

# ATTITUDE OF ALLIED HEALTH SCIENCES STUDENTS EXPERIENCED IN SHORT-TERM ACADEMIC AND STUDENT EXCHANGE PROGRAM AT UNIVERSITIES IN ASEAN

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## ABSTRACT

Abstract— The purposes of this research was to identify the views of Allied Health Sciences students who experienced in the short-term Academic and Student Exchange Program (ASEP) at universities in ASEAN about academic and social experiences. This study was a qualitative research using descriptive approach. The participants were seven exchange students (two men and five women) who had at least two years background either in Health Science or Applied Thai Traditional Medicine and participated in 168 hours of Academic and Student Exchange Program. Four of all participants were sent to a university in Laos PDR, and other three students were sent to a university in Vietnam. Data collection in this research employed an in-depth interview using semi-structured interviewing approach. The research proved that students gained more academic and social experiences although they were personally concerned with lack of language proficiency, inadequate knowledge and skills, and social distances before going abroad, new experiences and diversity in the different cultures motivated the students to welcome and enjoy with the concerns. This outcomes of the study have been contributing to develop the short-term exchange program towards the long-term program and to shed light on the students to be sent outbound next academic year.

Keywords— attitude, perception, Academic and Student Exchange Program

## INTRODUCTION

Globalization has become a major topic in the global socio-economy. It has integrated people from all over the world to participate closely among others, and transformed a country to be modernized. Globalization has also changed the way of life including a career path. Companies have often identified job qualification as “good command in English or proficiency in English both written and spoken, or other language skills may be advantage”. This points that companies view “international skills”, “intercultural competencies” are the key components of a highest standard employee. It is not surprising, graduates who have these skills are often sought for and prior to be considered (Gerhards and Hans, 2013). In the same senses, a mindset “internationally” has been engaged to education; many universities have promoted the higher education standard by including international agenda in pursuit of international cooperation in the organizations’ strategy. The international courses, international academic mobility programs such as study abroad, student exchange (Gochenour, 1993; Wallace, 1993; Daly & Barker, 2005) and overseas internship experience programs have been introduced to students as part of their study (Miles, Harris, Dhephasadin Na Ayudhya, 2018).

Although companies view experiences in study abroad as advantage, this evaluation is concerned with the degree of internationalization of each company. Multinational companies would rather prefer and firstly consider graduates who are good command in international skills than national companies where think these skills are less importance (Trooboff et al, 2007; Norris and Gillespic, 2009). Furthermore, the problem of English teaching in Thailand is another reason supports students to go abroad. Rojanabengjakun (2018) viewed that English teachers in Thailand are mostly Thai and teach English by speaking Thai during classes. Students have encountered the problems of pronunciation so that the going abroad is a choice. This is the reason why a number of short-term and long-term study abroad have rapidly increasing in the recent years. Studying abroad is frequently regards as one of key instrument to offer the students with the international skills and make their resume to be more valuable.

Moreover, Battsek (1962), Anderson et al. (2006) and Campbell (2016) explored there are four objectives to encourage the students to study abroad. First is the academic advances which are consisted of the acquiring of problem solving, language skills, higher educational development and quality. Second objective is intercultural competencies such as empathy and interest. Third objective is personal goals which encourage students to be more confident, self-aware, and satisfying. Finally, the fourth objective is professional benefits and abilities that students expect for their careers in the future.

In this regards, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University (SSRU), a university in Thailand realizes that one way to promote sustainability to society is the production of quality graduates. Whether the more international skills required, the greater supply to society. Hence, SSRU has initiated SSRU Strategies: Strategy 3 (S3) stated that “*Create network relationship and link to communities*” - also means to international partners. Of course, university members including College of Allied Health Sciences must seek for international collaboration with partner outside Thailand (Jummaree et al. 2018). Also, to engage “*international*” to the education, Tangtarntana (2017) described that there are many university activity platforms in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century opened for university networks to participate such as meeting with international outsourcing investors, joint programs for research projects, student and staff exchanging programs and other technological development. So far, many university members have tried to generate dual degree programs, joint researches and student exchange programs serve to SSRU students. 168 hour of Academic and Student Exchange Program (ASEP) at College of Allied Health Sciences is one of the choices. However, going western must earn high costs; some students have chosen short-course exchange programs in Asia and ASEAN countries in order to save their money. Thus, it may be a better choice for students whether the existing exchange programs in Asia and ASEAN countries have been developed their quality reach to western level. Program development is significant issue which should concentrate to students’ attitude, requirement and their own objectives.

## OBJECTIVE

To identify the views of Allied Health Sciences students who experienced in the short-term Academic and Student Exchange Program (ASEP) at universities in ASEAN about academic and social experiences.

## SCOPE OF RESEARCH

### 1. Location

College of Allied Health Sciences, a university in Laos PDR, a university in Vietnam.

### 2. Population

The number of sampling was seven exchange students of College of Allied Health Sciences, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University with at least two years background either in Health Science or Applied Thai Traditional Medicine.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Research design*

The study was a descriptive research that employed a qualitative approach and using an in-depth interview with semi-structured structures (Seidman, 1998; Sato, 2015). The descriptive method is to comprehend the academic and social phenomenon during seven Thai exchange students (two men and five women) participated in 168 hours-Academic and Student Exchange Program abroad. To data gathering, the researcher observed especially on the objectives, research questions and conclusions, others not related to these directions including past experiences, psychological process, norms and believes would not be questioned and observed in order to gather the correct data without bias.

### *Participants and sampling*

The participants in this research were seven Thai exchange students comprised of two men and five women who took the full course of short-term Academic and Student Exchange Program (168 hours). The research used anonyms (Rose, Lily, Poppy, Jasmine, Iris, Ivy and Ixora) to protect any identities of the

participants. The participants were born in Thailand, age between 20-22 years old. All participants were undergraduate students (sophomore – senior) who were studying at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University and having at least two years background in Health Science or Applied Thai Traditional Medicine according theme of the ASEP program was concerned with Alternative Medicine and healthcare. All participants were fluent in Thai and passed the SSRU English Proficiency Test or equal to. All participants were sent to universities in ASEAN countries. Four students were sent to a university in Laos PDR, and three students were sent to a university in Vietnam.

### ***Data collection***

*Demographic questionnaire:* the questionnaire was to collect the participants' background which consisted of age, gender, major, education, financial status, language proficiency, experiences, future plans and personal contact detail. These data were described the personal descriptions of the participants.

*Semi-structured interviews:* an in-depth face-to-face interview was followed Patton's method (2002) and Sato and Hodge (2015). Participants must attend 168 hours both lecture and workshop. Each participant was asked the open-ended questions after attending 72 hours in order to evaluate the progress, student's understanding and improvements. The researcher asked a permission to record the audio-tape during interview. Interview guide was introduced to participants in native language (Thai), but each open-ended question was asked in English twice times. The participants must respond after first time of questioning, then the researcher would revise the question by changing vocabulary or using synonyms - keep the same meaning, in order to double confirm the participants' response. The participants were gave a choice of language preference either Thai or English for their answer. All seven participants completely agreed to choose Thai language. During the interview, three lecturers were served as research cross-validation committees. Two of three consensuses were accepted. *First interview* was asked about motivation urged participants to join and expectation anticipated by participants. *Second interview* was concentrated to experiences in terms of academic and social experiences. Participants were asked to share their appreciated perception. *Third interview* was linked to problems or any disadvantages that participants encountered. When the interviewing was completed, the researcher transcribed from audio-recorder and compare with note taking.

### ***Data analysis***

The collected data were analyzed by descriptive method. The researcher transcribed a recorder and then compared with notepad. The researcher interpreted the results of interview and sent the interpretation to the participants personally in order to confirm the accuracy and guarantee that all participants agreed with what the researcher interpreted.

## **RESULTS**

This research revealed that the attitude of Allied Health Sciences students who experienced in the short-term Academic and Student Exchange Program (ASEP) at universities in ASEAN about academic and socio-cultural experiences were as follows.

### ***I. Motivation and Expectation***

All seven participants had the same motivation. A word "*study abroad*" motivated all Thai exchange students who had never background in abroad to join this Academic and Student Exchange Program. The participants were stimulated by cross-cultural experiences because it might be easier to reach. In the same senses, as theme of this ASEP was scoped to Health Sciences and Applied Thai Traditional Medicines, all seven participants perceived that the competitors were friends in classes, there were not be outside competitors. The participants were also motivated by neighboring countries in ASEAN as the program's destinations. The participants expressed that the first time of going out to the near country was a good start.

In accordance with expectation, the results were interesting because all seven participants expected "*international skills*" and "*intercultural competencies*" from this program which supported the students to be better quality graduates.

*Rose:* I expected the meaningful experiences because it would make me grow up. This program might help me improve my language skills; reading, listening, speaking and writing skills. This program was a first time of mine to study abroad. I would like to put the international experiences in my resume. Vietnam was a neighboring country where its cost of living was cheap. Coming to Vietnam would save my money and I can gain more and more experiences.

*Lily:* I hope to gain experiences from where I had never familiar with. Different society was always different cultures and believes. I really anticipated to see the traditional medicine, herbal medicine and other traditional therapies from outside Thailand. I have never ever been abroad, I have only heard that some traditional medicine was educated from times to times by norms and believes. I was familiar only with Thai Traditional Medicine I knew that some patients were believed folk doctor in his/her own way of treatment. I was motivated what the knowledge behind this believes treated the patients better. I, myself thought that traditional medicine was an art of life. It was not only wisdom, but it was also culture.

*Poppy:* I was a Thai traditional medical student. Most of my seniors who had graduated from my department worked in Thai hospitals. I personally thought that we were able to take care of foreign patients with our traditional treatment (Applied Thai Traditional Medicine) and we could learn more and combine other traditional treatments from countries – not only Thai and Chinese. I asked myself how would we understand and know more other alternative medicines. Of course, global language was very significant for communicating with other people. Going global was also a good chance to see other traditional medicines from the owner nations. Thus, this ASEP program was my destination. I would be able to go abroad whether I joined this program. The same senses of that, I would understand other traditional medicines from other nations whether I participated closely with this program. I extremely expected to reach my goals. I would like to develop my communication skills during I joined this program. Besides, “*Ao Dai*” or Vietnamese traditional dress motivated me to visit Vietnam and dressed up. I would like to be part of Vietnamese culture.

*Jasmine:* It would be so cool whether my resume was indicated that I was an exchange student. Even the ASEP program was a short-term, it was meaningful for me because I was one of chosen program candidates. I really expected to have better opportunity in academic and socio-cultural experiences. I wanted to learn new ideas from foreign instructors and to share my Thai cultures to Vietnamese friends. I thought that the Academic and Student Exchange Program would gave me knowledge.

## *II. Academic experiences*

All seven participants totally agreed that they gain academic experiences from the program’s function. Four participants were sent to a university in Laos. The theme of exchanging program was Healthcare, Health Promotion and Health Management for elders. Four participants summarized that people in Laos could less access to primary healthcare system in their country, treatment in Thailand was their better choice.

*Ixora:* Lao people were alerted not much about healthcare in elders even they had been known that it was the significant issue, a number of hospital in Vientiane were not over 30 hospitals. Less opportunity to access primary healthcare system. However, Lao government had promised urban-oriented healthcare system would be expanded.

*Ivy:* My Lao classmates decided to go to Udon Thani; a northeastern province of Thailand, to access healthcare. They would rather prefer the quality of treatment than in their country. Conversely, my Lao classmates were alerted very much in enterprises and business management.

*Jasmine:* Consumer behaviors in Lao teenagers were not different from Thai. My Lao friend said that the younger would eat junk food and join a round table meal in the cafe, but their parents and the elders would eat more vegetables with “*Jaew*” – chili sauce and “*Tom som*” – hot, salt and spicy soup. The younger had not been cared much about health when compared to the elders. They thought that eating would be more enjoyable whether they had friends and Vientiane KFC.

*Iris:* There was something come up in my classmate’s mind, whether he could initiate healthcare or alternative therapy small business in Laos, his Laos family members and other people would have had more choices than present. They would not have wasted their time to go to Thailand.

In accordance with Three Thai exchange students who were sent to a university in Vietnam, the theme of the program was Herbs and Nutrition for health, the participants were wondering in Traditional Vietnamese Medicine and Vietnamese lifestyle.

*Poppy:* Vietnamese ate various types of vegetables such as carrots, tomatoes, parsley, basil, onion, cabbage, and etc. each meal. I saw, all their meals would be composed of vegetables. I would like to exemplify a Vietnamese dish namely “*Spring roll*”, there were many vegetables and herbs as ingredients such as mints, lotus roots, carrots, cucumbers, chive, and peanuts. Each ingredients could support their good health. Mints contained an antioxidant and anti-inflammatory agent. It relieved seasonal allergy symptoms. It also contained menthol which had a cooling effect and helped to break up mucus. According Fakkham’s study (2018), mints were “*Ya ros yen*” or cooling benefits which could relieve a sore throat, and common cold. Eating mints supported oral health as it was a natural anti-microbial agent. Carrots contained antioxidants which could protect against cancer. It supported excretory system, reduced levels of cholesterol, helped regulate blood sugar, and improved heart health. Lotus roots relieved cough and mucus problems. So, Spring roll and other Vietnamese dishes were a wonderful healthy dish.

*Lily:* I noticed that Traditional Vietnamese Medicine technique was similar to Thai Traditional Medicine and Traditional Chinese Medicine. Traditional Vietnamese Medicine practitioner described me that illnesses or health problems were come from toxic wind. Massage and finger pressure were Traditional Vietnamese Medicine techniques to relief the illnesses. This idea and methods were similar to Thai Traditional Medicine. Thai Traditional Medicine practitioners were also educated that once wind or “*Thart*” in human body were imbalance, human would feel sick.

*Rose:* Traditional Vietnamese Medicine techniques had “*Cao Gio*” or wind scraping and “*Bam Huyet*” or finger pressure that were similar as “*Gua Sha*” in Traditional Chinese Medicine. I saw that Traditional Vietnamese Medicine practitioner would advise patients to keep going veggie (sometime a week) after treatment. They believed that vegetables and herbs would maintain health. Some patients with chronic conditions, the practitioner prescribed herbal teas and herbal pills.

### III. Problems and Disabilities

*Lily:* Even English was a global language and an instrument that could connect people from all parts of the world together, it had become a major barrier between me and classmates. In the class I tried to express my opinion in English, but it was difficult for me to express all what come up in my mind. I should have spoken more but it was personally difficult to explain in English. My classmates always tried to listen and understand me, I felt sad because I sometimes left them wait for nothing.

*Poppy:* A teacher would like me to share Folk Medicine and local beliefs about Thai Traditional Medicine. She slightly knew about “*a folk treatment with blasting*” that a folk medicine also called “*Mor Pao*” had spelt some magic poem and blasted on the pained muscle which the injured points would get better. I could not explain its critical detail because I did not know how to explain in English. I did usually speak out a word – not a complete sentence, sometimes in Thai even I knew the teacher and friends would not be understand. My English was poor.

*Iris:* My Laos buddy was an outbound exchange student who was sent to America last three years. He was a talkative friend and spoke English very well. I tried very much to communicate in English with him even he could understand Thai language. What language could we understand each other at that time was Thai, poor me definitely!!

*Rose:* I was going out abroad and studying at international program at a university in Vietnam, where I should have recognized that I would gain a fluent in English class. My classmates were, but I was not. I usually kept talking in Thai and I sometimes would like to isolate my friends because I did not want to speak out in English. However, my anxiety was reduced when my friend had showed me the wonderful traditional dancing video. There was not English subtitle, but I understood. Beautiful Arts was nonverbal communication that could communicate people from diversity to understand each other. I was attracted and enjoyed. It caused my anxiety relieved.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As English was not a mother-tongue of Thai exchange students, the students worried about communication with classmates in classrooms. This anxiety negatively affected their participation in classes – could not demonstrate the critical and personal thinking, and pursuit deep detail of tasks in classes. This negative circumstance was concordant Woodrow (2006) and Sato & Hodge (2015).

Even the seven participants expressed the same expectation that all of them would mostly like to improve their English proficiency, reading, listening, speaking and writing skills, all participants (Rose, Lily, Poppy, Jasmine, Iris, Ivy and Ixora) had their extreme goal to be pursue the success in academic. They said that they would be enthusiasm to participate any activities related to their major. This finding was consistent with Sato (2015) who described that “*although learning English was an important component to academic success, it was not the ultimate goal or objectives of their study abroad participation*”; and Holland’s study (1984) stated occupational choice theory; people in the same occupation tended to have similar personalities.

The research proved that students gained more academic and social experiences although they were personally concerned with lack of language proficiency, inadequate knowledge and skills, and social distances before going abroad, new experiences and diversity in the different cultures motivated the students to welcome and enjoy with the concerns.

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