A Framework of Management Science in ESL Background

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More and more international students came to the United States to study management and business science in English. Is business just business? Does it have to do with language and culture in the ESL learning context? How can teachers and researchers accommodate the needs of ESL learners in the English context while addressing major knowledge in their study? This study proposed a framework of management science in ESL background based on a postmethod understanding of the teaching process.

Teaching Context

The program we will discuss in this paper is an MBA program in a university of Pennsylvania. The program was opened in the middle of 1990s. Since students come from different countries of the world, their business knowledge and English levels vary from one another in terms of American cultural background, English vocabulary, pronunciation, and so on. The program intends to accommodate (1) recent college graduates from all disciplines seeking advanced management training and (2) experienced professionals looking for additional knowledge and skills in the business arena. It usually takes a student two years to finish the study in the program.

The student population in this program comes from 15 different countries. All students have passed GMAT test. All international students have passed TOEFL test. Table 1 here shows the distribution of the students in the program:

Table 1 Distribution of student population in the MBA program:

Nationality	Number
Saudi Arabia	1
Germany	5
Moldavia	1
Taiwan	14
Vietnam	3
Korea	2
Mainland China	2

France	3
Bangladesh	1
Pakistan	2
Indian	28
Indonesia	1
Japan	2
Nigeria	1
International total	*65*
America	*41*
Total MBA	*106*

Table 1 above shows that the students come from almost all populated continents   with diverse backgrounds. Although all the students can read, speak, and listen in English their levels vary from one another as aforementioned. In terms of reading and writing abilities, it's hard to say which group of prior students is stronger.

American vs. International Students

Table 1 also shows a change of proportion between American students and internationals students. Differing from what was a couple of decades ago, the population of international students has outnumbered that of American students in the program. As shown here in Table 2, international students as a whole group of ESL learners have changed from the minority to the majority of the program.
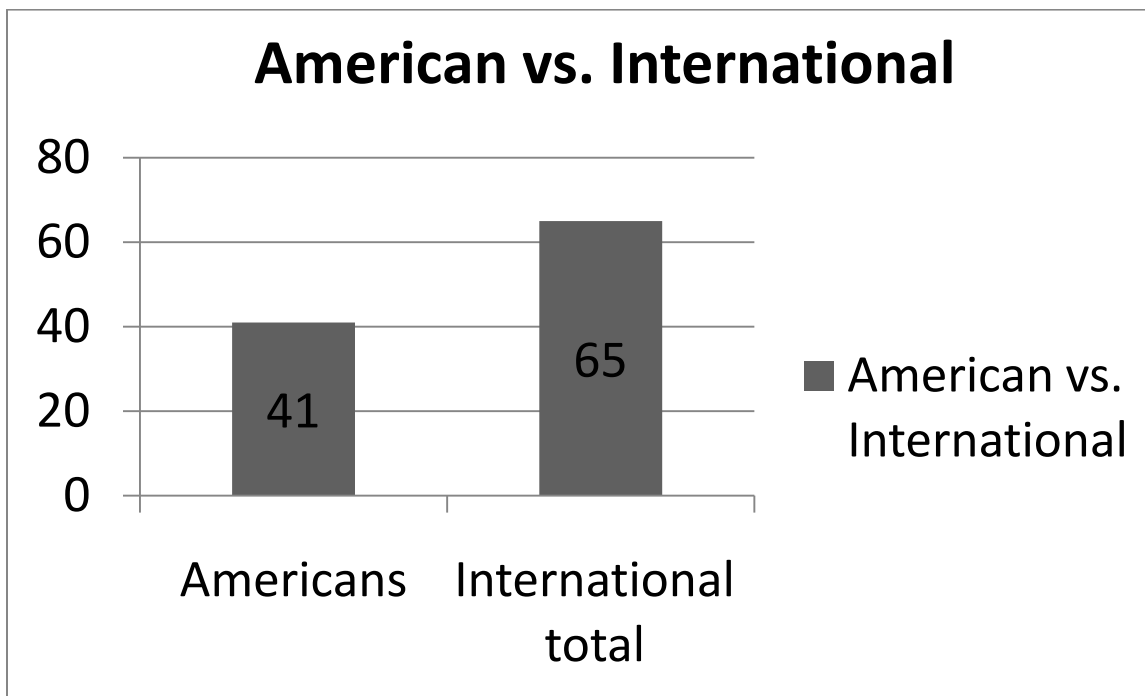
The Professors' In-depth Knowledge

What the professors bring into the MBA classes are at least two types of knowledge: knowledge as a professor in business and knowledge as an English or ESL speaker. As a professional in business, most professors have rich practical experience in business and management. As an English or ESL speaker they can communicate and lecture fluently in the class. Most of them have studied in both American and their home universities. The two types of knowledge can be a very valuable resource for the MBA classes.

Current Curriculum

The goal of the program has a focus on its curriculum, composition of students, and teaching methods. Faculty members have extensive academic, industrial, and consulting experience and bring a strong, real-world flavor to the classroom. Curriculum includes Accounting, Finance, Human Resources, International Business, Marketing, or Supply Chain Management. The program emphasizes strategic decision making in a changing global environment. Based on the course menu, however, the learners' ESL home cultural background and the host cultural differences are ignored.

Related Literature

Review of ESL Research Findings

Research on ESL study has shown several main findings in the field. First, most of the differences and resulted barriers in ESL learning are believed to be culturally constrained (Atkinson, 2003; Helms-Park & Stapleton, 2003; Kirkpatrick, 1997; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999; Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996; Shi, 2003; and Wang & Wen, 2002). Second, there is a close relationship between L1 and L2 learning (Wang & Wen, 2002). Third, along with the development of ESL learning, there is learners' self-development in terms of cognition, communication, emotion, and epistemology (Katznelson, Perpignan, & Rubin, 2001; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999; Rubin, Katznelson, & Perpignan, 2005; Shih, 1999; Wenden, 2000). These "by-products" require that teachers show the learners the needs of exploration of ideas, the quest for purpose, and the projection of oneself in their ESL learning, such as writing. Fourth, democratic assessment needs to be incorporated in practicing ESL testing (Cheng, 2004; Luoma & Tarnanen, 2003; Shohamy, 2001). This will require "shared authority", "collaboration", and the involvement of both the instructors and the learners as well.

M. P. Follett's Theory of Management Science

Based on Follett's theory of management science, individual is a social being who finds both identity and a sense of fulfillment in a group experience (Fry & Raadschelders, 2008). The group is a

cohesive and coherent entity whose process can lead to changes in individual ideas and actions that produce mutual compatibility and harmony among its members. There are neither individuals independent of society nor a society independent of individuals. Instead, there is a reciprocal relation in which the individual both shapes society and is shaped by it.

A Framework of MBA Program in ESL Background

As previously described, students the MBA program are expected to be seeking advanced management training and to graduate as global professionals in business and management. With the requirement into consideration and based on the students' needs analysis, we summarize three core skills that they need to grasp in their study in the MBA program: critical thinking, communication in ESL, and life-long learning ability.

Due to the diversity of the students and the outnumber of the international students, we argue that no single traditional teaching method is sufficient to fulfill the objective of the MBA program. Since it is "teaching a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context embedded in a particular sociocultural milieu" (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p. 538), a postmethod understanding of the teaching process will be the closest approach to achieve the goal in the specific teaching context. This method incorporates not only the knowledge that the professors bring into the classes but also the experiential knowledge that the professors accumulated during their years of business practice. In addition, the knowledge that the ESL students bring into the class is also an important part of the curriculum. Seen from the recent ESL research findings how we understand and interpret the ESL learning context is an important component in the MBA curriculum design. There are five points we believe are essential to the framework design.

First, incorporation of students' cross-cultural backgrounds and communication skills into the curriculum as complementary to the current business and management curriculum.

Second, the issue of power and empowerment.

There has been a lot of discussion on the topic of teachers' power and students' empowerment in TESOL field. In the specific MBA teaching context, students are so new to the host culture that they may not be quite clear about what their power limit is. The new way of being empowered may make them get lost or even become directionless in learning. We personally had the experience when we first came to the US to study as ESL students. Regardless of the fact that this is either the result of suppression or the ramification of cultural constraints, the process of empowerment will not be done overnight.

Third, reconceptualization of critical thinking.

One of the biggest benefits we as ESL students get from study in the US is critical thinking. It has benefited international students in such an amazing way that to some extent, different perspectives is the key to successful cross-cultural communication. Therefore, introduction of contending theories and perspectives will be a must in the MBA curricula.

Fourth, co-teaching.

The program features in diversity as we have discussed above. Therefore, while the business professors do not know much about TESOL field they can turn to the colleagues in the Department of English or Education for help and trade their major knowledge with the other knowledge. In other words, a workshop with the professors from the above mentioned departments and even co-teach with different shares of duties and contents will add more to the sources of the MBA program.

Fifth, assessment is the last but the vital part of the program. Assessment will follow postmethod principles rather than focusing on a single performance in the final test paper. A better assessment method should incorporate the following sections in the form of a portfolio:

- Participation 5%
- Regular presentation 20%
- Final project 35%
- Reports and responses 15%
- Study journal 10%
- Self-rating 5%
- Final presentation 5%
- Contribution to the class 5%

Transformed Ideology of the Program Management

Based on Follett's theory of management science and the fact that the students will become professionals in business and management in the future, the management and ideology of the program should be transformed accordingly as discussed here:

1. The individual student is a social being who shapes the program and is shaped by it.
2. The task of the program is to produce harmony and unity from conflicts among students.
3. Professional scholarship must be balanced against the idea of the students.
4. Communication and authority should flow horizontally as well as vertically in the program.
5. The basic task of the teacher is to organize and integrate experience of students.
6. Effective student participation is a way to increase collective responsibilities, an awareness of interdependence, an integration of differing perspectives.

Final Remarks

The analysis of the teaching context, teaching population, students' needs, and the in-depth knowledge of the instructors results in a postmethod framework of the MBA program in the researched university. It is understandable that the framework can encounter resistance when applied to the specific teaching and management context. However, for program and university administrators, program professors and students, it is important to understand that the untraditional program needs untraditional

approaches to match it. This understanding alone will contribute to the reconceptualization of the nature of the MBA program we have discussed in this paper.

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