

WHEN TWO WORLDS COLLIDE: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF FOREIGN-BORN PROFESSORS' TEACHING EXPERIENCES IN AMERICAN BUSINESS CLASSROOMS

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to identify the challenges facing foreign-born professors (FBPs) teaching in American business classrooms. We interviewed 10 foreign-born faculty members of various tenure standing and in various disciplines at three universities. Our study showed that language skills and differences in educational systems between the U.S. and FBP's home country have a tremendous impact on the teaching effectiveness. FBP's self-reference criterion may aggravate the problems they face in their early teaching career. Our study revealed the strategies that FBPs used to adapt which include changing attitudes and changing teaching methods from pure lecturing toward more interactivities.

INTRODUCTION

Currently, a large number of foreign-born professors (FBP) teaching business courses in American universities. As of the 2006–2007 academic year, approximately 1168 foreign-born faculty teaching in AACSB accredited business schools in the United States (AACSB Business School Questionnaire 2007). Their positions within AACSB institutions suggest that these individuals are knowledgeable enough in their disciplines to teach students the finer points of business. However, despite their expertise, many of these faculty members experience a great deal of difficulty in the classroom. Some existing research examining the teaching effectiveness of foreign-born teaching assistants (TAs) have shed some lights, given that many TAs would later become foreign-born professors. For example, based on a survey of undergraduate students, foreign-born TAs were found having an adverse effect on the academic performance of native students (Marvasti 2005). Responding to this widespread perception of lower teaching effectiveness of foreign-born teaching assistants, thirty-eight states have mandated oral English language competency standards and/or short courses. What is implied in this mandate is the belief that language skills caused the teaching ineffectiveness among foreign-born TAs. In addition to linguistic problems, other factors such as “department training, prior teaching experience, social skills, difficulty of discipline, and cultural differences” can all determine foreign-born TAs' teaching effectiveness (Marvasti 2005,

p. 155). Furthermore, foreign-born TAs received lower teaching evaluations and it was partly attributed to the undesirable classroom environment due to the cultural gap between the foreign-born teachers and the native students. But no details were offered as to what aspects of culture that affected teaching evaluations (Fleisher, Hashimoto, and Weinberg 2002). As far as FBPs are concerned, challenges also include “prejudicial stereotypes about foreign-born faculty, which comprise beliefs about their inferior ability as out-group members to perform task.” (Marvasti 2005). Because a faculty member plays a more significant role in student learning and takes on heavier teaching responsibilities than a TA, more research is needed to examine FBP's teaching experiences directly. One study used secondary data collected by the U.S. Department of Education to investigate the perceived effectiveness of FBPs (Marvasti 2005). It compared FBPs with native professors in teaching, research, and service. But the measures used to assess teaching mainly concerned with the time allocated to teaching activities, thus did not help us understand the teaching effectiveness of FBPs. In summary, compared to their native-born peers, FBPs may experience additional challenges that were particularly incurred by cultural differences.

Given increasing FBP population in American business classrooms and lack of research that examines specifically their teaching experiences, this paper seeks to investigate the common challenges facing foreign-born faculty teaching in the American business class-

room, examine the underlying factors that contribute to the problems, and provide advice to overcome these obstacles. Considering that FBPs teaching in American classroom is one example of cross-cultural education, we begin by reviewing the literature on cross-cultural teaching. We then present the research methodology, followed by a discussion of the findings. The final sections contain implications for improving the teaching effectiveness of FBPs and directions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Due to the lack of specific research on FBP's experiences in American business classrooms, our literature review focuses on general cross-cultural teaching studies with an emphasis on business. The existing literature suggests two areas where difficulties can arise, including: (1) culture and language, and (2) classroom etiquette and expectations.

Challenges of Culture and Language

Hofstede (1980) identified four dimensions along which cultures can be examined for similarities and differences: Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism/Collectivism, and Masculinity/Femininity. He further noted that the greater the differences between nations on these dimensions, the more challenging interaction between people of those cultures could be in an organizational setting. Educational experience is partly culture-based, and indeed, the experiences of several American professors teaching abroad seem to support Hofstede's theory. Lindahl and Finelli (2002) noted that without changes to content or delivery, course satisfaction can diminish when a course is transplanted from one culture (U.S.) to another (French) with no adaptation. Examining an MBA program between Spanish students and American/British professors, Aram (1994) found that, consistent with their previous education experiences, Spanish students expected an inequality between students and professors, low interaction, and the inability to voice their opinions. Course content was expected to be highly theoretical and memorization was encouraged. Students expressed a high concern for obtaining a good grade, and the quality of the professor was based on the grade received. Students displayed an "us vs. them" mentality, bonding together against foreign faculty members. In contrast, the British and American faculty had different expectations. They assigned grades based on student effort and performance, and expected punctuality, preparation, attentiveness, and participation. Exams and course content were more applied.

One important component of culture is language. As Usunier and Lee (2005) note, language encompasses the verbal and non-verbal aspects of communication be-

tween people, and provides much of the context for understanding the meaning of words, gestures, and symbols. As such, many of the difficulties that arise in transitioning between cultures stem from language misunderstandings. In the professor-student dyad, existing studies mainly addressed the language problems foreign students encountered studying in American institutions (Dao, Lee, and Chang 2007; Yeh and Inose 2003). For example, several studies found that students with lower levels of English fluency tended to have more difficulty adjusting to the American classroom experience (Dao, Lee, and Chang 2007; Yeh and Inose 2003; Hayes and Lin 1994). What happens, however when the dyad changes to one between a foreign-born professor and a native-speaking American student? In one study, 22 percent of foreign-born faculty surveyed recognized that their accent could be a barrier to their teaching effectiveness (Manrique and Manrique 1999).

Challenges of Classroom Etiquettes and Expectations

As Aram (1994) and Lindahl and Finelli (2002) suggested students are acculturated to certain classroom styles and behaviors that are unique to different cultures/nations, and these are carried with them through their higher education experiences. For example, "Prior studies have shown that Asian students may have particular difficulty in understanding the body of marketing knowledge due to differences in learning styles, relationships with teachers, familiarity with lectures, communication barriers, commanding influence of the family, and societal attitudes toward failure" (Clarke and Flaherty 2003, p. 119).

Learning style is defined by Rodrigues (2005, p. 609) as "the elements of individual differences that are important to knowledge and skills acquisition." It is indicative of how an individual learns or the best way to acquire and retain information for later recall. He notes that learning styles become instituted in students as a result of their continued reinforcement in classrooms and at home. For example, Asian students focused on memorization rather than critical thinking. Coupled with language problems, Asian students are less likely to participate in class discussions. There is a preference for the "one right answer" and a focus on conveying ideas in writing (Rodrigues 2005). Lindahl and Finelli (2002) found similar support for the "right answer" preference in their accounting course at a European Business School. Students in that study were clearly less comfortable with the American model of discussion and uncertainty, as well as the possibility of multiple outcomes. On the other hand, American students preferred class discussions when compared to their foreign-born counterparts (Rodrigues 2005).

The expectations of professors' roles in classroom also vary across cultures, and can have a profound effect

on the classroom environment (Tompson and Tompson 1996). For example, Asian students view their faculty as authority figures who command a degree of respect. Thus, confrontational behavior is very low, as is approaching faculty with a problem.

Related to the classroom dynamic are the specific teaching methods used by a faculty member. Ulrich (2005) identified the top 10 methods that were considered “helpful” in facilitating learning by American business majors: (a) internships, (b) applied lectures, (c) case analysis, (d) expert talks, (e) group projects, (f) case studies, (g) cooperative learning, (h) homework, (i) small group discussion, (j) programmed instruction. Given that foreign-born faculty spend anywhere from 12 to 17 years in their own educational culture before transitioning to academic life in another culture, they will most likely carry what they learn as students into their own classrooms. The American-born professor may instinctively create a class that is highly participative and focused on discussion, where the foreign-born professor may tend toward the memorization and strong theory focus that was the cornerstone of their own academic experience.

In summary, there is lack of research specifically examining foreign-born faculty’s experiences in American business classroom. This study intends to explore the following: What is their first-year teaching experience? What factors may affect their teaching effectiveness? Finally, how have their teaching strategies evolved over the years and what pedagogies have proved successful?

RESEARCH METHODS

In depth personal interviews were conducted to collect foreign-born faculty’s personal accounts of their teaching experiences. Compared to close ended survey questions, this method would allow us to probe the challenges faced by foreign-born faculty in greater depth, without imposing preconceived options or opinions. The following sections present the instrument used for the in-depth interviews, the sampling method and data analysis method.

Instrument

We chose to use a semi-structured interview guide that contained main questions that address the research questions and still leave room for developing personal rapport for further probing (Miles and Huberman 1994; Rubin and Rubin 2005). Three faculty members in the College of Business of a large public university in the Western U.S. pretested the guide. The resulting interview guide addressed four areas: Graduate school experiences, Career teaching experiences, Teaching styles/pedagogies, and Suggestions on preparing for teaching in American classrooms.

Sampling

The sampling process served two goals. First, we must establish credibility with a sample including interviewees who are experienced and knowledgeable of the subject matter and more importantly can provide a variety of perspectives (Rubin and Rubin 2005). In addition, given its exploratory nature, the sampling was open in the investigation to anyone who provided the opportunity for discovery. In other words, sample size evolved until reaching theoretic saturation or no new information or data seemed to emerge with regard to the research questions (Strauss and Corbin 1998). As a result, the authors interviewed a convenience sample of 10 foreign-born faculty members from three universities through snow-balling technique, with consideration of balance in terms of gender, native culture, tenure, and discipline (see Table 1). All participants have taught for at least two years. The interviews averaged between about 30 minutes and two hours, using both audio recording and researcher notes. Researchers contacted participants personally. Interviews were conducted in English, which was the second language for all but one interviewee. As shown in Table 1, our participants came from various business disciplines thus providing a sound foundation which should uncover the common challenges faced by foreign-born business professors.

Data Analysis Method

All audio-taped interviews were transcribed to facilitate data analysis. To explore their experiences, it is necessary to develop a scheme to code the verbal responses gathered from the interviews. A coding scheme composes a set of codes used to retrieve the “chunks” of information that have meanings attached to them, and then organizes them so that a researcher can cluster the “chunks” of similar meanings together to find the answers to a research question. One can construct a coding scheme based on the research question, the conceptual framework, or the hypothesis (Miles and Huberman 1994). But because of the exploratory nature of this research, we utilized an open coding method instead to extract the major themes or categories of teaching experiences of FBPs. Open coding is a process where “data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarity and difference” (Strauss and Corbin 1998, p. 102), without a predefined coding scheme. Two research assistants who have had training in this type of data analysis completed the coding task. They independently read and reviewed the transcripts line by line, generated labels/codes for “chucks” that contain distinctive meanings, and then compared and revised codes continuously. At the end of this process, each derived a list of codes related to each question contained

TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF FOREIGN-BORN PROFESSOR PARTICIPANTS

Variable	Range	Frequency (n = 10)
Gender	Male/female	6/4
Tenure:	Assistant professor	5
	Associate professor	2
	Full professor	3
Disciplines	Marketing Management	3
	Economics	4
	Management Information System	1
	Finance	2
Native Culture	European (U.K., Hungary, Russia, New Zealand)	4
	East Asia (Korea, China)	3
	South Asia (India)	2
	Mid East (Iran)	1

in the interview guide. The next job is check-coding where the two assistants compared the codes they each developed and discussed the discrepancies. After lengthy discussions, some disagreements were resolved and some still existed (see the final list of codes in Table 2). The inter-rater reliability was calculated before and after the discussion to assess the reliabilities of the analysis. Inter-rater reliability is the ratio between the number of agreements in codes and the total number of codes. Higher inter-rater reliability implies more agreement among raters of the codable blocks (Miles and Huberman 1994). The inter-rater reliability improved from 84 percent to 92 percent after the discussion. A reliability score above 90 percent is the conventionally agreed-upon cutoff for inter-rater reliability (Miles and Huberman 1994). Therefore, it was reasonable to conclude that the codes developed from the data were valid and effective in distinguishing different meanings.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

In this section, we will present our findings of FBPs' experiences in American business colleges. We consider the experiences of their first year, and then focus on the factors that may have impacts on their teaching experiences. We also examine their teaching styles especially how they have evolved over time and successful strategies FBPs have developed to adapt to American student body. Finally, we present suggestions and recommendations to American graduate school and foreign-born doctoral students who are in preparation for American academic life.

First Year Teaching Experiences

We began by asking faculty to discuss their early teaching experiences, with a focus on their first year. This question produced a wide range of responses:

"It was actually pretty good" (New Zealand, Economics).

"It was really hard" (Hungary, Management Information System).

"That was the worst experience" (Iran, Economics).

"I remembered that internally I struggled a lot. It may not be obvious to students but I remembered often times I didn't want to go to school or be part of it" (Korea, Marketing Management).

When probing the reasons for challenges, culture, and language seemed to play a role, with "difficulty with accent," "new student culture," and "new university" all being cited as issues. Given the heightened importance of rapport and communication in the American classroom, it was not surprising to find that language issues presented a unique challenge. As noted by our participants:

"I did have one student who told me she did not understand one word that I said and she could not understand the way I said her name" (Iran, Economics).

"I had to prepare a lot because I was a foreigner. I wasn't very comfortable with English even at that time. I spent lots of time coming up with sentences, making sure that I was prepared and not making a fool out of myself" (Korea, Marketing Management).

TABLE 2
LIST OF CODES

First Year Teaching Experiences (FYTE)

FYTE: Positive

FYTE: Negative

- ◆ Communication problems (language, accent)
- ◆ Different student cultures
- ◆ Teaching above student levels
- ◆ Large class size

Factors that Influence Teaching Effectiveness (TE)

TE: Linguistic problems

- ◆ Accent
- ◆ Pace of speech
- ◆ Could also be Excuse of troubled students
- ◆ Limited use of humor due to its cultural background

TE: Country differences

- ◆ No influence due to social or political differences
- ◆ Culture differences in educational systems (authoritarian vs. interactive orientation)

TE: Classroom etiquette

- ◆ Less respectful students
- ◆ More informality

TE: Demographic characteristics

- ◆ Gender – male authority
- ◆ Younger look could be taken advantage of
- ◆ Ethnicity

Teaching Styles (TS)

TS: Successful teaching strategies

- ◆ Engage students with more interactivities and hands-on exercises
- ◆ Understanding individual needs/abilities
- ◆ Set clear expectations

TS: Evolvement of classroom styles

- ◆ Less lecturing and more interactivities (discussions, cases, projects)
- ◆ Being more specific on learning goals/expectations
- ◆ Adjust to student abilities

TS: Most often used pedagogies

- ◆ Case studies
- ◆ Group projects
- ◆ In-class discussions
- ◆ Lectures
- ◆ Guest speakers
- ◆ Community/service learning
- ◆ Field trips

Better preparation for the academics: (PA)

PA: Preparation in the graduate programs

- ◆ Assistant teaching programs to gain experiences with undergraduate students
- ◆ Opportunities of class observations of master teachers

PA: Self-preparation

- ◆ Get teaching experiences
- ◆ Improve communication skills/English
- ◆ Maintain positive and open attitude

In addition, issues such as unrealistic expectations of students and large class size were also indicated.

Factors that Influence Teaching Effectiveness

Our participants identified issues such as language problems, country differences in the area of educational system, classroom etiquette, and demographic characteristics may affect their teaching effectiveness.

Language. Here language again affects teaching effectiveness of FBPs.

"I think that [language] affected my teaching because we did not always understand each other because of my accent" (Russia, Economics).

Fortunately, as our interviews revealed, the language problem tends to become less of an issue as faculty advance in their tenure track and start to develop strategies to cope with their language issues. An interesting point brought up by some of our interviewees is the use of humor in class. Given the complex socio-cultural meanings embedded in humor, our FBP participants were cautious about using humor in classroom.

"I have to be a lot more careful of what type of humor because there is a large number of a fairly unknown background in individuals so I have to tone down the humor. Because even milder things can offend somebody, and that is especially true in a more religious area" (Hungary, Management Information System).

Country Differences. Differences in social or political systems between our participants' home countries and the U.S. did not seem to have any effect on teaching effectiveness. But differences in the culture of higher education systems did seem to affect teaching performance. For example, many of our interviewees attended institutions at home that were dominated by authoritarian, lecture-based classes, whereas heightened degree and depth of interaction with the students is one of the most distinguishing features of the American business classroom. As a result, adapting to a more open and participative style proved difficult. For example:

"Because I have 16 years of educational experience in Korea and I am used to the Korean way of teaching. I also have some experience in the American classroom, but I have habits that I brought with me from Korea . . . In the United States it is more applied, it is more interactive" (Korea, Finance).

"In my program . . . there were pure lectures. There was not a lot of problem solving and not much interaction in them" (Hungary, Management Information Systems).

"Yes well this was a different teaching style than even in Europe. The teachers don't really seem to have authority here" (Russia, Economics).

Interactivity creates a performance aspect to teaching, as well as a need for innovation. Success requires

extending beyond traditional lecture to a more varied pedagogical approach. Information needs to be current and relevant, and students should have the opportunity to apply the material in a direct manner (through projects, assignments, etc.). Just like one of the participant commented,

"Basically here you have to have a smile on your face. To a large extent being a professor here is more like being a performer. In Iran, students don't care if you are looking at them or writing on the board. Performance is a big part of the grade here when it comes to (student) evaluation" (Iran, Economics).

Classroom Etiquette. The informality of relationships between students and faculty, both in and out of the classroom, is perhaps the most discomforting to our interview participants. American students have a strong sense of equality with faculty members, and seem to expect that their ideas will be respected, whether or not they are correct. Consider the following comments:

"They think that you are their equal. They like to refer to you by first name. Much, much more informal. In my country professors were there to tell us, and were not there to be challenged. . . . It was not customary to challenge or to ask questions right on the spot. You have to give more respect and not only in verbal communication but behavior too" (Hungary, Management Information Systems).

In many home cultures of our participants, being respectful is associated with showing obedience without challenging the authority of the teacher. But American students do not seem to infer any particular authority from the degree itself. To them, it is only how knowledge is conveyed that seems to bear any significance. Thus, this classroom informality tended to be perceived by our participants as disrespectful behaviors:

"I am uncomfortable with a certain amount of informality. I don't think it is appropriate to refer to your professor by their first name. For example, I don't think they have the same degree of respect for teachers that I was used to when I was a student" (Hong Kong, Marketing Management).

"In India, we have to respect the teacher and we have to show non critical obedience and we have to listen to what the teachers say. That is the tradition and culture. Here in the U.S. what is important is that the students ask the teacher questions" (India, Economics).

Demographics Characteristics. Sometimes, demographic characteristics such as ethnicity and gender seemed to play a significant role. Consider the following comments:

"I think being a woman is not a good thing. Being an Asian woman is particularly not good. Being a younger-looking person didn't help either. Had I been a European male, 6 feet tall with Euro-

pean accent, things could have been easier” (Korea, female, Marketing Management).

Evolvement of Teaching Styles: What’s Working

In our study, we are interested in learning what strategies these foreign-born faculty members have developed to address the different learning styles of American students, especially how their teaching styles may have evolved over time. All participants, including those on tenure-track and those well-established full professors alike, mentioned the inevitable adaptation of their teaching styles to the American students’ learning styles and specific classroom behaviors. For our participants, the evolution from the first year usually took place in following areas:

1. Adjust to student learning abilities. Typically, our interviewees came to the U.S. for graduate studies. With no prior experiences with American undergraduate students and classrooms, they were likely to use their own countries as a point of comparison, and often developed higher and unrealistic expectations for the students’ academic abilities than what the students themselves expected.

“I changed from my first semester of teaching. I thought in the beginning that I was supposed to teach them as much knowledge as possible. This was not appreciated by the students, so I changed the course content to meet the needs of the class and take it down to focus on essential knowledge” (Korea, Finance).

2. Set clear expectations for students. Several participants emphasized the importance of setting clear expectation for students.

“Probably one of the things that I do more consciously than I did in my first years is that I explain my expectations thoroughly. I try to make sure that the students clearly understand my expectations and I didn’t do this in my first years. . . . I spend more time trying to make sure that they understand the expectations than I did before” (India, Finance).

3. Given that American students prefer informal interaction to formal lecturing, almost all of the professors in our study have evolved to include more student activities in the classroom. They couldn’t emphasize enough the importance of involving students in the learning process, which probably was not considered a top priority by the professors in their home countries. For example:

“I do less lecturing and more discussions and more team projects. I try to get them involved in doing things on their own. That’s pretty much my major lesson. . . . The feedback always comes back

that is when they always learn the most when they are in these project situations” (Hungary, Management Information Systems).

Suggestions for Better Preparing for American Academia

Our interviewees make suggestions to the American doctoral programs to better prepare foreign-born students for teaching in the U.S.:

1. Provide teaching opportunities: most of our respondents strongly recommended that graduate schools should provide teaching opportunities for foreign graduate students, especially those who are interested in teaching in US in the future. They should be given the responsibility to teach the whole class, rather than being a teaching assistant for a professor. These teaching opportunities will prepare graduate students for the changing student expectation.

“Understanding what the American students are thinking all you [need] to be a little more aware of what might need to do to adapt. . . . A lot of it is more cultural adjustment. Not so much teaching as much as understanding what is different about how were taught (sic.) and how that is different from American students, so that at least you can close the gap” (India, Marketing Management).

2. More mentoring from master teachers: One senior member of our participants suggested:

“Maybe have them sit in some expert teachers classes. There are some people that are master teachers and I don’t think that any of the universities take the time to tell the doctoral students that they should attend at least one lecture by one of these master teachers. That would be an incredible source and very beneficial to the students. I think that should be a required part of the program” (India, Finance).

3. A required course in teaching: One participant mentioned one teaching course he took in graduate school.

“It was about teaching methods, preparing undergraduate students and how to do certain things in the classroom, classroom management. I had to interview the two professors from our own department and write sort of a journal” (Hungary, Management Information System).

Our interviewees also make recommendations to the foreign graduate students to better prepare themselves before assuming teaching roles in American universities. In addition to gain teaching experiences, they suggested:

1. Improve English Skills. No one seemed to emphasize enough the importance of good English skills.

“I think that when they don’t have very good

English skills it is not fair for the students taking their classes” (New Zealand, Economics).

“We have accents and we can’t hide them. That is probably my lifetime effort. The second thing is to fill up the gap between our communication and our knowledge. It is a problem because we know what the answers are but we can’t express that” (Korea, Finance).

2. Develop an Open and Positive Attitude. This is particularly important for foreign-born professors as they eventually all have to learn that adaptation is a must for them to become a seasoned academia. Many of our participants indicated the whole process of adaptation is more or less frustrating. None underestimated the psychological impact the teaching experiences have on their academic life. Therefore, a positive attitude seemed to be the key to their success.

“Well just be more firm and be more open and have more of a positive attitude” (Russia, Economics).

DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our study suggests that to foreign-born professors, successful transition to the American classroom is largely a function of cultural adaptation. These adaptations may include improving language skills, understanding student expectations in terms of appropriate classroom behaviors and professor-student relationships that may be vastly different from their own educational experiences, and adjusting teaching styles to different student learning styles. Based on what we have learned from our participants, we recommend the following steps as a guide for all foreign-born business professors to help them navigate smoothly through their early teaching years:

1. Gaining sensitivity – the first step in a successful transition to a different culture is to be aware of the different levels at which cultural influence is conveyed. For an American student, these influences can take several forms, ranging from broad to specific. First, there is the “American” national culture which helps to define the nation and its values. Second, there are also state and regional influences that help to further develop cultural nuance. It is important to recognize these differences as they can influence the classroom in terms of language and expectations. A student born and raised in New York State, for example, might be very different from a student born and raised in the state of Nebraska. Last, there may be issues of university or educational culture. Currently, educational systems are managed largely at the state level, and the large number of colleges and universities provide the opportunity for schools to develop

“personalities” that attract certain types of students. As such, it is important to not only learn about the general area/university but the wider culture as well. Interestingly enough, our studies suggested that it is not the differences of national cultures but the characteristics of different educational cultures (authoritarian, lecture-based vs. interactive, student-oriented) have direct impact on the teaching effectiveness among our FBPs. Thus, sensitivity to the cultural influences at different levels will help FBPs set realistic expectations for student classroom behaviors and academic performances.

2. Acquiring Knowledge – once a general awareness has been built, specific knowledge of your students and classroom environment can be developed. This knowledge focuses on knowing “what” – what are the expectations of students and/or faculty colleagues? What level of interaction is appropriate for a given type of course? How much formality is comfortable in my relationships with students? This knowledge helps to identify points of difference and potential means of minimizing those distances. But as revealed by our participants, the obstacle here for FBPs is the notion of self-reference criterion (SRC) or the tendency of unconsciously referring one’s own cultural values, experiences, and knowledge as a basis for judgments or decisions. Hence it is common among our FBP participants to have heightened expectations about student abilities, misperceptions about appropriate classroom norms related to interactivity and etiquette, etc. In our study, all participants came to realize eventually the SRC’s influence on the problems they face in teaching and took measures to address them or make adjustment. We would recommend proactive measures for FBPs to (1) understand the problem at hand in both American and home culture contexts with no value judgment, (2) examine the influences of SRC on this problem, and (3) develop teaching strategies to address this problem without SRC influence. At this stage, attending teaching clinics, reading about effective pedagogies and having courses reviewed by master teachers can all contribute to narrowing the knowledge gap of American business classrooms and creating an effective learning environment.

3. Understanding Intangibles – Rapport with students in and out of the class can serve as a true performance asset if attention is given to the subtler aspects of the interaction. For example, be aware of how body language, gestures and tone of voice might be perceived by students.

Our interviewees have all learned over the years that it is essential to fine-tune the delivery of course content to create a more favorable environment and that outlining specific behavior expectations in the syllabus can minimize “disrespectful” behavior. It is imperative that foreign-born professors attend to non-verbal cues and respond to student concerns to clarify precisely the issue or comment at hand. Given the lower power distance in American society, for FBPs from cultures of higher power distance, it is also important to attend to the need of the student to have his/her ideas valued and respected. Other approaches that have proven successful include providing recent and relevant examples of concepts, engaging in a transparent process (i.e., explaining what students will learn and why an assignment is important) which was often non-existent in an authoritarian educational system, and providing greater instructional guidance for students.

CONCLUSIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The transition to life as a faculty member is seldom easy, and can be more difficult for the foreign-born business professors adjusting to the American classroom. Our study showed that language skills have a tremendous impact on the teaching effectiveness. Differences in educational systems between the U.S. and FBP’s home countries significantly hinder their understanding of American student’s motivations which may in turn affect their expectation of classroom behavior and the role that a professor plays in the learning process. FBP’s self reference criterion may aggravate the problems they face in their early teaching career. Our study revealed the adjustments that FBPs have made to adapt which include changing attitudes and expectations toward student classroom behaviors, and changing teaching methods to move away from pure lecturing toward more interactions and emphasizing student involvement.

One theme that held true to almost every interviewee was the constant internal struggles that they have endured, especially in the early years of their career. These internal struggles have led to emotional or psychological drain among many of them. The consequences can range from frustration, destruction of self-confidence, and sometimes negativity toward teaching and increasing distrust and alienation from the students. As the business faculty shortage continues in American universities and more foreign students pursue teaching careers in American business schools, their teaching effectiveness will inevitably become an issue that any business school must face. Despite the fact that they teach different disciplines, our interviewees found the common administrative mental-

ity is that they are expected to be able to teach with no difficulty. Albeit subtle, they expressed frustration with the lack of support. Therefore, future research should examine the types of emotional outcomes that may result from their teaching experiences, and more importantly, what impacts they may have on the other areas of their job performance, such as research productivity, service effectiveness, and overall job satisfaction. It will be fruitful to identify the type of supports that administration can offer to make it smooth transitions for foreign-born faculty members.

In this study, FBP’s self reference criterion with regard to their own education experiences in home country seem to have an impact on the problems they face. But we would also suggest future researchers examine the interactions between a professor’s native educational culture and his/her personal social styles on teaching effectiveness. For example, although both graduating from the same educational system in a foreign culture, someone who is naturally expressive and amiable will have an easier time adapting to American classrooms that values interaction and discussion.

This study represents the first step toward understanding the FBP’s teaching experiences in the American business classroom. As an exploratory research, we examined issues that are common to FBP in various business disciplines. As marketing faculty, we are also particularly interested in identifying any unique challenges facing foreign born marketing professors. For instance, we assume the effect of understanding mainstream culture on teaching varies across different disciplines. More specifically, we suspect that faculty teaching the technical aspect of information systems and those teaching economics theories may feel the least relevance between the American pop culture and the subject matters they teach. While those teaching more application-based courses, might find culture to have a greater effect. However, the data of this study is insufficient to allow for close examination of this matter. To provide more insights for foreign born marketing professors in particular, future research should gather more data from FBPs of different stages of their professional careers and examine if and how the perception of challenges in teaching may vary. Especially, we think comparisons between foreign born master teachers and rookies would prove most instructive for all FBP marketing faculty. Comparisons between native born and FBP marketing professors may also help reveal unique challenges faced by FBPs.

Finally, Hofstede’s model of cultural dimensions can be useful in future studies to formulate specific hypotheses regarding how culture may affect FBP’s expectations about American students, types of teaching methods used in classrooms, and interactions between faculty and students, etc. A larger scale data collection with quantitative data analysis may be needed for hypothesis testing.

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