

A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Teacher Confirmation and Student motivation in China, Korea, and Japan

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Abstract

With an understanding that instructional communication and learning behaviors differ culturally, this study investigates the relationship between teacher confirmation and student motivation among Chinese, Korean, and Japanese students. Students in China ($n = 718$), Korea ($n = 362$), and Japan ($n = 350$) completed surveys assessing their perceived teacher confirmation and student motivation. Results indicate teacher confirmation is positively correlated with student motivation in each nation. There is also a significant difference among these groups on teacher confirmation and student motivation. The results showed there was a higher level of perceived teacher confirmation and student motivation in China, with Korean students scoring the lowest on perceived teacher confirmation and student motivation.

Keywords: *Teacher confirmation, student motivation, cross-cultural comparison, MANOVA*

Introduction

To date, the majority of instructional communication research has been conducted in the United States, which largely represents the Anglo-European culture (McCroskey & McCroskey 2006). Studies show instructional behavior is effective in raising students' perceived cognitive learning and motivation in a US context (Ellis 2000). However, whether these teaching behaviors are transferrable from the US to other cultures remains unclear. Several teaching behaviors studied in instructional communication lead to different results based on cultural contexts (Zhang & Oetzel 2006). Teacher confirmation is an instructional behavior that helps students' perceived learning in the classroom (Ellis 2000). Goodboy and Myers (2008) affirmed a positive relationship between teacher confirmation and student motivation. They discovered students not only recognized confirming attempts by instructors, but also acknowledged these attempts significantly influenced their ability to learn and stay motivated in the classroom. However, studies are currently limited to US classrooms, and if teacher confirmation is an effective teaching strategy in other cultures is unknown. McCroskey (2006) noted that whether instructional communication is effective across different cultures is doubtful and which kind of teaching behaviors can be transferred is unclear. Similarly, the effectiveness of teacher confirmation in other cultures, as one aspect of instructional communication, has not been demonstrated. Moreover, whether the relationship between teacher confirmation and student motivation remains positive has not been adequately studied outside a US context. Therefore, this study investigates if the relationship between teacher confirmation and student motivation is stable across cultures and compares these relationships between teacher confirmation and student motivation among Chinese, Korean, and Japanese classrooms.

Teacher Confirmation

Teacher confirmation is the process through which teachers communicate to students and make them realize they are valuable individuals. Ellis (2000) proposed teacher confirmation is best understood across four dimensions: (a) responding to student questions and/or comments, (b) demonstrating interest in the students' learning process, (c) employing an interactive teaching style in the classroom, and (d) absence of general disconfirmation. The fourth dimension, absence of general disconfirmation was deleted from further studies because it failed to cross-validate in separate samples. When instructors are confirming in the classroom, students show higher levels of cognitive learning, affective learning, and motivation (Ellis 2000). Goodboy and Myers (2008) discovered students recognized confirming behaviors by an instructor, and acknowledged that these behaviors significantly influenced their ability to learn and stay motivated in the class. Teacher confirmation is related positively to students' preparedness for class and willingness to talk in class (Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield 2010), classroom satisfaction (Goodboy & Myers 2008), student effort and interest (Campbell, Eichhorn, Basch, & Wolf 2009), communication satisfaction (Goodboy, Martin, & Bolkan 2009), and predicted outcome value for the course (Horan, Houser, Goodboy, & Frymier 2011). Teacher confirmation is related to increased student motivation and emotional interest through building a favorable classroom environment (Edwards, Edwards, Torrens, & Beck 2011).

Student Motivation

A large body of research has investigated what moves an individual to engage in actions and make certain choices (Dörnyei & Ushioda 2013). Student motivation as an educational context has been studied extensively. Student motivation is the internal intention that drives students to gain knowledge and skills in the classroom (Brophy 1987). Student motivation is defined as a students' desire to attend in the learning process, also a reason why they feel involved or uninvolved in academic learning. A person is intrinsically motivated, which means he or she feels satisfaction or enjoyment when participating. On the contrary, extrinsically motivated people participate in a task aiming to achieve a reward, instead of only finishing the task. Extrinsic motivation is a kind of motivation induced by punishments or rewards from success in tasks (Lin, McKeachie, & Kim 2001).

Student motivation is influenced by numerous factors, including parents, teachers, and other factors. Brophy (1987) claimed motivation to learn is acquired from general experience and can be stimulated through direct instruction or socialization from others, such as parents and teachers. Raffini (1993) argued teachers' beliefs towards teaching and learning exert an influence on students. Stipek (1988) explained, "students expect to learn if teachers expect them to learn" (p. 179). Student motivation is also related to teacher's self-disclosure; a high level of self-disclosure leads to high student motivation and their affective learning (O'Sullivan, Hunt, & Lippert 2004). Differences in instructors' teaching methods, including the type of task in which they ask students to engage, can also have an influence on students' motivational goals that they adopt for learning (Ames 1992; Maehr & Midgley 1991). Given the previously established relationships between teacher confirmation and student motivation, the following hypothesis is put forth:

H: Teacher confirmation is positively related to student motivation in Korean, Japanese, and Chinese classrooms.

Culture and Educational Systems in China, Korea, and Japan

The effectiveness of teacher confirmation varies in different cultures (Goodboy, Bolkan, Myers, & Zhao 2011; Zhang & Oetzel 2006). Neuliep (1997) claimed the cultural context where communication happens has the characteristics that best define human interaction. Therefore, although the effectiveness of instructor behavior has been tested in the US and similar results found in other cultures, such as China (Zhang & Huang 2008), it is still necessary to study teaching communication from a broader cultural perspective (McCroskey & McCroskey 2006). In this study, the relationship between teacher confirmation

and student motivation in Chinese, Korean, and Japanese classrooms is studied. These three countries are all East Asian countries and have different educational practices and pedagogy, which influence the relationship development between teacher confirmation and student motivation.

Understanding Confucianism is useful to understand the pedagogy and teaching system in China (Alon & McIntyre 2005). According to the Learning Cubic Model (Boisot & Fiol 1987), which depicts teaching styles as having three dimensions (conceptual versus practical, individual versus collective, and under instruction versus via self-study), the typical Chinese teaching-learning pattern fits the conceptual-individual-under instruction style. In this approach Chinese students are accustomed to and prefer studying as separate individuals under the detailed instruction of their teachers focusing mainly on theoretical topics. They expect and are expected to listen to, take notes of, and to copy what their instructors say and write. The concepts of high power distance and filial piety affect the interaction between teachers and students. Chinese teachers have the authority and deserve respect from students. Instructors are treated as authority figures second to students' parents and their authority is not challenged (Siu, 1992). The principle of filial piety teaches students to keep silent and be passive in front of authority figures (Ho, 1996). "Chinese instructors demand silence in class; no questions" (Alon & McIntyre 2005: 200). The collectivistic societal orientation is also a typical feature of Chinese education and it affects educational practices. Collective cultures typically prefer a high-context communication that emphasizes indirectness and non-verbal expression compared with low-context cultures (Gao, Ting-Toomey, & Gudykunst 1996). Saving face is also important for many Chinese and face management helps maintain harmonious relationships. Therefore, Chinese students rarely ask questions, as questions can be seen as "threatening" (Gao *et al.* 1996: 289).

In Korea, the tradition of Confucian elitism is also important in shaping a competition-oriented society (Lee 2006). However, the Korean educational system differs from the Chinese system. Education in Korea is treated as the success of the whole family, and children work hard on their studies (Sorensen 1994). The classroom is relatively teacher-centered and children are taught to focus on the teacher. There is a saying in Korea: 'One does not dare to step on a teacher's shadow'. The teacher plays a crucial role in the teaching practices and he/she is regarded as a ruler in schools (Shin & Koh 2005). An exam-orientation is another key characteristic; in fact, schools sort students depending on examination results. Leung (2001) argued the examination-orientation is an extrinsic motivation for learning. Many teachers also think exam preparation should be reflected in the class since examinations are used to test students' achievement levels. The educational atmosphere in Korea is rather competitive and academic study is regarded as the first step in preparation for getting a better job (Hyun, Lee, J. B., & Lee, H 2000; Kim, Lee, & Park 1993; Rohlen 1983; Stevenson & Baker 1992). Park's study (2002) showed Korean students tend to dislike group learning, which may represent a more individualistic and competitive spirit in Korean classrooms.

Compared to the Chinese and Korean educational systems, Japanese teaching has unique characteristics. In Japanese education, encouraging students' motivation seems much more important than focusing on exam preparation. Belonging and community are stressed in Japanese education (DeCoker & Bjork 2013). In Japan, *Mimamoru* is a component of a larger pedagogical method "*machi no hoiku*", which means one should care for children by waiting. *Mimamoru* aims to help children develop social-emotional ability without intervening and it influences the teaching-learning process in Japanese preschools (DeCoker & Bjork 2013). Also, a combination of strict rules within close relationships is used in Japanese classrooms, in which "positive reinforcement" and "forceful methods" are used to help teachers control the class. As these educational systems differ historically, structurally, and culturally, the following research question cross-culturally compares these constructs:

RQ: To what extent do Korean, Japanese, and Chinese students differ on teacher confirmation and student motivation?

Method

Participants and Procedures

A total of 1430 students participated in this study: China ($n = 718$), Korea ($n = 362$), and Japan ($n = 350$). Participants were located through previously established social networks at various universities/colleges in each nation. The Chinese participants ranged in age from 18 to 57 ($M = 25.18$; $SD = 6.13$), Koreans from 18 to 57 ($M = 24.88$; $SD = 7.57$) and Japanese from 18 to 57 ($M = 26.92$, $SD = 8.13$). In China, men ($n = 378$, 52.6%) were slightly more prevalent than women ($n = 326$, 45.4%). In Korea, there were also more men ($n = 208$, 57.5%) than women ($n = 154$, 42.5%). In Japan, there were slightly less men ($n = 174$, 49.7%) than women ($n = 176$, 50.3%).

Regarding educational background, participants were diverse. In China, 19.9% completed high school ($n = 143$), 16.7% finished 2 years of college ($n = 120$), 54% got a bachelor degree or equivalent ($n = 388$), 3.1% completed some graduate education ($n = 22$) and 5.4% had the equivalent of an MA ($n = 39$). In Korea, 6.1% completed high school ($n = 22$), 60.8% finished 2 years of college ($n = 220$), 20.4% got a bachelor degree or equivalent ($n = 74$), 10.5% completed some graduate education ($n = 38$) and 2.2% had the equivalent of an MA ($n = 8$). In Japan, 24.1% completed high school ($n = 157$), 46.1% finished 2 years of college ($n = 300$), 18.1% got a bachelor degree or equivalent ($n = 118$), 10.0% completed some graduate education ($n = 65$) and 1.7% had the equivalent of an MA ($n = 11$).

As for the participants' major, in China, 5.4% reported the sciences ($n = 53$), 1.7% education ($n = 12$), 1.8% communication ($n = 13$), 1.0% history ($n = 7$), 2.2% music ($n = 16$), 8.5% languages ($n = 61$), 7.7% IT ($n = 55$), 4.6% mathematics ($n = 33$), 24.4% sociology ($n = 175$), 1.0% psychology ($n = 7$), 7.7% business ($n = 55$), 0.4% sports ($n = 3$), and 5.2% were undeclared ($n = 37$). In Korea, 11.0% reported the sciences ($n = 40$), 7.5% education ($n = 27$), 2.5% communication ($n = 9$), 1.1% history ($n = 4$), 5.5% music ($n = 20$), 12.2% languages ($n = 44$), 5.2% IT ($n = 19$), 1.7% mathematics ($n = 6$), 1.7% sociology ($n = 6$), 1.7% psychology ($n = 6$), 4.1% business ($n = 15$) and 0.3% sports ($n = 1$). In Japan, 6.6% reported the sciences ($n = 23$), 2.9% education ($n = 10$), 4.6% communication ($n = 16$), 2.3% history ($n = 8$), 4.9% music ($n = 17$), 7.7% languages ($n = 27$), 8.6% IT ($n = 30$), 5.1% mathematics ($n = 18$), 3.7% sociology ($n = 13$), 3.1% psychology ($n = 11$), 5.7% business ($n = 20$) and 3.1% sports ($n = 11$).

Participants completed an anonymous survey in mainland China, Korea, and/or Japan. The survey was translated into Chinese (Mandarin), Korean, and/or Japanese through a process of back translation before data collection and there were no problems found during the translation or back translation process. The kappa reliabilities were .84 for the Chinese version, .79 for the Korean, and .85 for the Japanese versions of the surveys. Data were collected in 2015 through self-administered online surveys. The survey took about 15 to 20 minutes to complete and participants were notified that they were permitted to end their participation at any time.

Instrumentation

Participants completed online surveys that included the following scales: teacher confirmation scale, student motivation scale, and demographic items. See Table 1 for means, standard deviations, and alphas for all variables. Following Muethel and Bond (2013) and procedures set forth by Vail Fletcher, Nakazawa, Chen, Oetzel, Ting-Toomey, Chang, and Zhang (2014), we tested the scalar equivalence for each scale. While it is common to explore concepts or variables across cultures, the meanings of concepts often differ across cultural groups. Thus, it is essential to assess whether cultural groups understand constructs similarly or not. The establishment of equivalence is essential to making reliable and valid cross-cultural comparisons (Muethel & Bond, 2013; Vail Fletcher et al. 2014).

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviation, Reliability Coefficients and Correlations

Chinese students:							
Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(1) Responding to Questions _{ab}	2.31	1.07	.85	–			
(2) Demonstrating Interests _d	2.35	1.09	.87	.42**	–		

(3) Interactive Teaching Style _{fg}	2.29	1.07	.87	.65**	.40**	–	
(4) Student Motivation _{ij}	3.49	.98	.94	.23*	.16*	.32**	–
Korean students:							
<i>Variables</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>α</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(1) Responding to Questions _{ac}	1.64	1.05	.69	–			
(2) Demonstrating Interests _{de}	1.77	1.12	.69	.58**	–		
(3) Interactive Teaching Style _{fh}	1.65	1.05	.69	.58**	.58**	–	
(4) Student Motivation _{ik}	3.13	1.18	.67	.53**	.54**	.53**	–
Japanese students:							
<i>Variables</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>α</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(1) Responding to Questions _{bc}	1.90	1.05	.80	–			
(2) Demonstrating Interests _e	2.27	1.39	.79	.42**	–		
(3) Interactive Teaching Style _{gh}	2.08	1.25	.80	.78**	.58**	–	
(4) Student Motivation _{jk}	3.25	1.14	.88	.32**	.28**	.36**	–

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$. Subscripts represent significant mean differences between groups based on Games-Howell post-hoc comparison.

Teacher Confirmation Scale

The Teacher Confirmation Scale is a 16-item measure (Ellis 2000) designed to assess student's perception of their teachers' confirming behavior in the classroom based on the following three dimensions: responding to students' questions (e.g. "My instructor takes time to answer students' questions fully"), showing interest towards students, and teaching style. The 16-item scale is based on the revised 4-factor structure designed by Ellis (2000), but modified after a fourth dimension failed to cross-validate in numerous studies. The scale is based on a Likert scale ranging from 0 *strongly disagree* to 4 *strongly agree*. A scalar invariance test ($\chi^2(715, N = 1430) = 310.68$, CFI = .97, and RMSEA = .07), $\Delta\chi^2(310) = 20.71$, $p < ns$, revealed scalar equivalence does exist. Thus, the same factor solution fits in all three nations.

Student Motivation Scale

The Student Motivation Scale is composed of 16 bipolar items with seven response options, from 1 to 7 (Christophel 1990), a Likert-type scale. Participants report their own level of motivation towards the class they most recently attended. The higher the score, the greater the motivation. Sample items include the following aspects: inspired—uninspired, challenged—unchallenged, motivated—unmotivated, interested—uninterested, involved—uninvolved, stimulated—not stimulated, want to study—don't want to study, fascinated—not fascinated, not dreading it—dreading it, important—unimportant, invigorated—uninvigorated, enthused—unenthused, excited—unexcited, aroused—not aroused, useful—useless,

helpful—harmful. A scalar invariance test ($\chi^2(510, N = 1430) = 274.99$, CFI = .92, and RMSEA = .06), $\Delta\chi^2(240) = 17.06$, $p < ns$, revealed scalar equivalence does exist. Thus, the same factor solution fits in all three nations.

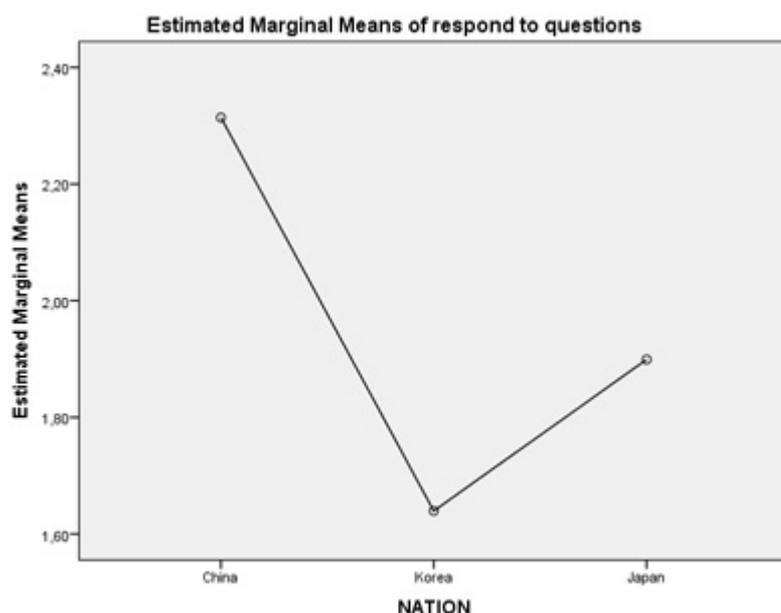
Results

To confirm the hypothesis, Pearson correlations were conducted. The hypothesis predicted teacher confirmation would be positively correlated with student motivation in Chinese, Korean, and Japanese classrooms. The hypothesis was confirmed in each nation. See Table 1 for the correlations in each nation.

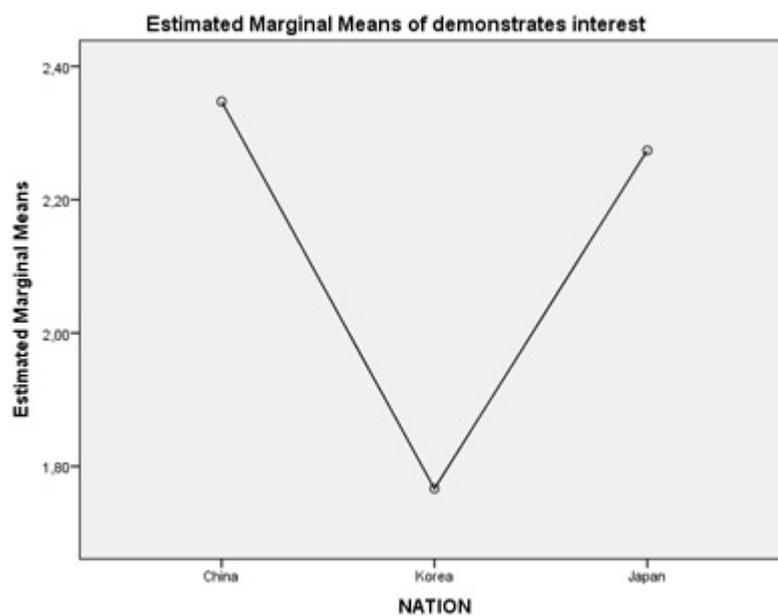
The *RQ* asked the extent to which there is a significant difference in the level of teacher confirmation and student motivation among Chinese, Korean, and Japanese students. To explore the *RQ*, a multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) was conducted. Table 1 includes the means and standard deviations. Participants were divided into three groups based on their nationality. The independent variable was nationality (China, Korea, and Japan). The dependent variables were: the three factors of perceived teacher confirmation (responding to students' questions, demonstrating interest towards students, and teaching style) and student motivation. There were statistically significant differences in perceived teacher confirmation and student motivation based on a student's nationality: $F(8, 1422) = 17.00$; $p < .0001$, Wilk's $\Lambda = .88$, partial $\eta^2 = .06$. More specifically, nationality had a statistically significant effect on responding to questions, $F(2, 1427) = 35.12$; $p < .0001$, partial $\eta^2 = .06$, demonstrating interest toward students, $F(2, 1427) = 18.62$; $p < .0001$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$, teaching style, $F(2, 1427) = 24.75$; $p < .0001$, partial $\eta^2 = .05$, and student motivation, $F(2, 1427) = 9.70$; $p < .0001$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$.

Based on the MANOVA results, univariate analyses were conducted to clarify differences between the nations on each dependent variable. Chinese students perceived the highest teacher confirmation by responding to questions, with Korean students perceiving the lowest. Students in China also perceived more perceived support from teachers through demonstrating interest than students in Japan and Korea, with Koreans scoring the lowest. Chinese students also perceived their teachers to have the highest confirming teaching style. Regarding student motivation, Chinese students were the most motivated compared to Japanese and Korean students. See Table 1 for group comparisons based on Games-Howell post-hoc comparisons. Figures 1-4 visually represent the mean differences between the three nations on the four dependent variables.

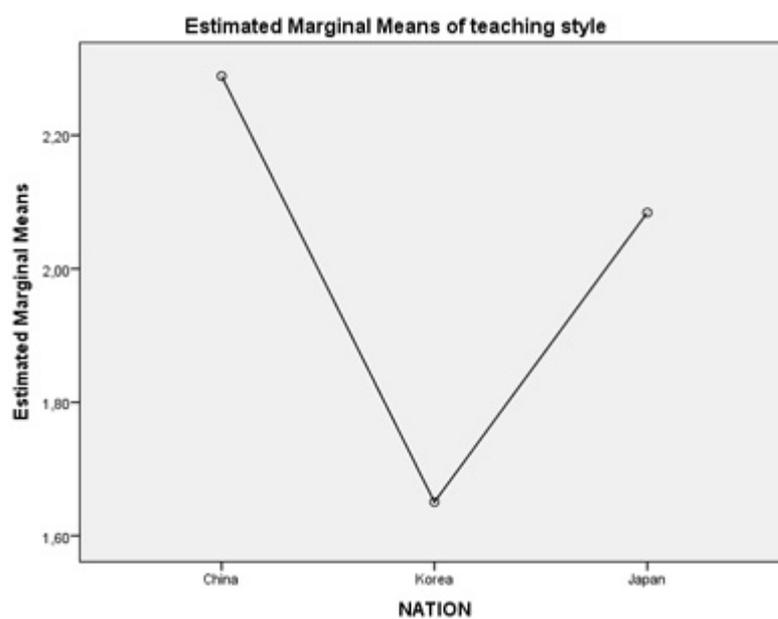
Responds to Questions



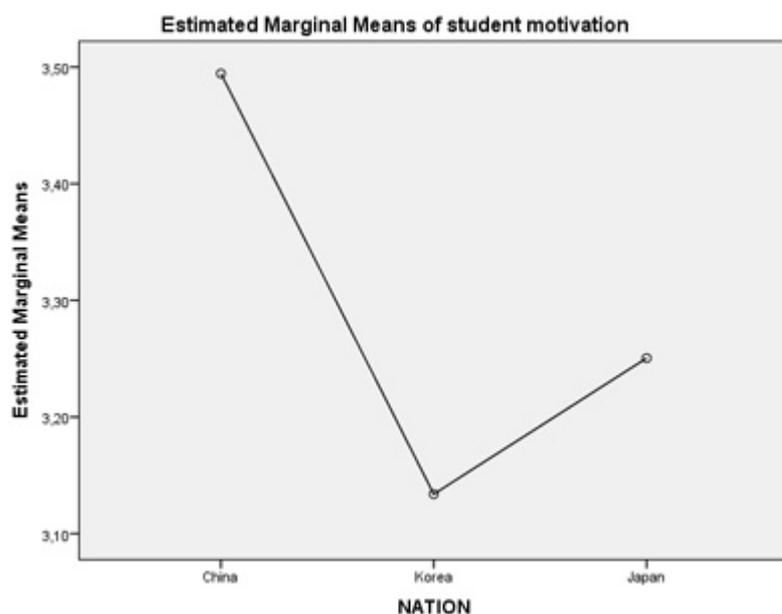
Demonstrates Interest



Interactive Teaching Style



Student Motivation



Discussion

This study examined teacher confirmation as an important role in teaching practices. The hypothesis was supported. Teacher confirmation was positively correlated with student motivation in Chinese, Korean, and Japanese classrooms, which confirms results from other research (Goldman & Goodboy 2014). The *RQ* explored the extent to which teacher confirmation and student motivation differs among Chinese, Korean, and Japanese students. The results show Chinese students perceive a relatively higher level of perceived confirmation from teachers than Japanese and/or Korean students. Also, Chinese students reported higher levels of student motivation than Japanese and/or Korean students.

Biggs (1994) found Chinese teachers frequently engage students in solving problems after class and push for thought processes among students. Chinese students are also shown to pursue “one-to-one interaction” with teachers after class (Biggs 1994). Apparently, teachers are active in responding to students’ questions and there is a close studying-learning relationship between teachers and students. Moreover, the Chinese educational system has been reformed, and a new curriculum proposed. The New Curriculum of Basic Education (NCBE) was proposed and its main purpose is "education should be oriented towards modernization, the world and the future" (MOE 2008). Teaching pedagogy was changed, more specifically, interaction between teachers and students was stressed in the NCBE. Teachers are expected to offer chances to inspire students and motivate them to participate in the learning process. Communicating with students and demonstrating their interest towards students’ study process is further advocated within the new system. Zhang (2008) claimed reforms of teacher education have changed teaching methods, instructional relationships, teacher's attitudes, etc. Therefore, curriculum reform and an intimate teacher-student relationship after class could lead to higher perceived teacher confirmation and student motivation in China compared to Japan and Korea.

Implications

This study contributes to our understanding of the relationships between teacher confirmation and student motivation in Chinese, Korean, and Japanese classrooms. Students’ perceptions of teacher confirmation and student motivation are significantly different in China, Korea, and Japan. Students in China perceive a much higher level of perceived teacher confirmation from their teachers and higher levels of student motivation compared to Korean and Japanese students.

The findings of this study could be useful to instructors and students in China, Korea, and Japan. Teachers in Japan and Korea could benefit from the results by recognizing a need to increase their confirmatory behaviors towards students and to motivate students to improve their performance by mediating the classroom environment. Also, this study is the first to investigate the effects of national culture and pedagogical differences on the interaction between teachers and students in China, Korea, and Japan. The relationship between teacher confirmation and student motivation in China, Korea, and Japan has not been studied before and these results could lead to further analyses of these and other Asian educational systems.

Furthermore, this is one of the first studies to empirically explore the cross-cultural, statistical equivalence of the Teacher Confirmation Scale (Ellis 2000) and the Student Motivation Scale (Christophel 1990). While it is standard practice for researchers in cross-cultural research to translate US-developed scales and conduct research in non-US settings, few researchers report equivalence across cultural groups. It is critical to establish measurement equivalence and test for measurement invariance when conducting cross-cultural research (Vail Fletcher et al., 2014). We must report equivalence so that we know whether or not different cultural groups are interpreting our scales the same way or not. Given the extreme equivalence issues in cross-cultural research, it is possible that without running such analyses many of our findings could be attributed to misinterpretation, and not to “cultural differences” (Vail Fletcher et al., 2014).

Limitations and Future Research

This study is not without its limitations. First, the samples in each of the three nations are convenience samples, and thus generalizations should be done with caution. Second, self-report measures were used to assess perceptions of educational settings. There are other methods (such as interviews and focus groups), which could provide a new perspective to understand these constructs. Future research should explore the influence of globalization and immigration on the educational systems in Asian countries (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley 2009). Educational communication and trade between Western and Eastern countries has already started to influence the training and teaching in Asian classrooms (Kaiser, Hino, & Knipping 2006). Many international schools have boomed in recent years and the pedagogical systems to some extent absorb the essence of both Western and Eastern education. Therefore, it is possible that Western pedagogical methods are influencing “traditional” Asian pedagogy. Thus, the relationship between teacher confirmation and student motivation should be studied with this influence in mind and in such international schools. It would be useful to conduct in-depth interviews with students and educational staff to better understand the influence of Western pedagogical methods, and to possibly use these findings to aid curricular development.

This study explored the relationship between teacher confirmation and student motivation in Chinese, Korean, and Japanese classrooms. The findings stress the importance of cultural difference in the classroom. Overall, this study highlights the extent to which instructional communication and pedagogy differ across cultures and provides further justification for studying instructional communication in other cultures.

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