

International Students's Soft Skills in Music Graduate Program

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Abstracts

The study aimed to study how to develop soft skills in education management for international students in the music graduate program. This study used the quantitative research method, which collected data by questionnaire. The population was 600 Chinese students studying in the graduate music program in Thailand during the years 2020-2023. The sample was 222 students selected by using the convenience sampling method. The research tool was the soft skills self-evaluation questionnaire, which included six skills: problem-solving and creativity, readiness to learn/critical thinking, adaptability, self-motivation/positive attitude, communication, and teamwork. The results were analyzed by using descriptive statistical analysis.

The research findings found that the main respondents were doctoral students in music majors (66.40%). 43.08% of the graduate students had more than 10-year work experience. In problem-solving and creativity skills, over half of the students strongly agree that they understand a situation, take into account the context (54.05%), and can analyze a problem, visualizing what could be the best and worst possible scenarios (52.70%). 40% of the students mostly agree that they had the readiness to learn, critical thinking skills, and adaptability skills. 62.16% of graduate students have confidence in their long-term vision of what they want. The trend of self-motivation/positive attitude skills is quite high. However, 56.76% had less confidence in dealing with their stress. Communication skills were the lowest skills in the self-evaluation score. In contrast, teamwork skills were the highest skills in students' self-evaluation. As an important skill of today's employment, the research findings could apply to the professional development program for graduate students to enhance their future work abilities. Moreover, the administrators of the graduate program in music could apply the findings in providing opportunities to develop soft skills, which less confidence in the international student who attend the program.

Keywords: soft skills; international student; graduate music program; Thailand

Introduction

In today's interconnected world, pursuing higher education transcends national boundaries, leading students to seek academic opportunities in foreign countries. For music enthusiasts, exploring a graduate program in an international setting broadens their knowledge and skills and exposes them to diverse cultural experiences.

While technical expertise and musical proficiency are essential components of any successful music program (Panapinun & Phensit, 2021), developing soft skills is equally crucial for students pursuing advanced degrees in music. Soft skills encompass a range of interpersonal and intrapersonal attributes that empower individuals to navigate the

complexities of professional and personal contexts. Integrating soft skills into the curriculum of graduate music programs has emerged as a vital aspect of holistic education (Warrner, 2020), ensuring that students are not only accomplished musicians but also well-rounded individuals capable of thriving in the global music industry.

This article aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the soft skills acquired by international students enrolled in the graduate music program in Thailand. By exploring the multifaceted dimensions of soft skills development, we delve into international students' challenges, the resources and support available, and the long-term impact of soft skills on their professional journeys. Moreover, we will address international students' unique experiences and perspectives, shedding light on the cultural adjustments they undergo, the enriching exchanges they have with fellow students and faculty members, and the transformative effects these interactions have on their personal growth and musical development.

By examining the soft skills acquired by international students in the graduate music program in Thailand, we can gain valuable insights into the broader implications of fostering a global learning environment within music education. Furthermore, understanding the diverse range of soft skills nurtured by international students can help institutions design and implement effective support systems and curricula that cater to the holistic needs of these students, ensuring their successful integration into the global music industry.

There has been a notable increase in the enrollment of international students in Thai universities, with students coming from neighboring countries as well as China, Vietnam, Western countries, and Africa (Jampaklaya, Penboona, & Lucktong, 2022). Motivations for choosing Thailand as a study destination include affordable tuition fees, quality education, cultural diversity, and the opportunity to experience a new culture. English-taught programs and scholarships also attract international students to Thailand.

International students face challenges in acculturating and integrating into the Thai culture and education system. Language barriers, cultural differences, and social integration issues are common concerns. However, universities have implemented language support programs, intercultural events, and buddy systems to facilitate integration.

Research Objectives

To study the international students's soft skills in the music graduate program.

Research Methodology

This study used the quantitative research method, which collected data by questionnaire. The population was 600 Chinese students studying in the graduate music program in Thailand during the years 2020-2023. The sample was 222 students selected by using the convenience sampling method. The research tool was the soft skills self-evaluation questionnaire, which included six skills: problem-solving and creativity, readiness to learn/critical thinking, adaptability, self-motivation/positive attitude, communication, and teamwork. The questionnaire was developed from the literature reviews and the “*National validation of VET_GPS soft skills list*” (2019). The results were analyzed by using descriptive statistical analysis.

Conceptual Framework

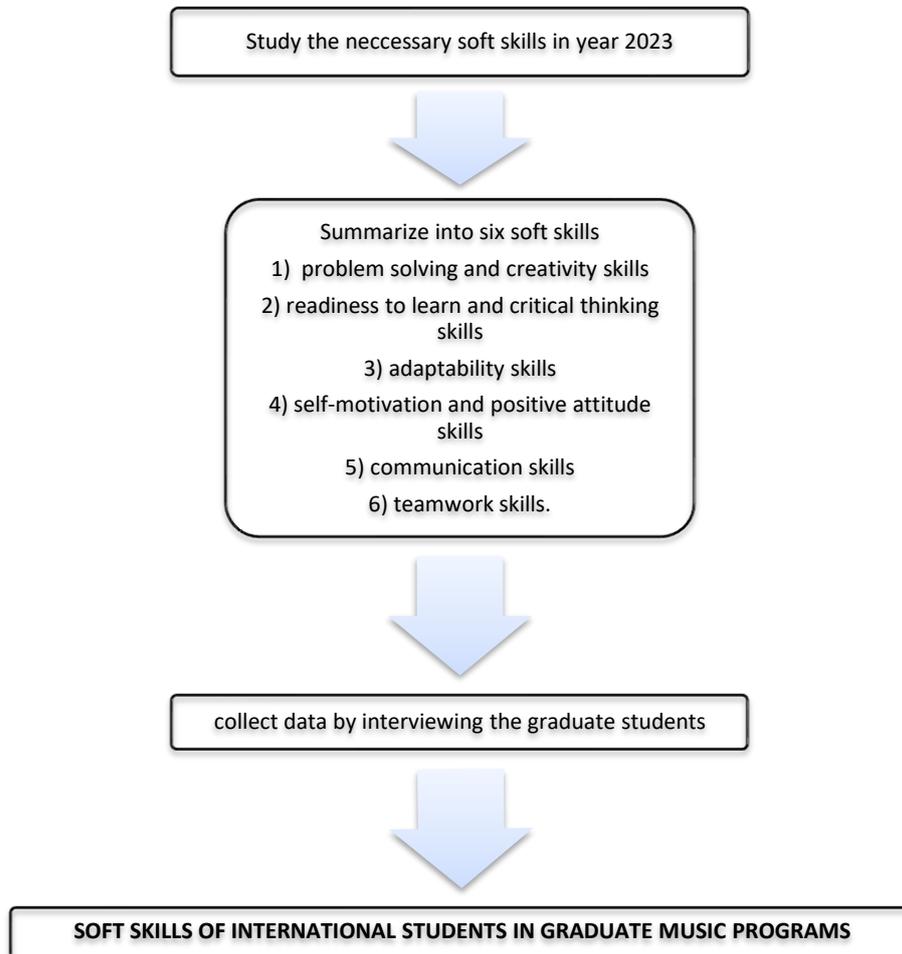


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Research Findings

According to the survey, the majority of respondents (53.36%) are aged 31-40 years, and 66.40% of all respondents are pursuing a Ph.D. in a music program in Thailand. 43.08% have more than ten years of work experience, and 23.32% have 5-10 years of work experience.

The questionnaire is divided into two parts. The first is a closed-ended question with a Likert scale in which the respondents agree and disagree on various issues in each soft skill. The second part is open-ended questions about activities to develop soft skills. The researcher presents the findings divided into individual skills. as follows.

1. Problem-solving and creativity skills

According to the results of the self-assessment on problem-solving and creativity, it was found that: Most international students are confident that they can accept advice and understand

that, depending on the field, there are people more prepared than themselves, that could make a potentially better decision, and they can seek for advice before making a decision. The average is 4.42 and 4.38, respectively, and the skill with the lowest average is the ability to see problems from the perspective of others to find the best solution. The average was 4.14.

Activities during graduate studies that promote problem-solving and creativity skills development include: Communication and interaction in an intercultural environment, cooperation with classmates from different countries and backgrounds, will learn to listen to and respect the views of others, understanding the differences between different cultures, and improving problem-solving skills. Learn new skills, learn new skills or areas of knowledge that will push the students to think about new problems and find creative solutions. Teamwork, working with others to solve problems, thinking together, and exploring new ideas and solutions can stimulate creativity and improve thinking. Solve practical learning and life problems, and think and implement solutions. When dealing with some emergencies, it is also more likely to have coping strategies. Much reading, carefully observing the details of life, trying to solve problems that have never been encountered, design works, and creation. Participate in music composition or improvisation workshops encouraging creative thinking and problem-solving skills. These activities will challenge the students to explore innovative ways of creating music and overcome artistic challenges. Collaborate with fellow musicians to organize concerts, recitals, or musical events. This will require problem-solving skills to address logistical issues, scheduling conflicts, and technical challenges while encouraging creativity in designing engaging performances. Engage in interdisciplinary projects that combine music with other art forms, such as dance, theater, or visual arts. This will foster creativity and problem-solving as they integrate different artistic mediums. Continuous learning improves problem-solving and creative thinking skills. A graduation thesis is the best activity. While improving soft skills, they will solve various problems in graduation thesis writing.

2. Readiness to learn and critical thinking skills

In readiness to learn critical thinking skills, students thought they could link new ideas with what they already knew well, with an average of 4.21. The skills with the least confidence in learners are that they can learn and remember new things quickly, with an average of 3.99.

The results of open-ended questions on readiness to learn and critical thinking skills were found to: In studying abroad. Self-learning has been greatly improved, especially the ability to search for foreign materials, which has grown rapidly. With the teacher's suggestions and the team's learning and discussion, the learning and thinking will be more comprehensive, and they will be more willing to share their ideas and experiences: thesis writing, survey research, comparative research, research report, and summary. Attend seminars, workshops, and guest lectures by renowned musicians and music scholars. Actively participate in discussions and critically analyze the presented topics to enhance their critical thinking abilities. Take part in research projects that require in-depth analysis and evaluation of music-related subjects. This will develop the readiness to learn and engage in scholarly inquiry, encouraging critical thinking and the ability to synthesize information. Seek feedback and constructive criticism from professors, mentors, and peers. Actively reflect on this feedback to continuously improve their work, demonstrating the readiness to learn and critically assess their musical development. Look for role models to follow. Analyze their behavior patterns in learning to improve their learning and thinking abilities through paper writing, training learning, and thinking ability. Determine the thesis topic, research literature, and design the

thesis structure frame. They think excellent paper retrieval ability is the most effective activity to improve learning and thinking ability.

3. Adaptability skills

Most students agree that adaptability skills are skills developed while studying abroad. The average value of each issue obtained from the research results is quite close. In most aspects, they have their own opinion and consider the opinions of others, with an average of 4.34 answers. Students feel that change and challenges help them develop their skills. They accept reality and work with it, and they work well with different people, with averages were 4.29 and 4.24, respectively, and what students are least agreeing about. The average is 4.20: they plan well yet can adapt those plans as needed.

The adaptation that occurred during their study abroad trip was something that most respondents agreed that they had developed through different activities and environments. Details are as follows: Active participation in social activities or volunteer organizations can improve interpersonal skills, cooperation, and adaptability. Participate in communication and interaction in a cross-cultural environment, understand how people from different cultural backgrounds cope with changes and challenges, learn from them, and adapt to their situations. Cultivate an attitude towards adaptive learning, continuously learning and developing new skills and knowledge to cope with the requirements and environment of studying abroad. Proactively seek feedback and suggestions from others to improve their performance and abilities. Change their living environment often, learn different languages, and experience different cultures. Explore various musical genres and styles that are different from their cultural background. This will expose the students to new musical traditions, techniques, and perspectives, fostering adaptability to artistic expressions. Participate in music festivals, workshops, or collaborative projects that involve musicians from diverse cultural backgrounds. This will require them to adapt to different working styles, communication patterns, and cultural practices, enhancing their adaptability skills. Take part in community music programs or outreach initiatives. Engaging with different communities and audiences will expose them to various contexts and challenges, promoting adaptability and flexibility in their musical approach. The ability to adapt to change contributes to soft power growth. Develop flexibility and an open mind. Adaptability helps identify and solve problems. For example, in communicating with the tutor, we should be able to adjust our thoughts quickly.

4. Self-motivation and positive attitude skills

This skill is the highest average score when compared with other skills, with an overall average of 4.40 in the following sub-topics: 1) They learn from their past successes and mistakes or failures had an average of 4.40 2) They make decisions that move them towards what they want to have an average of 4.42 3) They know how to care for themselves in stressful periods had an average of 4.18 4) They are ready to work hard to achieve their goals had an average of 4.52. 5) They have a long-term vision of what they want for their life, had an average of 4.50.

The activities to improve these skills were to set clear learning goals and break them down into manageable small goals. Develop a study plan with detailed steps to help maintain positive motivation and direction forward. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle and ensuring adequate sleep, a healthy diet, and moderate exercise will help boost energy levels and a positive attitude. Networking with optimistic people while studying and living abroad, providing support, sharing experiences, and positive energy. Set personal musical goals and create a structured practice routine to stay motivated and committed to their artistic development. Self-discipline and perseverance are essential in maintaining a positive attitude

and achieving long-term goals. Embrace challenges and setbacks as opportunities for growth. View criticism and failures as learning experiences rather than obstacles, cultivating a positive attitude towards self-improvement. Engage with fellow musicians and attend performances to find inspiration and motivation. Surrounding themselves with a supportive musical community can foster a positive attitude and enhance self-motivation. International students should not shy away when facing problems. Develop self-confidence. Activate their resources and knowledge, face various things, and actively solve problems. It is also a way to increase responsibility, face problems, and deal with them positively.

5. Communication skills

Communication skills had the least average score compared with other skills. The average score for this skill was 4.02. The student had least agreed with the topic “If they do not understand something in a conversation, they ask until they understand it,” with a score of 3.74. The most agreed was when they were listening to others. They are usually entirely concentrated on what is being said, with a score of 4.30.

The activities for developing these skills were as follows; Active participation in presentations and public events can help improve communication, presentation skills, and self-confidence. Communicate and interact with people from different cultural backgrounds, learn to respect and understand differences between different cultures, and improve the ability to communicate across cultures. Participate in teamwork projects, collaborate to solve problems, and learn how to communicate, negotiate and cooperate effectively. Learn how to listen attentively, understand the intentions and needs of others, and give appropriate feedback and responses. Participate in group activities, learn to be good at expressing oneself, be ready to help others, and do things used to empathy. Collaborate with musicians from different cultural backgrounds and engage in ensemble performances. This will require effective communication to synchronize musical ideas, interpret musical directions, and create cohesive performances. Attend workshops or courses focused on vocal or instrumental technique, where clear communication with teachers and coaches is vital for understanding and implementing their instructions. Engage in interdisciplinary projects where effective communication between musicians and artists from different disciplines is crucial to harmoniously integrating various art forms.

Activities to improve communication skills are mainly about increasing communication opportunities. Acquire rich communication skills. Attend seminars and meetings. Get feedback in the communication and then deal with the validity of the information. 1) Talk to experts. Take advice from experts and revise research. 2) Communicate with classmates. Communicate with classmates, put forward their views and suggestions, and supplement and enrich their research content.

6. Teamwork skills

Teamwork skills are at a high agreed level, which a total average score was 4.37. The highest score on sub-topic as they usually meet deadlines when they work, and when others need my help, they support them as best they can. The scores were 4.49 and 4.45, respectively.

The teamwork activities during studying abroad to develop the skills were as follows; Organize team-building activities such as outdoor training, team games, or challenge tasks to promote cooperation, collaboration, and trust among team members. Participate in project cooperation, work with team members to set goals, assign tasks and work collaboratively. Through cooperation on practical projects, practice teamwork and problem-solving skills. Declare and research projects together, know oneself meanwhile know others,

and be good at using different specialties to work together. Join music ensembles, orchestras, or choirs to experience collaborative musical settings. Working with fellow musicians, they will develop teamwork skills such as active listening, mutual respect, and coordination. Participate in group composition or arrangement projects, where teamwork is necessary to combine individual ideas and create cohesive musical works. Engage in ensemble rehearsals that involve musicians from diverse backgrounds. This will require effective teamwork to navigate cultural differences, communicate musical intentions, and create unified performances. Build teams and networks. Learn to manage teams and share responsibilities. Teamwork helps the learning process and improves soft skills. Team communication can share experiences, expand the learning circle, on the one hand, enhance the breadth of knowledge, on the other hand improve the tacit understanding between the team. Learn from different people. Look at different people. Improve emotional intelligence. For example, they are working as a team on class assignments. Assign different tasks according to different people's characteristics.

Table 1. Comparative of Skills' Average Score (Likert-scale)

Skills	Average Score
Problem-solving and creativity	4.26
Readiness to learn and critical thinking	4.12
Adaptability	4.28
Self-motivation and positive attitude	4.40
Communication	4.03
Teamwork	4.38

N = 222

Discussion

Research shows that self-motivation and positive attitudes have the highest average outcomes. This aligns with Kah Loong Chue and Youyan Nie's (2016) research in *International Students' Motivation and Learning Approach: A Comparison with Local*, which found that international students have higher self-motivation than domestic students.

However, communication skills are a problem for international students. In the study *Language Challenges Faced by International Graduate Students in the United States* by Ya-Hui Kuo (2011), international students need more confidence in using English for communication. This aligns with the lowest average assessment of students in communication skills. Higher education institutions are critical in supporting international students in developing these skills through targeted interventions and programs. Host institutions can foster effective communication among international students and create inclusive learning environments that promote academic success and intercultural understanding.

According to this research, communication skills development in graduate students is important and developed during their overseas studies. This encourages them to continue working after graduation, aligning with their academic results. According to the research, communication skills development in graduate students is important and developed during their

overseas studies. This encourages them to continue working after graduation, in line with the academic results of Haans and Pieters (2016) found that communication skills are essential for success in the music industry.

The research findings found that teamwork skills can develop during the overseas study, which is similar to the results of the study on collaboration skills of Yoon and Kim (2018); musicians need to work effectively with other professionals and create successful musical projects.

This research found that coming to study abroad of international students and gaining knowledge and study skills also helps develop soft skills necessary for future careers. The skills developed in the students come from more than just studying in the classroom. However, it is caused by the students living in a foreign country and encountering different environments such as climate, geography, food, lifestyle, various facilities, and different cultures. These are just as important in developing soft skills as in the classroom.

Graduate students take problem-solving and creativity skills as an important part of learning because studying abroad pushes them to unexpected situations and unfamiliar environments, and they can develop problem-solving skills in different situations. This also forces them to be ready to learn new knowledge in the limited time to stay abroad.

Studying abroad necessitates adapting to a new environment, cultural norms, and educational systems. Students will face numerous challenges, such as language barriers, different teaching styles, and unfamiliar weather and facilities. The different language greatly improves communication skills, and with all these conditions, international students tend to maintain a positive attitude, work in a team and live with others.

Recommendation

1. Practical Recommendations

The result from this research could use to promote the benefit of international students studying abroad with the chance to improve their knowledge and soft skills, which are becoming more important in working in the future. Higher education institutions could use the research findings to plan their course and provide activities encouraging students to improve their soft skills.

2. Recommendation for future research

The future study might point out and design the research to focus on each skill. Researchers might research the activities that can enhance the soft skills abilities of international students. The other soft skills not mentioned in this research are also interesting topics for study.

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