

## **Understanding Asian Students Learning Styles, Cultural Influence and Learning Strategies**

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### **Abstract**

*The role play by culture in influencing students in their learning cannot be underestimated. Various academics have concluded that Chinese and/ or Asian students tend to be passive learners. They seldom participate in class discussions. In an attempt to help students in their learning, it is necessary to provide a greater insight into the insight of why students behave in a certain way. By doing so we would open the doors to bridge the gap in students' learning. A survey was conducted for 80 students in a local private education institution. The results do seem to suggest the influence of culture on learning. Cultures are subjected to changes particular if students have been away for some time from their home country. Their home culture would have diluted. The results from a questionnaire survey of 80 students, however, revealed findings that seem to differ from the conventional perspective. Students are less hesitant to ask questions in class, open to small group learning and choices of course of students due to their own choice and career rather than parents' influence.*

**Keywords:** Culture, learning styles, learning strategies and dimensions of culture

### **1. Introduction**

The importance of cultural influences on students learning styles cannot be underestimated. Eilisha (2007) pointed learning styles are often culturally-based and students from different culture would therefore have different ways or patterns of learning, thinking and behaviour. Similar views were also shared by Kim and Bonk (2002); Ramburuth and McCormick,(2001) and Teng (2007) on an understanding of culture is necessary as it would affect learning styles. Furthermore, Ward (2006) also identified variety of factors that influence on learning styles such as prior learning experiences, assessment methods, values and religion amongst others. Seo and Koro-Ljungberg (2005) even pointed that without efforts to understand students' cultural background, the main goal of higher education that is quality education cannot be fully realised.

There has been much research and studies which seem to indicate that Asian students tend to be dependent learners relying on their teachers to provide content materials in contrast to countries they choose to pursue their education that encourage more independent learning. Murphy (1987) and Chan (1999) pointed out the Chinese students tend to passive learners where learners seldom ask questions in class. Students also depend more on teachers for information and reply more in the use of rote learning and memorising (Ballad and Clanchy, 1991). Further discussion in are found in subsequent sections in the paper. Most of the researches done were on a homogenous group of students vis Chinese, Koreans or Malaysian. What would happen when students from different culture interact and mix with each other? Would their learning styles change, modify or would they still adhere to the previously adopted learning styles in their home country? Hence, the purpose of this paper seeks to investigate a class of students from different countries and that they have been away from their home country for more than a year.

The outcome of the research would help to reveal more on students' learning styles which would have implications on teaching strategies. It would help students improve on their learning and learning outcome. This paper is divided into three sections; the first section discusses the numerous literature on the factors that influence students learning style in particularly culture. The second section discusses and analyses the survey result and the third section proposes ways to bridge learning gaps. To provide clarity, Asian students are those students from China, Hong Kong and also other parts of Southeast Asian countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia.

### ***Understanding culture and countries' culture***

There are several ways culture can be defined. Hofstede a prominent researcher in culture defines culture as the "collective programming of the mind that distinguishes members of one group of people from others" (Hofstede, 1980). "The sum total of the ways of living built up by a group of human beings transmitted from one generation to the next (Biggs and Moore, 1993, p. 24). Kennedy (2002, p. 1) provides further behavior description of culture "as not just a matter of overt behavior, but also includes social rules, beliefs, attitudes and value that govern how people act and define themselves". As culture varies greatly, so too there are several models or framework that differentiates different types of culture. This includes Hofstede (1980) five dimensions of culture and Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, (1997) seven dimensions of culture. More information on Hofstede and Trompenaars can be found in the appendix pages. Hofstede five dimensions of culture provides greater insight into how countries differ and are similar in the dimensions of culture. Using [www.geert-hofstede.com](http://www.geert-hofstede.com) website, it provides countries dimension of culture in which the table below provides a summary of the selected countries dimensions.

**Dimension of culture country score**

	Collectivism - Individualism	Power distance	Masculinity - Femininity	Uncertainty avoidance	Long term - Short-term
Singapore	20	74	48	8	72
Hong Kong	25	68	57	29	61
China	20	80	66	30	87
South Korea	18	60	39	85	100
Malaysia	26	100	50	36	41
Indonesia	14	78	46	48	62
Thailand	20	64	34	64	32
Vietnam	20	70	40	30	57
Philippines	32	94	64	44	27
UK	89	35	66	35	51
Australia	90	36	61	51	21
USA	91	40	62	46	26

**Source: <https://geert-hofstede.com>, 2016**

*Note; for scores of 50 or less indicates Collectivism; Power distance (small); Femininity; Uncertainty avoidance (acceptable); Short-term focus. Scores of 50 and above Individualism; Power distance (large); Masculinity; Uncertainty avoidance (avoid uncertainty); Long-term focus*

From the above, it can be concluded that Singapore, Hong Kong and China are quite similar in culture dimension though with minor variations of scores amongst the dimensions. One reason for the similarity could be the culture of Singapore is very much influenced by Confucian ethnics, which is a key aspect of Chinese culture. Indonesia and Vietnam with a number of Chinese communities also yield relatively similar scores.

From the selected list of Asian countries, one key characteristic of selected Asian countries is these societies tend to exhibit collectivism and high power distance. This differs from Western societies (notably UK, Australia and United States) where they exhibit individualism and low power distance. As for the other dimensions of culture, there are mixes of scores. In the case of uncertainty avoidance, all selected countries with the exception of South Korea have low score, meaning uncertainty avoidance is acceptable. South Korea is less open to accept changes, preferring to maintain well established codes of conduct. Countries in Singapore, Hong Kong, China and South Korea take a long-term prospect with concern for the future.

People tend to save more in the present for the future and are pragmatic rather than conform to traditions. For the rest of the other selected countries, they have low score, meaning these societies take a short-term prospective in which tradition is highly value, they view societal change with suspicion, less concern for the future and therefore would not hesitate to spend more in the present. Scores for masculinity and femininity are in the moderate range of being male-dominated (masculinity) and female-dominated (femininity) emphasis on quality of life.

### ***Understanding types of learning style***

Learning style is defined as a set of cognitive, emotional, characteristics and psychological factors that serve as relatively stable indicator of how learners perceive, interact and respond to the learning environment (Keefe, 1979) Yeap and Low (2002) defined it 'as an individual typical and preferred way of perceiving, thinking, solving problems, drawing references and remembering'. Ellis (2005) defined it the characteristics way in which an individual orient to problem-solving. Essentially, it concerns how learners perceive and receive information that involves knowledge acquisition. Likewise, there are several learning styles which can be categorised into;

#### **Perceptual learning styles**

Perceptual learning styles includes learners who learn by visual, auditory, processing (read/ write), tactile and kinaesthetic. Visual learning style involves learners preferred learning being by sight such as the use of PowerPoint and video. For auditory learners, learners prefer hearing sound such as teacher speaking or use of audio recording. In processing, learners learn best through a combination of read and write where the learning process could involve either note-taking or reading either aloud or silent. Tactile learners learn best with the use of physical touch with sense of touch. Kinaesthetic learners involves "do-it-yourself" learning style where learning is by trial and error and learning on the job usually apply with skill-based acquisition learning (Wen, 2011).

#### **Cognitive learning styles**

Cognitive learning styles could vary from that of focuser to scanner learners; field independent (convergent) versus field dependent (divergent). For focuser, learners pay careful attention into the finer details with in-depth analysis of the knowledge content. This may involve considerable more time and effort. For scanners learners which prefer to scan through the whole materials to form a broad understanding though it may not be in-depth but with less time. In the case of field independent learners, learners adopt a divergent approach by reading through the entire article or passage before "breaking" into smaller parts of the article or passage. In contrast to field dependent where learners take a systematic approach to compile parts of material to form a larger whole, hence undertake a convergent view (Wen, 2011).

#### **Personality learning styles**

Personality learning styles include either reflective or impulsive learners. Reflective learners are cautious learners, preferring to gain deeper content knowledge, to ensure they are accurate in their understanding, think more carefully instead of "jumping into quick conclusion" in which mistakes may happen that will lead to embarrassment. On the other hand, for impulsive learners, these learners are quick-minded, preferring to scan through the whole content to form a general understanding and assume some risk in their understanding of the content (Wen, 2011).

### ***Culture influence on learning styles***

How does country culture influence on learning styles? A research paper by Wursten and Jacobs (2013) provided insight how the five dimensions of culture (Hofstede, 1980) influence on education and learning. A summary on the compilation of similarity of dimensions of culture are provided as follows. Three groupings can be compiled. Group 1 where countries share similarity of at least four dimensions and Group 2, with one or less dimension of culture being similar. Thailand and the Philippines fall under Group 3 with three dimensions being similar. The groupings are being arrived at using Singapore as a benchmark.

**Group 1: Singapore, Hong Kong, China, South Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam**  
**Collectivism, Power distance (high), Masculinity, Uncertainty avoidance (low to moderate), Long-term view**

Teacher-centered with much respect given to hierarchy position and status
Students expect teacher to outline paths of learning, lessons could be detail in content and coverage
Students expected to respect teachers, harmony in class with minimal questions asked by students
Relationship is important and often extends beyond classroom
Communication is implicit and indirect
Structural learning situation preferred, examination predominately used
Perseverance is rated as a virtue
Success based largely on academic performance, brings pride oneself and family
Students select subjects based on career goals and aspiration

*Adapted from Wursten and Jacobs (2013)*

**Group 2: Thailand and the Philippines**  
**Collectivism, Power distance (high), Masculinity & Femininity (moderate), Uncertainty avoidance (moderate), Short-term view**

Teacher-centred that retains much control of class
Students expect teacher to initiate communication, speak when ask to do so and harmony in class
Fair degree of importance place on success and achievement, reward achievement performance for Thailand (masculinity)
People oriented, caring for others and quality of life. Less distinction made between winners and losers for the Philippines (femininity)
Implicit communication preferred, "face conscious"
Use of mixture of assignments and examination with moderate level of uncertainty avoidance
Importance to preserve the status quo and tradition, hence stability as a virtue
Success based largely on academic performance, brings pride oneself and family

**Group 3: UK, Australia and United States**  
**Individualism, Power distance (low), Femininity, Uncertainty avoidance (low), Short-term view**

Student-centered learning where students play an active role in their learning
Teachers provide brief outline, encourage students to be independent learners
Students speak out in class with questions often ask, diversity of opinions are encouraged
Relationship confine to within classroom
Verbal communication is explicit
Unstructured learning situation, assignment to encourage critical thinking and problem-solving.
Stability is a virtue
Success goes beyond academic success, quality and balanced life highly upheld
Subjects selected by students based on interest

*Adapted from Wursten and Jacobs (2013)*

From the above, several conclusions can be drawn. In a collectivist society, students only speak when called upon by the teachers, confrontation is avoided, teachers are to be respected and treated as an expert. On the other hand, in individualistic society, students are free to respond when invitation is opened to the whole group, disagreement and confrontation with teachers are accepted, in fact is a part of an engaging learning environment.

In countries where power distance is low, the approach to learning is towards student-centred where there is extensive interaction two-way communication between students and teachers. Students are encouraged to put forth their argument and critique. On the other hand, for high power distance society, teacher-centred is the learning approach. Communication tends to be one-way between teachers and students unless initiated by teachers. How well students have learned depends on the competencies of teachers (Wursten & Jacobs, 2013). For a feminine society, there is less pressure to succeed unlike in the masculinity society. Students select subjects out of interest rather than career reasons. How well students perform focuses on social adaptation when contrast to academic performance where failure in school would have major consequence on self-image. In uncertainty avoidance culture, assignments are usually which are broad and do not require specific answers. Students are rewarded base on the uniqueness and innovativeness of ideas.

On the other hand, where uncertainty avoidance is high, assignments are often provided to students with detailed and structured instructions. Rewards for students are focused on accuracy of answers provided. For countries with short-term orientation, education serves to satisfy individual students' interest rather than in fulfilment of parents and career aspirations (Wursten & Jacobs, 2013). For long-term view, education signifies success in one's life and is a means to satisfy parent and career aspirations.

### ***Understanding Chinese culture***

In trying to examine and comprehend the learning styles of Asian students, Wong (2004) considered few factors that may influence a learners' learning style. These include culture, Confucian heritage an integrated part of Chinese culture, type of assessment method use and prior learning experiences. Culture plays a very fundamental role in influencing the way Chinese learners learn particularly that of "Confucian values". Chinese educational philosophy very much shaped by Confucianism as pointed out by Bush and Qiang (2000). In "Confucian ethic, strict discipline, proper behavior and filial piety provides explanation why students in class seldom asked questions on what teachers taught leading to the unquestioning acceptance of teachers' knowledge (Murphy, 1987). In addition, asking questions is considered challenging the authority of teachers. Students are therefore quiet and passive in class as questioning in class is not encouraged (Chan, 1999) and would not challenge or question the teachers in open (Hing, 2013). Asking questions in class is also considered to be wasting other students' time as fellow students want to gain as much knowledge as possible (Chang and Holt, 1994). In some instances, due to Chinese modesty and self conscious, students do not considered asking questions in public as good habit (Cheng, 2000). Students therefore display passive role in class where they are not encouraged to speak out for fear of being incorrect and are "face conscious" or feel embarrassed especially when questions posed may reveal knowledge gap (Tsui, 1996). However, by not asking questions do not mean students are not paying attention or mentally active. According to Cortazzi and Jin (1996), students could be mentally active by co-operating with teachers and actively listening to teachers. Moreover, in a collective-oriented culture, students find comfort and security by engaging in discussion in small group rather than asking questions or voicing one's opinion openly in class (Cortazzi and Jin, 1996; Littlewood, 2001).

Biggs and Watkins (2001) pointed that in Chinese culture, teachers are well respected with wisdom, as a guide with knowledge and wisdom of teachers are taken-for-granted and not to be questioned. Respect for age, rank, hierarchy and maintenance of harmonious relationship are the values upheld by Hong Kong students while self-assertive are discouraged (Bond, 1992). Bond (1996) further emphasised that being conscious of oneself is important and that one should not cause someone else to be put to shame. As such, one should be modest. Hwang (1987). Maley (1983) highlighted that books that contain much knowledge, wisdom and truth and are rarely question unlike in Western society where knowledge is subjected to different interpretations, opinions and diversity of views are highly valued. In terms of learning, Chinese students prefer a teacher-centred style, expecting teachers to be well prepared for lessons, mastery of knowledge, and present content knowledge in coherent, systematic structural manner and competent to answer questions posed by students (Xiao, 2006). Teachers are not only expected to provide detail course materials to enhance learning but a role model as well, cultivate good morals to transform students into person with highly developed social conscious (Hu, 2002) and also guide students in their learning (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). Teachers controlled much of the learning environment and are expected to provide students with clear outline and knowledge is arranged in systematic and consolidated manner. Since the main form of assessment is examination, acquiring as much knowledge as possible in class places higher priority than questioning the content.

Chen (2007) and Zeng (2006) however do note that while students seldom ask questions in class to maintain harmony, students do approach teachers after class instead. Biggs (1996) believed that Chinese students were more active on a one-to-one interaction with teachers engaging in peer discussion outside instead of within class itself. Group-society norm of relationship extends beyond classroom. Cortazzi and Jin (2001) disagree that Chinese students are passive rather they are reflective learners demonstrated by them asking thoughtful questions after sound reflection. This also reinforces the view of a collectivist society where members in society maintain family-like atmosphere. Teacher-student relationship are highly valued and viewed on long-term basis. Pratt, Kelly and Wong (1999) substantiated clear evidence of culture dominance of family-like culture. This is a far cry from Western education system where knowledge is gained through active learning which is characterised by active participation in class and sharing of one's opinion with other learners.

As noted by Hofstede (2011), individualistic society emphasises on individual development, independent and critical thinking whereas in collectivism society, there is much conformity to group norms.

### ***Characteristics of Chinese learning style***

Chinese learners tend to exhibit modest and much diligence in their learning (Park, 2000). Education is highly valued. In Chinese culture, elderly is much respected including teachers (McIneracy, 2005). Ballard and Clanchy, 1991 noted that Chinese students tend to use repetitive rote learning where memorising is heavily relied upon (Kember and Gow, 1989). Biggs (1996) seek to distinguish the difference between rote and repetitive learning where rote learning as learning without understanding while repetitive learning with the intention to understand the content meaning itself. Biggs and Watkins (1996) noted that though Chinese students use memorising as the main learning tool, there is in fact deep learning involved since he noted that students excel in subjects like Mathematics and Science which required not only understanding but ability to apply to a diverse range of circumstances which relying purely by memorising without understanding would be limited. Salili (1996) noted that Chinese students learnt well in concrete subjects but weak in abstract thinking subjects which required thinking and lack in creativity. In addition to culture and Confucian heritage, the type of assessment and past learning experience do influence as well.

The types of assessment based on various studies showed the used of examination in which the outcome determines one's academic performance. With the use of examination which tends to limit critical thinking as compared with assignments, students therefore reply on the memorising and regurgitate knowledge as a means to pass the examination and even to do well. Students as such adopt surface learning. This learning strategy is being for the weaker and less fluent students highlighted by Kirby, Woodhouse and Ma (1996). There is less emphasis on the practical problem-solving questions (Chan, 1999). This may result in learning without much understanding and therefore knowledge retention is short-lived. Watkins and Biggs (2001) postulated that Chinese students excelled in their studies due mainly to diligence and attentive in class. On the other hand, though repetitive learning is being adopted, however as pointed out by Biggs (1986), Kember (2000), Entwistles and Ramsey (1983) that it helps to facilitate deep levels of understanding. Kember and Gow (1989) argued that memorising help students to reduce workload needed, achieved better results.

Does past learning experience have an influence on students' learning styles? Wong (2004), Maesin, Manor, Shafle and Nayan (2009) stated that when learners in their previous learning experience spent considerable amount of time exposed to teacher-centered learning, where most information is provided for and all the learner needs to do is to memorise to pass the examination certainly the expectation would carry forth to the level of education. Unfortunately, if the education system and the emphasis are very different from the earlier learning experience, students would face quite serious learning challengers especially at the beginning in the course of the study.

The result of students and teachers of a different culture could result in the following;

In educational system that is more Western, Asian students differ in their learning behavior and needs. In collectivist society, students are seen to part of larger group, conforming and submitting to group needs and expectations are more important than individual. Being high in power distance in Asian societies, students are expected to respect their teachers, answer questions only when ask by teachers, some participation in small group discussions and hence passive learners. On the other hand in Western societies where it is predominately low in power distance, students are expected to "speak out", engage in lively debate with teachers, peers in classroom and as such active learners. Success in Asian societies is being seen as socially-oriented that brings prestige to family and friends others (Yu, 1996; Yu and Yang, 1994) unlike in the case of Western societies where students' success is seen as individual achievement. Past learning experience of Chinese students expect teachers to be prepared well for lessons, provide students with detail course materials and guidance in a structural manner. However, the often un structural manner in which lessons are delivered where teachers only provide brief outline to students, teachers as facilitator of learning rather than being involved in guiding students to learn, Asian students perceive teachers' responsibilities and role being deviated, nonchalant attitude in addressing students' learning needs.

### **Empirical study of students learning styles in a local private education institution**

To substantiate the above discussions, a set of questionnaires in the form of survey were given to students who are pursuing their “O” levels, Diploma, Higher diploma and degree courses from both Business and Psychology studies. A total of 80 students participated in the questionnaire survey. These students mostly come from Asia, refer to table 4. The questionnaire consisted of mostly closed-ended questions with some open-ended questions. For the close-ended questions, respondents are asked to select their preferred choices in a 5 point Likert scale ranging from “1” strongly disagree to “5” strongly agree. Details of the survey and descriptions are as follows;

**Table 1: Discipline of studies**

<b>Business specialisation</b>	Nos. of students	Nos. of students
Higher diploma	30	
Diploma	8	
Degree	10	
<b>Total of business students:</b>		<b>48</b>
<b>Psychology (Higher diploma)</b>		<b>19</b>
<b>“O” level students</b>		<b>13</b>
<b>Total students</b>		<b>80</b>

Note; Students taking “O” level are of age 15 to 16 years of age taking the national GCE “O” levels, Diploma are students have completed their “O” levels completed year 11 of education. Higher diploma students would have completed year 12 of education, whereas degree are students who have completed at least 12 months of higher diploma.

**Table 2: Full-time/ Part-time students**

<b>Full-time</b>	<b>Part-time</b>	<b>Total</b>
73	7	80

Majority of the respondents are full time students who studied in the regular school hours of 9am – 6pm. Part-time students are mostly working adults who attend classes in the evening.

**Table 3: Age profile (years)**

<b>15 – 18</b>	<b>19 - 21</b>	<b>22 - 25</b>	<b>&gt; 25</b>	<b>Total</b>
41	19	9	11	80

Slightly half of the students are 15 – 18 years which include “O” level students, diploma and higher diploma although some students taking higher diploma may exceed 18 years. A good majority of students taking Psychology courses are 25 years and above, although not all are part-time and a few mature students taking full-time classes.

**Table 4: Countries students originated**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Singapore	22	China	21
Malaysia	5	South Korea	4
Indonesia	13	India	1
Indo-China (Thailand, Myanmar, Vietnam)	10	Others (Russia, Middle East, Europe)	4

From the above table, close to a third of the students surveyed are from either China or South Korea though Chinese students dominates. A third of the respondents are from Southeast (Malaysia, Indonesia, Indo-China) with Indonesia respondents predominate. Less than a third are Singaporean respondents. There are only 4 students from outside of Asia. As these students only account for a very small proportion, it would not affect much on the survey outcome as the focus is on Asian learners.

**Table 5: For overseas students, number of years students have since left home to study abroad**

< 2 years	2 – 5 years	> 5 years	Total overseas students
9	37	12	58

More than 63% of students have left their home country to study abroad for between 2 to 5 years with only 15% having been away for less than 2 years. This has implication on the influence of their home country culture impacting on their learning styles. Being away for 2 years or more, students may be influenced by a blend of mix culture from that of the country where they are currently studying (Singapore) and their home country.

**Table 6: Learning styles****Perceptual learning styles**

Learning styles	Top 2 preferred learning styles (Nos.)
Visual	43
Audio	35
Read & Write	24
Kinesthetic	42

The perceptual learning style is based on the popular VASK model in which respondents are to indicate their most preferred options based on five questions. Based on the choices selection, the perceptual learning styles are then determined. The two most common learning style based on VASK are visual and kinesthetic. Hence, a combination use of visual and kinesthetic could enhance learning.

**Cognitive learning styles**

N = 80	Mean (5 point scale)
Convergent learners	3.7
Divergent learners	3.7

For cognitive learning style, a set of questions were put forth to respondents and the mean score yield similar scores, which indicated there is no one predominated cognitive learning styles.

**Personality learning styles**

N = 80	Mean
Reflective learners	3.3
Impulsive learners	3.6

As for personality learning styles, similar a set of questions were put forth to respondents, there are more impulsive learners than reflective learners. One possible explanation could be that students may have several assignments and or homework due at the same time or much closed to one another and they would need to rush through instead of investing more time to check their work before submission.

**Table 7: Learning paradigm (5 point scale)**

Description	Mean	(1 to 2 scale)	(3 scale)	(4 to 5 scale)
Educators using teacher-centered approach	3.9	5%	21%	74%
Learners do not mind teacher-centered approach	3.5	9%	36%	53%
Learning approach in home country (teacher-centered)	3.5	12%	34%	54%
For learning to take place, learners do not mind adopting student-centered approach	3.7	12%	23%	65%

Teacher-centered approach seems to be practised both in students' home country and the current teaching environment. Respondents do expressed that they do not mind that teachers use student-centric approach as they may receive more autonomy and encourage learning independently instead of being too dependent on teachers.

**Table 8: Learning behavior**

Description	Mean	(1 to 2 scale)	(3 scale)	(4 to 5 scale)
I am comfortable express opinion/ ask questions in class	3.6	10%	29%	61%
Asking questions in class is not a challenge	3.7	10%	30%	60%
In order to maintain class harmony, students should not ask too many questions in class	2.9	40%	35%	25%
Asking questions is disrespectful	2.2	66%	24%	10%
I see my teacher as someone whose authority should not be challenge	3.1	22%	44%	34%

From the survey results, respondents expressed that they are quite comfortable at expressing opinions or asking questions especially where there are areas of doubts. They do not see as disruption to class sessions or neither by doing so they are disrespectful to their teachers. On the other hand, some degree of harmony would facilitate a more conducive learning environment especially in Asian classroom setting.

**Table 9a: When do students seek help from**

Description (when to seek help)	Respondents received (top 2 choices)	% response
During class	25	20%
Outside of class	29	23%
During class break/ in-between lesson	46	37%
Send teachers email	25	20%

**Table 9b: From whom students seek help from**

Description (whom to seek help from)	Respondents received (top 2 choices)	% response
Classmates	47	27%
Teachers	56	32%
Friends	34	20%
Internet	37	21%

In order not to disrupt lessons, respondents indicated they prefer to ask questions in-between break time instead of during class (where lessons is on-going). Students also approach teachers after class sessions have ended and some even send email. This also means teachers are prepared to spend some time after class to address students' query with some degree to indicate relationships with teachers are reasonably good. Respondents would prefer to ask teachers as their one choice to be followed by classmates which are encouraging. Respondents may seek help from internet source as also an alternative source of information.

**Table 10: Learning motivation and responsibility**

Description	Mean	(1 to 2 scale)	(3 scale)	(4 to 5 scale)
Learning is my own responsibility	4,1	1%	13%	87%
Learning is the responsibility of teachers	3.1	24%	44%	32%
Learning responsibility is both myself andteachers	3.8	6%	26%	68%
My teachers motivated me in my learning	3.8	1%	27%	72%
I have good relationship with my teachers with high level of trust	3.7	5%	29%	66%
I depend on my friends/ classmates for information and guidance	3.3	22%	23%	55%

Most respondents do acknowledge that learning is the responsibility of students, though there are respondents who also indicated that learning is also the responsibility of teachers. Hence, it is not surprising that mean score of 3.8 is relatively high for shared responsibility between students and teachers. Furthermore, respondents also indicated quite high mean score for teachers motivated students' learning. As such, there is consistency in the results obtained, given that teachers have a part to play in students learning responsibility and this resulted in teachers motivating students in their learning. In fact, based on the results, respondents seem to depend on their teachers more than their friends, nevertheless, though the mean score is quite high for friends and classmates dependency. This is a case of collective society where there is strong level of trust.

**Table 11: Learning in small group**

Description	Mean	(1 to 2 scale)	(3 scale)	(4 to 5 scale)
I am positive in learning in small group	3.8	3%	23%	74%
When I am in small group discussion, I feel comfortable to express my opinion or ask questions	4.0	6%	10%	84%
Small group discussion helps in my learning	3.7	6%	24%	70%
I do not like learning in small group	2.8	44%	34%	22%

Respondents on the whole are positive and feel comfortable learning in small group setting. Respondents have expressed in open-ended questions why they preferred learning in groups indicated with small group, they could clarify doubts without always approaching teachers for assistance. In addition, peer learning with an exchange of views and also being learners able to relate with another better. It encourages collaborative rather competing with one another, contrary to the above learning literature that Asian learners are less willing to share and competitive. One possible explanation for respondents working together could be in a foreign country, they are more exposed to different forms of learning pedagogy and the learning environment could be more student-centered than their home country. While respondents indicated quite strongly on the preference for small group learning, they are also respondents who preferred to learn on their own with reasons cited that students who are “better” would result in having to contribute more than “weaker” students. With more learners in a group, inevitably there are some students are able to grasp concept or knowledge at shorter time compare to others. This may result more time having to wait, clarify facts or given more opinion, there may not a conclusion arrived out hence, more time consuming.

**Table 12: Assessment method preferred**

Description	Mean	(1 to 2 scale)	(3 scale)	(4 to 5 scale)
Prefer examination	2.9	34%	35%	31%
Prefer assignment	3.5	11%	36%	53%
Prefer examination and assignment	3.5	12%	39%	49%
Prefer to have continuous assessment (mini-test, MCQ, etc)	3.2	21%	41%	38%

Respondents prefer to have assignment or at least a mixture of assignments and examination rather than just examination. The survey outcome is encouraging as it may imply students are more prepared for deep learning rather than surface learning as in the case of term-end examination. In fact, more respondents also welcome continuous assessment rather than examination as being a fairer way to assess students' learning instead of just one-off examination which adversely penalize students.

**Table 13: Results/ performance**

Description (when to seek help)	Respondents received (3 choices indicated)	% respondents
Fulfill Own goal	63	34%
Satisfy teachers' expectation	36	19%
Satisfy parents' expectation	19	10%
Look good among classmates/ friends	48	29%
Social pressure	22	8%

**Table 14: Motivation underlying choice of study**

Description (when to seek help)	Respondents received (3 choices indicated)	% respondents
For own interest	55	31%
Career aspiration	49	28%
Parents' influence	32	18%
Friends' influence	11	6%
Social status	30	17%

Respondents indicated that good results are to fulfill their own goals rather than to satisfy teachers and parents' expectation. On the other hand, the good result may also to satisfy their self-esteem as it may look among their peers and friends. Likewise, for the selection of choice of study, the results are encouraging as majority does so for their own interest first, to be followed by career aspiration and parents or social influence. This may reflect a masculine society and power distance is important to Asian culture.

### **Analyzing the survey results**

Does the survey result fit into the discussions on the above various literature and assumptions with in regard to Asian students' learning styles? The following analysis provided some insight.

#### **Learning paradigm**

Respondents on the whole preferred teacher-centered approach to learning as they are influenced by past and current learning experiences which also uses teacher-centered approach (Xiao, 2006; Wong (2004). As noted in the description above, respondents are open to receiving student-centered approach to encourage more independent learning. This reinforces relatively high power distance society culture.

#### **Students seldom ask questions and are afraid to do so**

While this is true for some students, the results suggest otherwise with 69% of respondents indicated they are comfortable to ask questions and asking questions is not a challenge to the teachers' authority. This is contrary to the many literatures by Murphy (1987), Chan (1999), Hing (2013) and Wong (2004) which noted students are passive learners, quiet in class with an unquestioning acceptance of teachers' knowledge. The outcome indicates the "middle ground" between collectivist and individualist society.

#### **Good relationship with teachers helps extend learning beyond classroom**

The results indicate positively in this regard with 56.8% of respondents indicated they ask questions after class and some would send email to teachers. This reinforces quite strongly the "family-like" atmosphere in a collectivist society where student-teacher relationships are highly valued on a long-term basis (Pratt, Kelly and Wong, 1999) with 66% indicated so. .

#### **Learning is students' responsibility**

An overwhelming majority of students acknowledge that learning is students own responsibility though 68% also indicated that learning is a shared responsibility of both the students and teachers. In fact, 72% of respondents acknowledge teachers do play a significant part to motivate students in their learning. This seem to point out in Asian societies, teachers do see themselves as the "fatherly" figure, having the responsibility to ensure students engage well in their learning journey, though one other explanation could be the school's systems to evaluate teachers' performance based on pass rates.

#### **Positive in group learning environment**

With a high mean score of 3.8 and 4 in respondents being positive and find comfort in group learning respectively, this is no surprise as pointed out by Cortazzi and Jin (1996) and Littlewood (2001) that in a collectivist society, students find security and comfort in group learning. It also encourages expressing of opinions than doing so in front of the whole class which some students may be shy, insecure or unsure if their opinion expressed is valid and sound.

#### **Preference for assignment assessment**

Judging from the mean score, respondents indicated preference for assignment (53%) and/ or both exam and assignment (49%) point to uncertainty avoidance being moderate. In fact, from the countries dimension of culture, only South Korean has high uncertainty avoidance score while most of the countries have moderate score though Singapore has low uncertainty avoidance score. This could indicate respondents being preferred assessment which allow students to express in more varied way than examination type questions.

#### **Academic performance is important**

Respondents indicated so, which is an evident of masculine society where good results is highly valued not just to fulfill own goals but also self-image so it look good to their friends and also not to disappoint teachers.

#### **Education is to fulfill students' interest**

which a good majority of students indicated so and also for their career aspiration. The career aspiration could a perspective being shaped by society or the influence of parents which is ranked third. As such, the survey while on the one hand point to short-term orientation (for own interest) and on the other hand long-term orientation.

The overall results of the survey and analysis did indicate culture do have some influence in students' learning particularly in the area of collectivism, relatively high power distance and masculinity where students preferred teachers playing an active role in their learning, with learning often extends outside of classroom and trusting teachers as their primary source of help. Teachers are quite highly respected and authority not to be challenge. Due to “group society”, it is no surprise that students welcome small group learning especially for students who are shy where they seek security from fellow classmates. Academic results and performance are important to satisfy students own goal and also self-esteem as well especially among friends and teachers. On the other hand, the survey result point to students preferring assignment based assessment and the willingness to ask questions seem to depart from the literature writings that Asian students are passive. A possible explanation is a large majority of students have left their home country to study abroad for several years with exposures of different society although still predominately Asian based (Singapore), mass media and other students learning styles may have changed the otherwise strong influence in their home country.

### ***Limitations of the research***

While the research attempted to study the learning styles of students from a variety of countries, it has several limitations which future research and studies could provide. The survey result did indicate that as a result of mix cultures of students from different countries coming together to study and learn their learning style may differ from literature studies undertaken by other academics. Longitudinal studies across time (over at least six months from the point students arrive and learning styles assess again after six months) could be researched to provide a more substantive conclusion. Certainly, this may pose some challengers especially not all the students would still be in the private education institutions which could be addressed by tracking students. Another limitation could be to fine-tune the results to measure the learning styles of students based on nationalities instead of base on course and level of studies. Having a larger sample across more discipline of studies could certainly add to the validity of future studies.

### ***Learning strategies***

Moving forward, if efforts are to be made to bridge learning gaps and encourage active, deep and independent learning, blending both Asian and Western educational system (independent learning, active participation and critical thinker) may yield even a “win-win” situation. Student-centered approach where students where students are active learners and teachers would be more of a facilitator and coach is the way to go through as we progress into 21<sup>st</sup> century education. An understanding of culture facilitates teachers to adapt the learning strategies that will motivate instead of demotivate students. For instance, teachers could make a gradual shift in learning strategies. Teachers could better reach out to students since they have a closer and more trusting relationship with students. A number of learning strategies are suggested and discussed to enable a shift towards student-centric learning.

### **Clarification pause**

Instructor pause for a short while after concept or explanation has been made. This is to allow students to digest taught materials and possibly provide space for students to ask questions in areas of doubt (Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 1991).

### **Short quiz or review questions**

The questions can be given after a certain lesson materials have been taught. This allows instructors to gauge the level of understanding, clarify doubts which may arise from time to time, identify those students who are unsure of or not paying attention during lesson (Faust & Paulson, 1998).

### **Students notes with fill in the blanks space**

Lecture materials partially provided and certain content are deliberately left blank by teachers which would require students to pay attention to fill in during lesson. Students would therefore pay more attention instead of listening to a lecture passively which students may not in fact been attentive.

### **Flip classroom**

An innovative learning method in which lecture materials are uploaded online a few days before actual lesson starts. Students are required to read and understand the lecture content. When students come for lesson, either questions or case study would be given to students to attempt.

In order to answer the questions would need students to read the lecture material ahead of time (Stone, 2012). More time is therefore devoted to critical analysis and thinking rather than delivering the full lecture. How detail lecture materials are taught would depends on the discretion of the teachers.

### **Students' summary of other students' answers**

The purpose is to facilitate active learning where learning is a shared process. In addition, it also compelled students to be more attentive when another student is providing the answers. The student who summarise another students' answers would usually ask for clarification. This allow answers to be repeated which could benefit those students who did not understand when answers were initially given (Faust & Paulson, 1998).

### **Concept mapping**

It is an illustrative method whereby various related concepts are linked. Students first identify related concepts and the next step requires these concepts to be linked with lines. Concept mapping is excellent for promoting greater depth of understanding of related concepts and form meaningful relationships between pieces of information (Novak & Gowin, 1990).

### **Visual list**

It requires students to make a list of opposing points of argument in which the "T" is first drawn and either individual student or a few students would attempt to list as many points as possible, some of the points could be for instance "Pro" and the opposing side "Cons" (Faust & Paulson, 1998).

### **Think-pair share**

Some students are not too comfortable in a group setting when it comes to discussions or solving case studies. A better non-intimidating way to help students to get use to working in group is the use of "think-pair' share" where instead of collaborating in groups of 4 students, student are pair with another student. Teachers may allow the pairing to be decided by the students initially and in subsequent pair sharing, the teachers would select and pair students up. In "think pair share", one student thinks of a question and share with the partner his or her ideas (Lynam, 1981; (Springer, Stanne & Donovan, 1998). Teacher may randomly select a few students to share their ideas with the rest of the class.

### **Jigsaw learning**

Teacher divides the class into heterogeneous group of 4 – 5 students each. An article or passage is divided into several sections with each student in a group assume the role of "section expert". Allow a few minutes for the "section expert" to read and comprehend the section. Thereafter, each "section expert" would meet another group "section expert" and share their ideas. At the end of brief discussion, each member of the "section expert" returns back to his or her group and share the ideas to the rest of the teammates. Teacher may ask a few students from different groups to share the section with the rest of the class (Macpherson, 2007).

### **Collaborative teams**

Collaborative learning is especially useful in enabling students to develop social cognitive skills such as making interacting among new friends, obtain support mutually and develop higher level of friendship and trust in discussion (Economides, 2008). Contrary to the views that students with Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) background tend to be reserved and have difficulty in adapting to Western style learning, Cross and Hitchcock (2007) have demonstrated that students are able to do well in groups where there were exchange of ideas and information, in fact a good way to build information and knowledge. The determining factor to ensure collaborative learning is success depends much on the teachers who serve as guides instead of teachers to help students to adjust, shift their mindset and migrate to a different learning style that would help to develop in students' both academically and social skills.

### **Probing questions**

During group or team discussion, teacher should walk round each group to listen to their discussion and to stimulate critical thinking; probing or dialectic questions could be posed to students. In addition, probing question could also be asked when teacher randomly select students and put to students.

### **Teachers provide prompt feedback**

At all times, teacher need to provide prompt feedback after each answer has been given. Studies have shown that students could learn better when prompt feedback is being to students as the immediacy of the response promotes learning (Shimazoe and Aldrich, 2010).

### **Instructional conversion**

Is whereby teacher reinforced the concept by explaining and repeating the concept a few times during lesson which is a form of scaffolding method of learning (Froyd and Simpson, (n.d.). Subsequently, when student grasp the concept, teacher would gradually switch to the use of questions such as (what, why, when or how) with more time being devoted to questioning and urging students to respond.

### **Team assignments**

Where appropriate, team assignment can be used. One of the main issue encounters with the team assignment is the contribution of each student are never equal. The more hardworking student usually would end of contributing most compare to other students. Smith (2000) suggested the following steps. Keep the group size to within four students, assign roles to each student either being held responsible for each question, ask students to explain the concept or possible answers to question, teacher to observe team discussion and each student to write on the entire assignment.

### **Peer review**

Is used whereby a few students come together and work on a single assignment. When group marks are awarded, peer review can be used where each student would assess fellow students contributing and deserving marks (usually percentage of the marks awarded by teacher, say 80% or 100%). Each student is to agree on the marks allotted by signing an agreement form.

### **Conclusion**

The extant literatures substantiate the importance of culture in influencing students' learning styles. In a multi-racial society and classroom dynamics, however, one should also consider the role of mix cultures did in some ways "dilute" the effect of national cultures and hence may have an effect on learning styles. To better facilitate students' learning, improve on learning outcome and performance, one should leverage on viewing culture as an inducing instead of hindrance force on learning, Interaction among peer learners and implementing appropriate learning strategies would help improve learning and form part of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning.

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