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ENGAGING STUDENTS BEYOND DISCUSSION:

Leadership Education and Nonnative English-Speaking Classrooms

Abstract

Leadership education seeks to develop leadership knowledge and skills for a universal student body. Challenges arise in English-speaking classes when student populations are comprised entirely of nonnative speakers. Activities accommodating multimodal concepts of learning may better facilitate knowledge acquisition and provide context in light of a significant lack of English proficiency. This mixed methods study examines the value of non-traditional leadership classroom activities engaging nonnative English students. Participants who completed undergraduate-level leadership studies courses with an English language curriculum reported preferences and retention resulting from the use of experiential learning, including art in the classroom, simulations, and low ropes activities.

Introduction

The world has seen a recent increase in the presence of United States colleges and universities through International Branch Campuses (IBCs) (Lane, 2011), United States-accredited universities in foreign countries (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Altbach, 2003; Bourgeois, 2017), and other importations of US higher education. Similarly, leadership education curricula has become "one of the most widely taught subject around the world" (Collinson & Tourish, 2015: 576). While leadership, as an academic discipline, has been described as having universal appeal (Northouse, 2013), the proliferation of the transfer of Western concepts has been referred to as "neocolonialism," and potentially inappropriate (Nguyen, Elliott, Terlouw, & Pilot, 2009). Ethical arguments aside, teaching Western concepts, definitions, and theories of a leadership education curricula in English to students who are nonnative speakers presents unique challenges in the classroom. Specifically, the academic language—the language used to convey abstract concepts and complex ideas—can be especially challenging for nonnative speaking students (Zwiers, 2006). Additionally, students in some cultures, China for example, are traditionally quiet in the classroom, where class materials are designed to facilitate student memorization (Chan, 1999). In the Leadership Studies classroom, teaching methods that extend beyond classroom lecture and discussion may, therefore, lead to higher levels of understanding of theories and concepts than relying on variations of oral discourse.

This project investigates the level of comprehension of nonnative speaking students in leadership courses conducted in an international setting in English, and employing various pedagogical methods such as group work, art in the classroom, "low ropes" group

activities, simulations, and a variety of other learning strategies. Where traditional classroom lecture, discussion, and other forms of oral strategies no longer serve as the foundation of delivery, these activities attempt to motivate and engage students with the course material by appealing to other available learning styles. As more universities seek to introduce a Leadership Studies curriculum as part of their internationally-located programs, the number of nonnative speaking students grows, and the need for creative approaches to facilitate the transfer of knowledge increases. This project seeks to provide insights into better understanding the value of experiential approaches to teaching leadership in classrooms where learners' native language differs from the class instructional language of English.

There is much literature regarding the comprehension of nonnative English speakers in the classroom, however, very little research has been conducted to test the level to which these nonnative speaking students learn an academic discipline such as leadership. A heavy majority of the extant literature dealing with nonnative speaking learning focuses on language acquisition. The current study seeks to add to the current body of literature in identifying teaching strategies and successful pedagogical methods in Leadership Studies.

Literature Review

While the extant literature includes much research regarding the teaching of leadership (Kellerman, 2012), and extensive studies of teaching strategies in nonnative speaking classrooms (Long, 1983), studies with a focus on teaching leadership in English to nonnative speaking students are far less present. A brief review of the literature will expose a significant gap in the literature addressing the bridge between teaching leadership and teaching nonnative speaking students.

Teaching Leadership. Higher education institutions are actively engaging in leadership development in order to prepare their students for the opportunities and challenges arising from a changing world. Various methods are employed in the teaching of leadership (Yukl, 2010): from behavioral approaches, to transition points, and case-based education (Mumford, Peterson, Robledo, & Hester, 2012), however, literature regarding the effects of these methods in international classrooms is scarce.

One study endorses pedagogy that embraces critical thinking and reflection to bring to attention the process of leadership reflected in our actions, belief systems, relationships, and environment (Cunliffe, 2009). Another recent study published by Deborah Rowland (2016) emphatically endorses experiential learning as necessary to developing the kinds of leadership necessary to affect change in a contemporary context. She cites neuroscience research that proves knowledge acquisition is enhanced with experiences that consider active learning and the environment, thereby engaging emotion, critical thinking, and reflection (Rowland, 2016). These studies, however, are largely absent of any consideration for disparities in language or cultural difference in the classroom.

Social Learning Theory. Research has also used social learning theory to understand how leadership development, particularly cross-cultural leadership development, relates to global leadership activities (Caligiuri & Tarique, 2009). Social theory posits that the learning occurs through three components: attention, retention and reproduction. The attention phase occurs when the person observes a new behavior, either in another person or in himself; the retention phase occurs when the person remembers and practices the new behavior; and the reproduction phase occurs when the person changes his behavior. In one study, Caligiuri, & Phase Two Results. Focus group interview protocol aimed at discerning which specific teaching strategies students found to be most valuable.

Tarique found that cross-cultural leadership development is higher when high contact cross-cultural leadership development experiences are used (2009).

Case-Based Methodology. Another method that has been associated with high leadership cognition is the case-based method. Researchers have found the ability to forecast how events will develop on specific situations, particularly crisis situations, is associated with a high leadership cognition (Mumford et al., 2012). Aligned with the ability to forecast, Parks (2005) suggests leadership must be taught in a way that participants practice seeing all of the multiple systems at play in a given situation.

The case-based methodology uses past experiences from people or organizations and demands students to make sense, formulate a solution based on incomplete information, and forecast a possible outcome. The case-in-point methodology uses the foundation of the case-based method in drawing on practical experience, but it adds past and present experience of the student. A main difference between the traditional case-based methodology and the case-in-point, is that in the case-in-point, the instructor must be aware of emerging issues and topics in the class and link the experience to the course content (Parks, 2005).

Effective Strategies for Teaching Nonnative Speakers. Research regarding teaching and learning in classrooms with nonnative speakers has been conducted for decades, but has revealed a shift to a more student-focused model toward the end of the last century (Long, 1983; Pica & Doughty, 1985).

Although much of the literature in this theme gravitates to the teaching and learning of English, there is mention of specific classroom strategies identified as effective in teaching certain academic disciplines. In the health fields, specifically, instructional activities such as conversation circles have been cited as particularly helpful in teaching nonnative speaking students (Caputi, Engelman, & Stasinopoulos, 2006). Similar collaborative exercises have been suggested in other academic disciplines. Technology and verbal interaction have been cited as especially valuable considerations in getting students actively engaged with the course content (Egbert & Simich-Dudgeon, 2001).

Experiential Learning Techniques. Much of the current body of literature regarding experiential learning comes from Kolb and Kolb. Their work, dating as far back as 1984, draws on the teachings of prominent educational pioneers such as Dewey, Piaget, and Jung among others (Kolb & Kolb, 2009; Kolb & Kolb, 2012). This extension of historic scholarly work posits a non-linear cycle of learning that drives student development and knowledge acquisition (Kolb & Kolb, 2009).

A proliferation of more recent research has emerged on modalities of learning and the benefits of active, experiential learning (Tate, 2013). The way students learn and retain information has been found to be enhanced through combining concrete experience and abstract conceptuality, students more easily grasp classroom knowledge (Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 2001). Using a variety of experiences can "take advantage of the way brains acquire information" (Tate, 2009: 44). Research have evidenced that experiential learning through collaboration and active participation of the students increase the comprehension of the theory, as the students internalize the concepts through experience. These studies show that after experiential learning there was a statistically significant increase in competences such as analysis, synthesis, problem solving, decision-making and social influence. (Gomez & Gomez, 2016; Trujillo, Gomez & Cerda, 2012). Experiential learning activities such as artwork, movement, role plays and simulations, are specifically noted as most effective to the transfer of knowledge (Tate, 2013).

These Western strategies, though, deviate greatly from traditional classroom environments in certain cultures, such as China, where students are less likely to question instructors' knowledge, and class activities are dominated by lecture with minimal engagement (Chan, 1999: Wang & Moore, 2007).

Chan (1999) cites certain Chinese cultural values placed on concrete, practical disciplines means students may struggle with "softer" academic areas, such as leadership, which would require more personal interaction and engagement (p. 299). Additionally, Wang and Moore (2007) extend such findings, suggesting students adjust their learning styles and preferences for success as a result of experience in classrooms dominated by content-based lectures, videos, handouts, and demonstrations.

Conclusion. As mentioned in the opening of the literature review, research on the teaching of leadership to nonnative speakers is sparse. There is ample justification for the investigation of leadership education in the nonnative English-speaking environment. The themes explored in this review help to guide and inform research of this unique facet of leadership education. Additional study will serve to add to the literature relative to university leadership education, which may assist in understanding the transfer of leadership knowledge in environments where culture and language may inhibit learning via traditional teaching strategies. This research may also prove useful in encouraging creative pedagogical approaches in the traditional classroom where students have high levels of English proficiency.

Conceptual Framework

Employing pedagogical strategies that include experiential learning and reflection have been endorsed as key to facilitating leadership education (Guthrie & Jones, 2012; Tate, 2013). Further, intercultural considerations have been prioritized in providing essential context in teaching leadership

theory and concepts (Collinson & Tourish, 2015). As a result of the "cross cultural applicability" (Kolb & Kolb, 2009, p. 43) of experiential learning, there has been recommendation for experiential learning in the teaching of nonnative speaking students to encourage active involvement (Egbert & Simich-Dudgeon, 2001). Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, which suggests the structure of a class and the inclusion of instructional experiences improve student learning (Healey & Jenkins, 2000), along with the aforementioned pedagogical concepts, guide this investigation into the value and assistance of combining active academic instruction techniques in leadership classrooms with English as the language of instruction and students who are nonnative English speakers. Where experiential Learning, according to Kolb & Kolb (2012), focuses on the "dual dialectics" of action/reflection and experience/abstraction, it is expected that each combination of the Experiential Learning cycle in the Leadership Studies classroom will lead to higher levels of success in the facilitation of knowledge.

Research Questions

This study addresses the lack of empirical evidence regarding experiential teaching strategies employed in the leadership education of nonnative speaking students. The questions guiding this explanatory sequential mixed methods research are:

I. To what extent do nonnative English-speaking students find experiential activities helpful in learning leadership concepts and theory?

II. What specific types of experiential instructional activities do these students cite as particularly valuable in their leadership classroom experience?

III. What correlations, if any, exist between students' English proficiency levels and their perceptions of select leadership courses?

Methods

An Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods design was chosen for this project because of the researchers' aim to "find out more about the target sample" and for "further in-depth investigation of the research problem" (Hesse-Biber, 2010: 71). Here, the quantitative data identifies the experiential learning activities that resonated with a broad sample of students during their classroom experience. The second, qualitative, phase not only confirms student learning and retention of concepts and theory, but also assists researchers in determining shared perceptions and challenges, and elaborate on an understanding of the degree to which experiential activities assisted student learning. The combination of methods is not mutually exclusive, but it allows the research to find results that would not be possible to find using one method alone (Del Valle, 2001). Figure 1 illustrates the progression of the implemented explanatory sequential research design.
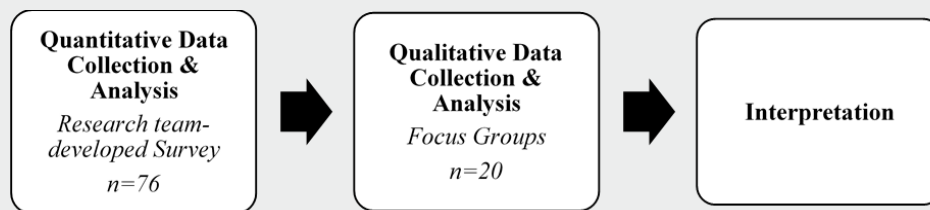

Figure 1. The order of progression and components of the explanatory sequential design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011)..

Phase One Data Collection. To answer RQ I, "to what extent do non native English speaking students find experiential activities helpful in learning leadership concepts and theory?" a research team-developed survey instrument gathered data regarding lessons and concepts of which students maintain comprehension. The survey was administered through a web-based software in which students were invited to the survey using the site's QR code access and email invitations.

Survey instrument. To meet the research objectives, the research team developed an Ad Hoc instrument. The survey consisted of 17 questions divided in three parts: the first part had questions related to the leadership experiential experience during the courses; the second part had questions related to the students' English competencies; and a final part with sociodemographic questions.

The researcher-developed survey was distributed two months following the conclusion of the courses in which experiential learning activities were applied. Student participants were asked to respond to a number of questions investigating their individual experience and reflection on non-traditional teaching strategies. Specifically, students were prompted to report their personal experiences and opinions regarding specific courses where experiential learning activities were regularly utilized. A number of survey questions compared student experiences performance, and perceived level of difficulty to other courses-- leadership courses as well as in general. Participants reported on each of the following questions, using a Likert scale, from 1 to 5, to match their response:

- Compared to your other courses, did you enjoy your (experiential leadership class) more or less than other courses? 1(not at all to) 5 (very much).

- Compared to your other leadership courses, did you find your Leadership 310 class was more or less difficult? 1(a lot less difficult) 5 (a lot more difficult).

- How different would you say your (experiential leadership class) was compared to your other leadership classes? 1(not different at all) 5 (very different).

- Compared to your other Leadership classes, how much better or worse was your final grade in (experiential leadership class)? 1(a lot lower) 5 (a lot higher).

Additional questions explored student self-reporting of English proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and listening, as well as a number of general questions to provide a better understanding of the context of their academic experience (class standing, progression in the program, familiarity with leadership courses, etc.). Finally, participants chose from a list of most memorable and most helpful learning activities from their experience. The list included classroom activities including:

- Art-based activities (Poster making)

- Group discussion

- Simulations

- Case Studies

- Presentation

- Community Service Project

- Outdoor group activities (Low Ropes Challenges)

With the understanding that language competency of participants may expedite survey fatigue for some participants, and being mindful that "length above all other considerations, is a huge cost of being a respondent" (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014: 32), the survey was designed with brevity and simple language in mind. Comprehension of the survey was of paramount importance in encouraging participants to complete the entire survey, so all questions included translations in the native language. As such, nearly all of the 17 questions were formatted as multiple choice-- allowing a single unique response, or multiple responses. Drop-down menus were also used in the design of questions for participants to choose from a limited set of responses (Dillman et al., 2014). The participant survey was also piloted with a number of Chinese undergraduate students and Costa Rican graduate students, not included in the participant sample.

Participants. The participant sample for the initial phase of the current study consists of 76 students in Leadership Studies courses in China, facilitated by faculty of a university in the United States, as well as students in an online program at a Central American university that maintains US accreditation. The participants were 49% female, 47% male (4% preferred not to answer), ranging from 18 to 53 years old. Specifically, all of the participants successfully completed a lower-division leadership course, having passed the course with at least a grade of C or higher, and were therefore familiar with the activities used in the investigation. Both courses were 16-week semester-long credit-bearing courses taught by instructors educated and trained at institutions in the United States. While the participant sample included students in Costa Rica and China, data was analyzed as a single group of "nonnative speakers," rather than representative of two different

cultures or locations.

Phase Two Data Collection. A second, qualitative, design was employed to further investigate the meaning making of the experiences of students. Merriam (2009), endorses qualitative inquiry to uncover meaning in a particular experience or phenomena. The qualitative phase consisted of semi-structured focus group interviews, in which a subset of survey participants from Phase One of this study were invited to engage in discussion regarding their experience. Questions and conversation prompts guided students in an exploration of the results from the initial quantitative survey to address RQII, "what specific types of experiential instructional activities do these students cite as particularly valuable in their leadership classroom experience?" Participants expanded survey results of a heightened level of meaning and effectiveness of learning relative to their respective leadership course experience.

> Focus Group Participants. The final question of the Phase One survey asked students their willingness to participate in the Phase Two focus group conversations. From the students who volunteered to engage in further discussion, students were purposefully selected to participate in one of several focus groups scheduled in Phase Two. Student focus groups were convened in focus groups that reflected the diversity of the Phase One population regarding class standing, gender, performance in their leadership class, and English competence.

> Focus Group Interviews. Focus groups were scheduled in evenings to optimize student availability. Each focus group interview lasted 60-90 minutes, and were recorded to ensure accuracy in representing the participants' perspectives and responses. The semi-structured interview protocols prompted students to respond to the ten initial questions with follow up questions for clarification and additional detail,

including:

- From the survey that was distributed, over 80% of students said that the Outdoor Group activities and Games were the most valuable in learning about leadership. Can you tell me about what you remember learning from those activities?

- From the same survey, many students said they thought the class was "different" or "very different" than other courses. Can you tell me what you think was different about the course?

- What kinds of (experiential learning) activities do you do in other classes that help you to learn the material?

Data Analysis. Use of the SPSS Statistical Software package facilitated the analysis of the Phase One quantitative findings. Descriptive statistics were used to ascertain means and frequencies to reveal trends and commonalities in answering the first research question. Additional inferential analysis, such as scatter plots and correlations, provided insight into the relationships between the use of experiential methods, personal identifiers, English competency levels, and final grade achievement. The relationships uncovered answered RQ III of the study, "What correlations, if any, exist between students' English proficiency levels and their perceptions of select leadership courses?" Data collected during the initial quantitative survey was analyzed and informed the development of the Phase Two qualitative interview protocol. Specifically, focus group questions were written to explore trends and relationships revealed in the quantitative data analysis. Coding and analyzing qualitative findings using the Dedoose web-based research software reveal common themes across participant experiences, competencies, and demographics. Following the implementation of both phases of research, findings were again integrated, or "mixed," in the data analysis stage for final reporting.

Results

The first phase of the current study yielded 76 completed surveys by participants at both sites. An analysis of the Phase One data led to the development of an interview protocol used in four focus groups with a minimum of five students in each group. Focus groups during the second phase of the study included students who completed the survey instrument, and reflected diversity in each program regarding class standing, gender identity, and language proficiency.

Phase One Results. Relying, initially, on descriptive statistics, an analysis of the collected data indicated simulations and other experiential learning activities were reported by students as valuable in the learning of leadership. The results of this study reveal that experiential learning techniques enhance leadership education when the language of learning differs from the native language of the students, and simulations provide the necessary context for them to understand various leadership concepts and behaviors.

In both programs sampled in this study, students are required to demonstrate prescribed proficiency on a standardized English examination. For students in the Costa Rica sample, all of the students are required to take either the TOEFL or the TOEIC. While 450 is the minimum scored in the TOEIC to graduate, 20% of the participants in the focus groups had not taking any proficiency test, yet.

Across the Pacific, students enrolled in the US-based course in China had all reached level 4 English proficiency in the College English Test (CET)—a China-based exam. Additionally, the US university requires successful completion of a hybrid exam following the successful completion of 13 credit hours in the program. While the mandated language of instruction is English, instructors in the program frequently include basic translations in PowerPoint slide decks and other course materials.

Even as most respondents disclosed having studied English for five years or more , and having reported passing minimum levels required to continue with the leadership studies program, a strong majority of participants rated their English speaking, writing, listening, and reading abilities (reported separately) as "average." Similarly, Costa Rican students expressed a preference for reading theory and completing simulations in Spanish, rather than in English, even with having studied English for more than seven years. Despite the potential language barriers, grades for the classes included in this study were frequently reported as "a little better," or "much better" than in other courses.

Nonnative speaking students in both China and Costa Rica reported overwhelming favorability to experiential learning activities such as "low-ropes" group activities, simulations, watching films, and art activities. Additionally, despite finding the leadership course investigated in this study as more difficult, than other leadership classes, students reported these classes as more enjoyable compared to other courses they had completed.

Several significant correlations were found at the 0.01 level, as shown in Table 1. Among the highest positively related variables, the research found:

- University-level leadership courses and difficulty following the instructors' directions (0.83)
- University-level leadership courses and perception of course being different (0.79)
- Perception of the course being difficult and perception of course being different (0.70)
- Among the negatively correlated variables, the research found:
- Difficulty following the instructors' directions and years of studying English (-0.79)
- Years of studying English and the perception of course being different (-0.60)

Table 1.

Correlations among variables significant at the 0.01 level.

Variables	Course perceived as different	Difficulty following instructors' directions	Enjoyment rate of course	Grade comparison compared to expected	Number of languages spoken	Number of university-level courses in leadership taken	Number of years studying English
Course perceived as different		0.70		0.42		0.79	-0.60
Difficulty following instructors' directions	0.70		-0.42		-0.39	0.83	-0.79
njoyment rate of course		-0.42			0.32	0.36	0.51
Grade comparison compared to expected						0.33	-0.31
Number of languages spoken		-0.39	0.32				0.49
Number of niversity level courses in leadership taken	0.79	0.83	-0.36	0.33			-0.73
Number of ears studying English	0.60	-0.79	0.51	-0.31	0.49	-0.73	

*Note: N= 76

Phase Two Results. Focus group interview protocol aimed at discerning which specific teaching strategies students found to be most valuable. While those who participated were given indication regarding the phase one survey results for context and premise, their respective individual responses were not solicited. Additionally, participants were asked to recall certain lessons and activity goals to confirm the acquisition of leadership knowledge during the activities. Focus groups were conducted in English, however participants frequently conversed in their native language before conferring individual responses.

In general, participants acknowledged the uniqueness and difference of the courses in which nontraditional teaching strategies were employed. They recognized higher levels of interaction with the instructors and found increased levels of peer support resulting from working collaboratively with classmates on specific tasks and assignments. When describing the Leadership class in China, for example, participants chose words such as "special," "creative," "attractive," and "interesting." Similarly, Costa Rica participants chose words like "challenging," "interactive," and "practical".

Simulations. Among focus group participants, they agreed that the simulation was one of the most meaningful activities. The simulation allowed the students to experience a hands-on application of theories regarding change management and leadership. They expressed feeling very excited about results and about seeing personal improvement over the duration of the class, and likened the experience to "a serious video game," admitting they "couldn't put it down, until (they) managed to get the best results." Other participants lauded the fact the simulations were taken from Harvard Business Publications, equating the level of complexity and rigor to the Ivy League University with which the publication is associated: "I thought it was very cool to a Harvard Business simulation; I mean; it showed us that we are capable to completing tasks that people in Harvard are doing, too!"

Small groups and teams. Working in teams was challenging, especially because the professor changed the teams 3 times during the course, and he used Blackboard random function to create them. Participants from both research sites expressed that they do not particularly enjoy working in groups, but they understand the importance of working in groups and with different people, especially in the context of a leadership course. They also mentioned the use of peer evaluations at the end of each assignment gave them a sense of fairness.

Participant students affirmed the benefits of working in small groups during in-class activities and out of class assignments. They appreciated the network of support available in working in a group, "when someone is having trouble, we can help

each other." There was, however, one important caveat to the value of small group work. Participants had opinions about how the groups were selected, sharing they had a strong preference for being able to choose the members of the group, rather than participating in groups selected by the instructor. In addition to concerns about the holding less committed members of group accountable, and matching the academic levels of students with whom they are not familiar, it was more comfortable and enjoyable for the students to work with friends or roommates with whom they had maintained a relationship outside of class activities.

Some students had shared that they had been involved in several group activities across classes with the same students in their groups. This, they said, helped them to develop a familiarity with each other's' work styles, and facilitated a sense of efficiency among group members. "We have been a group for three semesters. We are familiar with each other, so we work well."

Finally, students shared that the size of the group mattered in determining its value or effectiveness. "Three or four" was repeatedly estimated as an ideal size for a small group, and "five or six, but never more than six" was also reported. The primary reason for the limited size of the group was more practical than tactical. More students in a group means more schedules to coordinate, making it increasingly difficult for groups to find time to do the work. Often, students would forego face-to-face meetings and instead facilitate the assignments in group chats on WeChat, WhatsApp, Google Hangouts, or other social media platforms. It is important to note that BlackBoard course

management software was used, however, none of the students reported using this tool for their group projects.

Experiential activities. While all the students in the focus group agreed with the findings of the quantitative survey suggesting the low ropes activities were most helpful, the group expressed apprehension in accurately recalling the intended lesson of the activities. More than one student had expressed an inability to remember the purpose of the experiential activities, but after working through the instructions and summarizing the activities, participants eventually arrived at correctly identifying lessons of collaboration, problem solving, and communication as take-aways from the lessons. Students were also able to recount specific details of the activities including conversations that took place, activity instructions, and how students from other courses had enviously observed the leadership class activity taking place outdoors.

Students reported similar experiences for activities including art in the classroom, and active experiential learning strategies designed around reflection, diversity, and specific leadership theory. One student struggled with an appreciation for art in the classroom, stating that she enjoyed the opportunity for creativity, but felt that sometimes creativity could sometimes be overshadowed because "we are not good at drawing pictures, so we are just thinking what is easy to draw."

Finally, one other activity using oranges to demonstrate diversity was also raised as most meaningful in their leadership class. Students recalled the activity after a brief discussion regarding the use of food in one of their oral English courses. They viewed the oranges as small reminders from the lesson that they could, quite literally, take

with them at the conclusion of the class.

Increased interaction with the instructor. Students at each location had had the opportunity to meet with the course instructor—in small working groups, or individually—as part of the course instruction. Typical class size at the Chinese campus averaged between 40 and 60, making small group meetings with six or seven students a very different learning environment. Students were very responsive to this strategy and expressed strong favorability over interactions in the larger classroom setting.

The Central American participants that had previously attended an online course mentioned the level of interaction they had with the professor was notably different. Weekly videos introduced course topics and explained concepts, making the class different for them. Additionally, the instructor maintained a higher level of availability that surpassed students' previous experiences and expectations. "I could see the professor. I could hear him. He was available on WhatsApp, and email. A colleague of mine even Skyped with him," one participant explained.

Chinese respondents also favored more intimate meetings with the instructor. Specifically, the students in the project-based leadership course at the center of this study explained that frequent small group meetings with the instructor were identified as most helpful. The 20-minute meetings included guided questions to help facilitate group progress and ensure student learning. The students participating in this study were required to meet with the instructor five times during the course of a sixteen-week semester. Participants who were also enrolled in another, similar, course taught by the same instructor, have a three-meeting

requirement. Each of the students who enrolled in these two courses preferred the five-meeting model, stating that the meetings kept the students on task and progressing through the stages of the project development.

Using the native language in class. The nonnative English-speaking participants in the focus groups were asked to estimate the percentage of the English classroom lecture which they understood. While a few of the high-achieving students (students with higher grades in the class relative to this research) disclosed levels of 70-80% understanding, the responses ranged from 20% among students just beginning the leadership program, to more frequent estimations of 50-60% among students who were further into the program. For their part, participants expressed that, while they understood the assignments, comprehension was strained and anxiety increased with an online course modality. Nearly all students, regardless of their estimated comprehension or course modality, shared a view that incorporating the native language in delivering instructions, or directly in course materials (i.e., PowerPoint slides, vide subtitles, etc.) made the learning easier, more comfortable, and more meaningful.

When it came to videos and other instructional technologies, students mentioned the helpfulness of subtitles, noting the native speakers included in videos such as TED Talks would frequently speak too fast for them to understand. Similarly, in PowerPoint slides with instructions or definitions, the use of their native language and local examples provided clarity and assurance of understanding. Asked about receiving instructions in the native language, one student stated, "It makes it easier when I hear them in Spanish, so I know—not only think that I know—what I am supposed to do."

Limitations

While attempting to be methodologically rigorous, the study has the following limitations to consider when examining the results and preparing for future studies.

Sample Size. The results of 76 respondents on the quantitative phase provides a small sample to establish significant relationships from the data. Further data should be collected from future courses to have a more representative sample.

Self-Reported Results. The survey and the focus groups collected information on how the respondents feel and think about the leadership course; this study does not measure changes on the leadership competence. Due to the self-reported nature of the study, the data may be biased due to use of selective memory, telescoping, attribution or exaggeration. As this research progresses, it would be beneficial to introduce an instrument that also measures the change of leadership competences.

Language. While the surveys were offered in both English/Mandarin and English/Spanish to the participants, the focus groups were conducted in English, with sporadic use of the native languages. It is plausible that the interpretation of the questions may have been misunderstood from what they were originally intended.

Discussion

The findings from the current study provides insight into effective and meaningful teaching strategies for leadership education in the nonnative English-speaking environment. Through an investigation that includes two cultures, this research affirms the use of nontraditional pedagogy to enhance student learning of leadership concepts, theory,

and behaviors. It reinforces the ideology that active learning is more meaningful and more valuable for students whose native language differs from the language of instruction. In classroom environments that were notably different than those to which study participants had grown accustomed, students were motivated by activities and strategies that engaged them in the learning process, provided context to overcome strained language comprehension, and afforded the opportunity for increased interaction with their peers and course instructors.

The results of the correlation analysis confirm assumptions that experiential courses were different than students' experiences in other courses. It can be concluded that with more experience in traditional lecture-based leadership courses, students developed an expectation of course methodology and requirements. Because the experiential techniques deviated from these expectations, students found it more challenging to process instruction as well as course content.

Through the use of simulations, art in the classroom, and experiential activities, students practiced the skills and concepts of leadership in a context that transcends language. Using their own experiences to provide context for the curriculum, students were able to retain knowledge while engaging in classroom exercises they enjoyed. The use of these strategies allowed students in both classroom environments to make personal meaning of creative and problem-solving assignments alike. Students repeatedly embraced the practical nature of these strategies and articulated a strong preference to the perceived utility of the active lessons over the abstraction of theory. By complementing the traditional learning strategies of reading assignments, written exercises, and examinations, with activities that tasked them to demonstrate the concepts they studied, students reported high levels of satisfaction, appreciation, and learning.

Creating opportunities for students to collaborate in teams or groups gave students the opportunity to

form peer networks of support on which they could rely for clarification of language and expectations. In self-selecting their work groups, students were able to adopt a familiarity with their peers to facilitate communication, accountability, and the assignment of tasks. When students were assigned groups by the course instructor, students found it more difficult to schedule meetings, find commitment across group members, and prescribe appropriate identity within the group. The preference for self-selected groups that work for longer periods of time highlights cultural values regarding collectivism and underscores the importance of relationships in the context of leadership education.

By incorporating students' native language in the leadership class environment, students are afforded a foundational understanding of definitions, directions, and classroom information. It keeps the focus of the classroom instruction on the learning rather than the teaching and supports efforts to provide an initial understanding of course curriculum. Students were also more comfortable in engaging in small group discussions and other experiential activities when allowed to use their native languages. Classmates would offer support, guidance, and assistance with reflective processes during activities, increasing the likelihood that learning and comprehension were present. In classrooms restricted by accreditation regulations, institutional policy, or other directives to adhere to an English environment, this research asserts there is a place for native language in facilitating leadership education among nonnative speakers. The use of the native language provides reassurance for students in following instruction, and valuable points of reference in developing a familiarity with course material.

Implications for Practice

As the footprint of US higher education extends to other nations and world regions, so too does the teaching of leadership education. The ways in which the leadership curriculum is delivered has significant

implications on the comprehension and meaning making on the part of the student. Implementing active and engaging instructional activities will help leadership educators better facilitate learning among nonnative speakers.

One caveat to the inclusion of experiential learning in the nonnative speaking classroom hinges on the cultural expectations and traditions of the students. For the instructor's part, experiential learning opportunities must be well-planned and include clear, unambiguous instruction. In cultures where experiential learning is, literally and figuratively, a foreign concept, additional mechanisms of structure and support may be required. Each instructor my experience varying levels of success in early attempts to introduce any pedagogical strategies that differ from students' established mental models. While this research seeks to transcend the limitations of language, other cultural implications cannot be overlooked.

Additionally, the delivery and implementation of the experiential activities must be intentional. As Kolb and Kolb (2009, 2012) proclaim in their seminal research, and Cunliffe (2009) affirms in the realm of leadership education, reflection and processing are critical in the success of any experiential learning. This holds true in the arena of a Leadership Studies classroom. Instructors of the courses used in this study afforded students much opportunity for structured and unstructured reflection. Guided journal assignments, directed small group discussions, and embedded reflections within activities allowed students to make connections between experiential activities and abstract concepts. As witnessed in focus group interviews for the current research, students are better able to recall concepts and meaning with the help of guided conversation-- in English and in their native languages.

These findings could benefit educators in international settings, as well as those who teach second language international students visiting a university with an English-based curriculum. The results of this study could greatly benefit faculty and instructors to tailor their lessons to ensure higher levels of comprehension and contextual value. Additionally, the current research may benefit department chairs, faculty, and administrators whose responsibilities include development of program and course curriculum for students with lower comprehension levels of English.

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