



A reflective exploration of international academic exchanges: Analysing impacts and envisioning transformative international learning experiences

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of international mobility has emerged as a prominent aspect of higher education internationalization worldwide. However, it is crucial to recognize that the essence of internationalization extends beyond the sheer number of international students enrolled. A pivotal focus lies in the multicultural competencies these students cultivated during their extended residence and study abroad periods. This empirical study endeavors to ascertain the genuine accomplishments of international students concerning multicultural exploration and the development of a global mindset while pursuing degrees overseas. Key considerations encompass the daily experiences of these students in communities with diverse cultures, their adaptation to academic life on campus amidst classmates and professors from various cultural backgrounds, and the evolution of their multicultural competencies and global perspectives. Through critical reflection, this paper presents a conceptual framework to enhance comprehension of multicultural competencies within the context of higher education's internationalization trends. The research methodology involved qualitative interviews conducted with international students in Taiwan, and the ensuing data underwent analysis using content analysis techniques. The findings underscore the intricate nature of multicultural competencies in higher education, encompassing multiple processes and challenges. To foster more successful international study experiences, this study advocates for collaborative efforts from host institutions and peers alongside international students' comprehensive understanding of the host country's culture.

Keywords: higher education, global mindset, internationalization, international mobility, multicultural competencies

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INTRODUCTION

"Internationalization is changing the world of higher education, and globalization is changing the world of internationalization."—Jane Knight (2003). Advances in technology, air travel, and the internet have greatly reduced geographic restrictions and accelerated connections among individuals and nations. The phenomenon of rapidly increasing global interaction, known as Globalization, has influenced our daily routines and changed our experience in everyday life (Giddens, 1999, 2003). When did Globalization begin? Not all world historians agree with each other's viewpoints (O'Rourke & Williamson, 2002). Nevertheless, the impact of Globalization cannot be underestimated. National Geographic (2022) defines Globalization as the growing interconnectedness and interdependence of global cultures and economies. Globalization has been influencing our personal lives and society in different aspects, including the economy, politics, technology, and culture (Giddens, 1999, 2003). In his speech in 2016, Barack Obama, former president of the USA, stated, 'Globalization is a fact, because of technology, because of an

integrated global supply chain, because of changes in transportation. And we will not be able to build a wall around that (Hellmann, 2016),' indicating that it is inevitable for every individual to live with Globalization in the modern world.

Globalization brings people close together, and the links between the global economy, politics, technology, and culture also affect the policy directions of school education and higher education institutions. The literature tells us that one of the primary goals for most students seeking higher education is to prepare themselves to connect to their future workplace, professions, and life opportunities (Chan, 2016; Owen, 2017). Higher education is significant for every country for the following reasons: It enables individual development and encourages economic, technological, and social change; It stimulates the exchange of knowledge, research, and innovation; It prepares students with the skills they need for their future careers, ensuring better economic security and a stable future (*Future of International Mobility Will Combine Physical and Digital Experiences to Reach a Wider Range of Students – UNESCO-IESALC*, n.d.). With the globalization trend, many job requirements have changed. Higher education institutions are bound to integrate global development into curriculum designs and teaching methods to meet students' needs. As a result, 'the consequences of globalization on universities inevitably lead to the internationalization of education' (Nacheva & Sulova, 2020).

Internationalization, a sign of global competitiveness, is seen as the 'battle for brainpower' (Hazelkorn, 2008). However, in the early era, internationalization in higher education was marginalized, even though many professors or researchers travelled widely to other countries (Hénard et al., 2012). Qiang (2003) suggests that nations and cultural identities are crucial elements of internationalization in higher education. The concepts of internationalization can be categorized from curriculum, student/faculty exchange, technical assistance, and workplace competency development to a supportive culture and climate for an international institution (Qiang, 2003).

Now, internationalization in higher education has increased its importance due to the development of advanced communication and technology services. As De Wit (2019) states, international education has moved from margin to core because of the increasing importance of research and education for economic development and the growing demand for higher education. Hazelkorn (2008) also observes that countries with high-level international students benefit from their contribution to domestic research and development. Thus, Knight (2003) suggests that internationalization should include two dimensions, the national and the institutional levels, i.e., governments and higher education institutions, which play a significant role during the process. As Knight (2003, 2007, 2012) describes, internationalization is integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into higher education. Through the breadth and depth process, we can understand the relationships between different countries, the diversity of cultures, and world views.

Therefore, here are a few perspectives to consider: How can a country or an institution embrace internationalization through different approaches? How can a government or an institution prepare citizens or local students to welcome those outsiders and make them feel at home? Who are the stakeholders during the integration process? What training do they need to get beforehand before the integration process? How can institutions compete fairly to attract international students or other transnational opportunities? Internationalization in higher education is an exotic life experience for most international students. The experience stays and affects their future decisions and interactions with others, for better or worse.

With the trend of internationalization and workplace globalization, one of the significant goals in higher education is to cultivate cross-culturally competent students or global citizens (Killick, 2020) to boost their success in the future global job market. "Embrace Culture" is one of the six competencies Miller (2015) suggested for the education framework in the 21st century. To expand his idea in a globalized higher education world, the basic understanding, acceptance, and appreciation of the cultural diversity from different cultural or ethnic groups will prepare students for their future workplace. The terminology 'intercultural,' 'cross-cultural,' and 'multicultural' are often used interchangeably in many articles relating to globalization, internationalization, or international mobility. As explained by Deardorff and Jones (2009), the

terminology and definition of intercultural competence have been discussed by professional experts for some time, such as "cross-cultural awareness," "foreign language proficiency," and "successfully interacting with persons of diverse backgrounds."

Thus, the crucial concepts of multicultural competencies are the knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes, and behaviors we need to understand other cultures, recognize the values of different cultures, and act the right way toward other cultures. For international students, multicultural competencies are the knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes, and behaviors they gain while studying abroad to live and blend into the local society. Likewise, multicultural competencies are also required for local academic institutes, faculty members, and students to welcome international students. Only through two-way interaction and equal understanding can we achieve the goal of internationalization.

According to Hénard et al. (2012), "Student mobility is the first step and the most visible part of internationalization." As it is known, higher education has changed dramatically over the past decades. One of the significant changes is the massification of higher education globally. As stated in the UNESCO Higher Education Global Data Report (2022), the enrollment ratio has doubled in the last 20 years of higher education in many countries, with about 235 million university students worldwide. Another change in higher education is the growth of students' interest in mobility programs, including exchange programs, internships, and pursuing academic degrees in foreign countries. International mobility in higher education increased from 0.3 million in 1963 to 2 million in 2000 and tripled from 2000 to 2019 (UNESCO, 2022). Statistics show that international students accounted for 7% of total enrollment in higher education programs among the OECD countries in 2020 (OECD, 2020). Possible reasons for the increase in international student mobility are the accessibility to high-quality education, employability in the globalized labor market, and migration to another country (OECD, 2022).

Apparently, the phenomenon of international student mobility can also be found in Taiwan. The National Development Council, a Taiwanese government organization, has been promoting a project since 2011 called "Higher Education Output: Expansion of Overseas Student Recruitment" to encourage the development of internationalization in higher education. The key features of this project are enhancing the environment for studying in Taiwan and strengthening the marketing of Taiwan's higher education advantages. The approaches for enhancing a friendly environment for studying in Taiwan focus on improving the teaching environment in English at the university campus, establishing an administrative support system for overseas student affairs, simplifying and relaxing the admission application policy, work-study program, and staying in Taiwan after graduation regulations, operating overseas student network communities, and promoting overseas Chinese students to participate in professional internships. The approaches for strengthening the marketing of Taiwan's higher education advantages include constructing a global layout for studying in Taiwan, developing a suitable environment for East Asian students studying in Taiwan, and promoting international people and students to study Chinese in Taiwan for a short period to realize the advantages and reputation of Taiwan's higher education.

In addition, the "New Southbound Talent Development Program" in 2017, implemented by the Ministry of Education of Taiwan to support the New Southbound Policy, attempted to recruit students from Southeast Asia with great potential. The government held Taiwan higher education fairs, provided admission information sessions, and doubled the scholarship grants for students from those countries (MOE, 2021). With the encouragement of the "Higher Education Output" project and the "New Southbound Talent Development Program" from the Taiwanese government, the number of international students pursuing academic purposes in Taiwan has increased from 4.39% in 2017 to 5.87% in 2022, as shown in Table 1. Among all the international students, the top 6 regions of international students' origin are Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Mainland China, and Macau. Two key factors that attract students from those regions to study in Taiwan are various grants integrated by the Ministry of Education and affordable living expenses and tuition (MOE, 2021). Additionally, after the Ministry of Labor's open policy on the employment of overseas and international students, another appealing factor for international students is working in Taiwan to get a higher salary than in their home countries (Table 2).

Table 1. Student numbers in higher education programs in Taiwan

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total Students	1,273,894	1,244,822	1,213,172	1,203,460	1,185,830	1,140,089
International Student (Total)	121,461	129,207	128,157	90,895	94,579	103,658
% of international students (Total)	9.53%	10.38%	10.56%	7.55%	7.98%	9.09%
International Student (Academic purpose)	55,916	61,97	63,53	62,387	65,383	66,917
% of international students (Academic purpose)	4.39%	4.98%	5.24%	5.18%	5.51%	5.87%
International Student (Non-academic purpose)	65,545	67,237	64,627	28,508	29,196	36714
% of international students (Non-academic purposes)	5.14%	5.40%	5.32%	2.37%	2.46%	3.22%

Source: Ministry of Education (2022). <https://stats.moe.gov.tw/statedu/chart.aspx?pvalue=31>

Table 2. GDP per capita list 2024

Country	Hong Kong	Taiwan	China	Malaysia	Indonesia	Vietnam
GDP per capita	\$54,080	\$34,050	\$13,160	\$13,910	\$5,510	\$4,640

Source: International Monetary Fund: GDP per capita, current prices (2024)
<https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDPDPC@WEO/THA/IDN/PHL/VNM/MYS>

The good intention of the "Higher Education Output" project and the New Southbound Policy, a policy to enhance cooperation and exchange between Taiwan and 18 countries in Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Australasia (Jamil, 2023), attract more international students to study in Taiwan. Moreover, as the Ministry of Education (2021) claimed, studying in Taiwan has become a trend for those from the New Southbound nations. More than ten years have passed since the initiation of the 'Higher Education Output' project, making it crucial to examine its effects and reflect on possible improvements for international academic exchange programs in Taiwan.

This study was empirically conducted to identify the authentic achievements of international students in terms of multicultural exploration and global mindset development while studying overseas for degrees. Highly concerning issues included: How did these international students lead their daily lives in a community with different cultures from their own? How did these international students adapt their campus study with classmates and professors of various cultures? Did these international students develop multicultural competencies and global mindsets?

METHOD

The data reported in this study were collected from 11 international students in four different colleges in Taiwan from June 2022 to August 2022. Nine international student participants were enrolled in undergraduate programs, and two were enrolled in the master's program at the time of the interview. Two interviewees were from Macao, one from Hong Kong, and five were 4th or 5th generation Chinese immigrants overseas from Malaysia and Indonesia. The participants' Chinese language proficiency levels varied from beginner to mastery. Demographics and detailed background information for the 11 participants are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

A semi-structured interview facilitated an in-depth exploration of the participants' studying experiences. Using interviews in qualitative research is valuable for analyzing relevant features in a changeable social life (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017). According to a study by Alshenqeeti (2014), semi-structured interviews are the most common type among qualitative researchers. Unlike

structured interviews, semi-structured interviews are flexible with the guided interview topics and questions.

Table 3. Demographic information of the participants

Participants		N (11 participants)	%
Age	Range 20-26		100%
Gender	Male	5	45%
	Female	6	55%
Home Country	Malaysia	4	36%
	Indonesia	2	18%
	Macao	2	18%
	Hong Kong	1	9%
	Japan	1	9%
	Swaziland	1	9%

Table 4. Detailed background information of the participants

Code name	Gender	Age	Education Background	Major	Country	Mother tongue	Language ability
A	Female	21	Freshman/private University of Technology	Visual Communication, Design	Malaysia, 5th generation Chinese immigrant	Cantonese ¹ , Mandarin, Hakka, Malay, English	Cantonese, Mandarin, Hakka, Malay, English
B	Female	21	Senior/national university	Business Administration	Indonesia, Chinese immigrant	Indonesian	Indonesian, English, Hokkien, Mandarin
C	Male	21	Senior/national university	Agribusiness (English Program)	Swaziland	Siswati	Siswati, English, Portuguese, French
D	Male	21	Sophomore/private University of Technology	Leisure Service Management	Macao, China	Cantonese	Cantonese, Mandarin, English ²
E	Female	21	Freshman/private University of Technology	Information Management	Malaysia, 5th generation Chinese immigrant	Mandarin, Hakka	Mandarin, Malay
F	Female	20	Freshman/private University of Technology	Architecture	Malaysia, 4th generation Chinese immigrant	Mandarin, Hokkien	Mandarin
F	Female	22	Freshman/private University of Technology	Marketing and Logistic Management	Indonesia	Indonesian	Indonesian, English, Chinese
M	Male	20	Freshman/private University of Technology	Business Administration	Malaysia, at least 5th generation Chinese immigrant	Mandarin	Malay, Hokkien, Mandarin
M	Male	23	Graduate student/public university	Social work	Hong Kong, China	Cantonese	Cantonese, Mandarin
M	Male	26	Graduate student/public university	Social work	Macao, China	Cantonese	Cantonese, Mandarin
F	Female	22	Senior/private university	International Trade	Japan	Japanese	Japanese, Mandarin, English

Note: ¹ Cantonese is the main language at home. However, all five languages are mixed in daily conversation at home
² The participant's English level is very elementary

Adhabi and Anozie (2017) explain that researchers can adjust the drafted outline questions and go deeper to ask more relevant questions according to the interviewees' responses in a semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews give the researcher enough time to explore subject issues in-depth, making them an ideal data collection approach for qualitative research. Individual or group interviews are acceptable based on the flexibility of semi-structured interviews (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017). In this study, ten individual interviews and one group interview were conducted. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most interviews were conducted online, and only three participants were interviewed onsite. The average interview lasted between one and two hours. Every participant was interviewed two times.

The interview questions focused on issues including the participants' detailed background information, their decision-making process for studying in Taiwan, problems and challenges at school, the similarities or differences between their previous educational experience in their home country and their educational experience in Taiwan, their cross-cultural exploration experience and interpersonal interaction in daily life, their professional career goals in the future and self-preparation for these goals, and their reflection about the growth of their transnational vision, local culture, and multicultural literacy.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The study aimed to examine international students' multicultural exploration and global mindset development while studying abroad for academic purposes. Based on the interview responses and observations from the 11 participants, the preliminary results can be integrated as described below with the summary in Table 5.

Table 5. Summary of the participants' responses to interview questions (N=11)

Category	N	%
Financial support	5	45.45
Academic features and achievements	11	100
Academic schoolwork	6	54.55
Cross-culture exploration	8	72.73
Multicultural competencies	3	27.27

Scholarship policies and labor market open policies provide sturdy financial support to international students

Scholarships and grants are crucial factors for international students studying in Taiwan. Two kinds of scholarships are provided for all international students: government and university scholarships (*Study in Taiwan*, n.d.). All 11 international student participants received university scholarships while studying in Taiwan. International students can also apply for financial aid or subsidies while studying in Taiwan.

"I get the scholarship every semester, and I am qualified to apply for subsidies for underprivileged overseas Chinese students. Both financial supports help me greatly" (Informant I).

Most university scholarships for international students are provided annually; students must maintain some academic requirements, such as GPA, to apply for another year's international student scholarships. For those international students who cannot fulfil the requirement but need financial support, they can easily find a part-time job opportunity either on campus or off campus.

The students described that the legal regulation of working in Taiwan supports their financial needs. They can still handle their financial situation if they cannot

maintain the academic requirements for the scholarship. "One of the reasons why I came to Taiwan is that I can work legally there. Now, I am working at a Tofu pudding shop" (Informants E, F). "I am a work-study student" (Informant H). "The hourly pay is pretty good (compared to his home country). Because of my English ability, I can find a job at an English cram school with a high pay" (Informant C). "The hourly pay is high (compared to the hourly pay in her home country). I work on campus and off campus. I work in a factory with many Indonesian students during winter and summer vacations. Even though we need to work night shifts, the pay is good" (Informant B). "I work for a study abroad agency, helping people apply for schools in Japan" (Informant K).

International students are unfamiliar with Taiwan's academic features and achievements

With the help of University Entrance Committee Association offices overseas, another common factor for international students to study in Taiwan is the recommendation from teachers, family members, or friends who have been here for university degrees. The University Entrance Committee Association offices provide an alternative and easily accessible choice for those international students who cannot smoothly apply for a university in their home country. In addition, most international students prefer to study at a school they can connect with, such as friends from the same old high school or friends from their family. Moreover, it is easy to get admission because the requirements for international students are low, even for students with limited language ability. Therefore, most students are unfamiliar with their university's academic features or achievements before starting school.

"My sister is here studying at another school, and she loves her study life in Taiwan" (Informants B, C). "Overseas Chinese High Schools are not recognized in Malaysia. It is not easy for us to apply for a local university" (Informants A, E, F, H). "I came here because I know someone at this school" (Informants A, D, E, F, G, H, I, J). "My high school and the college I am studying are partner schools, and my high school teacher could help me with my college application to Taiwan. Also, a Taiwan office is assisting us with our university entrance application to Taiwan" (Informants A, D, E, F, H, I, J). "My country is less developed and has diplomatic relations with Taiwan, so I can easily get university information about Taiwan. I applied for an international program here, and no Mandarin language ability is required" (Informant C). "I studied at an international high school in Indonesia. My Mandarin is not good. I studied Chinese for two months at the Chinese Language Center of National Taiwan Normal University before I started my university studies. I did not expect only Mandarin to be used in my major. It is quite challenging for me during the tests. Sometimes, I could not understand the questions very well" (Informant B). "I was required to take Mandarin Chinese in my first year of university, but the first two years were still very challenging for me if teachers only used Mandarin in class" (Informant K).

International students' daily life in Taiwan is limited to academic schoolwork or campus

To get financial support from the school for the following year, academic schoolwork is the priority for international students. Most international students do not participate in any school clubs or student unions held by Taiwanese students. The club they often joined was an international student club held by the school, and it usually held activities for special events or holidays, such as an international student welcome party or Christmas party. Some schools have different international student clubs for different student backgrounds, such as the Indonesian international student club.

"Because of my poor Mandarin language ability, I need to spend much time on my schoolwork; however, the results were not always good" (Informant B). "I will focus on my schoolwork because I am new here" (Informants E, F). "I can get 100% tuition

deduction for the next academic year if my GPA is the top 25% among my major students, 50% tuition deduction if my GPA is the top 50% of my major students" (Informants A, H). "I only joined one school club for international students" (Informants A, B, C).

International students seldom participated in local social activities or engaged in cross-culture exploration

Studying abroad is a brand-new experience for almost all international students; however, they can find their connection with their home country by hanging out with other international students with similar backgrounds. The only host cultural exploration international students have is with local students or teachers during a class. Besides, most schools usually arrange for international students to stay in the same dormitory for administrative convenience, i.e., international students share the dormitory room with international students. This arrangement stops international students from interacting with local students after class. Most of them have friends from their home countries, and their friends have arranged housing in their community with students of the same cultural background. Without interaction with local students and the preparation for exploring the new environment, most international students prefer to stay in their comfort zone with people from their hometown community.

"I live off campus with friends from my hometown. It was arranged before I came here" (Informants D, E, F, G, H). "I do not like the arrangement of the dormitory. I live off campus by myself" (Informant B, C). "I usually hang out with students from my home country after class, sometimes with local students from my major to work on a group project" (Informants A, C).

The growth of international students' transnational vision, local culture, and multicultural competencies are minimal

As mentioned above, one of the possible reasons for international student mobility is to enhance their employability in the globalized labor market (OECD, 2022). It is assumed that the experience of studying abroad will cultivate international students with multicultural competencies to prepare them for a globalized workplace. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, culture is a way of life, especially a particular group's general customs and beliefs at a particular time. It is the attitudes, behavior, and opinions of a group within society. In other words, culture encompasses the lifestyle, prevailing customs, and beliefs specific to the local people. It encapsulates the collective attitudes, behaviors, and opinions shared by a community within a society. From the above statement, we can deduce that acquiring a transnational vision and multicultural competencies is limited without frequent interaction with local people.

"I do not need to learn Mandarin because I study in an international program, and English is the language we use with teachers and students; however, I lost the internship opportunity to work in a Taiwanese company because of my poor Mandarin ability" (Informant C). "It is difficult to make friends in Taiwan because my Mandarin is not good, and Taiwanese students are afraid of speaking English with me. I do not know how to join an activity or program to meet local friends" (Informant G). "I only have one Taiwanese friend. Because of her, my school life in Taiwan is not so tough" (Informant B). "We are like international orphans staying at the dormitory alone during holiday events when all Taiwanese students go back home to get together with their families" (Informant A).

Discussion

The results presented above identify several potential solutions for the observed phenomena. We have introduced a conceptual diagram (Figure 1) outlining the cultivation of multicultural competencies and provided reflective suggestions to advance internationalization in higher education in Taiwan. Five categories will be discussed as follows.

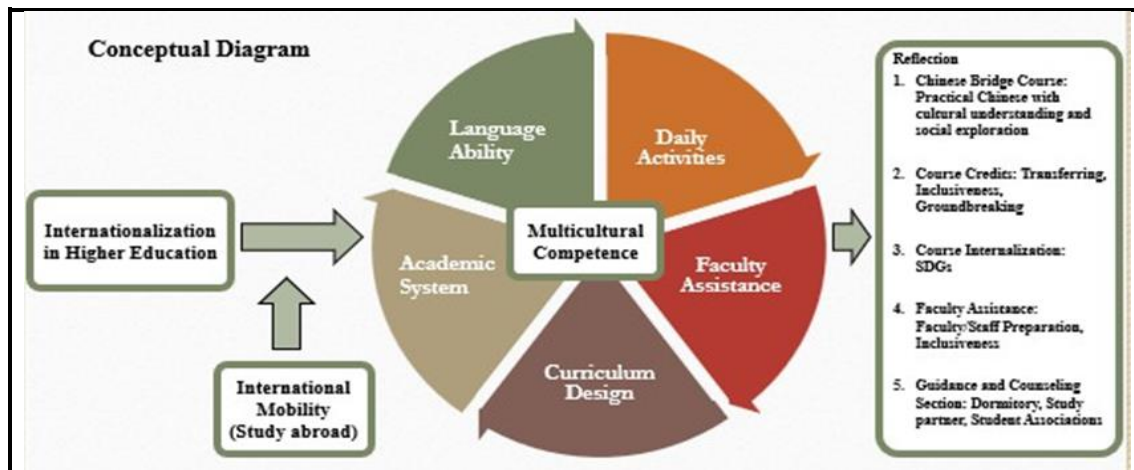


Figure 1. Conceptual Diagram of Multicultural Competence

Language ability requirements

Language proficiency stands as a pivotal prerequisite for the seamless integration of international students into a new academic and cultural environment (Wilczewski & Alon, 2023). Despite the existence of Chinese Language Centers in many universities that support language development, a significant discrepancy exists in admission requirements. Some institutions admit students with limited language proficiency, necessitating merely a one-year commitment to Chinese courses. We advocate for the implementation of standardized language ability requirements for university admission, similar to the practices observed in the USA or UK. This may involve the provision of conditional offers to international students with limited language proficiency, affording them the opportunity to enroll in the university after they fulfill the requisite language standards at the Chinese Language Center. The role of the Chinese Language Center should extend beyond academic language skills to encompass practical applications, fostering cultural understanding and exploration. This comprehensive approach will assist international students in navigating problems, challenges, and stress caused by insufficient language ability in both academic and daily life. Through this framework, universities can proactively contribute to their international student community's academic success and well-being.

Academic system and course credits

The dynamics of academic systems worldwide exhibit notable variations in the number of semesters per academic year and the overall duration of academic years, creating a multifaceted landscape for international students. As international students pursue degrees or engage in exchange programs in Taiwan, aligning with the interests of Taiwanese students studying abroad, they encounter challenges adapting to diverse academic structures. A critical consideration is the seamless transfer of credits across international borders and the implementation of an inclusive approach toward credit recognition. Therefore, ensuring a smooth process for transferring credits becomes paramount to facilitating the academic pursuits of students engaged in diverse international educational experiences (Junor & Usher, 2008). This facilitation of credit transfer is not just an administrative task; it is integral to supporting the academic pursuits of students engaged in diverse international experiences. By addressing these challenges, educational institutions contribute to a more interconnected and enriching global academic landscape, ensuring that the achievements of international students are universally acknowledged and valued.

Course internationalization

While English Medium Instruction (EMI) is emphasized in Taiwan's higher education for internationalization, merely using English as a medium is insufficient. Achieving true course internationalization necessitates comprehensively integrating global perspectives within the curriculum (Leask, 2015). It involves going beyond language proficiency, delving into social

contacts, cultural expansion, and establishing connections with international industries. On the other hand, the evaluation of course internationalization should extend beyond linguistic considerations to encompass a broader spectrum of elements. This includes exploring how the course content engages with social dynamics, promotes cultural understanding and establishes links with global industries. The objective is to foster a learning environment that transcends linguistic boundaries, fostering a rich multicultural experience.

Moreover, a forward-looking approach is imperative. Envisioning a global future for courses involves adapting to current international standards and anticipating future trends. This could mean extending the scope of study scenarios to include entrepreneurial contexts and international business components. By doing so, educational institutions can better prepare students for the challenges and opportunities our increasingly interconnected and globalized world presents. The call for course internationalization is about adopting English as a medium and creating an immersive, globally oriented learning experience that equips students with the skills and perspectives needed to thrive in an internationalized academic and professional landscape.

Faculty assistance

As international mobility trends continue to grow, the responsibility for a successful and enriching experience becomes a shared endeavor between international students and local educational institutions. While international students are responsible for preparing for their studies abroad, it is equally crucial for local teachers and faculty to be well-prepared to welcome and support these students (Hudzik, 2011). Despite the increasing prevalence of international travel, fostering genuine multicultural awareness and inclusiveness necessitates a tailored and intentional approach.

In navigating this shared responsibility, academic authorities must grapple with several critical questions: 1) Integration of international students - How well-prepared are Taiwanese universities for effectively integrating international students into the academic and social fabric? - What measures have been taken to facilitate cross-cultural cultivation, considering international students' diverse backgrounds and perspectives? - To what extent has the impact on local students been considered, and how can the integration of international students contribute to broadening the horizons of the local academic community? 2) Preparation for teachers and faculty - How are teachers and faculty adequately prepared to receive and engage with international students? - In what ways is an international mindset instilled in educators, ensuring they possess the necessary cultural sensitivity, guidance, and inspiration to support a diverse student body?

Addressing these questions is fundamental to creating an inclusive and culturally responsive educational environment. By proactively tackling the challenges and opportunities associated with internationalization, educational institutions can foster an atmosphere of mutual understanding, respect, and collaboration among students and faculty from diverse backgrounds. This holistic approach ensures that international students and local educators contribute meaningfully to the collaborative learning experience, fostering a sense of belonging and shared understanding in the academic community.

Guidance and Counseling

Ensuring a smooth transition for international students into their academic journey in Taiwan involves intentional guidance and counselling efforts. Guidance and counselling offices play a pivotal role in supporting the well-being of international students. Beyond academic concerns, these offices can provide a confidential and supportive space for international students to navigate personal challenges, emotional well-being, and cultural adjustments through individual life counselling (Arthur, 2017). Whether facing homesickness, language barriers, or other personal issues, having a dedicated support system through guidance and counselling services ensures that international students receive the assistance they need to navigate and overcome these challenges.

However, providing practical support requires a global mindset and multicultural competence to understand and address the unique challenges international students from different

cultural backgrounds face (Keum et al., 2022). Ensuring counselling staff are trained in cultural sensitivity and have the necessary language skills is crucial for offering meaningful assistance. Therefore, educational institutions should provide ongoing training for counselling staff to enhance their cultural competence. This training should include awareness of cultural differences, sensitivity to diverse backgrounds, and understanding international students' unique challenges. Another suggestion is to foster collaboration between guidance and counselling offices and international student services. Working closely with departments supporting international students can also provide valuable insights and ensure a holistic approach to cultural competence.

CONCLUSION

The present study explores the complexities of internationalization in higher education, mainly focusing on the experiences of international students. A nuanced understanding emerges, revealing critical insights into the challenges and trends prevalent in this academic landscape.

Firstly, a noteworthy observation is the need for more preparedness among many international students before embarking on their educational journeys. Insufficient familiarity with the host institution's achievements and distinctive features, coupled with a limited understanding of the host country's culture, underscores the need for enhanced pre-departure orientation programs. Initiatives aimed at equipping international students with comprehensive knowledge about their destination can significantly contribute to a smoother transition and more positive study experiences.

Secondly, a recurring pattern surfaces regarding the limited interpersonal interactions and cultural exploration between international and local students. The tendency of international students to remain within their comfort zones rather than engage with their local counterparts poses a substantial barrier to the cultivation of cross-cultural understanding. Initiatives that encourage and facilitate meaningful interactions, such as structured programs and collaborative projects, can play a pivotal role in fostering a more inclusive and interconnected academic community.

Thirdly, pursuing academic degrees for immigration purposes among certain international students highlights the multifaceted motivations driving individuals to study abroad. Acknowledging these diverse aspirations is crucial for institutions to tailor their support services effectively, ensuring that academic programs align with international students' broader goals and aspirations.

Despite the identified challenges, it is imperative to recognize that internationalization in higher education is an inevitable global trend. As international student enrollments continue to rise, educational institutions must take proactive measures. It is imperative to assist international students in developing their multicultural competencies during their study abroad experiences and inspire faculty members and local students to embrace a global mindset.

Envisioning more successful international study experiences necessitates collaborative efforts from host institutions, peers, and international students alike. Schools can contribute by implementing comprehensive support mechanisms, including mentorship programs, cultural immersion initiatives, and robust orientation sessions. More importantly, fostering a global mindset among faculty members and local students creates an inclusive academic environment that embraces diversity. Ultimately, the success of internationalization in higher education hinges on a collective commitment to understanding, respecting, and celebrating the rich cultural diversity that international students bring to host countries and take back to their home countries.

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