

Diverse Classroom Management Styles: A Future Pilot Study

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ABSTRACT

A great influx of international students has been arriving in the United States to study in American colleges and universities. As a result, classrooms have been marked by substantial ethnic diversity among both students and faculty members. Although learning styles directly affect the ability of students to learn, little is known about appropriate classroom management styles for a culturally diverse classroom environment. The purpose of this exploratory, pilot survey study is to investigate how students of different national origins experience selected classroom management behaviors in an undergraduate business program in a big metropolitan city. Current and former students will respond to questions about how they like group projects, detailed classroom discussions, and questions directed at them from the professor. The results will be presented in the form of descriptive statistics. This research will be limited by the small sample size and the nonrepresentative nature of the sample. A larger and more representative sample of college and university students would enable analysis by means of inferential statistics and generalizable conclusions regarding how students of different genders and diverse national origins respond to different classroom management styles. The findings of this study may be valuable in suggesting future research possibilities into classroom participation by a diverse student body, ultimately leading to a more globalist thought process benefiting students, educators, and institutions of higher education.

KEYWORDS: Classroom Management, learning environment, teaching styles, cultural, diversity, orientation, globalist, psychological, perspective, and diverse classroom

Literature Review

Introduction

In the past few decades, a wave of students has arrived in the United States from Spanish-speaking countries, Middle Eastern countries, and Asian countries (Crosby, 1999). Students of different religions and cultural backgrounds may have different learning styles and different expectations from the instructor (Countryman, 2017). The diversity of modern classrooms calls for an understanding of how educators need to create culturally responsive classroom environments to ensure the success of a wide range of students (Ashburn, 2006; Asimeng-Boahene & Klein, 2004; Brown, 2004; Gay, 2001; Landson-Billings, 2001). A culturally responsive management style would help to ensure that the various diversity issues will be addressed in a well-synchronized way (Brown, 2004). A teaching and classroom management style needs to be designed to

achieve active student participation in the learning process (MacGregor, 1991; Mathews, 1993).

In the United States, diversity thrives because American culture fosters adaptability (Hurtado, 2001). During the 1980s, 30% of American population growth occurred from immigrants (Asimeng-Boahene & Klein, 2004). One in five students in American colleges and universities is a member of a minority group (Alger et al., 2000). Since 2014, international student enrollment has increased by 14.18% in U.S. colleges and universities. In 2016, one million international students enrolled (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2016). This increase creates an additional layer of challenges in managing U.S. classroom culture (Williams & Case 2015). Educators

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in contemporary America face a classroom environment more diverse than that of any other immigrant nation. This classroom diversity reflects university and college admission policies focused on ensuring diverse student bodies. Colleges and universities today perceive diversity in a student body as an asset, a source of pride, and a marketable feature for the school.

In addition to being a source of pride, diversity calls for new approaches in classroom management. Educators should understand what management styles they need to address this classroom diversity and to ensure a positive learning environment. Educators need to learn how to embrace diversity in their teaching methods (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002), and they need a strategy for doing so when the semester begins (Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clark, 2003). Simply admitting a diverse student body into the institution does not solve the issues that arise subsequently. More important in addressing the issues is ensuring that the curriculum is structured to adapt to those students (Milem, 2001; Vita, 2001).

In some geographical areas, diversity does not need a great deal of attention, because the student bodies themselves are not diverse (Asimeng-Boahene & Klein, 2004). However, at LaGuardia Community College in Queens, New York, where I teach undergraduate business courses, 60% of the students come from outside the United States, with 20,000 students from 120 different countries (Mellow, 2017) and 110 different languages represented (Ashburn, 2006). No single cultural background represents an absolute majority group in my classes.

My perception is that the student body at my college is predominantly Hispanic, followed by African American, Asian, and Caribbean students. I have noticed in my classrooms that for a few countries, students have differing learning styles even when they have similar national and religious origins. Often, gender differences seem to override the differences in nationality and religion. An Asian or a Middle Eastern student will typically react differently in the classroom depending on whether that student is male or female.

When a teaching style is not adapted to the needs of the students, learning capacity can suffer. With a more suitable classroom management style, students are more likely to connect to the social environment and are more able to negotiate the classroom environment to enhance learning capacity (Hyman & Snook, 2000). The effective management of classroom diversity leads to positive outcomes in learning and student development (Gurin et al., 2002) and helps to develop meaningful connections with the

students (Brown, 2004). Educators will benefit from an investigation of the way students respond to classroom management styles in a diverse classroom.

To this end, I am proposing an exploratory pilot study that focuses on differences in nationality and a few specific teaching methods. As an example, I generally invite detailed discussions in my classroom. Detailed discussions enable students to interact with the lecture topic and with the professors. When students do not understand a topic, they often rely on classroom discussion for help (Elshout-Mohr, 1994). This discussion helps to foster a clear understanding. Therefore, to make learning easier when teaching a complex topic, professors often find it beneficial to engage in detailed discussion (Bonnel, 1991). A more profound discussion helps the conceptual learning method (Black & William, 1998). Detailed discussions enable students to interact with the lecture topic and with the professors. Often, a detailed discussion helps students grasp a difficult topic from the lecture. Students may not understand a discussion in the classroom if it does not involve detail.

Further, after a detailed explanation of a topic, educators can pose and asking students if they need more clarification (Faust & Poulson, 1998). I believe that students like a detailed discussion class. I do not have any evidence for this assumption, and I have not located any previous research to demonstrate whether I am correct. Some students may not enjoy or benefit from detailed discussions for personal or cultural reasons. However, a homogeneous classroom environment in a metropolitan city is usually impractical. Most often, student bodies in these classrooms are multicultural, multiethnic, and religiously diverse.

As another example, some students may like a group project, whereas others may like an individual project. One study shows that 91% of 700 students stated that they like group project (Faust & Poulson, 1998). A group project enhances students' knowledge by enriching the ideas in a project with the perspectives of other people and with multiple reviews of the material (Longmore, Dunn, & Jarboe, 1996). Group interaction enhances students' skills and ultimately increases success. A group project expands social interaction, especially between different cultural groups (Caruso & Woolley, 2008; National Survey of Student Engagement, 2006; Vita, 2001). In addition, during a group project, students have the opportunity to express their ideas in front of others, thereby building additional social and leadership skills. Despite these many advantages, educators cannot assume that all students will thrive by participating in group projects.

Furthermore, some students may not like to be asked a question by the professors, because they are not accustomed to this practice. Some researchers (e.g., Scarcella, 1990) have found that Asian and Hispanic students do not ask professors any questions during the class and do not like being asked questions by their professors, either. An investigation of effective management styles may help professors create a positive environment in a diverse classroom because student learning effectiveness should be the focal point of any academic setting (Schneider & Schoenberg, 1998).

Perspectives

There are several perspectives to be used when exploring classroom management styles. There are cultural and ethnic issues, issues related to the type of geographical community, gender issues, and psychological issues. I now explore each of these perspectives in turn.

Cultural and ethnic perspectives. When I studied in China as an exchange student, most of the students in my class were American. One of the Chinese professors did not speak English, and he used a translator in the class. Not only did students not ask questions of the professor as students do in American universities, but also there were no jokes or any off-topic discussions in the classroom as often occurs in an American classroom. In addition, the professor was not expecting any questions from the students. One topic was particularly unclear, to me and to other students as well, but we all refrained from asking for clarification. Chinese students are obedient and quiet in the classroom (Scarcella, 1990). This cultural orientation has been found to be true for Latino/Latina students as well (Scarcella, 1990).

I know that in my 3-hour long classes in the United States, if there were no interaction between the students and the teachers, students would become bored quickly. On the other hand, I do not want students to feel that I have put them on the spot, if asking and answering questions is not a norm of their culture. This issue is an example of the importance of understanding cultural differences in diverse classrooms to ensure positive outcomes (Vita, 2001). A classroom management style that reflects the cultural values and belief systems of the students can help to enhance learning capacity (Brown, 2002; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Howard, 1999; Lands- Billings, 1994; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995) and enable the students to feel that they can express themselves comfortably (Asimeng-Boahene & Klein, 2004).

Perspectives related to geography (urban vs. nonurban). Many community colleges are in large

urban areas, in contrast to the environment of many students at 4-year colleges. A majority of community college students work full-time or part-time (Mellow, 2017). Employment during school often has a negative effect on performance. Whether urban or nonurban, 2-year community colleges have a low rate of completion (Tinto, 1994), and engaging community-college students into a classroom discussion is often difficult (Tinto & Russo, 1994). Urban and nonurban classroom environments are often quite different in terms of the level of diversity, and educators in urban classrooms face many hurdles in designing a productive and meaningful classroom management style (Countryman, 2017; Heberman, 1995).

Perspectives related to gender. Gender differences in the classroom can be strong. As an example, an extended lecture is well accepted by 89% of male students but by only 76% of female students (Hurtado, 2001). Similarly, a group project is well accepted by 67% of female students but by only 56% of male students (Hurtado, 2001). Behaviors may differ by gender in every cultural, ethnic, national, and religious group.

From my own observations, I have noticed that female students from the Middle East and Asian countries are more introverted than are their male counterparts. Interestingly, even though these female students may share the same religion and similar socioeconomic conditions, they are often more assertive regarding their grades and performance than are the males. However, male students from these two regions, but not females, are sometimes overly confident about their grades. Another observation that I have made during my 14 years of teaching is that compared to male students from Asia, female Asian students are more inclined to ask a question at the end of the class if they do not understand a lecture topic. It is interesting to speculate as to whether there is a relationship between assertiveness regarding grades and academic success for the female students from those regions. However, I have not seen these gender differences among students from non-Asian countries. Student bodies such as these require constructive classroom managing skills. More quantitative information is needed on how teachers can engage students and manage a classroom well in a diverse student body in the 21st-century educational environment. One area in particular where research is lacking is gender differences in the classroom across cultures. I did not locate any research in which this question was investigated.

Psychological perspectives. Any learning process is a highly emotional process, and educators' teaching

methods affect the learning capacity of the students (Brown, 2004). I have attended five American colleges and universities as a student, excluding two exchange student programs abroad: one in England and one in Jinan, China. In England, I remember feeling hurt when a professor invited only two of four students in the class to a party. In an American college, this exclusion would have been unlikely, but in England, it was considered acceptable. Nevertheless, I did not adjust well to the incident. I believe the incident would affect my learning process if the exchange program had been in a classroom setting for the rest of the semester. I have noticed differences between Asian students and students from other regions regarding grading, class discussion, and homework-related projects. In my classes, after an examination, Asian students typically compare their grades with those of other students and evaluate grade differences for perceived unfairness. I have not noticed this practice among non-Asian students. Asian students tend to be emotionally involved in classroom activities and seem a bit more assertive about the grades they receive.

Effective methods are needed not only to improve learners' academic performance but also to improve their social and emotional behavior (Metlife, 2002; Public Agenda, 1994, 1997, 2002; Rose & Gallup, 2000). If educators fail to manage social and psychological challenges in the classroom, the level of academic performance may decline (Marzano et al., 2003). Failing to manage a diverse classroom may affect students' active learning behavior. Active learning techniques in 21st-century classrooms differ from the traditional teaching techniques (Ahmed & Rahman, 2022). Although the lecture is a part of teaching effectively, other teaching factors, such as detailed discussion, are essential (Ahmed & Rahman, 2022) in managing a diverse classroom and addressing the needs of a diverse student body.

Method

I am proposing an exploratory pilot survey study to discover how students perceive a group project, a detailed lecture style, and questions presented by their professors during the lecture. I will also ask questions about national origin and gender. I will send a questionnaire to about 100 of my former and current students. The sample will be a purposive, nonprobability sample from a set of diverse classrooms in a dense metropolitan area in New York City. The questions will be as follows: (a) Do you prefer a group project or an individual project? (b) Do you like a detailed classroom discussion? (c) Do you like to be asked questions by your professor during the lecture? The demographic questions will follow.

Before the study begins, approval will be granted from the Institutional Review Board to conduct the study. The results will be collected by anonymously, tabulated manually, and presented descriptively. All participants will sign a written Informed Consent form before completing the questionnaire. Students who complete the questionnaire will be assured complete privacy and anonymity in their responses. The Informed Consent form will assure participants that they are free to withdraw from the study at any time, that they may decline to participate without any harmful consequence, and that their responses will not affect their outcomes in the course. There will be no risk to the respondents beyond any psychological stress they may feel from completing a paper and pencil questionnaire about attitudes in a classroom.

Limitations

This research will be limited by the small sample size and the nonprobability nature of the sample selection. No conclusions from the study will be generalizable to a larger population. All findings from this study will be based on the responses students had to an undergraduate business class administered by one professor over a few semesters. No questions will be asked about sexual orientation, gender identity, or other cultural issues apart from gender and national origin. For other professors, other semesters, other curricula, other schools, or other populations, the results may vary a great deal. Thus, the value of this pilot study is not in the findings but in the questions, it raises and the method it suggests for soliciting student responses to classroom management styles deconstructed by cultural background, gender, and other demographic factors.

Conclusion

With diversity in college and university classrooms increasing, educators need to ensure that their classroom styles are responsive to the needs of their students (Smith, 1997). However, most colleges focus on the college environment rather than the classroom environment. Management styles in diverse classrooms have received little research focus.

The diversity of the college classroom reflects the globalized and international environment of the current world. Globalization and internationalism cannot be removed from everyday life anymore. Diversity involves differences in culture, national backgrounds, emotional orientations, sexual orientations, geographical location (urban vs. nonurban), gender, and gender identity. Implementing a well-structured teaching pedagogy to manage a diverse classroom style is a daunting task that requires planning, knowledge, and research (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004).

The proposed study will be of value not because of the findings, because the sample selection will be limited to the classes of one professor in one urban community college, and the sample size will be small and non-representative. Further, beyond this study, one needs to explore quantitatively to generalize how students of different genders and diverse national origins respond to different classroom management styles.

The value of the study is in the questions it raises and the method it suggests for soliciting student responses to classroom management styles deconstructed by cultural background and other factors important in understanding diversity. The findings of this study may be valuable in suggesting future research possibilities into the question of classroom participation by a diverse student body, ultimately leading to a more globalist thought process benefiting students, educators, and institutions of higher education.

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