

STUDY ABROAD EXPERIENCE: WHAT REALLY MAKE DIFFERENCE FOR INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS STUDENTS AT SIAM UNIVERSITY?

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Abstract: This study examines different experiences international business students at Siam University get while studying in Thailand. Since Globalization has become more widespread, businesses are aware of the increasing impact of it in their customers' base and their need for new graduates who are comfortable interacting with people from different backgrounds. This is therefore an interesting topic for employers, educators, researchers as well as students. The paper presents the results of a survey study of factors influencing study abroad experience of 154 international students. Taking the UNESCO global movement Education For All (EFA) into account, four distinct factor configurations are identified; perceptions, motivations, degree of integrity and expectations. A focus group of 8 students assigned for the in-depth interview reveals many benefits in their study abroad program. It concluded that they may have improved their abilities to ingeniously solve problems by applying well-known concepts to different situations, look at a project from different perspectives, maintain self-confidence while listening and learning from people whose value systems may be different, be flexible and adaptable to rapidly changing situations and new environments, visualize, forecast, analyze and address business situations from a different cultural, develop an understanding of global issues in their industry of interest. This final part empirically examined and compared result which related to the study of what really make the difference in study abroad experience. Investigated the *why* and *how* of decision making by students, as well as the *what*, *where*, and *when*. Accordingly, smaller but focused samples were more needed than large samples. The results show that there is a relationship between students' demographics and students' perception of studying abroad experience.

Keywords: Globalization; International students; Study abroad; Different backgrounds; Experiences; Factor configurations.

1. INTRODUCTION

These days, studying abroad is becoming an exciting experience full with mixed emotions; it is the best way of preparing students to work in a global and multicultural work environment. This is one of the reasons that Business schools are promoting the international student exchange (Wright and Clarke, 2010). As higher education becomes increasingly competitive, and students become more internationally mobile, the United States remains the top destination for foreign students, followed by the UK and France (Choudaha, R. & De Wit, H. 2014). According to the concept "Think globally, act locally", in a globalized economy, every student should be educated as an international student, a global citizen with the goal to compete globally. After the global financial crisis, Asia has increasingly attracted the attention of the world with its booming economy and the abundance of business opportunities. Furthermore, in Thailand, business schools are playing a greater role in helping their students acquire intercultural skills through a variety of experience. These activities range from incorporating more global contents in courses (Andrus, Laughlin and Norvell 1995, Chan 1995) to developing course in multicultural business (Ray and Rider 1995) to organize brief study trips abroad (Gorden& Smith 1992). Thus, the problem to be investigated is to see what make the difference to study in Thailand rather than at home in the stand

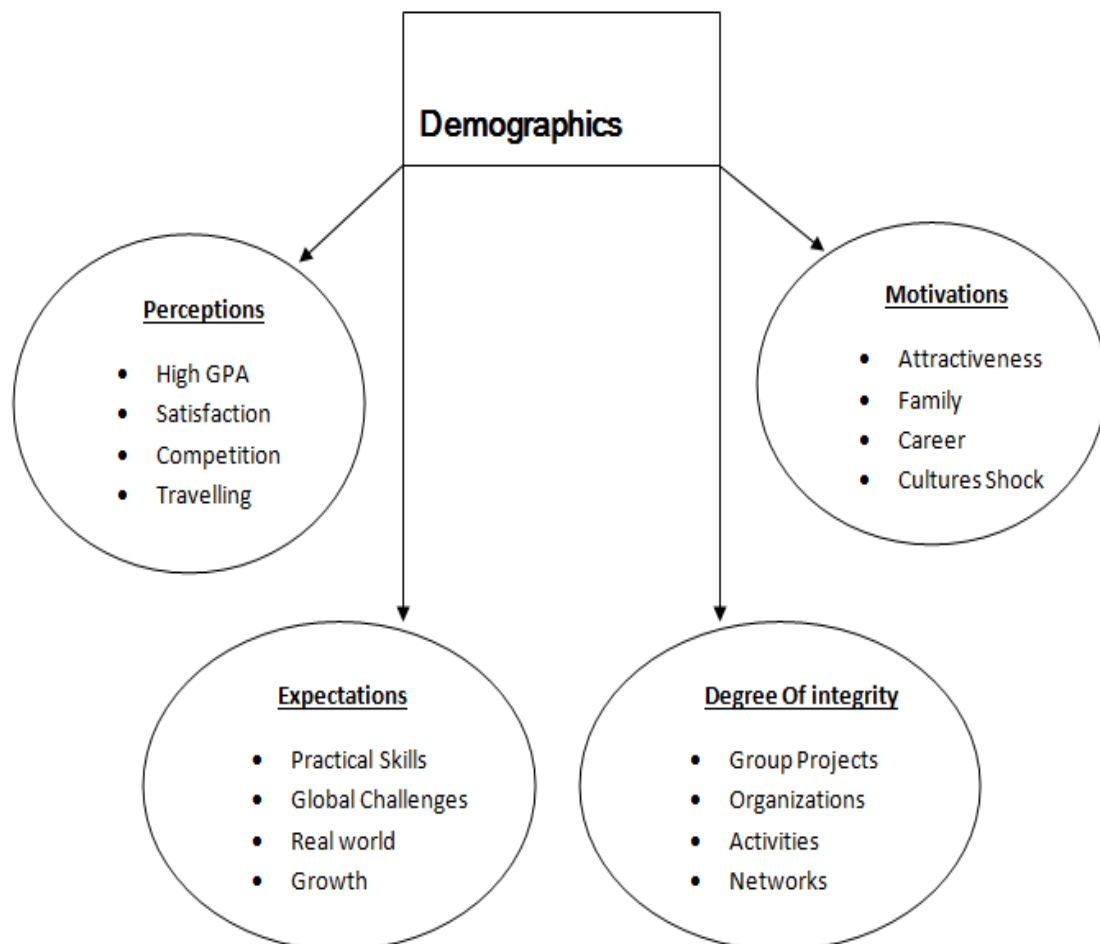
point of international students. The main goal of this article is to understand the motivations, the perceptions, the process of decision making to study abroad, the activity preference and the experience that students get when they are abroad. Believing that these factors mentioned above have a significant relationship with the demographic profiles of the students, the way they behave during their trips and their perception toward overseas job searching or their destination preference once graduated.

What are your perceptions of study abroad? What motivated your choice to study abroad? What are your studies' expectations? What is the degree of your integrity so far? To answer these questions, this paper presents the results of an empirical study of the factor configurations of 170 participants, but just 154 seem to be usable. - 107 males and 47 females.

2. OBJECTIVES

More specifically the objectives of this study are to: Asses the nature and scope of cultural orientation provided to international students; Examine how they perceive the importance of various cultural dimensions.; Examine the effectiveness of cultural orientation programs provided to them; Recommend critical issues to be included in the way the program deal with them is structured in the university even nationwide.

3. HYPOTHESIS



Along this previous part, we can find that; There is a relationship between student demographics and students' perception of studying abroad.

There is a relationship between students' demographics and the factors that motivate their decision to study abroad.

There is a relationship between students' demographics and the factors that influence their expectations from study abroad.

There is a relationship between students' demographics and the degree of integrity into the Thai society.

4. LITERACY REVIEW

A larger body of research has investigated factors that have an influencing role in student experience. Let's consider some accordingly of the hypotheses indentified above.

A study from the Institute of International Education (IIE) (2014) reports that the growth rate has increased to three percent in the most recent year, the perception of study abroad as a key factor in affecting international understanding has been supported since the early 1930s (Meras, 1932). Another study from European students suggested that the potential impact on family and personal relationship was a significant component in a student intention to study abroad (Sonto – Otero et Al, 2013).

The research in why students decide not to travel abroad is limited; the same factors that can influence one student to go can influence another not to go, therefore there is an ambiguity in factors that influence the perception of going global for education purpose.

Obviously there are a lot of questions of students who want to learn outside their country seeking motivation. Achievement motivation is the desire to work hard and to do things well (McClelland, 1961; 1987). It is associated with higher confidence in one's abilities (McClelland, 1987). Numerous studies have demonstrated relations between students' achievement motivation and their academic related behaviors (Bogler & Somech, 2002; Halamandaris & Power, 1999). By the way, Vince Salyers, EdD; Cathy S. Carston, PhD; Yasmin Dean, PhD; Chad London, PhD from Mount Royal University, Canada (2015) explored the motivations of students who study in global settings. Students reported practical motivations for participating in studying abroad. Their responses acknowledged opportunities for career development, language, and cultural knowledge acquisition. These themes were consistent with those from the literature (Clarke, Flaherty, Wright, & McMillen, 2009; Ingraham & Peterson, 2005; Fry, Paige, Jon, Dillow, & Nam, 2009; Gilin & Young, 2009; Mapp, 2012; Mapp, McFarland, & Newell, 2007; Rhodes, Biscarra, Loberg & Roller, 2012) as reasons why students participate in the overseas programs.

The study by Vince Salyers, EdD; Cathy S. Carston, PhD; Yasmin Dean, PhD; Chad London, PhD from Mount Royal University, Canada (2015) explored the expectations of students who study in global settings. Consistent with cited literature, (Clarke, Flaherty, Wright, & McMillen, 2009; Ingraham & Peterson, 2005; Fry, Paige, Jon, Dillow, & Nam, 2009; Gilin & Young, 2009; Mapp, 2012; Mapp, McFarland, & Newell, 2007; Rhodes, Biscarra, Loberg & Roller, 2012), students expected to develop personal and social awareness from their international experiences. A study by Maiworm and Teichler (1996) shows that Erasmus students often find work that allows them to exploit the distinctive skills they gained while studying abroad. Norris and Gillespie (2009) found that studying abroad truly does change one's life, as the respondents' career choices were affected by the experience of studying abroad.

A study by Chiangnan Chao, from St. John's University of New York (2015) examines Chinese students' decision making considerations for going to the U.S. for their higher education. The results indicate that Chinese students want to develop a global view and depart from the traditional Chinese system of college education.

Another study from Bomi Kang and Carol M. Megehee in Coastal Carolina University, USA (2014) shown that decision principles drawn from self-determination theory. Thus, the reasons to make decision for participating in study abroad can be either intrinsic or extrinsic; Intrinsically motivated students would participate in activities due to the desire to learn, to know, and to experience new things, rather than to please their parents or to enhance their professional resumes. Intrinsically motivated decisions are done for their own interests.

5. METHODS

Qualitative research has been chosen because it is a method of inquiry market research and further contexts for the sustainability in business. The sample will be drawn from three criteria: the level of precision, the level of confidence, and the degree of variability in the attributes being measured (Miaoulis and Michener, 1976). The *level of precision (1)* is the range in which the true value of the population is estimated to be. This range will be expressed in percentage points; in this case it is ± 5 percent. By breaking this explanation down let us assumed that if we find that 60% of students in the sample have adopted a the decision to study abroad due to their geographic origin with a precision rate of $\pm 5\%$, we can conclude that between 55% and 65% of students in the population have adopted the practice. The *confidence (2)* is based

on ideas encompassed under the Central Limit Theorem. Additionally, the values obtained by these samples are distributed normally about the true value, with some samples having a higher value and some obtaining a lower score than the population value. In a normal distribution, approximately 95% of the sample values are within two standard deviations of the true population value. In other words, this means that, if a 95% confidence level is selected, 95 out of 100 international students will have the true population value within the range of precision specified earlier. The third criterion, the *degree of variability* (3) in the attributes being measured refers to the distribution of attributes in the population.

The sample technique to be used in this research is the simple random sample. It is a subset of statistical international business students at Siam University in which each student of the subset has an equal probability of being chosen. In this particular case, the population is 250 students roughly, and the sample is random because each student has an equal chance of being chosen. Yamane Taro (1967:886) provides a simplified formula which is the one we used to calculate sample sizes of this research paper. A 95% confidence level and $P = .5$ are assumed.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

- n = the sample size
- N = the population size
- e = the acceptable sampling error

95% confidence level and $P = 0.5$ are assumed $e = 0.05$

Let's calculate the sample size: $N = 250$; $e = 0.05$; Then $n = 250 / [1 + 250 (0.05)^2] = 153.84$

Data Collection Procedure

Three sources of data were collected as part of this phase. Responses to online surveys (1) distributed via social media and email. During the survey process, a very short cover letter explaining the project, along with a copy of the 3 pages questionnaire printed in English (2) have been given to students. To minimize any cultural shock resulting from recent arrival in Thailand, data have been considered only from students who had been in the country for a minimum of three months. Participation was voluntary, anonymous and included no response incentives. Students spent roughly 10 to 15 minutes to complete the surveys before they are collected. A total of 170 questionnaires have been distributed. All students have been invited to participate in active interviews (3), even though the number of students needed was eight. The active interview (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995) was carry out in the form of individual interviews; exploring in greater depth responses received to questions that were posed.

6. RESULTS

All the results are recorded in the tables and figures. In table 1 we can find out ethnicity, gender, level of education, length time abroad. Gender equality is a global priority in education and is inextricably linked to Siam University efforts to promote the right to education and support the achievement of the Education for All (EFA) and broader development goals. Unfortunately, there were not easy way to balance the number of female and male participants. Among these students, 107(69.48%) were male and 47 (30.52%) were female. Moreover the mobility of students across borders has become big dealing in recent years. In Thailand, specifically at Siam University, the executive administrations have become increasingly efficient in tracking and reporting the data surrounding their education export industries. In this study, as we can see in the table a total of 154 participants were recruited, all of them were international business students, indeed with 69 (44.80%) undergraduates and 85 (55.20%) graduates. Spending more than a year abroad opens up even greater opportunities, as you will have more time to focus on areas outside of school such as interning, volunteering, or working at a part-time job. Ask for the length time studying in Thailand: 23(15%) less than 6 months; 11(7.1) between 6 months to a year; 23(15%) between 1 – 1.5 year; 8(5.2%) between 1.5 – 2 years; 35(22.7%) 2 – 3 years; and finally 54(35%) answered that they are in Thailand more than 3 years ago.

Table1. General Students' profile

	Asians (n = 110)	Africans (n= 26)	Caucasian (n=11)	Middle- east (n=7)	Total (N=154)
Gender					
Male	77	21	5	4	107
Female	33	5	6	3	47
Education					
Undergraduate	46	14	4	5	69
Graduate	64	12	7	2	85
PhD	0	0	0	0	0
Length time abroad					
3 – 6 months	10	5	7	1	23
6 months – 1 year	6	1	2	2	11
1 – 1.5 year	18	4	0	1	23
1.5 – 2 years	4	2	1	1	8
2 – 3 years	25	8	1	1	35
3 year – Up	47	6	0	1	54

Choosing the right location for students is very important; there are several aspects that impact making a choice. The incentives might come from an external environment as well as people that really count for you. Think about getting to know another culture and the travel opportunities your choice will bring. Therefore students were asked the following question: What motivated your choice to study abroad? What are your studies' expectations? What are your perceptions of study abroad? The answers are in the table2 below:

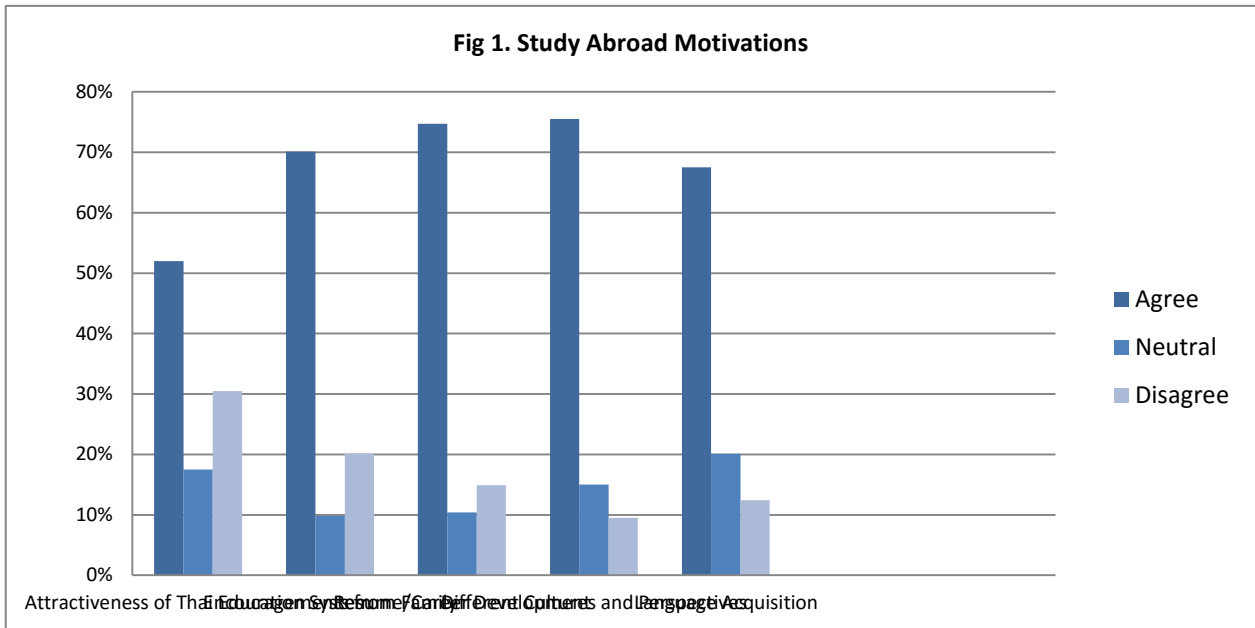
Table 2; Factor configurations: perceptions, motivations and expectations

N = 154 students	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Motivations					
Thai education attractiveness	10	70	27	31	16
Family encouragement	20	88	15	27	4
Career development	11	104	16	19	4
Culture perspectives	27	89	23	15	0
Language acquisition	12	92	19	31	0
Expectations					
Skills development	27	96	12	19	0
Personal growth	34	112	4	4	0
Real world application	23	108	19	4	0
Culture shocks	16	69	54	15	0
Perceptions					
High GPA advantage	31	77	27	19	0
Find satisfaction	46	89	11	8	0
Enjoy competition	39	76	31	8	0
Enjoy travelling	81	57	8	8	0

Motivations

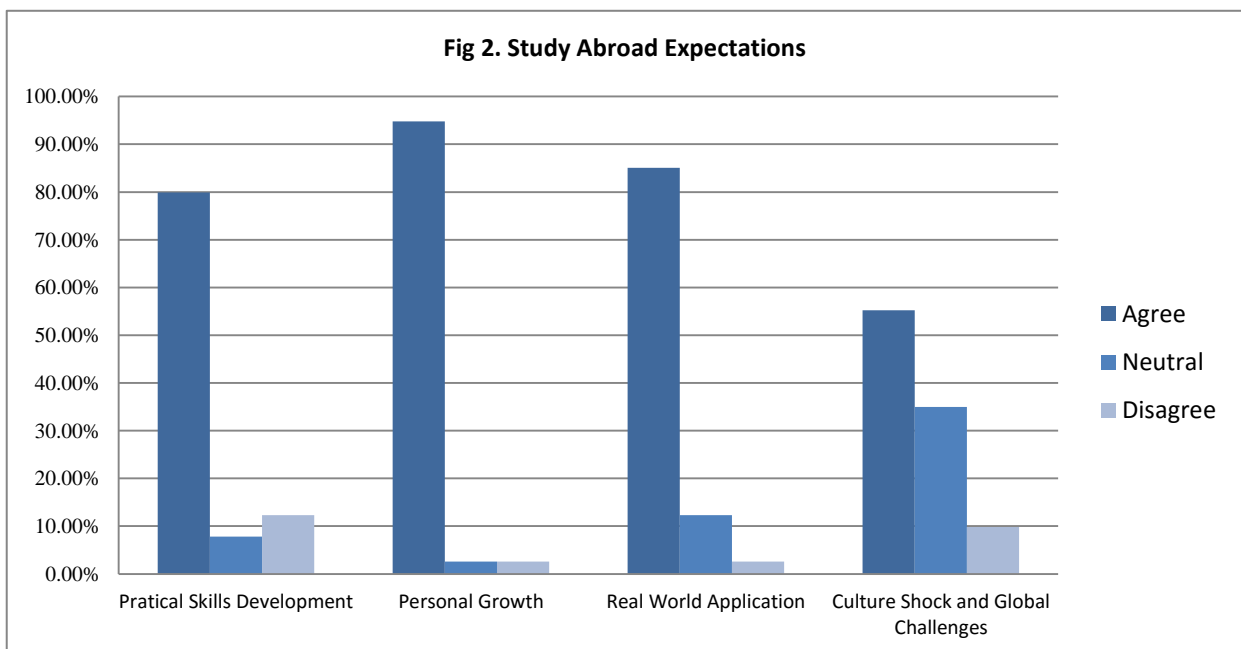
Because of the narrow difference between the scales disagree and strongly disagree, in order to keep things simple, let's put the two answers in one, that means strongly disagree and disagree become just disagree as it can be seen in Fig 1. Thus, ask to students what motivated their choice to study abroad; first of all they have been asking upon the attractiveness of Thai education system; 10 (6.5%) strongly agree, 70 (45.5%) agree, most of them where from Asean countries. 27 (17.5%) stayed neutral; 47 (30.5%) disagree most of them from Africa and Europe. Ask if the choice had been motivated by the encouragements from their families; 20 (13%) strongly agree, 88(57.1%) agree, most of them from Asean countries; 15(9.8%) stayed neutral; and 31(20.1%) disagree. Ask if their motivation came from hoping to a resume

/ career development; 11(7.1%) strongly agree, 104 (67.5%) agree, 16(10.5%) stand neutral; and 23(14.9%) disagree. When ask about different cultures and perspectives impacted their choice to study abroad; 27(17.5%) strongly agree, 89(57.8%) agree, 23(15%) stand neutral, and 15(9.5%) disagree. Ask about the language acquisition motivation; 12(7.8%) strongly agree, 92(59.7%), 19(12.4%) stayed neutral; 31(20.1%) disagree.



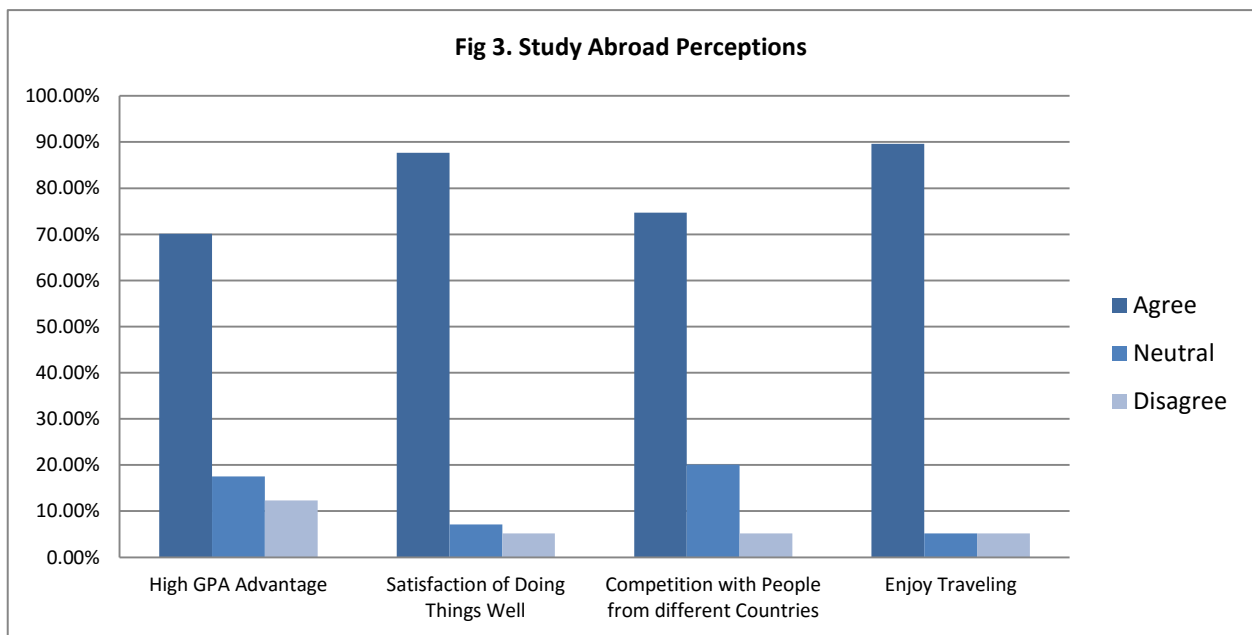
Expectations

The experience from studying is surrounded by all kinds of assumptions, many are correct, but others could not be the truth. So many students are the victim to the “expectations vs. realities” syndrome that can see their expectations reduce. In that case, students should not keep their expectations up. And fine way to see how they can be adapted with the challenges they face. The same approach will be followed as the previous one. Ask what are their studies ‘expectations; 27 (17.5%) strongly agree, 96(62.4%) agree that it is for the practical skills development; 12(7.8%) were neutral; and 19(12.3%) disagree. Ask if their personal growth is part of their expectations; 34 (22%) strongly agree, 112(72.8%) agree, 4(2.6%) stayed neutral and 4(2.6%) disagree. Ask if they are looking for the real world application of the content beyond the classroom, 23(14.9%) strongly agree; 108(70.2%) agree, 19(12.3%) gave a neutral answer and 4(2.6%) disagree. Ask if they have been facing a culture shock and if they are in the stage of dealing with intercultural global challenges; 16(10.4%) strongly agree, 69(44.8%) agree, 54(35%) neutral, and 15(9.8%) disagree.



Perceptions

Because study abroad programs are expensive and require considerable time commitments from both side students and their supervisors, a major concern is ensuring that the Thai education system meets students’ expectations. Indeed, assessing students’ expectations regarding study abroad can provide useful information for possible changes that would help Siam University meet its objectives. This study is to examine students’ perceptions on a number of different issues. The same approach as the previous will be used in the bid to keep things simple. Ask if their perception of study abroad is to take advantage of the opportunity to have a high GPA; 31(20.1%) strongly agree, 77(50%) agree, 27(17.5%) neutral and 19(12.3%) disagree. Ask if their perception it to find satisfaction in doing things as well as they can; 46(29.9%) strongly agree; 89(57.8%) agree, 11(7.1%) neutral; 8(5.2%) disagree. Ask if their perception is personally enjoy being in competition with people from different countries; 39(25.3%) strongly agree, 76(49.4%) agree, 31(20.1%) neutral; 8(5.2%) disagree. Ask if they perceive study abroad as time to enjoy traveling; 81(52.6%) strongly agree, 57(37%) agree, 8(5.2%) neutral; 8(5.2%) disagree.



Interviews

At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience (Seidman, 2006: 9). The purpose of these interviews is to learn from the qualities of experience and the significance of situations. While serving as a primary tool of data collection, it will also function to clarify data obtained through our survey. The interview has been taken by 8 students from different backgrounds; through it 4 questions have been asked in the bid to attempt to know about students’ experience when study abroad, to discover and record what the student has experienced in Thailand, what they think about it. When asked why they personally chose the program in Thailand most of their answers came from the intrinsic motivations. For example Fabi Halbleid an exchange student from Germany answer that it was recommended by his friend, and it was a good opportunity to him to visit Asia, because he has ever been there before. Ben Idahosa a master degree student from Nigeria said that to him, his motivation come from the fact that in his hometown in Nigeria,, many multinational companies operate in crude oil industry, therefore his ambition was to go overseas for study and then come back home with a degree that can give him hope to be hired. And he added Thailand was more affordable. Another student Mafaz from Maldives who has graduated in Marketing mentioned that Thailand has been his first destination because he was quite interested in Thai culture, as he had been looking for a job there. As it can be demonstrate most of the students chose Thailand because of its affordability and as well the accreditation of the entire English programs offered.

When ask how the program fits with their academic plans, all of them seem enthusiastic, they all appreciated their lecturers as most of them come from well known western institutions. For instance Fabian Driediger from Germany said “Compare to Germany, programs in Thai education system is following the North American system. However, as most programs are internationally recognized, I feel that they fit very well.” And Patrick Brixter from Spain said that: “The

program has helped me to understand how businesses work worldwide as well as improve my language and business skills.” Even though some students mentioned things that are not related to academic requirements, but the outcomes are quite positive.

When asked if they contribute to group projects, most of them reply with the ongoing activities and motivations when working in group. For instance Chris Buchi Okafor a master student from Nigeria said that: “I contribute to group projects by given out ideas that always lead to the success of the group”. Some said they have discovered leadership within them by working with people from different background as you cope with different point of view when analyzing a case study. Magnus Murphy from Sweden for instance said that: “I usually contribute much by writing and doing assignments by gathering information from other members. When it is done, the other group members could look through what we come up with and change what they think is necessary to be changed.” It can be concluded that all students have to come up with their value added at the end of the day. This is somehow the purpose of study in group in the multicultural environment.

When asked what do they get out from this experience, most of them mentioned about tolerance and understanding of other cultures, the avoidance of ethnocentrism and the promotion of integration. As an illustration Fabian Driediger said: “The major experience was the challenge of bringing together the different cultures from different continents. I think there is a big learning curve for students in understanding and avoidance of ethnocentricity. Furthermore, I have learned much about other cultures and met many good friends.” It can be seen that at the end of their studies, students changed the way they see the world, the way they behave. And they see themselves doing things that they have ever thought they will be doing. For example having friends from different religion as Mafaz mentioned, most of his friends were Christian and Buddhists. And they recognized that a society which works collectively has a higher productivity than the one which does not. As mentioned by Chris Buchi Okafor that: “We should learn from other people intellectuals and have the ability to compromise.”

7. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The results show that there is a relationship between students’ demographics and students’ perception of studying abroad experience. Asians students come to Thailand in the bid to get satisfaction in doing things as well as they can do. According to the survey more than 92% (102 out of 110 students) agree upon this matter. On the other hand more than 96% (25 out of 26) of the African students perceive study abroad as a good opportunity to compete with people from different countries. However European students perceive study in Thailand as a good opportunity to enjoy travelling. All of them strongly agree about it. Other results show that there is a relationship between students’ demographics and the factors that motivate them to study abroad. For instance, Asians students are more motivated by the encouragements from their families. 90% (99 out of 110) of the students agree that the choice to study in Thailand has been motivated by their relatives. Nevertheless 92% (24 out of 26) of African students strongly agree that resume and career development are the factors that motivated them to study in Thailand. They believe that it is the best way for them to cope with the multicultural environment and to get a competitive advantage in the job market in their home country. On the other hand European students are motivated by the way that they will get in touch with people that have different cultures and perspectives. All for them strongly agree with this issue.

Other studies show that Asian students’ expectations from study abroad lie in their personal growth. 82% (90 out of 110) of them strongly agree. Most of them have part-time job that might be the reason that makes them more confident. African students on the other hand expect practical skills development of contents beyond the classroom. It seems significant because they all come from sub-Saharan Africa countries where there is still lack of infrastructure for education such as internet access, library access and so on so forth. 88% (23 out of 26) agree. Expectations from Europeans students come from the culture shock and intercultural global challenges. They are looking for something new, things that are different from where they growth up. All of them agree with this issue.

There is a relationship between students’ demographics and the degree of their integrity in Thailand. All the participants have answered “YES” when asked if they have work on group projects with students from different cultures. We can therefore conclude that study at a multicultural environment like Siam University is a good opportunity to brainstorm with people from different backgrounds. 81% (89 out of 110) of Asian students said that they initiate meetings with professionals at Thai organizations to gain insights into corporate. Just few of European and African students said “YES”. This means that Asean Economic Community is doing quite well in their integration process as set up by the organization in 2015.

Recommendations

As this research paper purpose was to provide guideline and high light key success factors of study abroad experience to students and educators throughout experiences within and outside of the classroom. The recommendations to Siam University executives are as follow: If they expect to attract more international students and create more values for the university they might consider offering volunteer activities for their international students and listing them on their website. The university office might also encourage local students going on exchange or direct enrollment programs who are interested. The university should match new graduated with businesses in Thai organizations.

Research limitations and Difficulties

This study is limited by its sample. It is just from international business students at Siam University. However the sample size is acceptable even though it has a large number of Asian students with very limited number of European students, and no American. There was as well an insufficient corporation with the registration office at the university to get some statistical data upon current students enrolled and last five year data from students who have graduated. Most of the participants did not show enthusiasm to fill up the survey form. Most of them were complaining about the time to fill up the questionnaire. Some had not even accepted to do it. Yet, the comparison of international enrollment statistics is somewhat problematic as the registration office which is in charge to collect data in different ways and according to different definitions such as exchange students or regular students. This makes statistical comparisons difficult and often inaccurate or misleading.

Suggestions for Future Research

Since Siam University looks for ways to increase the quality of students who participate in international program, it is important to know barriers that would appear to be preventing students from electing to participate in studying abroad opportunities presented by Siam University.

Know whether students have met their expectations after their study. Being able to identify the factors that influence to meet their expectations should help educators and administrators understand the characteristics of students wanting to study abroad. Understanding the characteristics may assist educators in developing different programs and better promotional strategies to attract a wider variety of students to participate in study abroad program.

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