INTERNATIONAL PRACTICUM: SUPERVISORS'
AND COORDINATORS' PERCEPTIONS
OF INTERCULTURAL KNOWLEDGE

Bao Kham*

University of Foreign Languages, Hue University, 57 Nguyen Khoa Chiem St., Hue, Vietnam

* Correspondence to Bao Kham < baokhamnp@yahoo.com.vn >

Abstract. This study, which is part of a larger research, focuses on exploring intercultural knowledge perceived by Thai tertiary supervisors and coordinators in an international practicum context. Based on in-depth interviews, the results indicate that both supervisors and coordinators emphasized the role of intercultural knowledge in facilitating preservice teachers' and interns' cultural adaptation and implementation of their professional duties. The study also highlighted various suggestions made by supervisors and coordinators regarding the preparation of preservice teachers and interns for their placements in cross-cultural settings.

Keywords: international practicum, intercultural knowledge, supervisors, coordinators, preservice teachers, interns

1.   Introduction

Intercultural knowledge has become one of the important themes emerging in international practicum research. Subthemes revolving around intercultural understandings include cultural awareness (Sahin, 2008), intercultural competence (Cushner and Chang, 2015; Cushner, 2014, Ciftci and Karaman, 2019), intercultural sensitivity (Cushner, 2007; Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen and Hubbard, 2006; Lash, Akpovo, and Cushner, 2020), intercultural development (Ateskan, 2016, Marx and Moss, 2012), and cross-cultural experiences (Wilson, 1993; Tambyah, 2018). All the research results are really beneficial as they not only contribute to the development of intercultural field, but also expand our knowledge of intercultural impacts upon preservice teachers or interns in terms of their personal and professional growth. However, all the research results are still limited in some way since they concentrate exclusively on the cultural and professional practice of students who take part in either teacher education courses or study abroad programs. Few studies focus on diverse work related to overseas practicum supervisors

or cooperating teachers or organizers. Studies that do center on their work reflect their very restricted professional practice. For example, Major and Santoro's (2016) study explores the interplay between cooperating teachers and preservice teachers in an international field experience. Gilliland (2015) reflects her perception of both benefits and challenges as an international practicum supervisor. Similarly, Parr (2012) accounts for his coordinating work as a teacher educator in an international teaching practicum. It is evident that none of the studies explore intercultural knowledge from the perspective of either a supervisor or coordinator. The gap prompts this study's exploration of intercultural knowledge from the perspectives of supervisors and coordinators. The aims of the study are to understand their perception of (1) intercultural knowledge and (2) developing intercultural knowledge among preservice teachers and interns in international contexts.

2.   Literature Review

International practicum and intercultural knowledge

Research affirms the role of international practicums as a necessary context for intercultural knowledge to grow. Chan and Parr (2012) claimed that cross-cultural experiences in international practicum contribute to the formation of intercultural identity in preservice teachers and interns, resulting in a change in their values, cultural perspectives, self-confidence, and dispositions to work and learn collaboratively. Quezada (2004) and Sahin (2008) indicated that student teachers placed in an international field experience may acquire increased cultural awareness and sensitivity. Sharing the same perspective, Cushner (2009) believed that international practicums can contribute to consolidating candidates' intercultural and international knowledge. His study found that interactions with people from other cultural settings enable student teachers to expand their cultural knowledge, understand others' view of the world from an insider's perspective, foster a global perspective, and promote their understandings of the value of multi-cultural education. In line with Cushner's study, Kabilan (2013) discovered that preservice teachers in other cultural settings gain their understanding of new world views of education and culture, and are able to adapt to new working cultures because learning in an international environment is characterized by ongoing negotiations of meaning under the impacts of intercultural and language factors. These findings are strongly supported by Ateskan's (2016) study.

Exploiting a different but related aspect of intercultural competence, Soboleva and Obdalova (2015) revealed that preparation for international practicums such as orientation seminars contributes to the formation of cognitive readiness for intercultural communication, a significant component of intercultural competence. The concept "cognitive readiness" refers to

"the cognitive abilities of an individual to interact in terms of intercultural dialogue" (p.58). Examples of such abilities include those that apply a wide range of strategies to process, interpret, critically evaluate information from the perspective of intercultural dialogue.

Although it is clear that international settings facilitate intercultural knowledge growth, being in such environments does not automatically lead to its development. Cushner and Chang (2015) affirmed that intercultural growth was not considered as an inevitable result of international practicum. As they claimed, "Simply exposed to a new and different culture does not seem to be sufficient to develop intercultural competence" (p.11). This is strongly supported by Wikan and Klein (2017), who pointed out, "Immersion is a necessary but not sufficient condition for intercultural competence as an outcome of international practicum" (p.103). In order to warrant intercultural development, Cusher and Change (2015) emphasized the need for teacher educators' heightened attention to the inclusion of proper guidance and cultural contents right in practicum preparation while Wikan and Klein (2017) highlighted the importance of student teachers' engagement and socialization in the local community.

Intercultural knowledge in different models of international practicum

Since the paradigm of second language teacher education shifted away from learning as a cognitive process to learning as a socially mediated process (Le van Canh, 2014), intercultural knowledge has become an indispensable dimension in different research models. In a study about the impact of international experience, Wilson (1993) constructed a model in which there are two categories: *gaining a global perspective* and *developing self and relationships*. According to the model, international experience can contribute to the development of a global perspective in preservice teachers through the acquisition of substantive knowledge and the development of perceptual understanding. Substantive knowledge refers to understandings of other cultures and awareness of global issues, dynamics and human choices while perceptual understanding refers to open-mindedness, empathy and anti-stereotyping. Besides, cross-cultural experiences can also contribute to personal growth and interpersonal relationships. Whereas the former refers to enhanced maturity, responsibility and independence, the latter refers to building up connections with people in the host and home cultures. Although it assists in framing a variety of benefits of international practicum, the model cannot be without shortcomings. Tambyah (2018) identified one of the limitations - the lack of integrating newly developed theories, especially intercultural competence. Therefore, he proposes a modified model by maintaining the four constituents but transforming the two categories into *dispositions for global education* and *professional purpose and relationships*. The actual differences of the two models lie not only in the categories but also in the interaction of the constituents. While there is a clear-cut division among the constituents of the two categories in Wilson's model, in Tambyah's model, there is no border but, instead, an overlap

of the two constituents, substantive knowledge and personal growth. There is clear evidence that Tambyah's model not only demonstrates a more dynamic relationship but also a wide scope of interaction of the two constituents, one of which is substantive knowledge. As Tambyah (2018) explained,

> "Dispositions for global education refers to increased knowledge of cultures, acknowledging and addressing stereotypes and personal growth in accepting oneself and others. It is broader than Wilson's focus on 'gaining a global perspective', describing a reflective, global mentality incorporating knowledge of self, other cultures and social justice. Professional purpose and relationships interrelate 'new' cultural knowledge, building interpersonal relationships, maturity and independence with renewed purpose for teaching." (p.4)

In short, intercultural knowledge assumes a more powerful role in Tambyah's model than in Wilson's as the scope of its impacts extends to both self-awareness and interpersonal connections, thus creating personal professional and cultural growth.

"Similar but different" settings

Tambyah (2018) first proposed the concept of "same but different" international practicum settings. The study conducted by Tambyah revealed the different meanings of the "same but different" phenomenon. The clearest example is the study participants' use of the same language. Although their practicum happened in the USA where the Australian participants shared the similar language, the findings indicated that unexpected language differences that emerged in their cross-cultural experiences sensitized them to language diversity. The researcher reported the participants' issue of "semi-foreign culture" (p.11), which refers to specific situations where the teacher participants struggled with some misunderstandings in spite of their shared language. The same is true for culture as Tambyah (2018) claimed,

> "The experience of culture in "similar but different" settings raised opportunities and obstacles to intercultural understanding. While the international practicum widened participants' cultural experience of important events and traditions, there were notable contradictions in their experience of food which challenged both an emerging disposition for global education and revitalized professional purpose" (p.13).

The results of Tambyah's study supported those of Cushner (2009), who reported unexpected barriers student teachers faced despite the similarity of language and affirmed that the same language context can result in both advantages and disadvantages. In line with the study results of Cushner's (2009) study, Marx and Moss' (2011) study pointed out that the shared language, though facilitating easy communication, may make teacher education students avoid

148

facing substantive cultural dissonances and, as a consequence, deprived them of intercultural development.

It is evident that Tambyah's proper emphasis on the importance of the concept of "same but different" international practicum settings is significant for not only international practicum design and preparation but also for cross-cultural and intercultural research in terms of explorations of nuanced features of data.

Supervisors' and coordinators' perceptions of intercultural knowledge

Aspects of intercultural knowledge in international practicum perceived by supervisors or coordinators are scarcely found in the literature. It is more scarce when these aspects are reflected on and reported by the supervisor or coordinator him/herself. One such rare article was published by Gilliland (2015). As an international practicum supervisor, the author described her reflection on its challenges and benefits from her cultural perspective, and then provided various recommendations regarding the preparation of an international practicum. The first aspect the writer emphasized was the one of cultural immersion. According to the author, the key to immersion was making preservice teachers' existing assumptions relevant the those of local students. As she indicated, "Immersion in Thai culture also meant the [preservice] teachers had to learn how to adapt their assumptions about teaching and lesson planning to a different set of student expectations" (p.206). Another aspect to which priority was given was building a community comprising pre-service teachers and supervisor to provide self-support for the sake of easing the cultural adaptation to a new culture. As the author explicated,

> "Being far from home requires everyone – teachers and supervisors – to form a new community supporting each other and to lower the professor-student boundaries they may have had before."

Or

> "An international practicum means being away from home and familiar comforts, so teachers need to find community with each other." (p.208).

From this perspective, the author highlighted the importance of predeparture preparation made not only by the home institution but also by the host one. As she pointed out,

> "Besides pedagogical issues common to all practicum courses, the international setting means that teachers will have to develop an understanding of a new culture and how they fit personally into that culture" (pp.207–208).

Another article was written by Parr (2012) as a teacher educator and coordinator of an international practicum for Australian preservice teachers in South Africa. The article reflected

his view of international practicum as "border crossing work" (p.98), which comprised both benefits and risks. The writer confirmed that an international practicum as a cross-cultural experience offers preservice teachers and teacher educators various opportunities not just to deepen their cultural awareness but to transform them as they are engaged in it through service learning. However, he also highlighted its potential risks of various types, social, cultural, ethical, professional and administrative. According to the writer, experiencing risks means embarking on a variety of worlds of tensions that require great efforts on the part of participants. Parr (2012) explained the concept of experiencing an international practicum as "living the contradictions" (p.103) as follows:

"By this I mean on the one hand getting by, enduring or fitting in with these contradictions, and on the other hand responding pro-actively responding pro-actively to a range of contradictory discourses. In this way, the experience becomes one of active participation in 'mutually contradictory worlds of experience…" (p.103).

In short, international practicums as seen by these two writers are valuable border-crossing educational experiences where preservice students are given chances to be immersed in cross-cultural experience, experiencing tensions of different kinds, geographic, economic, cultural, political, disciplinary or all of these, and transformative moments through complying with diverse standards.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the framework constructed by Tambyah (2018) to aid in the data interpretation and discussion. The reason for this choice is that this framework would help examine cross-cultural experiences from the intercultural perspective in a more interactive and scrutinized way than in Wilson's model.

Research Methodology

Participants

The participants recruited for this study were Thai lecturers and administrators from 4 different host universities who belonged to the partnership network with the home institution, the University of Foreign Languages, Hue University. They included 4 university lecturers who acted as practicum supervisors and other 3 university lecturers who acted as both practicum coordinators and supervisors. One administrator worked as a practicum coordinator.

All the practicum supervisors had extensive experience in tertiary instruction, ranging from 5 to 9 years. All of them had deep understandings of the practicum programs and of Vietnamese students as they were all involved in the program for more or less 2 years.

Table 1: Demographic description of supervisors' and coordinators' instructional, coordinating and internship experience

Participants	Instructional experience	Coordinating experience	Internship/ practicum experience
1. Supervisor A	6 yrs	N/A	2 yrs
2. Supervisor Y	9 yrs	N/A	4 yrs
3. Supervisor O	17 yrs	N/A	2 yrs
4. Supervisor P	8 yrs	N/A	1 yr.
5. Coordinator E	N/A	6 yrs	2
6. Coordinator K	N/A	7 yrs	2 yrs
7. Supervisor & coordinator M	5 yrs	N/A	2 yrs
8. Supervisor & coordinator N	5 yrs	N/A	2 yrs
9. Supervisor & coordinator J		N/A	3 yrs

As student teachers' placements were based mainly on university campus, not secondary schools, there were no cooperating teachers and all the host university staff involved were regarded as supervisors performing all the duties of cooperating teachers. Furthermore, the host university staff acted on behalf of the home university staff as the home university did not send their supervisors to the host university to reduce the cost of the international practicum.

Data Collection

The data was collected mainly through in-depth interviews. Each of the semi-structured interviews lasted for 45 minutes. Most of the interview questions were open-ended as this type of question is believed to generate rich and insightful data. All of the interview questions aimed to focus on their evaluation of preservice teachers or interns and also of the practice of supervising or coordinating the practice as well as their suggestions for prospective practicums. All the interviews were conducted face-to-face and digitally recorded following the completion of the program designated for the 2019 cohort of teachers and interns.

Data Analysis

The data processing approach was chiefly data-driven. According to Saldana (2016), the whole process underwent two consecutive cycles: coding examples and pattern coding. For the first cycle, the main method used was descriptive coding where a summary was assigned to a word or a phrase or a passage. For the second cycle, generated codes were grouped to form patterns or themes. The following are some examples of codes and themes used in the study:

Table 1: Sample codes and themes

Themes	Codes
[1] Ensuring a satisfying stay	- Achieving a satisfying stay - Maintaining survival
[2] Fulfilling duties	- Performing Teaching Assistant - Dealing with students - Dealing with office duties
[3] Exploring culture [as it is]	- Developing intercultural understanding
[4] Achieving readiness	- Getting prepared
[5] Training of culture	- Training in terms of culture - Training in terms of language
[6] Immersing in cross-cultural experiences	- Participating in extracurricular activities - Engaging supervisors' projects - Networking with buddy system

Finally, all of these themes were then arranged logically to construct the frame for the final report.

3.   Findings and discussions

The analysis of the interview data generated six different themes: (1) ensuring a satisfying stay, (2) fulfilling duties, (3) exploring culture, (4) achieving readiness, (5) training in language and culture, and (6) immersing in cross-cultural experiences. The first four themes were regarded as responses to the first goal, supervisors' and coordinators' perceptions of intercultural understandings, and the two last themes were considered as answers to the second goal of the study, their perceptions of different pathways to developing intercultural knowledge.

Supervisors' and Coordinators' Perceptions of Intercultural Knowledge

Theme One: Ensuring a satisfying stay

On the basis of his internship supervising experience, supervisor P pointed out different conditions for warranting a satisfactory stay when preservice teachers or interns were available on Thai campus for their practicum.

"I think maybe the cultures of Vietnam and Thailand are not different, they learn more about the Thai culture, gain more knowledge to be here, they can stay here happily and they can enjoy with my students because they are active…"

"…They can apply many activities to stay with happily in the campus and they're having fun in the classroom with Thai students. They are able to control the class with their understanding of different cultures."

Tambyah's (2018) concept of 'similar but different' and Ting-Toomey's (1999) antecedent factors of intercultural adaptation can help interpret and explain what the supervisor's advice means. The "similar but different" features from Tambyah's (2018) perspective were clearly manifested in what supervisor P explained about the distance between the two cultures, Thai and Vietnamese. From his assumption, Vietnamese and Thai cultures may be more or less similar (*"not different"*) if they are approached from a system-level perspective. However, when it comes to individual and interpersonal levels *("in the classroom", "with Thai students", "different cultures")*, there may be cultural dissonances. According to Ting-Toomey (1999)'s intercultural theory, one of the system-level factors such as cultural distance between the culture of newcomers and that of the host has a strong effect on the newcomers' adaptation. The larger the cultural distance is, the more efforts and resources student teachers will need to have so as to bridge the different gaps. Besides, such individual-level factors as newcomers' expectations or cultural knowledge and interaction-based knowledge (i.e. value-based system or contextual norms) are considered "critical in the adaptation process" (Ting-Toomey, 1999, p.240). Apart from these, the interpersonal-level factors such as students' personal and social networks or mediated networks can contribute to the cultural adjustment process. As explicated by Ting-Toomey, the personal and social network which refers to a variety of resources, affective (e. g. exchange of supportive messages), instrumental (e.g. practical help) and informational (e.g. knowledge sharing and keeping informed) will enable student teachers to better cope with emergent issues in their cultural adaptation.

On the basis of such distinctions, supervisor P recommended the two levels of developing cultural knowledge for the purpose of achieving a satisfactory stay. At one level, the supervisor emphasized either "*learning **more** about Thai culture*" or "*gaining **more** knowledge to be here*".

This level can be interpreted as the system one where the factor of cultural distance between Vietnamese and Thai cultures is regarded as not being large. Similar cultural features would facilitate preservice teachers or interns in learning more deeply and extensively about the host culture. At another level, the lecturer emphasized the "*understanding of different cultures*". This level can be considered as either individual or interpersonal one where pre-service teachers or interns may face unexpected cultural dissonances due to their lack of understanding contextual norms, their shortage of support and assistance or limited contact and social network. These findings regarding these two levels can be illustrated by those from different studies of impacts of Thai culture. Nicholls and Apiwattanakorn (2015) pointed out that there are five major

values as evident markers of Thai culture that can affect Thai classroom instructional practice. Manifested in the form of orientation, these markers include *ego, grateful relationship, smooth interpersonal relationship, flexibility*, and *education and competence*. Ego orientation can be found in such features as face, self-esteem, and truth avoidance. Grateful relationships can be detected in terms of loyalty or gratitude. Smooth interpersonal relationships can be characterized by such features as harmony, and avoidance of criticism. Flexibility can be understood as tolerance. And education and competence are manifested in levels of education as social status or respect. In addition, Gilliland (2015) and Gunawan (2015) raised the importance of the concept of *sanuk* which may affect Thai classrooms and also Thai people's social interactions. The concept, which means having fun, may lead to the exclusion of serious discussions in the classroom as they can be regarded as causing possible tension, and the inclusion of fun instructional methods as they may be considered effective for Thai students. From these illustrations, I would argue that on the system level, all these major markers representative of Thai culture could also be shared by Vietnamese student teachers who have shared all the Oriental values. I would also argue that on the individual level, they may find the concept of *sanuk* unexpected and different because of their possible lack of knowledge of how the orientation penetrates into Thai classrooms and realizes itself and impacts classroom practice as a norm.

Apart from the cultural factors, language, whether it is different, is also mentioned. In the language different setting, an encouraged solution can be to learn Thai language, as supervisor P suggested:

> *"If they know some Thai words, it will be easier for them to be here. Basic Thai, for example to buy something, ask for price. And because Thai students do not know Vietnamese and they do not speak English good enough."*

Sharing the same view, supervisor and coordinator M from the same university confirmed:

> *"Firstly, it should be Thai language, they have to know some Thai language for survival and Thai culture. Then, there are other classroom activities, the main activities."*

Both of the supervisors emphasized the importance of learning Thai as a foreign language since the two cultures don't share the same language. Regarding the lack of the language similarity, Cusher (2009) pointed out the problem of struggling with communication. The researcher also indicated that when the languages are different between the host and home cultures, student teachers would need much more time to develop trust and mutual understanding that are considered as a necessary basis for entering discussions about more sensitive issues. Supporting Cushner's viewpoint, Fantini (2021) emphasized that the lack of host language proficiency would cause serious difficulty in understanding and accessing the host

culture. The researcher claimed that language together with culture as a lingua-culture which acts as a tool of mediation for all our assumptions and behaviors would prevent us from seeing beyond our native lingua-culture. However, as the researcher confirmed, knowing another language would facilitate the development of intercultural competence, by which another lingua-culture can be explored. As Fantini (2021) pointed out, "if entering a second lingua-culture opens new possibilities, entering a third or more lingua-cultures offers a richer experience, lessening the chance of polarizing the world through comparison of only two modes" (p.15).

Theme Two: Fulfilling duties

As previously analyzed, intercultural knowledge has become significant for preservice teachers when it comes to classroom teaching practice. As coordinator K remarked:

"Sure, because they came to teach children or Thai students and intercultural communication was important, it was better if you know about other people, you know what they think, and then you come to teach them."

With such a comment, the coordinator raised two major issues necessary for the fulfilment of their duties. One is the need for trainee teachers to understand their students. "*What they think…*" may not be limited to their assumptions but may be open to their values, attitudes, and their beliefs. The problem with all these shared ideas is that all of them are so deeply embedded in the school or class community that they operate unconsciously and often are taken for granted. Another issue is "*…intercultural communication…*", which would be a real challenge for trainee teachers because they have to satisfy at least two conditions for effective intercultural communication as previously discussed. The first one is language, which is a necessary condition; the second one is intercultural knowledge, which is a sufficient condition. However, whether or not all these two issues, understanding their assumptions, beliefs and values, and implementing intercultural communication, can be addressed properly may depend on one factor - time. Being well aware of the factor, supervisor Y expressed her concern:

"I think it is the only challenge for the students because they teach students in different cultures. The previous mindset in Vietnamese culture, and they have to adjust in a couple of weeks, it may be little bit short for them to adjust and accept."

The supervisor recognized exactly what the cultural dissonance is: "*the previous mindset in Vietnamese culture*", and also what they need to do to cope with the difference: "*they have to adjust*". However, the real challenge lies in the fact that trainee teachers' engagement with the difference would be a transformative process which would require a certain amount of time to take effect. For a short-term overseas practicum, in this case, a 4-week program, the process would become a huge pressure for trainee teachers. As Lash, Akpovo and Cushner (2020)

explained, this adjustment process "does not happen quickly or naturally", and "this change will take time and is more developmental or evolutionary in nature than it is revolutionary" (p.18). Actually, time seems to be an impactful factor in the intercultural adaptation process. Dwyer (2004) affirmed that the longer the overseas study experience, the better it would be. His study results indicated that for a six-month duration, students would be able to achieve essential learning outcomes personally, academically, professionally as well as interculturally. Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, and Hubbard (2006) confirmed that a 4-week non-language-based program could improve overall intercultural sensitivity. Cushner and Karim (2004, cited in Cushner, 2009) claimed that although qualitative and quantitative studies produced conflicting findings about the impact of short-term and long-term programs, the former, rather than the latter, seems to be insufficient for psychosocial growth. All these study results have strongly confirmed the deep concern expressed by the supervisor.

For interns, the internship duties to be performed seem to be different, as coordinator E described:

"*And also, have the company visit or factory visit to let them know the industry in Thailand is growing, let them know the business culture here, how the people come to you, how people produce to you, how they do presentation, I think many things to learn, not only for them just going to observe, they have many details, small things they can learn. It depends on the students, some may get this point, some others may get another point. This is what we want them to know.*"

The short description revealed three important duties of an intern: taking part in the business culture, understanding the culture, and performing professional duties. It also indicated all the components of a business culture, including specific activities (company or factory visits), its unique business operations ("*how the people come to you*", "*how they produce*", "*how they do presentation*"), and its typical duties ("*learn*", "*observe*", "*get this point*", "*depend on students*"). All these activities, operations and duties would constitute the substantive knowledge interns need to develop professionally. In other words, when interns carry out such activities, perform such operations or implement such duties, they acquire the substantive knowledge required by the internship, including intercultural knowledge.

It is evident in this theme that in an international context, there seem to be close cultural and professional connections. Tambyah explained, "acculturation experiences through international field experience provide unique opportunity to increase professional growth" (p. 3). Sharing the same viewpoint, Hinze and Fitzsimmons (2013) claimed, "Student teaching placements in international destinations have been found to result in personal and professional growth greater than one might expect in a traditional domestic student teaching placement" (p.43).

Theme Three: Exploring Culture

Both Wilson's and Tambyah's models clearly show that professional and cultural knowledge are intertwined but separable. The four elements in the two models are relatively independent of each other. Regarding this theme, supervisor O explicated:

*"They learn some cultural exchange by participating in some excursions provided by the faculty of Liberal Arts. So **it is not just about academic but also cultural learning as well**."*

In this case, learning culture is thought as an objective on its own. Actually the viewpoint of cultural knowledge as a type of understanding on its own does not exclude that of cultural and professional knowledge as integrated one. It is clear from the business field previously analyzed that professional operations, activities and duties operationalize in a definite climate and through definite assumptions, values and beliefs. Therefore, cultural and professional knowledge are not exclusive but, instead, complementary to each other. Supporting the opinion of supervisor O, coordinator E claimed that,

*"**We also have something about the culture**. We have traditional Thai clothes wearing, to introduce Thai traditional clothes and cooking class, how to cook Thai food, and also taking pictures session, wearing Thai stuff, Thai dress … to give them good memories in Thailand."*

Although these cultural activities occur on their own, they all contribute to the development of assumptions, values, and beliefs. This confirmed the interplay between Wilson' two elements, substantive knowledge and perpetual understanding. Increased substantive knowledge would certainly lead to heightened perceptual understanding which would then impact personal growth and interpersonal relationships.

The supervisor's and coordinator's emphasis on the role of cultural learning is supported by the results of various studies. Marx and Moss (2012) indicated that cultural learning through involvement in a foreign cultural context can help preservice teachers or interns experience cultural differences, thus becoming cultural outsiders or others who can be afforded to develop intercultural sensitivity. Cushner (2009) found that increase in cultural knowledge not only helps student teachers and interns to challenge their perspectives of the world, but also assists them to reflect on their own cultures from a new and different perspective. Sharing this viewpoint, Fantini (2021) confirmed that expanded cultural understanding enables international experience students to change their perspectives from being intercultural to intracultural. As Fantini (2021) explained, "When exploring "otherness", one learns to understand and appreciate one's own heritage even more. […] In other words, it is difficult to have keen awareness of the milieu on has been immersed in from birth if one has never been outside of that milieu" (pp.11-12).

Theme Four: Achieving Readiness

The analyzed data of the three previous themes show the supervisors' and coordinators' perceptions of various challenges trainee teachers and interns would face in international practicum. These perceptions also highlight the need to qualify preservice teachers for a teaching practicum and interns for an internship. Being aware of such a preparation for the purpose of qualification, supervisor O claimed:

*"And because of the different cultures as well. If they have more time, we would like to have kind of training all cultural exchanges and also language, basic Thai, so that the students will be **more ready** to start their own practicum, even inside the university or outside to teach students at different schools."*

By suggesting making students "***more ready***", the supervisor raised a very important issue: intercultural readiness. The state of readiness is significant for the uptake of tasks of any type in any field. Therefore, determining the extent of readiness is regarded as a necessity. Brinkman and Weerdenburg (2014) proposed the concept of intercultural readiness which constitutes four key components: intercultural sensitivity, intercultural communication, building commitment, and managing uncertainty. Intercultural sensitivity refers to the extent to which people pay attention to others' backgrounds, needs and perspectives. Intercultural communication refers to the extent to which people notice how they communicate with other people from other cultures. Constructing commitment indicates the degree to which people impact their social environment. Handling uncertainty clarifies the degree to which people can see the complexity of culturally diverse environments.

It can be interpreted based on the concept that the kind of training the supervisor expressed through "*intercultural exchange*" would involve preservice teachers or interns in preparing themselves to be sensitive to other cultures so that they can understand and communicate well to people from other cultures on the basis of their commitment and understandings of culturally diverse nuances. Therefore, to make preservice teachers or interns be really ready for their teaching practicum or internship, training sessions should permeate all four components of the intercultural readiness.

Supervisors' and coordinators' perceptions of pathways to developing intercultural knowledge

Theme Five: Training as a pathway

Based on their own practicum supervising and internship coordinating experience, supervisors and coordinators suggested different pathways to developing intercultural knowledge for preservice teachers. The following is what they put forward:

158

"From my own perspective, because we have been working with international students for 4 or 5 years, the first thing I would recommend is that maybe we need to offer some cultural sessions for the students, which is very important, even though they share the same thing that we need one or two hours, or half of a day to do that. The second one is that the language for communication, the Thai language for communication."

(Supervisor O)

"Actually, I am not sure it meets their needs or not. But when they came here to learn more about Thai culture, Thai education, I think they should learn these things."

(Supervisor and coordinator J)

As previously presented in Theme One, the concept of "same but different" proposed by Tambyah (2008) acts as a filter to screen the amount of culture and language they need to acquire for a satisfactory stay in Thailand. In terms of culture, the amount was just "*learn **more** about Thai culture*" while in terms of language it was just "*basic Thai*". Therefore what these two supervisors suggested is quite appropriate for a short-term practicum, "*one or two hours, or half of a day to do that*". Besides, supervisor O suggested how learning Thai culture could be organized. It was in the form of "*cultural sessions*". Although the suggestion did not indicate how a session can be arranged, it was relevant in comparison with the suggested amount of time allocated.

For interns, the suggested pathways seemed to be different. As coordinator K put forward,

"Actually, for the main part, it will be the workshop because it was related to their study and practicum, but for the other, I didn't expect them to join, I didn't put forth them to join, but they really like joining the activities, especially intercultural communication, it opened their mind and exchange cultural and academic aspects with Thai students. And I think it supported them to know more about other culture, and sometimes when we had international event, they could make new international friends, new people and we had Candle Festival they could see how the community was like."

As clearly seen from the description, the coordinator proposed two different ways of organization. One is "*workshop*", which is part of the practicum, and the other is "*activities*" or "*events*", which are closely associated with intercultural communication. It is evident from Wilson's model that the dynamic interaction of the four elements can help interpret the deep significance of the coordinator's suggestion. By taking part in the different forms of organization, interns can expand their substantive knowledge (i.e. "*know more about other culture*" and "*see how the community was like*"). As a result of their increased substantive knowledge, their perceptual understanding is heightened , which naturally results in personal growth (i.e. "*open their mind*").

At the same time, their interpersonal relationships were also extended (i.e. "*make new international friends, new people*").

This finding is consistent with the result of the study by Stachowski and Sparks (2007) who suggested the need to integrate cultural learning into international field experiences in the form of school and community activities as a learning outcome so as to develop students teachers' awareness of and sensitivity to cultural and national dissonances. Actually this suggestion echoed the viewpoint of Zeichner (1996) which pointed out the failure of the professional preparation of pre-service teachers' full roles due to the "narrow focus of most practicums on the classroom and the lack of attention to school and community contexts" (p.125).

In short, different forms of training organization and their significance were well perceived by these supervisors and coordinators.

Theme Six: Immersion as an alternative

The analyzed data showed three different alternatives to developing intercultural knowledge: (1) extracurricular activities, (2) supervisors' projects, and (3) buddy system. According to the supervisors and coordinators, each of the alternatives had its own way to contribute to the development of intercultural knowledge. First, extracurricular activities, as supervisor Y affirmed, are believed to impact classroom learning. However, for Vietnamese students, these activities were adjusted so that they could connect with outside activities which reflected local cultures. Therefore, it is clear that engaging with various extracurricular activities would be a form of practicing different types of cultures, school and local plus traditional. In other words, if well organized, these activities could actualize the acquisition of both substantive knowledge and professional growth. As supervisor Y and explained,

> *"I can break the activities into two types: the activities organized by the organizations outside my program, I mean, during this time, there are a lot of extracurricular activities and some students told me there are a lot of activities, sometimes we missed some classes and I said "It is a part of learning" because Thai students when they study on campus, we tend to believe that doing extracurricular activities would help their learning apart from activities provided in class. Here they have to adjust a little bit. For example, during the Candle Festival, we let them join activities by organizations outside."*

This finding is in accordance with the result of the study by Starchowski and Sparks (2007) who claimed,

> *"…the Overseas Project requires far more than merely completing a student teaching assignment abroad. Project participants are challenged to explore their placement communities beyond the boundaries of their schools and homestay hosts, to meet diverse people and become involved in local*

activities and events, and to reflect—through structured reports— on these experiences, seeking meaning and new insights that broaden their perspectives on how others live, think, and do…" (p.119).

The study result also supports the view of Chacko and Lin (2015), who confirmed the need for teacher education programs to "find ways to help teacher candidates get involved in their local communities so that they get to live in the local culture and traditions of the host country" (p.53). The finding also echoes the suggestion of Yuen and Grossman (2009) which emphasized the need to introduce cultural immersion programs or simulations where student teachers would be made accessible to relevant information about different aspects of different cultural groups and also to opportunities to learn with the people from other cultural cultures.

Different from extracurricular activities which were collective, engaging supervisor's project was absolutely individual, depending on the supervisor's enthusiasm and arrangement. However, regardless of their personal essence, students' involvement in the project would generate positive effects. Heightened perceptual understanding could be achieved both affectively and cognitively. As supervisor and coordinator N confirmed:

"When they had some free time, if they didn't go to the classroom or sit in other classroom, I invited them to my activity as well.

Last year there were so many activities happening in U B, and I joined the Committee, so I asked them if I would like to go, to see what we did at that time. The activities are more like tourism project, they need to give the speech or presentation in front of other schools. So they can actually get the feelings of what people are doing, they broadened their mind."

Finally, joining the buddy system was a worthwhile effort as this system is a distinctive feature of the Thai innovated education system. As coordinator K describes how the system worked:

"I think it is like their friends. They help them how to survive in a new place if abroad. Even Thai or ASEAN but new things challenge them all the time. In Thailand, we have kind of friend class, but I know in Vietnam sometimes classmates, it was not like in Thai university or school. They come, have lunch together, dinner together, talk, group work, pair work. They got some ideas of how to be friends, they are happy to talk to them and they were happy to stay here or do anything. For buddy, I think it's good. When we go abroad, it is difficult to talk or discuss in the whole group, you may like to talk to just some people, start communication, start using English too. Thai buddies can practice English and Vietnamese students too. I think it support their learning too."

As the system operates informally, the coordinator believes foreign students would benefit from the system, especially for achieving a satisfying stay on campus. As supervisor and coordinator N pointed out:

> *"They did not have much misunderstanding. They tried to communicate. It is good for my students because they can learn English more from your students. And your students learned how to be flexible with the culture."*

The findings about the buddy system supported the two important concepts of *a cultural translator* and *intercultural guide* proposed by Marx and Moss (2012). According to these researchers, a cultural translator helps newcomers see and understand cultural differences they may experience but fail to explain by using their own culturally based assumptions. And an intercultural guide provides newcomers with assistance in creating a favorable environment for their exploration of cultural dissonances through guidance in the comparison and contrasts of as well as reflection on different cultural perspectives that are vital to newcomers' intercultural growth. As Marx and Moss (2012) explained, "Such an environment must attend to students' affective, thoughts and feelings, and take risks as they seek to understand cultural contexts" (p.44). Actually, Thai buddies work as both cultural translators and intercultural guides for Vietnamese preservice teachers and interns because immersing in cross-cultural communication can be perceived to be beneficial for both Thai and Vietnamese students linguistically and culturally. In such international settings, linguistic exchange could definitely lead to perceptual change in which flexibility would be one result. Emphasizing the role of an international context in facilitating openness and flexibility, coordinator K commented:

> *"If you want to increase the quality, we should put them into international environment. They can express their own culture as well, also accept other people's culture, so from there, we can learn from each other, we can grow together and the quality will be much better. Their minds and brain will be bright as well."*

These two comments affirmed a transformative change that can occur in the international setting. Through language as an effective communicative tool, substantive knowledge of cultural differences is acquired and increased, leading to changes in their perceptual understandings from being ethnocentric to being ethno-relative. These above comments echoed an adjustment process Bennette (1993) called "perceptual experience of difference" which consists of six different stages placed on a continuum starting from ethnocentric orientation and ending in ethno-relative orientation. The ethnocentric stages begins with denial that refers to the state where a person considers his/her outlook as central. The next stage is defense where a person regards his/her view as superior in spite of his/her understanding of cultural differences; and the last stage of this orientation is minimalization in which a person tries to minimize differences but, at the same

time, noticing differences. The ethno-relative stages starts with acceptance where a person accepts his/her views as one of the many different ones. The next stage is adaptation in which a person interacts with others in culturally appropriate ways. And the last stage in this process is integration where a person integrate him/herself with others from a different culture. This change process is regarded by Lash et al. (2020) as one of "bloodshed, oppression or genocide" (p.18). And an attempt to shift conception from ethnocentrism to ethno-relativism requires preservice teachers "to rise above traditional ethnocentrism and explore new relationships across cultural boundaries" (p.18). This conceptual change, as Lash et al. (2020) indicated, would, therefore, take not only time but also pro-active and collective efforts of individual preservice teachers under the guidance of knowledgeable teacher educations.

As a result, personal growth culminates in such forms as flexibility and open-mindedness. This finding is consistent with that of the study conducted by Rios, Montecinos and van Olphen (2007) which confirmed that powerful cultural immersion experiences forced preservice teachers to be flexible and creative while they need to be open-minded at the same time. Likewise, this study result is also in line with that of the study carried out by Jacob, Swensen, Hite, Erickson and Tuttle (2010) which found that student teachers identified cultural sensitivity and flexibility as significant personal indicators of a successful international teaching practicum. This finding also supports the result of Robinson and Foran's (2017) study that emphasized the role of an international context which demanded and also afforded the formation of flexibility as a professional attribute.

4.   Conclusions and implication

The previous theme-based analysis has showed the different aspects of intercultural knowledge perceived by Thai university lecturers and administrators who work as international practicum supervisors and coordinators. These aspects can be summarized as follows:

The first aspect of intercultural knowledge is the awareness of similarities and differences between the home and host cultures at both system and individual levels. For the Vietnamese and Thai cultures where there may be various shared cultural features, the differences on the system level may not be as many as those at the individual one. However, such awareness of cultural assonances and dissonances is not enough as adequate intercultural knowledge includes that of the host language. Both cultural knowledge and host language proficiency would be necessary and sufficient conditions for the successful implementation of intercultural communication.

The second one is the connection between the development of intercultural knowledge and the personal and professional growth of preservice teachers or interns. In international practicum settings, the interplay between these elements seems to be much stronger than in traditional and domestic settings.

The third is the important role of cultural learning on its own. In other cultural settings like international internships, increased substantive knowledge of the host culture would develop not only intercultural sensitivity but also intracultural competencies. Furthermore, the preparation of cultural knowledge and host language proficiency for preservice teachers and interns would generate intercultural readiness for interns and preservice teachers.

The final aspect is the importance of intercultural training and immersion activities. Training can be in the form of a basic host language course or short cultural sessions organized by both host and home universities. Besides, immersion activities can include the organization of extracurricular activities or the involvement in supervisors' projects and the use of the buddy system.

International practicum supervisors' and coordinators' perceptions of the intercultural knowledge suggest three important implications for international practicum planning and implementation. First, both home and host universities need to pay attention to the careful preparation of preservice teachers and interns so that they can be interculturally ready for international settings. Host universities also need to provide substantial support so that student teachers and interns can be given opportunities to develop intercultural sensitivity, an important factor for the development of intercultural knowledge. Second, proper attention needs to be given to the development of basic host language proficiency so that interns or preservice teachers can be prepared to make intercultural communication possible. And finally, the careful organization and significant support of home and host universities would be useless unless preservice teachers and interns make great and real efforts to be ready to face all types of challenges they will encounter in overseas practicums and, more importantly, to move "beyond educational tourism" (Quezada, 2017, p.464).

REFERENCES

1. Anderson, P.H., Lawton, L., Rexeisen, R.J., & Hubbard, A.C. (2006). Short-term Study Abroad and Intercultural Sensitivity: A Pilot Study. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 30*, 457-469.

2. Ateşkan, A. (2016). Pre-service teachers' cultural and teaching experiences

abroad. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, *42*(2), 135-148.

3. Bennett, J. M. (1993). Toward Ethnorelativism: A Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity. In R. M. Paige (Ed.), *Education for the Intercultural Experience* (pp. 21-71). Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.

4. Brinkman, U. & van Weerdenburg, O. (2014). *Intercultural Readiness: Four Competences for Working across Cultures.* London: Palgrave MacMillan

5. Chacko, J. B., & Lin, M. (2015). Teacher preparation for the global stage: International student teaching. *FIRE: Forum for International Research in Education*, *2* (2), 41– 56.

6. Chan, J. and Parr, G. (2012). *Intercultural teacher education: challenges and ethical dilemmas on an international practicum*. Paper presented at the international conference of Australian Association for Research in Education, at Sydney University, Sydney.

7. Çiftçi, E., & Karaman, A. (2019). Short-Term International Experiences in Language Teacher Education: A Qualitative Meta-Synthesis. Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 44(1). http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2018v44n1.6

8. Cushner, K.H. (2014). Strategies for enhancing intercultural competence across the teacher education curriculum. In S. Sharma, J. Phillion, J. Rahatzad, H.L.Sasser, *Internationalizing Teacher Education for Social Practice: Theory, Research, and Practice* (pp.139-162).Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

9. Cushner, K.H. (2007). The Role of Experience in the Making of Internationally-Minded Teachers. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, *34*, 27-39.

10. Cushner, K. (2009). The role of study abroad in preparing globally responsible teachers. In *The handbook of practice and research in study abroad* (pp. 173-191). Routledge.

11. Cushner, K. & Chang, S.C. (2015). Developing intercultural competence through overseas student teaching: checking our assumptions, *Intercultural Education*, *26*(3), 165-178, DOI: 10.1080/14675986.2015.1040326

12. Dwyer, M. M. (2004). More is better: The impact of study abroad program duration. *Frontiers: The interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, *10*(1), 151-164.

13. Fantini, Alvino E. (2021). Intercultural Communicative Competence: A Necessary Ability for All. *World Learning Publications*, 4. https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/worldlearning_publications/4

14. Gilliland, B. (2015). Benefits and Challenges of Supervising an International

Practicum. *CATESOL Journal*, *27*(2), 201-209.

15.   Gunawan, J. (2016). Understanding culture in higher education in Thailand. *Education for health (Abingdon, England)*, *29*(2), 160–161. https://doi.org/10.4103/1357-6283.188783

16.   Hinze, J.S., & Fitzsimmons, P. (2013). Forms, Foci and Forces: The Need for Overseas Pre-Service Teacher Professional Experiences. *Teach Journal of Christian Education, 7*(8),

17.   Jacob, W.J., Swensen, D.L, Hite, J.M., Erickson, L.B., Tuttle, M. (2010). Preservice teachers preparation in international contexts: A case study examination of the international student teacher program. *Excellence in Education*, 1, 46-56.

18.   Kabilan, M.K. (2013). A phenomenological study of an international teaching practicum: Pre-service teachers' experiences of professional development. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *36*, 198-209.

19.   Lash, M.J., Akpovo, M.S., & Cushner, K.H. (2020). Developing the intercultural competence of early childhood preservice teachers: preparing teachers for culturally diverse classrooms. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 1-22.

20.   Le, Van Canh (2014). Great expectations: the TESOL practicum as professional learning experience. *TESOL Journal*, *5*(2), 199-224.

21.   Major, J., & Santoro, N. (2016). Supervising an international teaching practicum: Building partnerships in postcolonial contexts. *Oxford Review of Education*, 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2016.1195734

22.   Marx, H., & Moss, D. M. (2011). Please mind the culture gap: Intercultural development during a teacher education study abroad program. *Journal of teacher education*, *62*(1), 35-47.

23.   Nicholls, P., & Apiwattanakorn, P. (2015). Thailand: Where Culture and the Classroom Collide. The New English Teacher, *9*(1).1-14.

24.   Parr, G. (2012). Leading an international teaching practicum: negotiating tensions in a site of border pedagogy. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 40:2, 97-109, DOI: 10.1080/1359866X.2012.669824

25.   Quezada, R., L. (2004). "Beyond educational tourism:" Lessons learned while student teaching abroad. *International Education Journal*, *5*(4), 458-465.

26.   Sahin, M. (2008). Cross-cultural experience in preservice teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education: An International Journal of Research and Studies, 24*(7), 1777-1790.

27. Rios, F., Montecinos, C. & van Olphen, M. (2007). Lessons learned from a collaborative self-study in international teacher education: "Visiones, Preguntas, y Desafios". *Teacher Education Quarterly*, *34*(1), 57-74.

28. Robinson, D.B. & Foran, A. (2017). New Scotland to (old) Scotland: Lessons learned from an international student teacher practicum. *Scottish Educational Review*, *49*(2), 56-71.

29. Saldana, J. (2016). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (Third edition). London, UK: Sage.

30. Soboleva, A. V., & Obdalova, O. A. (2015). Cognitive readiness for intercultural communication as an essential component of intercultural competence. Language and Culture, *1*(5), 55–62. https://doi.org/10.17223/24109266/5/7

31. Stachowski, L.L., & Sparks, T. (2007). Thirty Years and 2,000 Student Teachers Later: An Overseas Student Teaching Project That Is Popular, Successful, and Replicable. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 34*, 115-132.

32. Tambyah, M.M. (2018). Intercultural understanding through a 'similar but different' international teaching practicum. *Teaching Education, 30*, 105 - 122.

33. Ting-Toomey, S. (1999). *Communicating across Cultures*. New York: The Guilford Press.

34. Wikan, G., & Klein, J. (2017). Can International Practicum Foster Intercultural Competence Among Student Teachers?. *Journal of the European Teacher Education Network*, *12*, 95-104.

35. Wilson, A. H. (1993). Conversation Partners: Helping Students Gain a Global Perspective through Cross-Cultural Experiences. *Theory Into Practice*, *32*(1), 21–26. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1476478

36. Zeichner, K.M. (1996). Designing educative practicum experience for prospective teachers. In R. Hoz, M. S. Silberstein (Eds). *Partnerships of Schools and Institutes of Higher Education in Teacher Development*. Ben Gurion University Press.

37. Yuen, C.Y.M. & Grossman, D.L. (2009). The intercultural sensitivity of student teachers in three cities. *Compare*, *39*(3), 349-365.