

# Role of international study experiences in the personal and professional development of university lecturers in the Humanities and Social Sciences fields in Thailand

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*This study investigates the role of international experience on personal and professional development of university academic staff in the Humanities and Social Sciences fields in Thailand. The participants were 23 lecturers from nine universities in Thailand. A semi-structured face-to-face interviewing method was employed. The findings reveal that international experiences develop the lecturers' cognitive and affective skills as well as enhancing intercultural understanding and broadening their worldview. For professional development, the lecturers gain up-to-date information and a profound body of knowledge. Lecturers' attempts to transfer international knowledge into classroom practices included: the delivery of in-depth subject knowledge, promotion of essential study skills, implementation of different classroom activities, increasing self-esteem, enhancement of intercultural understanding, and fostering global mindedness and greater awareness of global issues.*

*Keywords: international experiences; professional development; university academic staff*

## INTRODUCTION

In the current global context, higher education institutions in all countries are driven by the demands of internationalization to focus on updating academic content as well as promoting intercultural understanding and sustainable human development. The internationalization of higher education may occur through various methods, such as student and staff exchange programs, branch campuses, twinning programs, and distance learning. In particular, sending academic staff to study abroad is part of an overarching strategy most universities use to internationalise their education services. International cooperation among universities via lecturer temporary exchange programs enable students and academics to learn about other cultures by attaining new knowledge and understanding of cross-cultural difference (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Gacel-Avila, 2005; Hamza, 2010; Knight, 2004). It is estimated that by 2025 15 million students will be studying abroad; the figure was approximately two million in 2007 (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Students and academics from developing countries are often sent to study in developed countries such as the US, UK, and Australia where they can access advanced educational systems and English teaching environments (Chan & Lo, 2008).

Generally speaking, studying abroad is an investment opportunity that may benefit both the host and home countries involved. For host countries, international students inject money into their national economies. For example, Davis (2003) reported that international students spend

up to \$12 million each year in the US. For the home country, citizens who engage in study abroad bring back new knowledge, skills and intercultural understandings. In other words, studying abroad allows students to broaden their intellectual and cultural horizons (Cohen, Paige, Shively, Emery, & Hoff, 2005; Gacel-Avila, 2005). In this regard, higher education institutions in all countries seek to identify the benefits from international academic cooperation.

In line with the actions of many developing countries, the Thai Government, each year, allocates a significant amount of money to support university academic staff to study abroad (Office of the Civil Service Commission, 2013). The government's expectation is that academics will make use of the knowledge and experience gained while studying abroad to help in the development of Thailand. Specifically in relation to the university context, academic staff members who study abroad can, upon their return, assist fellow academics to improve their knowledge and skills, especially those who work in the field of Humanities and Social Sciences. Unlike in the hard sciences fields, where academic study relies on the delivery of concrete findings from experimental research, much of the work produced by academics in the Humanities and Social Sciences tends to be based on qualitative studies involving theories and concepts. Humanities academics potentially have the opportunity to learn new teaching approaches or conceptual frameworks from colleagues who have studied abroad, thus benefitting their classroom teaching. Additionally, studying abroad provides a great opportunity for academics to build extensive (international) networks and assist their domestic work place to widen its research horizons (Bodycott & Walker, 2000; Yates, 2002).

In terms of cultural understanding, studying abroad enables academics to develop a global perspective; that is, develop their understanding of complex social, economic and political issues and their impact on people's lives. Indeed, discussions with peers and others inside and outside the classroom help academics studying abroad to consider different points of view. Following graduation, many academics return home with a changed attitude, and knowledge and insights gained from abroad on how to improve their teaching performance in class. In turn, there is a general expectation by study sponsors and colleagues that returning academics will embrace their own role as global citizens who respond to local and global social, environmental and political issues (Hanson, 2008).

In spite of wide interest in the field of study abroad, few studies have been conducted to investigate the international experiences of university academic staff who take up the opportunity to study abroad. A limited number of studies have been conducted on the personal and professional benefits academics gain from working abroad, and of the benefits to their colleagues when they return (Bodycott & Walker, 2000; Razzano, 1994) and most academics who return from abroad generally only share their experiences with immediate peers. Knowledge about the nature of international experience is especially lacking in the case of Thailand. Consequently there are limited resources available to help academics who do not have the opportunity to study abroad. In addition, academics who plan to further their study do not have an opportunity to understand how the overseas experiences might alter their personal and professional lives. Publicly available, evidence-based findings concerning the experiences of academics who study abroad will help to guide the development and implementation of programs to assist academic staff to pursue studies abroad, particularly in the Humanities and Social Sciences fields.

The qualitative study discussed in this paper investigated the role of international study experiences in the personal and professional development of university academic staff. It also examined how academic staff changed their perceptions of teaching approaches on their return. The study, therefore, examined how lecturers alter their classroom pedagogical practices in response to their international study experience.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This literature reviews focuses on theoretical conceptions related to international education. The concepts of internationalization in the university context are discussed including characteristics of internationalization, approaches for internationalising higher education, and claims and criticisms against internationalization. Then, the importance and benefits of international education are addressed and the relationship between international education and global citizenry is explored.

### **Internationalization**

To achieve world-class standards in higher education, many countries, especially developing countries, have embraced the concept of internationalization of education. The aim of the concept is to advance academic standards as well as prepare students for life in a global context. The concept of internationalization of higher education is defined by Knight (1993) as “the process of integrating an international and intercultural dimension into teaching, research and service functions of the institution” (p. 21). This includes “specific policies and programs undertaken by governments, academic systems and institutions, and even individual departments or institutions to cope with or exploit globalization” (Altbach, 2004, p. 6). Universities implement various strategic plans and projects to promote overseas collaboration with institutions; that aim of the strategies and projects is to improve student mobility, staff development and curriculum innovation. These include student and faculty exchange programs, internships, study abroad programs, research and collaborative development projects, offshore programs and satellite campuses (Rubzki, 1995; Schuerholz-Lehr, 2007).

To meet public demands for the internationalization of higher education, attempts have been made in Thailand to create international cooperative relationships with other nations. The Office of Higher Education Commission, for example, has launched two staff development projects: 1) Strategic Scholarships Fellowship Frontier Research Networks: Masters, Doctoral and Research Scholarships, and; 2) Students and Staff Mobility. The first project aims to develop university staff and upgrade their qualifications by providing Masters, Doctoral and research scholarship. The second project focuses on short-term student and staff exchanges, credit transfer and mutual recognition of degrees (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2015).

According to Knight (2004) internationalization of education in a country can be accomplished through six approaches. The first and most common approach is an activity scheme for internationalising higher education. It includes activities such as study abroad, institutional networks, development projects, and branch campuses. The second approach views education internationalization as outcomes or goals to be achieved, such as improved student competencies, increased education profile, and international agreements and partnerships. The third approach involves the basic functions of internationalization, such as of academic standards, income generation, cultural diversity, and students and staff development. The fourth approach deals with the process of integrating international perspectives into teaching, learning and service functions at the universities. The fifth approach focuses on the promotion of and support for international and intercultural representations on university campus. The sixth approach focuses on internationalization abroad through the use of cross-border delivery channels such as face-to-face teaching and distance learning. It also includes adopting different administrative management systems with other countries, such as using franchises, twinning, and branch campuses. Notably, combining several approaches rather than adopting only one approach can achieve the internationalization of higher education; most universities adopt the multi-approach method, according to their priorities. In Thailand, for example, student and

faculty exchange programs operate alongside activities such as expanding branch campuses and/or distance learning.

Internationalization of education may also be interpreted as contrary to localisation. Several claims have been made which reveal the tension between being local and becoming global (Deem, Mok, & Lukas, 2008; Hayes & Wynyar, 2002; Lynch, 2006). The term 'McDonaldisation' of higher education has been used by some academics to suggest that internationalised education devalues the national education sector and limits the number of local studies conducted in the academics' own languages (Hayes & Wynyar, 2002; Lynch, 2006).

Alternatively, Niland (2000) argued that the internationalization process should not be thought of as promoting homogeneity in international standards at the expense of local culture. Rather, people may come to appreciate their own local culture more when stepping into the global context. Thus, seemingly aware of the dominance of Anglo-American standards and practices, Mok (2007) asserted that contextualization should be taken into account during the course of internationalization. To illustrate this point in relation to the Asian education context, academics should try to connect the core cultural spirit of Asia to their own work (Tong, 2007). In this regard, incorporating international standards into the local context may help to achieve this balance.

Despite claims that internationalization of higher education exploits the local academic culture, internationalization is regarded as integral to the pursuit of academic excellence and higher research standards, particularly in developing countries. Thus, it is no exaggeration to say that, in the quest to create world-class universities, higher education institutions worldwide are reforming and restructuring their educational systems to enhance their academic excellence and international standards.

### **International education**

International education offers great potential for learners to develop their abilities (e.g., cognitive skills), and to meet the social and workplace demands of the twenty-first century (Mestenhauser, 1998). It provides students with new knowledge and enhanced academic competence. Experiencing different teaching approaches and assessment methods, students develop their abilities to think critically and creatively. In terms of academic research, students can build extensive research networks with research partners abroad (Yates, 2002). Moreover, international education facilitates the development of students' intercultural competence and communication skills (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Hamza, 2010, Welch, 1997).

When learners live among people from different backgrounds in host countries, they are required to recognise the cultural differences that may cause misunderstandings. More specifically, the authentic cultural and academic experiences they gain from studying abroad can enhance their capacity to manage and exploit the new global context because they become better equipped with the skills to adapt to different cultural contexts (Gacel-Avila, 2005; Mestenhauser, 1998; Van Hoof, 2005). Additionally, the experiences that learners encounter in the international education period will contribute to their developing a global perspective (Marcotte et al., 2007). Various global issues may be raised in discussions with friends and professors in and outside the classroom. In this respect, their world perspectives are widened and they are likely to become more conscious that they also have a responsibility to positively contribute to the furthering of world development.

### **International education and global citizenry**

According to UNESCO's 21<sup>st</sup> century educational vision, international education contributes to the essential graduate attribute of global citizenry. It states that higher education should serve an interconnected world by fostering students' professional and intellectual competence. Furthermore, it should promote students' intercultural understanding and global consciousness. Students should be able to recognize and appreciate the value of their own culture and the cultures of others, as well as learn to establish good relationships with people from diverse societies (Gacel-Avila, 2005). In other words, cultivating the qualities of global citizenship is a fundamental task of higher education worldwide. Indeed, students need to be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to manage their way in a borderless world and universities have a responsibility to prepare them with the necessary skills.

Various terms and meanings have been suggested by academics to define "global citizen." According to Thanosawan (2012), global citizens are individuals who belong to not only a nation state, but also a global civil society. This is similar to the definition provided by Schattle (2008), who described global citizens as people who "think and act locally and globally." Morais and Ogden (2011), and Schattle (2009) asserted that global citizenship involves three key concepts: social responsibility, global awareness, and civic engagement: social responsibility refers to concern for other individuals, society, and the environment; global awareness includes recognition of the value of one's own self as well as a consciousness of world issues; and civic engagement requires strong commitment to reflect on local, regional, national, and global issues.

Notably, Winn (2006) added the aspect of environmental concern, social justice, and civic participation to the concept of global citizenship. Hanson (2008) agreed with Winn, stating; "A good global citizen is involved locally, nationally and internationally; is conscientious, informed and educated about issues; exhibits environmental and social responsibility; advocates alongside of the oppressed; or lives by the dictum, 'Be the change you want to see in the world'" (p. 80). Bosanquet (2010) characterized the qualities of global citizenship as a graduate attribute related to the concepts of intercultural awareness, cross-cultural competency, inclusivity, diversity, globalization, sustainability, leadership, multiculturalism, internationalization and community engagement.

With regard to international education, Tarrant (2010) claimed that study abroad is one of the ways to promote global citizenship. Throughout their years abroad, students can acquire global citizenship characteristics by talking with people from diverse background, travelling to new places, exposing themselves to new cultural environments, and learning different perspectives. They may also expand their worldview and explore local and global issues in a critical way while engaged in academic activities and in their life experience outside the classroom (Kuh, 2008). More importantly, processes of self-reflection and critical evaluation will gradually transform them into responsible members of the global community.

Academics studying abroad are also expected to willingly engage in social activities and perform social responsibilities by not ignoring what is happening around them. Indeed, Letterman-Aguilar and Gingerich (2002) argued that international education could successfully foster students' global citizenship if programs integrated the notions of experiential education that promote critical thinking development.

## METHOD

### Participants

Twenty-three lecturers from nine universities in Thailand participated in this study. The lecturers were drawn from the Humanities and Social Sciences fields. The Humanities disciplines included Philosophy, Religion, Theatre Arts, Linguistics, Literature, and Languages, such as Chinese, English, Japanese, German, and French. The Social Sciences disciplines included Psychology, History, Political Sciences, Management and Educational Policy, Communication Arts, Women's Studies, Anthropology, and Social Development. Purposive sampling was used for participant selection with four inclusion criteria applied: (1) was the participant a Thai full-time lecturer in any field of study; (2) had the participant obtained a Master or Doctorate degree from an overseas university; (3) had the participant worked in the university for at least one year after graduation; (4) did the participant agree to share their experiences in the study.

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for participants: gender, field of study, country and level of study abroad, year of graduation, number of years in host country, and academic title. Thus, 12 countries: UK, US, Switzerland, Germany, Netherland, Japan, China, Australia, India, Canada, France, and New Zealand, had hosted various of the participants. Three participants achieved a Master's degree and 20 achieved a doctoral degree. The time spent abroad ranged from one to 12 years. Five of the participants were appointed as Assistant Professors and one was appointed as an Associate Professor upon their return to Thailand. The participants represented diverse backgrounds and levels of qualification and spent differing numbers of years abroad. The sample demonstrated a wide variety of perspectives, which contributed to rich data quality.

**Table 1: Background of the interviewees**

No.	Gender	Field of study	Country/ level of study abroad		Year of graduation	Number of years in host country	Academic title
			M.A.	Ph.D.			
1	Male	Psychology	France	France	2011	10	
2	Female	Political science	US	US	2013	6	
3	Female	Japanese	Japan	Japan	2004	9	
4	Female	Management & Educational Policy	-	UK	2010	5	
5	Female	Political sciences	New Zealand	US	2011	8	
6	Female	History	Germany	Netherland	2007	8	
7	Male	Linguistics	France	France	2011	10	Assistant Professor
8	Female	Applied Linguistics	Australia	Australia	2010	6	
9	Female	Chinese	China	China	2010	8	
10	Female	Japanese Literature	Japan	Japan	2003	5	Assistant Professor
11	Female	Communication Arts	US	US	2002	6	Assistant Professor
12	Female	Linguistics	Canada	Canada	2010	12	
13	Female	Children Literature	UK	-	1998	1	

## *Role of international study experiences*

No.	Gender	Field of study	Country/ level of study abroad		Year of graduation	Number of years in host country	Academic title
			M.A.	Ph.D.			
14	Female	German Linguistics	Switzerland	Switzerland	2007	4	Associate Professor
15	Female	Theatre Arts	UK	-	2004	8	
16	Male	Philosophy & Religious	India	India	2012	7	
17	Female	Women's & Gender Studies	Canada	Canada	2009	6	
18	Female	Teaching English as a Second Language	UK	UK	2006	4	
19	Female	Gender and Thai Literature	UK	UK	2006	9	Assistant Professor
20	Female	Social & Policy Sciences	UK	UK	2009	5	Assistant Professor
21	Male	Anthropology	Canada	Canada	2011	7	
22	Female	Linguistics & Applied Linguistics	China	-	2013	3	
23	Female	English	-	Australia	2010	4	

### **Materials**

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted to collect data in this study. An interview instrument was developed comprising four parts designed to collect different types of data about the participants: background information; impact of overseas experiences on personal development; impact of overseas experiences on professional development; and changes in teaching methods after returning home. The aim of the interview was to explore how the study abroad experiences of university academic staff impacted their personal and professional development, and to compare their perceptions of their classroom practices pre and post their study abroad.

### **Procedure**

An e-mail inviting participants (i.e., academics) to volunteer to take part in the study was sent during May 2014 to the Humanities and Social Sciences faculties of various universities across Thailand. The e-mail included an information sheet and consent letter detailing the purpose of the study, expectations of the participants, and issues of confidentiality. After the interview dates were confirmed, the participants were given an interview schedule which covered the topics for the interview. This allowed the participant to prepare their thoughts about the interview topics, and thus allow the researcher to obtain more productive data.

Each interview took about 45 minutes and was audio-recorded with the interviewees' consent. Interviews were conducted at the interviewee's office or in an open area at his/her workplace. The audio-recorder provided good quality recording. All interviewees were very cooperative and provided very useful data to answer the research question. All interviews were conducted in Thai and then translated and transcribed fully into English. The quotations provided in this paper are the comments made by interviewees translated into English by the researcher.

A content analysis of the transcriptions was carried out using the four main themes aligned with the interview format: interviewees' background; impact of overseas experiences on

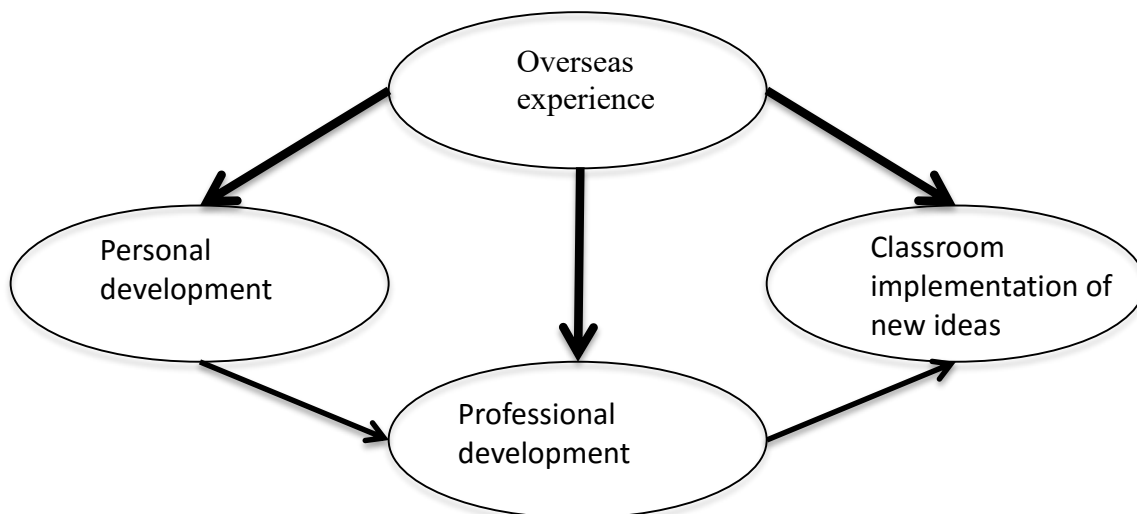
personal development; impact of overseas experiences on professional development; and changes in teaching methods after returning home. Each theme was analysed under subsequent topics related to the interview questions.

### Findings and discussions

Analysis of the participants' interview responses revealed an association between study abroad experiences and personal and professional development. In particular, it revealed the interviewees' personal changes influenced their professional development and their classroom strategies.

Figure 1 illustrates how the interviewees' personal changes influenced their professional growth. This growth is reflected in the knowledge the participants brought back to their home country. In turn, the interviewees attempt to implement what they themselves have learned and experienced in the host countries they visited into the classrooms in their home country.

In terms of the interviewees' personal growth, it was evident that international education fostered interviewees' cognitive development. Most of the interviewees claimed that their ideas were now well-organised and systematically developed (interviewees 3, 6, 11, 20, 21, and 23). Two of the interviewees indicated that they had learned to be more critical and questioning in their review of information. Furthermore, some interviewees reported that they were more sceptical about political and social issues taking place around them (interviewees 7 and 12).



**Figure 1: Impact of international experiences on personal, professional, and classroom strategies**

Analysis of the interview data also revealed that character changes in the interviewees were promoted by critical reflection. Exposure to unfamiliar people and cultures, and their engagement with different academic conventions (including different kinds of learning activities and assessments), enabled the interviewees to critically reflect on their own assumptions and those of others, as well as profoundly understand more complex worldviews. The interviewees claimed to be able to express critical opinions about the people and situations they encountered during their study abroad. In this respect, experiencing different teaching approaches and assessment methods abroad allowed the interviewees to develop their abilities to think critically (Mestenhauser, 1998). Most interviewees indicated that when they returned



home from studying abroad they were more focused on developing students' critical thinking skills in the classroom. Transitioning from giving lectures to posing questions requiring students to think critically was revealed as a significant change in the teaching style of some interviewees. They reported directing students to engage in group discussions to provide them with the opportunity to express their opinions and share ideas with their friends. Moreover, a number of interviewees (e.g., interviewees 8, 12, 19 and 21) expressed the view that learning the perspectives of others was one method of becoming a good critical thinker. Interviewee 19 asserted:

*There was one magic word that I always used in my class that was "Groups." When I went to the class, I regularly assigned the students to get into groups and discussed a particular topic that we would learn on that day. After that they also needed to present their group's conclusion to class. In this way, the students did not have to listen to my lecture. In case that they were shy to show their opinions in class, group discussion would at least offer them the opportunity to express their ideas amongst their friends.*

Moreover, in terms of intercultural understanding, international study experiences helped to develop students' intercultural competence and communication skills (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Cohen et al., 2005; Gacel-Avila, 2005; Hamza, 2010; Welch, 1997). Through interaction and communication with people in the host countries, most interviewees revealed that their understanding and appreciation of cultural differences had improved. Many participants indicated that they had learned to respect other people's ideas, motivations, actions, and beliefs (e.g., interviewees 6, 9, 13, 15, 17, 18, 20, and 22). As interviewee 6 commented:

*Immersing myself in a multicultural society allowed me to be more tolerant of different viewpoints and behaviours of different religions.*

In relation to pedagogical practices, some interviewees reported a greater concern than before their abroad experience for promoting intercultural understanding to students. They felt that, in order to prepare students to communicate effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds, it was critical to encourage them to accept and respect cultural diversity. To achieve this, interviewee 20, for example, provided students with a selection of reading texts and articles that examined essential cultural issues. It was expected that cultivating an appreciation of cultural differences would enable the students to reflect on their lives and the lives of others, thus expanding the breadth of their cross-cultural understanding. This finding supports Niland's (2000) view that internationalization should not be regarded as a means of promoting the homogeneity of international standards and the abandonment of local culture but rather should be regarded as a phenomenon that assists people to better understand their own culture.

It also emerged from the data analysis that not only did the international study experiences enhance the intercultural competence of the participant the experiences also broadened the participant's worldview. Marcotte, Desroches, and Poupart (2007) asserted that international education experiences broaden students' global perspectives; this was reflected in the participants' interviewee responses. The academics indicated a greater awareness of both local and international issues and they viewed the world as increasingly interconnected. In other words, they had become more interested in different social issues and in the world at large. Along with efforts to enhance their students' intercultural competencies, some interviewees indicated they now implemented in-classroom activities that concentrated more on fostering students' global-mindedness and awareness of global issues. This aligns with Hanson's (2008) claim that international students are immersed in a global environment and it is, therefore,

expected they will come to realise their roles as global citizens responsible for both local and global issues. Interviewee 1 reflected this sentiment in the comment:

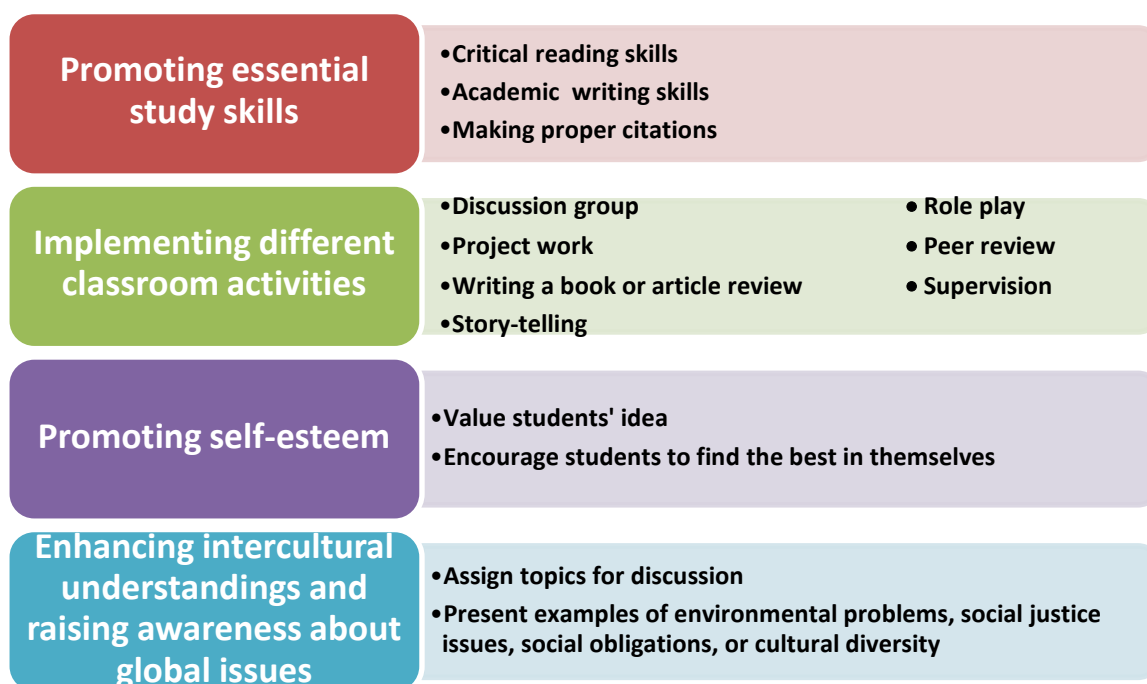
*From our past experience, no matter good or bad, we learn from them all and we feel gratitude for them. Once we get lost and cannot find the way out, we are not able to help the others. Today we become a big tree which can contribute knowledge and skills to our students.*

Some participants also claimed that after returning home they needed to prepare students to actively engage with world issue such as environmental sustainability, social justice issues, social obligations, and cultural diversity. They expressed the view that students, as human beings, should be enabled to express their compassion and understanding towards others. The interview data showed some participants cultivated global citizenry in students through class projects and voluntary activities. Thus, it may be argued that international education experiences help academics promote global citizenry in students as a result of their direct experiences in the foreign lands (Kuh, 2008; Letterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002; Tarrant, 2010). As highlighted in this research project, international education offered academics a great opportunity to build extensive research networks and widen their research horizon (Yates, 2002). Many interviewees claimed they had become more confident in terms of their research capacity because of the work they carried out with their supervisors in the host countries. They also reported they were better able to advise students about the publishing process when submitting their work to an international journal, and support them to present academic papers at conferences, either in Thailand or abroad. Additionally, some interviewees (e.g., interviewees 4, 8, and 11) indicated that the challenge of employing new approaches and methodologies in their research helped them to expand their research expertise. Most interviewees commented that they had become more aware of the issue of plagiarism. In turn, upon returning home they tried to impress upon their students the importance of providing proper citations. Students in Thailand are not fully aware of the ethical problems associated with plagiarism and how best to utilise the information technology and Internet sources available to them. Interviewee 21 commented:

*I always reminded the students about the effects of plagiarism and pointed out that the main focus of writing an essay was to produce an original idea. They should be proud of their own work.*

Furthermore, interviewees revealed that international education experiences offered them the opportunity to observe and experience various teaching and learning methods. Many participants recognised the advantages this would give them in terms of implementing different activities to create a more effective classroom. The interviewees suggested a variety of teaching activities, including small group discussion, role play, project work, peer review, writing book and article reviews, supervision, and storytelling. Notably, the analysis of interview data revealed that many interviewees assigned student activities which required students to think critically, such as group discussion, essay writing, and project work. They suggested such activities encouraged students to reflect on the value of becoming a global citizen.

Lastly, the interview findings suggested that applying international education experiences to classroom practices reflects the inherent goals of Humanities and Social Sciences studies. Figure 2 shows the interviewees' attempts to transfer the knowledge gained abroad to teaching approaches in class.



**Figure 2: Model of international knowledge application to classroom practices**

The attempts by academic staff to implement such learning activities based on newly acquired knowledge is reflective of personal and professional development. That is, the academics have developed broader perspectives of life and pedagogical approaches as a result of their study abroad and this has improved their skills in developing students' capacity for critical thinking and understanding of cross-cultural issues. As a result, students develop into responsible global citizens.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study contributes to our understanding of the ways in which international study experiences impact the personal and professional development of university academics in the Humanities and Social Sciences fields. In addition, it demonstrates the changes in the perceptions of academics to teaching approaches following their return (i.e., to Thailand) from study abroad. This study also provides a model for the transfer of new knowledge gained abroad into classroom pedagogical practices. As such, it contributes to the growing research understanding of the benefits of academics' international education experiences.

Most studies of international education privilege quantitative methodologies and focus on the experiences of students. This research employs a qualitative methodology to further understanding of university academics' overseas study experiences to attain a Master's degree or Doctorate in Humanities and Social Sciences fields. The results of this study may be used by sponsors of international study initiatives for academics to guide their decision-making related to program design and implementation. This study clearly presents the benefits of internationalization initiatives and strategies by universities in Thailand to the Thai higher education sector. To complement the findings of this study of academics perceptions of personal and professional benefits derived from international study, future research should seek to better understand the perspectives of the students of the academics. In particular, the students' opinions of their lecturers' changed teaching methodologies and their perceptions of benefits or difficulties to emerge from such changes.

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