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Using popular movies in teaching cross-cultural management

Popular movies
in teaching
management

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Abstract

Purpose – The present study aims to understand context and dynamics of cognitive learning of students as an outcome of the usage of popular movies as a learning tool in the management classroom and specifically in the context of a course on cross-cultural management issues.

Design/methodology/approach – This is an exploratory study based on qualitative analysis of reflection notes of 14 students who participated in an elective course on “managing cross-cultural issues (MCCI)” in the second year of their MBA programme. Students were asked to submit reflection notes focused on classroom learning as an outcome of the course MCCI with specific reference to used movies *Outsourced* and *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*. Students’ reactions in their reflection notes were analyzed through qualitative content analysis.

Findings – The findings of this study reveal that students found selected movies very relevant and effective in learning cross-cultural theories, issues and developing cross-cultural competence. They also enjoyed movies as learning experience in the classroom. Both instructor’s observations and students’ reactions regarding the effectiveness of movies as classroom learning tool are very positive.

Practical implications – Popular movies, if appropriately selected and included in cross-cultural training programmes for expatriate managers, immigrant workers and managers who travel to different countries, could be very useful as a learning tool for developing multicultural perspective and cross-cultural competence.

Originality/value – This paper could be very useful to academicians and researchers who want to use popular movies as an instructional or research tool for exploring the psychodynamics of classroom learning in management and social sciences courses or professional training programmes focused on cross-cultural management skills, global leadership skills, diversity management.

Keywords Cross-cultural management, Movies in management classroom, Teaching with movies, Intercultural communication, Cross-cultural training, International HR practices, Cinema, Popular culture, Learning

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Cross-cultural management can be best understood as how people communicate and manage relationships with other people inside (co-workers) and outside (clients) their organizations in different cultural settings (Adler, 2002). Cross-cultural management skills are considered essential skills for global managers of transnational corporations or organizations going for internationalization of their businesses in other countries and regions. It is argued that manager having good level of cultural sensitivity/cultural intelligence and properly trained through appropriate cross-cultural training programmes; adjust in the foreign environment in less time, manage diversified teams effectively and perform better in overseas assignments. Cross-cultural training is essential for financial and strategic reasons and to avoid high rates of expatriate failures (Harzing and Pinnington, 2011, p. 392, 393). Cross-cultural training facilitates



the expatriate's cross-cultural adjustment in the host country and hence minimizes problem of adjustment (Black and Mendenhall, 1990; Kealey and Protheore, 1996, Tung, 1981). It also helps employees to become effective in their overseas jobs as quickly as possible because it provides coping techniques relevant to living and working in a specific foreign environment (McFarlin and Sweeney, 2006; Earley, 1987). That is why many *Fortune* 500 companies such as Motorola, IBM, BP, Shell Oil, and Du Pont invest heavily on cross-cultural training for their expatriates to make "trans-culturally competent" and reduce expatriate failure rates and maximize organizations' competitive advantage (Harrison, 1994; Callahan, 1989, Caudron, 1991).

Relevance of popular movies in management classroom

Importance of audio-visual media in classroom (training videos, films, television, internet) has always been appreciated by academicians across disciplines especially in management and social sciences (Livingston and Ignatius, 1947; Golen *et al.*, 1982; Pescosolido, 1990; Champoux, 1999; Hunt, 2001; Hobbs, 2006; Tyler *et al.*, 2009; Green, 2008; Berk, 2009; Kenworthy-U'Ren and Erickson, 2009; Luccasen and Thomas, 2010). It has been argued that audio-visual media has greater potential to influence students' mindsets in the classroom compared to lectures and discussions. Popular culture materials like documentaries, feature films and television shows, if used effectively, could play a role in facilitating the active learning experience of students, more so in cases where the class size, historical emphasis or issues of diversity make it difficult to adequately engage students in active learning (Pescosolido, 1990; Burns *et al.*, 2010; Goldenberg *et al.*, 2010).

A significant number of management scholars believe that young students tend to remember popular movie content more often than monotonous textbooks, research papers and other scholarly reference material. They are also very comfortable in connecting movie scenes, dialogues of actors, story of the movie and music with theoretical concepts explained in the classroom. Dunphy *et al.* (2008) argued in their paper that who would like to watch a training film on CEOs discussing management issues rather than popular Hollywood movies, e.g. *12 Angry Men* (1957) or *The Godfather* (1972) which could be better connected to management principles in a far meaningful way. They argued further that training videos focused on professional development have limited appeal due to their burdensome subject matter and deadpan delivery; and fail to leave long-lasting impact on students. Popular movies are also recommended because of their easier accessibility to educators and students when compared to professional training videos, educational videos, documentaries and other audio-visual media resources available in the market. Gallos (1993) emphasized that popular films can be powerful vehicles for teaching students' conceptual flexibility and ability to shift perspectives. She also cited several movies in her paper which could be very useful for management trainers in teaching multiple cultural contexts of the same situation, e.g. *Dead Poets Society* (1989), *The Karate Kid* (1984), *Rashomon* (1950), *Working Girl* (1988), *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989). There are several open resources available on the internet to management scholars, trainers and students which suggest long list of recommended Hollywood movies useful for academic and training purposes.

Using popular movies in intercultural/cross-cultural training

The use of films in intercultural training has been recommended by a number of scholars (Bhawuk and Brislin, 2000; Champoux, 1999; Littrell *et al.*, 2006; Summerfield, 1994; Mallinger and Rossy, 2003; Varner and Beamer, 2005; Verluyten, 2007, 2008). As Cardon (2010) state that one of the primary benefits for university students is that films are entertaining, engaging and in many cases stimulate curiosity towards other cultures. Films can be very valuable intellectual exercise in deciphering other cultures and with guidance and help of the instructors, students can learn nuances of cultural theories and constructs very easily by means of films shown in the classroom (Cardon, 2010; Mallinger and Rossy, 2003; Tidwell, 2001; Bhawuk and Brislin, 2000). In their study, Smith *et al.* (2010) reported about their experience of successful usage of the movie *Crash* in teaching cross-cultural intelligence and measuring students' understanding of cultural perception, cultural communication, cultural identity and cultural relations through a multi-step 360° evaluation process. They found that students performed well in understanding the causes of cross-cultural problems but performance related to basic understanding of cross-cultural concepts did not fare well. They reported further that students found the movie *Crash* very engaging and enjoyable and they chose scenes in their written reports because of their emotional appeal not for their relevance to specific cultural concepts.

There are few academic contributions available in intercultural training literature where scholars have presented their innovative approach to teach cultural theories or cross-cultural management by using films in the classroom, e.g. Mallinger and Rossy (2003) on *Gung Ho*, Tidwell (2001) on *The Joy Luck Club* and *Fools Rush In*, and, Cardon (2010) on *Slumdog Millionaire*. Cardon (2010) has found the movie *Slumdog Millionaire*, a very valuable tool to learn about principles of stereotyping across cultures, and Indian culture particularly. He strongly recommended *Slumdog Millionaire* for non-Indian students studying in American universities, as being a popular Academy Award winning movie as Best Picture, probability of its availability in the market is quite high and awareness of students about this film also could be very high; and most of them might have seen it. Bumpus (2005) recommended a valuable reviewed collection of six movies relevant to teaching OB concepts with diversity perspective in MBA classroom, which could be very relevant in context of a cross-cultural training programme:

- *A Soldier's Story* (Jewison, 1984);
- *The Associate* (Petrie, 1996);
- *Smoke Signals* (Eyre, 1998);
- *The Joy Luck Club* (Wang, 1993);
- *For Love or Country: The Arturo Sandoval Story* (Sargent, 2000).

There are several documents available on recommended lists of movies useful in intercultural training, e.g. *Intercultural Training with Films* by Christine Roell (2010), which could be helpful to instructors looking for appropriate movies for using in their courses.

Films in the classroom: a theoretical context

As Champoux (1999) said in his classical article “Films as a teaching resource”; “films are a comfortable familiar medium to contemporary students that can keep student interest in the theories and concepts under discussion.” He added further that although most films are fiction, they can offer powerful experiences that students are unlikely to have in a classroom. Film scenes can offer visual portrayal of abstract theories and concepts taught in management and social sciences courses. Explaining concepts through different film scenes bring theories closer to realistic situations. Films can provoke good discussion, assessment of one’s values and self if the scenes have strong emotional content. Cinema’s ability to create a unique experience gives it unbeatable power as a teaching tool (Champoux, 1999).

Cognitive impact of films on learning

Psychologists have argued in favor of impact of films on cognitive learning of students in the classroom. As Blasco *et al.* (2006) said that the use of film in learning and teaching is crucial to provoking the reflective processes and attitudes in the learner. Some others also argued that learners’ ability to retain and recall information as well as overall satisfaction with the learning experience was significantly higher where film was an integral part of the learning and teaching activities (Lesser and Pearl, 2008; Casper *et al.*, 2003; Butler *et al.*, 2009). Champoux (1999) argued that films offer both cognitive and affective experiences in the classroom. Film scenes could be very helpful in enhancing analytical skills of students and changing their worldview as they offer opportunity to connect theories to realistic situations. Ayikoru and Park (2011) argued that films (particularly popular movies) have significance influence on students’ cognitive learning in the classroom; as:

- visualization and imagery and the potential to move from imagination to reality and possibly vice versa;
- memorization and recall of learned material long after the initial learning in a classroom setting;
- emotionality and stimulation of the senses during and after learning;
- positive motivation mainly for less motivated learners; and
- stimulation of intellectual curiosity and criticality.

Benefits of using popular movies in the classroom

Educators and researchers have advocated several benefits of using popular movies and films in the classroom. Pescosolido (1990) argued that the use of films can be important in learning and teaching, and highlight particularly that active learning can be encouraged and better supported through the use of audio-visual materials from the popular culture arena. It is also argued that using films could encourage students to engage to different and personalized articulations and viewpoints concerning the issues being examined, which may be rather difficult to attain in traditional teaching methods including lectures; and films proved to be useful in the context where different, multiple and varying perspectives need to be recognized and critically evaluated (Ayikoru and Park, 2011). Ayikoru and Park (2011) also argued that using films is unmistakably bound up with enhancing emotionality in learning and teaching development, as well as having a potential to motivate less enthusiastic learners.

They further argued that using films is perceived as an effective teaching tool for instructors in the areas where they lack practical experiences or struggle to inspire students with conventional delivery methods. Using films in the classroom also challenge relationship equations (traditional power distance) among instructors and students and both the parties may see themselves as co-learners in the process (Ayikoru and Park, 2011).

Pedagogical challenges of movies in the classroom

Using films or popular movies in the classroom is not an easy task for instructors. Champoux (1999) cautioned instructors regarding usage of films in the classroom as film scenes could be strong distracters in the classroom for some students and using films in classroom also reduces time for theoretical discussions. Butler *et al.* (2009) argued when information mentioned in text not consistent with information revealed in films, students tend to recall incorrect information rather than correcting inconsistencies in information, which needs to be handled cautiously. Ayikoru and Park (2011) mentioned three main pedagogical challenges of using popular movies in the classroom, which should be handled carefully:

- (1) The difficulties of finding thematically relevant film to support learning and teaching. The instructor needs to work hard in selecting the right movie relevant for the session or course.
- (2) The instructor's ability to stimulate and guide class wide discussions once a given film has been shown to the learners. The instructor needs to be confident in using movie as an effective learning tool.
- (3) Effective time devoted to film show during class hours. They recommended 30 minutes for two hours session and ten minutes for one-hour session for showing movie clips.

Mallinger and Rossy (2003) brought attention of scholars and researchers to a very important issue regarding usage of movies in management and social sciences courses, that is handling of cultural stereotypes in a diversified classroom. There may be some uncomfortable situations in the classroom if students find some scenes objectionable on grounds of racial, caste, language, religion or any other kind of prejudice. There are also chances that films shown in the classroom may strengthen certain stereotypes among students against some specific groups if this issue is not handled carefully by the instructor in the classroom. Careful selection of films which are not limited to portraying and representing one dominant narrative/people will be another way of minimizing undesirable outcomes of using films as educational material (Ayikoru and Park, 2011). Mallinger and Rossy (2003) also advised instructors to select movie scenes very carefully and recommend that scenes loaded by with nudity, violence or foul language should not be shown in the classroom as some students (females and students believing in strong moral or conservative religious values) may not like it or refuse to participate in classroom discussions.

Another important challenge which instructor may find difficult to handle, is to use foreign language films (dubbed or subtitled) in their courses as mean to expose students to foreign culture. Champoux (1999) cautioned management scholars and trainers about this limitation arguing that some students may not like to watch foreign

films with subtitles, and foreign films can also have culturally-based subtleties (e.g. humor, satire) that a nonnative might not understand easily.

Different methods of using popular movies in management courses

Champoux (1999) suggested that a film as an effective learning tool can be used in different ways in the classroom, e.g. as case, experiential exercise, metaphor, satire, symbolism, meaning, experience and time. Braim (2010) presented an exhaustive theoretical account on different cultural themes identified in the movie *Outsourced* on four different functions- as metaphor, experience, case and meaning and. Huczynski and Buchanan (2004) proposed that films can be effectively used as narrative in theory-building and exploring different perspectives in management classroom. Champoux (1999) further suggested that there are four different ways to use a film in a teaching course. An instructor can show film scenes in the classroom:

- before the theoretical discussion;
- after the theoretical discussion;
- repeatedly in the classroom or;
- one can show two different movies on the same story to generate comparable different perspectives on a specific social, cultural, psychological or management issue.

In view of the author, a film can be used in several different ways as given below:

- The instructor can show very few selected scenes from a selected movie in one or two sessions in a course and generate discussions on specific theories, models and issues. This method is useful when the instructor wants to make classroom discussions interesting and motivate students to learn through audio-visual media. This method is also best suited for those instructors who want to just give a trial to themselves and students with popular movies as classroom learning tool.
- The instructor can show the entire movie before theoretical sessions. Selected scenes can be repeated in the classroom, if required during discussions. This method is useful when the instructor wants to focus on students' reflections on the movie before building theoretical framework. For using this method, the instructor has to make arrangement for separate screening of the entire movie to students before they come for planned theoretical discussion in the classroom. This method consumes more time.
- The instructor can give introductory lecture on relevant theories before the movie show and later starts discussion on the movie and relevant theories. This method is very helpful in preparing students for a rigorous theoretical discussion in the classroom and developing their analytical skills.
- The instructor may use few selected movies as cases in the entire course and show selected scenes from different movies in different theoretical sessions to generate discussions as per pre-decided session plan. In this method, selected movies are used as continuous cases to integrate various theories and models across different sessions. This method is very useful when the instructor wants students to link and integrate various theories and models across different contexts.

- The instructor may assign some selected movies to students as individual or group project assignment and ask them to do film analysis on the basis of relevant theories (cultural, social, psychological, political etc.). Students will get CD/DVD of the movie from video libraries, do library or internet research and submit the project report to the instructor. This method is very useful in exploring and developing students' creativity, theoretical and applied knowledge, project management and team management skills. This approach is also suggested by Fontenot and Fontenot (2008).

The methods described above are not only exclusive methods for effective usage of popular movies in the classroom. Films can also be used to conduct experimental research in the classroom but in that case, applying experimental control is not an easy task for any researcher because of easy accessibility of popular movies to students. Smith (2009) has strongly argued in favor of heavy usage of popular movies in organizational behavior courses, he used 46 selected movies and ten scholarly articles in his course and movies were used as a kind of preview material before planned classroom sessions. As mentioned in his paper, this approach was very successful and well appreciated by his students. There could be numerous variations of using popular movies in management or social sciences courses but it solely depends upon the instructor how one views different pedagogical tools in context of a specific course.

Methodology

The present study is conducted with an objective to understand students' perceived effectiveness of popular movies as classroom learning tool in context of the course "Managing cross-cultural issues". The author has been using popular movies in teaching courses on organizational behavior for last five years and observed that students found movies very interesting source of theoretical and practical learning, and relevant to realistic life situations. The author believed that a qualitative study of learning notes of students could be very useful in understanding context and dynamics of cognitive learning of students as outcome of usage of popular movies as learning tool in the management classroom and specifically in context of a course on cross-cultural management issues. The study has been conducted by keeping the following objectives in mind:

- How do students perceive popular movies as an effective learning tool in context of the course on cross-cultural management issues?
- How do popular movies influence students' cognitive learning in context of the course on cross-cultural management issues?
- How do students perceive relevance of popular movies in achieving learning objectives of the course "managing cross-cultural issues"?

The course: managing cross-cultural issues

The course on "Managing cross-cultural issues" is an elective course offered to second year MBA students of School of Petroleum Management, Pandit Deendayal Petroleum University, Gandhinagar (Gujarat state, India). The course was designed and taught by the author during academic years 2009-2010 and 2010-2011. The course is designed to achieve the following learning objectives:

- To help students in understanding issues related to cross cultural diversity at work places.
- To sensitize students to the need for managing differently in diverse cultural environments.
- To develop skills for diagnosing and understanding heterogeneity of cultures, and to function effectively in different cultural environments.

Course pedagogy. The course was conducted in a seminar-cum-workshop format and different pedagogical techniques such as lectures, case discussions and group project were used to achieve the goal of effective learning. The selected movies *Outsourced* (2006)[1] and *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002)[2] were adopted as video cases in the course to make classroom learning more interesting and relevant to students. The course was conducted in ten classroom sessions of 90 minutes each (total 15 classroom hours), contributing to 1.5 credits to students.

Sample. The present paper is based on author's own teaching experience with two batches of MBA second year students. The 2008-2010 batch had 14 students (13 boys and one girl) and 2009-2011 batch also had 14 students (13 boys and one girl) who opted for this course in their second year MBA. All of the students were Indian citizen, belonging to different states of India, in the age group 22-30 years and majority of them belonged to Hindu religion (barring one Christian student in 2008-2010 batch). In both the batches, most of the students had good command over English and Hindi languages (written and spoken), and had seen many English (Hollywood) and Hindi movies in the past. Some of them knew other Indian languages including Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil, Malayalam, Bangla, Orriya, Kashmiri, Sindhi and Telugu. An average student of the class had good fluency over English, Hindi and the language of one's state. From national culture perspective, all of the students in both the batches belonged to "Indian" culture.

Selection of movies. For the batch of 2008-2010, only *Outsourced* (2006) was used in the course. Positive feedback on using a popular Hollywood movie in a course on cross-cultural management motivated the author to go for including more movies in the next attempt. Hence, for the batch of 2009-2011, the author decided to include *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002) for adding more flavor in the course content. Both the movies, *Outsourced* and *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* are also featured in the recommended list of Christine Roell (2010) in her paper on intercultural training with films. The author was not aware of many internet resources related to selected movies (cited in this paper) when these movies were actually used in the course as video cases. Hence, this paper is based on author's experiences and observations in the classroom.

Screening of movies. The author had experimented with the method-4 (as described in the section "different methods of using popular movies in the classroom" in teaching the course on "Managing Cross-Cultural Issues" to second year MBA students. Selected scenes from both the movies, *Outsourced* and *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* were shown different sessions as per pre-decided session plan and relevant theoretical issues were discussed in the classroom. If a scene needs to be discussed in the next classes, then it was repeated to refresh students' memories on students' demands, so they can quote dialogues, background or actors in their discussions. Some scenes from both the movies, which depicted sexual intimacy were skipped in screening, as there was only one female student in the batch.

Course work. Students were asked to read selected chapters from reference books, case studies and recommended research papers before each session. Students were also asked to refer to books *Understanding Cross-Cultural Psychology*, authored by Pittu Laungani (2007) and *Asian Perspectives on Psychology*, Henry S.R. Kao and Durganand Sinha (Eds) (1997); as these books present Indian and East Asian perspectives of culture as well as a wonderful comparative analysis of Eastern and Western cultural psychologies. The second main reference book *Understanding Cross-Cultural Management*, authored by Marie-Joëlle Browaeys and Roger Price (2008), is another wonderful book presenting a complete framework of cross-cultural management from Western perspective. Students were advised to explore more books on culture, cultural psychology, social psychology, cross-cultural management etc available in the library, so they do their own comparative analysis of different cultural theories and approaches. It helped very much in the classroom discussion when students could connect movie scenes shown in the class to various cultural theories and concepts, and their own life experiences. This created a very positive environment in the classroom.

The task. The present paper is based on analysis of learning notes of students of MBA 2009-2011 batch. To evaluate learning outcome of the course, students were asked to write reflection note (within 1,000-1,500 words) on their classroom learning with specific mention to learning acquired through movies shown in the classroom. Students were asked to explain theoretical and applied aspects of their learning with proper examples from movie scenes.

Data analysis. Students' reactions written in their reflection notes were analyzed through qualitative content analysis. First, reactions with specific reference to movies were separated from statements related to general theoretical learning; and then classified and coded on the basis of indications of cultural concepts mentioned in those statements through thematic analysis. The data analyzed and discussed in this paper pertains to the batch of 2009-2011 (14 students only).

Results

Content analysis of students' reactions

As instructed by the author, 14 students of MBA batch 2009-2011 submitted their reflection notes as a part of course evaluation. Students' reactions with reference to their learning of cultural theories and concepts from movies shown in the classroom were analyzed through qualitative content analysis. Tables I-II gives an account of content analysis data with reference to various theoretical constructs related to cultural theories considered for content analysis. The numbers mentioned in Tables I-II indicate number of students whose reactions were classified and coded under that category. For example, in the category "culture shock", six students cited *Outsourced* movie whereas seven students cited *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* movie in their learning notes. The number does not indicate about frequency of a specific theoretical construct or theme used in different statements. Table I indicates that "culture shock" has emerged as the most dominant theme in the analysis, followed by "acculturation processes", "cultural adaptation" and "intercultural communication". Students' reactions (as written in their learning notes) are cited in discussions on various theoretical themes. We have used two-lettered codes (abbreviations of students' names) to indicate individuals against their reactions for convenience in referencing and for maintaining confidentiality of the

identity. There was only one female student (HP, Gujarati) and all others were male students belonging to different states, communities, language groups etc.

Table II indicates that ten out of 14 students cited both the movies in their reflection notes while describing their learning outcome and six students out of 14 cited both the movies in critical statements related to their perceived learning effectiveness. There are only three students who cited the movie *Outsourced* only and one student cited the movie *MBFGW* only. This indicates that both the movies have influenced students' classroom learning very significantly.

Perceived learning effectiveness of movies. Table I indicates that six students out of 14 have specifically mentioned statements focused on their perceived learning effectiveness of both the movies. It is very visible in the statement of JM (male, Gujarati, speaking Gujarati and Sindhi languages), "The objective of the course was well covered with healthy classroom discussions amongst us and the movies. The movies showed us the real scenario how people get culture shock and how they cope up with it". Another student PZ (male, Kashmiri, resident of Delhi) also said in similar statement, "By the help of movies (*Outsourced* and *MBFGW*), we could relate better the use of this subject (applicability of MCCI course)". These statements are quite supporting to satisfactory achievement of learning objectives of the course as students find movies as connecting links between cultural theories and realistic life situations as well as emphasizing on applied aspects of MCCI course. The classroom learning is perceived as very realistic and focused on exploring different contexts, as mentioned in the statement of AT (male, North Indian), "The learning through movies was very helpful as we could see and understand scenario more effectively". Another student NJ (male, South Indian) expressed in his statement, "Both movies covered a wide range of cultural issues and learning" which indicates that some students could see strong connectivity between cultural theories, issues and practical learning. The course

S. no.	Theoretical concept cited with specific reference to the movie			
		<i>Outsourced</i>	<i>My Big Fat Greek Wedding</i>	
Table I.	1	Culture shock	6	7
Content analysis of student's reactions with specific reference to movies <i>Outsourced</i> and <i>My Big Fat Greek Wedding</i> : perceived association of movies with theoretical concepts	2	Acculturation process	5	4
	3	Cultural adaptation	2	5
	4	Culture and intercultural communication	5	1
	5	Cultural adjustment	1	2
	6	Family culture	Nil	5
	7	Influence of family culture on self and personality	Nil	3
	8	Cross-cultural competence, cultural intelligence	4	1
	9	Differences between Eastern and Western cultures	3	Nil

Movie	Number of students	
	<i>Outsourced</i> only	<i>My Big Fat Greek Wedding</i> only
Table II.		
Movies cited by students in their reflection notes	Both	10
	Learning effectiveness of both the movies	6

objectives two and three specifically mention about the need of understanding and diagnosing different cultural contexts and managing in different cultural environments. It seems that students perceived these movies as valuable source of understanding different cultural environments in this course, as indicated in the statement of SO (male, Orriya speaking, belonging to Jharkhand state), "Through the movies, I came to understand that before visiting any new country or place with a different cultural background, one should have general idea of that culture, so that culture shock can be avoided". The statement of SO also indicates that students have understood value and the need for cross-cultural training for managers looking for careers in other countries.

These reactions indicate that in general, students appreciated the selected movies as a valuable tool for delivering effective learning in the classroom and they also expressed their satisfaction regarding achievement of learning objectives of the course. We can see here in their reactions that most of them were able to connect movies with their life experiences and course content quite easily and effectively. The movies also helped them in drawing their own picture of cultural understanding. The author also has observed that usage of movies in the classroom enhanced students' interest in the course, kept them motivated throughout the course and helped them in developing their own perspective of different cultural theories. The author also felt that this entire process ends up in bringing collaborative learning in the classroom, a desired goal as mentioned by Ayikoru and Park (2011).

Culture shock. Culture shock has emerged as the most dominant theme in the qualitative content analysis of students' reactions in their learning notes as 13 out of 14 students mentioned this concept and related concepts in their statements. Culture shock was also the most discussed topic across many sessions throughout the course. When students were shown the movie *Outsourced* first time in the classroom, students' first reactions on the scenes related to arrival of Mr Todd at Mumbai Airport, encountering taxi drivers, auto rickshaw ride, catching train and arriving at small town Gharapuri, were singing the same theme, "culture shock". Students also mentioned some excerpts and examples from the chapter 1 "What is this thing called Culture?" and chapter 2 "A perspective on cross-cultural differences between Eastern and Western culture" from the book of Pittu Laungani (2007) while discussing experiences of Mr Todd in India. This concept came into discussions whenever there was any scope in any session and they reflected on how to cope with culture shocks in unusual situations. The importance of culture shock as a theoretical concept can be understood in the statement of NS (male, South Indian) who tried to connect this concept with his own life experience, "The experience of culture shock was well portrayed in movies *Outsourced* and *MBFGW*. The movie *Outsourced* has depicted firsthand experience in a different culture very well and highlights culture shocks experienced by its characters very well. I also faced similar culture shocks when I came to Gujarat to join this MBA programme". NS's statement clearly tells us how students connect theories to their own realities when they watch relevant movie scenes in the classroom and discuss them critically. Another student NJ (male, South Indian) also expressed how both the movies are helpful in understanding relevance to culture shock and coping with culture shock. "These movies depict the importance of adjusting to a culture and overcoming culture shock". Students have also understood the need for cross-cultural training for foreigners who are posted on overseas assignments before

they land up in the foreign land, as culture shock is good enough to shake up one's life. This can be easily seen in the statement of SO in context of *Outsourced*, "The movie shows how a foreigner visiting India get culture shock in different situations, but learns to adapt to it and overcome culture shock when meets another foreigner in restaurant, and learns to accept this new culture, improves his cultural intelligence and not bullying to Indians". Needless to say, culture shock and coping with culture shock are considered important themes of any cross-cultural training programmes by International HR practitioners.

Culture shock is not only understood in context of an individual's experience of a foreign culture but also in different social contexts, e.g. family environment, marriage ceremony, public places etc. The movie MBFGW has emerged very effective in exploring different aspects of culture shock especially in context of family and social environment, as expressed by JM, "We learnt about culture shock and different aspects of culture shock. We initiated discussion on man-woman relationships, different cultures- one is too loud, expressive and conservative, patriarchal. Learning about model- denial, defense, acceptance, adaptation, adjustment, integration. We learnt how to cope with culture shock". Here, JM has specifically mentioned about developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS) by Bennet (1986), which talks about ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism and how people learn to adapt when they are exposed to different cultural environment.

Another understanding of culture shock emerged in classroom discussions on food habits, body language, social etiquettes, celebrations etc.; as HP mentioned in her critical statement in context of the movie MBFGW, "Culture shock for both families happens in form of food, their habits, speaking manners, eating, gathering, celebrating occasions etc. Small and nuclear family Vs Big and joint/extended family". Students brought very rich content to classroom discussions on getting culture shock in different family environment, as the classroom was quite diverse in context of Indian culture. Students compared the Big Greek Family environment with a typical Indian (Punjabi/Gujarati) joint family and the Big Fat Greek Wedding ceremony with a typical Punjabi wedding ceremony, which reflect more of collective culture.

Cultural adjustment and adaptation. As "culture shock" dominated discussions in most of sessions in the course. Another relevant concept that attracted students' attention in this course was "cultural adjustment and adaptation". Students mentioned terms acculturation, cultural adaptation and cultural adjustment very frequently in their learning notes. The following statement of AT is a reflection on applicability of cultural adjustment model of Oberg (1960) in real life situations; "I understood cultural adjustment from honeymoon to irritation & hostility stage, gradual adjustment, biculturalism stage. Cultural adjustment takes its own time." It is revealed in thematic analysis of reactions that two theoretical models, cultural adjustment model (Oberg, 1960) and DMIS model (Bennet, 1986) have significant impact on their learning. Students also learnt that cultural adjustment or adaptation is a gradual process and it takes its own time. They also learnt about influence of multiple factors on cultural adjustment process; as we can see in the reaction of NJ in context of MBFGW – "This movie tells us about individualistic and collectivistic cultures. Boy gets culture shock when meets girlfriend's family members. Boy learns about informal and jovial environment of family, importance of food, eating/drinking and celebrating every moment, stood firm on his decision of marriage and adapts to Greek culture. . . . I learnt

cultural adaptation model- denial, irritation, acceptance, adaptation ... how to cope with culture shock.”

Another important factor in cultural adjustment process, as identified by students through the movie *MBFGW* is “respecting and accepting other cultures as they are”. Here, reactions of two students sound quite similar:

- (1) PR (male, South Indian): “This movie shows us experience of an American marrying a girl from a conservative Greek family and how he cope with the situation, and both the families after initial resistance and uncomfortable encounters, learn to adapt with each other. This movie tells us about respecting and accepting other cultures.”
- (2) SO: “I learnt that nothing is impossible, though cultural differences are there but attitude to mix and adapt with other cultures, and respect to other cultures helps in cultural adaptation. The movie also depicted how people get culture shock and learn to overcome it”.

Students have also recognized importance of one’s personal attitude in learning cultural adaptation process and overcoming their own resistance to culture shock situations. The statement of HP explaining attitude and behavior of Mr Todd (*Outsourced*) reveals how she found importance of involving other people in one’s cultural adaptation to the different cultural environment – “Mr Todd gradually learns about Indian culture and adapts lifestyle, e.g. with ‘Holi festival’, develops better communication with coworkers and other people around him ‘auntjee’ and others”. The author also feels that if in a course on cross-cultural management, students become aware of their own cultural stereotypes, learn to accept and respect other people and cultures as they are; this is itself a great learning outcome of the course and both the movies, *Outsourced* and *MBFGW* have achieved their learning objectives in that way.

Cross-cultural competence and cultural intelligence. The third most important concepts as recognized by students in the course MCCI, is cross-cultural competence and cultural intelligence in connection with culture shock and cultural adaptation process. The statement of NS clearly indicates in this direction –

I also learnt about cross-cultural competence and cultural intelligence through the movie *Outsourced*, when hero initially failed to recognize and respect cultural differences but later learnt, and started finding this environment and his colleagues and the country very interesting. This is my learning- how to adapt to new cultures after doing one’s homework properly, it is required in the age of globalization.

During discussions in the session, students debated with critical arguments on “theoretical definitions of cross-cultural competence and cultural intelligence”. They debated over the issue if cultural intelligence could be enhanced through cross-cultural training as it is something like basic human ability to understand different cultures or it is cross-cultural competence, which should be focused in cross-cultural training as an essential skill. Another student VR (male, South Indian) stated in context of *Outsourced* –

The movie shows us, when a foreigner enters in a country not by choice, there is an initial resistance to the culture of the country, which then accepted slowly where the individual feels

that he can live with this culture, and slowly adapts to this new culture. This movie also tells about importance of cultural intelligence.

Another student PR recognized that cultural intelligence also means our own understanding of how our behavior is perceived and interpreted by people of other cultures; and how can we improve our attitude and behavior with proper understanding of cultural intelligence, cross-cultural competence, culture shock and cultural adaptation process –

This movie has given a great deal of learning since it involves the behavior of Indians and how our behaviors are perceived 'odd' by foreigners. It shows about experiences of a foreigner in India, which he encounters in different situations and places; and how he learns to cope with them and becomes a good manager for his team members. It depicts well on culture shock, cross-cultural competence, cultural adaptation, cultural integration and cultural intelligence.

The positive orientation of students in direction of understanding their cultural sensitivity is another objective achieved through both the movies in the course MCCI. One cannot change one's cultural intelligence level through just one shot of cross-cultural training but exposure to theoretical concepts and relevant information through movies/simulation games may play important role in developing cultural sensitivity.

Differences between Eastern and Western cultures. As the author used the movie *Outsourced* in various theoretical sessions and this movie shows experiences of an American expatriate manager in Indian Call Centre office, dealing with Indian people in the office and outside the office, with his boss in America and cultural adjustment in a different country; discussions revolved around cross-cultural differences between Indian and American culture specifically work culture. Students brought different examples from the first two chapters of the Pittu Laungani's book on *Understanding Cross-Cultural Psychology* while discussing differences between Indian and American culture. In his book, Laungani has narrated a number of examples from his own life experiences with British, American, European and other Western countries and how people from Western countries perceive and interpret behavior patterns of Indians, Pakistanis and other South Asian countries. The statement of VP (male, North Indian) is quite relevant in this context –

Differences in Eastern and Western work cultures can be easily seen in this movie. As we see that people from Western countries are more professional in their conduct and behavior whereas Eastern (particularly Indians) are driven more by emotional appeal within the work environment.

Another student JM also reacted in similar way but presented different aspects of professional work culture in Indian offices of a US multinational company –

Learnt about differences between Eastern and Western cultures, etic and emic approach of cultural study, could connect movie with concepts well with my own experience of working at IBM, as when some people from US came for project knowledge sharing and it was difficult for both of us (We – Indian team and them – US team), and they were facing a lot of problems and difficulties and could not adapt to situations.

These statements indicate that through the movies students have learnt importance of cross-cultural differences between professional work cultures of different countries.

Awareness and recognition of cross-cultural problems underlying beneath the work environment is the first step in the direction of developing cultural sensitivity.

While expressing their views on Indian culture particularly, the author has observed that few reactions of some students could be considered loaded with ethnocentric attitude, which could be strengthened through the movie *Outsourced*. The following two statements somewhere indicate in that direction:

- (1) SO: "The movie also shows that Indian culture cannot be taught in classrooms but one has to learn about it with joy and experiencing with feelings, and capture its essence".
- (2) VR: "This movie is a completely relevant learning experience, as we belong to India, and the entire plot of the movie is tied with India. This movie tells us that Indian culture cannot be trained in the classroom but one has to feel, experience and learn it".

As per author's own analysis of these statements, these statements are emotionally overloaded rather than expressing cultural sensitivity towards other cultures. One cannot deny this fact that life experiences are the best teacher for anyone in the world but people need professional training to learn cross-cultural management skills. If cultural competence cannot be taught in the classroom, there would be no need for training courses on cross-cultural skills and many multinational companies could not investing on cross-cultural training of their expatriates and immigrant workers. These statements confirm our findings quite similar to findings of Smith *et al.* (2010) that indicate students gets influenced by emotional appeal of movie scenes rather than their connectivity with cultural theories and concepts. Ayikoru and Park (2011) also cautioned over excess enthusiasm and emotional excitement of students in context of using movies for classroom learning, as in that case, movies could be great distracters from theoretical learning.

Family culture and influence of family culture on self and personality. One of the important themes identified and recognized by students in the course MCCI is 'influence of family culture on self and personality'. Both the movies were recognized as potential sources of learning in context of this theme during classroom discussions but *MBFGW* scored over *Outsourced* here if we look into written statements of students in their reflection notes. The two selected statements are good indicators of students' perceptions regarding relevance of *MBFGW* on this theme:

- (1) SO: "I learnt that how family culture influences a person's personality? Introvert girl born and brought up in an orthodox family. I learnt how cultural differences influence people's relationships when two different families encounter each other".
- (2) NK: "Watching it was a fun. The film exposes inner working of passionate Greek family, good learning about family culture, intense relationship among family members".

The movie *MBFGW* was selected by the author to cover specific topics, e.g. influence of family culture on individual's self, personality, life style, attitude and behavior. The movie also enlightens on interpersonal relationships among family members and between different families. The only female student of the class (HP) also highlighted different relevant points on personality, attitude and behavior of Toula (the central

character of the movie) in context of a Big Greek family and how girls are expected to sacrifice everything they wish, for the pride and honor of the family. She also tried to connect these issues in context of rearing of girl child in Indian families. In the classroom discussions, students tried to connect various scenes of the movie with a typical Indian marriage ceremony, and how different people act and react to different situations happening in a marriage ceremony. Many students in the classroom tried to identify similarities between the Greek family depicted in the movie with a typical Punjabi Indian family and some of them also shared their own personal experiences of similar intercultural marriages happened in their social circles. The movie also provide rich content in terms of scenes and dialogues to understand differences between individualistic and collectivistic cultures which is well recognized and appreciated by students during classroom discussions. Considering these experiences, the movie has achieved its learning objective in the course by bringing relevant theoretical learning to students.

Discussion

In this entire experiment of using two popular Hollywood movies, *Outsourced* and *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, the author had different experiences during the course. Students, who joined the course, were quite enthusiastic right from the first session and maintained their enthusiasm throughout the course. Some cultural issues such as multiculturalism, ethnocentrism, individualistic and collectivistic cultures, culture shock and cross-cultural competence dominated the discussions throughout the course. Right from the beginning, students were well aware about relevance of cross-cultural management skills in their future career. In the beginning of the course, the author (as an instructor) was quite apprehensive about using selected movies across different sessions as students may lose continuity and interest in later sessions, which may impact quality of discussions negatively. However, it did not happen and students participated in discussions with full enthusiasm throughout the course. Another apprehension of the author was that while using selected scenes from different movies in the same session may distract students during discussion and students may find it difficult to connect theoretical constructs with different movie contexts but this approach was also liked by students and they found it quite interesting to connect scenes from different movies to the same theoretical concept, e.g. culture shock or intercultural communication. In general, students agreed that movies provided them variety of visual stimuli and ideas that forced them to see the same picture from multiple angles hence resulted into developing multiple perspectives on cross-cultural issues. These observations confirm that selected movies helped students in shifting theoretical perspectives (Gallos, 1993). Students found both the movies very meaningful and relevant in context of the course MCCI. Most of them agreed that these movies helped in achieving learning objectives of the course very effectively. Students were so involved in the course that some of them came up with their own recommendations on popular Hollywood, Bollywood (Hindi) and Indian languages, and even foreign languages movies which could be used in courses on cross-cultural management, cross-cultural communication or cultural studies. Some students expressed during classroom discussions that after having discussions on movies in context of cross-cultural issues, when they referred theories later for understanding of concepts, they could connect movie scenes with relevant theoretical concepts in a better

way. This observation is quite in line with findings of Champoux (1999), Tidwell (2001), Mallinger and Rossy (2003), Cardon (2010).

One of the major objectives of the course was that at the end of the course students should develop their own theoretical perspective and enhance cultural sensitivity. However, it is very difficult to keep free oneself from lifelong learning of cultural stereotypes that are learnt in a specific cultural context. In a classroom, full of students of Indian national culture, mostly of Hindu religion and only single girl student in the class, it was a tough task to keep classroom environment free from cultural stereotypes. There were instances of arguments on gender issues and cultural stereotypes, cultural biases of Indians against Americans and Westerners or Indian's special pride on their cultural values or cultural biases of Westerners against Indians; but all these incidences helped in realistic cultural learning in the classroom and developing multiple perspectives on cross-cultural issues (both, students and the instructor agreed on this point) and selected movies worked as catalyst in this learning process.

Considering gender factor in the class, the author decided to skip "scenes with mild sexual intimacy" in classroom screening to avoid any embarrassing situation; as in both of batches (2008-2010 and 2009-2011), there was only one girl student in the classroom. Initially the author was quite apprehensive about active participation of only female student in discussions because of strong male dominance in the classroom; but it did not happen and despite being only one in the group, female students contributed to the best of their potential in classroom discussions. With this experience, the author confirms his belief that proper selection of scenes according to the nature of target audience is very important factor in determining success or failure of popular movie as a learning tool. The instructor needs to be very sensitive regarding cultural context of participants while selecting appropriate movie or movie scenes for the cross-cultural training programmes (Mallinger and Rossy, 2003; Ayikoru and Park, 2011).

Limitations of the study

One of the limitations observed by the author in teaching course on 'Managing cross-cultural issues' was that both the groups (2008-2010 and 2009-2011) were dominated by males, Hindu religion and Indian national culture. The classroom experience could be far interesting and rich if students could be from diverse backgrounds (different nationalities, religions, ethnic groups, languages other than Indian sub-continent languages and 50 per cent female students), but these are "idealistic conditions" which an instructor can wish for teaching a course on cross-cultural management.

Although all the students knew English very well but some of them found difficulties in understanding some words and phrases spoken by different actors in both the movies (may be because of foreign accent) but they were quite vocal in expressing their difficulties.

Small batch size (14 in both the batches) is another factor, which acted as a limitation in classroom learning. A small group of students limits variety of ideas and thoughts in classroom discussions. On the basis of classroom observations, it is felt by the author that batch size of 25-30 could be ideal for such kind of courses focused on cross-cultural management, cross-cultural communication or cross-cultural skills

training etc. A large group (more than 40) is not also recommended that an instructor may find it difficult to control the class and most of students may not be watching the movies seriously which may dilute effectiveness of classroom discussions.

The author has experimented with only one of the methods (method-4) for using popular movies in the course MCCI. One can also test with other methods for assessing effectiveness of popular movies under different situations. For example, movies as case analysis project (individual or group project, method-5) could be used to understand differences in psychodynamics of individual and group learning by using movies as research tool.

Conclusion and implications to international HRD practices

Cross-cultural training is considered extremely important by international HR practitioners as it helps in developing essentials skills needed for global managers who are expected to work with culturally-diverse teams, manage with overseas clients, work in virtual workplace, travel different countries for business purpose and perform effectively in their assigned job domain. Though this study is exploratory in nature and based on qualitative analysis of reflection notes of a small sample ($n = 14$) of MBA students who belong to a specific national culture “Indian”; but classroom experiences are good evidence that popular movies (if appropriately selected for a specific cross-cultural training programme) could be very effective in achieving learning objectives of the training.

The findings of this study may be summarized as:

- Selected popular movies *Outsourced* and *MBFGW* are proved as effective classroom learning tool in context of the course on “Managing cross-cultural issues”, considering students’ perceived satisfaction regarding achieving learning objectives of the course and relevance of the selected movies in the course context.
- Students found both the movies quite interesting and effective instrument to keep them motivated towards continuous learning across different sessions in the course.
- Students felt that selected movies helped them in understanding cultural theories and concepts in light of realistic life situations. Though popular movies present dramatized version of a story and depicted behavior patterns may be exaggerated by the director for enhancing entertainment value of the movie.
- Students identified and recognized importance of some theoretical concepts such as culture shock, cultural adjustment and adaptation process, differences between Western and Eastern cultural perspectives, cultural intelligence and cross-cultural competence for developing cross-cultural management skills. They also expressed that these theoretical concepts should be essentially covered and dealt carefully in any cross-cultural training programme for professional managers. They also suggested that development of cultural sensitivity through proper theoretical knowledge of cultural psychology is essential for any cross-cultural training programme and popular movies could be very effective in developing cultural sensitivity as they leave long-lasting impact on human mind.
- The author believes that positive experience of using popular movies in a course on “Managing cross-cultural issues” and insights generated through this

qualitative study could be very useful to academicians and researchers in understanding relevance of popular movies as pedagogical tool and as a research tool especially in context of cross-cultural management, cross-cultural psychology and international human resource management practices. However, it is also advised that one should use a specific pedagogical tool (be it movie, simulation game or case study) only when one feels comfortable and confident about it and believes that it is appropriate and will work in context of a specific academic course or professional training programme. Blind usage or inappropriate use of a pedagogical tool in any academic course or professional training programme has enough potential to deliver disastrous results to the trainer as well as participants of the programme especially in context of cross-cultural training programmes where one needs to be culturally-sensitive to participants. There is also a need to explore new ways of effective usage of popular movies in context of cross-cultural training programmes.

Notes

1. The movie web site (www.outsourcedthemovie.com/ms_corptraining.html) recommends corporate training material developed by Michigan State Business School professors Aneil Mishra, PhD and Karen Mishra, PhD and global outsourcing consultant Atul Vashista, Chairman of services globalization firm NeoIT, and founder of international business training company GlobalAbility. The review of the movie Outsourced may be accessed on [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outsourced_\(film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outsourced_(film)).
2. The movie *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* is in recommended list of popular movies by The Cross-Cultural Training Centre (CCTC) of Central New Jersey (www.cctcnj.org). The review of the movie may be accessed on http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/My_Big_Fat_Greek_Wedding). Some suggested internet documents available on the movie *MBFGW* are: Iti Rakshit (2010) and Weschler (2003).

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