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Innovative Blended Learning Approaches Through Appreciative Inquiry: A Case Study of Chinese Students in Thailand

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Abstract

In recent years, the adoption of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) in educational settings has gained considerable traction, emphasizing strengths and positive attributes over weaknesses. While numerous studies have extensively explored this approach within Western contexts, limited research has been conducted in Asian countries, particularly regarding Chinese students. This study aims to investigate the application of the AI approach among Chinese students pursuing higher education abroad, specifically at international universities in Thailand. Thailand is experiencing a significant influx of Chinese students due to its rapid growth and appeal.

Utilizing the 4D phases of Appreciative Inquiry – Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny – this study explores the experiences of Chinese students in these phases. In the Discovery phase, Chinese students identified presentation experiences as crucial "high points," emphasizing teamwork, idea generation, and skill development. During the Dream phase, they envisioned optimal educational experiences. The Design phase involved devising innovative strategies for blended teaching and learning. Finally, the Destiny phase ensured the sustainable implementation of these strategies.

The study employed semi-structured interviews with 30 Chinese students. To ensure a comprehensive investigation, a triangulation approach was adopted, including interviews with an additional 15 students from diverse national backgrounds and five faculty members. The findings provide valuable insights into blended teaching and learning, offering practical implications for educators in designing effective teaching plans tailored to this context. Furthermore, it presents an innovative perspective on business education, thereby enhancing the application of the AI model for Chinese students.

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Introduction

The People's Republic of China currently boasts the world's largest number of students studying abroad, with over 847,000 students sent overseas (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2018). Notably, Thai universities have witnessed a substantial surge in the Chinese student population, escalating from 8,444 in 2011 to an impressive 14,423 in 2020 (Nation Thailand, 2023), and this trend continues to grow. Thailand, a rapidly growing country, holds great appeal for Chinese students and their parents seeking more cost-effective international educational environments. Thailand offers lower tuition and living costs compared to developed Western countries. With widespread English-medium instruction and its status as a core ASEAN nation, Thailand presents favorable conditions for student's future development, making it a prime choice for Chinese parents (Lin, 2023). Additionally, while many students never previously considered studying in Thailand before entering university (Lin, 2023), they now view Thailand as a gateway to the Asian international talent market and also see great potential in Thailand's future prospects (Lin, 2023). Numerous individuals choose to study in Thailand due to its promising position within ASEAN, indicating substantial industrial growth. International corporations located in Thailand offer competitive salaries comparable to those in China, and English-medium instruction in Thai international universities provides an excellent environment for language practice (Nation Thailand, 2023). With the rapid industrial expansion, many international corporations have established factories in Thailand, and the lack of local managerial talent opens doors for international students to gain valuable experience (ICEF Monitor, 2019). This exposure provides Chinese students with a strong advantage to secure positions in industries of other Asian countries, making Thailand an attractive launching pad for advancing in the Asian foreign business arena.

When a number of Chinese students choose to study in Thailand, understanding the challenges encountered by Chinese students in international university settings, characterized by diverse cultural backgrounds, is important to support their learning effectiveness. Rienties and Tempelaar (2013) explain that students from Confucian Asia, including China, encounter significant transitional barriers in Western education systems. These challenges stem from inherent cultural aspects such as high-power distance and robust uncertainty avoidance, leading to a preference for

teacher-centered learning approaches. Zhao and Bourne (2011) further discuss Chinese students as passive learners in classrooms, noting that their silence is often a deliberate choice. Additionally, insights from Jiang and Altinyelken (2020) and Zhu and O'Sullivan (2022) explain that while Chinese students may excel in tests and assignments, they are often quiet in classroom discussions. Exploring Appreciative Inquiry (AI) with Chinese students in international education is, therefore, of benefit, as AI's focus on strengths and positive aspects can help educators design supportive and inclusive learning environments and enhance learning outcomes.

In the recent context of education, problem-solving commonly involves a series of inquiries that aim to identify areas of a situation that may be functioning sub optimally (Sandars & Murdoch-Eaton, 2017). This approach revolves around understanding "what is going wrong" to drive improvements. In contrast, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) presents a distinctive approach that focuses on examining the positive aspects and strengths of a given situation. It has garnered participation from various entities, including businesses, nonprofits, governments, and communities, with over 75 notable AI initiatives documented by Ludema and Mohr (2003). The profound impact of AI is further acknowledged by Quinn (2000) of the University of Michigan, who posits that AI is currently revolutionizing the field of organization development. Furthermore, AI has gained recognition as an action research method extensively studied and applied in the educational field to enhance the teaching-learning process (Mellish, 1998; Yballe & O'Connor, 2000; Yoder, 2004).

Particularly in the post-COVID era, educators face significant challenges that need an enhanced teaching-learning approach. The sudden disruption caused by the shift to remote or hybrid teaching-learning models has compelled educators to swiftly adapt their strategies to the changing environments and seek innovative methods to engage students. In this evolving educational landscape, AI offers a framework for improving the teaching and learning experience for students (Conklin, 2009). Unlike the traditional model where students passively receive knowledge from teachers, AI encourages a collaborative environment where both teachers and students actively contribute to the learning process based on their unique desires and individual goals. When using AI in classrooms, students and teachers can express their thoughts, ideas, and aspirations, fostering an optimal learning experience

(Conklin, 2009). This student-centered approach shifts the paradigm from passive absorption to active participation and empowers students to take ownership of their education.

Nevertheless, limited research currently exists on AI's application with Chinese students. Moreover, most of the AI studies have looked at Western countries and were done before the pandemic hit (Conklin, 2009; Havens, Wood, & Leeman, 2006; Sandars & Murdoch-Eaton, 2017), while there is hardly any research on this in Asian countries or in the use of AI to design teaching and learning methods for Chinese international students. The present study aims to fill that gap by offering evidence-based practices for enhancing the educational experience of Chinese students in international settings. The case institution in this study is recognized for its academic distinction and its diverse environment, with students and faculty from over 60 countries. This institution has seen a surge in the admission of Chinese students, making them the largest demographic among international students. Given the popularity of the business program among Chinese students, it is imperative to understand their motivations and preferences to devise effective educational approaches.

Literature review

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) encourages people to investigate, observe, and discuss to establish efficient institutional environment, which allows a sustainable development in an organization (Cooperrider, 1990). Rather than fixing problems and analyzing what or why is not functioning, AI prompts organizations to explore what has been exceptionally successful and envision how it could become more prevalent (Preskill & Catsambas, 2006). It serves as a “tool for recalibrating the lenses through which we experience a phenomenon,” allowing for the creation of opportunities for future change based on past and present strengths (Harrison & Hasan, 2013).

AI is action research which has widely been applied in organizational development, such as US Department of Health and Human Services, McDonalds, Nokia, British Airways (Havens, Wood, & Leeman, 2006), individual development in the organization (Hart, Conklin, & Allen, 2008), tourism (Joyner, Lackey, & Bricker, 2019; Yudarwati, 2019), and health care (Trajkovski, Schmied, Vickers, & Jackson, 2013; Roberts & Machon, 2015). It has also been applied in mentoring (Gordon, 2008); in parenting (Buyarski, Bloom, Murray, & Hutson, 2011; Moore et al., 2017), and in various

educational contexts to achieve desired outcomes, such as evaluating the effectiveness of desirable leadership practices in graduate classes (Conklin & Hart, 2009), analyzing the role of university extension education in communities (Bowling & Brahm, 2002), identifying emerging leadership in classroom environments (O'Connor & Yballe, 2007), and facilitating organizational change in educational administration (Stetson & Miller, 2003).

The integration of AI in the classroom has allowed for the construction of courses that adopt an appreciative orientation towards student experiences and course management. Yballe and O'Connor (2000) applied the principles of AI commonly used in organizational settings to the pedagogical effort. They aimed to design educational processes that fostered cooperation, intrinsic motivation, and dialogue with others, with the goal of creating a “realistic, positively transforming, and hopeful” worldview (Yballe & O'Connor, 2004). In their work, O'Connor and Yballe (2007) extended this concept to the development of teams within the classroom and contented that team members have the ability to utilize recollections of their team's most successful moments to create favorable team perceptions and inform their decisions and behaviors (O'Connor & Yballe, 2007). These efforts reflect the application of AI principles to create an appreciative pedagogy that emphasizes collaboration, intrinsic motivation, and positive transformation in the classroom.

The distinctiveness of AI lies in its positive principle, which consists of four phases: *Discovery*, *Dream*, *Design*, and *Destiny* (Cooperrider, 1990).

1) *Discovery* is to appreciate what are best in the organization;

2) *Dream* is to create visual image describing how the organization will look and feel at its best;

3) *Design* is a dialogue about what specific action steps are needed in the organization;

4) *Destiny* focuses on sustaining AI's positive approach to improvement.

The current research aims to adopt this 4D model and conduct interviews to explore the effective teaching-learning approach in a business school in Thailand where, as explained above, the Chinese students are the largest demographic body among international students. Therefore, emphasizing the diverse management of education and explaining perceptions of Chinese students is essential. Hence, the following research questions (QRs) are proposed:

RQ1 Discovery: What are the highpoints experienced by Chinese students in the current teaching-learning approaches when studying at the business school in Thailand?

RQ2 Dream: How can a visual image be created to describe the ideal teaching-learning approaches for Chinese students at the business school in Thailand?

RQ3 Design: What specific action steps can be taken to enhance the teaching-learning approaches based on the identified strengths at the business school in Thailand?

RQ4 Destiny: How can the positive practices of AI be sustained to support continuous improvement in the teaching-learning approaches at the business school in Thailand?

Research methodology

The current study employed a qualitative research methodology due to its capacity to capture rich data for understanding participants' experiences and exploring intricate contextual factors in the field of AI (Cooperrider, 1990). A purposive sampling technique was utilized to enhance the quality and relevance of the interview data by targeting specific participants, thereby facilitating in-depth exploration and promoting the transferability of findings. The interviewees were selected from among students who had completed a fundamental business core course at an international university in Thailand. This course, designed for first-year students across various faculties, encompasses foundational principles of organization, business ownership, management, production, marketing, accounting, and finance. The determination of the number of interviewees was guided by the concept of data saturation; interviews were conducted until no new information emerged, and responses began to duplicate, indicating that a sufficient amount of data had been collected.

The interview questions were designed to target the four phases of AI, namely Discovery, Dream, Design, and Delivery. The Discovery phase was formulated to understand the essence of "what gives life" to the subject/course, thereby exploring its most salient facets. In contrast, the Dream phase was conceived to foster visionary thinking by contemplating "what might be" and envisioning a promising future trajectory. To address the Discovery and Dream phases, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 Chinese students who were from the mainland China and completed the fundamental business core course. The ages of student

respondents ranged from 18 to 22 years (mean, 20 years) and 55% of the sample is male, while the remaining 45% is female.

Moving into the Design phase, after researchers reviewed the gathered insights from the Discovery and Dream phases and ensured clarity and completeness; in turn, five lecturers were interviewed to explore their views and inputs regarding feasibility and effectiveness of the collected ideas from students which represented perceptions of what makes a great learning experience. The lecturer interviewees had at least 12 years of teaching experience as faculty members in the business major and discipline and were knowledgeable about the teaching-learning methods in this fundamental business core course.

Finally, the Destiny phase, which focuses on sustaining positive improvements, was also addressed by lecturers in interviews. This involved exploring actions for empowerment, continuous learning, and adaptability to ensure the longevity of positive changes in the subject/course. Furthermore, in order to ensure a comprehensive understanding of this phenomena, a separate data collection via interviews was conducted for the Design and Destiny phases with additional 15 students who completed the same fundamental business core course and were not Chinese nationals but from diverse backgrounds and nationalities such as Thai, Burmese, and Korean. This triangulation approach (Heale & Forbes, 2013) in this qualitative research aimed to enrich the study by offering varied viewpoints and contributing to a more thorough understanding of the subject matter.

All semi-structured interviews were conducted by the authors face-to-face in English, as English is the medium of instruction at the institution of all interviewees. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. The authors started interviews with a brief overview of AI and the questions are listed in Table 1. The data collected from the interviews underwent content analysis. After the completion of coding and data analysis, an additional researcher with proficiency in qualitative data analysis independently coded and analyzed the data. This practice facilitated comparative analysis and enhances the reliability of the overall analytical process.

Results

Phase One: Discovery

In the perspectives of AI's "Discovery", the impression of the course was discovered. As for questions "Recalling your time when you studied this subject, what

Table 1 Appreciative Inquiry's 4D phases and Interview Questions

Phase	Purpose of phase	Interviewees	Interview questions
Discovery	The identification of processes that work well.	30 Chinese Students	<p>Recalling your time when you studied this subject, what were your high points and how did you feel when you reached your high point?</p> <p>What was the scenario where you felt positive about working together with others to get something done?</p> <p>Who was involved and what was your role in the cooperation?</p> <p>Which type of communication did you find the most effective for you and your team members, and why?</p>
Dream	Envisioning what the current situation could be like in the future.	30 Chinese Students	<p>What aspects and capacity should the subject have for a better future?</p> <p>What do you value the most in yourself, people whom you work with in the class, lecturers, and the university?</p> <p>What are your positive images of the future function and form for the subject?</p>
Design	Planning and prioritizing processes that would work well.	5 Lecturers and 15 Students (Non-Chinese)	<p>Does this list reflect every contribution to a great learning experience?</p> <p>Are there other ideas, hopes, and desires that have not been made?</p>
Delivery	The implementation (execution) of the proposed design.	5 Lecturers and 15 Students (Non-Chinese)	<p>How can we sustain what we are doing?</p> <p>What needs to be done to ensure that the changes continue?</p>

were your high points and how did you feel when you reached your high point?" Among 30 Chinese student interviewees, 12 of them mentioned the "high point" in studying the business fundamental course which was their presentation experience. 10 Chinese students mentioned discussion activities; four mentioned the calculation part; three mentioned lecturer class and one mentioned an exam. Therefore, the highest occurrence during the interviews was with the presentation experience mentioned by 12 Chinese students and one of the examples is as follows:

"The high point in this subject was my presentation experience where we needed to form a team with 5 members from various backgrounds and worked together with them in idea generation, data collection, analysis, and presentation in front of all other classmates. When I worked together with my team members, my thoughts got clearer from discussion. I liked the part where everyone shared their opinions, and we came out with a consensus after a long discussion." (A second-year student, 20 years old, earned the grade "A" in this subject)

For the question "What was the scenario where you felt positive about working together with others to get something done?" "Who was involved and what was your role in the cooperation?", 18 Chinese students answered that they felt positive about working together with other students when they conducted their presentation in the class, while 7 interviewees highlighted their preference for group work on group assignments. They believed that dividing tasks and working collectively enhanced their overall performance. Additionally,

5 interviewees emphasized the importance of forming groups to build relationships and foster strong friendships among group members. They found that such interactions positively influenced their learning experience. Overall, the highest occurrence belongs again to the "presentation exercise" and one example is presented below:

"I felt positive about our cooperation made for our team presentation, particularly in its process where we made efforts together in the team and searched for the necessary information. Our team was truly diverse with Chinese, Korean, and Thai students. When we worked together, we expressed our ideas and learned from each other. Even through sometimes we disagreed with each other, we worked together to overcome the conflict and finally we became friends." (A third-year student, 21 years old, earned the grade B in this subject)

Regarding the question "Which type of communication did you find the most effective for you and your team members, and why?" 22 Chinese students found face-to-face communication the most efficient. They preferred to receive immediate feedback from teachers and peers and face-to-face communication was considered as the easiest method for this purpose. The remaining eight students mentioned that they would rather use "Line" or "Microsoft (MS) teams" given that this method provided the "video-chat" and "share document files" functions. The example for the interviewees' comments for the face-to-face communication is as follows:

"Among various communication types used in this subject, such as face-to-face, Line, and MS teams, I

believe the face-to-face was the most effective one. We held face-to-face meetings during class time or sometimes outside the classroom over the weekend. All team members were involved in such meetings and discussed ideas and preparation together for assignments, presentation, and even for the examination. I like to communicate with people directly because I can get immediate responses from them and observe their facial expression clearly. Since English is not the native language for most of us, face-to-face communication appears to be the most effective way to facilitate discussions. We also used Line and MS teams; Line is good to send some urgent messages, and for MS teams, we can share documents and keep them in folders. But when we have something important to discuss, we all prefer to meet in person." (A third-year student, 21 years old, earned the grade B in this subject)

The discovery phase revealed that Chinese students found their presentation experiences to be the most significant "high point," which emphasize teamwork, idea generation, and communication skill development. Group work, especially for presentations, was positively received for enhancing collaboration and relationship-building. Face-to-face communication was deemed the most effective by 22 out of 30 students, facilitating immediate feedback and clearer understanding.

Phase Two: Dream

For the question "What aspects and capacity should the subject have for a better future?", most of interviewees, i.e., 26 out of 30 Chinese students, answered by focusing on real business practice. They wanted to have more activities related to real business, e.g., company visits, guest speaker sessions where practitioners can share their business experience. The following is an example:

"I hope to see more real business practices in this subject. In addition to the knowledge from the textbook, it would be great if we can have a chance to talk to real business practitioners in Thailand." (A second-year student, 20 years old, earned the grade A- in this subject)

With the fifth question "What do you value the most in yourself, people whom you work with in the class, lecturers, and the university?", 20 Chinese students first identified their value in their communication and presentation skills when they had on-site class. In turn, 15 interviewees found the values in their lecturers; i.e., experiences and teaching skills of lectures, and explained that their lecturers were responsible and willing to support students with those skills.

"I valued my lecturer the most because when I was studying the subject, she was like a guiding light for me. When I first came to Thailand, it was a new environment for me in terms of both culture and teaching-learning styles. When I lost my way in my studies and didn't know whom to turn to for guidance, my teacher was there to provide me with the help I needed." (A third-year student, 22 years old, earned the grade B in the subject)

"I have experienced online and remote learning during the pandemic, and I prefer on-site class where I can meet my teacher and peers face-to-face. It brings a level of personal connection and learning that online platforms can't replicate." (A fourth-year student, 22 years old, earned the grade A in the subject)

"I actually really enjoy studying on campus because it gives me that extra motivation when I feel like someone's keeping an eye on me. The whole experience, I just felt so much better when I could go back to the campus to study. And as an international student, there's something special about being able to see my teachers and classmates in person. It's like the real deal of studying abroad!" (A third-year student, 22 years old, earned the grade B in the subject)

For the question "What are your positive images of the future function and form for the subject?", all 30 interviewees mentioned the three terms, "practical," "useful" and "interesting." The following are some examples:

*"I wish this subject were more **practical and useful**. We want to start applying the business knowledge into the real business situation rather than just listening to a teacher so that the subject becomes more interesting."* (A third-year student, 21 years old, earned the grade A in the subject)

*"I hope the subject will be extremely **useful** to my future career because, as you can see, the world is changing so fast since the Covid-19 pandemic. It is **interesting** for us to learn a **practical** method in this subject to cope with the rapid change in Thailand and the neighboring countries of Thailand"* (A fourth-year student, 23 years old, earned B+ in the subject)

*"I believe, if I were still in China, I find myself with only few opportunities to truly experience the dynamic of multinational businesses. Being able to visit **multinational corporations** located in Thailand as a part of my course requirement here can definitely go beyond simply acquiring management skills. It's about gaining a real-world perspective on how these skills are put into*

action within the complexities of actual business situations. (A fourth-year student, 22 years old, earned B in the subject)”

A list of activities aimed at enhancing the teaching-learning experience was generated from the discovery and dream stages. The activities include educational field trips, community projects, company visits, business simulation games, classroom role-plays, and guest speaker sessions.

In the "Dream" phase, Chinese students emphasized the need for real-world applications such as company visits and guest speaker sessions to bridge theory and practice. They valued communication skills and appreciated on-site learning with supportive lecturers. Envisioning a “practical,” “useful,” and “interesting” future for the course, students highlighted the importance of adapting to rapid changes in the business landscape.

Phase Three: Design

For this 3rd stage, additional 15 students who are non-Chinese nationals as well as five lecturers offered their ideas and suggestions in response to the question “Does this list reflect every contribution to a great learning experience? Are there other ideas, hopes, and desires that have not been made?” All of them highlighted that gaining real-world experiences, such as community projects and work shadowing, can be of importance in enhancing the learning process for not only Chinese students but also all international and local students who need to survive in today’s dynamic business environment. One lecturer suggested incorporating role-play games to encourage student engagement and enhance the practical application of theory. Another lecturer explained the importance of leveraging advanced technology and internet resources, which enables students to become better prepared for today’s first-moving trend and changing environment. The following are some examples from the lecturers:

*“Organizing **community projects** for the first-year students not only allows them to actively contribute to the local community but also translates classroom knowledge into practical community development. These initiatives instill a strong sense of social responsibility, going beyond theoretical understanding to foster empathy and awareness of broader societal implications. Additionally, these projects provide invaluable opportunities for students to develop essential skills such as teamwork, ensuring a more comprehensive educational experience that goes beyond traditional learning boundaries.”*

*“By offering students opportunities to engage in **real-world experiences** such as putting themselves in the shoes of customers and observing operations at a coffee shop, we enrich their learning journey. Establishing an emotional connection with business allows students to not only acquire knowledge but also develop practical experience and critical thinking skills. This approach fosters a comprehensive and meaningful learning process that goes beyond conventional classroom learning.”*

*“Indeed, our students have abundant opportunities to gain direct exposure to multinational corporations in Thailand, a distinct advantage compared to conditions in China. Through **work shadowing** practices in MNC subsidiaries, students acquire management skills and insights into real-world business operations. This hands-on experience goes beyond the classroom, providing a nuanced understanding of global business dynamics, cultural intricacies, and practical challenges. Additionally, it fosters valuable networking opportunities, connecting students with industry professionals and mentors. In summary, our students benefit not only from acquiring skills but also from a holistic and immersive learning experience, positioning them competitively in the global job market.”*

Also, two lecturers particularly mentioned that in order for students to successfully gain real-world experiences, the course should establish long-term relationships with companies and build partnership with industry. It was explained that when the course has an effective partnership with companies and create mutual understanding and benefits, it is much smoother to propose and conduct the real-world business activities, e.g., company visits, work shadowing, and hands-on projects with companies. Arranging discussion meetings with partner companies prior to the commencement of semester is also inevitable for detailed planning, themes, and scheduling.

Moreover, in this phase, non-Chinese students were also interviewed to seek their views and perceptions to confirm whether such ideas, hopes, and desires from Chinese students can also be of use and value for both Thai local and international perspectives. 10 students have expressed that the activities that related to real world experience would be highly beneficial for them in understanding the practical application of business concepts. Additionally, five students pointed out that collaborating as a team would enhance their motivation and commitment. Here are a few examples:

*“I agree with using **role play** as a learning tool for our classes which lets students showcase what they’ve learned from the lectures in a fun and practical way. They’ll be given business scenarios and must use their knowledge to play out the situations. This enjoyable learning-by-play method makes the learning process more engaging and easier to grasp.”* (A fourth-year student, 21 years old, Thai, earned the grade A in the subject)

*“I also wish the subject would be more **interesting**. For example, I am interested in working together with others. So, when I can build a teamwork and improve the team performance, I feel very motivated. Learning such skills in the subject can be more **useful and practical** for me.”* (A fourth-year student, 22 years old, Korean, earned the grade B in the subject)

In the “Design” phase, the interview results indicate that no differences were observed among Chinese students, non-Chinese students, or lecturers. The triangulation process further confirmed the significance of incorporating real-world experiences to enrich the learning process. Building partnerships with industry and promoting internal collaboration within the university were also identified as key for sustainability.

Phase Four: Delivery

The five lecturers and 15 non-Chinese students were asked, “How can we ensure the sustainability of our current efforts?” and “What measures are needed to maintain the ongoing changes?” Firstly, in response from lecturers, four lecturers agreed that sustaining the new teaching and learning model, institutions and departments should actively engage with stakeholders to secure essential resources, funding, and recognition to support the continuity of the initiatives. Moreover, three lecturers suggested that providing the teaching team with appropriate training to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge will impact the sustainability of the new teaching and learning practices. One lecturer mentioned that building strong connections with industry and local community is vital. Such networks will foster valuable collaborations and opportunities for students, enhancing the sustainability of the program. One lecturer emphasized the need of effective communication for any change implementation in order to inform the expectations for students. The following are some examples:

*“Establishing a **robust network of alumni and industry professionals** is crucial for the continuity of these activities. When we have strong connections with*

our alumni, they become valuable mentors and contributors to the learning experiences of our current students. Moreover, collaborating with industry professionals offers students more opportunities to engage with real-world practices and gain practical insights. These connections not only enrich the learning journey but also sustain the engagement of external stakeholders, ensuring the long-term success of these activities.”

*“I think **faculty development** plays an important role in ensuring the success of these activities. Providing **training and development opportunities for lecturers** is essential as it equips them with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively facilitate and manage these experiences. When faculty members are well-prepared, they can guide students through the learning journey with confidence and expertise. This enhances the overall quality of the teaching and learning experience and enables us to create an engaging learning environment for our students.”*

*“To sustain, an **effective communication with our students** is crucial, we have to inform them about the upcoming changes, ensuring they are aware of the improvements for a better learning experience. It is equally important to clearly communicate the scoring criteria and expectations set by the lecturers; students have to understand what is required of them and perform to their best potential.”*

Furthermore, three lecturers noted that achieving the activity’s effectiveness and continuity, it is also essential to promote internal networking and collaboration among various subjects, departments, and faculties in a university. By involving students from first to fourth-year courses with a shared nature in the activity, overall impact and success can be maximized.

The interview responses from non-Chinese students also revealed their perceptions towards their objectives and ambitions for the business course. Eight of them emphasized the importance of adequately training teaching teams to ensure they possess the skills and knowledge necessary for implementing the new teaching methods successfully. Four students recognized the value of building strong connections with industry and the local community to enhance program sustainability, providing them with valuable collaboration and career opportunities. Three students agreed that clear and transparent communication about changes in the teaching and learning model is essential as they desired timely updates, easy access to information, and

opportunities to provide feedback to facilitate a smoother transition. The following are some examples:

"We would love to be informed about the changes that need to be made, and we are truly excited to be a part of them. It would be greatly appreciated if teachers could keep us updated on these new developments, as we are more than willing to participate and contribute." (A fourth-year student, 22 years old, Thai, earned the grade A in the subject)

"I noticed from the announcement that our school is actively engaged in numerous collaboration projects with various organizations and local communities. Additionally, I saw that we recently hosted a career day, during which many well-known companies visited our university to recruit students. It's very exciting to learn about these initiatives because they offer us a wealth of opportunities to gain real-world business experience." (A fourth-year student, 22 years old, Burmese, earned the grade A- in the subject)

In the "Delivery" phase, ensuring the implementation of the teaching and learning strategy from the interview involved faculty training, effective communication with students, and engagement with stakeholders, which emerged as crucial for maintaining ongoing changes. Non-Chinese students emphasized the value of transparent communication and industry connections for their learning and career development.

Discussion and recommendation

The interview results are discussed here according to the four research questions introduced above.

RQ1 Discovery: What are the highpoints experienced by Chinese students in the current teaching-learning approaches when studying at the business school in Thailand?

During the AI's Phase 1, Discovery, it was evident that Chinese students found their presentation experience as one of the highpoints in their study where they had an opportunity to form a team with students from various backgrounds with the chance to work together. On such occasions, they also highly valued face-to-face communication for receiving immediate feedback from lecturers and peers. In the post Covid era, the mode of learning has been shifted to virtual platforms such as using Microsoft Teams for virtual interaction by showing faces through a computer-generated source even with remote participants, which provide greater flexibility and convenience for exchanging immediate feedback. Nevertheless, students still desire real-world experiences

including in person face-to-face interaction to improve their communication, interpersonal, and practical skills. The pandemic may have exposed them to online and remote learning; however, as introduced above, their preference for on-site and face-to-face communication remains unchanged, which was also supported by the interview findings from other international and local students who expected being physically present on campus to interact with many other students for a more enriching and well-rounded cultural experience at the international university.

RQ2 Dream: How can we create a visual image that describes the ideal teaching-learning approaches for Chinese students at the business school in Thailand?

In terms of the AI's second phase, Dream, which focuses on understanding students' desired future, feedback was collected from Chinese students regarding their aspirations for the subject. Seventeen (17) students expressed a strong desire for more engaging and interactive activities to be incorporated into the curriculum. They specifically mentioned the importance of company visits, which would allow them to witness firsthand how businesses operate and gain insights into various industries. Furthermore, the students emphasized the value of guest speaker sessions. They believed that hearing from industry professionals and experts would provide them with valuable perspectives and real-world examples, making the subject more relevant and exciting. By interacting with professionals from different fields, students could broaden their knowledge and gain practical insights into the business world.

Another aspect the students highlighted was their desire for hands-on learning in the classroom. They expressed a need for opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge to real-life scenarios and engage in practical business practices. By actively participating in business simulation game, case studies, or projects with industry or local community, students develop essential skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and teamwork, preparing them for future challenges in the business world.

In addition to the ideal teaching-learning environment, the students expressed a collective wish for the subject to become more "useful", "practical", and "interesting". They desired a curriculum that is closely aligned with current industry trends, particularly in Thailand, its neighboring countries, Asian countries and more, and addresses the evolving needs of the business landscape. By incorporating relevant and up-to-date

examples, case studies, and practical assignments, the subject would become more engaging and applicable to their future careers.

RQ3 Design: What specific action steps can be taken to enhance the teaching-learning approaches based on the identified strengths at the business school in Thailand?

In the third phase, called the Design perspective, the researchers analyzed the interview results collected from lecturers, which served as a foundation for creating an ideal design to enhance teaching and learning. The suggestions and feedback provided by the student participants were carefully considered in this process. One significant recommendation that appeared from the Chinese students which was also firmly supported by other international and local students during the interviews is the need to modify the current lecture style, which typically focuses on teaching one chapter or topic per week. To address this, the lecturer participants propose incorporating additional learning components and opportunities for students, such as guest speaker sessions where experienced practitioners and executives share their knowledge and expertise with students. This should provide students with valuable insights from successful practitioners. Moreover, for discussion classes, it was found that two-way communication, particularly face-to-face interaction, is considered the most effective. To promote this, lecturers can increase the mark allocation for presentation exercises, and feedback should come not only from a lecturer but also from students, team members and peers inside the classroom via face-to-face communication, allowing for a more comprehensive evaluation process. Also, while case studies are already used in discussion classes, additional approaches such as role-playing games and hands-on learning in the class can be incorporated, which aims to provide students with experiences of real-life business practices, further enriching their learning experience. Alongside these modifications, the lecturer participants emphasized the importance of community projects, company visits, and work shadowing exercises. They believe that engaging students in initiatives to support the local community fosters personal growth and social responsibility. Company visits provide practical exposure to business environments, connecting theoretical knowledge to real-world applications, while work shadowing enables students to have realistic ideas of their chosen fields and job roles, and to set the right expectation with regard to tasks and responsibilities in

work before actually stepping into it. By integrating community projects, company visits, and work shadowing into the educational framework, a dynamic and engaging learning environment can be created, and these diverse and holistic teaching methods cater to the students’ needs and preferences, nurturing academic knowledge, practical skills, and social responsibility, which prepares all students regardless of their nationalities for success in their future careers and in contributing positively to society. Table 2 introduces the suggested modifications for teaching methods that cater to the needs of the students.

Table 2 Proposed Allocation for Business subject components

Proposed mark allocation
Oral presentation
Discussion activities
Case studies
Role play
Hands-on business practice experience
Work shadowing at companies
Projects with industry and local community
Business simulation game
Reflection from business seminars by guest speakers
Mid-term and final examinations for both theory testing and application
*Evaluation method: both vertical and horizontal evaluation, and self-evaluation

On a related note, it is important to highlight that the findings from this design phase were substantial. This also led us to align to the hierarchical framework of Bloom's Taxonomy which contains six domains: *Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze, Evaluate, and Create* (Bloom et al., 1984; Conklin, 2005). The implementation of hands-on business practices such as projects with industry and local community and work shadowing in companies can be classified into the various levels in the hierarchy of Bloom's taxonomy. For instance, in the process of conducting such activities, first, students need to observe and gain an understanding of work and project concepts and knowledge, which aligns with the lower levels of Bloom's taxonomy such as "**remember**" and "**understand.**" Second, through their learning journey, students will be challenged to apply their knowledge in real-world contexts and analyze information critically, which corresponds to the "**apply**" and "**analyze**" levels. By actively participating in collaborative projects with the local community, they will be required to assess the environment, identify opportunities, and generate business ideas. Third, the activities emphasize fostering students’ abilities to

evaluate information, arguments, and problem-solving approaches, and this aligns with the **"evaluate"** level of Bloom's taxonomy where students learn to assess the effectiveness and limitations of various business strategies and solutions. Eventually, the learning experience will cultivate students' creative and innovative thinking and problem-solving skills; thus, by engaging in project-based work, students will operate at the **"create"** level of Bloom's taxonomy. This will enable students to develop unique solutions to complex challenges and demonstrate their understanding of the subject matter in innovative ways.

RQ4 Destiny: How can the positive practices of AI be sustained to support continuous improvement in the teaching-learning approaches at the business school in Thailand?

The last phase, Destiny, considered the beginning of an ongoing creation of an appreciative learning culture. To create the change for the business course, it is necessary for all lecturers and students to participate in the implementation of the new course plan and design. When a fundamental business course only uses the traditional teaching and learning method which places the emphasis on lectures, textbooks, and case study, students may feel limitation to contribute towards the development of a higher order of management skills. The findings of this study suggest implementing the integrative blended teaching and learning method (Hermens & Clarke, 2009), which is a combination of lecture, textbook, case studies, a role-play, and hands-on business practice experiences where the emphasis is also placed on student's teamwork and execution of strategy and management of tactics. This should be a positive reinforcement of learning experience that allows students to contextualize what is learnt from lectures and case studies, through learning by doing while enhancing understanding of cause and effect. It aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice, enabling students to develop a deeper understanding of how business concepts and strategies are implemented in real-world scenarios.

To sustain the effectiveness of these activities, a comprehensive approach is recommended. This includes garnering institutional support by involving relevant departments, administrators, and stakeholders. Establishing a strong network of alumni and industry professionals offers valuable mentorship and real-world exposure for students. Promoting collaboration among different subjects ensures a cohesive learning experience. Lastly, allocating resources wisely, including budget,

technology, and administrative support, is vital for the smooth execution and long-term success of these initiatives. By implementing these strategies, the business course can cultivate a dynamic and engaging learning environment, empowering students to become adept and adaptable business professionals with the necessary skills to excel in the real-world.

Conclusion

Previous studies have reported that the experience of Chinese students studying abroad encompasses various challenges, including language barriers, cultural adjustment issues, and pressure concerning their career development plans (Zhou, Knoke, & Sakamoto, 2005). Consequently, the behavior of Chinese students in classrooms is frequently stereotyped as that of passive learners who exhibit reluctance to actively participate (Zhou, Knoke, & Sakamoto, 2005). However, our interviews have revealed that Chinese students are not as stereotyped; they do not merely sit quietly and excel only at exams. They prioritize student-centered learning and actively pursue increased opportunities for face-to-face communication to enhance their language proficiency and broaden their understanding of diverse cultures. Language and cultural disparities do not diminish their motivation to study; rather, they actively seek real-world business practice.

To improve effectiveness in teaching and learning, a well-designed business course can be of help. Through interactive class exercises via face-to-face discussions and communication, students can improve their language and interpersonal skills and gain confidence in expressing themselves (Tigelaar, Dolmans, Wolhagen, & Van Der Vleuten, 2004). Building teamwork with other students in a class for performing effective projects and presentation exercises can help students navigate cultural training and network with their friends and future business partners. Visiting established corporations in Thailand, receiving advice from local managers, and observing real work scenarios provide students with opportunities to apply their theoretical knowledge into practice, and such collaboration between academic institutions and industries offers unprecedented chances for students' career development. All these course plans truly make the study abroad process rewarding for Chinese and international students, while they can also be effective for the career development of local students.

Particularly the post-COVID era accelerated the adoption of remote teaching and online learning and has

pushed academic institutions into a new ecosystem. While these changes have brought flexibility and convenience, it is important to recognize the challenges they present, particularly in preparing students for the job market and the demands they face in their future career. According to the interviews conducted with both students and lecturers in a business school, the significance of adopting a well-designed approach that combines a blended teaching and learning method (Tucker, 2020), which is expected to be even more effective for overall learning and particularly valuable in the future. The concept of blended learning has gained prominence and has been extensively researched as highly effective teaching models in recent years (Zhao & Watterston, 2021). By implementing an integrated blended teaching-learning approach and incorporating top-down, peer evaluation, and self-evaluation methods, business courses will not only become more practical and engaging; yet it will also align with the changing environment.

Furthermore, the current study also discussed the implementation of new teaching and learning methods by guiding students towards achieving higher levels of cognitive skills, particularly in the domains of "evaluate" and "create" in Bloom's taxonomy. By actively observing professionals in real-world settings and participating in hands-on projects, students will be empowered to become critical thinkers, evaluators, and creators, fostering their growth as well-rounded and capable individuals prepared for success in their personal and professional lives.

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