

A Study of Cross-Cultural Values on the Policy Implementation of Foreign English Teachers in Primary Schools

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to investigate the cultural differences between Chinese English teachers and foreign English teachers by employing Hofstede's Dimensions of National Cultures and then propose current policy implementation of foreign English teachers in Taiwan primary schools. In this study, Lu's Nation Culture Values is used as the survey tool. Depth interviews with a principal, Chinese English teachers and foreign English teachers are conducted. The results of study found that South African teachers have masculinity and high uncertainty avoidance compared with Chinese English teachers. South African teachers have long-term orientation compared with American and Canadian teachers. Policy implementation suggestions are made accordingly. Improving foreign teachers' teaching skill in teaching English as a foreign language to meet masculinity. Chinese English teachers teach textbook lessons whereas foreign English teachers teach theme-based lessons to meet individualism and masculinity. Perform consistent policy requirements to both Chinese and Foreign teachers to satisfy high uncertainty avoidance. School administrators enforce management power to foreign English teachers in order to improve short power distance. Contract fulfillment bonus is added for long term orientation. The research findings are further discussed in the following text.

Keywords: Foreign English teachers, Dimensions of National Cultures, Cross Culture

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Introduction

As a universal language being spoken internationally in the 21st Century, English ability is a basic skill required by the individuals involved in international affairs, business management and trading, politics and diplomacy, and new technology. The global influence of English language is increasing as a major language used in the fields of publishing, newspapers, airports, aviation industry, international trade, academic conferences, sciences, technology, sports, international competitions, pop music and advertising (Graddol, 1996; Holborow, 1999). It has become the international language that functions as an official language in many countries. It is also the foreign language that is learnt by the largest number of people in the world. According to the information provided by British Council, there is approximate one third of the world population in total of 2.236 billion people speaking English as a foreign language. The number is expected to reach half of the world population which is around 3 billion people communicating with each other in English by 2020. English language has also been applied to communication and interchange by international political and trading organizations such as United Nations, World Bank and WHO. The importance of English language proficiency cannot be neglected if a country seeks to enhance its competitiveness and be internationalized.

A data revealed by Taiwan in 2009 showed that the English language proficiency that Taiwanese people had was worse than average among Asian countries while their English communication skills were also poor. Taiwanese students are incapable of speaking English fluently even after years of learning. In Singapore and Hong Kong, on the contrary, the economic developments of both markets are thriving due to the better English skills their people possess. Therefore it would be crucial for every country to equip their people with a good command of English under the competition between globalized markets.

There has been 12 years since Hsinchu City government started to carry out the policy of English language education in 2002. This policy is embraced by many parents of local families and has brought cultural stimuli to both students and teachers after a decade of implementation. However, the cost in the employment of foreign English teachers is extremely high while the actual effect of implementation remains unknown. The majority of relevant academic research was focused on exploring the teaching aspects of foreign English teachers instead of the executive outcomes of the policy. In light of this, the English language education scheme conducted by Hsinchu Elementary School was taken as an example to explore the social, cultural background and characteristics of foreign English teachers from multicultural perspective to provide references for the improvement of existing policies and systems of English language education.

Research Design

The differences between English language teachers from different countries in the dimensions of Nation Culture Values were studied and the policies for English language teacher in Taiwan were further discussed according to the results of study in which the following hypotheses were examined:

H1: There is a significant difference between English language teachers from different countries in the dimension of “Power Distance” of Nation Culture Values.

H2: There is a significant difference between English language teachers from different countries in the dimension of “Individualism” of Nation Culture Values.

H3: There is a significant difference between English language teachers from different countries in the dimension of “Masculinity” of Nation Culture Values.

H4: There is a significant difference between English language teachers from different countries in the dimension of “Uncertainty Avoidance” of Nation Culture Values.

H5: There is a significant difference between English language teachers from different countries in the dimension of “Long-term Orientation” of Nation Culture Values.

The questionnaire design of this study was based on the questionnaire of Nation Culture Values modified by Lu (1999). Partial content of the questionnaire has been revised and rephrased to be used in the field of education. 51 foreign English teachers and 106 Taiwanese English teachers teaching at elementary schools under the English Language Education Scheme in the academic year of 102 in Hsinchu City were given questionnaires. In total, 157 questionnaires were sent to both Taiwanese and foreign English teachers and 134 of them were collected. After eliminating 5 invalid questionnaires that contained incomplete answers, there was a total of 129 valid samples collected, with a valid response rate of 82%.

Data Analysis

For analyzing the statistic data, 80 Taiwanese English teachers were categorized as the first group (Taiwan) while 30 South African English teachers as the second group (South Africa); 14 American and 3 Canadian teachers who are from North America with similar cultural background were combined as the third group (the US and Canada).

One Way ANOVA was applied to analyze the differences between dimensions of Nation Culture Values possessed by English language teachers in Hsinchu City in order to explore the differences between English language teachers from different countries in dimensions of Power Distance, Individualism, Masculinity, Uncertainty Avoidance and Long-term Orientation.

The differences between English language teachers from different counties in the five dimensions of Nation Culture Values were demonstrated in the Table 1. Hypothesis 1 and 2 were rejected due to the fact that the differences in two dimensions of Power Distance and Individualism were found insignificant. The results for other dimensions were provided below after examination:

Table 1: The differences between dimensions of Nation Culture Values

Dimension	Country	N	Mean	F Value	Scheffe	Hypothesis
Power Distance	1. Taiwan	80	2.808	0.552		Reject
	2. South Africa	30	2.713			
	3. the US and Canada	17	2.694			
Individualism	1. Taiwan	80	3.593	1.988		Reject
	2. South Africa	30	3.519			
	3. the US and Canada	17	3.399			
Masculinity	1. Taiwan	80	3.399	3.160*	Taiwan < South Africa	Support
	2. South Africa	30	3.695			
	3. the US and Canada	17	3.618			
Uncertainty Avoidance	1. Taiwan	80	3.965	3.910*	Taiwan < South Africa	Support
	2. South Africa	30	4.260			
	3. the US and Canada	17	3.918			
Long-term Orientation	1. Taiwan	80	3.995	3.187*	South Africa > the US and Canada	Support
	2. South Africa	30	4.181			
	3. the US and Canada	17	3.840			

Note: * $p < .05$

The mean of this dimension for the group of South African English teachers (3.695) is higher than the group of Taiwanese English teachers (3.399). The hypothesis of the study H3 is thus supported, meaning that there is a significant difference between English language teachers from different countries in the dimension of “Masculinity” of Nation Culture Values. The difference might be resulted from the fact that 98% respondents in the group of Taiwanese English teachers are female with less masculinity. There are also significant differences between Taiwanese teachers and South African teachers in the questions of “It is important for me to have a job that provides an opportunity for advancement” and “It is important for me to have a job, which has an opportunity for high earnings”. Both questions have reflected that Taiwanese English teachers take interpersonal relationships more seriously and would look for spiritual satisfaction whereas South African English teachers would rather appreciate competition, work achievements and the successful.

The mean of this dimension for the group of South African English teachers (4.260) is higher than the group of Taiwanese English teachers (3.965). The hypothesis of the study H4 is thus supported, meaning that there is a significant difference between English language teachers from different countries in the dimension of “Uncertainty Avoidance” of Nation Culture Values. The difference might be resulted from the fact that South African English teachers are teaching in an unfamiliar environment as in Taiwan and thus require precise norms and rules to avoid risks. They had been experiencing political and social unrest during the emancipation for racial segregation policies in South Africa so that working in a steady environment is more valuable for them. A higher orientation towards Uncertainty Avoidance is found in this group who prefer explicit and detailed terms and rules of work. Therefore, South African English

teachers show more approval on the questions of “I like to work in a well-defined job where the requirements are clear”; “Clear and detailed rules/regulations are needed so workers know what is expected of them” and “In a situation in which other people evaluate me, I feel that clear and explicit guidelines should be used” than Taiwanese English teachers.

The mean of this dimension for the group of South African English teachers (4.181) is higher than the group of American and Canadian English teachers (3.840). The hypothesis of the study H5 is thus supported, meaning that there is a significant difference between English language teachers from different countries in the dimension of “Long-term Orientation” of Nation Culture Values. South African English teachers show more approval on the questions of “I feel guilty if I behave improperly” and “I have a strong sense of shame” than American and Canadian English teachers. This result also indicates that South African English teachers care about their future so that they can make sacrifices for their goals and dreams while paying attention to and respecting moral requests.

Conclusion

The orientations for the five dimensions of Nation Culture Values possessed by foreign English language teachers were analyzed by the study while the suggestions regarding the implementation of English teacher policies being obtained from the in-depth interviews with the Principals, Taiwanese and foreign English teachers of schools. During the interviews, it was found that foreign English teachers received less supervision from administrative staff due to language and cultural differences. Although Principals and Directors of schools were playing the management roles, they failed to understand foreign English teachers’ demands due to language barriers, and thus authorized Taiwanese English teachers to be in charge instead. However, those Taiwanese English teachers did not want to manage foreign teachers as their colleagues.

Moreover, there were gaps between Taiwanese English teachers and foreign English teachers in teaching perceptions even if they worked together. Apart from the different ideas resulted from cultural differences, the communication between both groups was also insufficient. For seeking a harmonious work relationships in the long run, most Taiwanese and foreign English teachers would rather respect each other’s opinions and choose to make a concession to avoid conflicts when they had different ideas. Both school Principals and Taiwanese English teachers would suggest that foreign English teachers should improve their English teaching capacity and efficiency as well as learn basic Chinese language to facilitate school administration. It is advised by school Principals that a reward mechanism should be arranged for encouraging those foreign English teachers who work hard and fulfill their contracts. The mass employment of teachers from one specific country should also be avoided to spare schools the administrative problems.

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