

# Impacts of Study Abroad Experiences on Chinese students' Multilingual Development: A Case Study in Thailand

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*Abstract: The 21st century is the age of internationalization and globalization, and the increased effort put into emphasizing local and global opportunities is relatively obvious. This paper presents both quantitative and qualitative research examining study abroad experiences in Thailand impacted the intercultural communicative competence of students, eventually leading to multilingual development of their Thai language ability, English language proficiency, and intercultural abilities, which were the three main constructs for data collection. The population consisted of 30 purposively selected Chinese students enrolled in a graduate program in the 2020 academic year at private universities in Thailand. After a minimum stay of one year in Thailand, the students were asked to complete a questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale to self-assess their Thai language ability, English language proficiency, and intercultural abilities. The results demonstrated that study abroad experiences provided students with both positive linguistic and cultural outcomes. The overall mean scores of English language proficiency and intercultural abilities were at a high level, which indicated a high level of development of the students in English and intercultural abilities, whereas their Thai language abilities were at a low level. The interview findings also corroborated the findings of the questionnaire. The study revealed that study abroad experiences offered ample opportunities to pathways to bilingualism and multilingualism. Therefore, investment in the international experiences of students to meet the demands of global competence should be essential to gradually move both students and institutions towards internationalization and globalization.*

*Keywords: Intercultural communicative competence, Study abroad experiences, Multilingual development, Internationalization, Globalization*

## Introduction

A new global era has arisen and the world is gearing towards internationalization and globalization. The two terms (internationalization and globalization) denote some different aspects, and they have represented a variety of topics such as international studies programs, coursework, political relations, economics and colonization (Yook & Turner, 2018). Generally, globalization refers to the dynamic mobility of both human and non-human such as ideas, trade, investment, various services, pollution, and diseases across borders whereas internationalization in education is defined as how international, intercultural, and global dimensions are integrated for educational purposes, functions, and delivery (Knight, 2004). In educational view, on the other hand, internationalization includes study abroad and its post outcomes or impacts on students, scholars, curriculum, college administration, international connection among institutions (Deardorff, 2004, p. 5, 6). As seen by this definition, study abroad and international experience are the two activities in part of internationalization.

A new wave of international education has massively expanded and it is undeniable that internationalization plays a vital role in educational dimension especially at school campus and institution level. This can be clearly seen from a big number of international students enrolling in universities in North America, Europe, Australia, the United Kingdom, and China. It is reported that the United States is the largest destination where the estimation of 819,000 international students enrolled in all levels in 2012. Unsurprisingly, the Chinese are the biggest population enrolling in foreign schools and universities (Abella, 2015).

According to the statistical number of Chinese students who pursue their study abroad, the number has been constantly expanded. The number of Chinese students studying abroad reached 703,500 in 2019 (Ministry of Education: The People's Republic of China, 2020). By the next decade, it is estimated that Chinese students will become the world's largest group of students population (Henze & Zhu, 2012).

One of a promising outcome of studying abroad is to become a global citizen. Evidently, global citizenship has been presented in various domains including education. The term might be defined in totalizing manner, meaning a person with rights and privileges as a citizen everywhere (Gaudelli, 2016). However, looking closely at language education, a view from Block and Cameron (2002) presents language as a the primary medium of human social interactions which is the starting point and process of social and cultural bonds. If English is an international language, the values of English education on the growing and mutual advocate of nation, global citizenship, and morality in the global sense should be highly respected (Man-fat Wu, 2020). Therefore, English language should be a suitable means to promote global citizenship. In this sense, global citizenship involves various roles of English as an international language which international communication takes place outside native speakers of English countries (Golubeva, Wagner & Yakimowski, 2016).

It is evident to see that English has become an international language; however, what Graddol (2016) observed the directions of English in the last ten years tends to be realistic at present. Graddol predicted that the economic importance of other languages has been growing and English would become a near-universal basic skills. As a consequence, multilingual speakers tend to far outweigh both monolingual and bilingual English speakers in the current world's labor markets (Ushioda, 2017). In linguistic practicality, those who can compete with high market challenges and economic advantage should be those who can move beyond English and be competent to communicate with the entire world communities. Needless to say, being multilingual users can be seen as a strength asset in the rise of globalization.

As English continues to become an international language, it seems paradoxical to see that the decline of native-speakers norms is highly noticeable. English itself should not been taught as a subject on its own, but additional languages and skills should be promoted. Ortega (2013) proposes a way forward multilingual turn which signifies the importance of multilingual competence rather than L2 proficiency. Similarly, the growth of other languages beyond English should be competitive for learners to be able to engage in diversified classroom and real-life contexts. Therefore, it could be said that the world is shifting from monolingual language assumption to a more multilingual and translingual orientation in which cultural and social dimensions are taking place and embedded in such meaning-making repertoires (Houghton, Rivers & Hashimoto, 2018).

It is therefore to recognize that globalization leads to the advent of new forms of communication (Man-fat Wu, 2020). A prediction by Graddol (2004) tends to be expectedly realistic, "English may not be the dominant language of the future, but the need to be multilingual will be enhanced." The monolingual paradigm has been challenged by the multilingual turn, and the importance of developing a second, third, even a fourth language in order to move beyond monolingualism to bilingualism or multilingualism is well-established (Fantini, 2020). Those who are able to participate in more than one language will be the ones who also engage in more than one cultures and eventually these interactions are inextricably linked with the goals of intercultural communicative competence (ICC).

English, one of the dominant languages, has been used and spreading by relatively increased numbers of the world population. Even though the term "English as an international language" was proposed by Larry Smith in 1976, 1978 (Marlina, 2018), three

decades later, Graddol (2004) contends that the population of speakers of English as the first language will be declining towards nearer 5% by 2050. However, the growing trend and demand of English as the world's primary language in international communication has become apparent for many decades. If we look at a striking number of English users, it shows that the estimation of English users is approximately 1.1 billion and 1.8 billion whereas the native speakers of English are estimated somewhere between 320 billion to 380 billion (Jenkins, 2000). In the meantime, the number of English speakers may surpass 4 billion by the year 2050 (Rose & Galloway, 2019). Therefore, it could be said that English has become a globalized language and its globalization has brought with a radical change in communication, transactions, and networks (Seidlhofer, 2011). With these tremendous numbers of English users, English has become a powerful language and eventually a medium of communication in many domains such as governments, the courts of law, the media, and the education system (Crystal, 2012).

The role of English as an international language has warranted some massive changes of paradigms. With the growing interest in this notion, English is widely used not only in English-speaking countries but also in non-native English countries (Chen & Le, 2019). Similarly, Sadeghpour (2020) summarizes geographic and demographic changes of English and it could be now a growing realization that a belief system about absolute advantages of native speakers of English has been gradually declining. In sum, what McKay (2002) concludes almost twenty years back tends to be realistic that the continuation of English as an international language will result in a rising number of bilingual speakers of English who can mainly use English for wider communication.

Language and culture cannot be separated; therefore, learning a language is intertwined with learning a culture. At the global level, the ability to communicate, interpret and see relationships between phenomena from different cultures is highly necessary. The demands of globalization and internationalization strive for learning outcomes to go beyond local expectations. In terms of English language, Kumaravadivelu (2012) asserted that the challenges of globalism should not depend totally on Western-oriented or native speaker knowledge systems, and the relationships between the individual and the community should be another realistic and practical concept in this scenario. Therefore, language and culture in diverse transcultural and translingual settings can be noticeable due to the fact that the majority users are non-native speakers of English (Fang & Baker, 2018).

In this way, transcultural and translingual concepts can be inevitably linked to intercultural competence (Byram, Nichols & Stevens, 2001). The interchangeable term of "intercultural competence" can be various such as global citizenship, global learning, global awareness, global competence, intercultural sensitivity, global mindset, and/or cultural learning (Roller, 2012). The components of intercultural competence contain three elements which are knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Byram, Nichols & Stevens, 2001). Attitude is the foundation component which means a willingness to relate one's own beliefs, values, and behaviors whereas knowledge refers to the knowledge about others' and one's own identities and social groups function. Finally, skills of comparison, of interpreting, and of relating are very necessary to become intercultural competent.

As the world tends to be more globalized and challenging, a need to respond to the trend should be highly recognized. The concept of intercultural competence is eventually replaced with intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997; Fantini, 2019). The model of intercultural communicative competence has profoundly affected intercultural pedagogy and assessment including work in study abroad contexts (Jackson, 2018) and it is built on the notions of communicative competence which Hymes (1996) proposed in relation to the teaching and learning which are linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence,

and discourse competence. However, Byram added 5 more dimensions of the intercultural speaker's competence which are intercultural attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness. Looking at all dimensions closely, they seem to be more or less similar to what Fantini (2019) earlier reconceptualized.

According to Fantini (2019), intercultural communicative competence takes place when one interacts with others who have both linguistic and cultural differences from oneself, and one needs to perform that complex interaction effectively and appropriately. There are multiple components and sub-components including in the framework such as characteristics or attributes, the ability to establish connections, the ability to communicate without misrepresentation, and the ability to integrate oneself into others' mutual interests or needs, target language proficiency, and four dimensions in which three of them (knowledge, attitudes, skills) are similar to Byram's model, but awareness is added and this makes the model more critical.

It is clearly seen that language proficiency remains one of the common outcomes of study abroad (Watson, Siska & Wolfel, 2013). English has positioned an international language with its use has been increasing across the globe, and its use as an international language is viewed as a tool for international communication. Students who engage in study abroad experiences tend to use English as a medium of communication in both their everyday and classroom interactions. By the turn of the present century, English medium instruction began to be widely introduced in universities in Asia and elsewhere across the world (Barnard & Hasim, 2018). As a consequence, it is highly possible to see higher number of multilingual users across the globe.

The terms bilingualism and multilingualism constitute the same phenomenon but the latter seems to be an extension from the former (Aronin & Singleton, 2012). Weinreich (1953, cited in Aronin & Singleton, 2012, p. 4) agrees that bilingualism is the practice of alternatively using two languages but multilingualism is the practice using alternatively three or more languages. However, if study abroad students are non-native speakers of English and their experiences don't take place in English as a native language and English as a second language countries, it is also possible to note that the students can embrace and involve more than two languages. This phenomenon corroborates what Ushioda (2017) envisions the multilingual turn which is associated with not only an increasing acceptance of multilingualism but rejection of the "native speaker" monolingual bias.

Since the majority of English users today use English alongside one or more of other languages they speak (McKay, 2012), a respect for multilingualism should be promoted. All of the languages individual uses should be a rich and meaningful source for one's communication and interactions among each other. Therefore, the rapid growth of international education will motivate students to pursue studying abroad and this trend will eventually embrace students in potential gains in the areas of both language and cultural competence.

Due to the growing trend of study abroad and its rich outcomes, the need for more multifaceted dimensions of study abroad impacts should be explored. Moreover, the large number of Chinese students studying abroad and enrolled in higher education degrees in Thailand has dramatically increased during the last ten years (2011-2021). The percentage of Chinese students was the highest (38.50 %) among other nationalities in Asia such as Vietnamese, Cambodian, Burmese, Malaysian, Lao, and others (Thanuttamanon, 2021). Therefore, it should be profitable to investigate the impacts of university Chinese students' study abroad experiences on Thai language ability, English language proficiency, and intercultural abilities. It took place in a private university in Thailand where a number of

research studies in multilingual development is limited. It is believed that the findings of the study will shed light on the growth and emerging unfounded data of international education. This study explores the impacts of Chinese university students' study abroad experiences on multilingual development which refers to Thai language ability, English language proficiency, and intercultural abilities.

## Research methodology

This is mixed - methods research employing explanatory sequential design. The design began with quantitative method, which is followed up by qualitative method designed to explain the quantitative findings in depth (Leavy, 2017). In the study, 30 Chinese students (21 female and 9 male students) were purposively selected and involved in the study. They were selected on the following conditions:

1. All participants were Chinese students enrolled in a full-time international graduate program in a private university in Thailand. The nationality of students was Chinese.
2. They had been in the graduate program for more than 1 year.
3. They were able to communicate in English (writing, reading, listening, and speaking) with the researchers without any language barrier.
4. In view of language use while study abroad, it was believed that all participants had tremendous amount of Thai language exposure due to the fact that Thai language is the official language in Thailand and it has been entirely spoken in the country
5. They were willing to participate in the study; the consent form was signed by all samples.

### *Data Collection*

The original survey of assessing intercultural communicative competence developed by Fantini (2019) was properly validated and employed in five countries; therefore, it is appropriate to reserve and use it in this small-scale study. To make it best fit into the context of the study, the researcher slightly adapted the questionnaire and it was eventually validated by three experts in the field of English language teaching. Finally, this 5-Likert scale questionnaire consists of 4 parts – Personal data, Thai language proficiency, English language proficiency, and Intercultural abilities. Due to Covid 19 pandemic in Thailand, it was distributed via online platform to 40 students but 30 responses consisting of 9 male and 21 female students were returned. The questionnaire data was analyzed by Mean and Standard Deviation. After the questionnaire analysis and its data interpretation, convenience sampling technique was employed to collect interview data. Three interviewees were face-to-face interviewed with the researchers in English and the data were audio-recorded with the interviewees' consent. The interviews were semi-structured drawn from the questionnaire findings, and all of the three interviewees were allowed to elaborate on the topics or issues being investigated. In terms of ethical considerations, the researcher was granted their permission to release the data in case of any publication.

## Research results

### 1. Questionnaire Findings

Table 1 Thai language ability (n=30)

No	Statements	Mean	SD	Level of Ability
5	<i>I am able to satisfy basic survival needs and minimum courtesy requirements.</i>	3.30	1.49	average
6	<i>I am able to satisfy some survival needs and some limited social demands.</i>	3.17	1.34	average
3	<i>I am able to communicate only in a very limited capacity.</i>	3.10	1.49	average
<b>Overall Mean</b>		<b>2.46</b>	<b>0.94</b>	<b>low</b>

The finding shows that the overall mean score of Chinese students' self-assessment in study abroad experiences on Thai language proficiency is low ( $M = 2.46$  and  $SD = 0.94$ ). This means Chinese students self-assessed their Thai language ability at the low level. Item 5: *I am able to satisfy basic survival needs and minimum courtesy requirements* gains the highest mean score ( $M = 3.30$ ,  $SD = 1.49$ ), while the second highest mean falls into item 6: *I am able to satisfy some survival needs and some limited social demands* ( $M = 3.17$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ). Finally, item 3: *I am able to communicate only in a very limited capacity* gains the third highest mean score ( $M = 3.10$ ,  $SD = 1.49$ ).

Table 2 English language proficiency (n= 30)

No	Statements	Mean	SD	Level of Ability
5	<i>I am able to satisfy basic survival needs and minimum courtesy requirements.</i>	4.33	0.96	high
1	<i>I have ability in English language.</i>	4.27	0.87	High
2	<i>I am able to function English language in the spoken language.</i>	4.17	1.02	high
<b>Overall Mean</b>		<b>3.66</b>	<b>0.77</b>	<b>high</b>

According to Table 2, the data reveals that the overall mean score of self-assessment in Chinese students' study abroad experiences on English language proficiency is high ( $M = 3.66$  and  $SD = 0.77$ ). It means Chinese students perceived that their English language ability was high after they experienced study abroad in Thailand. Item 5: *I am able to satisfy basic survival needs and minimum courtesy requirements* shows the highest mean score ( $M = 4.33$  and  $SD = 0.96$ ) while item 1: *I have ability in English language* gains the second highest mean score ( $M = 4.27$ ,  $SD = 0.87$ ). Finally, the third highest mean score falls on item 2: *I am able to function English language in the spoken language* ( $M = 4.17$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ).

Table 3 Intercultural abilities (n = 30)

Abilities	Mean	SD	Level of Ability
Knowledge	3.52	0.96	high
Attitudes	4.05	1.70	high
Skills	4.10	0.80	high
Awareness	3.71	0.98	high
<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.85</b>	<b>1.11</b>	<b>high</b>

Table 3 shows that the overall mean score of Chinese students' self-assessment in study abroad experiences on intercultural abilities is high (M = 3.85 and SD is 1.11). This means Chinese students perceived that the level of their intercultural ability is high. Among the four abilities, skills gain the overall highest mean score (M = 4.10, SD = 0.80) and attitudes gain the overall second highest. (M = 4.05, SD = 1.70).

Table 4 Highest mean score of each category (n = 30)

Statements	Mean	SD	Level of Ability
Knowledge I know the basic greetings, dress, and behaviors of the host country.	3.87	0.90	high
Attitudes Try to understand differences in the behaviors, values, attitudes, and styles of host members.	4.20	0.13	high
Skills I adjusted my behaviors, dress, etc., as appropriate to avoid offending my hosts.	4.33	0.66	high
Awareness I realize the importance of differences and similarities between my own and the host language and culture.	4.10	1.18	high

Table 4 shows the items that gain the highest mean score of each category. It is rather interesting to see that the item that gains the highest mean score in “knowledge” category illustrates students' basic knowledge in greetings, dress, and behaviors of the host country (Thailand). Looking at “attitudes”, the highest mean score item shows that students try to understand differences in the behaviors, values, attitudes, and styles of host members. It is also noticeable from “skills” category that students agreed that they adjusted their behaviors, dress, etc., as appropriate to avoid offending their hosts. Finally, the highest mean score of “awareness” category shows that students realized the importance of differences and similarities between their own and the host language and culture.

## 2. Interview Findings

Followed up by the interview, the findings are presented as follows:

### 1) Thai language proficiency

#### 1.1) Thai Language Needs for Survival

It is clearly seen that all three interview participants used Thai language for survival during their study abroad. Sandy said, “*For Thai language, I can use simple words and sentences to express myself, which can basically satisfy my daily life such as taking a taxi, shopping, asking for directions.*” (Sandy's reflection)

In the reflection data, it seems that the findings concurred with those in the questionnaire findings. As we can see, the highest overall mean score of this part shows that Chinese students were able to satisfy basic survival needs and minimum courtesy requirements, but were not able to speak the host (Thai) language fluently and accurately on all levels. One of the participants stated, *“Even though Thai language is very gentle and I choose Thailand as my destination, I can use Thai to order food, buy clothes, and buy fruits in my daily life.”* (Sally’s reflection). Likewise, Alisa had a relatively similar idea with the other two participants. She said, *“I did not try to spend much time on learning Thai language because I thought Thai is not an international language and it is too different from Chinese or English. Therefore, I only learn a little bit of oral common words for living.”*

Finally, the ideas expressed above could be construed in a way that all participants seemed not to try to learn and use Thai for their future benefits but survival needs during their stay on campus and in Thailand.

## 2) English Language Proficiency

### 2.1) Authentic Use of English

As far as English language proficiency is concerned, all three Chinese participants tended to agree that study abroad during their Master’s Degree in Thailand relatively enriched the use of real-life communication. Having stayed and attended in the program for one year and a half, they perceived that their language ability was significantly improved. When they were in China, the curriculum seemed to focus on grammar accuracy, not communicative competence. One of the participants said, *“When I was in China, I could read, write, and listen but not speak. In the first class of my graduate study, we started the first class with self-introduction and I found that I was quite reluctant to speak out. I could not communicate even in a sentence level. After one month, my English was much better, and I gradually understood the importance of real communication even though it was quite hard for me at the beginning of my sojourn. Finally, I have made a great progress on learning and using English. This is due to huge use of English as intermediate language as academic and normal communication with professors and local people.”* (Alisa). Sandy also agreed with Alisa that before coming to Thailand, her spoken English was not good. After one month in Thailand, she started to change her belief and attitude towards learning English – from learning to read and write to learning to communicate effectively. *“In terms of English for me, the four aspects of listening, speaking, reading, and writing have been greatly improved especially speaking and writing. The student-centered teaching philosophy made me have to give a lot of reports and presentations in classes. I think this was the biggest help to improve my oral English. The improvement in writing is of course the conduction of the thesis. At the same time, writing, knowledge of English grammar and sentence structure have also been consolidated all the time”.* (Sandy)

Perhaps the most straightforward opinion of Sally was seen in the following open-ended reflection: *I have improved four English skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening) in these two years. I know how to write academic English and write paper and English articles. I am more willing to communicate with people than before. Reading ability has also been improved; my reading comprehension speed and accuracy are better than before.* (Sally’s reflection)

The interview results support the quantitative data in a way that study abroad helps boost English proficiency in all four skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. As seen in the above excerpts, all of the participants were willing to communicate in spoken English; that is, they were able to use English in real-life and authentic situations such as in various academic functions, for survival needs, and routine social demands.



### 3) Intercultural Abilities

#### 3.1) Study Abroad Affects Intercultural Abilities

When asked to describe cultural dimensions the participants had encountered during the study abroad, Alisa asserted, *“I had been through several changes on different people with different backgrounds. First, I felt disappointed and curious about native cultures and their behaviors. Then I found the similar and natural essence about different people and I tried to find the reasons why we are different. Finally, I respect, understand, and tolerant the differences, and I consider that people with different cultures are attractive but people with the bad behaviors should not be blamed for cultures.”* The three key words *“respect, understand, and tolerant”* clearly show that Alisa had positive attitudes towards people who belonged to different cultures. She was also aware of the importance of differences and similarities between her own culture and the host culture. This finding seems to corroborate the questionnaire findings in relation to the high ability in awareness and attitudes.

Interestingly, Sally’s attitude towards the host and international culture during her study abroad was positive. She stated, *“My mind is more open and respectful of different cultures on a cultural level. I also learned about various cultural differences. For example, a girl cannot walk in front of a monk, and she can only walk in the back. Monks must eat before noon, and heads should not be touched. For example, Thais want to take off their shoes when they go to people’s houses, while Chinese like to change their shoes. Understanding these cultural taboos will make it easier for me to deal with people from different cultures.”* Such expressions seem to reflect the impact of study abroad, where Sally could achieve all four dimensions of intercultural abilities: knowledge, attitudes, skills, and awareness.

Likewise, intercultural abilities is also the case illustrated in Willa’s reflection, which was also demonstrated how much she had tried to understand the differences between Thai and her own cultures even she struggled to find appropriate ways to conform to routine cultural norms. Finally, she also adjusted her behaviors to fit into the context. She stated:

*In Thailand, I have to take off my shoes when entering someone’s house. I understand and I can also do it even I don’t like it that much. It is contrary to Chinese etiquette. But to be honest, I don’t like it because it is contrary to Chinese etiquette. (Sandy’s reflection)*

In other situations, Sandy followed Thai norms, which respect of Buddhism and Buddha image is of high value. She said:

*Thailand is a famous Buddhist country, but in China most people don’t have religious beliefs including me. However, I respect Thai Buddhist culture. While studying in Thailand, I went to Indonesia with the School’s study tour program, and I also experiences Buddhist culture in Bali. In addition, my friends and I traveled to Malaysia and felt a lot of local cultures. What impressed me most was that I had to take off my shoes when entering the house, just like in Thailand. (Sandy’s reflection)*

Finally, it could be said that the acquisition of intercultural abilities is potentially revealed in the expressed reflection. All participants expressed development of intercultural abilities while study abroad. All four dimensions – knowledge, attitudes, skills, and awareness clearly appeared during their intercultural encounters.

## Discussion

This present study aimed to explore the impacts of Chinese students' study abroad experiences on multilingual development. According to the findings of students' self-assessing questionnaires, it showed that students self-assessed their Thai language proficiency at the low level, English language proficiency at the high level, and intercultural abilities at the high level. The findings can be reasoned by the following possible explanations; benefits of study abroad on multilingual development and roles of English as an international language.

The benefits of study abroad have been immensely viewed in the existing literature (e.g., Nguyen, 2017; Watson, Siska & Wolfel, 2013; Brecht, Davidson & Ginsberg, 1995; Interis et al., 2018; Jackson, 2018; Fantini, 2020). In this study, the context took place in Thailand where the roles of Thai language in international context are evidently presumed to be less important than Chinese and English. However, drawn from the interview data and reflection, Chinese students chose Thailand as the destination due to its practicality such as the absence of financial restrictions, appropriate geographical location, familiar culture and climate, and pleasant social environment. These could be the reasons why they were not very keen to practise and use Thai as much as they wish. It is presumed that the degree of learning and using Thai language seems to be low, which is associated with the questionnaire findings. On the contrary, they used Thai language in order to survive just for the routine and communicative needs such as ordering food, taking a taxi, doing shopping, and asking for directions.

However, regarding the impacts of study abroad in Thailand on multilingual development, there are some benefits of exposing the third language apart from Chinese (the mother tongue) and English (an international language). Chinese students, like other international students, are challenged to second or third language learning difficulties especially those who study in non-English speaking countries (Henze & Zhu, 2012). The information from the reflection and questionnaire could possibly imply that Chinese students realized the importance of Thai language for just functional survival, not academic achievement. This possible reason is evident in the finding of Pan et al. (2008) that "host language" proficiency not only influences the academic work of overseas students, but also affects their social lives and understanding of the host culture. Even though Chinese students had a difficult time using and learning Thai as the third language, the findings show that they had a particularly fertile environment on campus and in Thailand. For example, Alisa said that her perspectives had been broadened when she first started to communicate in Thai. The consequences of knowing Thai could probably be an advantage to help her find a job in her hometown (Kunming). She said, "*Some organizations require knowing more than 2 languages, and knowing Thai can possibly be a benefit for me to have more working channels.*" Alisa's view tends to corroborate what Ushioda (2017) concluded with a very salient concept of "Multilingual Turn", in which this pattern resonates the globalization. Likewise, Graddol (2016) stated one of his convincing insights that "Postmodernity is the age of multilingual speaker." Therefore, multilingualism with Chinese, English, and Thai can be an attribute of individuals, yet it also has a significant presence at societal level (Stavans & Hoffmann, 2015). Finally, it could be concluded that despite low ability in Thai language, Chinese students had positive and authentic language learning experiences in Thai context during study abroad.

Turning to the findings of Chinese students' English language proficiency during study abroad, the analysis shows a positive impact of study abroad on English or second language development. Rose & McKinley (2018) observe that English language is highly connected

to internationalization, and Englishization equals internationalization. Therefore, in this era it is apparent to see an enormous number of Chinese students growing in Thailand during the last decade. In this study, the interview with three participants revealed that they chose the program because of English-medium instruction with reasonable tuition fee compared to other universities in Europe, Australia, or USA. The willingness to pay values for study abroad (Interis et al., 2018) was returned for great experiences in internationalization. The majority of Chinese students agreed that they could function English language especially in spoken dimension even though English is not used as a second language in Thailand. In addition, study abroad in this context enriched the level of language exposure in the class, and the students also used English for other academic and functional purposes such as thesis supervision, personal advice, registration, students' activities, and other personal businesses. All interview participants agreed that they liked the learning atmosphere in Thailand best. Classroom was the place they could use English to discuss problems and brainstormed ideas to complete the course assignments. Alisa contended that a small class size helped her express herself in English freely, and a close relationship between teachers and students produced ample opportunities to perform well in class. In this point, it could be concluded that global human resources are the result of study abroad. In the meantime, the prevailing atmosphere of the globalized academic potential will be enriched for international students (Rose & McKinley, 2018).

Intercultural abilities, which is certainly enhanced during studying abroad, is one of the main values and trends in language education (Fantini, 2019). Chinese students, in this study, had widely experienced both linguistic and cultural diversity from both inside and outside classrooms. They accepted that study abroad brought them to the world of diversity, appropriateness, awareness, and negotiation. For example, Alisa contended that she had learned how to understand people from different backgrounds, be patient, tolerate people, negotiate with people, and finally learn from people. She also confirmed that studying abroad also boosted her independent abilities such as decision making, living alone, taking care of oneself, making plans, and managing time and money. This could be said that apart from language abilities, studying abroad had shaped the aspects of students' knowledge, attitudes, skills, and awareness which are essential to being a 21st century global citizen (Fox, Corretjer & Webb, 2019). In this study, studying abroad had highly impacted on students' intercultural abilities and the findings concur with a study conducted in Thailand (Cheng, 2019). In Cheng's study, all Chinese interviewees, who had enrolled in nine universities in Thailand, agreed that they possessed comprehensiveness of intercultural communicative competence, and this competence enriched their learning ability and wide interest. Nonetheless, the generalization about this finding should be limited; Chinese students tend to have insufficient communication between international and local students (Henze & Zhu, 2012). This reduced intercultural communication can be one of the challenging experiences Chinese students have had to encounter and it might possibly lead to inconsistency of intercultural communicative competence.

Finally, after a two-year study abroad in Thailand, Chinese students could study, live, and well harmonize with those from local and international cultures. Studying abroad in an international program in Thailand, even not the best place for international academic excellence, can be a starting point to prepare and cultivate international students for Englishization, internationalization, and multilingualism.

## Conclusion

The findings of the study have implications for national education directions throughout the countries where English is not used as a second language. It should be noted that, at the national level, policy makers should accelerate and integrate teaching and learning languages other than English (Dornyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017) and develop intercultural communicative competence into national curriculum for the purpose of preparing students for multilingualism. In the meantime, existing national and international programs should be constantly internationalized via the contexts' own unique initiatives. Promoting local languages and cultural values can also be integrated into short courses or experiential learning during study abroad.

At the university or school levels, on the other hand, administrators should constantly invest in teacher education programs or short-term study abroad to enhance the quality and attributes of teachers in the growing era of multilingualism. At the same time, investment in students' international experiences should be provided for their invaluable opportunities. As stated by Galloway, Numajiri & Rees (2020), "With the use of English as a global language and ever-increasing demands for English proficiency, growth in English medium instruction is expected." Finally, preparing teachers and students to meet demands of global competence should be an essential next direction in order to gradually move towards Englishization and internationalization.

## Limitations of the Study

This study is small-scale research in which participants are limited to Chinese students. Unfortunately, the study was undertaken during Covid 19 pandemic in Thailand and this outbreak had a limitation on population accessibility of Chinese students enrolled in other faculties. Therefore, it will be profitable if the future study focuses on the comparison of students from different nationalities. Furthermore, the replication of studies either conducted in Thailand or other countries with higher number of participants should be undertaken for a better understanding of the existing situations.

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