from the point of view of distance education is that these students rated working on their own from the study materials as their least favourite method of learning. Thirteen students (52%) rated it as five. Only one student rated it has his or her most preferred method of studying. Three reasons emerge from the literature as to why this method was least preferred. First, students find this method of learning to be boring and time consuming (a reason that has occurred in other areas!). Second, they lack the self-discipline that this type of study requires. Finally, there is no interaction with the teacher. Student 16 and 1 adequately sum up the feelings of the cohort. Student 16 thought that, *"it (working on one's own from the study materials) is quite boring, sometimes difficult to concentrate for a long period. Making notes only without discussion is one-way communication."* Student 1 was of a more pragmatic disposition and stated that *"It's difficult to find the incentive, except when I think of the money I paid for the course."*

Summary

The answers given by students at first sight give some credence to the view that Chinese students prefer passive learning. However, there is some evidence to support Gilleard's (1998) view that more unusual method may be successfully employed. There was no rejection of role-play or group working and many students regarded group projects as a good way to learn. Similarly although all of students had been taught in large groups and the main teaching method that they had experienced was formal lectures and note taking. This is not the method by which this case study group would wish to be taught. Worryingly from the point of view of distance learning the students were not accustomed to working on their own from the study materials provided and neither did they like this as a method of learning. What they appear to desire is a more interactive method of learning and teaching where the tutor is more immediately accessible to answer questions. This view also agrees with the students' view of the role of the teacher (see section 3 in this chapter).

2. Staff Interviews

In the interviews the staff were asked three basic questions. These were how they had run their sessions at the study schools, i.e., the basic format of the sessions, why they had run them in this way and if they had changed how they had taught in light of experience.

Format of the sessions

To some extent the format of the sessions is dictated to the staff by the rather formal set up of the study schools, the number of hours in a session and the number of students in the class. All staff used at least part of their sessions as information giving. Although not all of the staff used the term, most sessions at the outset were a combination of lectures or seminars. Brown's teaching session was typical of the responses, s/he said, "*I'd structure it a little bit of formal, I obviously go with some prepared overheads, a little bit of formal teaching, but a lot of informal breaking off, doing exercises, talking about issues, getting them to do things, respond, and interactive stuff as well*". Specifically Brown would "*first of all present an overview of the modules, to ensure that everybody is on board with what is happening. And then, once I've done that, I tend to give them a little bit of a keynote lecture backed up by some interactive work.*" In a similar manner Lilac began by presenting *"an overview of the modules, to ensure that everybody is on board with what is happening. And then,* *once I've done that, I tend to give them a little bit of a keynote lecture backed up by some interactive work."*

Of the staff only Red did not to teach in a lecture/seminar package. Her or his sessions were all essentially interactive seminars. The aim of these sessions was to introduce the students to theoretical concepts and by interactivity to gauge the students' level of understanding.

Within the seminar portions of the teaching sessions other teaching methods such as group work were sometimes used. Green's technique was that after *"talking them through the OHP's, or the material I've taken out there, and then just try to sit them down and get group discussion going where they're concerned".*

Reasons for the format of the sessions

Responses to why they had structured their teaching sessions in the way that they had were very limited. The reasons that were given the choice of format were firstly culture, i.e., they believed that this was how Chinese students preferred to be taught. Second, they had talked to and taken advice from staff who had taught in Hong Kong and had learned from their experience.

Changes to the format

Not one member of staff interviewed reported changing their delivery. Instead where changes were made they concerned themselves with what was taught not how it was taught. Typical of this was Brown who reported that *"when I first started teaching I used to do a lot of the subject specific material, and increasingly over the years I've found that that doesn't work, particularly at the beginning of the course, and I do more study related materials".*

This view is typical of the shift in the nature of the study schools. At the outset study schools were essentially the full-time programme taught in Hong Kong. This approach has been replaced by a move to an emphasis upon skills and "graduateness".

Summary

Staff had no prior training with regard to how they should teach in Hong Kong. What is slightly surprising is that all staff were given a free rein as to how and what to deliver: almost all of them taught in the same fashion. They had adopted a teaching strategy that was a combination of lectures and seminars. Within the seminars a range of activities have been used. No member of staff said that s/he had changed the format of how they had taught at the study schools although there had been a change of emphasis on what was taught.

3. E-mail Interviews

In the e-mail interviews the students were asked to give their opinions of both the study materials and the study schools. They were specifically asked if there were any changes that they would like to see.

The study materials received mixed reviews. Arial thought that, "*The learning materials are good. The unit guidebooks are clear enough to let us know how to start our study. And, the modules are easy to read and they are able to help us focusing on main points on each module.*" On the other hand Baskerville thought that differences in styles between authors were apparent, and as a consequence, some materials were easier to follow than others.

Suggestions for improvements, where made, were pragmatic. They included putting additional readings in to the boxes and taking care not to give conflicting advice concerning how to reference.

Study schools were well liked by the students. Hallam staff were regarded as friendly and approachable. The only suggestion for improvement was that more time should be devoted to the study school. This again could indicate the need that these students have for contact with the teacher.

Summary

Both the study materials and the study schools were received favourably by the e-mail group. The contact with staff that is provided by the study schools is particularly welcomed and appears to be a particularly strong feature of teaching delivery that is preferred by these students. Suggestions for improvements to study materials concerned the style of presentation. No student suggested any changes with regard to contextualising to Hong Kong.

Conclusion

The evidence from the three research sources offers some support to the research proposition that Chinese students prefer teaching and learning strategies that are passive. Evidence presented in the students' questionnaire gives some support to the notion of a preference for passive learning in that observation and watching videos were both liked as forms of instruction. However, the majority of the students as a form of instruction least preferred lectures. While these students have been exposed to such methods as large group lectures at school and at University; these are not their preferred method of learning. There is also evidence to suggest those more active forms of instruction, particularly group work and group discussion, may be effectively employed.

Evidence from the staff who have taught at study schools suggest that they have used a mix of methods that range from didactic information giving lectures, combined with seminars that attempt various degrees of interactivity. No member of staff reported any problems with these methods.

Students opinions in both the e-mails and the questionnaire indicated a need for greater contact with the teacher but this need would not be best met by didactic lectures.

Section 3: The Role of the Teacher/Lecturer

1. Student Questionnaires

To test the perception of the role of the teacher the students were asked to think of the best teacher that they had ever had. They were to describe him or her and were told to say whether they perceived that individual as a friend.

The qualities that the students saw in their best ever teacher may be encapsulated under themes of pedagogic practice, student-teacher relationship and "heart". With regard to pedagogic practice students expect their teachers to have "*professional knowledge*", "*to use innovative teaching methods*", "*to always provide useful and effective notes and materials"* and *" to put a lot of effort in his teaching materials.*" While none of the students said that their best teacher was all knowing, they did see her or him as a guide who helped them *"to understand the topic.*" This to some extent accords with the view of Chan (1999) that students are socialised to be provided with knowledge by the teacher.

As may be expected none of the students specifically mentioned the power distance relationship between students and teacher. However, they did see the teacher as a distant figure to which they should look up to. Student 10 said that the status of the teacher was different "*I have to respect them.*" This does go some way to indicating the impact of Confucianism and power distance in the student-teacher relationship (Chan, 1999) and to the good teacher references of Jin and Cortazzi (1998: 2001). Further to this Student 12 expected instruction from her/his best teacher in her/his *"private lives".* This accords with the Confucian view of the teacher as a moral instructor (Cheng and Wong, 1996).

Almost half of the students (12) specifically stated that they expected the teacher to be a friend. The relationship with a good teacher is such that s/he would be expected to be a friend who would also be "*helpful*" and "*patient.*" When answering the question regarding the teacher as a friend, students answered the question either directly or indirectly. When the question regarding friendship was directly answered, it was met with a response on some occasions that indicated that qualified the relationship, e.g., Student 22 said, "*Our relationship is good, like a friend.*"

In the student-teacher relationship, one significant theme stood out. I have called this theme "*heart*", as this was a term used by student 8 in describing her/his best teacher. In this theme several students stated that the teacher must understand them as people, must be aware of their problems must be sincere and care about them. Student 19 described her/his best teacher as having a "*sincere attitude*". On the same theme Student 12 said that, *"I can ask her any question even though it seems stupid. She was willing to teach me patiently. She understands that we are international students (and is) willing to teach us everything including our private lives."*

Summary

In describing the best teacher that they had had, the students gave a view of the teacher that is very similar to the Confucian view of the teacher (see Chapter 3). In addition to requiring the teacher to be academically well prepared and to speak clearly, a significant majority said that they expected the teacher to be a friend or "like a friend". The notion of the teacher as a friend appears throughout the students' answers. Further the relationship appears to go beyond friendship in the way that a westerner may understand it and brings in the concepts of heart - having a feeling for the student and moral guidance. When they are describing how a good teacher should teach, words and phrases that go beyond good pedagogy are used. Examples of this are that a good teacher should *"guide (us) in the right direction"* and *"totally understood what we might want."*

2. Staff Interviews

The staff were asked to give their perceptions of how they thought the students actually saw them. The majority of the staff said that they thought the students gave them an elevated status. The status that they perceived as bestowed upon them was that of Professor and may be probably consistent with power distance. As Red said, *"...definitely their perception is that we are, as teachers, probably call us Professors if they were allowed to, as an elevated position, rather than somebody who's there to share with them and facilitate their learning."* Similarly the view of Magenta was that *"I think the Chinese student status is quite important, and education, I think, they like to know that perhaps you've got a Masters or the experience you've got in industry. Those kind of things I would say enhance their perception of you."*

There were two views contrary to this position. In response to the question of how the students perceived him or her Black said, "*Do you know, I can't really remember how they addressed me and I didn't feel that they treated me any different from any other person.*" In a similar vein Blue did not think that the student put her/him on a pedestal. Blue saw this as cultural *"stereotyping".*

One issue upon which everyone was agreed was how he or she perceived the students' regard for them in terms of their subject expertise. When asked if they thought that the students saw them as "a *font of all knowledge."* The common response is encapsulated by Red who simply said, "*Yes, very much so."* Blue went further with this when s/he stated that, *"The teacher is sort of up there as someone who knows everything, and should just give out the information."* The perception of the teacher as the provider of all knowledge would be consistent with the Confucian view of the teacher.

Some staff reinforced the perception of themselves as providers of knowledge by describing how they thought the students expected to be taught. Violet said that "*they (the Chinese students) listen very attentively, they tend to do as you ask them to do."* On the same theme Red's perception was that the Chinese students appreciated "*the didactic, formal jug and mugs sort of set up, where a teacher pours out all the knowledge to the student."*

Red however thought that this relationship between the students and the teacher might be changing, as more students are educated abroad. When staff were asked directly whether students had ever contradicted or argued with them, three gave instances of occasions where this had happened. The remainder did not. Green said that s/he had been contradicted at the last study school but did point out that s/he had told the class that they were, *"allowed to disagree with me."* Magenta believed that the student-teacher relationship changed over the course of a study school and that the students *"by the time that they got to the final day of the Study School ..... were perhaps much more critical of standards."* Violet contradicted this and thought that this behaviour tended *"to be (from) those who have been exposed to other cultures."*

Summary

The perceptions of the teachers are not in total agreement. The majority believed that they do have an elevated status. There was no opinion that was contrary to the position of the teacher as the provider of all knowledge. Additionally there was a perception that the relationship between the teacher and the students might be changing in those examples of students contradicting staff were cited. However, these examples only appeared to arise in certain circumstances. These were when students were instructed that this behaviour was acceptable, had been exposed to other cultures or the study school had gone some way to altering the staff-student relationship.

A theme that ran through the staff responses was that they were aware of differences in Chinese culture and had pre-knowledge of Chinese culture. Differences in culture were referred to on several occasions without prompting, e.g., Green was aware of *"the traditional Chinese view of a teacher."*

3. E-mail Interviews

The students were not directly asked about the role of the teacher in the e-mail interviews. However, when asked about the study schools and the distance learning materials the role of the teacher was mentioned. The point that the students emphasised was the need for contact with the teacher. Typical of this was Baskerville who needed to learn from his or her teachers and wanted more study school contact. S/he did not think that the hours allocated to each subject at the study school was sufficient and wanted the teacher to teach more. S/he wrote, *"I think students want lecturers to speak more and teach more in the class as we've got only one class for each subject. The class start(s) at 9am and end at 5pm officially. But it always start late and finish early. I understand lecturers want to start when more students arrive. But I think they should give more before end class. As class only last for around 6-7 hours, we want to know more."*

Summary

Responses such as Baskerville's serve to emphasise the need that Chinese students have for contact with the teacher and for information from the teacher. This point will be discussed in greater detail in the implications for professional practice section of the conclusion.

Conclusion

The research proposition that the role of the teacher/lecturer is didactic and s/he is also considered to be a friend by the Chinese students and is seen as a figure that provides moral guidance, is for the most, part supported.

There is no disagreement between the students' view of the teacher and the staff's view of themselves as teachers. The first part of the research proposition that the "role of the teacher/lecturer is didactic is supported. Both the students and most of the staff saw the teacher as the provider of knowledge who is a somewhat distant figure. The second part of the proposition, that the teacher is also considered to be a friend by the Chinese students and is seen as a figure that provides moral guidance, while not referred to by the staff, was very definitely upheld by the students. What is apparent is that the students' requirements of the teacher appear to go much further than an UK based teacher expects to give. While an UK teacher/lecturer may expect to be well prepared and expert in the classroom, they may not expect to be a friend and moral guide.

From the description that the students have given of a good teacher, the relationship that the Hong Kong students desire is very different to that offered to full-time students within the School of Sport and Leisure Management and is even less for part-time distance learning students. At present many teachers feel that, due to large class sizes, they know very little of their students. Similarly limited contact at study schools, followed up with mainly distant e-mail correspondence, is not conducive to this type of relationship.

Section 4: Assessments

1. Student Questionnaires

Table 7.5: Students' Perceptions of Selected Assessment Strategies

Subject	Essays and Reports	Presentations	Written Examinations	Individual projects	Group projects
Mean Score	3.12	2.84	4.34	2.44	2.28
Ranking	4	3	5	2	1
Mean Score Previous Exposure	2.43	4.00	1.58	3.39	3.13
Ranking	2	5	1	4	3

The students were asked to rank methods of assessment in order where 1 is the most preferred and 5 the least preferred. Additionally the students were asked to state which assessment methods they were most commonly exposed to at their secondary school. Table 7.6 indicates that written examinations were the method of assessment that the case study group was most frequently exposed to in their secondary schools. However, the method that was most used was in fact the least preferred method of assessment. The case study group was almost unanimous in its dislike of examinations. The reasons given for this was that written examinations were perceived to be boring, a test of memory not intellect and those students may underperform on the day. Neither the mean scores of preferences or the majority of the students' views uphold the conventional view of a preference for examinations. Only one student placed examination as his or her preferred method of assessment. The overwhelming majority of the students had examinations as their least preferred form of assessment. Examinations were least preferred because they were seen to cause pressure and stress upon the students; they were hard, they were simply a test of memory; the outcome of them is unreliable and the inevitable boring. Student 14 gave an excellent summary of the group's feelings when she or he said that examinations *"tough and sometimes examinations test how much the student remembers at that moment. The outcome of the assessment may not be accurate."* It may be the case that examinations are not a preferred method of assessment but that if a student does well in examinations that he or she gains esteem.

The conventional belief that group work is least preferred because it may cause cultural problems, particularly to do with face, appears to unfounded as already been partly dealt under teaching and learning strategies. In this section of the research, students had group projects as their most preferred method of assessment. The majority of students said that they preferred group work because they were able to share pressure, ideas and workloads; learn from each other; group work promotes teamwork and it is fun. Students 1 and 22 give an elegant summary when they say: "*It helps to share the assessment and/or the burden as well as the stress that the course may bring*" and "*You can learn from other group members. Also you can learn how to plan and organise. It's more interesting.*"

Those students who least preferred group work did not give any reason that could be described as cultural. The reasons that they gave were pragmatic and simply concerned group dynamics. These dynamics were that groups are hard to arrange and not everyone may put in equal effort.

As with teaching and learning, the exposure figures indicate that students were not used to more active methods of assessment such as presentations. Essays and reports were the usual methods of assessment, but were not well liked by students.

Summary

The conventional view in the literature is that Chinese students prefer examinations and questions that require a definite answer; this cannot be supported by these findings. There is not a preference for examinations as stated by Maxwell et al (2000) and subjects that require definite or exact answers such as Finance appear to be as equally least preferred as examinations. The unexpected finding here is that group work is the most preferred method and is liked for sound pedagogic reasons. This is a problem for the teaching, learning and assessment strategies used on the distance learning courses. At present group work has only a minor part to play at the study schools and has no part in assessments.

2. Staff Interviews

In the interviews staff were asked whether or not their assignments had one correct answer. The majority of staff, with the exception of Blue, thought that their assignment did not have one correct answer. From the theory it would appear that courses with open-ended assignments should be problematic to Chinese learners. This was not thought to be the case by the staff. The only dissenting voice was Blue who said "*I think personally that they're (the students) happy with a right or wrong answer.*" The reason given for this by Blue was that this type of answer is "*more objective.*" In that "*they (the students) don't have to use their own thinking or too many paragraphs of evaluation.*" Although having voiced this opinion, Blue did finish by saying "*it just depends on the student.*" Other than Blue no one had noticed any problems regarding this open-ended assessment. Green particularly had not seen any problems, when probed about this point Green simply replied "*No, no....no.*"

When questioned about preferences for different types of assessment, responses given by the staff were mixed. Where staff had noticed differences in performance the responses were contradictory, e.g., two staff said that students preferred essays and an equal number said that they preferred reports. Typical of the differences in opinion were Red and Lilac. Red said "*I think probably a little bit more favourable towards the essay type answer which is broken into section, which isn't a report in my view, but I think most of them do have difficulties with a report type structure. They prefer to write in kind of little sections and call that an essay.*" On the other hand Lilac reported that "*the report's always very good.*" It may be that these apparent differences of opinion are not a consequence of perceived preferences but are a result of the order in which assessments are given. No one cited this as a direct answer to this question but some staff said that students did better as the course progressed; that they had received formative feedback from the first assignment or that the question rather than the assignment type was easier in some way. With regard to this, Blue thought that although the students performed better in the essay it was the gathering of materials that made the difference. For example, Blue believed that students found it easier to find the information for her or his second assignment as the information could be found in books, rather than the first assignment where information depended upon interviewing the right people.

Summary

The staff responses to questions concerning assessments are mixed. They do not support the notion that these students prefer any particular form of assessment or that they prefer assignments that have a direct answer. There is some evidence to suggest that students' performances improve as the subject develops. This notion will be investigated further in the archive analysis.

3. Archive Analysis

Tables 7.6.and 7.7 below illustrate an analysis of the type of assessment and critical analysis requirements of each of the assignments used on the undergraduate and postgraduate courses. The critical analysis requirements in all cases have been graded as low, medium and high. The criteria for the critical skills were taken from assignment brief. The grading is based on the percentage of marks awarded for critical and analytical skills. More than forty percent is regarded as high, from 20% to 39% as medium and less than 20% is low.

The criteria were self-devised, bearing in mind that cut off points needed to be made. These criteria were further agreed with the programme leader and other members of senior staff

Table 7.6: B. Sc. Hospitality Management - Analysis of Assignments	Assignment Requirement and Marks	
Assignment and Module	Critical Skills	Mark
Contemporary Hospitality Management		
Essay	Low	52.5*
Report	Low	52.5*
Marketing		
Essay	High	58.6*
Case Study Report	Medium	61.9*
Hospitality Facilities Management and Design		
Report (technical)	Low	59.8
Report	Medium	58.3
Organisational Behaviour		
Report	High	56.4*
Essay	High	47.8*
Small Business Enterprise Development		
Essay	High	47.7*
Report	High	53.5*
Strategic Management		
Themed Essay	Medium	65
Project	Low	65

Table 7.7: M. Sc. Hospitality Management - Analysis of Assignments

	Assignment Requirement and Marks	
Assignment	Critical Skills	Mark
Hospitality Business Development		
Essay	High	46.1*
Report (Action Plan)	Low	47.1*
Hospitality Quality Management		
1. Report	High	50.4*
2. Essay	High	47.7*
HRM		
Essay	High	53.3*
Report	Medium	49.3*
Finance		
Report	High	44.4
Report	High	49.5
Marketing		
Essay	High	55.4*
Case Study Report	High	58.6*
Strategic Management		
1. Themed Essay	High	51.5
Topical issues		
Report	Low	53.3*
Essay	Low	56.5*
Hospitality Entrepreneurship		
Essay	High	48
Feasibility Study	Medium	43
Dissertation	High	45.3

Types of Assessment

The types of assessment used are remarkably similar. From Tables 7.6 and 7.7 above it can be seen that most modules are assessed by a combination of an essay and a report.

What is immediately noticeable from the performances of undergraduate students in Table 7.6 is that the students appear to perform better in reports than in essays. Marks that have been compared are marked with an asterisk. In these cases the average mark for essays is 54.3% compared with the average mark for reports of 57.9%. An explanation for this may be that with the exception of Organisational Behaviour, the report is the second assessment and the students may have learned from the first assignments. Nothing conclusive with regard to preference for assignment types may be said, as there is wide variation between the modules. For example, average marks for essay range from a low of 47.7% for Small Business Enterprise to a high of 65% for Strategic Management.

An explanation for the high mark in Strategic Management may be that exit velocity in that it is the last module that is taught. The students may have learned study and essay-writing skills from earlier modules. An alternative explanation for this may be that it is the only subject that has e-delivery and as a consequence the students have greater contact with the tutor.

When marks are compared for essays and reports on the postgraduate course, the average marks are almost identical indicating no preference for either type of assessment.

Critical Skills

With regard to the postgraduate programme no pattern emerges with regard to level of critical skills and final marks. In some cases, e.g., in postgraduate Marketing where critical skills requirement is high the mark is high. Conversely low critical skills requirements in modules such as Topical Issues have produced only average marks.

This pattern is repeated on the undergraduate programme, where assignments that require high levels of critical skills often produce better marks than those that require low or medium skill levels.

Two problems in this analysis make any meaningful comparison across modules impossible. First, the mark shown is the final total mark, the actual mark awarded for critical analysis is unknown. Second, a different examiner marks each module. In an attempt to address this I analysed Hospitality Quality Management in more detail, as this is the only module that gave individual marks against each assessment criterion. The pattern that emerged from this relatively meagre analysis is that some students are good at critical analysis while others are average or poor.

Summary

The archive analysis demonstrates there is a lack of variety with regard to the diet of assessment. The remainder of the evidence provided by the archive analysis is inconclusive. There is a little evidence that the students prefer reports to essays but nothing that may be regarded as convincing. Similarly there is some slight evidence that the students may perform better in the second assignment. There is no evidence to support the view that the students are lacking in critical ability and do worse if this is required by the assignment. A very small survey of Hospitality Quality Management indicates that the case study cohort have varied critical skills.

Conclusion

There is no support for the theoretical proposition that this group of students is learners who prefer examinations and assignments that have a definite answer. Evidence from the student questionnaire shows that these students dislike examinations they regard them as memory tests and boring. Staff responses and the archive analysis do not support the notion that these students prefer assignments that have a direct answer or little critical analysis.

Two points have arisen from this part of the research. First, there is good evidence to support the idea that group work may be preferred. Second, the students in a significant number of the modules may perform better on the second assignment. This may indicate that, as with teaching and learning strategies, the students are able to learn from their experiences and adapt to new methods.

Section 5: The Chinese as Rote Learners

1. Student Questionnaires

To test the concept of the Chinese as rote learners the students were asked to describe in their own words how they would revise for an examination. The intention of this approach was to discover if the students only read and reread notes with the purpose of merely repeating them in examinations. This gave them the opportunity to demonstrate if their revision technique was a combination of memorisation and regurgitation of notes.

From the resulting narrative two main themes emerged. The first was that the majority of students would expect to study hard. They would (normally) study all of the materials usually in a highly methodical manner. Student 19 said that s/he would *"Read all the text book, do some easy study of past exam papers. Make a schedule in advance and plan a timetable."* Similarly student 23 would "*study materials by sequence*", while students 15 would *"revise the key theoretical concept. Do mock exam questions, essay plans etc."* Above all most of the students with only three exceptions intended to study hard and read the materials that they had been given. The words "study" and "read" were used in their answers by twenty-three (92%) of the students. Of the two students whose answer did not demonstrate a commitment to study hard neither said that they would rote learn; rather their responses indicated poor revision techniques. Student 21 observed that s/he would *"just read the notes and handouts."*

Notwithstanding the above, some students demonstrated what could be described as a tactical or strategic approach to study, in that they would follow the hints of their teachers or would attempt to guess which topics would be on the paper. The notion that Chinese students may be strategic in their learning is similar to the findings of Ramburath and McCormick (2002). It is also important from the point of view of the learning materials provided in that a suspicion of some staff has been that the students only engage with materials in which they are being assessed.

The second theme that came through the narrative, and that has already been alluded to, is that the students would seek to learn from past papers and would wish to "simulate exam questions". As above, they appear to be methodical in what they do.

The use of memory and memorisation was mentioned directly by three students. However when memorisation was mentioned it was in the context of some other study method, e.g., student 24 would "*spend time to read and memorise the main points for the examination*" and *student 7 revises by "study(ing) notes to memorise the main points.*" Similarly student 11 would "*firstly study all the handouts and then my own notes. If I don't understand, I'll refer to my textbook. Usually I'll memorise all the definitions and key points which I think are important.*"

Summary

While no definite conclusion can be made, the case study group of students do not appear to be rote learners whose revision tactic is to commit everything to memory and then repeat it. When memory is mentioned it is alongside what appears to be an attempt to understand the notes. They do not appear to be mere "tape recorders". Some of the students make mention of revision techniques that are patently far beyond mere memory. Examples of this are students who will *"highlight keywords and then write down their explanation". Others who would "assume examination papers and answer them by using own words" and "think of examples of theory."*

It is also possible that committing notes to memory does not mean that the students are learning by rote. Memorising notes for examinations may simply be a necessary tactic for examinations.

A further point for investigation came from this evidence. This is that this group of learners appear to be strategic in their approach to study. Several students in their answers mentioned how they would practise past papers and look for hints and tips about which questions may come up on examination papers.

2. Staff Interviews

To delve further in to the notion of Chinese students as rote or strategic learners, the staff were asked two questions. The first question was did the students' work go beyond what was contained in the study packs. The second was: had they noticed instances of work from the study packs being regurgitated or repeated verbatim?

Study Packs

Responses to this were mixed the majority of staff who answered thought the students did not merely repeat from what was in the study packs. Red said that s/he thought, *"in many cases, that the assessments bear very little relationship __ to the materials in the study pack."*. Other staff set work that could not solely rely upon the contents of the study pack. Magenta said that his/her *"unit doesn't particularly lend itself to that, because they've got to go out and find a real person to do it (the assignment)."*

On the other hand, Green had come across this type of behaviour. S/he reported that "*Yes, I've had work that's obviously copied learning, part of the learning materials, you know they worked it out."* However, Green continued by saying that, "*Some students choose to go off and use their own references rather than working under the one that we've given them."* The important point here may be that although Green could cite an instance of this behaviour, it was isolated and was not the behaviour of the whole. Blue had noticed work being reproduced from the study packs but noted that it was referenced and thought that this was what students were supposed to do.

Regurgitation

When asked about students regurgitating chunks of work, the responses were again mixed. They varied from the positions of Red and Magenta. Red's position was that the students go beyond regurgitation in that, *"they demonstrate understanding because they do address the brief."* Magenta thought that the Chinese students *"are very good at reading round a subject".* Brown made much of the fact that students appeared to work methodically in that they sent in draft work and asked for comments from her/him.

Along with their earlier comments, Green and Blue thought that they had seen examples of work being copied but Blue did not think that it was "*word for word"* and said that it was referenced. As mentioned earlier Green had examples of *"copied learning."*

Summary

From their answers members of the teaching staff appear to be split over the position of the students relying solely upon study pack notes and then repeating them. However, upon closer examination of the transcripts, the majority of staff have no examples of any of these practices while the two staff who did notice it could give only single examples. In neither case did the examples cover the whole cohort or a substantial part of it. When relying solely on notes provided was noted and instances of regurgitation were cited, they were only in a minority of cases. These cases were often backed up by contrary evidence of other students who did not engage in these practices.

From the interviews with the teaching staff there would appear to be little evidence to support the view that the Hong Kong learners learn by rote and will repeat chunks of work. As these students are competent in English, it may be that these students have the confidence to express themselves and their ideas. They do not have the insecurity that Au and Entwhistle (1999) observed when writing in a second language.

3. E-mail Interviews

The e-mail interviews with the students were conducted in order to answer a question that arose whilst investigating rote learning. The question has already been referred to and is that this cohort of students does not learn by rote but instead learns strategically. The four students in the e-mail group were asked how they and their fellow learners used the study packs. Did they read through all the notes and complete all of the exercises? Or did they concentrate only on the parts that were to be formally assessed? Three, Roman, Arial and Baskerville believed that all of the students were acting strategically, concentrating only on those parts of the syllabus that were to be assessed. Berlin believed that some students behaved in this manner while others did not. S/he believed that the answer was *"somewhere in between".*

When asked why they acted strategically, two themes emerged. These were firstly, that this is what they had been taught to do in school and second, that pressure of work gave them little time for study. On the first theme Arial was contrite for such behaviour and wrote, *"I realize this is not supposed the right and proper attitude of learning. But it seems more efficient in reading and easier to get higher marks in examinations since we don't need to waste our time "going through those materials that are not assessed." Students in Hong Kong have been told to study in such way since we were in college. We are "trained" to focus our study on sections which could earn us higher marks".* Baskerville believed that the practice was not confined to schools but also stemmed from Hong Kong universities that are under pressure to cram the curriculum so that the students may enter the job market early. This cramming of the curriculum made it such that only " *solution is (to) learn in strategic way"*

On the second theme of pressure of work; the students demonstrated their awareness of working conditions elsewhere in the world but thought that they were under pressure to work longer hours in Hong Kong. The consequence of this was that they had little time left for study. Baskerville summed this up when s/he wrote, "*While people from US and Europe are fighting for shorter work time down to below 35 hours per week. What most of the HK people working time is at least 12 hours per day, at least 5.5 day per week. 66 hours per week is normal situation to HK people. I think you would know what difficulties long distance learning students from HK are facing and fully understand why they should learn in strategic way."*

Summary

There is strong evidence from the e-mail interviews that at least some, if not a majority of the students are not engaging with all of the learning materials. There is evidence to suggest that a combination of previous educational experience and time pressure caused by work causes this cohort of students to learn in a strategic manner.

Conclusion

There is no evidence to support the view that this group of students learns by rote. The evidence presented in the student questionnaire does not indicate that this group of students learns by committing chunks of material to memory or by repeating study notes. Similarly although there is a little evidence from the staff interviews of tactics of this kind it does not extend to the whole cohort. Where examples were given they concerned only a very small number of learners. The research proposition that this group of students is rote learners cannot be substantiated.

However, another point for investigation did arise from the students' questionnaires and from past suspicions of staff that the Hong Kong Chinese students were strategic in their approach to study. Specifically, that they only engaged with the material that forms part of the assessment.

As a consequence of this finding the e-mail group of students were asked their opinion of this study style. As stated earlier there is strong evidence that this cohort of students do act strategically. This in turn leaves the problem that if students do not engage with the whole they are effectively being rewarded for completing only part of the course.

This section of the research falls directly in to the literature regarding learning styles where the research proposition was that the students would learn by rote and therefore be surface learners. On the contrary the evidence suggests a pattern that these students are in fact strategic in their learning. This is in agreement with later research (outlined in Chapter 4) that the Chinese learner's approach to study can be strategic and may be more strategic than western learners (Biggs, 1989, 1990, 1991; Lee, 1996; Kember and Gow, 1990, 1991; Watkins, 2000; Ramburath and McCormick, 2002).

Section 6: Classroom Discussion and Learning

1. Staff Interviews

Hallam staff were asked if they had experienced any difficulties in getting the Hong Kong students to engage in classroom discussion. On this issue the staff were in accord. From their answers two themes emerged. These were that certain attempts at classroom discussion would not work, but that techniques could be used that would enable engagement in this form of learning. Further, individuals may dominate discussion.

Staff thought that Hong Kong students would not participate in discussion that started with questions directed at the whole class. Black summed this up when s/he said "*There's one type of discussion they don't participate in which is me asking a question of the class as a whole, and saying 'what do you think about this, has anyone got any ideas?* Staff also reported that asking questions directly of an individual would also bring little by way of response. Red who had tried this reported that "*by focusing on individuals to get them to join the discussion, my success there has been quite limited, I think. They don't like to be picked on as an individual.*"

However, what is apparent from their answers is that staff were aware of the problems of classroom discussion and had used their pedagogic skills to good effect to overcome these problems. Staff did report that classroom discussion could be successfully used provided that it was instigated in groups or that initial reticence was overcome. Black again showed remarkable resource with this when s/he said that "*My technique has been to ask a general question and then stick up my hand, because someone who works in China told me to do this in Hong Kong. S/he said 'just stick up your hand and ask a question' and what happened then was instead of a deathly silence, people did stick up their hands to answer the question, which I wasn't, you know, I wasn't expecting that, and so you're able to ask a person for their contribution*"

Black along with others had also found that discussion could be brought about through group work in small groupings of two or three. Lilac had also struggled with question and answer techniques and found that "*I think that again is more difficult and I would always want to give them the questions, and then give them a little bit of time, to seek consensus from a group, or seek a participation with a group. You'll always get some participation but it tends to be the strong students*"

Lilac here gives a strong clue to the second theme that emerged that where discussion is instigated through group work that certain individuals could dominate the proceedings. The reasons that staff gave for this domination were language ability of strong personalities and a shyness or reluctance to answer from those with less strong personalities. Brown thought that "*there's a bit of a language issue, so occasionally within a group obviously you've got different language skills in terms of English, and I'd say the people who are more proficient in English tend to be more dominant in the learning situation."* Nevertheless, staff had attempted to deal with this and structured their classes accordingly. Lilac was aware of the dominance of individuals and had structured her/his class to deal with it. S/he had tried to "*get them all to engage in that (group discussion) without domination, I think, structuring the sessions is an incredibly important part of the whole thing, and having well prepared mechanisms that you can work with.*

Magenta had changed her/his style and reported that students had enjoyed the new learning experience.

Summary

The research proposition that Chinese students dislike classroom discussion is to some extent supported. From their responses it would appear that there is reluctance on the part of Hong Kong students to answer general questions and they do not like to be asked directly as an individual. However, experienced teachers can overcome this. Discussion started through groups can be used to encourage responses. Similarly giving clues as to how responses can be elicited has also been found to work. Interestingly group work, which was thought to be unworkable with Chinese students, has again found favour with this group of students.

2. E-mail Interviews with students

The four students were asked one direct question as to the perceived lack of participation of Chinese students in class. The students were in agreement that Chinese students were less likely than western students to ask questions in class were. The reasons for this behaviour were grouped under five themes. These themes are

Students do not wish to interrupt or waste others' time

Ariel believed that the study schedule is often quite restricted and as a consequence teachers needed the time to finish their material and that there was a fear *of "wasting other learners' time"*. Baskerville agreed with position but was quite scathing when s/he said "*students who ask question when they have enquiry are someone who (are) wasting others' time, time for recess, time for lunch, time for play*".

Students wait until after the class to ask questions

The reason given for this was the same as in the theory. If the students wait until the end of the lesson to ask questions then they will have time to digest and further understand the material. Ariel summed this up when s/he said that "*It seems to me if I ask questions after class, teachers or lecturers may have more time to understand my questions and they can address my problems directly and personally. And, it won't cause any interruption in class.*"

Cultural Reasons

Two themes emerged under cultural reasons. The first was very similar to face in that the students were afraid of embarrassing themselves by asking "*silly questions*". Berlin was quite short and to the point on this s/he wrote quite simply *"Chinese students, in general, do not wish to make themselves as a fool if they come up with not an intelligent question."* Ariel was in agreement with this position but took it further by stating *"If there is no questions from other learners in class, why do I have (them)? Am I so stupid that I do not understand the study?"* Ariel carried on with this analysis to say that s/he would normally look for further explanation in books. Baskerville would ask other students.

The second cultural theme that emerged and was brought up by everyone was simply Chinese culture itself. Roman and Berlin believed respectively *that "Chinese used to be passive of everything except money*" and that that "*Chinese basically are not outspoken as Caucasian in class*". Baskerville was particularly forthcoming on this issue: s/he wrote that *"One of the reasons maybe, cultural background cause people doing think (things) without question, esp(ecially) questioning your boss, your teachers, people whose status are higher than you*." Arial was in agreement writing "*HK Chinese learners are not usual to express ourselves in front of the others. The traditional culture of Chinese is different from the Western. Chinese are taught to obey, to listen, to do what their parents or teachers told. HK Chinese learners are not used to question.*"

Language differences

Language, particularly second language skills was stated as a reason for not asking questions in class by all of the students. Although all of the students wrote more than this Berlin simply summed up the position when s/he wrote, *"since the medium of instruction is English, that is the first barrier."*

Attitude of the students

This theme emerged from the answers of two students, Baskerville and Roman. Both of the students believed pragmatically that some students did not ask questions because they were too lazy or were not interested in their studies. Baskerville thought that in pre-University studies some students saw little point in asking questions as they merely sought high examination marks through regurgitation. Baskerville wrote *"students facing exams which never require creativity, but only memorisation. High marks go to students who can answer the question as a photocopier."*

Summary

From the answers of the students the research proposition that Chinese students dislike classroom discussion has some support. The students' e-mail responses indicate that questions are not asked as students do not wish to waste others' time: there are language difficulties, the attitude of some students may be wrong, students wait until the end of class to ask questions and that there are cultural differences. Of the reasons given for this behaviour by the students, all of them believed that is was caused by cultural differences.

Unexpectedly, two of the students, Arial and Berlin gave tips as to how Chinese students might be encouraged to answer questions. Arial believed that students were more likely to ask questions if they were placed in small groups and if other encouragement was given. Berlin went further and suggested that students may write down questions that are given to the teacher at the beginning of the class. This would have the impact of allowing students to reflect upon previous learning and ask questions without appearing silly or losing face.

Conclusion

From the answers of both staff and students, the research proposition that Chinese students dislike classroom discussion appears to hold true. The research evidence in this chapter is very similar to explanations of this behaviour that were found in the literature and were discussed in Chapter 5.

The view from both staff and students was that open general questions in class are often met with silence accords with the view of Martinsons and Martinsons (1996). The students themselves said that they might wait until the end of class to ask questions. This agrees with the experiences of Maxwell et al (2000). Further, there is evidence to suggest that Chinese culture plays a big part in the reluctance to ask and answer questions in class (Bodycott and Walker, 2000). Proficiency in the English language may also explain the students' reluctance to ask questions in class.

Notwithstanding this both the students and the staff gave methods by which students could be encouraged to participate in classroom discussion. Importantly, group work was cited as a method by which students could be encouraged to participate in discussion. Group work and its use have appeared through the course of this research as a preferred method of instruction and assessment. Again, contrary to the literature, the theme that this group of Chinese students appears to prefer group work as a learning experience has emerged. Further, both the staff and students gave interesting tips that would help students to engage in this learning by classroom discussion.

Section 7: The Overarching Research Questions

Question 1: How far are the teaching, learning and assessment preferences of Chinese Hong Kong learners met by the distance learning courses offered?

As was stated in Chapter 1, the course and materials delivered in Hong Kong are identical to the course that is delivered in Sheffield, with the exception of some alterations to teaching by some lecturers. A consequence of this might have been that that there may be cultural problems with regard to course content, study materials and delivery.

From the research findings it would appear that the content of the course is acceptable to most of the students. The students were happy with the study materials and the study school content. The only problem areas with regard to curriculum content are the poor student performances in the "human" subjects and Finance. One explanation of this poor performance in the "human" subjects may be that students are not exposed to these subjects in their working lives. Poor performance in Finance is more difficult to explain but it may be that students chose the Hospitality Industry because they were lacking in numerical skills.

With regard to the study materials, a criticism that might have been expected is that the learning resources should have been placed in the context of Hong Kong and the Far East. However, this research and the pilot research indicate that this is not the case. Students were not interested in any Hong Kong contextualisation, their requirement was knowledge of international business (Nield, 2002). Further, the actual distance learning materials were enjoyed by all of the students in the e-mail group.

The problem area, with regard to transferring the course cross-culturally is delivery. Much of this has been discussed previously. However, in summary, changes regarding delivery need to be made with regard to the length of the study schools, contact with tutors, assessments and teaching and learning strategies that are used. This is particularly important with regard to the study materials where the students exhibited a dislike of working on their own from them. Staff need to be made aware of the different expectations that Hong Kong students have of them.

Question 2: How appropriate is it to apply models of learning style across cultures?

Chapter 4 concluded that all of the four of learning style investigated in this study could be analysed at least in part using the research from this study. The models identified are styles based on the learning process (including both Kolb and Honey and Mumford); styles based on orientation to study and learning modality.

Styles based on orientation to study have been covered in this chapter in the section regarding rote learning. Learning styles based on the learning process and learning modality will now be analysed using the findings of the six theoretical propositions. Analysis of the styles is achieved by matching the learning preferences advocated for a particular learning style against the preferences in the research of the case study group. This will then enable comparisons to be made with the findings of previous applications of learning styles across cultures. More importantly it will be possible to discover how appropriate the recommendations of the learning style to the case study group.

The learning styles will now be analysed in turn. In each case the learning activities that support the different learners and compares them to learning preferences of the case study group. Will be represented in a grid. The case study group dislikes where an activity is marked with a cross (x) that activity. A plus sign (+) signifies that that activity is liked by the case study group. The basis upon which a cross or plus sign is awarded is from the research findings in this chapter 7. For example, where students were asked their preferences regarding methods of instruction as in table 7.2, there answers were regarded as liked if they were ranked one or two but least preferred if they were ranked four or five. Where rankings of three were given, other factors such as the number of students rating it highly were taken into account.

1. Kolb's learning styles

Table 7.8: Comparison of Teaching Activities that Support Kolb's Learning Styles and the Case Study Group's Learning Preferences.

Divergers		Assimilators		Convergers		Accommodators	
Observations	+	Discussion	X	Lecture	X	Projects	+
Discussion	X	Questions	X	Projects	+	Observations	+
Questions	X	Lecture	X	Homework	X	Small group discussions	+
Lectures reflect after	+	Projects	+	Case Study	+	Teacher model professional	+
Interest in people	X	Demonstration	+	Interactive instruction	X	Active participation	X
		Audio-visual presentation	+				

Source: Extrapolated from Clark, (2000) and Anderson and Adams, (1992).

From Table 7.8 it can be seen that the results are mixed. No set of learning activities is completely liked by the case study group. The learning style that has the closest match is the accommodator. The learning style that least matches the preferences is diverger. What is significant is that attributing one style to a group of students may lead to teaching and assessment that may be inappropriate. An example of this is that in their research Ayeung and Sands (1996) found that Hong Kong Chinese students indicated a preference for an assimilator style. Table 7.8 contradicts this by indicating that the case study group dislikes half of the methods recommended as suiting an assimilator style.

Importantly and this is a theme that runs through this part of the dissertation applying one learning style to a group may mean that some form of instruction that is liked by the group is ignored as it is believed to be preferred by a different learning modality only.

2. Honey and Mumford's learning styles

Table 7.9 shows the learning preferences associated with each Honey and Mumford's learning styles.

Table 7.9: Comparison of Teaching Activities that Support Honey and Mumford's Learning Styles and the Case Study Group's Learning Preferences.

Activists		Reflectors		Theorists		Pragmatists	
Do not like listening to lectures	+	Open-ended Questions	X	Work Alone	X	Work Alone	X
Group projects	+	Paired Work	+	Read and Summarise	+	Practical Work	+
Dislike Passive role	X	Small Group Work	+			Work related to reality	+
Group work	+	Ask Students to Draw on Own Experiences	+				
		Observation	+				
		Listening to lectures	X				

Source: Own Extrapolation from DeVita, (2001); Vincent and Ross, 2001; Mumford, (1997); F. E. D. U., (1995); Honey and Mumford, (1992) and Honey and Mumford, (1986a).

Similar to table 7.8 the results in table 7.9 are inconclusive. This group of learners does not fit into any one Honey and Mumford's learning styles. The closest fits are with the reflective and pragmatic learning styles. As with Kolb's styles, using activities recommended with one style could lead to problems. For example, if Chinese students are reflectors, they should respond to open-ended questions and have a preference for lectures. The research in this chapter clearly demonstrated that Chinese students do not respond to open-ended questions and do not display a preference for lectures.

Throughout the literature there has been a theme that Chinese students are essentially reflective. This proposition was substantiated by work undertaken by both Howarth (2003) and Barron and Arcodia (2002). Although the reflective style is a close fit for this group of students the problem with it is, like both Kolb and Honey and Mumford, it may lead to inappropriate activities.

3. Learning Modality

Table 7.10: Comparison of Teaching Activities that Support Different Learning Modalities					
Kinaesthetic		Auditory		Visual	
Tasks	+	Oral Examinations	X	Traditional Lectures	X
Practical Work	+	Lectures	X	Reading	X
Demonstrations	+	Seminars	X	Observing	+
Role Play	+	Discussion	X	Videos	+
Projects	+	Observation	+		

Source: Own extrapolation from British Council (2003), Park (2000) and Fatt (2000; 1998; 1993)

Table 7.10 indicates the teaching activities that support the different learning modalities. Within the literature the modalities are given as kinaesthetic, auditory, visual and tactile or kinaesthetic, auditory and visual. For ease of use, and as there is some confusion between kinaesthetic and tactile, the second grouping has been used in this table.

Table 7.10 indicates that one learning modality matches these learners. From the findings the case study group are highly kinaesthetic. However, with regard to this finding the preferred activities relate to the groups' preference for practical work. From the findings, it would appear that the case study group were strongly not auditory and had a some preference for two of the visual techniques.

If the work of Park (2000,) that found that Chinese students were strong visual learners had been followed, two recommended but inappropriate learning methods might have be used. Conversely, and what may be a problem when measuring the learning styles of groups, two methods that are preferred ,would be ignored if the group was said to be kinaesthetic only.

4. Styles based on orientation to study

This has been dealt with as a theoretical proposition. The research findings indicated that these students were not rote learners but were essentially achieving in that they have a strategic approach to work, engaging only with those study materials that helped them to achieve.

As pointed out earlier in this chapter these findings are similar to those of many later researchers who found that Asian students make greater use of achieving strategies than their western counterparts.

Summary

Each of the learning styles analysed in this research has been utilised to a greater or lesser extent to give an explanation of the Chinese learning preferences. Research classification and categorisation has been remarkably close in most cases to the findings of this research. However, this research advocates caution when applying findings across cultures. This issue and reflections on the usefulness of learning styles will be dealt with in greater detail in Chapter 8.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, EVALUATION AND LIMITATIONS

Introduction

This chapter will be presented in four interrelated sections dealing with conclusions, recommendations, evaluation and limitations of the research.

Conclusions

The conclusions are divided in to three parts. These are contribution to knowledge, conclusions concerning the reliability, validity and generalisability of the research and emerging issues.

1. Contribution to knowledge

This dissertation contributes to knowledge in two ways. The first is the knowledge gained from the two overarching research questions. The second is the knowledge gained from the theoretical propositions.

Conclusions against the overarching research questions

These were dealt with in chapter seven. In summary, the questions were "how far are the teaching, learning and assessment preferences of Chinese Hong Kong learners met by the distance learning courses offered?" and "how appropriate is it to apply models of learning style to national cultures?"

Question 1: How far are the teaching, learning and assessment preferences of Chinese Hong Kong learners met by the distance learning courses offered?

From the research it would appear that the courses in Hospitality Management that Sheffield Hallam University offers in Hong Kong are transferable in their content but not in their delivery. Changes in delivery need to be made in order to make the course suitable for Hong Kong students. It may be that in this case that criticisms of the noncontextualisation of content of courses offered abroad by commentators such as Craft et al (1998) do not hold true, but should instead be aimed at delivery.

Question 2: How appropriate is it to apply models of learning style to national cultures?

Each of the learning styles analysed has something to offer. Where the learning styles have been measured across cultures the findings have been in the main remarkably similar to the findings within this research. However, with the exception of styles that measure orientation to study; a measurement of any of the learning styles would have lead to activities taking place that would have been disliked by the learners. This finding is important as it casts doubt on the application of learning styles to groups. It may be that using any measure of learning styles and applying it to a group may be too simplistic. It is agreed throughout the literature that learning styles are different for individuals and that individuals should know their own learning preferences (DeVita, 2001; Mumford, 1997; F. E. D. U., 1995; Honey and Mumford, 1992 and Honey and Mumford, 1986a). The practice of measuring group learning styles and applying the findings to the group is contrary to this advice.

The research demonstrates that measuring a learning style may lead to inappropriate recommendations regarding teaching and assessment. It may also lead to preferred methods of instruction being ignored as those methods are thought applicable to a different style. As such any measurements should be treated with caution. A questionnaire similar to that used in this research may give better answers and a fuller picture of the needs of the learners. Even so it would only indicate the needs of the majority. The needs of individuals would still have to be recognised.

What the wider research in this dissertation also indicates is that there are omissions in some learning styles. For example, learning styles may purport to give an indication of learning preferences. They do not tell us how the teacher is expected to interact emotionally with the student. This is particularly pertinent with regard to the findings in this research of Chinese perceptions of a teacher. It is easy to see that students may have a preference for didactic teaching where the teacher is the knowledge provider. What the preference does not tell us is that the same person is expected by the students to have "heart".

In summary, there is some evidence in the literature to suggest that students from different national groups exhibit preferences for different learning styles (Hill et al, 2000). From the research undertaken within this study with regard to Chinese learners it is apparent that none of the differences are fully embedded in any of the learning style theories presented here. Where national groups are discovered to prefer a particular learning style, care should be taken with regard to recommendations that may advocate inappropriate teaching and learning methods. The research concurs with Reynolds (1998) who advocated caution when dealing with measures of learning styles.

Conclusions against the theoretical propositions

The six research propositions set up a stereotypical image of the Chinese student: what this research has done is to challenge that image. Conclusions against the six theoretical propositions have been made in the relevant chapters. In summary, of the six propositions, two have significant support, two have some support and the remaining two are unsupported.

The research propositions that are supported are that Chinese students dislike classroom discussion and will not ask questions in class preferring to remain silent taking notes, and that the role of the teacher/lecturer is didactic. S/he is also considered to be a friend by the Chinese students and is seen as a figure that provides moral guidance.

There is some support for the proposition that this group of students prefers passive teaching and learning methods, but there is also evidence that other forms of teaching and learning such as group work may be profitably used. While there is not total support for the notion that this case study group prefers hard and soft subjects, there is evidence to suggest that subjects that are work, practically-based and culture related such as Food and Beverage Management and Marketing are preferred.

There is no support for the propositions that this group of students is rote learners who have a preference for examinations and assignments that have a definite answer.

The findings add to knowledge by highlighting the learning preferences of the case study group and suggesting how these learners may wish to be taught. (Also see conclusions against matters arising).

2. Conclusions regarding reliability, validity and generalisability of the research

These have been dealt with in part earlier in this chapter in the critique/review of the methodology. This section will continue by examining the full picture of how it was sought to ensure reliability, validity and generalisability of the research and its findings. This will be achieved by matching reliability, validity and generalisability against the four design tests advocated by Yin (2003). See Chapter 6 for the design tests.

Reliability

Reliability has been required in the data collection stages. This has been achieved by adhering rigorously to the case study protocol outlined in table 6.4.

Further a case study database has been developed that as stated in chapter 6 comprises all of the raw data, the case study documents, the research instruments used in their raw states and in the forms in which they were tabulated and analysed. These are and have been available for scrutiny throughout the research process.

Validity

Construct validity and internal validity were used to test the validity of the case study. Tactics to ensure construct validity were used in the data collection and composition stages of the case study. Tactics to ensure internal validity were employed in the data analysis stage.

1. Construct Validity

As has been previously evidenced, and demonstrated in the data collection stage, multiple sources of evidence have been used against each of the theoretical propositions. These multiple sources of evidence have been used to create and establish a chain of evidence that links back to the research questions.

Further to this, key informants have reviewed the draft of the case study. All of the staff who were interviewed have been given the transcripts of their interviews and have been given the opportunity to read the research chapters. The students in Hong Kong have also been given the chance to read through their evidence in Hong Kong at the study school. Other than minor corrections no one has disagreed with the representation of the evidence that they gave.

2. Internal Validity

To establish internal validity in the data analysis stage pattern matching has been used against each of the theoretical propositions. The different sources of evidence have been organised to enable the researcher and reader to see how this evidence matches the theoretical propositions.

Within the analysis I have sought to address rival explanations of the behaviour. This has been achieved in three ways. First, I have endeavoured not to accept one explanation and to look for other explanations. Second, I have allowed other academics to scrutinise the work and to seek other explanations. Last, I have presented some of the findings of the work at internal and external conferences where the research has been subjected to rigorous questioning and debate.

Generalisability

The tactic suggested by Yin (2003) with regard to establishing generalisability in a single case study is that theory is used in the research design stage (see figure 6.2). The theory that has been drawn upon stems from the literature reviews and is encapsulated in the research questions and the theoretical propositions. These questions and propositions are in turn based upon theory relating to culture and to learning styles.

Although this single case study may be replicated with future cohorts of students in Hong Kong, I believe that the findings in this case may allow an analytic generalisation to be made. Analytic generalisation involves making a judgement about how far the findings from one case may be a guide to what might happen in another situation (Kvale, 1996). The analogy used for applying analytic generalisation is case law. In case law the court must decide if a precedent from a previous case may be applied to a new case (Kennedy, 1979). For this reason, I believe that while it is not possible to generalise the findings of this research to all Chinese learners or all Hong Kong Chinese learners. It may be that it is possible to generalise the findings to future students studying the same or similar courses.

3. Emerging issues

Throughout the course of the research, three issues emerged. These issues were first, the role of group work in teaching and learning and as a vehicle for assessment. Second, cultural differences in the perception of the role of the teacher and lastly, these students are strategic learners who do not engage with the whole learning experience.

The role of group work

From the literature review the stereotypical expectation was that due to Confucianism and power distance, Chinese learners would have a dislike of group working as part of a teaching and learning strategy and group work in assignments. The research in this case has demonstrated that this view is incorrect. Within the research the students indicated a strong preference for group work as both a teaching and learning strategy and as an assessment strategy. While this finding is surprising in that it contradicts the literature, it is unsurprising when we consider the literature in Chapter 2 and find that Chinese people are highly collectivist (Hofstede, 2001).

Role of the teacher

The most significant finding regarding the role of the teacher was not the pedagogic expectations of the teacher, but that the students placed great emphasis on the teacher having "heart". The concept of heart means that the teacher should have awareness not only of the students' learning needs but also of their need for empathy. Further, the students expect to have a greater contact with their tutors than is at present available within the distance learning courses offered by Sheffield Hallam University in Hong Kong.

The issues of "heart" and contact present significant problems with regard to this or any other distance learning course offered in Hong Kong. First, as there is little contact with students, very few, if any, of the teaching staff may establish any kind of rapport with their students. As a consequence of this there is little opportunity for "heart". Second, as contact with students is limited to the study schools and, if available, e-mail, students who do not possess e-mail have no real opportunity for the contact required by them.

Strategic Learning

Far from being stereotypical rote learners, the research has indicated that these students are learning in a strategic manner. This finding raises interesting problems with regard to the study materials and the assessments. The students only appear to engage with learning materials that form part of the assessment programme.

The problem this presents is that these students are not engaging with the whole course. It will be necessary to look at course design in greater depth to ensure that course materials require full engagement of the student.

Recommendations

Recommendations concerning the findings of this research will be made under two headings. These are impact upon professional practice and recommendations for further research/study.

1. Impact upon Professional Practice

It is possible that professional practice may be changed as a consequence of the findings of this research. Specifically changes in teaching, learning and assessment should be considered in the following areas.

1. Assignments

The diet of assignments associated with these distance learning courses is very restrictive comprising mainly of essays and reports. These forms of assignment while worthwhile should not form the whole of the assignment schedule.

From the research findings, group work should be introduced. While originally group work in distance learning was thought difficult, if not impossible, the proximity of students to one another in Hong Kong would allow for group work to take place. Group work may also be encouraged by the use of virtual environments. This should form the basis of further research.

2. Study Schools

In line with the wishes of the students the study schools should allow more contact between the students and staff in order that a rapport, if not heart is established. Where teaching, learning and assessment methods that are "unusual" in the Chinese experience are employed time and care should be taken to introduce these to the students.

3. Study Packs and other Learning Materials

Evidence from the student questionnaires and the e-mail interviews indicates that students are not motivated to engage with the study materials. To attempt to get over this problem, materials other than paper based should be used to stimulate the student's interest. From the questionnaire findings the students indicated that they had a preference for watching demonstrations and videos. Through e-learning it is possible to add value to the study packs by using some of these methods alongside the study packs.

4. The Role of the teacher

One of the challenging findings from the research was the different expectation that the Hong Kong students have of the teacher. Specifically the expectations with regard to empathy, awareness of students' problems and contact with the tutor need to be addressed.

As part of the traditional role of distance learning is to reduce the actual distance study schools have played a large but transient part in allowing students-teacher contact. This may be built upon by the use of e-mail but could go further in the use of blackboard sites and chat rooms.

5. Strategic Learning

It was probably unsurprising to find that the students only partially engaged with the study materials. However, to overcome this strategies need to be employed that motivate the students to engage with the whole. One strategy may already be in existence as was referred to earlier on the undergraduate programme Strategic Management has met with some success. This module differs from the others in that it has an e-learning component that allows for more access to the tutor. Further part of the assessment is based around weekly tests with which the students have to engage.

2. Further Research

1. Many of the changes to professional practice rely upon changing forms of delivery with the addition of other new forms of delivery, e.g. using e-learning to facilitate more student-teacher contact. Pilot pedagogic research as to how this may be effectively operated within distance learning should be carried out before they are rolled out across the whole course. Specifically it would be an improvement if these changes were implemented and evaluated in a programme of action research.

2. This research applies only to Hong Kong distance learning students. As the University is experiencing vastly increased demand from Mainland China and Taiwan for full-time courses, similar research using my research design, in to the needs of these students should be undertaken.

3. This is a single case study. The findings would be further supported and generalised if the study was repeated with future cohorts.

EVALUATION

I will now proceed to evaluate this dissertation. I will carry out the evaluation under two broad headings. These are a thorough critical review of the research process and reflections upon my personal learning through the course of my study for the Doctorate in Education

Critical Review of the Research Process

In reviewing my methodology I intend to critique and reflect upon four issues. These are the general strengths and weaknesses of the research process; the analytic framework; the methodology and the findings of the research.

General Strengths and Weaknesses of the Research Process

In reviewing the research process I feel that its success has been to provide insights into the case study group of students. The results of this study are different from the stereotypical view of the Chinese learner that was found to exist in some of the earlier literature. They are also contrary to some of the findings where certain learning style questionnaires have been used with groups of Chinese learners to uncover a "Chinese learning style".

Strengths of the Process

The achievements of this research stem from the flexibility of the methods used within the case study, the whole-hearted participation of the respondents, the number of methods used within the case study and the structured approach of the research process.

The flexibility of the methods used was important in that the ability to easily change from group interviews to e-mail interviews allowed the study to be completed within the time constraint that was imposed upon it. Given the twin constraints of time and distance the outcomes of the dissertation could not have been achieved without the full and timely co-operation of the respondents. Their co-operation was vital to the success of this case study. The student interview questionnaire was completed by all of the students in Hong Kong. Similarly, all of the staff who had taught in Hong Kong took part in the interviews. The volunteers for the e-mail interviews were representative of the student body. All of the respondents answered all of the questions in a full, rich and timely manner.

The number of research methods used within the case study allowed each of the theoretical research propositions to be fully analysed. In this way the pieces of evidence found from each of the methods was used as a building block for knowledge that allowed triangulation. They allowed patterns to matched and knowledge to be constructed.

The structured, five-stage approach taken to the research that was described in chapter six was important to the success of the research. The carefully planned structure and approach that is exemplified by piloting all of the research instruments allowed ambiguities and overly technical language to be removed. Importantly unexpected eventualities such as the SARS outbreak were allowed for and were dealt with in the research protocol.

General Weaknesses of the Research Approach

The general weaknesses of the research are its lack of generalisability and transferability. Although, as is demonstrated earlier in this chapter, it may be possible to generalise the findings to future cohorts of similar students in Hong Kong. While this analytic generalisation may be possible it is by no means certain, as the case-study cohort may not have been representative of future groups (see analytic generalisation in part 5 of this chapter). Another cohort studied over a different year could give different results and other matters could have arisen from the research.

While acknowledging that the findings may not be transferable, the methods used within the case study are transferable and may be replicated. It would be possible to generalise the findings in the future by repeating the case study with another or other cohorts (for further detail see criticism of research methodology later in this chapter).

Analytic Framework

Before deciding upon the methodology it was necessary to set up a framework for analysis that would help me to examine the learning preferences of Chinese learners. The research used two frames that had to be brought together. These frames were national culture and learning styles. In using these two frames several difficulties were encountered.

With regard to national culture, the main difficulty was that there are several approaches for considering culture. The approach used in this research was to consider culture from the managerial perspective with particular focus on the work of Geert Hofstede. Hofstede's work has its critics but this perspective suited the research as unlike other perspectives it considers national culture and dimensions that may make national cultures different.

With regard to learning styles, the main difficulty in using learning styles, as part of a framework for analysis is the lack of agreement upon what a learning style is. In this dissertation four separate "categories" of learning style were analysed and used. These were chosen as they are widely used within the literature and, importantly, all of them had been used to measure the learning styles of Chinese learners. Significantly it was their relative weaknesses as well as their strengths that were of importance to this investigation.

The final challenge with using this two-frame analysis was to bring national culture and learning styles together. This was achieved in Chapter 5 in which six possible differences in Chinese preferences for teaching, learning and assessment were investigated. These differences provided the framework for analysis and in the research were used as research propositions that were investigated separately and also to enable the two overarching research questions to be answered. This structured approach allowed me to be systematic in scrutinising the data.

Research Methodology

Having decided upon the framework for analysis, it was necessary to decide upon a research methodology that would enable me to answer the research questions. The methodology used in this dissertation was that of a case study. This methodology was the most appropriate as essentially the dissertation was studying a specific set (case) of students in Hong Kong. Additionally, case study was particularly appropriate to this research as it met the key criteria for using a case study. These criteria were that the research questions were essentially "how" questions, the case was set in the present and there was no control over events.

Importantly for me, a crucial advantage of a case study approach is that multiple sources of evidence may be used. As I was seeking objectivity in finding answers to the research questions I could use several sources of evidence in order to amass data and triangulate the evidence.

Criticisms of my methodological approach

To evaluate my methodology I will answer two questions. These are

1. Did the case study give me answers to the research questions and propositions?

There were two overarching research questions and six research propositions that were dealt with in this research. From the research there was evidence in favour of two of the research propositions. These were that Chinese learners prefer not to answer questions in class and that they have a different view of the teacher.

With regard to the research questions, it would appear that the courses in Hospitality Management that Sheffield Hallam University offers in Hong Kong are transferable in their content but not in their delivery. Also great care should be exercised when applying measures of learning style to groups as these may lead to inappropriate recommendations being made with regard to teaching and learning.

Although I have provided answers, the question that remains is "have I found **the** answers to these questions? I believe that I have interpreted the evidence within the case study consistently and have explored the answers that this research suggests. However, I have given the answers within the limitations of this case study. It is important therefore that I acknowledge these limitations.

a. Quantitative Data

Although the research used within this case study is primarily qualitative, some use of quantitative data was made. Quantitative analysis was used in the questionnaire for gathering information about the case study group and their backgrounds, and for summarising and ranking preferences for certain learning and teaching methods. It was also used in the archive analysis for measuring student performance in the course work and in different assignment types.

There are four possible criticisms of the quantitative analysis used within this dissertation. The first criticism is with regard to questions in which students were asked to state their preferences for certain types of teaching and assessment. In these cases, students were asked to rate their most preferred option with a 1 and least preferred with a 5. It is possible that all five of the options are in fact preferred or that all five are disliked. The resulting answers would merely give an order of preferences or dislikes. When formulating the research strategy I was aware of this. To counterbalance this and to allow inferences to be made with regard to preferences in each of these cases, the students were also asked to give qualitative responses. In addition to giving a scalar rating they were asked to say why they most preferred the option rated as 1 and least preferred the option rated as 5. In all of these cases the answers given by students revealed that all five options were not universally preferred or least preferred or disliked but there were in fact gradations of preference.

To further triangulate this the e-mail interviews were specifically designed to pick up on issues that required further investigation. Issues of preferences for subject, teaching and assessment were further examined in these interviews and interviews with staff. These interviews confirmed that the answers did address likes and dislikes.

A further criticism of the quantitative analysis within this dissertation may be of the tables that indicate students' marks for coursework. From the marks it cannot be inferred that high and low scores against certain subjects or types of assessment indicate a like or dislike of these subjects or assessments. These were not constructed for this purpose; instead they should be seen as indicative of achievement which may lead to further questions being asked. Findings from them were used as the basis of questions for further investigation that were covered in the e-mail interviews.

The third criticism is that the quantitative tables lose the richness of the qualitative data. While this is true, if the tables are taken on their own, this is not their role in this study.

The quantitative tables are summarising the data. The two sets of data should be read together as complementary..

The fourth criticism is simply the numbers involved in the case study. There are only twenty-five students in the case group. A consequence of this is that no inferential statistics could be used. For this reason all of the figures used in this analysis should be seen as indicative. This limitation is also acknowledged in a later section of this chapter, however, this use of quantitative methods should be seen as complementary to the qualitative methods.

In summary, if the quantitative information used within this dissertation were to be used as evidence in its own right, very little could be inferred form it. However, this was not its purpose. Its purpose was to summarise, be the basis for further questioning and be used as part of the triangulation strategy. It is acknowledged that there is no statistical significance to any of the figures

b. Within the qualitative data did I achieve an objective approach to analysing culture?

Within the research every effort was made to be objective in analysing culture. Yin's design tests and the ontology of critical realism have been adhered to. Nevertheless, a major criticism of this research that may be expected is that it may not be possible for me to represent a culture that is not my own. Could I as a researcher make a clear representation of other cultures? (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1998).

This understanding and representation of cultures is at the heart of this dissertation. What I have attempted to do, is to accurately represent the case study group. What I have done to seek to ensure that this representation is as accurate as possible to seek ways and means of ensuring that I have accurately represented the culture that I am studying. The techniques that were used to ensure that the findings are accurate are as follows.

The first is respondent validation, where essentially the respondents were asked to agree that the case study accurately represented them (Stewart, 1998). To carry out the respondent validation, the participants within the case study were asked to read the transcripts. This process was carried out with the students at the study schools, the e-mail interview group and with the staff.

Next, consistent with critical realism, I obtained feedback from outsiders by exposing my work to other professional at research conferences. Several of the members of the various audiences that the work was exposed to were Chinese. Their comments and suggestions were invaluable in carrying out this dissertation. In subjecting the work to this level of scrutiny I believe that I have enhanced its validity.

Finally, consistent with critical multiplism I have used multiple sources of data to triangulate my findings.

In conclusion, although I have made every effort to understand Chinese culture and to be objective about it, I may not have fully understood it. One criticism of my stance would be that representation of culture is by its very nature inherently subjective. I appreciate and fully understand this viewpoint, but believe that seeking objectivity was the proper stance to take. In doing this I am aware that my view of reality may be imperfect and may be flawed but this is consistent with the ontology of critical realism in that reality is only imperfectly apprehendable.

c. The representativeness of the sample.

In considering the findings my starting point was examining national culture and learning styles. In this dissertation the possibility of a Chinese national culture and a Chinese learning style was investigated using a case study of only twenty-five people. It is possible that this group is not representative of the Chinese culture or a Hong Kong Chinese culture. It may also be possible that this group is not representative of other cohorts of Chinese distance learners. This weakness is acknowledged. It is my intention to replicate the case study with another cohort in the future. Building upon this work will add further to knowledge.

2. Could I add to the data or have taken a different approach?

As has already been stated for this dissertation, case study was the best research method for me to use. The number of learners and the constraints of time and distance made case study almost the designated choice of methodology.

However, I believe that it would be possible to improve the findings by adding to sources of evidence and altering the methodology. Time and distance prevented any observation of teaching and learning in the classroom. Observation would have improved the study as it would have been possible to evaluate different methods of teaching and learning in situ. This would have helped improve the triangulation of methods and would have reinforced the research data.

One of the weaknesses of the research is that it has only used one case study group so that the findings are triangulated for this one group only. Although, as stated earlier, it may be possible to make an analytic generalisation to a new cohort of similar learners in Hong Kong, no definite claim to this may be made. An improvement on this would be to carry out multiple case studies of groups of distance learners as a longitudinal study over several cohorts. This will enable generalisation to be made to similar cohorts.

Further to this, the recommendations that are made with regard to improving practice in this dissertation need themselves to be researched. An addition that would have been useful in this context would have been to try out some of the recommendations. A vehicle for this would have been action research. I believe that a properly implemented and evaluated programme of action research would be a useful addition to the findings in this research.

2. Reflections upon my personal learning through the course of my study for the Doctorate in Education

The process of constructing and writing this dissertation starts with being interviewed for this course. As part of the interview process all candidates were asked to write a short paper outlining what their potential topic for the dissertation might be. Mine was an underdeveloped piece on learning styles. At this early stage my original thought was to undertake some highly quantitative research, possibly applying some of the instruments for measuring learning styles to a large number of hospitality students. This thinking took place before the course had started.

The first taught module of the course was qualitative research methods. To complete the assignment for this first phase of the course I wrote a 9000 word essay in defence of ethnography. The reason for this choice was that I had little real idea of how ethnography worked as a research method and wanted to know more. On reflection, what I learnt was a regard for quantitative methods and the first germ of the idea that I may use qualitative methods in my final dissertation.

The second taught module covered leadership in education. To fulfil the requirements of this element I carried out some primary qualitative research (interviews) with middle managers in education concerning their views of themselves as leaders. I delivered several papers on this topic at research conferences and considered developing this topic in to a dissertation proposal. In the course of the research for this assignment and the subsequent papers I came to value qualitative research for its depth and richness.

The third and ultimately dissertation-changing module covered internationalisation of education. This module brought together my teaching interests in internationalisation of the hospitality industry together with a growing aspect of my academic role. This role change included responsibility for distance learning courses in Hong Kong and consequentially responsibility for Chinese learners. It was this module that crystallised my interests in cross-cultural research with Chinese learners.

My revised first thoughts, concerning my dissertation, were that I would carry out some highly quantitative measures of the learning styles of Chinese students with the possibility of some qualitative triangulation. It quickly became apparent that this was not feasible for two reasons. First, simply measuring learning style would not be credible research to gain the qualification and would tell me nothing other than what an average learning style would be. Second, using quantitative research in the context of distance learning students in Hong Kong was not feasible as the numbers of students taking these courses would be low and therefore could not be used for quantitative research.

After deliberation, and much reading around the subject, it was clear that qualitative research would be a better vehicle for investigating the learning preferences of distance learning students in Hong Kong. In particular the use of a case study would fit the aim of the study as I was looking at one specific group. The case study itself met the criteria of investigating "how" questions, the events were contemporary and I had no control over events. Additionally, the case study allowed multiple sources of evidence (four separate sets of evidence were used in collecting the data). The case study evidence also gave me the richness and depth that was necessary in seeking to explain the learning preferences and needs of this group, and further, the case study would provide for new insights into the phenomenon under investigation.

Over the four-year period involved in thinking about and carrying out this research. I believe that I have developed as researcher and as a person.

As a Researcher

The research philosophy used in this dissertation was postpositivism, as this philosophy suited my perspective and my background and training as a researcher. However, through the course of the Doctorate in Education, I have become more aware of the value and potential of other approaches. I believe that I now have a more balanced view of both quantitative and qualitative research. I do not favour one approach over the other. I have come to understand that each approach has its own merits and demerits and that they may be used effectively either separately or jointly. It is this new understanding that helped to move my research position from positivism to postpositivism.

Further, with regard to research possibly the greatest change in me has been brought about by the advice that in qualitative research that one should always seek alternative explanations. What at first sight appears to be easy was in fact quite difficult and was a concept that I devised several tactics to deal with. This notion of seeking other explanations has spilt over to my working life. In striving to seek other explanations I have become more reflective and now look for other explanations in other areas of life. I believe that I am now more willing to accept other explanations and will more readily consider other opinions

As an individual

On an individual basis the course of this research has caused me to critically examine my working practice and myself, I have carried this out in three areas. These are in relation to learning styles, working practice and finally with regard to future career.

Learning Styles

When investigating learning style, it may be expected that one starts to question oneself and ask which style or styles one exhibits. Giving myself a style label would not in itself be useful, however, what learning styles did was to let me examine how I learn and with it appreciate how others may learn. In doing this it made me question my teaching and make allowances for dealing with diversity. Some of the changes that have been effected with regard to Chinese learners were explained earlier in this chapter. However, I have made alterations with regard to other learners; as an example, I take greater care with feedback. I now allow for group and individual consultations inside and outside of class. I now make myself available on a regular appointment basis to all students and have attempted to make myself more aware of their needs.

Working Practice.

It was never my intention that the sole purpose of this dissertation was to fulfil the requirements of the Doctorate in Education. Rather, I genuinely wished to understand the needs of this case study group of students and effect changes that would improve their learning experience. To support this statement I have already made changes to the course delivery and development of staff. I have moved my own module from purely paper-based delivery to a combination of paper based combined with a virtual learning environment (VLE). This VLE has a chat room that enables students to have the greater and faster access to their tutor that they desire.

I have changed the emphasis of study schools in Hong Kong to allow one-to-one tutorials in an attempt to allow staff and students to get to know each other. I have also used different methods of instruction including groupwork and role-play. Before new staff are allowed to teach these courses, I have arranged pre-sessional seminars to alert staff to the issues of teaching Chinese students and to deal with any concerns that they may have.

Career

The dissertation has caused me to reflect upon what I wish to do in my future career and more importantly what is best for me. At present I can best be described as an academic manager who has been actively involved in learning and teaching at a national and university level.

I have applied for a Teaching Fellowship and intend to extend my research from the learning needs of Chinese learners in a distance learning context, to the growing number of Chinese students who attend full-time courses within my school.

Summary

The past four years have been, at times, an arduous journey that has had the advantage of giving me time to reflect upon my occupation, teaching, future and myself. Throughout this time my behaviour has changed and I believe and hope that this has helped me to improve as a lecturer, a manager and as researcher.

LIMITATIONS

Most of the limitations have been dealt with the evaluation under the critique of the methodology. In summary the limitations are: -

1. The research has been primarily concerned with national culture. While every effort has been made to give an objective interpretation of culture, it is acknowledged that the view of reality that I have used is my own and as such it may be imperfect.

2. This research and the recommendations made from it are based upon a single case study. While limited generalisation may be made from this the findings cannot be generalised to other Chinese students or to Hong Kong Chinese students on a full time course.

3. The case study group is extraordinary in that the students comprising it have the same educational background; are English speakers and work in the same industry. A consequence of this is that they may not be considered as representative of other groups of Chinese students.

4. The case study is based on one group of learners attending courses in Hong Kong in one year only. It may be that this group is not representative of Chinese learners, Hong Kong Chinese learners, distance learners or hospitality management learners.

5. Although the case study was intended to be qualitative some quantitative information was gathered. This is particularly the case with information taken from the student questionnaire. As the numbers in this case study are low (25) no statistical inference should be drawn from them.

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Appendix 1

Student Questionnaire

Student Questionnaire

Dear Student,

I am undertaking research as part of a Doctorate in Education in to the learning, teaching and assessment preferences of Chinese students enrolled on Sheffield Hallam University's distance learning courses. The ultimate aim of the research is to improve the courses that we offer by distance learning to Hong Kong students.

Please take time to complete this questionnaire as fully and accurately as possible.

Thank you

Kevin Nield

Section A - About You

1. Your course (please tick one box only).

B. Sc. Hospitality Management ☐
M.Sc. Hospitality Management ☐

2. Your Age (please specify) ________________

3. Sex (please tick one box only).

Male ☐ Female ☐

4. What is your highest qualification? (please specify)

____
____
____

5. Nationality (please specify) ____

6. Are you of full or part Chinese origin? (please tick one box only)

Yes - full ☐ Part ☐ Neither ☐

7. Has all of your education been in Hong Kong? (please tick one box only)

Yes ☐ No ☐

If no, where were you educated previously and which qualifications did you gain?

____
____
____
____
____
____

Section B - About Your Secondary School

The following questions all refer to your secondary school - the school that you attended to the age of 18

1. On average, how large were the group sizes in which you were taught? (tick one box only)

less than 10 people ☐
11 - 20 people ☐
21 - 30 people ☐
31 - 40 people ☐
41 - 50 people ☐
more than 50 people ☐

2a. Put the following teaching and learning methods in order from 1 - 5. Where 1 was the method which was mainly used and 5 was the method that was least used.

Watching videos or listening to audios and making notes. ☐
Practical work, e.g., laboratory sessions. ☐
Formal lectures and note taking.. ☐
Working on your own from study materials provided. ☐
Seminars that include role play. ☐

b. Please specify any other methods that were used.

____
____
____
____
____
____
____

3a. In the boxes, place the following assessment types in order from 1 - 5. Where 1 is the assessment method that was most used and 5 is the assessment method that was least used.

Written essays and reports ☐
Presentations ☐
Written Examinations. ☐
Individual Projects ☐
Group Projects ☐

b. Please specify any other methods that were used.

____
____
____
____
____
____
____

4. On average, how many hours each week were spent in class at your secondary school (tick one box only)?

less than 20	☐
20 - 24	☐
25 - 29	☐
30 - 34	☐
35 - 39	☐
More than 40	☐

5. On average how many hours each week did you spend studying **on your own** after secondary school and at weekends (tick one box only).

less than 10	☐
11 - 14	☐
15 - 19	☐
20 - 24	☐
25 - 30	☐
More than 30	☐

Section C - Your Preferences

1 a. In the boxes, place the following subjects in order from 1 - 5. Where 1 is the subject that you most prefer and 5 is the subject that you least prefer.

Marketing	☐
Finance	☐
Human Resource Management	☐
Operational Management	☐
Practical Food and Beverage Management	☐

b. Give the reason(s) for your choice of **most** preferred subject in 1a above.

c. Give the reason(s) for your choice of **least** preferred subject in 1a above.

d. Are there any other subjects that you **like**? Give reason(s) for your answer.

e. Are there any other subjects that you **dislike**? Give reasons for your answer.

2a. In the boxes, place the following teaching and learning strategies in order from 1 - 5. Where 1 is the strategy that you most prefer and 5 is the strategy that you least prefer.

- Watching videos or listening to audios and making notes. ☐
- Observing a practical demonstration. ☐
- Formal lectures and note taking.. ☐
- Working on your own from study materials provided. ☐
- Seminars that include role play. ☐

b. Give the reason(s) for your choice of **most** preferred teaching and learning strategy in 2a above.

c. Give the reason(s) for your choice of **least** preferred teaching and learning strategy in 2a above.

d. Are there any other teaching and learning strategies that you **like**? Give reasons for your answer.

e. Are there any other teaching and learning strategies that you **dislike**? Give reasons for your answer.

3a. In the boxes, place the following assessment types in order from 1 - 5. Where 1 is the assessment that you most prefer and 5 is the assessment that you least prefer.

Written essays and reports ☐
Presentations ☐
Written Examinations. ☐
Individual Projects ☐
Group Projects ☐

b. Give the reason(s) for your choice of **most** preferred assessment type in 3a above.

c. Give the reason(s) for your choice of **least** preferred assessment in 3a above.

d. Are there any other assessments that you **like**? Give reasons for your answer.

e. Are there any other assessments that you **dislike**? Give reasons for your answer.

4. In your own words, describe how you would prepare for a written examination.

5. Think of the best teacher that you ever had. Give your reasons for describing him/her as the best teacher. Would you describe him/her as a friend?

6. What is your opinion of working in groups with other students? Do you like or dislike it? Give reasons for your preferences.

7. Give 3 reasons for choosing to study by distance learning.

Thank you the questionnaire is now complete.

If you would like to help in further research in this area and are willing to be interviewed please give contact details and I will arrange this at the study school in May 2003.

Name:

E-mail address:

Telephone Number:

If you have any questions about this research please contact me by e-mail at k.nield@shu.ac.uk

Appendix 2

Staff Schedule of Questions

Staff Schedule of Questions

Introductory Questions

1. Name
2. Subject taught
3. Number of times in HK
4. Ethical considerations

Study Schools

1. How have you taught at the study schools?
2. Why did you adopt these methods?
3. How have students reacted to your methods?
4. Have you changed how you have taught at the study schools as a result of your experiences in HK?
5. Have you used group work at the study schools? If yes, how successful was it?
6. Do students participate in discussions at the study schools?
7. Any other comments

Assignments

1. How do you assess your modules? Why?
2. How do students perform in your modules? Generally. HK students only
3. Have you altered your assessments in the light of your experience?
4. If yes, Why?
5. What type of questions are you asked by HK students about their assignments?
6. Are these different to those asked by other dl students?

Study packs

1. What comments have HK students made about the study packs, e.g., useful?
2. Have you altered your study packs in the light of your experiences?
3. How useful are the exercises that are given?

Appendix 3

Schedule of E-mail Questions

1. It has been said that Chinese students do not ask questions in class. Is this true in your case? If yes, then why don't you ask questions. If it isn't true then why do you ask questions?

2. It has been said that Chinese learners are strategic with regard to their learning , e.g., in the study packs they only read those sections that are assessed. Do you believe this to be true or untrue or somewhere in between?

3. What do you think of the learning material , i.e., the boxes and books that are sent to you? How would you improve them?

4. What is your opinion of the study schools? How would you improve them?

5. I have been through every assignment mark completed by all students on SHU's distance learning course. The HK students have gained better marks than everyone else in Marketing but worse marks in Human Resource Management and Organisational Behaviour. Why do you think that this is?

6. In the questionnaire nearly all of the students had Finance as their least favourite or next to least favourite subject. Why do you think this is?

Appendix 4

Publications

Chapters in Books

Nield, K., Ball, S. D. and S. Horner, (2002), "Academic leadership for the international development of hospitality and tourism education - a case study of distance learning in Hong Kong". In Vukonic, B. and N. Cavlek (Eds.), *Rethinking of Education and Training for Tourism*, University of Zagreb. 181 -190.

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Refereed Journal Articles

Nield, K. (2004), Questioning the Myth of the Chinese Learner, *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 190 -197.

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Nield, K., (2001), "Leading from the Middle – An examination of middle management and leadership in higher education", *10th Annual CHME Research Conference, London,* 19 - 20 April 2001.

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Nield, K,, (2003), "Questioning the myth of the Chinese learner", *14th Annual CHME Research Conference*, Sheffield, 23 - 24 April 2003, 409 - 421.

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