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Thai study abroad students as intercultural citizens: developing intercultural citizenship through *English* medium education and ELT

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ABSTRACT

Key claimed benefits of internationalizing higher education (HE) are increased intercultural interaction and awareness with internationally oriented universities aiming to produce graduates who are intercultural or global citizens. Yet, there have been few core strategies presented on how international HE programmes might realize such aims, and more research is needed. Furthermore, English language teaching (ELT) plays a central role in preparation and support for study abroad (SA) and internationalization in English medium education (EME), but has also been slow to incorporate intercultural education and intercultural citizenship. Hence, this study aimed to describe how Thai SA students developed a sense of intercultural citizenship during SA experiences with international HE programmes in Anglophone countries and identify roles ELT in facilitating the preparation for their subsequent SA programmes. Data were collected from semi-structured interviews (n = 14) conducted with students from three Thai universities who had experienced EME overseas education. From qualitative content analysis, findings revealed a range of understandings and responses to intercultural citizenship, English learning, language utilization, and the SA experiences. In addition, a mismatch was identified between ELT preparation and support efforts compared to the multilingual and multicultural reality of international HE.

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Introduction

Trends suggest that the number of students studying abroad (SA) worldwide is rapidly increasing, and prime destinations include international universities in Anglophone environments. Consequently, higher education (HE) has become increasingly internationalized with growing student mobility resulting in the number of international students doubling over the last decade (OECD, 2021). A key claimed benefit of this internationalization in HE is increased intercultural interaction and awareness. Recently, this intercultural dimension has been conceptualized under the notion of intercultural or global citizenship (Byram, Golubeva, Hui, & Wagner, 2016; Killick, 2013; Porto, Houghton, & Byram, 2018). Many international HE programmes aim to produce intercultural citizens who can interact across multiple settings, from the local to the national and the global. Yet, the extent to which international HE programmes meet these aims is

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still far from established and more research is needed. Frequently connected to internationalization has been an increase in English language use through English medium instruction (EMI) or education (EME) programmes (Dafouz & Smit, 2020). This makes English language teaching (ELT) and supports a highly relevant setting to develop intercultural citizenship. Moreover, previous research has shown a perceived link between the use and learning of English and the development of intercultural citizenship (Baker & Fang, 2021; Boonsuk & Fang, 2021; Porto, 2018; Wu, 2018). Again though, such research is still exploratory, and more is needed.

In Thailand, where this study was conducted, large groups of Thai students are interested in studying abroad, especially in Anglophone countries such as the UK, the USA, and Australia, and annual figures reflected a significant uptrend (Statista, 2019; UKCISA, 2019). The trend suggested that Thai SA students were attracted by internationalization efforts undertaken by Anglophone HE institutions and placed them as preferred destinations for overseas education. This pressure also impacted Thai HE. As a result, several HE institutions in Thailand decided to market to potential SA students by implementing internationalization in their curriculums through collaborating with overseas institutions to establish EME programmes to accommodate international and Thai students in their proximities (Lavankura, 2013). Furthermore, since the designation of English as a working language by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the language has become a vital communication tool between Thais and their neighbours (Baker & Jarunthawatchai, 2017; Snodin & Young, 2015). However, despite English being dynamically employed in and between ASEAN members, it is crucial to note that the concepts of English as a lingua franca (ELF) and multilingualism were not as frequently brought up or incorporated in ELT policies and implementations to prepare learners for the local reality of English. In contrast, L1 English users and Anglophone pedagogies remained the primary focuses of today's English language learning (Baker & Fang, 2021; Boonsuk, Ambele, & McKinley, 2021; Savski, 2019; Trakulkasemsuk, 2018).

Since international student mobility is increasing and Thai HE institutions are willing to invest in internationalization overhauls through EME to attract Thai and international students, practical questions have emerged. Whether it is to prepare Thai students for overseas education or accept international students into international programmes in Thailand, these HE institutions face a similar challenge: how responsive are their current ELT (including pre and in-session support and EAP) programmes and policies in enhancing intercultural citizenship skills? Answers to the question might provide valuable insights into how equipped Thai universities are in preparing students for studying abroad through intercultural citizenship development. If ELT programmes are internationalized to both accept and "send out" international students with linguacultural diversity, as will be argued in this paper, intercultural citizenship should become a core and a goal of competency development in the classroom. Consequently, education institutions should focus on offering a learning experience joined by people from diverse linguacultural backgrounds when designing policy, curriculum, instructional materials, and instructional activities aiming to prepare learners for global citizenship. With intercultural citizenship skills and competency, students might be sufficiently flexible to more comfortably adapt to the culturally diverse environments of international education. Similarly, with adequate intercultural awareness, students might become more resilient intercultural citizens and acquire fruitful SA experiences (Byram et al., 2016; Jackson, 2020).

To address the research gaps described above, this current study, therefore, aimed to investigate in what ways (if at all) Thai study abroad students developed a sense of intercultural citizenship as a result of their SA experiences in international HE in Anglophone settings and the role of ELT in preparation for SA programmes. This research aim was addressed via the following research questions:

- (1) To what extent do Thai SA students feel their experiences in English language learning prepare them for the intercultural dimensions of studying abroad including intercultural citizenship?
- (2) In what ways do Thai SA students' awareness of intercultural communication and intercultural citizenship increase after studying abroad?

This paper begins with a brief overview of the internationalization of HE and the intercultural dimensions to this, particularly as conceived through intercultural and global citizenship (while we recognize that these terms are not always viewed synonymously, this debate is beyond the scope of this paper). We then turn to English medium education (EME) as a rapidly expanding part of international HE and the focus of this study. We consider the role of English within EME and argue for the importance of an English as a lingua franca (ELF) perspective. English language teaching (ELT) is positioned as pivotal in bringing together both global citizenship and ELF approaches to education to prepare and support students for multilingual and multicultural SA and EME programmes. Following this, the study itself is presented with findings from interviews with Thai SA students around two themes which address the research questions described above. Finally, in the discussion and conclusion we draw together the findings to consider to what extent the students in this study developed as global or intercultural citizens during their SA experiences in EME settings and the role of ELT in preparing and supporting them in this. Furthermore, implications for policy, pedagogy and further research are proposed.

Internationalization of higher education, intercultural and global citizenship

We follow Knight's well-cited definition of internationalization as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivering of HE at the institutional and national levels" (2008, p. 21) due to the focus on the intercultural dimension. Students and staff in international HE are often expected to work in multicultural teams and as part of globally connected networks in which intercultural communication is a central part of daily practice. Recently, such practices have been described through the concept of intercultural and global citizenship with many universities explicitly incorporating it into core aims both in terms of educational outcomes and marketing (Aktas, Pitts, Richards, & Silova, 2017; Baker & Fang, 2021; Boonsuk & Fang, 2021). Intercultural citizenship is typically viewed in education as a way to adapt ideas of community connections and social responsibilities from citizenship education and expand it beyond the nation to globally connected groupings (Byram et al., 2016). Hence, intercultural citizens can be characterized as conscious of the global scale of social relations, respecting and valuing diversity across borders, while also participating in and being responsible to communities from the local to the national and the global. The importance of global citizenship in education is further emphasized by its inclusion in the United Nations sustainable development goals (SDG) for "quality education" (SDG 4.7).

Yet, how best to conceive intercultural citizenship is still under debate with tensions between neoliberal notions related to networks and personal gains for globally connected elites and contrasting notions associated with engagement across diverse social groupings, social justice and equality (Aktas et al., 2017). Furthermore, intercultural citizenship can also be given diverse interpretations in different national and educational settings (e.g., Golubeva, Wagner, & Yakimowski, 2017). Finally, although intercultural citizenship has been extensively discussed in education theory (e.g., Gaudelli, 2016; Killick, 2013), there is a comparative paucity of empirical research demonstrating its relevance to actual classroom practices or students' experiences of international HE. Moreover, findings from decades of SA research demonstrate that experiences of student mobility do not necessarily lead to improvements in intercultural awareness or the development of a more intercultural identity without proper educational support (Kingerer, 2013). In sum, more empirical research is needed investigating both the relevance of intercultural citizenship to students' experiences of international HE and how it might be incorporated into educational practices.

English medium education, English as a lingua franca and intercultural citizenship

As noted above, together with the expansion of internationalization in HE has been a similar, and often closely connected, increase in EME programmes. How best to define EME, or EMI, is still a matter of debate (beyond the remit of this paper), but we will follow Dafouz and Smit's conceptualization who use the term

“English-Medium Education in Multilingual University Settings; EMEMUS” or EME for short (2020, p. 3). This conceptualization is relevant to this paper in that it focuses on HE, emphasizes that English occurs in multilingual settings, and refers to education (rather than the more unidirectional “instruction”), thus, including both learning and teaching. While it should be noted that some definitions of EMI exclude Anglophone universities as English is the traditional language of instruction (e.g., Macaro, Curle, Pun, An, & Dearden, 2018), EME includes international programmes in Anglophone settings since they share many of the same issues as regards multilingualism and interculturality as other international EME programmes and should therefore be seen as part of a wider network of multilingual, English medium universities, rather than “exceptional” (Baker & Hüttner, 2019; Dafouz & Smit, 2020; Jenkins & Mauranen, 2019).

A major issue in EME research has been understanding the English used, and there is an increasing consensus that this is best understood as English as an academic lingua franca (ELFA) (Jenkins & Mauranen, 2019). Furthermore, as highlighted in Dafouz and Smit’s (2020) definition of EME, English is used alongside other languages in multilingual settings in which variability, adaptability and translanguaging are the norm, rather than conformity to a single “standard” Anglophone variety (e.g., US or British English). Even in settings where the students are supposedly “monolingual” and share the same L1, there are still at least two languages present (their L1 and English), and multilingualism practices are likely to be significant (Ishikawa, 2020; Tsou & Baker, 2021). However, the extent to which these diverse uses of English and multilingualism is recognized by staff and students or incorporated into policy and pedagogy is still minimal (Baker & Hüttner, 2019; Jenkins & Mauranen, 2019).

In sum, although intercultural citizenship education and development is relevant to all international HE programmes, this is especially important for international EME contexts since they often involve widespread multilingualism, multicultural settings and extensive intercultural communication, bringing linguistic and cultural issues to the fore. Due to the central role of language in international EME programmes, and most obviously English, it can be said that the ELT classroom can be considered as an ideal place in which to explore these issues further and prepare and support students for EME SA.

Intercultural citizenship education and English language teaching

As well as intercultural and global citizenship becoming a prominent part of today’s international education, it has also been increasingly incorporated into language education through the concept of intercultural citizenship education (Byram et al., 2016; Porto et al., 2019; Porto, 2018). Moreover, this inclusion of intercultural citizenship in language education is frequently linked to preparation and support for SA. Due to the already discussed association between the internationalization of HE and English through EME programmes, it is unsurprising that the connections between ELT and intercultural citizenship have also been strengthening (Boonsuk & Fang, 2021; Dearden, 2014; Fang & Baker, 2018; Jenkins & Mauranen, 2019). Nevertheless, before discussing the relationship between intercultural citizenship education and ELT in HE in more detail, it is crucial to understand its definition and significance. Intercultural citizenship education is a globalization-derived curricular objective that typically applies to most education fields (Gaudelli, 2016; Killick, 2013). In specific relation to language education, Byram (2008) regarded intercultural citizenship education as:

- (1) Causing/facilitating intercultural citizenship experience, and analysis and reflection on it and on the possibility of further social and/or political activity, i.e., an activity that involves working with others to achieve an agreed end;
- (2) Creating learning/change in the individual: cognitive, attitudinal, behavioural change; change in self-perception; change in relationships with Others (i.e., people of a different social group); change that is based on a particular culture but related to the universal (p. 187).

Extracted from the definition above, intercultural citizenship education has the purposes of comparing cultures, introducing cultural identities, exploring ideologies interculturally, attitudinal adjustment, and promoting peaceful coexistence through social cooperation. Intercultural citizenship education suggests

that global citizens should respect personal differences influenced by diverse value systems, exhibited through their actions while engaging in intercultural interactions and communication. In the educational contexts, students are expected to work towards adopting global citizenship competencies to become effective communicators in local and international environments.

Regarding language education, many of the features of intercultural citizenship education are already aspects of language education, such as an interest in “other” cultures, intercultural interactions and intercultural communication. While, ELT has typically focused on developing communicative and intercultural communicative competence, intercultural citizenship education adds actions and experiences which results in a change in the individual and their relationships to “others” (Byram et al., 2016). Thus, intercultural citizenship education goes beyond the awareness-raising and skills associated with intercultural communicative competence and adds the further dimension of students engaging in meaningful ways in intercultural communities (Byram et al., 2016). Studies showed that fostering intercultural citizenship in HE can benefit students by showing them intercultural experiences, allowing them to compare diverse behaviours of other global citizens, and encouraging them to make personal behavioural adjustments to become global citizens (Byram et al., 2016; Lu & Corbett, 2012; Porto, 2018). As a result, HE students can develop strong global citizenship competencies when exposed to international environments, and global citizens tend to have a higher intercultural understanding (Baker, 2016; Beaven & Borghetti, 2015; Ra et al., 2022).

Based on the above notions, it would be beneficial to understand if and how university programmes at students’ homelands help promote intercultural citizenship when preparing them towards overseas education because some might need more adjustments than others in terms of intercultural awareness and the ability to develop as intercultural citizens in overseas sojourns (Byram et al., 2016; Jackson, 2018; Ra et al., 2022). To excel as global citizens, international students need intercultural citizenship education to provide training on intercultural communication, awareness, and interactions based on possible scenarios and situations that the students might encounter during overseas education. To ensure students’ success amid linguacultural diversity, some international universities have designed activities to facilitate their students in the adoption of intercultural competencies, and examples of these activities included language immersion and cultural exchange programmes (Isabelli-García, Bown, Plews, & Dewey, 2018; Jackson, 2020; Lai, Zhu, & Gong, 2015; Sato & Hodge, 2015). This notion is congruent with a study exploring intercultural experiences and awareness of intercultural citizenship development of Thai and Chinese university students studying abroad in international universities (Boonsuk & Fang, 2021). That study further disclosed that formal and informal activities (e.g., training, club memberships, leisure times with international friends, movies nights, music, travelling, cooking, dining in dormitories, and volunteering projects) were perceivably productive in developing the students’ intercultural identities. Nonetheless, studies into intercultural citizenship, intercultural citizenship education and ELT are currently rather tentative and limited compared to the huge number of international EME programmes and SA students and more research is urgently needed.

Methodology

Research context and participants

The setting for the study was Thailand due to the relevance of the issues investigated here and the current lack of research in this setting. The research sites presented here are three universities with a large number of students who undertake SA in Anglophone contexts involving one large regional government university (N: 5), a prestigious metropolitan government university (N: 5), and a private metropolitan university (N: 4). This was to ensure a range of settings, although it must be recognized that all the sites were relatively privileged since this is where most students involved in SA are found. The call for research participants asked for students who had experience of SA at the university level in Anglophone settings. Specifically, 14 participants were recruited through convenience sampling (Cresswell & Clark, 2011; Selvi, 2019). These 14 participants had completed their SA sessions and

Table 1. Background information of the participants.

Participants	Settings	Genders	Level of Study	Field of Study	Countries
1	1*	Male	Master	Engineering	England
2	1	Female	Doctoral	TESOL	England
3	1	Male	Master	Accounting and Finance	America
4	1	Female	Doctoral	Applied Linguistics	England
5	1	Female	Master	English Language TEaching	England
6	2**	Male	Master	Linguistics	England
7	2	Female	Doctoral	Management	England
8	2	Male	Doctoral	TESOL	England
9	2	Female	Master	Environmental Design	America
10	2	Female	Doctoral	Linguistics	England
11	3***	Female	Doctoral	International Business	America
12	3	Male	Master	Management	America
13	3	Female	Master	Marketing	Canada
14	3	Male	Doctoral	Linguistics	England

1*: Regional Government University, 2**: Metropolitan Government University, and 3***: Private Metropolitan University

returned to Thailand. According to Table 1, this study increased participant diversity by selecting its participants from several disciplines. In addition, among the 14 interviewees, 6 were males, and 8 were females. From the 14 participants, 9, 4, and 1 had graduated from British, American, and Canadian HE institutions, respectively (see Table 1).

Research instrument and data collection

Since this study aimed to investigate the extent that Thai study abroad students developed a sense of intercultural citizenship as a result of their SA experiences in international HE in Anglophone settings and the role of ELT in preparation for these programmes, the process to elicit data from the participants was carefully designed and selected to ensure a range of data sources. Therefore, a mixed-method approach involving a questionnaire and interview was initially adopted (see Baker & Fang, 2021; Boonsuk & Fang, 2021). However, to facilitate an in-depth discussion of the data and findings, this paper focuses on the qualitative data from interviews. As interviews offer an effective way to gain in-depth personal information about motivation and attitudes, gain an understanding of personal perspectives in a way that is difficult to reach through surveys or from observation (Richards, 2003), permit “the respondent to move back and forth in time-to reconstruct the past, interpret, and predict the future” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 273), and allow a description of routine and problematic moments in individuals’ lives (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Hanauer, 2003), they were employed as the primary data collection instrument. Interviews were approached as a joint construction of knowledge and understanding between interviewer and interviewee rather than an attempt to uncover a single “truth” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

In this study, semi-structured interviews were used to enable similar data to be collected across sites but also to allow flexibility to explore emerging areas in the research (Dörnyei, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Richards, 2003). Thus, interviews were driven by predetermined rough questions administered through flexible word choices, adaptable sequences, and in conjunction with relevant follow-up questions (Richards, 2003). These questions were designed to guide the conversations considering the participants’ contexts. Word choices, wording, and follow-up questions were flexible to ensure that targeted data could be collected while interviewing the participants from diverse fields of knowledge. Areas covered in the interviews were based on the research aims and previous interview studies on this topic (Baker & Fang, 2021; Boonsuk & Fang, 2021; Fang & Baker, 2018) and included previous experiences of ELT and using English, specific preparation for SA, intercultural education experiences, experiences of studying and communicating during SA, language and communication support during SA, understanding and opinions of global/intercultural citizenship, and development of intercultural citizenship during SA.

The data collection was initiated in a fixed sequence. In the first stage, individuals matching criteria were personally contacted via telephone and email and asked if they were available and would like to volunteer to participate in the research project through interviews. After participants agreed, informed consent was gained to audio record the interviews and they were also informed that their participation was confidential and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. The interviews were conducted in Thai at two of the settings as this was the L1 of the researchers and participants. These were transcribed in Thai and then translated into English. In the third setting interviews were conducted in English as the shared lingua franca of the researcher and participants. The interviews lasted approximately 30–45 minutes.

Data analysis, trustworthiness and limitations

Data analysis consisted of qualitative content analysis involving a mixture of top-down “etic” and bottom-up “emic” coding and themes (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The individual researchers at each setting carried out the first round of analysis based on themes related to the initial research questions and also added any emergent codes. Data sets were then combined by the coordinating researcher based at an Anglophone university and re-analysed to ensure consistency of coding and identify core themes, as well as enhance dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This resulted in a refinement of the overall research themes around the research questions. Data analysis was then rechecked by the original researchers for reliability and agreement in interpretations. Data is presented which directly addresses the research questions in this paper and provides representative examples in terms of frequently expressed ideas or particularly articulate explanations.

However, in keeping with the constructivist approach adapted to interviews, the necessarily subjective nature of the interpretations and the data itself must be acknowledged (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Furthermore, interviews provide secondary accounts of participants’ interpretations of their behaviour rather than evidence of the actual behaviour itself. It should also be recognized that although the participants all shared experience of SA in Anglophone universities, they are not a completely homogenous group. For example, in addition to the wide range of programmes studied mentioned earlier, they had different previous experiences of learning and using English. While some had already spent time abroad or in EME programmes and were confident in their English ability, others had less experience and were less confident. While overall themes are presented in the findings, we have also attempted to show contradictory or alternative voices (Silverman, 2011).

Other aspects of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) included credibility by gaining insider perspectives through the role of members of the research team as teachers in each of their settings investigated, balanced by outsider perspectives from the overall coordinator. While the data collection cannot make claims to being longitudinal, the researchers had long-term familiarity with the settings and participants were asked to consider development and changes in their experiences over time. Due to the qualitative nature of the study and the small number of participants, generalization cannot be made, but by offering in-depth data it is hoped that the findings will be transferable to other similar contexts. Similarly, this in-depth qualitative data including particularly insightful or articulate extracts from the participants’ interviews helps to support confirmability.

Findings

This section discusses findings that emerged from interviews based on the research questions. Hence, the discussion is presented in two themes, aiming to address each respective research question; although, there is inevitably some overlap in themes and research questions. To maintain anonymity, the participants were identified by codes that represented their institutions and each individual in a number. For instance, I1S2 indicates that the participant is affiliated with Institution 1 and was identified using number 2.

Thai SA students' experiences in English language teaching for SA preparation and intercultural citizenship

When the participants were asked about their previous English learning experiences in their home-land (e.g., how much their knowledge and skills had prepared them for studying abroad), they had mixed opinions. According to the following extracts, some participants reported that they were positive about their English preparation (extract 1), others were less enthusiastic about the relevance of their ELT classes (extract 2). Moreover, levels of preparation differed for students; particularly depending on subject of study with those doing language based subjects, unsurprisingly, getting more support (extract 3).

Extract 1

I1S3: Although not comprehensively, they, in fact, helped quite significantly. Many courses are useful, and the knowledge can be practically applied in real life abroad. This is especially true with the classes that have skill-development focuses such as listening and speaking. Moreover, the lecturers introduced a wide variety of training activities with simulations that resemble overseas experiences.

Extract 2

I3S11: I can use some but not all. I mean, what I learnt in my English class was different from what I experienced in my real life there for example greeting.

Extract 3

I1S1: I think the English-major folks should not have any problems with the preparation. Since I am not from the English major it has been rough at first.

Similarly, mixed results emerged regarding preparation for intercultural communication during SA. Some had no preparation, others had courses, but they were optional, rather "broad" and stereotyped in their focus (extract 4). Many participants reported that they had not received or heard about intercultural education or intercultural citizenship until they took their master's programmes in SA settings (extract 5), a theme returned to below in response to research question two.

Extract 4

I2S6: We learned about you know like differences the cultural differences or what kinds of manners or kind of styles beliefs taboos and stuff, so it's not like really into different cultures, but it's a broad study of what we are living in the world and what kind of it's called etiquette right what we should do and shouldn't do.

Extract 5

I3S13: I had never heard these terms [intercultural education/intercultural citizenship] until I entered the programme, and they were included in many courses. I would say these terms were always mentioned in many different courses.

On top of that, responses from the interview data indicate that English was a core part of the participants' experiences with intercultural interactions, deeply interlinked with the development of intercultural citizenship and viewed as a necessary step in the process for many (extract 6).

Extract 6

I2S10: I think they go hand in hand, but for me English was the first bridge to the international world, so my intercultural competence increased um when I got more when I got to learn more about other people through English. So English was the pathway, and then um, so that's the case for me.

Some participants also recognized the value of multilingualism beyond English for intercultural interactions and development (extract 7).

Extract 7

I2S6: I would say it's the most important thing to become like an intercultural citizen since like English is like the main language the world is using right now. But however, it would also be great if we can speak their language, such as like Chinese and stuff since it's going to help like you have a lot of nation if you know these two basic languages plus the Spanish.

Yet, multilingualism was not universally valued, as the participant in extract 8 suggests when discussing her experiences of being educated in India and Malaysia before undertaking SA in the UK.

Extract 8

I2S8: I think I'm just like every other people who not doubt but don't want to be in an environment that is bilingual because I was in India and it was bilingual, so some of culture things got into me, and I didn't get the perfect English that I wanted to and when I was in Malaysia they also didn't speak proper English, and I think that would mess up my system a bit so I think if I go to a purer English speaking community, I would be able to learn English better.

In sum, the participants showed mixed levels of preparation in ELT and intercultural communication for SA. To clarify, most of them demonstrated satisfaction in the English proficiencies they achieved in their home country before studying abroad. However, they considered their intercultural communication experiences to be insufficient. Besides, they reported that English Language plays a vital role in their intercultural citizenship development. It can be seen that the use of English was closely tied to opportunities for intercultural communication and intercultural citizenship.

Thai SA students' awareness and development of intercultural citizenship during and after SA in EME settings

Moving on to the second theme, the participants were typically able to talk about ideas related to intercultural citizenship and were able to relate it to personal experiences and a sense of development during SA (extract 9).

Extract 9

R: Have you ever heard of the words intercultural citizens and global citizens?

I1S2: Before studying there, I had heard about them but not very often, and I was not sure about their meanings and implications.

R: Do you now see yourself as a global citizen?

I1S2: Before studying abroad, I was not sure if I considered myself a global citizen. It could be because I did not have a solid idea of what the terms meant. However, after spending time here doing activities, such as planting trees, with other students and lecturers who have different cultural backgrounds and speak different first languages, I understand the words better. Therefore, I am quite certain that I am now one of the global citizens.

In addition, the participants expressed an understanding of intercultural citizenship that frequently focused on openness, adaptation and going beyond essentialist national cultural categories (extracts 10 and 11), all key aspects of intercultural awareness and citizenship.

Extract 10

I2S10: I think it is important for me when I came back. I think I'm more open-minded, and I think it's, but I'm not sure if it's important to other people, but it's important to me ... Like I'm not I used to be quite conservative and quite nationalist, but now I'm not like that anymore, and my mind has opened, and I learned a lot of things from that.

Extract 11

I2S7: My understanding is that we uh I think nationalities and languages are just a shell of who we are. It's hitting me more right now when I meet with the Korean parents and grandparent there's so much more I have to learn ... It's about learning. It's about adjusting.

In terms of how intercultural citizenship developed, the role of formal education was varied, with no participants reporting specific courses in intercultural citizenship education. However, the participants did discuss more general intercultural education. The participants observed that intercultural aspects were integrated into many of their courses (see extract 5 above). Other participants mentioned specific courses with an intercultural focus during SA (extract 12).

Extract 12

R: Did you experience English language teaching regarding intercultural communication when you studied abroad?

I3S14: Yes, a lot. The course itself literally focused on this. There were many courses which were not directly related to only linguistics. There were ... err even if the name of the programme was Literacy and Culture

Yet, participants did not always engage with these courses. Some felt they personally did not need it, often due to previous experiences of intercultural communication before SA (extract 13) or difficulty making space for it due to other study pressures (extract 14). Other participants reported superficial essentialist orientation courses which they did not seem to evaluate very positively, such as the example of "British culture" in extract 15.

Extract 13

I2S9: It is important but like for me since I don't really need it. I was really used to this culture ... but for international who have been there in their first year to study abroad, it would be a great help to have the support like that.

Extract 14

I1S4: Actually, I wanted to take these courses because they are interesting. Unfortunately, I already have too much homework, so I chose not to take them because I need to focus on the regular courses first. Otherwise, it might be too exhausting trying to catch up with others in learning if I did not prepare in advance.

Extract 15

I2S8: maybe for the orientation day, the university advised us about the culture the British culture because we are like different country abroad what should we do if what happen there blah blah blah

Furthermore, the findings suggested that the participants' experiences of intercultural communication with other participants formed the core of their intercultural development. The participants frequently brought up the international and hence multicultural and multilingual mix of international programmes (extract 16).

Extract 16

I151: There are many international students here from many countries in Asia, Europe, America, Middle East, and South America. I like to hang out with them because I get to practice the language and learn about their cultures.

Nonetheless, responses to this international mix were varied, with some participants preferring it (extract 17), others being surprised but seemingly comfortable (extracts 18) but others reacting negatively and wanting to speak to Anglophone speakers (extract 19).

Extract 17

I256: I actually wanted that I kind of expected it even before going that it would be like this. I don't think I would be too comfortable being around the locals or L1 English speakers too much because most of them the cultural background is different.

Extract 18

I258: I expect I gonna see the English people, but when I'm there most of them they are it surprised me they were Asian as well they are Chinese and Indian, so I'm a bit shocked because I never met like original Indian accent before it was very hard for me to catch up, but after I used to it I feel like I'm so like I can understand very well

Extract 19

I155: I expected to improve my English by studying in the UK and spending more time talking to native English speakers. However, after my arrival, I found out that most of the people I meet are international students. Many of my classmates are non-native English speakers and mainly from China. To be honest, if I could choose, I would rather have more time to speak English with native English speakers than with non-native English speakers.

In sum, almost all participants indicated some knowledge of and positive attitudes to intercultural citizenship and SA does seem to contribute to a deeper understanding and engagement with such an identity. This seems to be linked as much, if not more, to interaction with other international students rather than formal education. However, not all participants reacted positively to the multilingual and multicultural nature of their international SA programmes.

Discussion

Concerning the first research question, although the participants generally had positive attitudes towards their experiences in English language learning, intercultural communication, and intercultural citizenship regarding SA preparation, such experiences were reportedly not adequately comprehensive. Moreover, the findings also indicated that there were mixed responses to intercultural education, with some receiving none, others ad hoc and rather broad essentialist courses. Significantly, no students discussed any explicit preparation or education for intercultural citizenship. While it is encouraging to see ELT rated well for some aspects of SA preparation, it is a concern that the intercultural dimensions are not well integrated. It can be said that existing educational management systems and policies in Thailand did not yet support the implementation of intercultural citizenship education. However, developing intercultural communication competence and awareness, a core part of intercultural citizenship, is a necessary process for students planning to study abroad because SA students need such essential skills to survive among new friends amid linguistic diversity (see Jackson, 2018; Kinginger, 2013). Evidently, the participants did not formally receive intercultural citizenship education from their curriculums, although some training efforts were provided as minor interventions. Hence, to equip students with capacities for an effective transition to multicultural and multilingual learning environments domestically and internationally, it is highly recommended that teachers, policymakers, and curriculum designers prioritize applying intercultural citizenship education. Furthermore, since intercultural citizenship education has

become a major goal of general education (e.g., inclusion in the United Nations SDGs) and in international HE education (Killick, 2013), and there is a growing body of research showing its relevance to language learning (Byram et al., 2016; Porto, 2019; Porto, 2018), as such, it is problematic that it is completely absent from ELT and SA perpetration reported here.

The data also revealed that there was a general recognition of the importance of intercultural communication skills and knowledge, and that successful communication did not necessarily involve inner circle Englishes. Yet, following previous research (Baker & Fang, 2021; Ra et al., 2022), many participants still viewed English as a crucial aspect of developing intercultural citizenship, often due to the opportunities for intercultural interactions it enabled. In common with many other studies in international HE settings (e.g., Jenkins, 2014; Jenkins & Mauranten, 2019), English was typically viewed from a more normative L1 English user perspective in which Anglophone Englishes were most prestigious and participants own uses of English less valued. However, there was also evidence among some participants of the value of their uses of English and that English employed by L1 English users was not necessarily relevant for intercultural communication and citizenship (see also Baker & Fang, 2021). There was also some limited appreciation of the importance of multilingualism in developing intercultural citizenship. Such varied responses to English and the tensions between normative monolingual educational and societal ideologies versus the diverse, multilingual and intercultural reality of international HE experiences are already well-documented in EME research (e.g., Jenkins & Mauranten, 2019) and would seem to be equally relevant to intercultural citizenship development.

For question two, on the understanding of intercultural citizenship, as with research in other HE settings (e.g., Baker & Fang, 2021; Byram et al., 2016), many participants demonstrated positive perceptions. More specifically, unlike the superficial understandings expressed by students before SA in previous research (see Baker & Fang, 2021), in this study the experienced students offered in-depth discussions relating it to personal experiences and highlighted the developmental aspects. Furthermore, themes of openness, adaptation and transcending fixed, national scales of language and culture were presented in the interview data; all central aspects of intercultural citizenship (Byram et al., 2016). In relation to the development of intercultural citizenship, it was clear that the international universities in this study had attempted to provide some support for their learners to become global citizens and professionals in today's diverse world and help them become internationally knowledgeable and interculturally competent through a variety of activities. In this study, some participants (e.g., see extract 9) agreed that university activities organized inside and outside campuses and leisure activities with international friends from the university (e.g., planting trees) provided vital opportunities for cultural exchange and supported them to adopt intercultural identities (Lai et al., 2015; Sato & Hodge, 2015). Hence, more of these activities should be systematically incorporated into HE curricula to expose students to intercultural interactions and maximize the benefits of intercultural citizenship education.

Nonetheless, while some students were well prepared for the intercultural and multilingual nature of EME in Anglophone settings, others were surprised and reacted negatively to what they perceived as a lack of contact with L1 English speakers. To elaborate, before travelling to Anglophone countries, such as the UK and the USA, some participants had high expectations that they would have extensive opportunities to practice English and exchange cultures with native English speakers. However, when they arrived, it turned out that they ended up spending more time interacting with Asian interlocutors, and such perceived limitations discouraged them from improving English or engaging with intercultural interactions (see Spencer-Oatey, Dauber, Jing, & Wang, 2017) for similar findings as regards Chinese international students). Given that Anglophone international HE institutes have long been highly multicultural and multilingual (Jenkins, 2014), this indicates some serious gaps in preparation for SA, which can potentially hinder intercultural interactions and development. Yet, unlike previous intercultural citizenship research (Baker & Fang, 2021) and more general SA studies (Kinger, 2013), there were no reports of a rejection of intercultural citizenship or intercultural interaction as a result of negative SA experiences. While the data does not

provide clear evidence as to why this might be, one possibility is that all the participants were in their “home” environments and had had time to process their SA experiences. Such space for reflection is a key part of intercultural development in SA (Jackson, 2012).

A clear implication of these findings is that more support needs to be given to students to prepare them for the diverse, multilingual and multicultural environments of international HE. Given the extensive role of English in international HE and the role ELT already plays in preparation for international study, the ELT classroom is the obvious place for this support. Firstly, this involves incorporating intercultural communication and intercultural citizenship education into ELT in a more systematic manner. This does not necessarily entail a radical change in teaching practices since ELT is already well-placed to provide intercultural education, given that the focus of the language classroom is typically on communication with “others” across cultures. Research on language teaching and intercultural citizenship education is beginning to emerge, suggesting a variety of ways the two fields can be merged in practice (Byram et al., 2016; Porto, 2019; Porto, 2018). Secondly, given the links between English, HE, EME and intercultural citizenship, there needs to be a greater awareness of the varied uses and users of English. In particular, this entails recognition of more local uses of English, awareness of the variable, fluid uses of ELF for intercultural communication and of the multilingual environments in which ELF occurs (e.g., Galloway & Rose, 2018). However, it is also fair to state that intercultural citizenship education is a relatively new concept, especially when designing courses and making policies for ELT (e.g., Bayyurt & Akcan, 2015; Porto, 2019). Hence, ELT practitioners might find it challenging to effectively implement this concept in English classrooms. Therefore, given the central role ELT plays in preparation and support for students during EME programmes, raising awareness of issues around “standard” English, ELFA, multilingualism, and intercultural communication are crucial as a starting point. Accordingly, further studies on intercultural citizenship education should be conducted to propose instructional contents, activities, and materials because the current knowledge gap of intercultural citizenship education in ELT is too large to drive practical effectiveness.

Conclusion

While the limited number of settings and participants means that we cannot make any generalizations from this study, we hope that the detailed presentation of findings will offer aspects that resonate (Richards, 2003) with the many similar contexts in which large numbers of students undertake part of their education in Anglophone EME settings. Overall, students were positive about intercultural citizenship and intercultural citizenship education. Experiences from studying abroad seemed to have led to a more in-depth understanding of intercultural citizenship, and many discussed the positive influence of SA on this. This suggests that intercultural citizenship is a relevant concept in understanding students’ experiences of SA and their intercultural development during that time. While various factors were reported as important in the development of intercultural citizenship, English emerged as a central factor in enabling intercultural interactions. Yet, tension was seen between idealized native English speaker norms and Anglophone interlocutors and the reality of the diverse, or Asian centred, student bodies of Anglophone international universities and the corresponding use of English as a lingua franca in multilingual, intercultural, communication. Furthermore, there seemed to be limited recognition of the role of multilingualism or other languages in intercultural citizenship development or EME. As regards ELT, there were positive responses to general language support, but the integration of intercultural education into ELT preparation for SA appeared minimal, ad hoc, and essentialist. There were no reports of intercultural citizenship education, suggesting ELT still has some way to go in preparing students for the intercultural aspects of SA and EME. During SA, there were more positive reports of support for intercultural communication and incorporation of intercultural citizenship education; nonetheless, this was not the case for all participants. Thus, it appears Anglophone international HE contexts also have improvements to make in systematically and consistently providing intercultural support and education if they are to deliver on their promise of fostering graduates who are intercultural citizens.

In conclusion, we would argue that intercultural citizenship education is highly relevant to ELT given both the use of ELF for intercultural communication in multilingual and multicultural communities across nations, languages and cultures and the global scale of ELT itself. An extensive body of research is beginning to build up across a diverse range of settings investigating how ELT can best meet the varied uses of ELF (e.g., Bayyurt & Akcan, 2015), particularly under Global Englishes approaches (e.g., Rose & Galloway, 2019; Widodo, Fang, & Elyas, 2020). These approaches focus on dynamic and adaptable uses of English, alongside other languages, in which learners are viewed as legitimate language users in their own right rather than “deficient” L1 English users. Additionally, the close connections between English and the internationalization of HE, especially through EME (Dafouz & Smit, 2020; Jenkins, 2014; Jenkins & Mauranen, 2019), means these issues are highly salient for ELT programmes that prepare and support students for SA. Empirical studies exploring the links between language education and intercultural citizenship education are beginning to emerge (Byram et al., 2016; Porto, 2018), including in relation to ELT (Baker & Fang, 2021; Boonsuk & Fang, 2021; Porto, 2019; Ra et al., 2022). These show generally positive attitudes from students to intercultural citizenship education as part of their language classes. Nonetheless, findings are still tentative, understanding of intercultural citizenship is often ad hoc and superficial, and intercultural citizenship is far from mainstream in ELT, strongly suggesting the need for further research of the type reported here.

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