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The Paradox of the Chinese Learner in the Context of the Research-Teaching Nexus: A Matter of Module Design?

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Abstract

With the increased number of Chinese students at western universities, academics for long have sought to explain their performance and searched for ways to resolve associated challenges, specifically for the research-teaching nexus. This paper proposes and investigates an alternative approach to learning for addressing the paradox of the Chinese learner. Using performance data from two deliveries and qualitative data on the student experience from one delivery of an undergraduate strategic management module at a UK Business School, the pedagogical redesign seems to explain why Chinese students had achieved high marks in some part of the assessments, contrary to perceptions. Staged, collaborative and cumulative learning for coursework embedded in the module design benefited these students. Unexpectedly, some home students objected to the module design, because they preferred discrete blocks of learning and assessment rather than cumulative learning and assessment for research-informed coursework. The encouraging results confirm the proposed approach but given the limited scope of this case study also call for further research.

Keywords: teaching and learning in HE; Chinese students; internationalisation of business schools; curriculum design; independent learners
The Paradox of the Chinese Learner in the Context of the Research-Teaching Nexus: A Matter of Module Design?

1. Introduction

Perceptions about international students, especially Chinese students, are that they have problems performing well in assessments in western universities. For example, students of Chinese nationality form the largest group of international non-European Union (EU) students at universities in the United Kingdom (UK): there were 67,325 students from China in 2010/11, up by 18.1% from 2009/10 (HESA, 2012). Whereas a lack of attainment by these Chinese students may be due to many complex and interrelated factors, it is the inability to achieve deep learning, critically analyse information, and demonstrate the application of knowledge to problems and tasks that has been highlighted as prominent deficits by some (for example, Edwards and Ran, 2006; Jones, 2005; Turner, 2006). However, these skills are necessary for the research-teaching nexus (e.g. Henkel, 2004, pp. 27–8). This implies that the cohorts of Chinese students in classrooms might experience challenges related to skills necessary for the connection between research and teaching.

1.1 Research Objectives

These learning challenges related to the interconnection between research and teaching are undoubtedly experienced by all students, but it appears to be the gap between the prior learning experiences and what is expected in UK higher education that makes the improvement of attainment of Chinese students worthy of study. Consequently, some (e.g. Warring, 2010) believe that many of the expectations and aspirations of UK higher education do not seem to be understood by Chinese students. More specifically, these expectations may include concepts and skills, such as independent learning, reflective learning, differentiation between rote learning and extracting meaning, creativity, synthesising information from a variety of sources, and group-working among others (Barrie, 2006; Robson and Turner, 2007).
Therefore, academics might find that teaching Chinese students sets new challenges for teaching methods and module design related to the incorporation of ‘research’ in an already diverse student population. Thus, this paper aims to describe the possible implications for innovative teaching, module design and assessment, centred around the research-teaching link, which might derive from an experiment as case study for the module ‘Strategic Management’ delivered to a group consisting of home (UK), EU and Chinese students.

1.2 Scope and outline of paper

The onus of this paper is the comparative performance and experience of students with varied backgrounds in a module designed around the research-teaching nexus. The learning outcomes of the undergraduate module (Subsection 3.1) inspired the redesign and related teaching methods, following the call for experimentation with regard to the research-teaching link by Elsen et al. (2009, p. 83), the plea for active participation in the inquiry process (e.g. Robertson and Bond, 2005, p. 531) and the stance that both teaching and research seek extension of knowledge (Burke and Rau, 2010, p. 134). It also echoes the ‘idealistic’ approach for the module redesign, while applying the ‘functional’ approach for the specific take on teaching strategic management; see Simons and Elen (2007) for this dichotomy on the research-teaching connection. Furthermore, the restructuring was a breakaway from the traditional teaching of strategic management (Jennings, 2002), being the case teaching method, simulations of practice (see also Arias-Aranda, 2007) and action learning projects. This perspective also fits with Burke’s and Rau’s (2010, p. 141) remark that by strengthening the research-teaching nexus the research-practice divide might also narrow consequently, which corresponds with the necessity to develop skills how to think (Smith, 2003). The chosen approach has some similarities to Mingers’ (2000) description of a module for teaching critical approaches to management students, albeit that the focus is less on teaching itself in his case. Additionally, the restructuring was inspired by searching for an alternative to existing views on how to deal
with different culture-based learning styles. Hence, the redesign is a move away from canonical approaches to the delivery of this topic, while incorporating the research-teaching link and accommodating diverse learning styles.

As a result of this redesign, realisation emerged that the coursework and examination results in the module ‘Strategic Management’ were different in some ways as previously thought with regard to the diversity of enrolled students. This applied particularly to Chinese students:

- Could the results show that they perform better when engaged in staged and collaborative learning for the embedded connection between research and teaching?

This line of enquiry for the first research objective led to a more intense review of extant literature on approaches to learning and teaching and the effect on student learning outcomes, with specific reference to Chinese students in western universities; to this purpose a narrative overview of literature in the second section of this paper followed guidelines by Green et al. (2006, pp. 103–4). After this review the student experience was evaluated following a qualitative research approach, supported by performance data, as described in the third section. The results in the third section and the findings in the fourth section allowed addressing additional questions. As a second research objective the question arose:

- What were the perceptions of the Chinese students on the teaching and assessments on the module compared to other groups in the cohort?

Ultimately, the outcomes of the experiment as case study for these two research objectives may have implications for teaching methods and module design in universities with an international student population. Therefore, suggestions for teaching practice and research close this paper.

2. **Background and Literature Review**

Since enrolment by Chinese students has become common in classrooms of western universities, the differences between Chinese and western approaches to learning might cause variance in learning.


2.1 Struggling Chinese Students (in UK Higher Education)?

This difference has been well recognised and the large body of literature since the 1980s on the learning approaches of Chinese students can be divided in different conceptions, albeit not focused on the link between research and teaching directly. The early literature provided a view of Chinese approaches to learning as being inadequate for study in western universities and may have focused on the international student as the ‘other’. Therefore, the view was that international students were expected to assimilate into the western model. A pedagogy that accommodates students from different cultures was recommended. The advantages and disadvantages of this cultural approach to pedagogy are also discussed in the literature (for example, Hyland et al., 2008; Nguyen et al., 2006; Tarry, 2011). In this line of thought, the idea of the international university and the international curriculum is now prominent, and this means planning teaching and learning that is accessible to all students. There is a host of literature providing advice, hints and toolkits for teaching international and home students (e.g. Burnapp, 2007; Carroll and Ryan, 2005). However, this approach of accommodation of cultures in pedagogy for international students does not address directly learning styles. Whereas western lecturers might be mindful of the different learning styles in their classrooms, international students themselves may be unaware that their previously successful study methods will not be useful in their UK university. Low marks and failure among international students seem derived from previous learning strategies, which may involve rote learning and regurgitation (Pennycook, 1996). The lack of awareness of learning and assessment strategies in the western tradition may cause anxiety in international students and lead to attempts to plagiarise and cheat in assessments (Hayes and Introna, 2005). This is why some researchers suggest that Chinese learners’ approaches are simply inadequate for academic success and there is a deficit that must be corrected (Ballard and Clanchy, 1991a, b). Yet, Chinese students can do well in UK universities, giving rise to the term ‘the paradox of the Chinese learner’
Hence, a first way of addressing the learning strategies is the acknowledgement of the gap and correcting the learning habits of these students in the context of the link between research and teaching, while ignoring the paradox of the Chinese learner.

A second way to address the gap in learning styles is by viewing it as inherent to culture. Chan (1999), Clark and Gieve (2006) and Cortazzi and Jin (1997) argue for a process of ‘cultural synergy’ in which academics and students can learn from each other about their cultures. Also, Kingston and Forland (2008) plea for a better understanding of the factual differences by pointing out some misconceptions with respect to actual performance of Chinese students and underlying principles of rote learning. Similarly, Campbell and Li (2008, p. 393) request both Asian international students and academics to adjust to the newly emerging classroom cultures. Robertson et al. (2000) follow this tactic when using the Delphi technique for reconciling the perceptions of international students and staff at an Australian university. Whereas this approach acknowledges the existence of the gap in learning styles and addresses to some extent the paradox of the Chinese learner, it does not directly result in explaining how the gap for the relationship between research and teaching itself can be bridged.

A third approach to the gap in learning styles is found in the teaching method as module design. In this perspective, Zhou et al. (2008, p. 72) point out that ‘however, merely asking for mutual understanding is not enough without understanding the processes involved’ and they recommend ‘reciprocal adaptations’ in pedagogy on the part of the learners and academics; that call is similar to the one by Campbell and Li (2008, p. 394), even though they focus more on understanding mutual learning and teaching styles. In the perspective of this approach, lecturing staff as module designers are best placed to deal with these aspects of learning. Rather than just telling students how to study, a teaching method that leads students through a more fruitful process of studying may lead to self-development and continued academic success (Wang and Byram, 2011; Watkins, 2000). This stance is mostly followed by Wong (2003, p.
165), who sees the Asian international students adapting to the learning styles at an Australian university. Hence, these propositional writings confirm that appropriate teaching methods embedded in module design might bridge the gap in learning styles and might address the paradox of the Chinese learner for the research-teaching nexus, while ensuring these teaching approaches benefit all students.

2.2 Need for Transforming the View on International Students

Returning to the starting point for this paper, the view of the struggling international student has been challenged by the paradox of the Chinese learner and the potential of alternative module design for the research-teaching relationship. Wang and Byram (2011, p. 421) discovered that Chinese students have valuable transferable learning skills and are very capable of taking on board new ways of learning. Not only Chinese but all students should be helped to achieve the skills which are put forward as essential attributes of a 21st century graduate from a UK university; see for example, the clusters of skills and abilities in the University of Edinburgh’s (2011) graduate attributes framework. So far, literature on teaching and learning in internationalised universities has been mainly aspirational, for example Sanderson (2008), or has made general recommendations (see Burnapp, 2007; Carroll and Ryan, 2005, among others). In this respect, Wang and Byram (2011, p. 421) recommend that lecturers should

encourage students to mobilise strategies transferable from their inherited learning culture whilst exploring and benefiting from alternative or new ways of learning.

Hyland et al. (2008, p. 30) point to the need for lecturers to adapt their pedagogy, but more importantly for the universities themselves to listen to their staff and students more carefully so that

the needs of both HEIs and the individuals within them could be met and consequently learning for all students enhanced.
From this point of view, Otting et al. (2012, p. 755) advise carefully structured and staged problem-based learning tasks for all students; again, this positions the design of modules centre-stage.

However, while advice abounds for the design of modules around carefully structured and staged problem-based learning, examples in the internationalised classroom are lacking in the literature. Haigh (2002) briefly outlines courses where groupwork in teams using the Internet was involved and where students were assessed by their contributions to a teleconference (Back et al. 1996, cited in Haigh 2002, pp. 56–7). Another course required students to work in discussion teams to critically analyse media reports of African events (Aspaas, 1998, cited in Haigh 2002, p. 58). A similar type of pedagogical design is described by Johnston and Olekalns (2002) who outline the internet-based delivery and assessment of a course called CALM (Critical and Analytical Learning in Macroeconomics) to almost 1200 students in an Australian university, one third of whom were non-native speakers of English. Jones (2005) focuses on perceptions of home and Chinese students of the delivery and assessment of the same CALM project as a critical thinking task. Her focus of investigation is not the course materials or written work, but how the course was perceived by Chinese speaking students in relation to critical thinking and concluded that

\[ \text{the study confirmed that, although cultural and linguistic differences are important, the way in which a subject and assessment task is presented to students has a profound impact on learning.} \]  

(ibid., p. 339)

Spronken-Smith and Walker (2010) describe three case studies of modules in which an inquiry-based and student-centred approach is used to develop students’ research skills. However, in all these studies, only overviews of problem-based solving and inquiry-based learning are provided.
3. **Methodology for Case Study**

Given the lack of in-depth evidence with regard to inquiry-based learning, the case study aims at filling this gap in scholarly knowledge by considering whether Chinese students perform better when engaged in staged and collaborative learning for the embedded connection between research and teaching (the first research objective), and how their perceptions of the teaching and assessments on the module compare to other groups in the cohort (the second research objective). In addition, it explores how a module can be designed and delivered allowing all students the opportunity to become independent learners, to develop an inquisitive mind and to perform well academically; with respect to the analysis. To this purpose, an opportunity to study the performance of Chinese learners emerged at the University of the West of Scotland; the module itself was developed using an action learning approach, whereas the analysis followed the case study methodology.

### 3.1 Module Strategic Management

What made this module about strategic management of interest is that one of its three learning objectives was: ‘to acquire knowledge and understanding of the debates surrounding functional, competitive and corporate strategy’. In addition, the transferable skills were listed as (i) analysis of case studies, (ii) critical review of theories, concepts and literature, (iii) in-depth study of specific topics, (iv) writing a complex report at various levels of analysis, (v) evaluate reports of others, and (vi) working in groups to study specific topics. Traditionally, the delivery of the module would elaborate on those debates for strategy during traditional lectures, using the textbook of de Wit and Meyer (2004), in which 10 paradoxes are discussed. The exam as assessment instrument was complemented by coursework about a generic question, including a case study (a traditional way for teaching strategic management, see remarks in Subsection 1.2). This canonical module design was viewed as being a passive
engagement with content by students and not meeting requirements for transferable skills, particularly for the paradoxes in strategic management.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

After the first delivery the set-up was changed to incorporate more active forms of learning, such as debating, staged building of coursework about an in-depth topic and peer-review. Instigated by one of the learning objectives, three streams of activities for coursework could be viewed as activating students to become independent learners and propagating the research-teaching link in that redesign (see Figure 1). The first stream was writing of the coursework, which followed the steps of (1) topic selection, (2) generation of academic literature for the topic (at least 5 academic journal publications), (3) appraisal of references (one of them submitted as an example), (4) draft report, and (5) final report; please note that for the steps 1–3 formative feedback was given by the module coordinator. For this first stream of coursework the students were divided into six groups, each representing a paradox of strategic management found in the main textbook for the module (for example, the paradox resources vs. markets [de Wit and Meyer, 2004, pp. 245–7]). Each student had to choose a topic that was positioned or related to the paradox of her/his group; there were supporting mechanisms to avoid replication of topics chosen by students for their coursework. The second stream in the learning activities was the delivery of a commentary (review) on the draft report of a student in one of the other five paradoxes. It was required that each commentary was based on the original paradox and two more academic references (that way indirectly increasing the sources used); students were expected to include the commentary and a response to it in their final report. The third stream was a structured debate by each group about their paradox. The purpose of this debate was three-fold: (a) to activate a group in studying their own paradox in-depth in order to form their own final report, (b) to learn more about organising arguments for and against, and (c) to inform the students about the other paradoxes to assist them in writing an informed commentary. For the components of forming the coursework three marks were awarded: (i) the debate as group
activity, though only during the last delivery, (ii) the commentary as individual effort, and (iii) the final report as individual work; the relatively high weight of the commentary expresses also its importance as formative assessment. The remaining 45-50% of the total mark for the module went to the exam (this percentage varied of over the academic years considered).

Because of no precedence and the extent of supporting materials, including the use of a virtual learning environment (VLE), it was not until the fourth edition that the full suite of support, including tutorials, could be realised. These changes induced by action learning (derived from Putnam [1999] and Wilson and Fowler [2005]) are captured in Table 1; systematically, the achievements by students in terms of content, marks, etc. and the feedback from students were used for improving the design of the module. This overview also shows that the students experience varied between these editions of the module. After the fourth year, changes were implemented in programmes, resulting in the withdrawal of this module. The third year was discarded for analysis since no Chinese students participated in the module for some odd reason. Therefore, because of the different module design of the first edition and of the missing data about Chinese students in the third one, the provision of the second and the fourth edition of the module Strategic Management served as a case study for this paper.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Furthermore, the activation of students was based on inquiry-based learning as the core for the connection between research and teaching. Simply including building more research into lectures and tutorials was seen as passive, akin to Jenkins et al.’s (1998, pp. 137–8) position. Using Spronken-Smith and Walker (2010, pp. 727, 735–6) the chosen approach was positioned in-between guided and open learning, and in-between information-active and discovery-active. Such also followed the comments by Hmelo-Silver et al. (2007) on the strengths of inquiry-based learning. Furthermore, it was commensurate with Strategy 2 and to a lesser extent Strategy 3 as proposed by Healey and Jenkins (2006, p. 49) for improving the research-teaching nexus in undergraduate programmes; a similar approach is also mentioned by Prince et al.
(2007, p. 289), albeit in the context of engineering education. Moreover, Magnussen et al. (2000) showed the beneficial impact of inquiry-based learning. Hence, this experiment for the module about strategic management, based on inquiry-based learning was expected to have a positive impact on the student experience for the research-teaching nexus, whereas it was not known how students from different backgrounds would perceive the structure for learning.

[Insert Table 2a-b about here]

3.2 Case Study Methodology

In Flyvbjerg’s (2006, p. 230) terms for the case study methodology, the experiment could be characterised as a choice for a ‘deviant’ instance; given the sample size of students, presented later, and because it concerns only a limited number of provisions, it was also to be typified as exploratory research. Furthermore, because the context of the module in the wider institutional setting is not really taken into account, the case study represents a holistic, single case (Yin 1994, p. 39). A quantitative study was rejected because of the limited suitable data. Moreover, a pure qualitative approach, such as grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), was discarded since the primary objective was not to form a new theory but to explore which impact the design of learning activities might have on the acquisition of academic skills by students. The performance data and the availability of qualitative information about the student experience – gathered through various mechanisms – rendered the case study approach the most effective research method; however, the results can only be paving the way for further discourse and research.

With regard to the composition of cohorts, a division relevant to the objective of this paper can be made in three groups; this is based on the actual enrolment of students for the module and is partly specific for the university. Each group is described briefly:

- Chinese students. These students were direct entry students into third year as they had already completed three years of study at a partner university in China. Furthermore, they
had to meet eligibility criteria such as proficiency in English. Typically, they spent two months before the academic year getting acquainted with teaching methods at the university and advancing their language skills.

- EU students. These students came from partner universities in other European countries (than the UK), and typically were in their third year of undergraduate study. They mostly followed courses during one semester at the university, and sometimes, two semesters.

- Home students. Due to the profile of the university, this group consisted mostly of students that entered the programme from which the module is part directly after secondary education. In addition to these students, this group also had a limited number of students that entered the third year after completing further education (called colleges in the UK leading to a higher national degree [HND]) and few mature students.

3.3 Data collection

From two deliveries performance data for each of these three groups were collected from each of the first diets\(^1\) (Table 2a-b) as the first source of evidence. For example, from the fourth delivery, whereas 63 students participated in the module, only 49 composite marks were eventually complete and useful; 3 students had received part of the marks in the previous academic year and 11 others had not completed all components for the composite grade at the end of the first diet. From these 49 usable results, 28 were from home students, 18 from EU students and 3 from Chinese students (see Table 2b); note that the low numbers are acceptable because the aim is to contribute to the discussion about approaches for dealing with an international population of students rather than providing decisive evidence that this alternative

\(^1\) A diet is a common term in the UK used for the delivery of a module in an academic year. The first diet refers to the initial delivery of a module and the resit diet to opportunities for students to retake the exam or resubmit coursework.
module design yields worthier outcomes. During the second provision, the delivery at another, remote campus in the UK was done by a local lecturer. Later, the lectures, tutorials, debates and group activities were transmitted by videoconferencing to the remote campus (two-way communication). All EU and Chinese students followed the module at the main campus. Hence, for the purpose of analysis the home group has been split into two subgroups: one at the main campus and one at the remote campus. Again, given the relatively low number of international Chinese students across the two deliveries, the findings from this experiment can only be viewed as explorative, corresponding with the case study method for the analysis.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

In addition, qualitative data were gathered through four types of interactions with students during the fourth delivery; the data collection was focused on the student experience with regard to the pedagogical design of the module. As a first source for qualitative information, the meeting with the teams to prepare for the debates was taken as an opportunity to collect information; these could be considered unstructured interviews. Invariably during these meetings, each group of students (consisting of 4-6 individuals) was asked what they found attractive and what they favoured less; each meeting was recorded in a logbook. As a next source for further information, a session was organised with representatives of the body of students, chaired by a teaching assistant; this was done to prevent the influence of the module coordinator. The teaching assistant and the four representatives agreed the minutes of the meeting. A plenary discussion with about 60 students served as a third source of information; notes were taken right afterwards. The results of these three interactions are displayed in Table 3 as aggregated comments. Finally, the individual meetings with students from week 10 were taken as an opportunity to deliberate on the module (see Table 4); again students were asked what they found attractive and what they favoured less, and comments recorded in a logbook (26 out of 49 students), which were later aggregated. Additional information that has not been considered for qualitative analysis consisted of feedback to and from students (for example, a
full-time employed, mature student stating this was the best module he had experienced in his undergraduate programme). The four types of interviews – three types of group sessions complemented with individual interviews – in addition to the performance data comply with the requirement for case studies to include multiple sources of evidence.

[Insert Table 4 about here]

4. Discussion of Findings

The data collected in Tables 1 to 4 can now be discussed to reflect on the questions whether Chinese students can perform better when engaged in staged and collaborative learning.

4.1 Results from Performance Data

Returning to Table 2a-b, the data from the home students’ group one are presented as two separate results, one including students at the remote campus and one only focusing on the main campus. The mark for the debate has been omitted since that was not an individual mark but a mark for a group effort and came only in play during the fourth delivery; the random composition of debating groups made it difficult to differentiate between groups in terms of attainment. Furthermore, since the coursework as inquiry-based learning is the focus of this paper, the average score has been set at 100 for each academic year. The relative performance of the three groups (home, EU and Chinese) can be derived from Table 2 for each of the two provisions.

Note that Chinese students performed far better in Year 4, whereas the exam results are consistent over the two years they participated. Table 1 gives a clue to why that might be: only during the final year of delivery the full support mechanisms and group interaction were available. For example, this was the only year during which students as a subgroup would sit together facilitated by teaching assistants and discuss the individual topics to ensure nobody in that subgroup would have a similar topic. This would support the inference that staged learning
is only successful, also for Chinese students, when appropriate supporting mechanisms are in place.

The exam results show a reverse trend in the same tables. A remark should be made about the set-up of exam questions. To compensate for possible differences in proficiency in English, the descriptive text, consisting of about 300–500 words, was published 48 hours in advance, while the factual questions were presented during the exam. This pattern would allow all students to comprehend the full text and give every participating student as far as possible an equal opportunity. Note that this ‘preview’ of exam questions was the only concession to the student population being from a diversity of backgrounds in terms of proficiency in English. Despite this effort, the traditional exam yielded a very different trend to the coursework related performance and across the three years does not show any difference in performance; that is consistent with generally reported ‘lower’ performance of Chinese students in traditional assessments.

4.2 Results from Qualitative Data

To find out more about how the three cohorts experienced the module with regard to how they can perform in coursework and exams, with a particular focus on the Chinese students, the aggregated comments of the unstructured interviews in Table 3 were derived through recursive abstraction of the notes. During the recursive abstraction, comments and results not related to the teaching method were removed for more detailed analysis; examples were the positively received guest lecture by a director of a company and the lectures addressing relating theory to practice and vice versa, even though retained in the table for the sake for completeness. These aggregated comments obtained in a systematic way form the basis for the discussion later, from which the main points have been captured in Table 5.

[Insert Table 5 about here]
During the meetings with the debating teams, the first group of interviews in Table 3, students frequently raised the issue that this was the first time they had been required to study journal publications. The guidelines for the module stated textbooks were not considered as counting towards the required academic publications, although they were allowed to be used. Apparently, most students were insufficiently aware of the nature of these. At the same time, students also raised the issue that they had hardly experienced any learning activities related to in-depth appraising of academic publications before and wondered why in earlier years these had not been part modules.

The interview with the students’ representatives added the time allocation (second row in Table 3). But time spent by students pointed out that an initial distribution of notional time allocated to the learning activities by the module coordinator was about right (students provided proof that they needed to spend about 160-200 hours on this module, which corresponded with the nominal 200 credit hours). Most interestingly, students asked that all steps, even those with formative assessments for selecting and defining the topic of the coursework, were marked so that they were incentivised to do well. Furthermore, during the group interviews it was indicated that the students preferred assignments set by the tutor(s) above developing their own topic; some of them viewed this setting their own topic within given guidelines as a waste of time. In addition, the representatives raised concerns about the videoconferencing and group meetings across the two campuses; although listed in the table these are not seen as essential to this study. These points show that students were trading off time spent on components of this module against (direct and immediate) rewards in terms of grading; the question remains whether such a stance could be reconciled with the non-linear steps in the research-teaching nexus and its formative feedback.

A plenary discussion with all students clearly raised similar points as the meeting with the representatives on the set-up of the module, albeit that the discussion was led mostly by direct entry students having an HND degree (spontaneous voting was used to find that out), see Table
3. But in addition, students made remarks about the need to review somebody else’s work; they did not view it as formative assessment towards reviewing their own work in progress. None of the EU and Chinese students joined this part of the discussion, except for comments about it being their first time with an assignment for coursework like this. Quite far into the module (week 8), there was still resistance by some home students towards the unusual approach of this module.

Finally, meetings with individual students, see Table 4, generated perspectives of students on the module consistent with the other three ‘group’ interviews. Again, the statements in the table were obtained through recursive abstraction. Notably, at that stage, 10 weeks into the module, the Chinese students did not ask for support anymore; also, these students did not miss any lecture or tutorial. All these individual meetings, most of them related to compensatory work for absence, were an opportunity to discuss the progression of the module and the view of students.

Hence, the performance data, the three unstructured group interviews and the individual meetings generated a rich picture of the perspective of students on the learning activities in the module and their progression towards becoming independent learners. These data from different sources generated as the main results:

- The performance of Chinese students for the coursework in the fourth delivery is better than the second delivery, whereas their performance in exams is relatively similar for both academic years.
- There is a huge variety in responses during unstructured group interviews and the individual meetings that can be segregated along the lines of home, EU and Chinese students.
- The home students are divided about appreciating the module and particularly the (domestic) direct entry students are uncomfortable with the unusual module design.
The interpretation of those distinct results, based on the performance data and more extensive qualitative data, leads to a more detailed discussion.

4.3 Discussion of Results

To start with, the results show that Chinese students possibly perform better when engaged with staged writing of coursework based on the research-teaching nexus (see Table 2), albeit necessary to have appropriate support mechanisms in place (based on the performance in Year 4 and the design of the module that year, see Table 1). The EU students performed better in the final exam than the home students at the main campus during two editions, while doing worse in the commentary. This difference is hard to explain, also when taking into account that the Chinese students performed at the same level as the home students for the commentary. It could well be that the confidence level of commenting on others’ work was easier for home students (also taking into account the relatively short turnaround-time of 2 weeks for a commentary). At this stage of the commentary, the Chinese students were not asking for support and feedback anymore (except to know how well they were doing, mostly asked informally during lectures). This is commensurate with Wong’s (2003, p. 165) finding that Asian students are able to adapt to the new style of teaching and learning within two to three months; this corresponds more or less with the submission of the draft report in this particular module (see Figure 1). Furthermore, the approach of the module corresponds with Neild’s (2004, p. 195) and Saravanmuthu ‘s (2008, p. 174) call that assessment should be structured in logical steps so that Chinese learners take on active and deeper learning styles. In addition, the design of the module also brought students in direct contact with materials, a preference of international students found by Ladd and Ruby Jr. (1999, p. 365). Hence, a first finding of the research is that there are indications that the step-by-step coursework complemented by a range of supporting mechanisms (such as facilitated group meetings) suits the Chinese students very
well and reflected in the performance for coursework; hence, this points to the alternative approach embedded in module design being worthwhile for further investigation.

Whereas Chinese and EU students generally appreciated the staged learning and the connection between research and teaching, the approach caused a larger divide between the home students. Particularly, in Table 3 it can be seen that some students have great difficulty with interacting with other students about their work and prefer to generate coursework in one go based on a generic assignment set by the module coordinator. As one student put it during the plenary discussion:

\[]\[
Who are you to tell me how to do my coursework? I know it because I have done it many times successfully already and I want to work on it and complete it in just one weekend.\]

The point of reference for the home students seemed to be an essay on a generic topic, to be submitted halfway or two-thirds during the teaching period. This group of students viewed the phased development of the coursework as a nuisance in their predetermined plan; that articulation was stronger from students with an HND degree. This attitude may be due to their previous experience at a further education college, and Barron and d’Annunzio-Green (2009, p. 9) summarise these differences as perceived by direct entry students as

\[]\[
less approachable staff, stricter time scales, ... and less familiarity with the pedagogical approaches adopted.\]

Submitting a coursework early during a semester would also allow more time for preparing exams. Furthermore, another point arrives from Regan (2003), who demonstrates the necessity for the link between teacher-led activities and the development of independent learners; but this seems not to have been taken on by the students with an HND degree in this module. This discussion about the appropriateness of the module design did not happen with the EU and Chinese students; these students had only initial difficulties to grasp the set-up of the model, but the more the module progressed and the more the debates took place, the more they seemed
at ease. Hence, a second finding suggests that some home students had become accustomed to the block-wise generation of coursework, particularly essays, and did not see the need to develop academic skills as essential to their learning processes; however, there was also an equally-sized cohort of home students who rather enjoyed the experience and saw the benefits of the research-informed approach well beyond this module.

These results reverberate in the time students need to allocate to this module. Initial signals from home students caused some alarm about the time needed for completion of each learning activity. As shown in the previous subsection, it became apparent that hours spent corresponded with an initial estimation for the module. When asked, the students expressed that this module caused them to spend more time on learning activities than any other module, even though not exceeding the notional hours allocated as discussed before. Some indicated that they had problems combining work to financially support themselves for their studies, even though the balance apparently tended to favour work. The limited time devoted to studies in relation to academic performance is also mentioned by Moreau and Leathwood (2006, p. 35); and this is commensurate with the profile of the university aiming at increasing attendance of students from deprived areas. Again, the point of reference for students seemed to be the writing of essays in a fairly short time, which creates more autonomy towards planning around personal, non-study related activities, but such is not beneficial for transferable skills related to the link between teaching and research; this conjecture supports the second finding of this study.

In addition, some students reported practical problems, too. For example, students experienced difficulties meeting deadlines for other modules running in parallel while engaging with this module. Particularly, one student with learning disabilities did not manage to work simultaneously on different subjects in conjunction with the many activities in the module. Other students brought the making of deadlines to the attention of the module coordinator, too, but these signals seemed in specific cases also related to jobs they were holding to support
themselves. On the contrary, a number of mature students, studying full-time and having full-time jobs, lauded the approach of the module since they took it as an opportunity to enhance their skills. Hence, a third finding of our study points to that continuous learning activities and formative assessment might be experienced as detrimental to other obligations by students, and as a fourth finding to difficulties for those students with particular learning disabilities who perform better when concentrating on one assignment.

This brings us to the impact of the module design on learning activities and styles. The case study demonstrates that the set-up of a module in the form of step-by-step building of coursework might benefit international students. In particular, the written (formative) feedback might be preferred by Chinese students and be key to their progression, as also noted by Kingston and Forland (2008, p. 217). However, it is not merely the staged writing of coursework, but also the many activities, such as debating and facilitated group interaction, which contribute to these results. It seems to come at the expense of the relative performance of home students, although that could be partly attributed to their educational background. But it also the divide among home students that must be considered. Therefore, a fifth finding of the study is that this particular module design may benefit international students, though more decisive evidence is required to support this stance, and might be experienced negatively by home students.

5. Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, the first and fifth finding from this experiment into cumulative teaching, learning and assessment for one module ‘Strategic Management’ indicated that the teaching method had a significant effect on the performance of Chinese students; see Table 5 for the comparison between the three cohorts in the classroom. The Chinese students on the module during the fourth delivery appreciated this kind of staged creation of coursework and seemed to benefit from it. This aligns with statements on the adaptability of Chinese students to western higher
education (e.g. Wang and Byram, 2011, p. 420). In this context, Campbell and Li (2008, p. 384) state that academic conventions in western universities, among them using references, conducting appraisals and writing literature reviews, are not explicitly taught prior to entry at western universities, making it difficult for the Chinese students to acquire these. In the case of the module, these elements are explicitly part of the process and students receive formative feedback to advance not only the development of their topic but also their academic skills. However, the encouraging findings for Chinese students could also be an expression of current cohorts being more autonomous learners and learning styles becoming more similar (Kingston and Forland, 2008, p. 216). Nevertheless, the findings from the research contrasts with the position of Edwards and Ran (2006), Jones (2005), and Turner (2006) who see the prominent deficits of Chinese students as constraining. The case study in this paper indicates the opposite is possible and even contains weak signals that Chinese students may actually be outperforming home students once the teaching method has been adapted to the model of staged writing for research-informed coursework, thus, answering the first research objective positively for this experiment, and also, that their perceptions of capabilities and confidence for the research-teaching nexus improved, as answer to the second research objective.

5.1 Implications for Teaching Practices

This cumulative teaching approach for research-informed coursework both depends on initial formative feedback by the tutor or lecturer and is complemented with groupwork (debates and supportive learning activities in groups facilitated by doctoral students as teaching assistants) and peer feedback (commentary). The performance of the Chinese students points out that it is possible that they do well in the right settings, particularly for the research-teaching nexus. It seems to pay off for Chinese learners who, according to Gu and Schweisfurth (2006, p. 87), have high levels of motivation and willingness to adjust. This approach accelerates also the learning process and reduces the hardship resulting from adaptation as Campbell and Li (2008,
p. 381) indicate. However, this teaching method requires considerable effort by the teaching staff, going beyond the traditional hours often allocated in workload models; Kirschner et al. (2006, pp. 83–4) mention this, too. Wong (2003, p. 155) refers to the lighter teaching loads for academic staff in Chinese and Japanese institutions allowing more contact outside lectures with students. For the research-teaching link reduced teaching loads in terms of modules and courses might be a necessity, and if research skills have to play a greater role in undergraduate studies, the work allocation for teaching staff should be revisited.

However, the principal claim resulting from the case study is that this method of teaching can lead to successful completion of a module by all students, not just students familiar with the western tradition of learning. Nevertheless, as intimated by the second and third finding, some home students (mainly direct entry HND students) perceived this method as too time consuming, had problems with time management and preferred to learn in discrete ‘blocks’ of time, allowing them to concentrate on their jobs and lives outside of the university. Again, these perceptions of direct entry and other students are well documented in the literature, and suggestions have been put forward on how to prepare these students (e.g. Barron and d’Annunzio-Green, 2009; Knox, 2005; Tait and Godfrey, 2001). In this context, Read et al. (2003, p. 272) note that the culture of independent learning is anyhow difficult for many students. Some exposure to module design of this kind might prepare students what is expected to acquire higher order skills in terms of the connection between research and teaching. Thus, answering the second research objective, the perceptions of Chinese students, and to a lesser extent EU students, were more positive towards this type of module design than specific sections in the cohort of domestic students, who for exogenous reasons to learning objected and had become accustomed to less intense forms of coursework.

In the context of principal approaches for dealing with Chinese students, this explorative study has broadened the scope by adding module design as a potential determinant for the research-teaching nexus, commensurate with Robertson and Bond’s (2005, p. 531) statement that
students in higher education need to understand explicitly what the nature of research is. The module design for engaging with students about the research-teaching link acknowledges the paradox of the Chinese learner and reaches beyond cultural differences by concentrating on generic academic skills. It also empowers academics to address all students, no matter their background, and not see ‘international students’ as a challenge. Nevertheless, it has a backlash in terms of learning problems for direct entry students, particularly for third-year undergraduate studies. However, the benefits seem to outweigh the efforts, if both the learning experience of (all) students and the acquisition of academic skills take a central position in the delivery of modules during early stages of study at universities, akin to what Brew (2003, p. 15) advocates; for this perspective support is also found in Smith (2003).

5.2 Implications for Research

In the context of skills needed for the research-teaching nexus, this experiment as case study highlights the need for wider research into how Chinese students can be given the opportunity via module design to adjust their learning approaches to succeed. Moreover, the findings of the case study derived from performance data and qualitative data about the student experience suggest that the performance of students in the module does not match with the western stereotype of Chinese learners (see Kingston and Forland, 2008, p. 214). However, since the number of Chinese students was limited, the experiment as case study should only be qualified as indicative. Because of the intricacies in the module design (debating as groupwork, facilitated group sessions for preparing steps of the coursework, interlinking debates and commentaries, staged development of coursework), most likely the next step should not be quantitative research because it may be too abstract and too general (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 19). Hence, it is recommended that further research into attainment by international students related to module design should adopt either a multiple case study design or a qualitative research approach.
Furthermore, this article also raises some important issues concerning how home students, especially HND students, expect to learn in the context of the research-teaching nexus. Further research is required into the expectations of students who come from further education into higher education, specifically into differences they will find in learning activities and their awareness of graduate attributes. There may be also a possible gap between UK practices and other countries. Kingston and Forland (2008, p. 210) indicate that the expectations of UK higher education are high, but that in practice international students, in the context of this study EU and Chinese students, are disappointed. The relatively low number of contact hours in relation to the credit points might be the cause, which potentially impacts on the engagement with the research-teaching link. Hence, more studies into the pedagogies of module design for the research-teaching nexus, which allows all students with diverse learning backgrounds to flourish, would contribute to the enhancement of current practice at UK universities; such backgrounds extend to students with learning disabilities whom might require tailored needs that could appear in contradiction to learning outcomes of modules based on the research-teaching nexus. Notwithstanding the specific situation in the UK and students that need to be accommodated, redesign of modules to augment the research-teaching nexus may be also be valid for universities in other countries having students from a variety backgrounds in the same classrooms.

References


Kirschner, P.A., Sweller, J. and Clark, R.E. (2006), Why Minimal Guidance During Instruction Does Not Work: An Analysis of the Failure of Constructivist, Discovery, Problem-Based,
Experiential, and Inquiry-Based Teaching. Educational Psychologist, Vol. 41, No. 2, pp. 75–86. doi: 10.1207/s15326985ep4102_1


Table 1: Overview of changes in module design. The guest lecture was delivered by a CEO or top manager. The development of the module design over the successive years was driven by the stage-wise introduction of its elements, the development of supporting materials (Virtual Learning Environment) and the systematic evaluation of feedback from students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credit hours</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lectures</td>
<td>• 12 lectures.</td>
<td>• 11 lectures.</td>
<td>• 11 lectures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 1 guest lecture.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• 1 guest lecture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutorials</td>
<td>• 1 tutorial introducing coursework.</td>
<td>• 1 tutorial introducing coursework.</td>
<td>• 1 tutorial introducing coursework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 4 tutorials about an example of paradox (3 x 1 hour video, 1 hour presentations).</td>
<td>• 4 tutorials about an example of paradox (3 x 1 hour video, 1 hour presentations).</td>
<td>• 1 tutorial about an example of paradox (video shown and available outwith contact hours).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 6 tutorials devoted to debates, each devoted to a separate paradox.</td>
<td>• 6 tutorials devoted to debates, each devoted to a separate paradox.</td>
<td>• 6 tutorials devoted to debates, each devoted to a separate paradox.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration in groups</td>
<td>• Initiative of students (only for part determined by deadlines in schedule).</td>
<td>• Initiative of students (only for part determined by deadlines in schedule).</td>
<td>• 1 tutorial about setting topics within groups (facilitated by doctoral students as teaching assistants).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students at remote campus as different subgroup.</td>
<td>• 1 tutorial about writing report (outwith regular schedule and facilitated by doctoral student as teaching assistant).</td>
<td>• 1 tutorial about writing report (outwith regular schedule and facilitated by doctoral students).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Subgroups mixture from both campuses.</td>
<td>• Subgroups mixture from both campuses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Collaboration in group necessary but supported by two short meetings with module coordinator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam preparation</td>
<td>• Revision lecture.</td>
<td>• Revision lecture.</td>
<td>• Revision lecture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Posting of sample questions.</td>
<td>• Posting of sample questions.</td>
<td>• Posting of sample questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 1 tutorial about preparations for exam (outwith regular schedule).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VLE</td>
<td>• Hand-outs lectures and tutorials.</td>
<td>• Hand-outs lectures and tutorials.</td>
<td>• Hand-outs lectures and tutorials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Guidelines for debates.</td>
<td>• Guidelines for coursework.</td>
<td>• Detailed instructions and guidelines for coursework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• More detailed guidelines for debates.</td>
<td>• More detailed guidelines for debates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Discussion threads.</td>
<td>• Quizzes for self-study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Subgroup pages and communication tools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2a: Performance of students for individual components during Year 2. The label ‘Home (P)’ refers to the students on the main campus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Weight (%)</th>
<th>Home (All)</th>
<th>Home (P)</th>
<th>EU</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Report</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commentary</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>109%</td>
<td>102%</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite grade</td>
<td></td>
<td>106%</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2b: Performance of students for individual components during Year 4. The label ‘Home (P)’ refers to the students on the main campus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Weight (%)</th>
<th>Home (All)</th>
<th>Home (P)</th>
<th>EU</th>
<th>Chinese*</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Report</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>118%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commentary</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>125%</td>
<td>123%</td>
<td>103%</td>
<td>123%</td>
<td>117%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite grade</td>
<td></td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Actually, five students followed the module; two did not take part in the exam of the first diet, but achieved similar grades for the final report as the other Chinese students (for five students, the performance for the final report would have been 117%).
Table 3: Overview of unstructured group meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Aggregated comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4–10</td>
<td>Separate meetings with debating teams (58 out of 69 students)*</td>
<td>• Very new approach. Have never experienced anything like this before (all students).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• HND (direct entry) students report a large gap between previous teaching practices and requirements for this module.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 11 students reported that for the first time in their study they to read an academic journal (home students).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Same 11 students reported reading the summary in another module running in parallel (home students). Very different from the in-depth evaluation required for this module.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Relatively new to prepare for a module in steps rather than one (broad) assignment. In 4 debating teams home students asked the teaching staff to set an assignment or a number of topics for the assignment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Home students seeking clarification why the structure for this module is needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 6 debating teams: questions about use of team facilities in VLE, uploading of materials, submission of coursework and guidelines for final report. Extensive use of VLE new to most students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 4 debating teams: some students not participating in groupwork (note that these students were called in for discussion, two students stopped studying for the academic year due to personal reasons).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Lectures are very good. Good use of demonstrating theory through examples and cases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Variety of academic staff** delivering lectures new to home students, but makes module more interesting (note that two home students saw it as detrimental to learning and preferred one lecturer). Guest lecture** by Operations Director of medium-sized company on strategy formation and personal experience much appreciated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Some home students did not see the need for in-depth reading and appraising academic journal publications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Chinese students (at end of meetings): clarifications on what sources to consult and what are academic publications for coursework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• All Chinese students and 3 home students (including one direct entry HND student): clarification on how to conduct appraisal of individual sources for coursework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Home students: why not exposed to learning some steps in years before (like critically analysing texts and writing coursework in steps)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 2 mature home students expressed that this way of studying was very beneficial for their practice (both having full-time jobs and studying part-time).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Meeting with representatives (4 students, chaired by teaching assistant)</td>
<td>• Involvement of other lecturers to deliver on specific topics new, but beneficial to learning experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Request to allocate marks to every step of the coursework (for example, the selected topic).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• For too many marks allocated to commentary (25%), which is only max. 500 words. Is disproportional to the marks for final report (20%), which is max. 3000 words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• This type of learning should be introduced in earlier years (particularly on style of referencing and writing a report [ed.: as opposed to submitting essays, the dominant form of coursework]).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Hours for module exceeding hours scheduled by students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Call for generic topics set by tutor. Coursework not contributing to gaining broader knowledge about strategic management.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Video-conferencing with other campus limits learning experience for those students (remark: caused by some unexpected technical difficulties); limits peer-to-peer contact.
• Limited possibilities for group meetings due to less facilities for students video-conferencing.
• Self-assessments for preparations exam hardly used due to time needed for steps of coursework.

| 8  | Plenary discussion of coursework (61 out of 69 students) | Home students, particularly direct entry HND, expressed concerns about learning style needed for assignment. Clearly expressed wish to have a broad set assignment (akin to writing an essay in which they could express their opinion).
   |                                                     | Same group expressed concerns about commentary and doubted why they should read work from others. Other students do not have knowledge for credible comments as formative feedback and only lecturers should give such feedback as commentary.
   |                                                     | Home students about 50-50 divided about set-up of module.
   |                                                     | EU and Chinese students hardly participating in discussion (after discussion, they questioned why home students had raised objections about steps for coursework).

* Discussions with five debating teams took place by video-conferencing, because some members were located at the second campus.
** The eleven lectures for the module were delivered by three members of academic staff (one from the second campus by video-conferencing); the twelfth lecture was a guest lecture by a practitioner.
Table 4: Overview of individual interviews at aggregated level. Note that curiously enough none of the Chinese students asked for such an individual meeting, but there was contact during the lectures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Aggregated comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 10–14  | Meetings with individual students (26 in total: 3 Chinese, 6 European students, 17 home students)* | - Chinese students: steps for coursework very clear, help to understand what to do and what is expected. First time for this type of coursework. More clarity than in other modules. One student remarked ‘I need to work very hard’.

- French students: used to writing about controversies. Less used to requirements for citing and referencing, and not familiar with using a case study in report. Contact hours and intensity of effort for passing modules less than in France, although required hours for this module close to their previous experience in the undergraduate programme. One student referring to studying in the UK as ‘educational holiday’.

- German students: level of assignment complies with German experience but less used to step-by-step writing of report. Debating of controversies new. One student reported that topics were already dealt with during first year of undergraduate programme in Germany.

- Home students: divided about module. With progression of module better understanding of what is required. Some asking that other modules should be organised like this. One student: when sitting down and looking at requirements for module, this is to be understood and very do-able.

- 9 students (EU and home): textbook about debates in strategic management difficult to access. Complementary textbook is too extensive (ed.: indicating volume of reading for module is above average).

- 7 home students: all steps, even those with formative assessments for selecting and defining topic coursework, should be marked.

- 5 other home students mentioned that the module was hard to combine with their job.

- 4 home students reported problems with the planning and scheduling in conjunction with the coursework for other modules.

- 3 students with learning disabilities found that this stage-wise progression of coursework suited them well while another one recorded that he preferred to submit every 14 days one coursework for facilitating planning of learning (note that for the latter solution was found within the redesign of module not impeding on groupwork and other students).

- 3 home students: benefits well beyond this module. Other lectures should adopt similar approaches or build on experiences with this module.

- 1 home student reported spending 6 hours on in-depth appraisal of one reference (step 3 for coursework). She felt distressed because ‘never before had she spent 6 hours on reading for coursework and this was just one paper.’**

* 12 meetings were a result of attendance monitoring and the remaining 14 were requests by students for addressing questions.

** The notional hours for steps 1–3 were set at 12 hours, presented during the introductory lecture.
Table 5: Comparison of the three cohorts in the case study. Note that for the performance the home students’ performance as taken as normative.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chinese students</th>
<th>EU students</th>
<th>Home students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prior experience</strong></td>
<td>• None.</td>
<td>• French students: used to discussing and reporting controversies.</td>
<td>• None.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• German students: use of sources and appraisal.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• EU-students: exposure to more informal forms of peer review.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of coursework and requirements</strong></td>
<td>• Challenging.</td>
<td>• Not really different from coursework in home countries, only more challenging for integration of academic sources.</td>
<td>• Mixed responses in cohort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Requires lot of effort.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Some students, particularly direct entry HND, strong preference for set broad assignment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• EU-students: exposure to more informal forms of peer review.</td>
<td>• Some not willing to accept formative feedback from other students; commentary by peers not appropriate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staged learning</strong></td>
<td>• Appreciated formative feedback throughout.</td>
<td>• No specific comments.</td>
<td>• Too much effort for module compared to other modules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Perceived benefits from inquiry-based learning.</td>
<td>• Used to commenting and peer-review (though not as formal assessment).</td>
<td>• Some students: not compatible with other obligations outside university life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Better structure for learning than other modules.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Performance</strong></td>
<td>• Exam: below average.</td>
<td>• Exam: comparable to home students.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Commentary: similar to home students.</td>
<td>• Commentary: lower performance to home students.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Final report: better than other two cohorts.</td>
<td>• Final report: comparable to home students.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1: Timelines for the lectures and stages of the coursework divided into three interrelated streams within the module.