

Instructor Credibility: A Cross-Cultural Examination

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This investigation compares 398 Spanish student and 481 Thai student perceptions of instructor credibility. The findings indicate a unidimensional construct shared in common by both cultures where instructor source credibility constitutes a second order factor that combines the three factors of: (a) competence, (b) trustworthiness, and (c) goodwill/caring. The results provide evidence for the cross-cultural application of an underlying theory for instructor source credibility measurement.

SETTING THE STAGE

Consider teaching a variety of courses with international students (at least 10 different nations) where improving teaching effectiveness becomes a constant challenge to keep up with diverse cultural values. The situation provides a unique opportunity to find ways of relating to students around the world that are studying together at the same time in one classroom. One specific challenge is to find a common teaching

style that operates effectively across the various cultural backgrounds. Developing the cross-cultural style of teaching directs curiosity toward a matter of discovering fundamental student evaluative orientations of instructors. Is there a common teaching style that operates across a culturally diverse student audience? The following case is the result of investigating such curiosity.

To test for common evaluative orientations of instructor credibility that exist across cultures, a theoretical framework calls for a broad description of audience perceptions. Credibility is the influential impression, through a process of identity attributions that is evaluated by the audience to recognize a source as believable. Turning to the advice of Aristotle's credibility theory, source credibility is almost always a result of audience perception. Hence, instructor source credibility is a result of student perception, and a credible instructor is one whom purposefully uses all available means to influence students' education. Effective international teaching, then, requires culturally sensitive audience adaptation. Many culturally sensitive international instructors show that teacher source credibility is greatly dependent upon the instructor's adaptation to various ways students understand lessons. That is because cultural values orientate students in different ways to seek clarity in learning what is taught. For instance, during lectures, culturally sensitive instructors that focus attention either on individual students, a small group, or a class as a whole invite various student attributions of instructor credibility evaluations. European and North American students often prefer more of an individualistic in-class dialectic to challenge and clarify what is taught, while Pacific/South(east) Asian students often prefer to seek clarity from the instructor outside of lectures as members of collectivistic groups. On the other hand, much can also be said about audience adaptation from culturally insensitive instructors – just try accommodating lesson plans for a U.S. style of public speaking in Thai culture – a very culturally insensitive idea that can lead to irreparable loss of instructor source credibility. Make no mistake; embedded within cultural values lies student orientations to evaluate instructor source credibility.

As international education continues to develop around the world, understanding the adaptation expectancies necessary to derive instructor source credibility depends upon identifying a multicultural student orientation. By developing a common understanding of how student audiences across cultures attribute instructor credibility, instructors become better able to establish themselves as credible and therefore increase teaching effectiveness. That is why the current research explores a common orientation from which to advise instructors on credibility as the concept varies in expression across cultures. In other words, the objective is not to perpetuate the discovery of differences around the world. Instead, the objective is to further advise instructors with a multicultural perspective that includes cultural similarities

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