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## A Reflection on the Effects of Immersion in the Host Culture of Asian Countries on International Students

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**Abstract** This study targets international students immersed in the host culture of Asian countries and identifies the potential effects of such immersion on these students by drawing upon the review of literature. An overview of the results in this study shows that international students immersed in the host culture of Asian countries can be affected by such immersion and undergo different challenges such as culture shock. Those effects are found to be reflected from daily activities of intercultural communication which leads to the emergence of English as a lingua franca (ELF). When international students are also found to be affected in their motivation of foreign language acquisition and attitudes toward native speakers and the target culture, it is thus concluded that regardless of which language international students immersed in the host culture of Asian countries adopt for intercultural communication, they are definitely affected by such communication which is part of intercultural education and beneficial for them in developing worldviews and the competence of responding to world affairs in the global society of the 21st century.

**Keywords** ELF, worldview, culture shock, intercultural education, intercultural communication

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## 1. Introduction

With the trend toward globalisation and internationalisation, the world has become smaller without the barriers of national boundaries due to the advanced development in communication and information technologies. Under these global effects, English as an international language has been widely adopted by people across the world, facilitating global interactions in tourism, business, technology and education. Indeed, internationalization in higher education has been promoted by many universities across the world and in turn made studying abroad become popular with students in various countries. According to the Ministry of Education in Taiwan, international students have rapidly increased due to wider sources of countries in recent years (MOE, 2025). Taking the United States where the number of international students takes up a high percentage of enrolment in higher education for example, international students in the United States are found to mostly come from Asian countries such as Vietnam, Taiwan, China, South Korea, and Japan in 2022-2023 (Baer & Martel, 2023). Regardless of where international students are immersed, they may have different experiences in gaining new knowledge and skills of interacting with people from different countries. Under these circumstances, international students immersed in the host culture are expected to undergo certain challenges. However, many international students may simply study abroad but overlook the effects of immersion in the host culture. In response to the question, studies find that immersion in the host culture may be considered a key factor in helping international students learn to adopt new ways of reasoning and thinking (Wahyuningsih, 2020). Studies also show that such immersion may function as international education and lead to academic exchanges of scholars and students (Marshall, 2024). More importantly, immersion in the host culture can serve as a kind of training that enables international students to cross cultural barriers and reflect on cultural diversity in specific contexts (Conti, 2025). Namely, international students may be affected by immersion in the host culture to some degrees and in different aspects.

Given that internationalization in higher education is a goal for universities in Asian countries, it is firstly assumed that international students exposed to the host culture of Asian countries might be affected in developing different kinds of competence and also acquiring English as a foreign language inside the classroom. Although the English language is considered important to international students immersed in the host culture, it is also hypothesized that their English language acquisition, in which English is not the target language, might vary with how non-native speakers in Asian countries adopt. No matter what effects immersion in the host culture can make on international students, this study aims to identify these potential effects on international students exposed to the host culture of Asian countries by drawing upon the review of literature.

## 2. Methodology

This study targeted international students immersed in the host culture of Asian countries. Unlike other studies, the study adopted a review of the past and recent literature within these 33 years to identify the effects of immersion in host culture on international students in Asian countries. All the data were collected from the literature related to notable viewpoints and findings published in various books or journals for further discussion in the study.

### 2.1 Research Questions

For collecting the data from the literature that could be for further discussion, there were three research questions in this study. The three research questions were in the following:

- (1) In what aspects are international students immersed in the host culture of Asian countries usually affected?
- (2) How are international students immersed in the host culture of Asian countries usually affected in their foreign language acquisition?
- (3) What are the visible effects of the immersion in the host culture on international students in Asian countries?

### 2.2 Limitations of this study

This study was limited by the lack of data that were collected in quantitative or qualitative research. However, the approach to the review of literature was still common to researchers who would like to know more about what was found and maintained by other researchers over these 33 years. The results of this study might deserve the attention of those who are interested in understanding whether the findings and viewpoints of other researchers concerning the effect of immersion in the host culture on international students could make differences due to the change of times and living environments.

### 3. Review of Literature

#### 3.1 The Perspective on Psychology

Research into the effects of immersion in the host culture on international students first finds that the perspective on psychology may reflect those effects due to the human nature such as a desire for language achievements or reactions to social interaction with others. For example, [Kramsch \(1997\)](#) asserts that personal psychology leverages the perceived need of learners to express their meanings in the here-and-now of the communicative situation. Studies also show that psychology can provide a common point of reference for understanding intercultural adaptation ([Alred & Byram, 2002](#)). Although international students studying abroad may experience various effects of immersion in the host culture, studies find that they may face problems arising from cultural differences and in turn experience culture shock from encounters with native speakers and the target culture ([Furnham, 2012](#)). Recent research highlights the notion that culture shock by nature is a psychological phenomenon which is often experienced by those who are immersed in the host culture ([Dervin, 2024](#)). Studies also echo that culture shock is positively considered to lead to both the adaptation to stress and the manifestation of a desire for a stable and friendly environment ([Mustafa, 2023](#)). On this point, culture shock as an obvious example of psychology which undoubtedly reflects the effect of immersion in the host culture on international students in Asian countries.

While understanding there is a relationship between psychology and the effects of immersion in the host culture on international students, this study finds that psychological factors such as motivation for the second or the target language (L2) and attitudes toward native speakers and the target culture may play a role in reflecting these effects. For instance, studies show that motivation is the driving force behind the success in learning a second or foreign language ([Dörnyei, 1998](#)) and helps individuals persist with specific tasks ([Chambers, 1996](#)). Truly motivated students who make efforts in language learning and enjoy various tasks tend to have motivation categorized into integrative and instrumental motivation as separate concepts, especially when they are in the countries where English is adopted as an international language rather than the target language ([Lamb, 2004](#)). More importantly, L2 motivation is beneficial for those who are immersed in the host culture in the development of the language they should adopt ([Anderson, 2019](#)). Since motivation to acquire English or the target language can be linked to the shared language identity, it may explain why students studying abroad are still influenced by immersion in the host culture in acquiring the target language. Recent research supports that L2 motivation may arise from the interaction between individuals and the host environment and includes the components that invoke the involvement in building up the self-concept ([Dörnyei, 2022](#)). Furthermore, L2 motivation may not only promote intercultural development such as cultural awareness or cultural identity ([Berg et. al, 2023](#)) but also enhance L2 achievements ([Wu, 2022](#)). On this point, international students immersed in the host culture of Asian countries may be motivated to learn the target language because of the desire for understanding the target culture and native speakers. However, they may also have the motivation to learn the English language for the concern of adopting English as an international language to interact with people from different countries.

In terms of the function of attitudes, research finds that attitudes which are developed and fostered in an intercultural environment easily influence what international students think about. For example, studies show that immersion in the host culture may be connected to one's attitudes toward the need for understanding others and expressing oneself ([Littlewood, 1992](#); [MacNamara, 1993](#)). Studies also find that attitudes often function as the input and output of social action ([Garret et. al, 2003](#)). According to [Houghton \(2013\)](#), socially-constructed attitudes are definitely related to one's cultural identity, which may determine what input he or she likes to engage with. Recent research sheds light on the fact that attitudes are often linked to social and ethnic identities and enable those who are exposed to the host culture to learn how to communicate and interact with native speakers ([Saville-Troike & Barto, 2022](#); [Furnham, 2025](#)). More importantly, [Oppenheim \(2020\)](#) maintains that attitudes consist of cognitive, affective and behavioural components and may directly or indirectly reflect one's stereotypes, beliefs, reactions or verbal statements during encounters with the other culture. All in all, the literature associated with the perspective on psychology shows that psychological factors may indeed reflect the effects of immersion in the host culture on international students studying abroad in Asian countries.

#### 3.2 The Perspective on Intercultural Communication

When the effects of immersion in the host culture on international students are considered to be understood from the perspective on intercultural communication, research finds that these students indeed have the necessity of communication and interaction with native speakers and people coming from different cultures in daily life. For

instance, studies show that Intercultural communication is a process that involves not only the knowledge of understanding and building up the relationship with people from different cultures but also the skills to communicate and interact with others through English as a shared language in a specific context (Scollon & Scollon, 1995). However, studies also show that the same expressions of English as an international language may function differently in various cultures during communication and interaction with people coming from different countries (Silberstein, 2001). Nevertheless, intercultural communication is considered the discourse in which cultural awareness and negotiation can be achieved through a shared language (Dasli, 2011). Studies further find that those who have the experiences in undertaking intercultural communication may develop critical thinking about themselves and others in the globalized world (Dooley & Rubinstein, 2018). Namely, a person's worldviews and cultural identity may emerge with their willingness to engage in intercultural communication during immersion in the host culture.

In response to the trend toward internationalization and globalization, recent research echoes that intercultural communication is common to people across the world for communicating and interacting with each other by adopting either the English language or the target language as a shared language. For example, Paige (2022) emphasizes that intercultural communication is the process of communication and interaction via English as an international language within a particular linguistic and cultural context. However, Baker (2024) maintains that intercultural communication enables learners exposed to the host culture to handle cultural and linguistic differences and to negotiate with cultural diversity by adopting the target language as an international language. Under these circumstances, the English language may not be the only language adopted by international students for intercultural communication. Indeed, intercultural communication, which can be recognized as part of intercultural education, aims to help learners develop their critical engagement, self-reflection and intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 2021). More importantly, those who are immersed in the host culture are usually considered to learn critical perspectives on cultural differences and benefit from it in developing a certain level of competence for communication and interaction with people from different cultures in a specific context (Kim, 2023). While learning to communicate and interact with people from different countries by adopting English as an international language, students may further be taught to cope with the unavoidable changes in cultural negotiation and develop culturally-contextualized knowledge (Corbett, 2022). Intercultural communication as part of intercultural education is to train students to tolerate cultural diversity and become more open-minded to what should be learnt in different cultural fields (Kremmer & Pinto, 2025). Regardless of where international students are exposed, they may be influenced by immersion in the host culture not only in the development of different kinds of competence and new thinking modes but also the acquisition of the English language and the target language through daily activities of intercultural communication.

### 3.3 The Perspective on Psycholinguistics

The perspective on psycholinguistics is associated with the effects of immersion in the host culture on international students mainly because research finds that these effects may stem from the cognition of learning the target language and the target culture. For example, it is found that bottom-up knowledge of patterns and forms in a specific language may emerge and make one produce meta-linguistic generalisations via induction when he or she is exposed to the host culture (Decoo, 1996; Gollin, 1998). Yet, studies also show that top-down knowledge can facilitate one's decoding, retention and retrieval of information through more highly-structured types of discourse between one language and another (Gathercole et al., 1999). As comprehension implies an understanding of the overall message above and beyond the literal meaning or expressions in intercultural settings, it seems uneasy for international students to achieve the overall comprehension and acquisition of the target language in the host culture. Garman (1996) asserts that comprehension involves the linguistic structure of the message, prior linguistic knowledge and contextual information. Regardless of which type of thinking is adopted, studies show that prior knowledge plays a crucial role in acquiring English as a second or foreign language (EFL/ESL) and gaining the new knowledge about the target culture (Foley & Thompson, 2003). According to Scovel (2010), comprehension can be greatly facilitated by the constant interplay between the contextual knowledge and linguistic codes. Namely, international students may not actually understand what native speakers talk about and what the target culture means without the related knowledge sometimes when native speakers use their own verbal or nonverbal expressions for communication in a specific context.

Living in the global society of the 21st century, people across the world face the norms of code-mixing and code-switching in the English language as a lingua franca (ELF) have emerged nowadays (Jenkins, 2006). When ELF is adopted by people across the world, it seems to make them become closer and more aware of it as a global phenomenon. For example, Bruthiaux (2002) points out that a cluster of economic, military, political and technological

factors has led to the worldwide dominance of English as a language of wider communication. [Vigneron \(2001\)](#) maintains that understanding ELF is a key factor in enabling individuals to adopt new ways of reasoning and thinking, thereby succeeding in a global society. On the one hand, the forms and expressions shown in ELF may function as English for specific purposes (ESP) because they are adopted for the purposes of negotiations in specific contexts of the workplace ([Hall, 2013](#)). On the other hand, adopting ELF as a shared language may make it easier for students who speak English as a foreign language to promote the efficiency of intercultural communication, in which they do not need to keep an assumed identity in standard English ([Matsumoto, 2011](#)). Recent research highlights the notion that individuals who adopt English as a shared language in global society may not associate it with a particular culture in various sectors, including business, advertising, entertainment, and technology ([Gulhavo & Rustamovna, 2024](#)). In addition, ELF is found to affect one's professional communication in different fields ([Assassi & Rouaghe, 2024](#)). Indeed, adopting ELF as ESP is usually viewed as a crucial strategy for solving conflicts and building up the cooperative relationship among businessmen as well as meeting what practitioners and clients need in the workplace ([Roshid et al., 2022](#)). More importantly, the linguistic expressions and cultural forms in ELF are continuously considered as both the results of local changes and global influences and the needs for communication with people from different countries ([Baker, 2020](#)). On this point, international students may learn to adopt ELF as a shared language during immersion in the host culture.

#### 4. Results and Discussions

An overview of the literature published in books or journals within these 33 years confirms that the effects of the immersion in the host culture on international students studying abroad in Asian countries could be reflected from the three perspectives on psychology, intercultural communication and psycholinguistics.

##### 4.1 Psychological Factors as the Role in Reflecting the Effects

Research finds that psychology may play a role in reflecting the effects of immersion in the host culture on international students in Asian countries. For example, the results of the study find that culture shock is a visible symptom and usually experienced by international students immersed in the host culture due to the lack of knowledge about native speakers and the target culture. In addition, the results of the study show that those who are immersed in the host culture can be affected by such immersion in L2 motivation and the attitudes toward native speakers and the target culture. When L2 motivation is found to be based on both English language acquisition and the acquisition of the target language, this implies that L2 motivation may function in reflecting these effects which involve the acquisition of the target language and ELF due to both the necessity of understanding more about native speakers and target culture and the desire for responding to world affairs in the global society of the 21st century. When L2 motivation of international students immersed in the host culture are found to be more related to integrative motivation, the results of the study also show that it leads to intercultural development such as cultural awareness and cultural identity. Regardless of where international students are immersed, the results of the study demonstrate that they are affected by immersion in the host culture in L2 motivation, which helps them deepen the understanding of the changing world. Compared to the psychological factor of motivation, the other one of attitudes is more complex and involve various components in how individuals perceive the target language and culture. Especially noteworthy is the finding that attitudes consist of an affective component which indicates that attitudes toward native speakers and the target culture may be linked to L2 motivation in reflecting the effects of immersion on international students. This highlights the notion that the interrelationship between the factor of attitudes toward native speakers and the target culture and the other factor of L2 motivation may mutually influence each other in reflecting the effects of immersion in the host culture on international students during immersion in the host culture.

##### 4.2 Intercultural Communication as the impetus to Reflecting the Effects

While examining the effects of immersion in the host culture on international students from the perspective of intercultural communication, research finds that such communication can act as a catalyst for the effects of immersion on these students. Indeed, intercultural communication is different from general communication and usually conducted by adopting English as an international language. Even when international students are immersed in the host culture of Asian countries, they indeed have many opportunities to communicate and interact with people coming from different countries via English as an international language. More importantly, it is found that those who are exposed to the host culture have to go through daily activities of intercultural communication inside or outside the classroom to discover and interpret the differences between their own culture and the target culture by adopting the



English language or the target language as a shared language. This highlights the fact that the effects of intercultural communication as part of intercultural education benefit international students in fostering new ways of thinking and reasoning and developing a certain level of competence to respond to global issues in the 21st century. The more willing to communicate and interact with others international students are, the more they may benefit from immersion in the host culture. To this point, daily activities of intercultural communication may influence international students' motivation for foreign language acquisition and attitudes toward native speakers and the target culture during immersion in the host culture.

#### **4.3 Psycholinguistic Conception as the Basis of Reflecting the Effects**

For international students immersed in the host culture, they may face learning challenges related to language and cultural barriers. From the perspective on psycholinguistics, the effects of this immersion can be shown on these students in their need for understanding specific expressions used by native speakers and grasping the deeper meanings of the target culture. The results of the study also find that the ability of international students to comprehend native speakers and the target culture may depend on prior knowledge gained through either inductive or deductive reasoning. As international students exposed to the host culture may not have any prior knowledge of the target language and the target culture, however, this indicates that they may still need to adopt English as a shared language to understand more about native speakers and the target culture. In response to this finding, this study highlights the notion that English as an international language is definitely essential to international students who are exposed to the host culture in different countries for comprehending what should be fully understood in daily life. With the trend toward globalization and internationalization, English is commonly adopted by people from different countries. Indeed, it is found that ELF emerges as a global phenomenon and may be increasingly adopted by non-native speakers as an international language in daily life. No matter how often ELF is spread among international students inside or outside the classroom, they can be affected by the immersion in the host culture in the acquisition of ELF. Especially when ELF may function as ESP in the workplace, this sheds light on the fact that the effects of immersion in the host culture on international students in acquiring ELF may be beneficial for them in their future work. However, this effect may primarily serve as the goal of improving the efficiency of communication and interaction with people coming from different countries rather than native speakers during their immersion in the host culture of Asian countries.

#### **5. Implications and Suggestions**

From the perspective of psychology, the results of this study show that international students definitely cannot adapt themselves to the new environment without a better understanding of native speakers and the target culture. It can thus be argued that culture shock is an unavoidable effect of immersion in the host culture on international students in Asian countries but may be positively or negatively experienced by these students. It is suggested that culture shock should be overcome through intercultural education arranged by administrators and teachers of their universities. While finding that immersion in the host culture may affect international students' L2 motivation and their attitudes toward native speakers and the target culture, the study shows that these two factors may be linked to one another. It is thus argued that the interrelationship between the attitudes toward native speakers and the target culture and L2 motivation may influence international students and reflect the effects of such immersion on them. Namely, international students' L2 motivation may be affected by their positive attitudes toward non-native English speakers and the target culture and become more motivated to acquire ELF or the target language during their immersion in the host culture of Asian countries.

According to the perspective of intercultural communication, the results of the study find that immersion in the host culture is not a static but rather an active process, which involves daily activities of intercultural communication via either the English language or the target language among international students. It is thus argued that daily activities of intercultural communication can be considered as part of intercultural education, which enables international students immersed in the host culture of Asian countries to become more motivated to communicate and interact with native speakers and those who come from different countries by adopting a shared language and hold positive attitudes toward cultural diversity during immersion in the host culture.

Based on the perspective of psycholinguistics, the results of the study show that international students may not comprehend the real meanings behind or beyond the target language and the target culture without the prior knowledge of the target language and culture during immersion in the host culture. It can also be argued that it is necessary for international students exposed to the host culture of Asian countries to receive the learning of the target

language and the target culture. Especially when ELF may emerge among non-native speakers for intercultural communication, international students who are exposed to the host culture of Asian countries can be affected in the acquisition of ELF. It is further argued that regardless of which language international students adopt, those who are exposed to the host culture of Asian countries are definitely affected by such immersion in their foreign language acquisition for promoting the efficiency of intercultural communication and developing the competence of responding to the world affairs in the global society of the 21st century.

## 6. Conclusions

As the process of immersion in the host culture is not a static but rather an active process, international students exposed to the host culture of Asian countries may go through the stage of struggling with learning new knowledge and skills of linguistic and cultural differences for the adaptation to the new environment. Especially when international students are immersed in the host culture of Asian countries where the English language is adopted by non-native speakers, they may face the challenges that they have never had. Under the circumstances, it is firstly concluded that international students exposed to the host culture of Asian countries can be affected by such immersion in experiencing culture shock, which arises from linguistic and cultural barriers. When the results of the study show that international students' attitudes toward native speakers and the target culture and their L2 motivation are linked to one another, it is secondly concluded that the interrelationship between these two psychological factors may play a role in reflecting the effects of immersion in the host culture on international students in Asian countries. Especially when L2 motivation may involve the acquisition of the target language and ELF, it is also concluded that international students who are more motivated to acquire different kinds of language may hold more positive attitudes toward native speakers and the target culture due to the need for understanding more about native speakers and the target culture. Since intercultural communication can be seen as the catalyst for the effects of immersion in the host culture on international students in Asian countries, it is maintained that regardless of which language international students adopt for intercultural communication, they definitely experience some effects and benefit from such communication in developing new reasoning and thinking modes such as cultural awareness and cultural identity. It is further concluded that the training of intercultural communication can be integrated into the English curriculum of international students as part of intercultural education which enables them to develop worldviews and the competence of responding to world affairs in the global society of the 21st century during immersion in the host culture of Asian countries.

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