

Power Distance and Individualism-Collectivism in EFL Learning Environment

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Abstract

The aim of this review was to critically evaluate the research works done on power distance and individualism-collectivism in English as a foreign language (EFL) and other types of English language learning. There is a more or less agreement on what happens to teaching and learning processes in high and low power distance (PD) classrooms. However, there are some findings suggesting the simultaneous existence of both individualism and collectivism (e.g. North Vietnam). In that case, individualism and collectivism have separate identities, rather than being mutually exclusive parts of a single dimension. There are some works in which Hofstede's (1983, 1986) cultural dimensions could not explain observed differences in the learning environment. There are possibilities of learning-specific new sets of cultural dimensions in classrooms due to the attitudinal changes of students compared to the average culture of the general population. In many works, a variety of approaches has been suggested for the teacher either to adapt to the culture of the classroom or to use methods of low PD and individualistic methods in high PD-collectivist classrooms in a cautious manner. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) seems an effective alternative to Grammar-Translation Method (GTM). Contradictory findings have been reported on Japanese classrooms. In one, the students desire to study independently, which the high PD and the collectivist culture of Japan does not allow. Two, for the Japanese learners, group working is more effective due to the collectivist culture. The contradictions involved in the two contentions need to be resolved through more research.

Keywords: classroom environment, EFL, English language learning, individualism-collectivism, power distance

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