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**Cultural Challenges and Opportunities of Transferring
Student-Centered Learning Concepts, Ideas and Practices in
Teacher-Centered Educational Environments**

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Abstract: Student-centered learning (SCL) promises improved learning outcomes and the development of critical 21st-century skills. However, the implementation of SCL in traditionally teacher-centered educational environments presents a unique set of cultural challenges and opportunities. This article explores the complexities of transferring SCL concepts, ideas, and practices into educational systems rooted in teacher-centered paradigms by focusing on the cultural dimensions described by Gert Hofstede. It also highlights the challenges and opportunities offered by the concept of educational transfer. Drawing on unstructured ethnographic observation as a method, we examine the sustainability of educational transfer when faced with cultural barriers that often hinder the adoption of SCL in teacher-centered contexts. The article will conclude with a proposed framework for navigating the cultural challenges and leveraging the opportunities presented by this educational transformation. This framework emphasizes the importance of cultural sensitivity, continuous dialogue, and adaptive implementation strategies. By addressing both the challenges and opportunities inherent in this transition, this article contributes to the ongoing global conversation about effective educational reform and provides practical insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers working towards more student-centered learning environments.

Key words: student-centered learning; teacher-centered education; cultural challenges; educational reform, andragogy.

1. Introduction

Student centered learning is an educational paradigm developed in Western educational contexts. Its transfer into educational environments deeply rooted in teacher-centered approaches and hierarchically constructed social relations raises a number of difficulties, while also presenting opportunities of educational systems' development and intercultural exchange and integration.

The main tenets of student centered learning (SCL) are active participation, peer to peer collaboration, learners' autonomy, committed learning environments and emphasizes the role of students as creators of knowledge, while teachers become facilitators. The main skills SCL develops are critical thinking, problem-solving, individual initiative. When deployed in cultures where respect for authoritative figures, saving face techniques, collective harmony, and compliant learning environments are paramount, the focus on developing such skills raises cultural tensions. Thus, the challenges that arise come not just from the difficulty of institutionalizing and henceforth integrating approaches leading to the development of such skills, but from the balance that needs to be made between educational innovation and cultural preservation (Lohmann, 2022).

Educational transfer is one concept used to discuss the intricate process of transposing educational policies, practices and innovations from one cultural context to another (Steiner-Khamsi, 2024). It consists of several steps, namely the identification of

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transferrable elements, contextual factors such as cultural, economic, political, adaptation strategies, and implementation mechanisms (Phillips & Ochs, 2004). Furthermore, it requires involvements of several key stakeholders like policymakers, leadership, practitioners in order to secure the overcome of possible difficulties and assure that adaptations to the features of particular contexts (Yang & Li, 2023). The concept contributes to highlighting not only the role of classroom environment, but also the part played by social expectations, institutional framework and deeply held values in discussing features of learning and knowledge transmission (Kersch, 2019). The telltale signs of possible difficulties in educational transfer are the roles assumed by the teacher and the students in the learning process. The more authoritative the figure of the teacher and the more passive learning required from students, the more difficult becomes the transition towards facilitator's role on behalf of instructors and independent thinking on behalf of students.

However, challenges can become opportunities for educational transformation and cultural exchange. Therefore, understanding the dynamics of culture is crucial for educational leaders, policymakers and practitioners focused on enhancing teaching and learning practices across cultural boundaries.

2. Gert Hofstede's cultural dimensions and their relationship with student centered learning

Hofstede's six cultural dimensions theory allows for a better understanding of how cultural values impact behavior in various groups and societies.

Power distance refers to how people perceive inequality and hierarchical relations. High power distance cultures revere authority figures, are ready to accept inequality generated by hierarchical order and centralized power structures. Hence, communication across levels is formalized and subordinates expect to be told what to do. On the other hand, in low power distance cultures, figures of authority are accessible, people are on equal footing and hold equal rights. As a result of that, power structures are decentralized, subordinates have expectations to be consulted and communication is informal.

Individualism versus Collectivism focuses on how people value individual or group interests. In high individualistic cultures, individual achievement is valued, personal independence matters, and task achievement trumps relationships. Furthermore, personal opinions are expressed and that is related to the adoption of direct communication. However, in high collectivistic cultures, relationships prevail over tasks and hence group harmony is a priority. In such cultures, the family bonds are extended, interdependence among individuals is of utmost importance and that is related to the importance of group consensus over individual opinion. An indirect communication style is also an important feature of such groups.

Masculinity versus Femininity focuses on how gender roles and features are perceived and treated in different cultures. In societies characterized by high masculinity, gender roles are clearly differentiated, work is more important than family, material success is a sign of achievement and the latter comes hand in hand with competition. The people in positions of power are revered and conflicts are solved by force. On the other hand, in high femininity cultures, cooperation, work-life balance, well-being are emphasized and negotiation is the way to solve conflicts.

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Uncertainty Avoidance refers to the attitude towards ambiguity and uncertainty. In high uncertainty avoidance cultures, risk tolerance is low and therefore formal rules and regulations are perceived as necessary by people. In such cultures, the need for structure and order, for consensus based decision-making makes innovation difficult. By comparison, in Low Uncertainty Avoidance societies, rules are designed and used only on a need basis, while innovation and flexibility are encouraged. Ambiguity does not represent a threat, and tolerance towards various opinions matters.

Long-term versus Short-term Orientation focuses on the difference in societal outlook: past traditions versus future adaptation. High Long-Term Orientation Cultures value persistence towards achieving future gains. Hence, traditions are adapted and problems are approached in a pragmatic manner. Last but not the least, long-term relationships are forged and valued. Nonetheless, High Short-Term Orientation cultures focus on immediate results and expect quick gains. Current needs matter more than future plans and from such a perspective traditions are important. Furthermore, absolute truth is valued.

Last but not the least, the Indulgence versus Restraint differentiation in cultural values analyzes the way gratification of natural human desires is approached in various societies. In High Indulgence cultures, attitudes like freedom of expression, optimism, extraversion, having fun are valued, while in High Restraint cultures strict social norms regulate individual behavior, and pessimism and introversion are prevalent.

A visual overview of the six dimensions discussed above is presented in Fig. 1 below.



Fig.1. Gert Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Source: <https://online.visual-paradigm.com/infoart/templates/strategic-analysis/purple-background-hofstedes-cultural-dimensions-theory-strategic-analysis>)

Even though the high-low approach is simplistic and leaves a lot of intermediate values and associated nuances outside the current discussion, we deem it necessary in terms of its importance for capturing the essence of cultural values. Based on the briefly overviewed cultural differences provided by Hofstede's framework, we will expand the analysis by looking at the impact of those values onto the teachers' and students' propensity towards integrating student centered approaches into their day to day practices. Additionally, we will also enrich the discussion by highlighting how adult learning principles can be enacted or hindered by specific cultural values. We add this element because one major aspect of educational transfer relies, in our opinion, on the success of train the trainers programs aimed enculturating adult teachers into the best practices of SCL.

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2.1 Power Distance dimension and SCL

The teacher-student relationship is very structured in high power distance cultures. Therefore, teachers find it difficult to assume the role of facilitators and allow their students to ask questions outside the thinking box of a given lesson. That is often perceived as a loss of control, authority and even face in front of students. On the other hand, students may be reluctant to assume more active roles. Therefore, some of the SCL approaches that may be difficult to transfer in such cultures are related to self-directed learning. Thus, student-led discussions, self-assessment and peer assessment, negotiated goal setting for one's own learning, feedback to teachers on teaching methods or course content may generate discomfort and reluctance.

COUNTRY	POWER DISTANCE
Africa West	77
Albania	#NULL!
Arab countries	80
Armenia	#NULL!
Azerbaijan	#NULL!
Colombia	67
Georgia	#NULL!
Iraq	#NULL!
Kyrgyz Rep	#NULL!
Morocco	70
Romania	90
Russia	93

Dimension maps: Power Distance

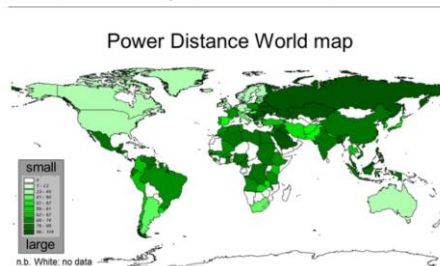


Fig.2. Power distance dimension- a selected country outlook (Source: <https://geerthofstede.com/culture-geert-hofstede-gert-jan-hofstede/6d-model-of-national-culture>)

Concerning adult learning, one important value is that of self-direction. However, as already made evident by the discussion above, in high power distance cultures, adult learners may find it difficult to apply it given their deeply rooted respect for the teacher as the authoritative figure in the learning process. Furthermore, the more experienced adult learners are, the more likely that they resist peer learning. What is more, it is more often that not for such cultures to accommodate the role of younger instructors as leaders or teachers for older learners.

Last but not the least, cultural expectations as to whose experience counts more in terms of age, status, gender, etc, may limit participation and group work in such cultures.

Related to the adult learning tenet of internal motivation, the concept may vary in terms of interpretation in relation to cultural values. Thus, age-appropriate learning assumptions may impact motivation to learn.

Professional identity and the very status of being an adult may come into conflict with what are perceived as roles and responsibilities of students. Thus, in high power distance cultures, some adults may resist resuming the role of students.

2.2 Individualism vs. Collectivism dimension and SCL

Since collectivistic cultures cherish group harmony and consensus, SCL approaches that push for individual growth and expression may not always be perceived favorably. For example, personal learning contracts or individual development plans may come into conflict with the need to secure group consensus and harmony. The influence of group

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affiliation over individual achievement can also impact the success on transferring best practices in project based-learning, assessment based on portfolios or constituting a personalized learning pace.

A	B
COUNTRY	INDIVIDUALISM/COLLECTIVISM
Africa West	20
Albania	#NULL!
Arab countries	38
Armenia	#NULL!
Azerbaijan	#NULL!
Colombia	13
Georgia	#NULL!
Iraq	#NULL!
Kyrgyz Rep	#NULL!
Morocco	46
Romania	30
Russia	39

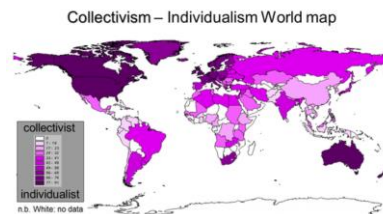


Fig.3. Individualism vs. Collectivism dimension - a selected country outlook (Source: <https://geerthofstede.com/culture-geert-hofstede-gert-jan-hofstede/6d-model-of-national-culture>)

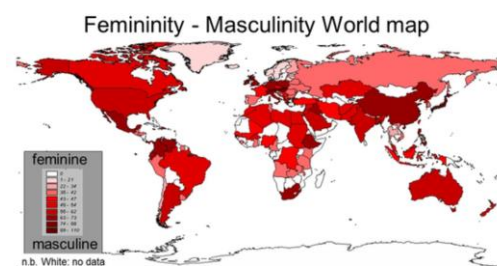
The adults' experience and its role in the learning process is one important principle. However, collectivistic cultures may not leave room for individual expression since that may be associated with boasting and breaking group harmony.

Another principle in adult learning is that adults are internally motivated. However, in collectivistic cultures, group/family expectations may be more important than individual aspirations.

2.3. Masculinity versus femininity dimension

Highly masculine countries prefer competition over collaboration and therefore cooperative learning strategies like speed quizzes, puzzle pieces, jigsaw method may not always generate envisaged results. Furthermore, reflective learning practices such as the reflective learning journal may be perceived as a way of losing face, since self-reflection and emotional awareness come into conflict with given cultural gender roles and structures. Furthermore, peer support systems which require an inclusive based approach and is based on techniques like mentoring, coaching, peer teaching may be seen as bringing less value than individual achievement. Also, the application of process-oriented assessment by teachers such as interviews, observations, checklists, rating scales that focus on effort and progress may come into conflict with achievement oriented values of learners, as well as of the teachers or institutions who are in the position to implement SCL.

COUNTRY	MASCULINE/FEMININE
Africa West	46
Albania	#NULL!
Arab countries	53
Armenia	#NULL!
Azerbaijan	#NULL!
Colombia	64
Georgia	#NULL!
Iraq	#NULL!
Kyrgyz Rep	#NULL!
Morocco	53
Romania	42
Russia	36



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Fig.4. Masculinity versus femininity dimension - a selected country outlook (Source: <https://geerthofstede.com/culture-geert-hofstede-gert-jan-hofstede/6d-model-of-national-culture>)

In masculine cultures status considerations can make collaborative learning challenging, especially when diversity needs to be assured within a learning environment.

2.4. Uncertainty Avoidance dimension

High uncertainty avoidance cultures are very shy of using experiential learning or open ended activities since they are more inclined to favor predictable learning environments. Therefore, when faced with the possibility of facing multiple solutions provided by problem-based learning requirements or by flexible learning environments, students from such cultures demonstrate their preference for “by the book answers” or what is also called “school solution”, as well as fixed schedules and clear rules. Last but not the least, the need for standardized approaches becomes evident when students are asked to design their own assessment tools and employ them with their peers.

COUNTRY	UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE
Africa West	54
Albania	#NULL!
Arab countries	68
Armenia	#NULL!
Azerbaijan	#NULL!
Colombia	80
Georgia	#NULL!
Iraq	#NULL!
Kyrgyz Rep	#NULL!
Morocco	68
Romania	90
Russia	95

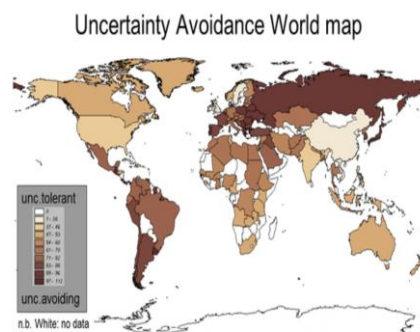


Fig.5. Uncertainty Avoidance dimension - a selected country outlook (Source: <https://geerthofstede.com/culture-geert-hofstede-gert-jan-hofstede/6d-model-of-national-culture>)

The high uncertainty cultures may value theoretical knowledge more than personal experience. Therefore, applying the adult learning experience principle may be challenging.

2.5. Long-Term vs Short-Term Orientation dimension

SCL methods and techniques that focus on gradual skill development, iterative learning processes like in the form of trial and error approaches clash more often than not with the preference of short-term oriented cultures for quick results, immediate learning. Thus, such cultures may feel discomfort with sustained effort, focusing on learning how to learn (i.e. meta-cognitive strategies), revision and improvement.

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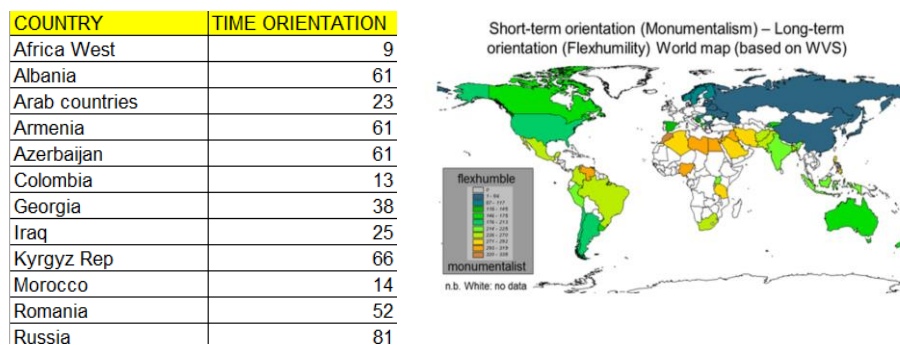


Fig.6. Long-Term vs Short-Term Orientation dimension- a selected country outlook (Source: <https://geerthofstede.com/culture-geert-hofstede-gert-jan-hofstede/6d-model-of-national-culture>)

One important characteristic of adults is that they aim for the practical application of the learning output. However, in short term oriented cultures what represents “practical” may differ from a Western based approach to that. Also, the practical focus may come into conflict with the value that long-term oriented cultures place on theoretical models.

2.6. Indulgence vs Restraint dimension

In restraint-oriented cultures, SCL concepts like play-based learning, experiential learning, student-designed activities may not necessarily be seen as less valuable compared to formal, structured learning experiences. Therefore, with those cultures’ focus on discipline and abidance by rules, creativity and innovation are not encouraged.

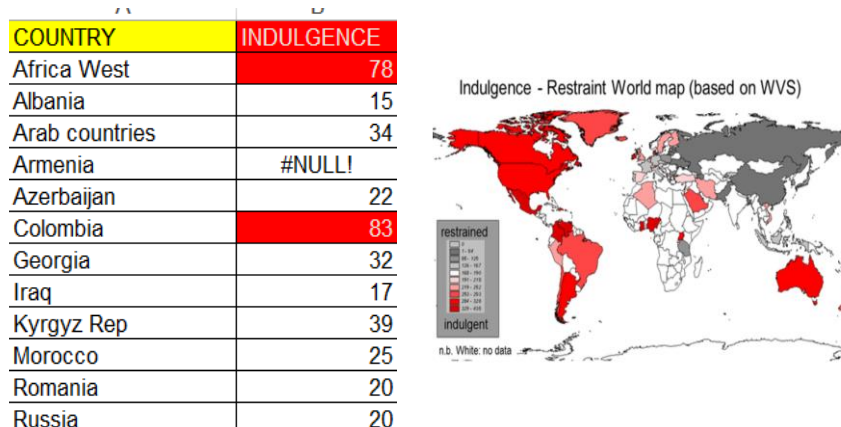


Fig.7. Indulgence vs Restraint dimension - a selected country outlook (Source: <https://geerthofstede.com/culture-geert-hofstede-gert-jan-hofstede/6d-model-of-national-culture>)

3. Opportunities for SCL transfer based on Hofstede’s cultural dimensions

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The opportunities raised by the accurate reading and understanding of cultural values are related both to the practitioner's adequate implementation of SCL approaches, and to long-term institutional integration.

3.1. Practitioners' outlook

In terms of practitioners' approach to employing SCL methods and techniques, several areas require attention especially in adult learning environments, namely: professional identity of learners, age-status interplay, balance between theory and practice, motivation, and learning environment.

Thus, acknowledging and welcoming professional expertise while introducing SCL approaches, creating room for expertise sharing and also showing respect for cultural norms, and not in the least striking a balance between recognition of individual achievement and group harmony are means by which acknowledging and capitalizing on adult learners' professional identity makes it possible to override cultural challenges.

Employing age-appropriate instructional approaches, considering age and status related learning expectations, and addressing power dynamics by demonstrating cultural sensitivity when designing group and team work are important drivers of SCL acceptance.

In order to strike a balance between the amount of theory and practice, it is important to gain knowledge about what kind of knowledge a given group values most. Additionally, understanding cultural timeframes is also important in order to set realistic expectations about learning outcomes.

Individual and group motivation are important drivers of learning. Therefore, accepting and working with different cultural views on what constitutes appropriate adult learning goals is essential. Also, applying the cultural lenses on career progression that is culturally driven provides for more realism in the selection of specific SCL methods.

Last but not the least, the design of culturally appropriate collaborative spaces is also conducive to the gradual acceptance of SCL approaches. In this case, it is a matter of balancing structure and flexibility, for example, when it comes to accommodating various uncertainty avoidance levels, or considering cultural norms shaping professional learning environments.

3.2. Institutionalization and possible internalization measures

One key challenge in SCL adoption is its internalization. Therefore, a scaffolded approach is needed and that can be structured based on some possible steps provided below.

1. Institutional Integration

- creating policies that support SCL while accommodating specific cultural features;
- creating governance structures anchored into local cultural norms and values while also promoting SCL approaches;
- employing or developing institutional quality assurance systems that make use of SCL approaches;
- consolidating existing educational structures via integration on a need-based approach of SCL principles, rather than creating parallel separate initiatives.

2. Capacity Building

- relying on local SCL champions who understand both the methodology and cultural features;

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- cascading training so that experienced practitioners train/mentor newcomers in the form of train-the-trainer programs reflecting cultural norms and values;
3. Resource Development
 - developing bilingual resources;
 - establishing resource-sharing networks among similar educational institutions;
 - building resource repositories that consider local technological features and cultural preferences.
 4. Cultural adaptation
 - using SCL approaches that align with local educational traditions;
 - including culturally relevant examples and case studies;
 - showing respect for local knowledge and learning approaches;
 - accommodating hybrid approaches that accommodate traditional and SCL approaches;
 5. Stakeholder Engagement
 - involving relevant leaders in SCL focused program design and implementation;
 - designing feedback that is observant of cultural communication norms;
 - maintaining regular dialogue with all stakeholders about SCL adoption;
 6. Quality Assurance
 - design and develop culturally appropriate evaluation methods;
 - collecting data by observing local hierarchical structures;
 - building continuous improvement processes that align with cultural values;

4. Conclusions

The transfer of student-centered learning practices to teacher-centered educational environments represents a complex endeavor. It requires a careful balance of cultural knowledge, institutional approaches and pedagogical wisdom. An adult learning lens allows for glimpsing the need for several types of changes. First, educators themselves need to begin perceiving their roles and responsibilities in the educational process as facilitators and not just authority figures. That takes role modelling and time for transformation depending on specific cultural variables. Second, structural changes are required, but they can only become meaningful and value adding provided that local cultural features are properly integrated.

Opportunities for educational transfer of SCL in teacher-centered learning environments depend on the wisdom to balance innovation with tradition, individual achievement with group affiliation, institutional requirements with practitioner's autonomy. While challenging to achieve, it represents the key to social growth and development.

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