

Peer Assessment in Higher Education: Using Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions to Identify Perspectives of Malaysian Chinese Students

Phaik Kin Cheah*, Fong Wei Diong and Yee Onn Yap

Faculty of Arts and Social Science, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR), Jalan Universiti, Bandar Barat, 31900 Kampar, Perak, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Peer assessments have been widely used as a method of assessment and teaching. Earlier studies have established its benefits and validity in higher education as a learner-centered assessment and learning process. However, there is little investigation conducted from the cultural perspective, especially in a non-Western setting. The present study aims to fill this gap by using Hofstede's cultural theory to identify the perspectives of Malaysian Chinese undergraduates on peer assessment. A homogeneous sample of 43 Malaysian Chinese students from a private university in Malaysia who were pursuing a degree program in mass communication participated in focus group discussions. Using thematic analysis, six themes were generated from the data. This study found that participants displayed high power distance, high levels of uncertainty avoidance, and preference for long-term gains. The participants' perception fit into Hofstede's collectivist and feminist dimensions. Results showed that undergraduates perceived teachers to be more qualified in awarding scores compared to peers. Students considered awarding higher scores to those whom they

considered as friends, and higher marks to peers who were popular. They also displayed face-saving behaviors to avoid embarrassing their peers in giving them feedback. By using peer assessments, there was increased motivation and responsibility toward the project. Students also appreciated peer feedback for long-term self-improvement.

Keywords: Evaluation, marking, measurement, mass communication, Malaysia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 27 October 2016

Accepted: 29 March 2018

Published: 28 September 2018

E-mail addresses:

cheahphaikkin@gmail.com, cheahpk@utar.edu.my (Phaik Kin Cheah)

diongfw@utar.edu.my (Fong Wei Diong)

yapyeonn@hotmail.com (Yee Onn Yap)

* Corresponding author

INTRODUCTION

Peer assessment has emerged as a popular approach especially in institutions of higher learning (Friedman, Cox, & Maher, 2007; Lindblom-ylänne, Pihlajamäki, & Kotkas, 2006; Speer, 2010). In this information age, computer-aided or online peer assessment methods are widely used to facilitate such assessments in regular and online courses (Chen & Tsai, 2009; Chew, Snee, & Price, 2016; Li et al., 2016). Peer assessment is a form of learner-centered assessment conducted by students that is necessary for effective teaching and learning. In fact, Llado et al. (2014) posit that peer assessment is a “learning procedure.” It is defined as “... an arrangement in which individuals consider the amount, level, value, worth, quality or success of the products or outcomes of learning of peers of similar status” (Topping, 1998, p. 250). In some reports, peer assessments were referred to as self-assessments because students administer the evaluations themselves (Reinholz, 2016). Researchers discussed peer assessment from the perspectives of learning empowerment (Chew et al., 2016), task complexity (Zundert, Dominique, Sluijsmans, Könings, & Merriënboer, 2012), fairness (Fellenz, 2006), social style bias (May, 2008), and comparisons with teacher assessments (Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000; Li et al., 2016) among others. This method of assessment has been tested on university and college students from various disciplines such as English language (Warwick, 2007), management (Baker, 2008; Friedman et al., 2007), entrepreneurship (Kotey, 2007),

engineering (Montalvão & Baker, 2015), and nursing (Bradbury-Jones, Sambrook, & Irvine, 2009; Pereira, Echeazarra, Sanz-Santamaría, & Gutiérrez, 2014).

Although the execution of peer assessment was found to be more challenging compared to teacher assessments (Greenan, Humphreys, & McIlveen, 1997), it is a flexible method of assessment that can be customized to evaluate students’ work. It is a suitable method of assessment to grade oral or written work (Topping, 2009). Studies have reported using this method to assess oral presentations (Montalvão & Baker, 2015), experiment proposals (Sung, Lin, Lee, & Chang, 2003), term papers (Haaga, 1993), singing (Latukefu, 2010), debates (Smith, 1990), and research posters (Edgerton & McKechnie, 2002) successfully.

Despite its wide application and coverage, there exists a knowledge gap in identifying the perception of students from different cultural backgrounds on peer assessments (McLeay & Wesson, 2014). Culture could affect the teaching and learning process in universities. Culture is defined as a “collective programming” of the people in a certain group that distinguishes them from people from other groups (Hofstede, 1980a). Members from that group share common values, beliefs, and meanings interpreted from their own shared experiences (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004) and they are carried across generations (House et al., 2004). Understanding a culture is helpful for teaching because it could help teachers create a good learning environment

(Bonham, Cifuentes, & Murphy, 1995) for the students. The cultural context is also a factor that determines a person's perception of the appropriate behavior in the learning situation (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Tinto (1998) showed the importance of both academic and social integration in ensuring success in higher education. Students needed to participate and adapted to the student culture and the environment in order to be successful in the university (Tinto, 1998). Teachers also need to be culturally sensitive and responsive to help students along in their academic achievements (Collins, 1999; Kainzbauer & Hunt, 2014). It was also found that students from different cultures had different preferences in learning styles (Joy & Kolb, 2009). For example, one study found that international students were dissatisfied with the peer assessment system, this could be due to the culture shock in a learning system that was different from what they were familiar with (Warwick, 2007). Furthermore, past research in the area of peer assessments were mostly done in the Western settings and peer assessments may not be suitable in countries with examination cultures like some Asian countries (Bryant & Carless, 2010). One way to learn about a culture is to examine the ways people solve problems (Schein, 1985). Therefore, using a cultural theory to identify the perspectives of students in the peer assessment process is useful to help teachers plan, adapt, and create a positive environment for teaching and learning.

Objectives

The present study aims to fill the knowledge gap in current debate to identify students' perception of peer assessment in a non-Western setting using Hofstede's model. This study applies Hofstede's model in an attempt to identify the cultural dimensions within the perspectives of Malaysian Chinese undergraduates on the use of peer assessments in a group project. Hofstede's model is typically used to make quantified comparisons of cultures of different nations. Therefore, this study attempts to contribute to the body of knowledge by providing rich qualitative insights to Hofstede's cultural dimensions from the perspectives of undergraduates within one nation. The use of a model in qualitative inquiry serves as a "realizable goal" as "it helps indicate to the extent to which the inductive analysis has emerged" (Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009).

The context of this study is unique as Malaysia is a multicultural country that is governed and inhabited by diverse ethnic groups namely Bumiputera (68.8%), Chinese (23.2%), Indian (7%), and others (1%) (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2017). The Malaysian population is predominantly Bumiputera comprising mainly ethnic Malay and indigenous groups. In everyday life, people are generally aware and sensitive of the different cultural practices, values, and beliefs. Teachers are held in high regard among the Malaysian Chinese community. Some Malaysian Chinese students would also gesture a slight bow when they see a teacher. Meanwhile, not acknowledging a teacher when they see one is considered

disrespectful. In everyday interactions, it could be considered disrespectful if a younger person disagrees or questions the authority. Teachers and elderly persons, or those with high social standing are considered people of authority. In addition, maintaining harmony in social interactions and communication is appreciated over confrontational, aggressive, or negative behaviors. Confrontational, aggressive, and negative behaviors are frowned upon and considered disrespectful and disruptive. Such behaviors are considered to be possible indications of the individual's lack of education and proper upbringing. Meanwhile, behaviors that reflect tolerance, including tolerance toward bad behaviors would earn the individual much respect from others.

In Malaysia, the context in a private university is somewhat different from a public one that is fully or partially government funded, because the undergraduates pay relatively higher fees. This would mean that the students who are less affluent would have to take up student loans, if they do not have scholarships. This situation puts some pressure on the undergraduates to maintain their grades as most loans require students to achieve and maintain a certain standard of academic performance. Therefore, it is safe to say that grading and assessments in this university are not only important for reflecting the students' academic achievements but also for some, survival.

Hofstede's Model

Hofstede's model is the "benchmark for discussion of national cultures and values" (McLeay & Wesson, 2014) and it has been tested and applied in many studies is an influential model (Kirkman, Lowe, & Gibson, 2006). The model has been used since 1980 and it is still relevant in the present day (Baptista & Oliveira, 2015). Kirkman et al. (2006), who reported a meta-analysis of Hofstede's framework, found a total 180 empirical studies done from 1980 to 2002 using Hofstede's framework. It has also been widely tested and cited in the studies in areas of education, teaching, and learning (McLeay & Wesson, 2014) such as learning styles (Warwick, 2007) and cross-cultural education (Kainzbauer & Hunt, 2014; Tinto, 1998).

Hofstede's model was built on the cultural dimensions which he had theorized which could be used to explain the different behavioral patterns among people from different nations (Williamson, 2001). The dimensions are power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long- versus short-term orientation, and indulgence versus restraint (Hofstede, 2001). Hofstede's model advances our understanding about the differences in collective behaviors among individuals from different nations. Hofstede's theory has sociological underpinnings of functionalism and positivism. His taxonomy is based on generalized behavior patterns and provides a useful guide to teachers, marketers,

innovators and other groups of people in planning a generic approach that appeals to most members in that nation.

Hofstede's framework measures the different behaviors of people from different nations (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). First, power distance is the degree to which those with less power accept and expect the unequal distribution of power (Hofstede, 1980a). The different forms of reliance on authority (Singh, 1990) are reflected in the power distance. Meanwhile, individualism versus collectivism is the degree to which the individual's (individualist) or the group's (collectivist) welfare is prioritized over the other (Hofstede, 1980a). A collectivist culture exists within a close-knit community whereby members in the group are loyal to each other (Hofstede, 1980b). In a collectivist culture, members of a group care for each other and take responsibility for one another (Gudykunst et al., 1996) as opposed to an individualistic culture whereby the individual is only responsible for himself or herself and his or her immediate family. Third, masculinity concerns the assertiveness and competitiveness versus femininity that concerns modesty. In a masculine culture, the roles of men and women are different whereby men are assertive, tough, and success-driven while women are more emotional, modest, caring, and focused on the quality of life (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). In a feminine society, both men and women take on the feminist role (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). The

fourth dimension is uncertainty avoidance. It is the degree of tolerance for and acceptance of future events, whereby societies with high tolerance would be open to alternatives and plurality while those with lower tolerance would respond in a more controlled manner and follow existing rules (Hofstede, 1980a). A culture with high uncertainty avoidance dislikes change and novelty, preferring consensus and conservatism (Hofstede, 1980a). Finally, societies with a long-term orientation would value delayed gratification while those with a short-term orientation would value quick results (Hofstede, 2001).

Hofstede's model has been criticized because it provided homogenous descriptions of group cultures and produced predictable (Bhimani, Gosselin, & Ncube, 2005), weak (McSweeney, 2002) and oversimplified conclusions (Signorini, Wiesemes, & Murphy, 2009). Another limitation of Hofstede's taxonomy is that it was designed for the application on large communities and economies (Hofstede, 2001), not individuals. Despite that, many studies have been conducted at the individual level (Kirkman et al., 2006). A later study proved that the theory could be effectively applied at the micro-level in a single nation (Mazanec, Crotts, Gursoy, & Lu, 2015). Given its limitations, Hofstede's model is useful in the present qualitative study as the categories of cultural characteristics provide general indications to identify the Malaysian undergraduates' perspectives on peer assessment. With its roots in anthropology, the theory also helps

us understand the ways people behave and how to measure culture that is complex and multidimensional (Soares, Farhangmehr, & Shoham, 2007).

METHODS

The participants of this study were recruited from a class of 215 undergraduates who had used the peer assessment method when they underwent two courses on event planning and event management in a private university in Malaysia. The courses were offered over two consecutive semesters (about 9 months) from October 2014 to June 2015. The event planning and event management courses were compulsory courses carrying three credits each. For both courses, the peer assessment component was the only component that scored the students' performance as an individual. The remaining assessment components contributed to shared group score. Students were required to work in groups to plan and organize events in campus and off campus within the two semesters. The students divided themselves into five project groups and each had its own leader and working committee. In beginning of the first course, the class was briefed about the methods and criteria of course assessment for both courses. This included the peer assessment method and criteria. Topping (2009) recommended the procedures for executing this method of assessment to involve briefing the students on the process and criteria for grading before asking them to review the work or performance and providing written grades

and feedback using a set of criteria given by teacher that is comparable to that of a teacher assessment.

After the students completed the peer assessment exercise in April 2015, the researchers recruited one of the five project groups comprising 43 students to participate in the study. The students who enrolled in the course were predominantly Chinese. Data were collected from six focus groups comprising a total of 43 second-year Malaysian Chinese students. In the six focus groups, there were nine male and 34 female Malaysian Chinese participants aged between 20 and 21 years.

Focus group discussions were employed because the participants were homogeneous and had similar experience (Patton, 2002) in doing the peer assessment exercise, making the inquiry more focused. Furthermore, group discussions could yield results that are greater than the sum of in-depth interviews with the individuals (Carson, Gilmore, Perry, & Gronhaug, 2001; Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Each focus group was a full focus group comprising between 7 and 10 participants (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). To manage the challenges of soliciting narratives in focus group discussions, the researchers selected facilitators for the focus group discussion from the participants themselves. The participants were familiar to the researchers as one researcher was the lead lecturer for both the courses in which the participants were enrolled, another researcher was the former lead lecturer for the courses so she served as an advisor to the students and the lead lecturer, and the

last researcher was a tutor. The arrangement to have the participant facilitators play a dual role was to encourage a more open discussion as they were familiar with one another. Hence, the facilitators and participants share common awareness and understanding of the context, culture, and issues. Within their familiar circle, participants are able to reveal and share their intimate experiences and perspectives in the discussion.

The researchers had obtained ethical approval from the university to conduct the study. Before the start of the focus group discussion, the participants were briefed about the research and invited to sign the informed consent form. They were informed that their participation was voluntary and that the information revealed would only be used for academic research purposes and their identities would not be revealed. The participants also gave their consent for the discussions to be recorded. The focus group discussions were held at the participants' convenience after their group meeting. Most of them experienced conducting peer assessments for the first time in university when they underwent the event planning and event management courses.

One facilitator was assigned to each group. Each focus group discussion lasted between 45 and 130 min. The researchers had trained the facilitators earlier and provided them with a list of semi-structured questions with probes. The questions were designed to elicit information about their perspectives in the peer assessment exercise without imposing a priori theoretical

constructs. For example, some of the main questions and probes that are descriptive, narrative, evaluative and structural in nature were as follows:

1. In the recent semester, you have experienced doing peer assessments. Tell me your experience.
 - a. What is your opinion about peer assessments?
 - b. What do you think of peer assessments or giving marks to other group members?
 - c. How did you feel when you had to give marks to other members of the group?
2. How did you award marks to your group members?
 - a. How long did you take to decide on what scores to give to your group members?
 - b. What were your considerations to decide on the score for each person?

Data Analysis

The focus group discussions were recorded and then transcribed. All transcripts were assigned pseudonyms and labeled from P01 to P43. Two researchers had coded the data independently (Given, 2008). After that similar ideas were categorized into themes and connections were built to link the themes with the Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Table 1) as the dimensions served as a "provisional perspective" (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Futing Liao,

2004) in the process of data analysis. All the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data fit into Hofstede's cultural framework. No other theme that were distinctly different emerged. A discussion was held among the researchers to decide on the themes to achieve inter-coder reliability (Given, 2008). The raters agreed with about 80% of the themes. Then a few participants were invited back for a follow-up discussion by the researchers to verify the key emergent themes for the group.

Researchers had multiple tasks as they were also the instructors responsible for implementing, executing, and monitoring the peer-evaluation process throughout both semesters. This involvement enabled the researchers to conduct informal observations of the participants' behaviors and experiences in managing their team mates, making decisions, planning their activities, and solving problems within their natural setting. Such involvement enhanced the researchers' understanding of the participants' perspectives within the context. Coincidentally, all three researchers are like the participants, Malaysian ethnic Chinese. As with other qualitative studies,

the researchers also faced the challenge of the "how" in applying reflexivity (Finlay, 2017). The researchers self-reflected and discussed their pre-conceptions, opinions and observations during planning, data collection and data interpretation. This practice of introspection (Finlay, 2002) through self-dialogue and group discussions in each stage made the researchers more self-aware of their own biases and pre-conceptions toward the students' perspectives. The researchers acknowledged the need to focus on the "new object rather than one's interpretation" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 25).

RESULTS

Dimension 1: High Power Distance

Theme 1: Teachers have more Authority over Peers.

Sub-theme 1.1: Teachers are the authorities who are more trustworthy and qualified in awarding scores than peers. Teachers were viewed to be of a higher level of authority compared to peers. Their position of authority is viewed as a more trustworthy and qualified. Given the high power distance,

Table 1
Summary of the research findings: Cultural dimensions, sub-themes and examples

Cultural Dimensions	Themes and Sub-Themes	Quotes and Examples
Dimension 1: High power distance	Theme 1: Teachers have more authority over peers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sub-theme 1.1: Teachers are the authorities who are perceived to be more trustworthy and qualified in awarding scores than peers 	<i>"I think lecturers would also be more objective in giving scores because the factors of friendship would not influence the scores awarded. Therefore, the peer assessment scores and lecturer's scores would not be the same."</i> (P10)

Table 1 (continue)

Cultural Dimensions	Themes and Sub-Themes	Quotes and Examples
Dimension 2: Theme 2: Common good and popular students		
Collectivist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sub-theme 2.1: Increased motivation and sense of responsibility towards the common good Sub-theme 2.2: Popular students who are recognized and respected by teachers and peers get higher scores 	<p><i>"I can see that some members care more about the event. As a whole this is a process, learning process and learning journey. This is because it was actually two semesters, quite long. So, I have learnt how to manage an event. This learning journey and process of learning is very important, can learn quite a lot of things. The peer assessment not so important... we have learnt what we need to learn. How many scores your peers give you is not so important. Not everyone was keen to assess the performance of others. But on the other hand, we cannot remove the peer assessment component. Since the learning process is long, may be peers are in the position to see how each of the member contributed to the success of the campaign." (P33)</i></p> <p><i>"In my experience, those who are popular get higher marks. Maybe because the students who like them would give them higher marks. But those who are not in their group will not give them high marks...depending on how much you favor the person." (P23)</i></p>
Dimension 3: Theme 3: The peer assessment exercise involves emotions and relationships		
Feminist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sub-theme 3.1: Peer assessment is an emotional process Sub-theme 3.2: Prioritizing relationships over performance 	<p><i>"If they give me high marks, I feel happy. If they give me low marks, I would also feel happy because they point out my mistakes." (P02)</i></p> <p><i>"I think most Malaysians give marks based on their relationship with that person. Not many of them will actually give marks fairly. If their best friends do not perform well, they will not give them low marks. If they are their enemies, they won't give them a good mark." (P22)</i></p>
Dimension 4: Theme 4: Strategy to avoid uncertainties		
High Uncertainty Avoidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sub-theme 4.1: Awarding high scores 	<p><i>"If I were unsure how to grade my friend, I will just give him or her benefit of the doubt and write down a high score. It is just safer to give higher scores to others." (P43)</i></p>
Dimension 5: Theme 5: Long-term benefits of peer assessment		
Long-term orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sub-theme 5.1: Peer feedback important for self-improvement 	<p><i>"I accept the feedback given to me by my friends because I want to improve myself. I am also interested to know how my friends perceive me so that I can correct my weaknesses. Their feedback will help me become a better person." (P38)</i></p>
Dimension 6: Theme 6: Withholding negative feedback		
Restraint	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sub-theme 6.1: Prioritizing face-saving 	<p><i>"Even if our peers have weaknesses, I don't think that many people would give negative feedback. They would just keep the negative comments to themselves and only give the positive feedback. Very few people would say it." (P32)</i></p>

the credibility of teachers was perceived to be greater compared to that of their peers in conducting assessments. Although the teacher herself gave the students the authority to award scores, the teacher was still viewed to be in a higher position in the hierarchy.

“The lecturer or the tutors are more knowledgeable and have the authority. We are all students and we are of the same level, and we all know each other....so, I feel that it will be better if the lecturer did the scores.” (P24)

“Most of the students prefer the lecturer and tutor to do the assessment as they are scared their friends may take revenge if they are not happy.” (P04)

As teachers are held in high regard, higher compared to their peers, they are considered to be worthier of the students' trust. Peers are interpreted to be relatively less objective in providing scores as they may be influenced by their personal relationships, unpleasant experiences caused by personal differences or past conflicts. The participants trusted the teacher more than peers. This phenomenon is common in the Malaysian Chinese culture where teachers are viewed as people who educated, accomplished, cultured in the Malaysian society with a moderately high social status in society. This finding is consistent with Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (2010) where cultures in Asian countries have a

higher hierarchical distance compared to those in Germanic and English-speaking Western countries that have a shorter distance. It also explains the students' lack of confidence and preference to have their instructor take charge (Cronje, 2011).

Dimension 2: Collectivist

Theme 2: Common Good and Popular Students.

Sub-theme 2.1: Increased motivation and sense of responsibility towards the common good. The participants perceived that “everyone worked harder” (P03) and “group members really put in effort to complete the project in order not to disappoint their friends” (P21). Group members were reported to be motivated to put in more effort and take more initiatives to contribute positively towards the group project when peer assessment was implemented.

“This is a good system because there are too many people for the teacher to supervise. So, it is fairer if we monitor each other. Peer assessment will also motivate us to perform better and avoid sleeping members in the group.” (P12)

“I feel that I am appreciated as a member to evaluate my peers. I feel that it is a fair way to evaluate group members because they would know what the other members have contributed.” (P14)

The participants' interpretations of their experiences reflected a deep concern

for common good. Members in collectivist cultures display loyalty to one another (Hofstede, 1980b) and take responsibility for other group members (Gudykunst et al., 1996). P14 appreciates her role as an evaluator not only provided them with the responsibility of observing and assessing their peers, but they also showed a heightened sense of self-awareness in their own behavior and contributions toward the group project. The participants could identify with the common good. Behaviors that bring benefit beyond the self reflects a person's open-heartedness and selflessness in the Chinese culture in bringing good to others beyond the self. Furthermore, such behaviors are also respectable.

Sub-theme 2.2: Popular students who are recognized and respected by teachers and peers get higher scores. Popular students are perceived to be recognized and respected by their peers and teachers. Participants perceive that popularity would mean a greater likelihood to gain higher scores from peers. Having a relatively higher status in the social hierarchy among their peers, popular students in the peer groups were perceived to be more likable, credible, capable and respected, thereby awarded popularity scores.

“The popular students will definitely get higher marks because they are more socially adapted and they are more favored by others based on their characteristics and energy such as enthusiasm. They know how to impress people by using flowery words.” (P11)

“For the students who know the lecturer personally, the lecturer can understand them better and would give them higher scores. The lecturer only looks at our work on the surface and do not know what others have done.” (P23)

Popular students have high social acceptance and are subjects of envy among their peers. The participants' interpretations of the culture reflected some degree of unfairness and difficulties if they have opinions that are different from their teacher and most of their peers pertaining to popular students. Students who have closer relationships with teachers are also popular among their peers tend to receive higher scores from their peers although the teacher was not involved in giving the scores in the peer assessment exercise. Thus, this collectivist behavior reflects the culture of the community whereby popular students are commonly respected and regarded by the group.

Dimension 3: Feminist

Theme 3: The Peer Assessment Exercise Involves Emotions and Relationships.

Sub-theme 3.1: Peer assessment is an emotional process. Participants faced internal conflict when they awarded scores to their peers. They displayed a greater concern for their peers' feelings than the objectivity of their scores. The participants attached emotions to the process of peer assessment. Furthermore, the participants' feedback on their peer assessment scores displayed feminist values putting their

peers' feedback and judgments above their own. They also displayed guilt if they did not reciprocate the high scores given by their peers.

"If I get high marks I would be motivated. If I get low marks I will reflect on my commitment and the efforts that I put into the project." (P10)

"I would feel bad and embarrassed if I award someone with a low score, and that person gives me a high score." (P27)

Sub-theme 3.2: Prioritizing relationships over performance. Students were more concerned about their relationship over performance and overall results of the project. They perceived themselves to be responsible for their peers' scores.

"We sometimes give friendly marks to our friends. Even though we know that this person has not contributed as much as the other members did, I would feel bad if because of the score I gave, his or her final grade would be affected." (P10)

Members in the group chose to avoid potential conflicts if they were to explicitly voice or note down their negative feedback. This behavior is in line with their priority to preserve the friendship among peers that would be beneficial in the long-term. However, if their criticisms did not negatively affect their friendship, they would not mind expressing their comments for the benefit of self-improvement in the

future. Peers also tried to neutralize and tolerate uncooperative behaviors. It is a respectful behavior in the culture to be able to tolerate others and avoid conflicts. Such biases in peer assessment were known, expected, and accepted practices. The participant said,

"We must also understand what they are going through and why they are not performing when we give marks. If they do not perform the task but shows a good and helpful attitude, I would give the person high marks. We have to look at this holistically. We have to use our judgment. I would rather not discuss this issue." (P08)

In prioritizing the relationship over performance, criticisms were held back as saving face was a concern. P32 was aware of the common values among the peers in prioritizing relationships by withholding negative feedback. P08 was even reluctant to discuss it in the open as the issues could bring about discomfort among peers in the group. If giving a negative feedback brought embarrassment to the peer thereby risking the damage of their relationship, the participants felt more comfortable leaving it unsaid although this could affect the group's performance.

Dimension 4: High Uncertainty Avoidance

Theme 4: Strategy to Avoiding Uncertainties.

Sub-theme 4.1: Awarding high scores In avoiding uncertainties, two participants said

that they would award high scores to their peers. One participant, P43, said she would award high scores in a situation when she is unsure how to evaluate her peer (see Table 1). P43's remedy to the avoid uncertainties is awarding high scores to her peers, to be on the safe side. Her reaction reflects her fears for potentially wrongly penalizing her peer if she had awarded a low score. Meanwhile, P30 would do the same when her peers do not perform up to par but she was uncertain of the cause. She said,

“Some of my friends do not have a good proficiency in English. So, when they produce the work the result is below average. But this is not their fault. We cannot give them a low score for quality of work just because their English is bad because they do put in the effort. So, I still give them a high mark. It would be unfair to follow the rubrics strictly.” (P30)

In an empathetic tone, P30 expressed her consideration toward the challenges that her peers may face when they worked on the project, such as language barriers. Such action reflects her generosity and kindness as she shows consideration and empathy toward her peers. However, as examination results and grades are perceived to be important indicators of a person's success the Malaysian Chinese culture, so awarding high marks to avoid uncertainties could put the integrity of the scores in question.

Dimension 5: Long-term Orientation

Theme 5: Long-term Benefits of Peer Assessment.

Sub-theme 5.1: Peer feedback important for self-improvement. Participants also valued feedback by their peers. Feedback from peers were said to be useful in helping the students achieve their long-term goal of self-improvement. The feedback from their peers would help them understand themselves better – namely their strengths and weaknesses, and work toward self-improvement.

“When I graduate, I will become a better person if I take the feedback from my group mates to perform better. I received some comments from my friends about my attitude, my work and my punctuality. Some comments were good and some comments were not very good. But I accept them because I want to improve.” (P13)

P13 described her position as being a team member who is open to any feedback from her peers. She interpreted such openness to be supportive and beneficial toward her ambition to becoming better person in the future. Thus, such openness to feedback is interpreted as being important, regardless of the quality or relevance of the feedback, as they contribute toward her achievement of her long-term goals. Her narration of her experience in receiving feedback in the peer evaluation process provided proof of her openness. Feedback was also a form of check and balance for group members as they would then know

if their performance or contributions were “up to par” (P10). Participants were grateful for the feedback from their peers that could contribute to their self-improvement in the long term. These qualities focusing on ambition, self-improvement, and forward planning among students indicate maturity and drive that are desirable qualities among young people in the Malaysian Chinese community.

Dimension 6: Restraint

Theme 6: Withholding Negative Feedback.

Sub-theme 6.1: Prioritizing face-saving.

Participants are empathetic toward their peers as the receiver of their feedback and scores. Participants who give feedback to their peers do so with considerations of saving the face of their peers. One participant practiced restraint in expressing feedback to avoid an embarrassing the peers.

“If we want to give negative feedback to our friends, they would feel embarrassed, and then I would feel uncomfortable giving the feedback. It also depends on the situation, if the person is open-minded, of course I will tell him or her and I would feel comfortable. I am not judging him but I hope we can learn from each other.”
(P10)

This participant perceived that criticisms could potentially spark off conflicts or ill feelings to the recipient. The participant put himself in the shoes of his peer as the recipient of negative feedback. It is thus

perceived that limiting the communication to positive matters would be face-saving. Avoiding the expression of negative feedback was also viewed as an act in support of a mutually cordial relationship with the peer. This behavior reflected tolerance toward others, a valued virtue in the Malaysian Chinese culture. However, the participant’s decision to voice negative feedback depended on his own judgement of his peers’ openness to criticisms. Therefore, he decides on the degree of restraint to apply when giving negative feedback. This also reflects the priority that the student put on the value of the face over his role and responsibilities as a peer evaluator.

DISCUSSION

The present study has achieved its objective in gaining a good understanding of Malaysian Chinese university students’ perspectives on peer assessment in group projects. The study found that the Malaysian Chinese university students’ perspectives in peer assessment fit into Hofstede’s collectivist and feminist dimensions. Their perspectives also displayed high power distance, high uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation.

Malaysian Chinese undergraduates perceive assessments from an authority to be more trustworthy than peer assessments. The peer assessment system is a source of motivation for students to strive toward common good and the learning outcomes over their individual scores. The feminist culture also makes this process one that is related to emotions and relationships.

Positive emotions and relationships are desirable elements in the Malaysian Chinese community. Therefore, avoiding uncertainties, preferring consensus, and practicing conservatism (Hofstede, 1980a) in their dealings have resulted the participants awarding high scores to their peers as a strategy. The strategy, although not adhering closely to the marking rubrics, is used to avoid any uncertainties. The motivations of the Malaysian Chinese students to score high grades do not only stem from the desire to be “successful” individuals, but also in most cases, their need to safeguard the financial support from student loans or scholarships. Such pressure to score good grades is quite common among students in the private university. Thus, their remedy to avoid high uncertainties toward the unknown factors and some degree of distrust toward their peer evaluation structure was to award a higher score to their peers. Meta-analysis reviews by Falchikov and Goldfinch (2000) and Li et al. (2016) on findings in peer assessment reports showed that results from peer reviews had high validity. Meanwhile, Sahin (2008) established the validity and similarity of peer evaluation and teacher evaluation in producing the students’ results in terms of grades and written or verbal feedback. The restraint displayed by participants by avoiding giving negative feedback to their peers, is a face-saving gesture. Practicing restraint to save another person’s face is also important in the Chinese culture because losing face may mean that the person could be embarrassed or lose the respect

from others. Also, the participants showed appreciation for the feedback from their peers that could contribute to their long-term ambition toward self-development and self-improvement. Behaviors that contribute to long-term gains show ambition and maturity, and are encouraged and respectable in the Chinese culture.

CONCLUSION

Results from this study contribute to current debate on using peer assessment as a formal method of assessment by filling in the knowledge gap. The findings highlighted the importance for teachers to be culturally sensitive and responsive to students as these considerations could affect the students’ success in university (Collins, 1999; Kainzbauer & Hunt, 2014). A practical implication of these findings is to enable teachers to apply evidence-based approaches in the planning and management of their assessments among Malaysian Chinese students in institutions of higher learning. Although findings from this study were not intended for generalization, they provided a helpful insight in understanding Malaysian Chinese university students’ perspectives on peer assessment. Therefore, the findings only present the dimensions and sub-themes that emerged from the inquiry to examine the undergraduates’ views on their recent experience in conducting peer assessments. Further research in examining Malaysian Chinese university students’ attitudes and motivations using qualitative inquiries would contribute to existing literature. Future research may

also investigate the cultural perspectives among Malaysian Chinese teachers who implement peer assessments in their courses as these too may affect the students' learning experience in the university.

REFERENCES

- Baker, D. F. (2008). Peer assessment in small groups: A comparison of methods. *Journal of Management Education*, 32(2), 183–209.
- Baptista, G., & Oliveira, T. (2015). Understanding mobile banking: The unified theory of acceptance and use of technology combined with cultural moderators. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 50, 418–430.
- Bhimani, A., Gosselin, M., & Ncube, M. (2005). Strategy and activity based costing: A cross national study of process and outcome contingencies. *International Journal of Accounting, Auditing and Performance Evaluation*, 2, 187–205.
- Bonham, L. A., Cifuentes, L., & Murphy, K. L. (1995). Constructing cultures in distance education. Retrieved on September 19, 2017, from <http://it.coe.uga.edu/itforum/paper4/paper4.htm>.
- Bradbury-Jones, C., Sambrook, S., & Irvine, F. (2009). The phenomenological focus group: An oxymoron? *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 65, 663–671.
- Bryant, D., & Carless, D. (2010). Peer assessment in a test-dominated setting: Empowering, boring or facilitating examination preparation? *Education Research Policy Practice*, 9, 3–15.
- Carson, D., Gilmore, A., Perry, C., & Gronhaug, K. (2001). *Qualitative marketing research*. London, UK: Sage.
- Chen, Y. C., & Tsai, C. C. (2009). An educational research course facilitated by online peer assessment. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 46(1), 105–117.
- Chew, E., Snee, H., & Price, T. (2016). Enhancing international postgraduates' learning experience with online peer assessment and feedback innovation. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 53(3), 247–259.
- Collins, B. (1999). Designing for differences: Cultural issues in the design of WWW-based course-support sites. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 30(3), 201–215.
- Cronje, J. C. (2011). Using Hofstede's cultural dimensions to interpret cross-cultural blended teaching and learning. *Computers & Education*, 56, 596–603.
- Department of Statistics, Malaysia. (2017). *Population & demography*. Retrieved on September 14, 2017, from <http://www.dosm.gov.my/>
- Edgerton, E., & McKechnie, J. (2002). Students' views of group-based work and the issue of peer assessment. *Psychology Learning & Teaching*, 2, 76–81.
- Falchikov, N., & Goldfinch, J. (2000). Student peer assessment in higher education: A meta-analysis comparing peer and teacher marks. *Review of Educational Research*, 70, 287–322.
- Fellenz, M. R. (2006). Toward fairness in assessing student groupwork: A protocol for peer evaluation of individual contributions. *Journal of Management Education*, 30(4), 570–590.
- Finlay, L. (2002). Negotiating the swamp: The opportunity and challenge of reflexivity in research practice. *Qualitative Research*, 2(2), 209–230.
- Finlay, L. (2017). Championing "Reflexivities". *Qualitative Psychology*, 4(2), 120–125.
- Friedman, B. A., Cox, P. L., & Maher, L. E. (2007). An expectancy theory motivation approach to peer

- assessment. *Journal of Management Education*, 32(5), 580–612.
- Given, L. M. (2008). *The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods*. Retrieved October 20, 2016, from <http://methods.sagepub.com/reference/sage-encyc-qualitative-research-methods>
- Greenan, K., Humphreys, P., & McIlveen, H. (1997). Developing transferable personal skills: Part of the graduate toolkit. *Education & Training*, 39(2), 71–78.
- Gudykunst, W.B., Matsumoto, Y., Ting-Toomey, S., Nishida, T., Kim, K., & Heyman, S.A.M. (1996). The influence of cultural individualism–collectivism, self construals, and individual values on communication styles across cultures. *Human Communication Research*, 22(4), 510–543.
- Haaga, D. A. (1993). Peer review of term papers in graduate psychology courses. *Teaching of Psychology*, 20, 28–32.
- Hofstede, G. (1980a). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Hofstede, G. (1980b). Motivation, leadership, and organization: Do American theories apply abroad? *Organizational Dynamics*, 9(1), 42–63.
- Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hofstede, G., Hofstede, J., & Minkov, M. (2010). *Culture and organizations: Software of the mind* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: McGraw Hill.
- Hofstede, G., & Minkov, M. (2010). Long- versus short-term orientation: New perspectives. *Asia Pacific Business Review*, 16(4), 493–504.
- House, R. J., Hanges, P. J., Javidan, M., Dorfman, P. W., & Gupta, V. (Eds.). (2004). *Culture, leadership and organizations: The GLOBE study of 62 Societies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Joy, S., & Kolb, D.A. (2009). Are there cultural differences in learning style? *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 33(1), 69–85.
- Kainzbauer, A., & Hunt, B. (2014). Meeting the challenges of teaching in a different cultural environment – evidence from graduate management schools in Thailand. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 36, 56–68.
- Kirkman, B. L., Lowe, K. B., & Gibson, C. B. (2006). A quarter century of Culture's consequences: A review of empirical research incorporating Hofstede's cultural values framework. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 37(3), 285–320.
- Kotey, B. (2007). Teaching the attributes of venture teamwork in tertiary entrepreneurship programs. *Education & Training*, 49(8/9), 634–655.
- Latukefu, L. (2010). Peer assessment in tertiary level singing: Changing and shaping culture through social interaction. *Research Studies in Music Education*, 32(1), 61–73.
- Lewis-Beck, M. S., Bryman, A., & Futing Liao, T. (2004). *The SAGE encyclopedia of social science research methods*. Retrieved on September 16, 2017, from <http://methods.sagepub.com/reference/the-sage-encyclopedia-of-social-science-research-methods>
- Li, H, Xiong, Y., Zang, X., Kornhanber, M. L, Lyu, Y., Chung, K. S., & Suen, H. K. (2016). Peer assessment in the digital age: A meta-analysis comparing peer and teacher rating. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 41(2), 245–264.

- Lindblom-ylänne, S., Pihlajamäki, H., & Kotkas, T. (2006). Self-, peer- and teacher-assessment of student essays. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 7(1), 51–62.
- Llado, A. P., Soley, L. F., Sansbello, R. M. F., Pujolras, G. A., Planella, J. P., Roura-Pascual, N., Martínez, J. J. S., & Moreno, L. M. (2014). Student perceptions of peer assessment: An interdisciplinary study. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 39(5), 592–610.
- Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation. *Psychological Review*, 98(2), 224–253.
- May, G. L. (2008). The effect of rater training on reducing social style bias in peer evaluation. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 71(3), 297–313.
- Mazanec, J. A., Crotts, J. C., Gursoy, D., & Lu, L. (2015). Homogeneity versus heterogeneity of cultural values: An item-response theoretical approach applying Hofstede's cultural dimensions in a single nation. *Tourism Management*, 48, 299–304.
- McLeay, F., & Wesson, D. (2014). Chinese versus UK marketing students' perceptions of peer feedback and peer assessment. *International Journal of Management Education*, 12, 142–150.
- McSweeney, B. (2002). Hofstede's model of national cultural differences and the consequences: a triumph of faith-a failure of analysis. *Human Relations*, 55, 89–118.
- Montalvão, D., & Baker, T. (2015). Correlating peer and tutor assessment on a low-stakes engineering assignment. *International Journal of Mechanical Engineering Education*, 43(3), 168–179.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Pereira, J., Echeazarra, L., Sanz-Santamaría, S., & Gutiérrez, J. (2014). Student-generated online videos to develop cross-curricular and curricular competencies in nursing studies. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 31, 580–590.
- Reinholz, D. (2016). The assessment cycle: A model for learning through peer assessment. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 41(2), 301–305.
- Roller, M. R., & Lavrakas, P. J. (2015). *Applied qualitative research design: A total quality framework approach*. New York, NY: The Guildford Press.
- Sahin, S. (2008). An application of peer assessment in higher education. *The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*, 7(2), 5–10.
- Schein, E. H. (1985). Organizational culture and leadership: A dynamic view. *Organization Studies*, 7, 199–201.
- Signorini, P., Wiesemes, R., & Murphy, R. (2009). Developing alternative frameworks for exploring intercultural learning: a critique of Hofstede's cultural difference model. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 14(3), 253–264.
- Singh, J. (1990). Managerial culture and work-related values in India. *Organization Studies*, 11, 75–101.
- Smith, J. A., Larkin, M., & Flowers, P. (2009). *Interpretive phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Smith, R. A. (1990). Are peer ratings of student debates valid? *Teaching of Psychology*, 17, 188–189.
- Soares, A. M. Farhangmehr, M., & Shoham, A. (2007). Hofstede's dimensions of culture in international marketing studies. *Journal of Business Research*, 60(3), 277–284.
- Speer, S. (2010). Peer evaluation and its blurred

- boundaries: Results from a meta-evaluation in initial vocational education and training. *Evaluation*, 16(4), 413–430.
- Sung, Y., Lin, C., Lee, C., & Chang, K. (2003). Evaluating proposals for experiments: An application of web-based self-assessment and peer-assessment. *Teaching of Psychology*, 30, 331–334.
- Tinto, V. (1998). Colleges as communities: Taking research on student persistence seriously. *The Review of Higher Education*, 21(2), 167–177.
- Topping, K. (1998). Peer assessment between students in colleges and universities. *Review of Educational Research*, 68(3), 249–276.
- Topping, K. (2009). Peer assessment. *Theory into Practice*, 48(1), 20–27.
- Warwick, P. (2007). Well-meant but misguided: A case study of an English for academic purposes programme developed to support international learners. *International Journal of Management Education*, 6(2), 1–7.
- Williamson, D. (2001). Forward from a critique of Hofstede's model of national culture. *Human Relations*, 55(11), 1373–1395.
- Zundert, M. J., Dominique M. A., Sluijsmans, D. M. A., Könings, K. D., & Merriënboer, J. J. G. (2012). The differential effects of task complexity on domain-specific and peer assessment skills. *Educational Psychology*, 32(1), 127–145.

