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# Exploring Classroom Practices in Collectivist Cultures Through the Lens of Hofstede's Model

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### Abstract

This study explores beliefs and classroom practices of teachers from collectivist nations through the lens of Hofstede's cultural dimensions. In this grounded theory study, an in-depth investigation of the ways in which six teachers from five different collectivist countries described their beliefs and classroom practices was carried out. Through the constant comparative method, the two authors grouped the findings into categories of beliefs and practices which were then examined through the lens of the six dimensions of Hofstede's model of cultural difference. Six categories of classroom practices, Pedagogy, Interaction, Student Role, Teacher Support, Differential Assessment, and Behavioral Management and three major beliefs, Importance of Teacher-Student Relatedness, Teaching: a Social Responsibility, and Learning for Life Skills emerged from the findings. The comparison revealed a multi-dimensional structure of teachers' practices with strong evidence of both traditional and constructivist practices. Our findings indicate that collectivist teachers will embrace individualistic practices of teaching which are congruent with their own cultural beliefs. Thus, the findings will add to the literature on cultural beliefs that affect teaching and learning. The findings will have implications for teachers, researchers, and policy makers in refining their perception of collectivist teachers.

### Keywords

Grounded Theory, Hofstede, Eastern Culture, Collectivist Culture, Collectivist Teachers, Classroom Practices, Teacher's Beliefs, Teacher's Practices

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## Exploring Classroom Practices in Collectivist Cultures Through the Lens of Hofstede's Model

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*This study explores beliefs and classroom practices of teachers from collectivist nations through the lens of Hofstede's cultural dimensions. In this grounded theory study, an in-depth investigation of the ways in which six teachers from five different collectivist countries described their beliefs and classroom practices was carried out. Through the constant comparative method, the two authors grouped the findings into categories of beliefs and practices which were then examined through the lens of the six dimensions of Hofstede's model of cultural difference. Six categories of classroom practices, Pedagogy, Interaction, Student Role, Teacher Support, Differential Assessment, and Behavioral Management and three major beliefs, Importance of Teacher-Student Relatedness, Teaching: a Social Responsibility, and Learning for Life Skills emerged from the findings. The comparison revealed a multi-dimensional structure of teachers' practices with strong evidence of both traditional and constructivist practices. Our findings indicate that collectivist teachers will embrace individualistic practices of teaching which are congruent with their own cultural beliefs. Thus, the findings will add to the literature on cultural beliefs that affect teaching and learning. The findings will have implications for teachers, researchers, and policy makers in refining their perception of collectivist teachers. Keywords: Grounded Theory, Hofstede, Eastern Culture, Collectivist Culture, Collectivist Teachers, Classroom Practices, Teacher's Beliefs, Teacher's Practices*

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Beliefs have been considered to have played the most valuable role in teacher education (Pintrich, 1990). Teachers' beliefs are significantly influenced and shaped by their past experiences, social and cultural values and interactions. Teachers' beliefs also play a significant role in deciding upon the choice of content and modes of delivery. Just as students' learning styles differ on the basis of their cultural orientations, teachers' classroom practices may also differ on the basis of their cultural orientation.

There have been numerous studies conducted on the various dimensions of the nature of teachers' beliefs based upon their cultural orientation (Chan, Tan, & Khoo, 2007; Hermans, VanBraak, & Van Keer, 2008). It has been claimed that teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning are heavily influenced by their own collectivistic or individualistic cultural orientation, as proposed by Hofstede's model of cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1980, 2001). However, with the international boundaries shrinking and the rapid expansion of information technology, it is possible that teaching practices of Eastern teachers, who very often are labelled as traditional, are gradually transforming (Ryan & Louie, 2007). The educational reforms in Asian countries are emphasizing modern teaching and learning innovations which are mostly developed in the West. Almost all school reforms have, to a great extent, ignored the forces that actually affect the teaching practices, namely cultures, beliefs, and norms, and have focused on external factors like modern teaching and learning innovations (Deal & Peterson, 2009). As a result, there is a disjuncture between these innovations and their implementation in Asian countries which are primarily collectivist in nature. Studies conducted in several countries in Asia strongly point towards the fact that teachers' own beliefs are not in accord

with these innovations, hence there is an incongruence in their classroom practices (Goh, Zhang, Ng, & Goh, 2005; Orafi & Borg, 2009; Underwood, 2012).

In a collectivist culture, the teachers' role is to transfer knowledge in a clear, structured, and direct way, whereas in an individualist culture, the teacher expects students to be active participants in knowledge acquisition through discussions and inquiry (Staub & Stern, 2002). However, lately there has been a plethora of studies that dispute the claims that collectivist students are passive learners and that collectivist teachers primarily use transmission teaching practices (Cheng, 2000; Littlewood, 2001; Xiao, 2005). For example, in a large scale study carried out in eight Asian and three European countries, Littlewood (2001) found that irrespective of nationality, a majority of students objected to the traditional transmission learning. These students wanted activities in which they were involved in achieving a common goal. Due to inadequate training, teachers overlook differences in behavior and attitudes of students and follow transmission style practices (Gayle-Evans & Michael, 2006). Thus the stereotype has been created based upon half-baked, limited interaction, or no understanding of collectivistic cultures (Sleeter, 2001). The recent success of education systems in China, Singapore, Hong Kong, and a few other Asian countries has renewed an interest among researchers in the teaching practices of these countries. The emphasis of educational reforms in all these countries was the adoption of more child-centered (Western, individualistic) teaching practices. However, there is a scarcity of studies that explore the use of modern innovations in teaching practices by collectivist teachers, the extent of its use, and how these practices have been amalgamated without compromising their deep-rooted, collective cultural beliefs. Such studies would be beneficial for researchers who are interested in cross-cultural studies in the field of education and policymakers who would want to advocate inclusion of best methods of teaching from the individualistic nations. Hence, this study was conducted with the following three objectives in mind:

1. Identifying the current classroom practices of teachers from collectivist countries.
2. Identifying the beliefs that guide these practices.
3. Analyzing these practices using the lens of Hofstede's model of cultural difference.

## **Research Questions**

The study was conducted to specifically answer the following questions:

1. What are the current classroom practices of teachers from collectivist nations?
2. What are the beliefs that guide these classroom practices?
3. How are these practices aligned with their cultural orientation as compared with Hofstede's model of cultural difference?

## **Literature Review**

### **Culture Matters**

Phillips (2003) defines culture as shared practices and values between the people of a group. However, these shared practices and values are dynamic in nature and constantly changing (Kramsch, 1998; Kumaravadivelu, 2008). Teaching practices are considered to be culturally bound. Teachers bring their cultural experiences and histories to the classroom in the

form of their beliefs (Haberman & Post, 1998). A substantial body of research suggests that teachers' beliefs and values about teaching and learning that are shaped by their culture and experiences affect their teaching practices (Fang, 1996; Kagan, 1992; Thompson, 1992). Teaching is considered metacognitive (Lin, Schwartz & Hatano, 2005) where a teacher is actively constructing teaching strategies on the basis of his/her belief that are driven from social and cultural interaction, traditions, values, experiences and professional development, and scholarly literature (Gergen, 1995, Pajares, 1992). Teachers' epistemological beliefs about learning and how people learn influence the style of teaching they adopt (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997).

### **Cultural Paradigms and Teaching Styles**

Teachers use one of the two types of teaching strategies: teacher-centered or student-centered (Prosser & Trigwell, 1998). A teacher in an individualistic culture mainly relies on individualistic approaches such as encouraging students to become independent thinkers focusing on individual needs, showing speech prominence, expressing their opinion freely and being assertive (Faitar, 2006). Teachers in individualistic cultures use open criticism of student work as a strategy for further improvement. Individualistic teaching environments are mainly student-centric environments; teachers are more likely to facilitate the transfer of knowledge by trying to bring about conceptual change in students' understanding of the world.

A teacher from a collectivist culture is most likely to use transmissive, teacher-centered teaching practices (Staub & Stern, 2002). A collectivist individual likes to be identified as a part of the group rather than standing out as an individual. Such an individual places more importance on the views, needs, and preferences of the group over his/her own. Asian countries, especially in the south and east of Asia are thought to be collectivist in nature and the teaching practices of collectivist teachers are assumed to be teacher-centric and transmissive in nature, grounded in their cultural belief that knowledge is always transferred from an expert (teacher) to a learner (student; Hofstede, 1980, 2001).

In a cross cultural investigation on the use of teaching styles in physical education, Cothran et al. (2005) reported that teachers from individualist cultures such as England, Australia, and Canada relied more on a production style of teaching as compared to teachers from Korea. On the other hand, teachers from Korea, a country where conformity and group needs are given priority, relied more on a command style of teaching. Production style encourages independent thinking and varied solutions are accepted whereas in command style a teacher guides students at every step and students follow the teacher as a model. In general education, teaching styles differ between cultures. Stigler, Gonzales, Kawanaka, Knoll, and Serrano (1999) reported teachers in the US and Germany frequently made use of manipulatives that encouraged students to work creatively and independently. According to Papert (1980) manipulatives are "objects to think with" which enables students to work independently and makes leaning fun in their classrooms (Moch, 2001). On the other hand, in Japanese classrooms, teachers focused more on group and seat work. In terms of talking and instruction during the class, Japanese teachers spent more time talking compared with the US and German teachers.

### **Hofstede's Model of Cultural Dimensions**

Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory was among the first theories to explain observed cultural differences between two cultures and measure it. After being modified and refined a few times over the past 3 decades, currently the theory consists of five distinct dimensions, each of which is briefly explained below.

**1. Power distance (PD).** This dimension explains the inequality of power distribution among individuals in society. In collectivist cultures, it is understood that a teacher assumes a power position and students are required to treat teachers with respect. The teacher relies mainly on a transmission mode of transferring knowledge. Students are dependent on the teacher and therefore questioning teachers' wisdom or debating with the teacher is not appreciated. Class discussions are mainly in the form of clarification, not debate (Keith, 2012; Signorini, Wiesemes, & Murphy, 2009).

**2. Individualism-collectivism (IC).** This dimension refers to the power of a group or society over an individual. In individualistic cultures, people are more autonomous and their behavior focuses on their personal goals and choices. However, in collectivist societies, group interest dominates individual interests. In collectivist cultures, the primary purpose of learning is to do things and use knowledge for the benefit of the community or earning livelihood, whereas individualists are more likely to focus on learning for personal development, self-satisfaction, and enhancement of self-esteem (Berger, 2011).

**3. Masculinity-femininity (MA).** In this dimension, Hofstede divides cultures on the prevalence of gender roles. Western cultures display more masculine traits of assertiveness, competition, and material success, whereas Eastern feminine traits display quality of life, interpersonal relationships, and concern for the weak. These dimensions affect teacher roles in relation to classroom management and student support. Unlike the masculine culture teachers, a feminine culture teacher will praise and support weak students and is not likely to create open competition conditions in the classroom or show failure as a calamity (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Signorini et al., 2009)

**4. Uncertainty avoidance (UA).** This dimension refers to an individual's perception and capability to handle uncertain, unstructured, and unknown situations. Collectivist teachers who are UA prefer structured classroom teaching and assessments. Students consider them experts and thus avoid any confrontation with them. Controversial topics are avoided at all costs to maintain order in the classroom (Manikutty, Anuradha, & Hansen, 2007; Prowse & Goddard, 2010)

**5. Long-term orientation (LTO) and short-term orientation (STO) dimension.** LTO represents virtues oriented towards future rewards, while STO traditions are oriented toward avoiding embarrassing situations and satisfying the needs of the society (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005). LTO teachers, particularly those in higher education, reward students for motivational purposes while STO give rewards just for making students happy (Signorini et al., 2009).

## Evolution of Cultures and Teaching Practices

Hofstede (1980) describes culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another" (p. 25). The culture of a nation is dynamic which constantly gets influenced by elements of other cultures through human interaction, migration, or political interferences. The cultural convergence theory (Axelrod, 1997; Barnett & Kincaid, 1983) posits that national cultures are basically subsystems of a much bigger global system and constantly exchange ideas from other cultures. Rapid globalization has enhanced such exchanges and thus a state of equilibrium of cultural practices is being maintained through the convergence of cultures. Contrary to Hofstede's assumption of culture as relatively static, Spencer-Oatey (2005) emphasizes a systemic notion of culture by stating that "the introduction of a single technological innovation may set off related changes. In other words, culture changes beget other cultural changes" (p. 13).

Our social process and interaction with the ever changing physical and biological environment is contributing towards the evolution of our cultures, thereby affecting

individuals' knowledge, beliefs, and actions (Baum, Richerson, Efferson, & Paciotti, 2004). In line with the social and economic changes, educational systems across nations have undergone transformation through reforms. Eastern nations curriculum reform in China (2001), education reforms in Thailand mandated by the National Education Act (NEA) in 1999 and National Education Blue print (2013) in Malaysia can be given as examples. The common element in most reforms is focused on transforming curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices towards child centered and inquiry based methods. The required changes in teaching and learning of reforms are generally transmitted to teachers through professional development practices which include reading of scholarly literature, attending training for skills and content, interaction with experts, teacher observation, and exposure to multimedia technology for modeling and knowledge. However, it is observed that teachers respond partially to such interventions. They adopt new recommendations if they find them matching and aligned with their personal context and beliefs (Burkhardt, Fraser, & Ridgeway, 1990). Kurihara and Samimy (2007) studied teaching practices of Japanese English language teachers after they attended a teaching training program in the United States. The results of the training were positive; however, teachers reported not being able to apply newly acquired knowledge fully owing to different social and cross cultural contexts in their own country.

### **The Role of Researchers**

The lead author, Amrita is an Indian national who worked for more than a decade in Thailand in K-12 education and is presently working as a senior lecturer in a large public university in Malaysia. She holds a PhD in educational psychology. As a lead researcher she was involved in conducting interviews, creating transcripts, analyzing data, and then writing the report. The second author, Noman is also an Indian national, who has worked as a school principal for 13 years in Thailand and is currently working as a senior lecturer in the same university as the lead author. He is also pursuing his PhD in educational leadership. He was responsible for analyzing the data through the constant comparative method, conducting the literature review, and then writing the report. Both the researchers have been in the field of K-12 education for more than a decade and have witnessed, firsthand, how teachers in the three countries they have worked in, selectively incorporate practices of individualistic countries. Both the authors come from India, a typical collective society and have worked in international schools in two different collectivist countries in which teachers were predominantly from Western (individualistic) societies. They have experienced, first hand, how teachers from the individualistic West as well as from the collectivist East are influenced by each other over a period of time and which is reflected in their modified teaching practices. This study is the result of their quest for a common ground in teaching practices that are modern and at the same time relevant to the needs of students and in accordance with what the teachers believe, irrespective of whether such practices emanate from the individualistic West or collectivist East.

### **Ethical Issues**

The participants in this were working adults who volunteered to be a part of this study. The participants were assured anonymity and were free to pull out of data collection process at any point of time. The participants were working adults and they volunteered to be a part of the study on the condition of anonymity. Institutional permission was obtained for the study.

## Research Method

A grounded theory design was employed to carry out this research. It enabled the researchers to gain rich descriptions of teachers' beliefs and practices. The terms constructivism and social constructionism are often used interchangeably and Charmaz uses constructivism as a generic term for both (Charmaz, 2000, 2006). While constructivism focuses on individuals, constructionism has a social focus (Young & Colin, 2004). For this study, the social constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2000, 2006) was used for data analysis and theory generation through which the researchers attempted to learn how the belief of teachers becomes the cornerstone of their practices. Social constructivism is associated with the post-modern era in qualitative research and is essentially an anti-realist, relativist stance (Schwandt, 2003; Young & Colin, 2004). There is a tremendous influence of social constructivism within grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000). With constructivist grounded theory, a shared reality is interpreted or discovered by the researcher and "reality arises from the interactive process and its temporal, cultural, and structural contexts" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 523). From a research perspective, the researcher perceives the idea of a shared reality through the interviews with the participants (Charmaz, 2000). From a constructivist approach, the researcher is able to understand the underlying social process within the context of his/her research (Charmaz, 2006). The rationale for choosing a social constructionist approach was grounded in the original argument of this study wherein we claim that teachers, irrespective of their orientation, willingly accept each other's ideas through social interactions or other means, but will adapt them based upon their own construction of meaning through their own cultural beliefs.

We have also taken inspiration from the Cultural Convergence theory of Kincaid (Barnett & Kincaid, 1983). In light of the cultural convergence theory, we argue that due to increased interaction between teachers of collectivist nations and the teachers from the West and the easy and abundant availability of literature on the modern teaching methods, there is an amalgamation of Western ideas of teaching and learning with the teachers of collectivist nations. The basic tenet of the theory is that culture is dynamic in nature and evolves through influential interactions between different cultures over a period of time, which is a belief deeply rooted in the theory of cultural convergence (Axelrod, 1997; Barnett & Kincaid, 1983).

## Participants

Ten in-service secondary school teachers who were enrolled in a Masters of Education program at a public university in the Northern state of Malaysia were invited to participate in the study out of which six accepted the invitation. The participants were selected on the basis of purposive and convenience sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) and were invited to volunteer for the study through emails. The countries represented by the participants are geographically situated in the Eastern part of the world and share collectivist values as stated in cross cultural studies between nations (Keith, 2012). The ranking of these countries on the IC-Individualism scale of 1-120 is India with 48, Iraq with 38, Malaysia with 26 and China with 20 (The Hofstede Centre, 2014). The individual characteristics of participating teachers are shown in the Table 1.

**Table 1.** Characteristics of teachers in the study

| Name     | Gender | Age | Country  | Years Teaching experience | Subject        |
|----------|--------|-----|----------|---------------------------|----------------|
| Mohammad | Male   | 27  | Malaysia | 5                         | Accounts       |
| Norah    | Female | 25  | Malaysia | 3                         | Social studies |



|               |        |    |       |   |               |
|---------------|--------|----|-------|---|---------------|
| Letchumi      | Female | 28 | India | 5 | English Lang. |
| Wang (Vivian) | Female | 28 | China | 6 | English Lang. |
| Yuan          | Female | 27 | China | 6 | English Lang. |
| Sheen         | Female | 30 | Iraq  | 7 | Business      |

*Note.* Names are pseudonyms

### Data Collection

The data for the study came from in-depth interviews of the participants and their narration of critical incidents over a period of 4 months. Although not planned initially, we met on three different occasions with the participants for data collection. During our first meeting we informed them about the study, requested their participation and when they agreed, the appointment for a semi-structured interview was made at a convenient time and place. During the first meeting, we also collected their personal information, their teaching experience, and the subjects they teach. Example of questions that were asked: How long have you been teaching? What age-group do you teach? What is your date of birth? In the second phase, participants were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. Example of questions that were asked this time around included,

- What do you understand by “teaching?”
- How do you carry out your classroom management?
- What activities do you use in your classroom?

Since the interview went longer than initially planned, the participants were again requested to meet one more time, which became the third phase of data gathering. During this phase, the participants were invited to share “critical incidents” of their classroom experience. A critical incident, as explained to the participants for the purpose of this study, was usually an incident, not necessarily dramatic or profound, which had significance for the participant to make her/him stop and think or attract an immediate response or compelled him/her to question an aspect of beliefs, behaviours, or values. It took 45 to 90 minutes in all to collect data from each participant. The interviews were conducted in a face-to-face format and were digitally recorded. All recording of the interviews and critical incidents were later transcribed in English in a single document.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis was focused on identifying teachers’ practices and beliefs from the transcript. The analysis was carried out using the methods suggested by Charmaz (2006). A constructivist grounded theory researcher needs to dig deep into the meanings, beliefs, and values instead of just scratching the surface. Charmaz clearly states that the interaction between the researcher and participants “produces the data, and therefore the meanings that the researcher observes and defines” (Charmaz, 1995, p. 35; emphasis in original) and the researcher must “add...a description of the situation, the interaction, the person’s affect and [their] perception of how the interview went” (p. 33).

To begin with, line-by-line coding was carried out. Line by line coding “helps you to refrain from inputting your motives, fears, or unresolved personal issues to your respondents and to your collected personal data” (Charmaz, 1996, p. 37). Since the coding was done as soon as the data were transcribed, it also helped in refocusing on subsequent interviews. Line by line coding helped the researchers in identifying the analytical direction for further coding. Line by line coding involves naming and categorizing of data during which it is reduced to discrete

parts and closely examined and compared for similarities and differences (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). For example, from the line provided by Norah, “for doing this you all have to tell me the ways you would like to do it,” we coded the phrase, “tell me the way you would like to do it,” as “creating opportunities.” As the second step, we used focussed coding to “synthesize and explain a larger segment of data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57). During this phase, data were analysed and coded in the form of emerging themes. Large groups of data were coded under themes. Themes were visited and revisited in order to ascertain that themes remain distinct from each other and did not overlap. As an example, the codes generated from initial coding like “asking for opinions,” “grouping students,” and “asking questions” were kept under one theme called “Teaching Method” while “providing extra help” and “break-time consultation” were placed under the theme “Support.” During the third phase of coding, called Theoretical Coding, each theme was revisited to identify possible relationships between them (Charmaz, 2006). The arbitrary themes that were generated in the focussed coding phase were merged into meaningful categories based upon how they relate to each other. For example, themes from focussed coding like “teaching method,” “classroom activities,” and “differentiated lesson plans” had strong relationship in terms of their pedagogical nature; hence, they were categorized into “Pedagogy.” A total of six categories were identified. In order to address the first two research questions specifically, we divided the emerging categories into two different groups, one for the practices of teachers and other for beliefs.

### **Rigor and Trustworthiness**

The validity of a qualitative study is the rigor associated with the study which can be judged using the three criteria of credibility, auditability, and fittingness (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003). Credibility implies “how vivid and faithful the description of the phenomenon is” (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003). In this research, the participants were allowed to guide the course of the interviews with minimal prompts. Member checks were carried out to ensure that the transcribed data captured what the participants said. Additionally, the authors read and reread the raw transcripts during the coding process to maintain proper understanding. The auditability refers to “the ability of another researcher to follow the methods and conclusions of the original researcher” (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003). The authors painstakingly documented the methodology, data collection process, and data analysis in order to enable future researchers to replicate this study. Fittingness refers to “the probability that the research findings have meanings to others in similar situations” (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003). Fittingness ensures that the results are presented in enough detail to allow others to evaluate them and use them. Fittingness also can be ensured by relating categories with the literature (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003). The discussion section later in this chapter discusses the categories in the light of literature.

### **Findings**

We present our findings in this section, which also includes quotes and passages from interviews for illustration purposes. Six categories were identified that were linked with the practices of teachers, which are as follows:

1. Pedagogy
2. Interaction
3. Student’s Role
4. Teacher’s Support
5. Differentiated Assessment
6. Behavior Management

The findings indicate three main beliefs of the teachers:

1. Importance of teacher-student relatedness
2. Teaching: a social responsibility
3. Learning: for life-skills and society

### **Current Classroom Practices of Teachers from Collectivist Nations**

From the present study, the data suggested six major categories for teachers' classroom practices.

**Pedagogy.** The interview findings suggested that most teachers used modern pedagogy that includes a student centered approach, hands-on activities, and games. However, teachers also relied on traditional methods whenever they thought it was needed. The findings are in conformity with Zahang and Liu (2014) who found a multi-dimensional structure of teacher's belief for classroom practices based on a mix of constructivist and traditional orientation. The choice of pedagogy mainly depended on the context and nature of the content taught. Teachers chose interesting activities and games for content that was relatively boring or complicated. As Letchumi said, "at times they are not interested in boring topics so I create interesting activities out of those contents. This way they understand the concept well and want to learn more" (lines, 9-11).

Most teachers preferred carrying out games and activities in groups or pairs as it ensured students' attention and more participation.

I combine games with my class activity. I use presentation activities, role plays, and lots of physical movement. (Students) They work in groups and pairs. . .groups are more effective, they participate well in the activities and games that I use. (Mohammad, lines 177-180)

Teachers used traditional methods such as lecturing, drill, and copying from the board for contents that were relatively simple and easy. For example, Wang said, "Sometimes, I use the blackboard, because the topic is simple. . .the content knowledge is not very deep so the use of the blackboard is enough" (lines 143-144). Some teachers mentioned use of pedagogies based on experiential leanings such as group presentations, interviewing techniques, and intensive use of role plays: "they should learn English for use in real life...most of the time I ask them to act the conversation scene in groups or in front of the class" (Yuan, lines 111-113). Wang added, "we organize activities like group presentations, go outside and ask questions from people or sometimes...some students teach a few topics to practice English" (Wang, lines 147-149). Most teachers expressed their liking for using a variety of teaching aids and technological tools such as flashcards, educational games, power points and smart boards, but they specifically mentioned that they use it when it is really required: "we can use modern tools when the contents are difficult to explain...I use power points and audio very often" (Norah, lines 213-214).

**Interaction.** The findings under this category indicate a broad spectrum of interaction within classroom settings such as student teacher interaction, student interaction, and formal and informal interactions. Teachers created opportunities, "for doing this you all have to tell me the ways you would like to do it," (Norah, line 210) and climate, "I encourage them to participate and tell them there is no right or wrong answer in English...just express!" (Yuan, lines 128-129) for students to express themselves freely in classroom discussions. Teachers felt effective interaction during learning was essential for them to understand students' progress and understanding and it was also an efficient way towards mastery of their content. As Wang

puts it, “I believe they must speak and make discussion using English for them to understand” (Wang, lines 149-150).

Teachers expressed significance of interaction in the classroom by explaining reasons; for instance, Sheen puts it in the following way:

I speak only for 15 minutes and wait for them to talk one by one to me and with their friends for rest of the class...talking will help them know the right answer and that will help me know their understanding. (lines 78-80)

Most teachers encouraged students in the classroom to question each other and even welcomed them to question what the teacher has said. However, the two teachers from China explicitly expressed that they do not expect students in China to question them although they encourage them to do so. For example, Yuan said, “(in) traditional culture, students cannot show disagreement with teachers. They take their teachers’ word: “they accept whether teacher says yes or no. But sometimes I encourage them to question me” (Yuan, lines 156-158).

Teachers believed that practicing effective interaction in the class also helps them in getting student attention: “I can’t go on talking, students will lose interest, (they will) talk or maybe sleep” (Letchumi, lines 6-7).

**Students’ role.** Most teachers’ statements revealed their practices focussed on defining the students’ role in the classroom. Teachers always created conditions and opportunities that encouraged or required students to play important roles in the classroom. One teacher mentioned relying on students to act as a role model for others in the classroom: “I use good students as role models. I want other students to see them and participate” (Mohammad, lines 184-185). Norah said, “so I let good students model the answer” (lines, 219-220). Teacher Letchumi wanted students to display leadership qualities and take initiatives to lead the projects, outdoor activities or co-curricular activities: “in outdoor activities or other co-curricular activities, they take initiatives and come forward to lead. They set up everything” (Letchumi, lines 21-23).

Sheen mentioned engaging students in evaluating peers and questioning others to develop self-confidence and leadership qualities. “Many times I do not teach, I let students find their own answers, I let students evaluate each other and present.” (Sheen, lines 79-80). Norah relies on empowering students to assume a more responsible role: “I let them choose, plan and do the activity so that they will do it until the end” (Norah, lines 212-213).

**Teacher support.** Almost all teachers spoke about extending extra support to their students within and outside the classroom. However, the kind of support varied from teacher to teacher. Teachers mentioned calling students to their offices after class to discuss their problems: “I call them to my office or meet them outside the class. Face to face discussion or one on one discussion helps them better” (Wang, lines 158-160).

Sheen mentioned meeting students outside classroom, like in the school cafeteria to extend any help they like. “Sometimes they like to do homework in the classroom. They sit in groups and do their homework. If they have problems, I invite them to meet outside the class or in cafeteria.” (Sheen, lines 87-88). Letchumi extended support to students by paying home visits and meeting their parents: “I give more time after school, after class (I) meet them, even visit their families and talk to their parents” (Letchumi, lines 36-37).

These practices by teachers were not focussed only on extending support for academic guidance but also on personal guidance. Teacher support is a practice that is an anticipated outcome of these teachers’ belief in nurturing students-teacher relatedness.

**Differentiated assessment.** The data revealed that all teachers practiced a variety of assessments and evaluations methods. They strongly believed in differences among students’ abilities to perform, therefore, they used their own standards for internal evaluation. According

to Sheen, “All students have different abilities, I cannot measure them with a single scale so I have to use different ways” (lines 101-102). Keeping that in mind teachers used multiple ways to assess students: “I create opportunities for them to participate. I don’t classify students as A or B students. I believe everyone can perform” (Letchumi, line 24-25).

Teachers conducted both formative and summative assessments. For internal assessment they used varied modalities to assess students’ learning such as presentation, portfolios, quizzes, and informal questioning: “I rely on verbal questioning, I don’t like exam paper, I look at their exercise and once in a while I call them and ask questions” (Mohammad, lines 203-204). Other assessment methods were discussed: “I can check their progress with homework, quizzes, sometimes ask them to talk, share, and present” (Norah, lines 221).

However, they accepted that for the final assessment they had to rely on standardized exam papers as that was mandatory by government policies. Also, results from those standardized exams reflected teachers’ teaching performance for their evaluation: “We just do what is required by the government showing evidence to our head master” (Letchumi, line 45-46). Sheen said, “At the end of the month we do exams. That way government can evaluate my performance too” (lines, 100-101).

**Behavior management.** Behavior management is considered as an important part of classroom practices. The findings suggest that teachers, in order to handle classroom disruptions and carry out their daily routine, relied on friendly ways and positive approaches. Norah said, “If they are being naughty, I ask questions and get them engaged, make them busy” (Norah lines, 216-217).

Teacher Sheen relied on the student-teacher relationship to encourage appropriate behavior: “I would show them (that) I am upset and not talk to them for a while” (Sheen, lines, 37-38). She used a variety of constructive approaches to stop unwanted behavior: “Sometimes I send them to another class to present and this can become a punishment to them” (Sheen lines 182-183). Teachers in general were against any strict consequences because students might come to hate the teacher or learning that subject. Yuan said: “They are not young children anymore, if I punish them they will hate me and the subject.” (Yuan, lines 124-125). However; some teachers like Sheen relied on a few stern ways of temporary expulsion and mild scolding: “I take away privileges or take away medals.” (Sheen, lines 96-97).

## **Beliefs That Guide the Classroom Practices**

The findings indicate three main beliefs that teachers suggested during their interviews.

**Importance of teacher-student relatedness.** The findings suggest that generally all teachers placed high significance on establishing a strong bond with their students. In the entire transcript the words, friend or friendly, are used more frequently than any other word; for example: “I want to be a kind, merciful, friendly with them” (Sheen, line 76). Yuan said, “If the teachers’ personality is pleasant and presentable, students become friends easily with you” (lines 120-121) and “I must have a good rapport with a student. I can be strict but I try to build friendly relationships” (Mohammad, line 186). Teachers’ basic beliefs were to create understanding and camaraderie with students. Teachers used a variety of relationship metaphors to express their relationship with students: “My relationship is like a friend or like elder sister. Maybe because I am not very old, sometimes I crack jokes to them, maybe this way I can understand them better (Wang, lines 152-153). Teachers didn’t want to portray themselves as an authoritative figure. Sheen puts forward her friendly demeanour by stating that “I don’t want to be like a minister coming to class and having students feel scared of me” (Sheen, lines 71-72).

Teachers believed that their healthy relationship with students was the core and foundation of the teaching and learning process. The subject of teacher-student relatedness has received a lot of attention recently through self-determination theory.

**Teaching: A social responsibility.** The data suggest a very sincere and a very collectivist belief of teachers towards the profession of teaching according to their self-construal, which is congruent to the findings of Markus and Kitayama (2004). All teachers considered their teaching job of utmost importance for the society and equated it with a huge social responsibility. As Letchumi puts it, “It (teaching) is kind of social service for me” (line 3). One teacher equates teaching as a holy process: “Teaching is a holy process. It is a difficult and a job full of responsibility” (Sheen, line 66). It is also described as a challenging job that requires lots of sacrifices for the sake of society. As Yuan puts it, “Teachers are like a candle, they burn themselves to light others” (lines 138-139). Such statements are evidence of the fact that a teacher sees him/herself in relation with others. Teachers have construed an interdependent model of self, where they see themselves as an important actor towards the service of society (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Consequently, this belief guided the practice of defining students’ role as a classroom practice in which teachers want students to take charge of their learning.

**Learning life-skills in society.** Teachers’ beliefs behind students’ learning were centrally focussed on creating responsible citizens for the society:

My college is a vocational college, I want them (students) to be motivated, I want them to love learning. After graduation they will go to the society. . .they must learn to find a good job to be able to contribute to themselves and the society. (Wang, lines 140-142)

They believed that their learning should help them become successful in life so that they can support themselves and family in raising their economic standards: “Teaching is educating for making them useful for the society. I teach rural students. They have family problems and have low income” (Mohammad, lines 173-174). However, most of them believed that learning can only benefit if they will develop skills and attitudes to benefit themselves in real life situations. They emphasized that content knowledge was not enough, and it needed to be transformed into life skills. Mohammad continues: “Rather than giving too much focus on an exam or text...I want to put more focus on shaping their personalities to become better human beings” (lines 175-176). One teacher related her belief that originated through her religious practice to define teaching:

My prophet taught people to lead and supervise. He did not teach skills, attitude, and behavior just for the sake of knowledge but he taught them morals. He did not give them only textbook knowledge but also skills to be able to *do amal* (*perform*). (Sheen, lines 67-70)

Such beliefs guided teachers’ pedagogical practices that encouraged higher engagement in learning. The teachers’ main focus was on the actual practice of learning skills and to be able to develop it further.

### **Alignment of Practices with Cultural Orientation**

The dimensions of Hofstede’s model of cultural difference have been discussed briefly earlier in this document. In the following section we compare each dimension with six classroom practices that have emerged from the data obtained for this study.

**Power distance (PD).** This dimension does not correspond with our findings of teachers' practices. Teachers held strong beliefs in establishing strong teacher-student relatedness hence maintaining a power distance would adversely affect the student-teacher relationship. Similar results have been found in another study conducted in Hong Kong (Bao & Lam, 2008). Teachers' pedagogical practices of this study have made it evident that teachers relied on plenty of hands-on activities and interesting games for learning. Teachers equated their relationship with students as that of a friend or elder sister. Teachers were aware of students' cultural mindsets that they may not question their teacher; still teachers encouraged students to question everything. They used questioning as a tool to develop critical thinking skills among students.

**Individualism-collectivism (IC).** Our findings relate closely with the features of this dimension, especially the belief that the focus of learning is on how to do things and use knowledge for the benefit of the society, which is also in accordance with the findings of Berger (2011). However, there were few instances where our findings did not concur with some of its features. Teachers' belief about teaching as a social responsibility and students' quest for knowledge for the benefit of the society and earning money was very obvious evidence in support of this dimension. Teachers' expectations for students' learning were mainly focussed on serving society. In fact, the belief that teachers perceive teaching as social responsibility also strengthens the conviction of this dimension. However, there was nothing in the findings that revealed that individual choices were not respected. Autonomy for the students, although limited, was evident as the practices revealed that teachers welcomed suggestions from students on choosing learning contents and activities.

**Masculinity-femininity (MA).** The findings of this study are closely congruent with this dimension. The practice of differentiated assessment as mentioned by teachers is striking evidence that the teaching process for these teachers was not an assertive process. Teachers displayed consideration for every member of the class by recognizing individual difference in ability to perform and making adjustments to their assessment practices accordingly (Noman & Kaur, 2014). The core belief expressed by teachers that building strong student- teacher relatedness was essential for the teaching and learning process enforced the practice of extending student support in a variety of forms. This practice is also a verification that teachers perceived the class as a single unit which needs to be moved forward together. However, the teachers did instill competition among students in order to motivate them to participate and engage them, which is contrary to the findings of Signorini and others (Signorini et al., 2009). Success and failure did not depend on scorning high marks. For instance, Yuan said, "I want students to participate; I don't care about scores" (Yuan, lines 127-128).

**Uncertainty avoidance (UA).** The results of teachers' practices were not fully aligned with this dimension. The pedagogical practices of our participants reveal that structured classes are no longer a prevalent practice among them. Their pedagogical practices state that they employ a variety of activities, games, and physical movements in their classrooms. They relied on a variety of technological support and teaching aids instead of just following a structured pattern. The practice of interaction shows that teachers were willing to listen to student's choices and preferences before conducting the class. In line with similar thought, the assessment practices did not focus on a single method; teachers used a variety of methods to assess students in different conditions.

**Long-term orientation (LTO) and short-term orientation (STO).** The findings suggest partial congruence of teaching practices with this dimension. In their beliefs, teachers made it evident that students must learn in order to contribute towards society and provide assistance in raising economic conditions of the family and community. However, in order to be successful, teachers gave equal importance to the aspect of acquiring skills. Some teachers mentioned explicitly that they did not want students to have only textbook knowledge. Almost

every participant emphasized acquiring skills, which involved deep learning practices. The pedagogical and assessment practices are evidence of how teachers practiced their belief by using a variety of methods that were inclusive in nature.

### Discussion

The present study aimed to explore teaching practices and beliefs of teachers who represent collectivist cultures and compare them with Hofstede's model of cultural dimensions in order to determine its relevancy in the rapidly changing world in which people are coming closer and advancement in technology is providing easy access to innovative practices. The findings have shown that teaching practices of collectivist teachers have evolved over time. Teachers are accepting and incorporating innovative techniques that are congruent with their own cultural beliefs. The biggest shift in teachers' beliefs was in moving away from the concept of power distance and adopting a closer relationship with their students in terms of involvement, discussions, support, and decision-making. Building close bonds with students is a Western concept but it was adapted since it was congruent with their belief of relatedness and social bonding. Establishing close bonds with students also enabled teachers to give students limited autonomy in the teaching and learning process within the classroom since they have realized that traditional practices like rote memorization, chalk-talk, and drilling exercises were not successful in acquisition of skills or engagement.

With the onset of globalization, people across the world are coming closer. Societies have become more diverse than ever before and there is a need for people to understand various cultural beliefs and practices and make necessary adjustments. One must be reminded that one core attribute that binds us all together is human nature. Keith (2012) puts it succinctly: "Despite a multitude of cultural differences in a variety of dimensions (e.g., social, psychological, economic, religious), the fact remains that all cultures have common needs to deal with the same problems." In educational contexts, the direct relevance of these findings reiterates that basic philosophical differences in classroom practices between cultures are shrinking and the practices heavily depend upon the cultural norms and beliefs of teachers.

### Implications and Limitations

The findings of this study add to the literature on cross-cultural difference in teaching and learning. The findings provide a new direction for teachers, researchers, and policymakers to view classroom practices of collectivist teachers. The results also have implications for policy makers who must understand that Western ideas or innovation could be incorporated in collectivist settings when aligned with teachers' own cultural beliefs (Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011).

The study is also not without limitations, for example the study relies on data derived from teachers' interviews and critical incidents. The gap between "what teachers said" and "what they practice in class" is still unknown. Similar studies in future must incorporate classroom observation to substantiate the findings.

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