

An Investigation of Online Learning Technologies Amongst Shanghai University Undergraduate Students

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BACKGROUND

- Commenced in 2004, the UTS BBus (Shanghai) is the largest offshore program at UTS
- Dual degree joint venture program between UTS and Shanghai University
- 220 students, joint teaching arrangement, English language
- Large lectures plus small tutorials taught by local staff
- High prestige factor: of several thousand diploma students, only about 5% enter the degree



IDENTIFIED PROBLEMS/ISSUES



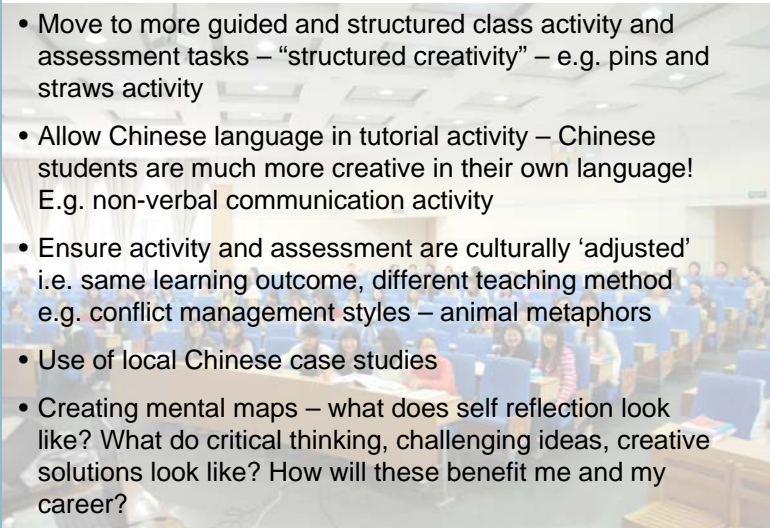
- Student perceptions of distance and lack of feedback/interaction with the institution (identity)
- Lack of support and resources to support study esp. 'new' modes of learning e.g. critical thinking, research skills, case study analysis.
- Assessment tasks & learning outcomes need to be the same, but different (what is 'equivalence'?)
- Prompted investigation of how online technologies (mainly, UTS Online/Blackboard) may be employed to assist to 'bridge the gap'

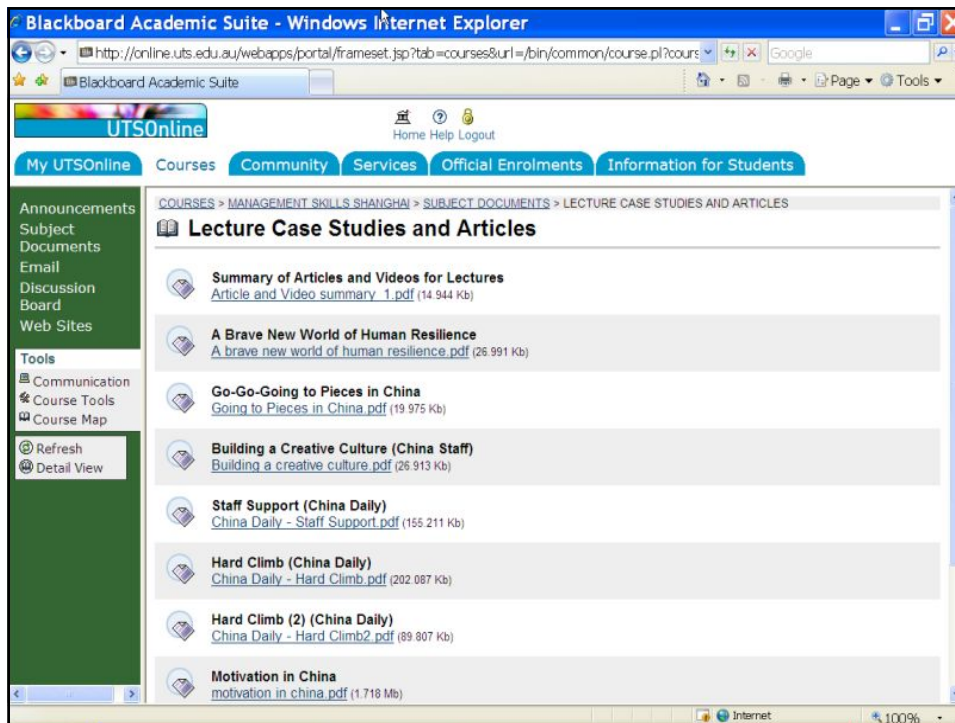


EARLY EFFORTS TO ADDRESS CHINESE LEARNING STYLES



- Move to more guided and structured class activity and assessment tasks – “structured creativity” – e.g. pins and straws activity
- Allow Chinese language in tutorial activity – Chinese students are much more creative in their own language! E.g. non-verbal communication activity
- Ensure activity and assessment are culturally 'adjusted' i.e. same learning outcome, different teaching method e.g. conflict management styles – animal metaphors
- Use of local Chinese case studies
- Creating mental maps – what does self reflection look like? What do critical thinking, challenging ideas, creative solutions look like? How will these benefit me and my career?






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AIMS & OBJECTIVES

1. To gain a greater understanding of the experiences of, and the way in which these Chinese students interact with, internet technologies in a T&L environment
2. To develop a basic site framework for introduction of UTS Online in the 8 subjects in the BBus Shanghai
3. To conduct a UTS Online training workshop for Shanghai staff
4. To develop specific guidelines for further application and development of internet technologies (via UTS Online) in the BBus Shanghai



METHODOLOGY



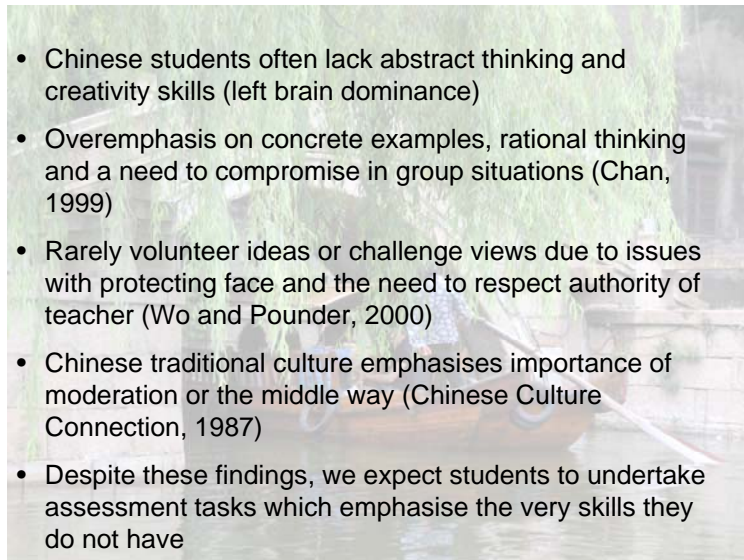
- Five focus groups with students
- Online survey of students (n=111)
- Focus groups with staff (teaching, admin and IT staff)
- Half day workshop with staff
- IT “tour” of facilities at SU
- Internet searches within China (e.g. from cybercafes and hotel rooms)
- Lit review of Chinese learning & internet use



CONTEXT: THE CHINESE LEARNER

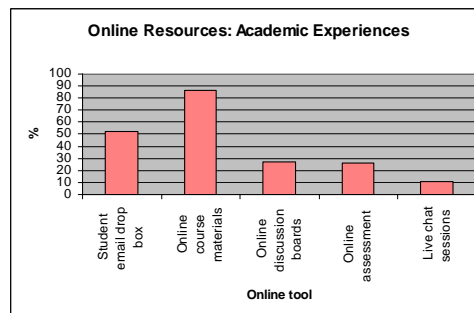
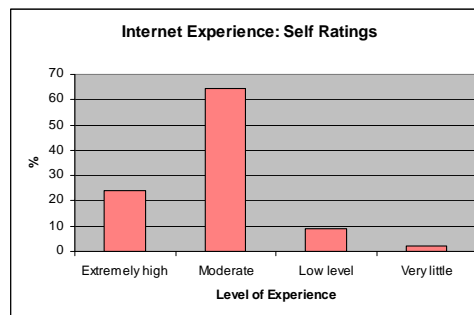


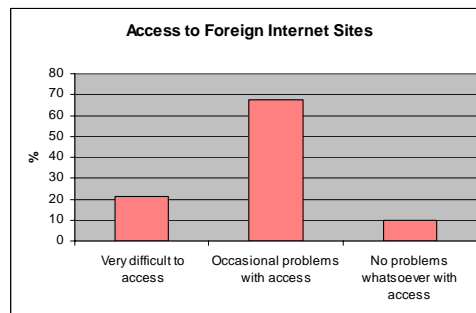
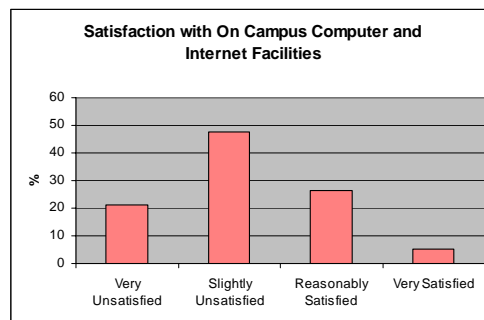
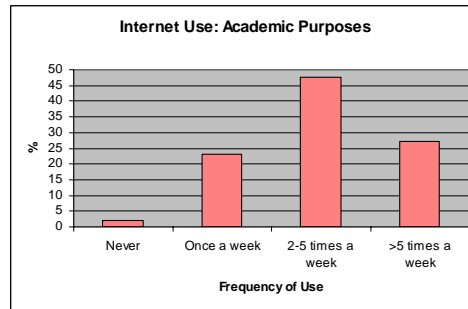
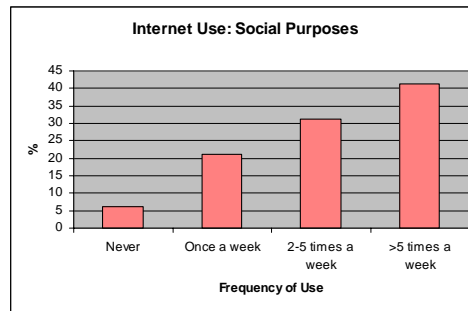
- Chinese students often lack abstract thinking and creativity skills (left brain dominance)
- Overemphasis on concrete examples, rational thinking and a need to compromise in group situations (Chan, 1999)
- Rarely volunteer ideas or challenge views due to issues with protecting face and the need to respect authority of teacher (Wo and Pounder, 2000)
- Chinese traditional culture emphasises importance of moderation or the middle way (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987)
- Despite these findings, we expect students to undertake assessment tasks which emphasise the very skills they do not have



CHINESE STUDENTS: LEARNING ONLINE

- Chinese students have a high level of self management in web based learning but preferred face to face contact (Parnell & Carraher, 2005)
- Liu, Lin and Wang (2003) found main benefits of online technologies to Chinese students as “more freedom and convenience”, “abundance of materials that could be easily found”
- Main shortcomings were “reduced real time communication”, “low network speeds”, “too much freedom in learning” and “poor arrangement of instruction materials”







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FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

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- Chinese students have extensive experience using technology for social purposes (facebook, second life, chat) but not academic purposes (public email drop-box and SMS most common)
- Modesty and Moderation means most students won't volunteer opinion or questions online, prefer face-to-face or email with lecturer
- Shanghai U. IT facilities very poor – outdated software, slow network speeds, one small computer lab, no access to foreign sites (contrary to perception on initial inspection)
- 98% of students have own laptop, 50% of these have ADSL connections, allowing access to foreign sites
- Within China, can't access many foreign sites, e.g. Taiwan sites, US Google and Yahoo, CNN, NY Times, Wikipedia

- *“In our school the English website is not very available. Sometimes I go to my friend’s place in another province and use her father’s computer to access American site. I think it will help me to get a higher mark”*
- *I think Discussion Board will not be popular for Chinese students because everyone will be afraid to go first. Also they will be afraid to write the wrong thing and then they will lose face with their teacher and also their friends”*
- *“If students can get used to this (Discussion Board) it will be good for us because we can share ideas with other students and the teacher. I think it is possible for us to change these ways and be more like Western students”*
- *“I think Chinese students like to ask the question to the teacher face-to-face. The teacher will respect us more if we do this and besides it can give us the opportunity to get to know the teacher outside of the classroom. So I will not ask the question on email. Actually I am quite scared to do this!*

SOME CONCLUSIONS

- Use of asynchronous discussion boards needs to be highly structured, linked to specific class work, and non-compulsory to begin with
- Chinese students suffer from extremely high levels of stress, the pressure to succeed is intense – they will not engage in any activity that does not directly benefit them here and now –clear link needed between the online experience and their individual performance
- Assessment tasks need to be designed with assumption that foreign sites are unavailable to students, that students lack sophisticated research skills
- Do not expect students to engage in learning which draws on particular skills unless you are prepared to teach them those skills e.g. self reflection, critical thinking
- There is a need to ‘acculturate’ Chinese students to online technologies at a basic level before any move toward more sophisticated applications for academic purposes
- This may involve a period of anonymity in order to protect face