

## Students' Perception of Diversity in an International Classroom

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**Submitted to the 4th ICTL\*\*:** June 30, 2013 | **Refereed and accepted by the 4th ICTL:** July 15, 2013

**Submitted to HLRC:** October 9, 2013 | **HLRC Editorial review:** October 27, 2013

**Presented at the 4th ICTL:** Nov. 13-15, 2013 | **Accepted by HLRC:** Dec. 3, 2013 | **Published:** Dec. 13, 2013

**Abstract:** This paper presents students' perception of diversity in an international classroom in one international university in Thailand. The aim of this exploratory study is to better understand students' perception of diversity to better meet their learning needs. By conducting a survey among students enrolled in bachelor's and master's international programs, this study explores how students perceive their classmates' diversity, such as, but not limited to, cultural, language, and knowledge differences. How does diversity affect students' learning in an international setting? What kind of diversity is the most disturbing for learners? Some recommendations grounded in the conceptual framework of cultural responsive teaching are derived from the results.

**Keywords:** Diversity, multicultural, international university, culturally responsive teaching (CRT), inclusive teaching, higher education, cross-cultural learning, students' perception

### Introduction

Teaching in an international setting is challenging. Teachers encounter different learning styles, diverse cultural backgrounds, and various English language levels. To better suit learners' needs, instructors seek to better understand their students' expectations. To this purpose, this paper explores students' perception of challenges and opportunities arising from studying in an international classroom.

This research aims at exploring students' perception of their classmates' diversity to enlighten teaching practice in the university. By providing information on students' perception of diversity in the classroom, this paper contributes to increase the understanding of students' experience in one specific international university in Bangkok, Thailand.

Classrooms in higher education are becoming more and more diverse. In international universities, teachers meet students of different ages, backgrounds, cultures, previous work experiences, and learning styles. For example, diversity in English language abilities among students requires teachers to adapt their courses. They must provide support and adequate activities for students' different language abilities (Croese, 2011). Teachers have to develop inclusive teaching skills to cope with increasing students' diversity.

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\*\* Fourth International Conference on Teaching and Learning (ICTL), Bangkok, Thailand, November 13-15, 2013.

Suggested citation: Jeannin, L. (2013). Students' perception of diversity in an international classroom. *Higher Learning Research Communications*, 3(4), 6-23. <http://dx.doi.org/10.18870/hlrc.v3i4.165>

This growing diversity in universities stems from different trends: globalization, students and teachers' migrations, wider access to higher education (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009), and adults' continuing their education later in life. As a result, students and instructors at the university display a kaleidoscope of personal, cultural, and economic traits affecting students' learning. In such diverse classrooms, students experience diverse learning styles and very different learning habits. Class diversity can either impede or leverage the learning process. The effect of class diversity on students' learning depends, among other things, on the activities proposed by instructors in the multicultural and multi-age setting.

### **Objective of the Study**

The study aims to understand students' experience of diversity in the international university to improve their learning process. This study explores students' perception of diversity to enhance teaching practices.

### **Research Problem**

This paper explores how students perceive the effect of classroom diversity on their learning experience.

### **Research Questions**

- What are the kinds of diversity that affect the most both the host and international students in their interaction with their classmates?
- How do students perceive cultural diversity in this international university context?

The aim of this study is to better understand how diversity affects students' learning and how they perceive cultural diversity. The research design is based on a descriptive survey design providing information on students' perception. The researcher collected students' perception of diversity in the classroom in one specific international university in Bangkok, Thailand, using a paper-and-pen survey.

In terms of conceptual framework, this study was grounded in the Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) approach developed by Ladson-Billings (1995) and Gay (2002, 2010). The results were analyzed through this framework to derive recommendations. Those findings can provide information for teachers willing to develop inclusive teaching activities, in a culturally responsive manner.

## **Literature Review**

### **Types of Diversity**

Many scholars have studied students' diversity and how it can affect the learning process (Bertrand & Lee, 2012; Crose, 2011; Smith, 2010). Students differ in age, work experience, race, gender, learning styles, language proficiency, prior knowledge, maturity, and learning abilities. Each personal, economic, or cultural trait can affect students' learning experience in the classroom.

Smith (2010) explained how different epistemological beliefs, combined with other differences, can affect learning in a diverse learning environment. Students and instructors holding a belief that the teacher should be the ultimate source of knowledge can fail to implement collaborative work and knowledge sharing among diverse learners (Smith, 2010). Those epistemological beliefs affecting the learning process can come from cultural backgrounds or past learning habits.

Students coming from different cultural backgrounds have been accustomed to certain teaching practices. In other words, they have been socialized with learning methods in their previous culturally constructed schooling environment (Eaves, 2009).

Cultural backgrounds affect students' learning styles (Boland, Sugahara, Opdecam, & Everaert, 2011; De Vita, 2001). Students feel more or less confident with different learning activities, depending on their previous cultural socialization (Boland et al., 2011; Eaves, 2009). De Vita (2001) tested learning styles for undergraduate business studies students enrolled in the United Kingdom, showing that the scope of learning styles' diversity broadened when foreign students were taken into account. By welcoming foreign students, universities increase the panel of learning styles in the same classroom (De Vita, 2001). As a result, learning styles vary considerably in an international classroom, which can affect the learning process of both host and international students.

### **Students' Issues towards a Diverse Learning Environment**

Adapting to a foreign environment can be difficult for students with different previous knowledge, different levels of English language ability, and different learning styles (Croese, 2011; Eaves, 2009). Eaves (2009) explored how Thai students experienced a new teaching environment in England, and how they had difficulties adapting to a different teaching culture. Previously exposed to a teacher-centered education, Thai students needed to adapt to different assessments and self-direction expectations in English universities (Eaves, 2009). Without recognition of diverse learning styles in the classroom, international students can face challenges along the adaptation process.

Host students can also face challenges when integrating and working with international students. Language barriers and different pre-conceived beliefs can impede a smooth collaboration among students (Croese, 2011; Summers & Volet, 2008). For example, Croese (2011) emphasized that language barriers could impede students' collaboration by disadvantaging the international students compared with the host students, or by limiting host and international students' interaction. Instructors should anticipate potential communication challenges and they should develop collaborative work between host and international students taking care of language difficulties and multicultural interactions.

### **Inclusive Methods to Adapt to Learners' Diversity**

Several authors proposed inclusive teaching methods to improve students' experience in a diverse classroom (Bertrand & Lee, 2012; Croese, 2011). Croese (2011) advocated for teaching methods based on cross-cultural work to develop cultural awareness. Teachers should develop

a panel of activities to teach and assess students, being aware of the epistemological and learning differences (Croese, 2011). Instructors should also recognize student's diversity in prior knowledge, especially for historically or socially sensitive subjects such as international relations (Bertrand & Lee, 2012). A truly international setting should accommodate diverse learning preferences in a welcoming and inclusive environment.

Regarding students' different needs and expectations, Richards, Brown and Forde (2007) promoted an inclusive teaching approach that adapts to students learning habits. If students expect to work and learn in groups, for example, as it is performed in their own native communities, teachers should provide those cooperative activities (Richards et al., 2007, p. 66). In fact, the feeling of inclusiveness that arises from group learning affects the quality of learning for students accustomed to collaborative learning.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework used to analyze the results and derive recommendations is based on culturally responsive teaching (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Gay, 2002, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995). In culturally responsive teaching (CRT), teachers stimulate students' individual learning in a consistent way with regards to their cultural learning styles and their initial preparedness to learn (De Vita, 2001; Pham, 2012). It is a student-centered approach that allows students to self-manage their learning process (Richards et al., 2007).

Gay (2010) provided four directions to guide the teachers' journey towards culturally responsive teaching: "caring, communication, curriculum, and instruction" (Gay, 2010, p. XVIII-XIX). This paper presents those four approaches below, split into two categories: culturally responsive education (curriculum and instruction) and culturally responsive teachers (caring and communication).

#### **Culturally Responsive Education**

A culturally responsive education relies on curriculum and instruction. A culturally responsive curriculum provides students with the opportunity to discover different cultural viewpoints. Subjects are presented with different approaches and examples (Gay, 2010; Hollins, 1995; Richards et al., 2007). To this purpose, Gay (2002) asked instructors to review the curriculum and instruction materials to identify issues with the representation of diversity in visual and narrative materials. In such a case, teachers should supplement those media with culturally relevant materials (Gay, 2002, p. 108). In other words, a culturally responsive curriculum allocates space and time for diverse viewpoints and voices.

Concerning culturally responsive instruction, teachers should include local examples and encourage students to encounter various communities' issues to share, exchange, and learn from others. For example, Richards et al. (2007) proposed to let students interview members of different communities to explore new perspectives. The quality of learning is indeed improved by a contextualized teaching approach that makes the course locally and culturally relevant (Blanchet-Cohen & Reilly, 2013; Pilot & Bulte, 2006). Contextualized learning serves culturally responsive instruction by sharpening the relevance of topics studied in class.

## **Culturally Responsive Teachers**

Culturally responsive teachers care about their students and communicate in a culturally responsive manner. Teachers are aware of students' challenges in international settings. As Hale, Snow, and Morales (2008) stated, "through an increased awareness, teachers can come to a truer understanding of the challenges their students face" (p.10). Instructors care about students' ways of seeing the world (Gay, 2000) and they welcome different viewpoints. This culturally responsive communication finally reduces misunderstanding and fosters trust between instructors and students. The teacher's communication style also provides an example for students who learn to interact with others. In the CRT approach, the instructor plays a central role in caring and communicating in an open-minded way with diverse students.

Concerning their preparedness, instructors should scrutinize their own conscious and unconscious perception of others. Teachers need to make themselves aware of their biases and privileges to truly welcome students' diversity (Hale et al., 2008; Lund, 2010; Richards et al., 2007). Lund (2010) and Richards et al. (2007) warned teachers against unexpectedly reinforcing stereotypes, racial inequality, and excluding behaviours. Lund (2010) warned teachers against the risk of perpetuating the concept of 'white privilege,' despite their willingness to be inclusive. The issue of 'white privilege' is the unconscious favour attributed to white people in terms of recognition and leadership power. Being aware of the risk of bias and caring about students' diversity are key characteristics of a culturally responsive teacher.

## **Methodology**

This exploratory study is a first step to better understand the types of diversity that affect students' learning in the international university. A descriptive survey design is a consistent way to answer the research question in this particular setting. It is related to the objective of the study; that is, understanding students' diversity challenges in regards of diversity in this international university.

In April 2013, a questionnaire was launched for students enrolled in graduate and undergraduate international programs in one specific university located in Bangkok, Thailand. Questions pertained to the academic courses students were studying during the semester which use English language as a medium of instruction. The questionnaire aimed to collect information about students' characteristics, learning styles, and opinions about their multicultural experience at the university. Information collected included their personal characteristics (age, nationalities, prior work experience), their perception of diversity, and diversity consequences on the learning process. Answers to the questionnaire were anonymous.

## **Data Collection**

The population of the research included all students registered in the international programs in undergraduate and graduate schools in the chosen university. In the international programs, 681 students were registered, from around 60 different nationalities. The researcher

adopted a convenience sampling method and collected 242 surveys from students enrolled in international programs. Respondents reported 52 different nationalities. A pilot test was conducted at the end of one of the economic classes and 16 students accepted to answer the questionnaire. It allowed the researcher to fine-tune the survey, improving the general understanding of the questions.

Before the collection, students received an email to inform them about the survey. The sample was selected by walking from one class to another after receiving colleagues' agreement to come at the beginning or at the end of their classes. The researcher walked from one class to another during the first two weeks of April 2013, which corresponds to the middle of the semester. Sixteen classes were covered.

In each class, the researcher explained the purpose of the survey and provided information on how to answer the questions. The researcher asked all students to complete the questionnaire on a voluntary basis, and to complete it only once. Answering the questionnaire reflected the students' consent. To answer students' questions, the researcher was present in each class and also mentioned that all respondents would be part of a lucky draw for a 500 Thai Baht cash reward. On average, it took 15 to 20 minutes to answer the 18 questions. Almost all the students who attended the class answered the survey.

## Survey

After collecting some demographical information, students were asked why they had chosen this specific university (Question 1 in the appendix). Besides that, the researcher also collected students' opinion on diversity in class (Questions 2, 3, and 4 in the appendix). The researcher asked students to answer the questions for general education or academic courses they took or were taking at the time of the survey in the university. The survey included the objective of the survey, which was to understand how students felt in diverse and multicultural classrooms.

Questions 1 and 2 proposed students with 8 to 9 possible answers that they could select and rank. The proposed answers came from factors mentioned in the literature, from the researcher's own experience, and from previous discussions with colleagues. This question format provided students with many possible answers. The question format was similar to one previously used by Hsia and Spruijt-Metz (2008), but students could also rank their answers. They had to pick and rank the three most salient answers knowing that they could also add other answers. Out of their three answers per question, 31 students picked "other" for Question 1; five students picked "other" for Question 2.

## Sample Bias

A convenience sample was chosen to include students with diverse nationalities, cultural backgrounds, and learning styles. All classes are truly heterogeneous in terms of cultural diversity and surveying those classes provided a wide cultural sample. Since the aim was not to generalize the results but, on the contrary, to understand students who are enrolled in the

university, the researcher chose a sampling approach based on various class visits. The sample covered 36% of the total population, including students from 52 different nationalities.

The sample used in this study is not representative of the diverse population in international universities. This study does not intend to generalize the results, nor to compare or depict similarities with other universities. Students in this sample can differ a great deal from students who were not included. However, the sample is large enough to derive and categorize students' perception that could be confirmed later with a statistical sample.

This sampling design provided information about students' perception of diversity in their learning context. It is the first step towards analyzing students' expressed issues with regards to class diversity at university level education. It can provide information about students' characteristics and their perception of diversity. The results can bring valuable information to better understand students' experience of diversity in this international environment.

### Data Analysis and Results

First, Tables 1 and 2 present some demographic information. Thai students account for half of the respondents in the sample.

Table 1. *Demographic Information About the Sample*

	%	N	Respondents
<b>Thai nationality</b>	50%	118	236
<b>Non-Thai nationality or double nationalities</b>	50%	118	
<b>Undergraduate students</b>	82%	196	240
<b>Graduate students</b>	18%	44	
<b>Work experience</b>	68%	164	241
<b>No work experience</b>	32%	77	
<b>High school in Thailand</b>	45%	108	240
<b>High school abroad</b>	55%	132	

Table 2. *Age of Respondents*

237 respondents	Min	Max	Average
<b>Age</b>	14	46	22

Table 3 below presents the reasons why students chose to study in the international university. Readers can refer to Question 1 in the appendix. Table 3 presents how many times each answer has been selected and ranked 1, 2, or 3. The column 4 shows the sum of the number of times each answer has been picked, whatever the attributed ranks. It gives the sums of

occurrences and it informs about the salience, or the endorsement intensity of each reason (Hsia & Spruijt-Metz, 2008; Spruijt-Metz, Gallaher, Unger, & Anderson- Johnson, 2004).

Table 3. *Students' Main Reasons for Choosing the International University in Bangkok*

221 respondents	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Ranked as #1	Ranked as #2	Ranked as #3	Sum	Sum with weights
<b>Specific professional skills or specific program</b>	39	24	22	85	187
<b>Improve English language abilities</b>	53	30	24	<b>107</b>	<b>243</b>
<b>Learn in multicultural classes and multicultural experience</b>	32	48	34	<b>114</b>	<b>226</b>
<b>Study subjects with international examples</b>	17	33	29	79	146
<b>Develop leadership</b>	7	8	22	37	59
<b>Develop critical-thinking abilities</b>	5	17	18	40	67
<b>Learn how to work collaboratively</b>	1	11	14	26	39
<b>Financial reasons</b>	6	9	10	25	46
<b>Graduate quickly/faster</b>	45	32	34	<b>111</b>	<b>233</b>
<b>Others</b>	15	6	10	31	67

Furthermore, to take into account the information brought by the ranking, each rank was attributed a coefficient: Each answer ranked first (#1) received 3 points, each answer ranked second (#2) received 2 points, and each answer ranked third (#3) received 1 point. The results between columns 4 and 5 were compared, using column 5 to confirm or contradict column 4.

By analyzing the salience ordering in Table 3, the three main reasons why students chose to study in this university are similar with and without weighting; it confirms their salience. However, how they order among themselves cannot be determined, since columns 4 and 5 differ on the ordering. Indeed, the ordering of those three main reasons depends on the weighting process.

The three most salient reasons why students chose to study in this university were to “improve English language abilities”, to “learn in multicultural classes and to have a multicultural experience”, and to “graduate quickly”, knowing that students can graduate in three years in this international university. Improving English language abilities was the most endorsed reason, ranked #1, while learning in multicultural classes and graduating quickly are the most endorsed reasons in ranks #1 and #2. Those three answers were the most often selected without using the rank ordering (column 4) and with using the weighting process (column 5).

Table 4 presents the issues students encountered when studying in international classrooms. The salience of each answer and their rank ordering (Hsia & Spruijt-Metz, 2008; Spruijt-Metz et al., 2004) are presented with and without weights.



Table 3. *Students' Issues with Regards to Diversity*

<b>204 respondents</b>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Ranked as #1	Ranked as #2	Ranked as #3	<b>Sum</b>	<b>Sum with weights</b>
<b>Age differences within class</b>	14	19	15	48	95
<b>English language differences</b>	49	38	31	<b>118</b>	<b>254</b>
<b>Diverse cultural backgrounds</b>	12	14	21	47	85
<b>Diverse initial knowledge in the subject</b>	12	38	36	86	148
<b>Gender differences</b>	2	0	9	11	15
<b>Different students' ability to understand the subject</b>	26	46	33	<b>105</b>	<b>203</b>
<b>Some students do not behave properly in class</b>	41	21	25	87	190
<b>None, class diversity is not disturbing for me</b>	42	7	7	56	147
<b>Other</b>	2	2	1	5	11

Table 4 presents students' perception on diversity. Students selected and ranked the three types of diversity among their classmates that are the most disturbing for them, knowing that they can answer that "class diversity is not disturbing". Question 2 is attached to the appendix.

The researcher analyzed the results in a similar way as before, measuring how many times the answers have been selected and ranked 1, 2, or 3 by students. Column 4 displays the number of times each answer has been picked. It gives the salience of each answer or its endorsement intensity without weighting.

Similarly, to take into account the ranking information, a coefficient was attributed to each rank: Each answer ranked first (#1) received 3 points, each answer ranked second (#2) received 2 points, and each answer ranked third (#3) received 1 point. The ordering of salience between columns 4 and 5 of Table 4 were compared. The ordering was the same with and without weights for the two first answers that emerged.

Students mentioned "English language differences" and "students' different ability to understand the subjects" as the two main diversity-related issues they face. "Students' diverse cultural background" was chosen only a few times. It does not seem to be an issue for respondents. This was confirmed by students' answer to the question about cultural diversity presented in Table 5.

Table 5. *Students' Perception: Do You Think Cultural Diversity at [the Name of the University] Is a Positive Opportunity for You?*

	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Yes</b>	212	94%
<b>No</b>	13	6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>100%</b>

As it appears in Table 5, 94% of students said that cultural diversity was a positive opportunity. To further explore students' perceptions of cultural diversity in the survey, an open question was used to ask students to explain the reason why they perceive cultural diversity positively or negatively (Questions 3 and 4 in the appendix). Students answered by a few sentences or a few words. All the answers were kept from students who perceived cultural diversity positively or negatively.

Using an open-coding approach for Question 4, the researcher qualitatively analyzed the students' 186 answers. By bringing out the main codes and grouping them, the researcher derived overarching themes to analyze students' perception. It must be noted that only a few students expressed negative judgments. They are displayed in Table 7, but they are too few to be analyzed with reliability. Thus, Table 6 reports the main codes, gathering all the positive reasons why students think that cultural diversity is an advantageous opportunity.

For positive judgments, after several grouping and regrouping, the researcher ended with four main themes, split over 14 codes. Table 6 presents the themes and codes that emerged from students' perception of cultural diversity. Figure 1 graphically presents the main themes and codes that the researcher was able to derive from their answers.

Table 6. *Themes and Codes for Students' Perception of Cultural Diversity*

Themes and Codes	N	%
Cultural awareness / sensitivity	123	46%
Learn from / understand cultures	72	
Experience of diversity	18	
Learn to interact / interact	16	
Broaden one's vision / open-mindedness	12	
Become culturally flexible/adjustable	5	
Acquire / exchange knowledge	63	23.5%
Learn from others	18	
Share / exchange	16	
Acquire new knowledge	12	
Interesting / discover / explore	10	
Learn / improve language	7	
Readiness for future / environment	43	16%
Students' future/ career/ business	31	
Globalized / real world	12	
Relationships	32	12%
Meet new people / make friends	27	
Network	5	
Others	7	2.5%
Total	268	100%

Table 7. *Students' Perception: Negative Judgments on Cultural Diversity*

Codes	Number of occurrences
<b>No real exchange &amp; no willingness to mix</b>	4
<b>Difficulty to understand others</b>	3
<b>Division Thai/foreigner</b>	2
<b>Discrimination</b>	1
<b>Difference is an issue</b>	1
<b>Unease</b>	1
<b>Negative judgment of other cultures</b>	1
<b>Difficulty to practice multiculturalism</b>	1

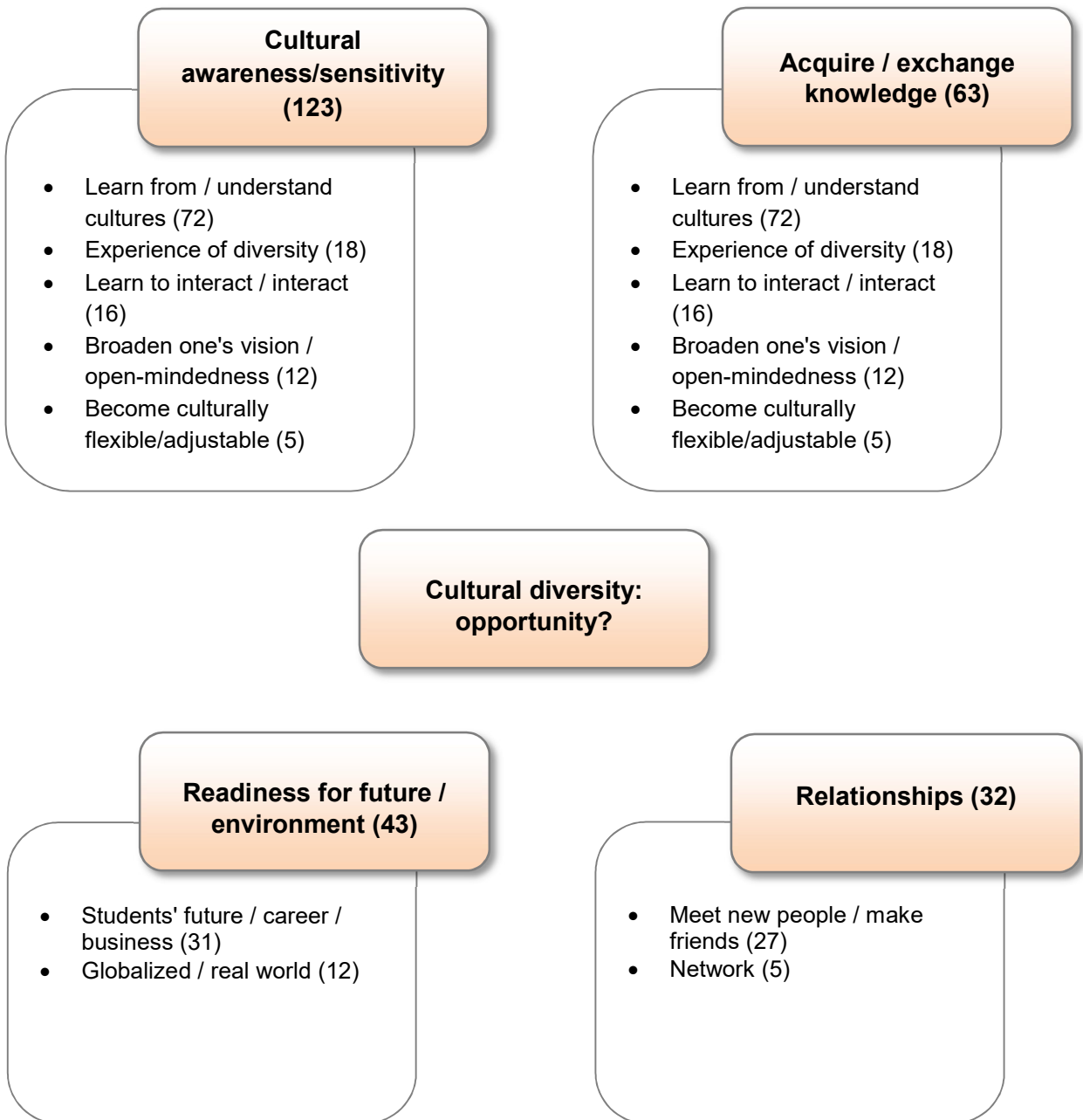


Figure 1. Codes mapping: students' perception of cultural diversity.

As it appears in Table 6 and Figure 1, respondents think that cultural diversity is an opportunity because it raises their sensitivity and awareness to different cultures. They can increase their understanding of different cultures, while learning how to interact and becoming more open-minded. Besides, cultural diversity is a source of knowledge, exchange, and language improvements. Students perceive that cultural diversity is an opportunity to prepare themselves in their professional lives, embedded in a globalized environment. Finally, students stress the opportunity to make new friends among a diverse community.

## **Discussion and Recommendations**

### **Discussion of Results**

The results give information on the reasons why respondents have chosen this specific university in Bangkok: students expect to improve their English language ability, to learn in multicultural classes, to have a multicultural experience, and to graduate quickly. Those results come from students who have chosen to study in this international university and this information is valuable for both faculty and administration. The students have already self-selected themselves to study in this university and their interest in English language and multicultural approaches is aligned with their individual university choice.

Learning with diverse classmates, students struggle with different language levels and diverse ability to understand some subjects. This result appears consistent with the fact that students chose this university to improve their English language skills; the English level diversity is a consequence of their choice. It must be noticed that “diverse initial knowledge about the topic” is a secondary answer in terms of salience. This answer is, in fact, close to “students’ diverse ability to understand the subject”, which has emerged as one of the main disturbing diversity effects. The endorsement of “diverse initial knowledge” and “diverse ability to understand the subject” should reinforce instructors’ attention to students’ heterogeneous readiness to learn (Glowacki-Dudka, Murray, & Concepcion, 2012; Pham, 2012; Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003).

Cultural diversity was perceived positively for 94% of the respondents. In fact, they perceived that cultural diversity makes them more culturally aware and knowledgeable through exchange with diverse students. They also wanted to adjust to the challenges of a globalized and multicultural world while preparing for their future career.

The few negative judgments of cultural diversity are reported in Table 7. They could be further explored during future interviews. One of the negative judgments was that diverse nationalities of students do not generally mix with each other in reality, so this perception should be further explored to clarify the reasons.

### **Discussion of Method: Reliability and Validity**

In all the classes visited, the researcher explained to the participating students how to fill out the questionnaire, in order to ensure that the students fully understood how to answer the questions appropriately. This served the reliability of the measurement. The researcher aimed to

collect students' perceptions of diversity in the international classrooms and those four questions aimed to understand why students self-enrolled in this university and how they perceive their classmates' diversity. Question 2 asked about the disturbing consequences of diversity to encourage students to express some possible issues.

In Questions 1 and 2, the researcher chose the picking and ranking format to allow deeper statistical treatment of students' answers. This method allowed students to cover quickly a large range of answers. They could also add other reasons in case the answers presented did not cover their thoughts. Some students added other reasons not mentioned in the questionnaire, such as the university's location and friends' recommendations for Question 1. A future questionnaire should include those items. Only a few students needed to add other items for Question 2. The picking and ranking format also brought intensity to students' answers. With the ranking procedure, they could express which answers better suited their thoughts. This format increased the reliability of the measurement: students could pick the closest answers to their opinion, and it did not require interpretation of students' answers.

For Questions 3 and 4 on cultural diversity, the aim was to let students' express their own opinion. This open-ended question "why?" contributed to the reliability of the study, since raw answers were collected and analyzed using a code and theme analysis. The researcher discussed codes' grouping with another researcher to reduce potential bias and to make sure the themes were consistent with the data.

### **Recommendations Grounded in Culturally Responsive Teaching**

In culturally responsive teaching, caring, as promoted by Gay (2002), fosters teachers' understanding of students' diversity challenges such as communicating in English. The result of students' struggle with diverse language abilities suggests that teachers in this university should encourage students to practice oral and written English to develop their communication skills.

Then, students' perceived differences in their classmates' ability to understand the subjects suggest that actions should be taken to individualize learning experience. Instructors should better conciliate different students' readiness to understand the subjects, using for example catch-up sessions, foundation classes, and learning support activities.

Finally, to enhance multicultural experience and learning, teachers should favour cultural awareness by providing relevant examples and case studies. They should build upon students' different perceptions and knowledge, and develop a contextualized teaching approach. Contextualized instruction provides students with locally relevant materials that can help them to connect international knowledge to their local environment. For example, as Richards et al. (2007) mentioned, teachers should use with caution international edition textbooks; the word international does not mean it covers subjects from different viewpoints. International textbooks can adopt a culturally dominant paradigm, presented as the mainstream (Richards et al., 2007), and the examples could be irrelevant to the local context. Teaching to an international classroom is not a homogenization process and culturally responsive teachers should supplement international textbooks with local case studies while promoting multicultural approaches.

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## Conclusion

Students perceive cultural diversity in an international classroom as a positive opportunity to become culturally sensitive, to learn more, to prepare for their future, and to develop friendship. They chose this international university to develop their English language abilities and to acquire multicultural experience. In a culturally responsive manner, teachers should support students' willingness to communicate in class in English and to interact in a multicultural environment. They should value diversity to provide different cultural perspectives on an issue and to meet various learning needs.

In terms of current practice, it seems that a few students struggled with participating in class and with mixing with other cultural groups. They have probably faced diverse barriers. Those obstacles could explain students' inconsistency between their expectations to use English in a sharing purpose and their current practice. Further research should explore this inconsistency.

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### Appendix

Question about students' university choice

**Question 1: Why did you choose [the name of the university]? Pick 3 answers. Rank the 3 most important reasons by writing 1, 2, or 3 in front of the three sentences.**

- ..... to acquire specific professional skills or for a specific program
- ..... to improve your English language abilities
- ..... to learn in multicultural classes and to have a multicultural experience
- ..... to study subjects with international examples
- ..... to develop your leadership abilities
- ..... to develop your critical-thinking abilities
- ..... to learn how to work collaboratively
- ..... for financial reasons
- ..... to graduate quickly
- ..... Other: please specify.....

Questions about diversity

#### **DIVERSITY AT [UNIVERSITY NAME]**

Your opinion on diversity is important for me. I would like to understand how you feel in diverse and multicultural classrooms.

**Question 2. Which types of diversity among your classmates are the most disturbing for you? Pick 3 answers. Rank the 3 first challenging kinds of diversity by writing 1, 2, or 3 in front of the three sentences.**

- ..... Age differences within class
- ..... English language differences
- ..... Diverse cultural backgrounds
- ..... Diverse initial knowledge in the subject
- ..... Gender differences
- ..... Different students' ability to understand the subject
- ..... Some students do not behave properly in class
- ..... None, class diversity is not disturbing for me
- ..... Other: specify: .....

**Question 3. Do you think cultural diversity at [the name of the university] is a positive opportunity for you?**

- Yes
- No

**Question 4. Why? Or why not?**

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