

Instructional Strategies of Distance Education Instructors in China

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Abstract

This study investigated the teaching strategies of distance education instructors at the major universities in Beijing and Shanghai, China in the summer of 2005. The study utilized Conti's 1983 and 2004 Principles of Adult Learning Scale (PALS) and researcher-designed open-ended questions to determine the teaching strategies of Chinese distance education instructors. Data were collected from 40 distance education instructors at the major universities to determine the extent to which the Western democratic form of distance education was employed. The study's results show that although Chinese distance education instructors teach their courses in the Western educational manner, to some extent; they nevertheless oppose the Western collaborative mode of instruction and, instead, feature the teacher-directed form of instruction.

Introduction

Background of the Study

Few things have more excited Western scholars than the fact that China, the third largest and the most populous country in the world, has relied heavily on distance education to teach and train nontraditional learners to promote desired changes in political ideology, socio-economic relations, and human productive capabilities (Wang & Colletta, 1991). Based on China Headline News (2004), there are 15.8 million non-traditional learners and 4.2 million traditional learners in China. With the total number of its learners reaching well over 20 million, China has become first in the world in the category of educational providers. Given the limited resources in China, the chief mode of instruction to educate and train China's 15.8 million adult learners is distance education.

Distance education has expanded around the world over the past few years as an increasing number of institutions recognize its economical and social benefits. These benefits have been highlighted in the literature. For example, numerous studies show that distance education offers flexibility that appeals to adult students who work or need to be at home. In addition, other studies show that introverted students in distance education programs become confident at expressing themselves, while other students provide more thoughtful responses to their assignments (Bradshaw, 1997; Klemm, 1997; Palloff & Pratt, 1999; Wang, 2002). This benefit has been attributed to the asynchronous nature of distance learning and the consequent inherent requirement for reflective responses subject to repeated scrutiny. China has seized the grand opportunity to join the rest of the world to offer its educational programs to its many adult learners via distance education. Western scholars have long speculated that China may feature a mostly teacher-centered, information-based and test-driven instructional format, a traditional model seen as reflecting its governmental organization by Westerners. This methodology might result in Chinese teachers "teaching to the test" and students may be expected to learn whatever the teachers or the textbooks convey. Student goals may indeed include the desire to achieve outstanding performance on exams, especially the nationwide college entrance exams that are tremendously important in China. Accordingly, a teacher-centered, information-based instructional methodology may be popular for these purposes. This very methodology is in

contrast with a Western Constructivist approach, which focuses on helping learners realize their own experience in a collaborative but critical way (Brookfield, 2000).

On the other hand, Western adult distance education is characterized by syllabus-based projects, learning activities, and teaching tools that are designed to create collaborative learning environments and relevant experience for students. In addition, Western adult distance education is enhanced by problem-based learning models (PBL) that differ from lecture-based classes and are usually predicated on a great deal of self-directed learning and collaboration. Learners are supposed to teach themselves what they need to know to solve a problem (Duch, 2005). Consequently, Western teachers are expected to be facilitators or resource persons while students are expected to be more self-directed during the learning process. The deliberations comparing China's distance education with Western distance education center mostly around an examination of the degree to which China has adopted any of the Western forms of student-centered teaching, and whether this adoption will help foster autonomy in thinking as advocated by Western adult learning professionals. Other questions ask about how adult distance education is delivered and the primary pedagogical methods used. These questions are particularly noteworthy given China's social context. However, to date, no empirical study has been conducted to determine adult teaching methods via distance education in China.

Significance of the Study

Such a study, particularly a comparative study that provides understanding of how adult distance education is practiced in a different social context, can help both Western and Chinese adult educators introduce the Western mode of distance teaching successfully in China. Thus, the purpose of this study was to determine the Chinese adult teaching format in light of the Western form of student-centered teaching via distance education so that an effective mode of teaching can be recommended to those who develop Chinese adult distance education programs.

Research Question

The following question was formulated: **Is Chinese adult distance education characterized by centralization or decentralization?**

Review of the Literature

Definitions of Special Terms

Distance education is defined as learning via telecommunications. The term telecommunications embraces a wide variety of media configurations, including radio, telephone, television and the Internet. The Greek root word “tele” means “at a distance” or “far off.” Heinich, Molenda, Russell and Smaldino (2002) define distance education as a form of education characterized by the following:

- Physical separation of learners from the teacher
- An organized instructional program
- Technological media
- Two-way communication (p. 268).

Pedagogy in distance education and adult education is defined as the art and science of teaching children. It represents a directing relationship between instructors and learners (Wang, 2005, in press). This mode of teaching pedagogically (treating adult learners like children) may still exist in some particular social settings. In distance education, the more control instructors have over learners, the more comfortable instructors feel. Many instructors assume learning via distance education will not occur unless they dominate teaching themselves (Palloff & Pratt, 1999; Wang, 2005, in press).

On the other hand, andragogy in distance education and adult education is described as the art and science of helping adults learn. It reflects a helping relationship between instructors and learners (Wang, 2005, in press). Instructors generally believe that learners are self-directed. Constructivist instructors further believe that learners are capable of learning via critical reflection. Therefore, the instructor serves as a learning facilitator or consultant, linking students to learning resources. In addition, instructors view themselves as co-learners in the learning process (Price, 1999), teaching courses that are syllabus-based, topic driven and collaborative – all of which contributes to meaningful engagement and an insightful educational experience. The concept of andragogy is especially popular in distance education in the Western hemisphere.

The History and Practice of Distance Education in China

According to Wang and Bott (2004), Chinese adult distance education is characterized by the rapid establishment of radio/television universities, correspondence and evening classes, and workers' colleges. It was not until recently that China began to experience a rapid growth in the use of the Internet and its computer technologies to deliver educational programs to its 15.8 million adult learners.

In an effort to eradicate illiteracy, China established a nationwide network of correspondence education and evening schools during the First Five-Year Plan (1953-1957). Huang (1992) calculates that there were 58 correspondence divisions attached to regular universities by 1957 with a total enrollment of 35,000 students and that 36 evening schools had a total enrollment of 12,000 students. During the Second Five-Year Plan (1958-1962), correspondence education and evening schools doubled throughout the nation with a total enrollment of 124,000 for correspondence schools and 29,000 for evening schools. With the formal inception of the Great Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), correspondence education and evening schools came to a complete standstill for several years (Huang, 1992). With the downfall of the Gang of Four in late 1976, correspondence and evening schools were made operational again. By 1979, 72 institutions had a total enrollment of 241,000 adult students and 30 institutions had 7,600 adult students. By 1989, correspondence students reached 530,800 and evening school enrollment grew to 178,700.

The formal operation of radio/TV universities was started in the early 1960's in big cities such as Beijing and Shanghai. By 1989, there were 43 radio/TV universities in China, covering 29 provinces. Starting in the late 1990's, the use of the Internet and Web based instruction has been booming in China, reaching out to 10 million students alone (Mau, 2003).

The multitude of distance education programs is aimed at the dissemination of scientific and technical knowledge in various fields. Historically, China's distance education programs offered degree and diploma courses in engineering, agriculture, forestry, teaching training, humanities, natural sciences, finance and economics, political science and law. Recently, vocational education and English were added to the list (Lee, 2004). One distinct feature of distance

education in China was the initiation of State-administered examinations for adult learners, which studies show adult learners warmly received. Chinese educators and scholars recommend textbooks, references and guidelines and adult learners undertake independent study in order to pass the required examinations. An innovation in developing this mode of adult education in China has been the integration of educational television, correspondence programs, the Internet and self-study examinations (Huang, 1992). Adult learners do receive assistance from the local communities. However, the local communities must follow the examination requirements specified in the respective fields by the Chinese educators and scholars.

Comparison of Teaching Philosophies of Adult Distance Education

To the Chinese adult educators, teaching always involves the transmission of knowledge and theory or the teaching of a skill -- whether via distance education or traditional classroom setting. Above all, teaching outcomes can be measured and the techniques employed can be assessed (Jarvis, 2002). Therefore, teacher-centered teaching makes sense to both Chinese adult educators and Chinese adult learners. It is believed that Chinese culture fosters this kind of teaching. A Chinese teacher who does not dominate teaching is viewed as lazy, disorganized and incompetent as an instructor. Paine's 1992 research reveals that teaching in China is viewed as text-driven and teacher-dominated. Faculty lecture on the text and are valued if they are great performers. To teach in China frequently means to teach the contents of the textbook and to educate learners. Learners must assume the submissive role of following their instructors and respect for adult educators is paramount in China. Confucian thought is to perpetuate the status quo in society (Wang & Bott, 2004). In learning, adult learners are not expected to challenge their instructors. In gerontocracies such as China, where reverence exists for teachers/elders, teachers are to be respected, not defied (Lamdin & Fugate, 1997).

Although adult distance education is a concept that flows directly from Confucian humanistic educational philosophy, Chinese adult educators do not ensure that there must be no class distinction in teaching. It is in the United States that adult education strives to become the education of equals. Since Knowles made the distinction between pedagogy and andragogy in the early 1970's, student-centered methods presage the learners and their learning; they also appear more relevant to the idea of learning in the democratic society (Jarvis, 2002). Western

adult educators accept Rogers' basic hypotheses regarding teaching adult learners, the first of which was, "We cannot teach another person directly; we can only facilitate his learning." (Rogers, 1951, p. 1441). Therefore, in Western adult teaching, the role of an instructor merely as an information disseminator is frowned upon. Rather, an adult educator's role is to help adults learn. The relationship between adult educators and learners is the helping relationship instead of the directing relationship as between Chinese adult educators and adult learners. To Western adult educators, to teach is to facilitate learning. Instructors try to be resource persons, linking learners to learning resources while encouraging autonomy in thinking. Ultimately, self-directed learning among adult students is encouraged. To facilitate learning, it is important to provide a safe educational environment where learning can best occur (Knowles, Holton III & Swanson, 1998).

Indeed, teaching philosophies determine the methods employed to teach or help adult learners both in China and the United States. However, an examination of the differences and similarities between the two teaching methods may help adult educators in both countries improve their methodologies by reflecting upon these differences in order to ascertain whether the methods used are the most appropriate and effective for the audiences served within the social and cultural context of each nation. Thus, the purpose in this comparative study is to determine whether the Western student-centered teaching has been used at all by Chinese adult educators via distance education, for this method has benefited Western adult learners for over 30 years since the formal inception of andragogy in the 1970's. For distance education to be effective among its 15.8 million adult learners, researchers must ask what is the mode of instruction of Chinese adult educators in light of the Western adult teaching methods via distance education?

Methodology

There has been great growth of interest in mixed methods research as expressed in the literature. Creswell (2003) defines mixed methods research as focusing on collecting and analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study. In this study, the reason for the use of this synthesis was to expand an in-depth understanding of Chinese adult distance education methods

from quantitative analysis to qualitative analysis. However, no greater priority or weight was given to the quantitative or the qualitative approach. In this study, a sequential explanatory strategy was employed. According to Morse (1991), this strategy can be especially useful when unexpected results arise from a quantitative study. When this occurs, the qualitative data can be used to examine the surprising results in more detail.

Instruments

First, Conti's (1983) survey instrument called PALS (Principles of Adult Learning Scale) was adopted for the quantitative portion of the study to determine the teaching methods of Chinese adult educators via distance education because this instrument has been validated by different researchers to determine instructors' pedagogical or andragogical approaches in a given setting. The overall PALS score, according to Conti (1983), can be broken down into seven factors that include: Learner-Centered Activities; Personalizing Instruction; Relating to Experience; Assessing Student Needs; Climate Building; Participation in the Learning Process; and, Flexibility for Personal Development. These seven factors comprise the basic elements that make up the instructor's general teaching modes – centralism (teacher-dominated teaching) or decentralism (student-centered learning, similar to a constructivist approach where learners are encouraged to depend on self-directed learning to solve learning problems in a collaborative, but critical way). Pedagogy represents centralism whereas andragogy (the art and science of helping adults learn) represents decentralism in teaching. High mean scores for factors represent support for the concept implied in the factor name. Low mean scores indicate support for the opposite concept. The survey utilizes a Likert scale from five to zero with five being the highest (support for the concept in the factor name) and zero the lowest (support for the opposite concept). The alpha reliability coefficient for the instrument was .90. (N of cases = 40, N of items = 44).

Second, a series of ten standardized open-ended questions were designed to complement and supplement the quantitative survey questionnaire. Further, the ten open-ended questions were validated by different published research. According to Patton (2002), the purpose of qualitative interviewing is to capture how those being interviewed view their world, to learn their terminology and judgments, and to capture the complexities of their individual perceptions and

experiences (p. 348). The participants interviewed answered the open-ended questions both orally and in writing.

Participants

The study was conducted in the summer of 2005. Beijing and Shanghai have pioneered distance education in China. Forty adult distance education instructors that teach in the major universities in Beijing and Shanghai were contacted and forty instructors (100%) volunteered to fill out the quantitative portion of the study and answered the ten open-ended questions. In addition to teaching regular university courses, these adult distance education instructors teach adults a variety of subjects on the radio or TV. Some teach vocational education and English on the Internet. Others teach correspondence courses via regular surface mail. They have been chosen to teach distance education courses because they have been determined as model teachers (excellent performers) by their school administrators and students. Naturally, their teaching via distance education has augmented their low salaries. The drawback of their overloaded teaching leaves them no time for research as required by their universities.

Data Analysis

Data collected in this study were analyzed using SPSS (12.0 for Windows) software. Since the survey instrument (PALS) contains positive items and negative items, different values were assigned to these items. For positive items, the following values are assigned: "Always" equals five, "almost always" equals four, "often" equals three, "seldom" equals two, "almost never" equals one and "never" equals zero. For negative items, the following values are assigned. "Always" equals zero, "almost always" equals one, "often" equals two, "seldom" equals three, "almost never" equals four and "never" equals five. Omitted items are assigned a neutral value of 2.5.

Analysis was conducted for each item in the research question. For descriptive statistics, mean scores and standard deviations were reported for adult education educators' responses. To provide a better picture of the population surveyed, the overall scale mean scores and standard deviations were also calculated. The findings were entered into tables and figures, and a narrative was developed to report the findings.

To provide greater depth of analysis, patterns and themes in qualitative data were reported to supplement and complement the quantitative findings. First, the textual data was organized categorically, reviewed repeatedly, and coded. Second, patterns and themes from the perspective of the participants were identified and described. The patterns and themes were listed using percentages in the section of findings. Third, these patterns and themes were analyzed and compared to the findings from the quantitative data analysis and the literature review of the study. The data analysis process was not aided by the use of a qualitative data analysis computer program since the qualitative database is small (e.g., less than 500 pages of transcription) (Creswell, 2003). Neither N6 nor N7 software was used for the qualitative data analysis.

Findings

The tables presented below summarize the analysis of survey results on each of the seven factors of Conti's (1983, 2004) instrument and the analysis of the results of the ten open-ended questions designed by the researcher. The mean responses for these adult distance education instructors on each of the seven factors are presented in separate tables. Each of the seven factors contains several items that make up the instructor's learner-centered (decentralism) or teacher-dominated (centralism) teaching methods. The standard deviation scores for these adult distance education instructors are also provided in the tables. For a better picture of the population surveyed, the overall scale mean scores and standard deviations were also included. The findings on the qualitative portion of the survey were reported in a table format. Table 1 summarizes the adult distance education instructors' responses for Factor One.

Table 1. Mean Responses: Chinese Distance Education Instructors on Factor 1
(n = 40)

Factor 1: Learner-Centered Activities Responses	M	SD
2. I use appropriate forms of disciplinary action when it is needed.	2.10	1.27
4. I encourage students to adopt middleclass values.	3.30	1.42
11. I identify the educational objectives of each of my students.	2.80	1.23
12. I plan units that differ as widely as possible from my students' socio-economic backgrounds.	2.50	1.18
13. I try to motivate students by confronting them during group discussions with their classmates.	1.90	0.99
16. I use one basic teaching method because I have found that most adults have similar learning styles.	2.70	1.06
19. I use written tests to assess the degree of academic growth rather than to indicate new directions for learning.	2.30	0.67
21. I use what history has proven that adults need to learn as my chief criteria for planning learning episodes.	2.00	1.05
29. I use methods that foster quiet, productive deskwork.	2.10	1.10
30. I use tests as my chief method of evaluating students.	1.90	1.20
38. I use materials that were originally designed for students in elementary and secondary schools.	3.40	1.26
40. I measure a student's long-term educational growth by comparing his/her total achievement in class to his/her expected performance as measured by national norms from standardized tests.	2.70	1.25

Table 1 shows that Chinese adult distance education instructors had low scores in seven of the 12 variables and slightly high scores in three of the variables that make up Factor One. These results suggest that Chinese adult distance education instructors support a teacher-centered methodology, rather than post-modern approaches such as constructivist/objectivist approaches. They favor formal testing over informal evaluation techniques and rely heavily on standardized tests. They encourage students to accept middle-class values. They exercise disciplinary action when needed, and determine the educational objectives for each student. They tend to practice

one basic method of learning. Table 2 contains the adult distance education instructors' responses for Factor Two.

Table 2. Mean Responses: Chinese Distance Education Instructors on Factor 2 (n = 40)

Factor 2: Personalizing Instruction Responses	M	SD
3. I allow senior students more time to complete assignments when they need it.	2.70	1.06
9. I use lecturing as the best method of presenting my subject material to adult students.	1.90	0.57
17. I use different teaching techniques depending on the students being taught.	3.40	0.84
24. I let each student work at her/his own pace regardless of the amount of time it takes her/him to learn a new concept.	2.50	1.08
32. I gear my instructional objectives to match the individual abilities and needs of the students.	3.00	0.94
35. I allow a student's motives for participating in continuing education to be a major determinant in the planning of learning objectives.	3.40	0.84
37. I give all students in my class the same assignment on a given topic.	1.50	0.85
41. I encourage competition among my students.	1.80	1.03
42. I use different materials with different students.	2.90	0.74

Table 2 indicates that Chinese adult distance education instructors had low scores in three of the nine variables and high scores in six of the nine variables that comprise Factor Two. These results indicate that Chinese adult distance education instructors engage in a variety of practices that personalize learning to meet the unique needs of each student. Objectives are based on individual methods and abilities. Instruction is self-paced. Various methods, materials, and assignments are used. Table 3 describes the adult distance education instructors' responses for Factor Three.

Table 3. Mean Responses: Chinese Distance Education Instructors on Factor 3
(n = 40)

Factor 3: Relating to Experience Responses	M	SD
14. I plan learning episodes to take into account my students' prior experience.	3.80	0.63
31. I plan activities that will encourage each student's growth from dependence on others to greater independence.	3.10	0.74
34. I encourage my students to ask questions about the nature of their society.	2.70	1.25
39. I organize adult learning episodes according to the problems that my students encounter in everyday life.	3.30	0.95
43. I help students relate new learning to their prior experiences.	4.10	0.99
44. I teach units about problems of everyday living.	3.30	0.82

Table 3 indicates that Chinese adult distance education instructors had very high scores in all six of the variables in Factor Three. These results show that Chinese adult distance education instructors planned learning activities that take into account their students' prior experiences and encouraged students to relate their new learning to prior experiences. To make learning relevant, learning episodes were organized according to the problems that the students encounter in everyday living. Students were encouraged to ask basic questions about the nature of their society. Table 4 describes Chinese adult distance education instructors' responses for Factor Four.

Table 4. Mean Responses: Chinese Distance Education Instructors on Factor 4
(n = 40)

Factor 4: Assessing Student Needs Responses	M	SD
5. I help students diagnose the gaps between their goals and their present level of performance.	2.90	1.29
8. I counsel students informally.	3.30	0.82
23. I have individual conferences to help students identify their educational needs.	3.00	1.15
25. I help my students develop short-range as well as long-range objectives.	3.50	0.71

Table 4 indicates that Chinese distance education instructors had high scores in Factor Four, Assessing Student Needs. These results show that Chinese distance education instructors treated students as adults and attempted to find what each student wants and needs to know. They relied on individual meetings and informal counseling. They diagnosed existing gaps between a student's goals and the present levels of performance. They assisted students in developing short-range as well as long-range objectives. Table 5 describes the distance education instructors' responses for Factor Five.

Table 5. Mean Responses: Chinese Distance Education Instructors on Factor 5
(n = 40)

Factor 5: Climate Building Responses	M	SD
18. I encourage dialogue among my students.	3.90	0.88
20. I utilize the many competencies that most adults already possess to achieve educational objectives.	3.30	0.67
22. I accept errors as a natural part of the learning process.	4.20	0.92
28. I allow my students to take periodic breaks during class.	4.30	0.95

Table 5 shows that Chinese distance education instructors had high scores in the four variables. The results suggest that Chinese distance education instructors established a friendly and informal climate as the first step in their andragogical model. Dialogue and interaction with other students were encouraged. Barriers were eliminated by using the numerous competencies that adult learners already possess as building blocks for educational objectives. Risk taking was encouraged, and errors were accepted as a natural part of the learning process. Learners could experiment and explore elements related to their self-concept and practice interpersonal skills. Failures served as a feedback device to direct future positive learning. Table 6 contains the distance education instructors' responses for Factor Six.

Table 6. Mean Responses: Chinese Distance Education Instructors on Factor 6
(n = 40)

Factor 6: Participation in the Learning Process	M	SD
1. I allow students to participate in developing the criteria for evaluating their performance in class.	1.90	1.27
10. I arrange the classroom so that it is easy for students to interact.	3.40	0.97
15. I allow students to participate in making decisions about the topics that will be covered in class.	3.00	1.05
36. I have my students identify problems that they wish to solve.	3.20	1.03

Table 6 indicates that Chinese distance education instructors had one low score and three high scores in the four variables that make up Factor Six. These results suggest that Chinese distance education instructors had students identify the problems that they wished to solve and allowed the students to participate in making decisions about the topics that would be covered in class. An adult-to-adult relationship between teacher and students was encouraged. However, they did not involve the students in developing the criteria for evaluating classroom performance. Table 7 describes Chinese distance education instructors' responses for Factor Seven.

Table 7. Mean Responses: Chinese Distance Education Instructors on Factor 7
(n = 40)

Factor 7: Flexibility for Personal Development	M	SD
Responses		
6. I provide knowledge rather than serve as a resource person.	1.90	0.88
7. I stick to the instructional objectives that I write at the beginning of a program.	1.50	0.97
26. I maintain a well-disciplined classroom to reduce interference to learning.	1.40	0.52
27. I avoid discussion of controversial subjects that involve value judgments.	2.80	1.62
33. I avoid issues that relate to the student's concept of himself/herself.	2.00	1.41

Table 7 shows that Chinese distance education instructors had low scores in all five variables that comprise Factor Seven. The results show that Chinese distance education instructors viewed themselves as providers of knowledge rather than facilitators. They determined the objectives for the students at the beginning of the program and stuck to them regardless of the idiosyncrasies that may arise from divergent student needs. A well-disciplined classroom was viewed as a stimulus for learning. Table 8 describes the overall scale mean scores and standard deviations of the Chinese distance education instructors' responses.

Table 8. Mean Responses: All 40 Chinese Distance Education Instructors on the Seven Factors (n = 40)

All Factors	M	SD
1. Learner-Centered Activities	2.48	1.14
2. Personalizing Instruction	2.57	0.88
3. Relating to Experience	3.38	0.90
4. Assessing Student Needs	3.16	0.99
5. Climate Building	3.93	0.86
6. Participation in the Learning Process	2.88	1.08
7. Flexibility for Personal Development	1.92	1.08

Table 8 indicates that Chinese adult distance education instructors had low scores in Factor one and Factor Seven. They had high scores in other factors. These results show that although they taught distance education courses to some extent in an andragogical manner such as personalizing instruction, relating to experience, assessing student needs, building climate and participating in the learning process, their classroom techniques did not focus upon the learner or include learner-centered activities. Their score in Factor Seven indicates that these distance education instructors opposed the collaborative mode of instruction. They viewed themselves as providers of knowledge rather than facilitators. They determined the objectives for the learners at the beginning of the program and persistently focused on these objectives regardless of the idiosyncrasies that may arise from divergent student needs to situations. Western Constructivists encourage learners to learn in a reflective, yet critical, way. The PBL model reflects the popular learning approach in the West. A well-disciplined classroom is viewed as a stimulus for learning. Discussions of controversial subjects that involve value judgments or issues that relate to a student's self concept were avoided. Above all, these Chinese distance education instructors

welcomed this rigidity and lack of sensitivity to the individual. This indicates that learners in China assume the submissive role of following instructors. Table 9 contains responses from the qualitative portion of the study.

Table 9. Qualitative Results: Ten Questions to Supplement and Complement the Quantitative Data (n = 40)

Open-Ended Questions	Responses
1. Briefly identify the following individuals: Malcolm Knowles, Jack Mezirow, Peter Jarvis, Stephen Brookfield, Kathleen King, and Sharan B. Merriam. Please indicate “unknown” for individuals you cannot identify.	For Question 1, 7 (17.5%) of 40 Chinese distance education instructors could identify those adult education leaders.
2. Briefly explain the difference between andragogy and pedagogy.	For Question 2, 13 (32.5%) of 40 Chinese distance education instructors could explain the difference between andragogy and pedagogy.
3. Do you negotiate curricular priorities with your adult students at the beginning of each course you teach? Why or why not?	For Question 3, 9 (22.5%) of 40 Chinese distance education instructors negotiated curricular priorities with their adult students at the beginning of each semester they taught.
4. Do you take into account your adult learners’ prior experience when planning your lessons? Why or why not?	For question 4, 31 (77.5%) of 40 Chinese distance education instructors took into account adult learners’ prior experience when planning their lessons.
5. Do you believe that the lecture method is superior to facilitating learning? Why or why not?	For Question 5, 6 (15%) of 40 Chinese distance education instructors believed that the lecture method is superior to facilitating learning.
6. Do you use learning contracts when assessing adult students’ learning? Why or why not?	For Question 6, 2 (5%) of 40 Chinese distance education instructors used learning contracts when assessing adult students’ learning.
7. Do you think it should be a goal of adult educators to help all adult learners become self-directed? Why or why not?	For Question 7, 40 (100%) of 40 Chinese distance education instructors believed it should be a goal of adult educators to help all adult learners become self-directed.
8. Do you design activities that build students’ self-esteem and sense of accomplishment while delivering course content? Why or why not?	For Question 8, 23(57.5%) of 40 Chinese distance education instructors designed activities that build students’ self-esteem and sense of accomplishment while delivering course content.
9. Do you encourage a search for real-life examples, develop assignments related to real-life situations and embed the content of your course in everyday life? Why or why not?	For Question 9, 25 (62.5%) of 40 Chinese distance education instructors encouraged a search for real-life examples, developed assignments related to real-life situations and embedded the content of their course in everyday life.
10. Do you think memorization can foster greater autonomy in thinking? Why or why not?	For Question 10, 35 (87.5%) of 40 Chinese distance education instructors believed memorization could foster greater autonomy in thinking.

These ten open-ended questions were designed to complement and supplement the seven factors in PALS. The responses to the qualitative questions corroborated the responses to the quantitative portion of the study.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine the Chinese distance education format in light of the Western form of student-centered teaching via distance education. This comparative analysis, which qualifies for the constant comparative method of Glaser & Strauss in grounded theory methodology, was conducted to assess the strengths and weaknesses of each form so that an effective mode of teaching can be recommended to Chinese adult distance education providers. The findings are that while Chinese distance education instructors do utilize Western andragogical methods such as personalizing instruction, relating to experience, assessing student needs, building climate and participating in the learning process, they view themselves merely as providers of knowledge rather than as facilitators of knowledge. They oppose the Western collaborative mode of instruction. Further, their distance teaching is characterized by rigidity and lack of sensitivity to the individual learner. This finding confirms the literature review that Chinese learners assume only a submissive role of following their teachers. Teachers in a gerontocracy like China are to be revered unconditionally. This leaves no room for teachers to make adaptations to accommodate the learning needs of learners. The Western format of adult distance education emphasizes negotiating priorities with adult learners at the beginning of each course, the use of learning contracts, and focus on the learners rather than events or things (Galbraith, 2004). This Western format does not conflict with the preferred model—PBL in distance education. Rather, it further enhances PBL in distance education. PBL makes a radical departure from lecture-based learning. It depends on self-directed learning and collaboration, which embraces principles of adult learning. Concepts such as negotiation with adult learners, the use of learning contracts and focus on learners represent the Western democratic approach to teaching and learning. They work well with Western constructivist approaches that are widely used in distance education. How can educators expect learners to learn in a reflective yet critical way without the freedom to choose what to learn, and how to learn? In fact, principles of adult

learning, PBL models, and even Western constructivist approaches are all excellent approaches in fostering adult learners' critical thinking skills in learning. Such elements in distance education in China do not seem to exist. Although 100% of Chinese distance education instructors interviewed believed it should be a goal of adult educators to help all adult learners become self-directed, they act as knowledge transmitters rather than as learning facilitators. Self-directed learners require their instructors to be learning facilitators or consultants (Grow, 1991; Wang, 2005, in press). Chinese distance education instructors' role as information providers can only serve as an impediment to learning. According to Knowles (1970, 1973, 1975, 1984, 1986, 1998), information providers are pedagogues. Pedagogues serve only as directors or coaches. When adult learners are in a position to use PBL model to learn, they are self-directed. When self-directed, learners need teachers as consultants or resource persons. This is simply because when learners are self-directed, they have a low need for direction and a low need for support (Wang, 2005, in press).

The Western format of distance education is directly derived from the core principles of andragogy. For example, since adult learners have the need to know how learning will be conducted, what learning will occur and why learning is important, Western distance education instructors engage their learners in a collaborative planning process. The shared control of program planning and facilitation are believed to make learning more effective (Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 1998). Although this is true, based on scholarly research and study, the reality in the West may present a different picture. For example, distance education may be a product of a highly centralized system of design in some institutions of higher learning in the United States. In these institutions, instructors are required to conform to a centralized curriculum design and any deviation from that design is frowned upon. However, at least in academic circles in the West, instructors know for sure what models work best for adult learners via distance education. In China's case, negotiating curricular priorities with adult learners would put distance education instructors, who are perceived as authority figures, in an inferior position. Naturally, Chinese educators in general do not allow this activity to occur in their classes. Another example is that Western distance education instructors believe in releasing the energy of self-directed learners. If learners are self-directed, educators ought to be learning facilitators or consultants, linking learners to learning resources. Although Chinese distance education instructors believe learners

should become self-directed, they still use the directing relationship, through a weaning process, between themselves and learners. This directing relationship characterized by being knowledge providers can only frustrate learners. If the self-directed learners' pent up energy is not released, little learning is expected on the part of the learners (Wang, 2005 in press).

An essential feature of Western distance education is its flexibility in that instructors do not believe a well-disciplined classroom is a stimulus for learning. Instructors change their mode of instruction according to the idiosyncrasies that may arise from divergent student needs to situations. In other words, Western distance education instructors take into consideration individual differences, subject matter differences, situational differences and even societal differences. Above all, they focus on learners rather than on things or events. They believe that excellence requires freedom and students' interests drive their education (School Mission, n.d.). In China, by being rigid and insensitive to the learners, instructors take away this freedom and interests from students. The unique kind of culture in China seems to support this special mode of teaching in all Chinese institutions of higher learning (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2000).

Although memorization may serve as a prerequisite for higher-order thinking skills, Chinese distance education instructors' overemphasis on this lower-order thinking skill may promote narrow, dependent, docile students "high in score, but low in ability" (Ross, 1992, p. 245). The following is an excerpt of the responses from those Chinese distance education instructors surveyed for the study:

Memorization, for those language learners, may help lay a solid foundation for their language competence. Memorization contributes to the reserved pool of resources that adult learners employ when thinking. Therefore, it should foster greater autonomy in thinking in this sense. Not rote memorizing, but dynamic memorization of ideas from reading, is really useful for the adult learners in handling different situations they encounter in work. More memorization means greater freedom in converting thoughts to language; more freedom in handling a foreign language means greater autonomy in thinking. If people learn something by heart, it will gradually become part of their

thinking. Before we can think autonomously, memorization is the first and basic step to take. Only after the phase of memorization can we internalize the learning contents and train our thinking. Without the memorization of what has been learned, what should the adult learners think about?

The results of these qualitative findings may run contrary to the research literature on Chinese higher education. However, the fact is that what has been written on Chinese higher education may not reflect a genuine picture of Chinese teaching and learning approaches given the fast-changing teaching and learning environments in China. Although memorization involves the internalization of pre-established or apparently objective and empirical knowledge and already formulated procedures and skills (Jarvis, 1987), it does not imply the possibility of the creation of new knowledge and different techniques. That is why Western adult educators may frown upon this method of teaching preferred by their Chinese counterparts. This is not to say that this method is not useful at all. As in China's case, this very method may prove to be useful when teachers teach the contents of the textbook. When learners are not allowed to challenge instructors' teaching, they can only release their energy in memorizing books in order to do a good job on exams. Further, it is known to the outside world that a "good" Confucian learner is excellent at memorization.

This study was designed to bring together the two prominent teaching methodologies relating to adult distance education in China and in the United States, and to suggest which method is optimal for learning regardless of different social contexts. Today, principles of andragogy (self-direction), PBL models, and constructivist approaches remain the buzzwords in distance education in the West, even though some institutions of higher learning still implement a highly centralized curriculum design like their Chinese counterparts. Both Western adult educators and Chinese adult educators should focus on a teaching methodology that will maximize student learning rather than to conform to the will of higher authorities. The shared control of program planning and facilitation should be implemented in distance education. The days when politics takes precedence over educational methods should be over.

Conclusions and Implications

This study was designed to determine to what extent Chinese distance education instructors utilize the Western format of education. Although there are some Western andragogical elements in their instruction of adult learners via distance education, Chinese distance education instructors basically oppose the learner-centered mode of teaching. Chinese distance education features a mostly teacher-centered (content-centered), information-based and test-driven instructional format. Unlike the Western mode of collaborative education, Chinese distance education focuses on promoting lower-order thinking skills, such as knowledge, comprehension and memorization. Greater autonomy in thinking can be achieved via critical thinking and critical reflection. Such a learning process can only be guaranteed by Western flexible and collaborative mode of distance education. Although this democratic mode of distance education has met with some resistance from the Chinese instructors, it does not mean that this mode of collaborative education should not be the norm of education in distance education around the world. The truth is, if distance education, like any other forms of education in any social settings, aims at fostering more interaction between instructors and learners, then only the Western format of distance education can honor the adult learners via distance education. The teacher-dominated mode of distance teaching may deprive the students of their excitement, sense of discovery, and reaching out when they become self-directed learners.

Obviously, for Chinese distance education to be effective for its 15.8 million nontraditional learners, the Western format of distance education should be recommended to Chinese distance education instructors. This very format characterized by syllabus-based projects, activities, and teaching tools that will create collaborative learning environments and relevant experience for students, expect teachers to be facilitators or resource persons whereas students are expected to self-directed in the learning process. As distance education places more and more emphasis on focusing on the learner rather than the teacher, there is no reason why Chinese distance education instructors should not learn a lesson from their Western counterparts. Further research is necessary, especially in the factors of Chinese culture presenting resistance to the Western democratic form of distance education. Recommendations are threefold:

1. How does Chinese culture affect the adoption and implementation of the Western form of distance education?
2. How do Chinese organizational cultures present barriers to the adoption and implementation of the Western form of distance education?
3. Does Chinese political culture play an important part in preventing Chinese adult distance education instructors from adopting and implementing the Western form of distance education?

All three recommendations point in one direction: the next study should focus on how institutional & familial culture can heavily influence praxis in distance education in China and in the United States.

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