

# A Study on the Impact of International Education Programs on the Global Competence of Teachers in Private Universities in Guangxi

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China's development needs talents with global competence, and teachers are fundamental in nurturing talents. However, the global competence of private university teachers is limited in Guangxi due to insufficient funding. In recent years, Guangxi University of Foreign Languages has actively explored international education cooperation with universities in Southeast Asia, providing study-abroad chances for the teachers. This study developed a global competence scale for private university teachers in Guangxi, China, consisting of four dimensions and nine competence factors, and assessed 47 teachers who studied at Payap University in Thailand. The results revealed that the teachers performed moderately in knowledge dimension, and performed well in the factors of intercultural communication and adaptation, while performed poorly in the international academic skill and action, and excelled in attitudes and values. Based on these findings, the study proposed suggestions for optimizing the international education program and other cultivation strategies.

*Keywords:* global competence, private university teachers, international education program

## Research Background

With the deepening of globalization and China's comprehensive opening-up, China needs comprehensive talents with global competence. "The National Medium- and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan Outline" (The Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China, 2010) states that "we must implement broader, wider, and deeper levels of opening up", and "promote the stable and sustainable development of the Belt and Road Initiative, fostering a community with a shared future for mankind", emphasizing the need to cultivate a large number of international talents with global perspectives, knowledge of international rules, and the ability to engage in international affairs and competition.

China encourages regions to leverage their geographical advantages to expand openness. Guangxi has clear geographic benefits, backed by the southwestern region, adjacent to Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau, and facing Southeast Asia.

Since the promotion of the Belt and Road Initiative in 2015 and the formal implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in 2022, Guangxi has actively explored cooperation with ASEAN

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countries in trade, economy, education, and culture. Thus, cultivating international talents is essential for both Guangxi's economic and social development and its higher education development.

In the face of a complex and diverse educational environment, private universities in Guangxi must continuously enhance their educational quality while strengthening international cooperation. Teachers are the foundation of education (Education Department of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, 2022). To cultivate high-quality talents with global competence, a qualified international faculty team is essential. However, Guangxi's private universities face challenges due to insufficient funding and limited opportunities for cultivating their teachers. Recently, Guangxi University of Foreign Languages (GUFL) has actively explored education cooperation with some universities in Southeast Asia; over 100 teachers have been sent abroad for further study. Therefore, under Guangxi's geographical advantages facing ASEAN countries, it is of significant practical importance to investigate how to cultivate teachers' global competence, or how to develop international education programs for teachers.

## Literature Review

### Connotations and Theoretical Frameworks of Global Competence

In 1988, the concept of “global competence” was first introduced in the report titled *Educating for Global Competence*, published by Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE) (Teng, Zhang, & Hu, 2018). There has never been a unified standard for the definition of global competence, and theoretical frameworks vary significantly; however, many Western scholars and institutions have made substantial research advancements in this area.

World Savvy (2020) developed the Global Competence Matrix based on four core concepts: “We are Connected”, “Our Stories Matter”, “The World Is Complex”, and “History Shapes Our Present”. OECD (2018) released “PISA 2018 Global Competence Framework”, defining global competence as a multidimensional, lifelong learning goal. The Global Competence Associates (GCA) (2020) created the Global Competence Model™, which visually represents the specific combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for global competence. While the connotations and theoretical frameworks of global competence vary, they all encompass aspects such as knowledge and skills, attitudes and values, and actions, which provide a solid theoretical foundation for research on global competence based on China's national context.

Although research on global competence in China began relatively late, some progress had been achieved. Tsinghua University (2020) defined global competence as the ability to learn, work, and interact effectively in international environments. The enhancement of global competence is a continuous, lifelong learning process that requires ongoing exploration and development of six core competencies across cognitive, interpersonal, and personal dimensions, involving six core competencies: knowledge of the world and global issues, proficiency in native and foreign languages, openness and respect, communication and collaboration, self-awareness and confidence, ethics and responsibility. New Channel Global Competence Model (Hu, 2019) is a global competence edifice, with Chinese culture serving as the foundation, a global perspective as the top, supported by six pillars: Humanities and Technology Literacy (STREAM) and foreign language abilities, alongside the core competencies (4C) of international talents. Both models emphasize cultural awareness and confidence, suggesting that a globally competent individual should possess a strong sense of national identity and self-esteem.

### **Measurement and Evaluation of Global Competence**

The measurement and evaluation of global competence vary currently. Through a literature review, it is found that the assessment of global competence mainly focuses on the following aspects: determining different evaluation indicators and content based on different target groups, constructing corresponding assessment scales, and validating these scales for practical application. PISA 2018 global competence measurement is worldwide recognized, and targets high school students (Teng & Du, 2018).

Chinese scholars developed scale for assessing global competence of different kinds of students in higher education. Liu and Wu (2015) developed a scale based on Hunter's theory of international capabilities, integrating key elements of "global citizenship" and the basic competencies of the DeSeCo (Definition and Selection of Competencies) program, an international initiative funded by the Swiss Federal Department of Education. Tang, Peng, and Li's team (2021) constructed a university student global competence model that encompasses knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values, grounded in the theoretical frameworks proposed by OECD. Liu, Ma, and Li (2018) designed a scale for graduate students in the context of higher education internationalization, and conducted sampling surveys and assessments at universities in Beijing. Liu and Yin (2020) selected teachers from eight leading Chinese universities as samples to statistically analyze university teachers' international competence, and then constructed an evaluation scale with three dimensions and eight indicators. Li, Zhao, and Bo (2023) developed a framework and scale questionnaire for international Chinese language teachers, consisting of four dimensions and seven competencies.

### **Cultivation of Global Competence**

From the perspective of curriculum development, scholars and educational institutions, both domestically and internationally, primarily explore the following two pathways for cultivating global competence:

Targeted curricula systems for global competence development: One notable example is the Global Competence Certificate (GCC) course, which is the first online graduate-level teacher education program in the U.S., focused specifically on global competence. This course aims to enhance teachers' global competence, develop their capacity to foster global competence in students, and establish a learning community for global competence education (Liu & Chen, 2019). Additionally, Professor Reimers at Harvard University led the "Global Education Innovation Initiative", which outlines 17 sustainable development goals and emphasizes the cultivation of global competence in primary and secondary education, resulting in a comprehensive curricula framework (Zhao, 2022). Tsinghua University has also introduced a selective course titled "Global Competence Overseas Practice", which explores an integrated model of "curricula + social practice" (Hu & Jing, 2018).

Integrated cultivation models combining teaching and practical activities: For instance, a land-grant university in the southern U.S. incorporated experiential learning activities based on Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model into its core advanced textile and apparel curriculum, exploring the impact of these learning activities on students' global competence. Jiang and Wang (2023) took a top-tier foreign language university in East China as an example, constructing an OBE (Outcome-Based Education) teaching model aimed at developing students' global competence and language skills through the core course "Comprehensive English". Huang (2023) explored a teaching model grounded in language, supported by discipline, reliant on practice, and backed by teachers, to enhance students' abilities to engage in international collaboration and competition.

From the literature review above, it is evident that global competence has garnered significant attention from scholars both internationally or in China. However, the existing studies exhibit some characteristics and limitations: Research on global competence in China is increasing but primarily focuses on economically developed areas or top-tier universities, with little attention to underdeveloped regions or to ordinary and private universities. Most studies concentrate on youth and students, with limited attention to teachers. The primary focus is on traditional Western developed countries, whereas globalization does not equate to Westernization (Hu & Jing, 2018), and global competence should not be synonymous with Western competence.

As Guangxi is very close to ASEAN countries, it is essential for scholars there to focus more on the neighboring countries rather than solely on Western ones. Thus, it is of significance to research on the international education cooperation programs between private universities in Guangxi and those in ASEAN countries, the global competence of private university teachers, and the impact of these programs on teachers' global competence. This study, therefore, employs a questionnaire targeting teachers who participated in the international education program before 2024, aims to assess their global competence after the program was finished, and explores effective ways to cultivate global competence among teachers in Guangxi's private universities.

## Research Design

### Population

The target population of this study consists of 47 teachers employed at GUFL, who studied in the international education program at Payap University in Thailand between 2018 and 2023, aged between 23 and 45 years old, with teaching experience ranging from one to 15 years and diverse academic disciplines.

### Research Tools

This study is based on PISA 2018 global competence framework and draws upon the international competence structure model and factor analysis summarized by Liu Y.'s team, as well as the global competence questionnaire for international Chinese language teachers developed by Li X.'s team. Combining these with the characteristics of the survey population, a questionnaire was created to assess the teachers' global competence after participating in international education program. The questionnaire includes four dimensions: knowledge, including world knowledge, understanding global issues, and international academic knowledge; skills and actions, including cross-cultural communication, cross-cultural adaptation, and international academic skills and action; attitudes, meaning the teachers' attitudes towards Chinese culture and multiculturalism; values, meaning a sense of global citizenship. All questions are formatted using the Likert' five-level scale, with options ranging from "Strongly Disagree", "Disagree", "Neutral", "Agree", to "Strongly Agree", scored as 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 respectively. Higher scores indicate higher levels of the global competence of the respondents.

Table 1

*Questionnaire Structure for Global Competence of Private University Teachers in Guangxi*

Dimensions	Factors	Items	Example items
Knowledge	World knowledges	1-5	2. I am aware of and follow issues related to climate change and global warming.
	Understanding global issues	6-9	8. I can analyze the impact of economic development on the environment.
	International academic knowledge	10-12	11. I am familiar with the cutting-edge issues in my field internationally.

Table 1 to be continued

	Cross-cultural communication	13-17	13. When communicating with foreigners, I notice cultural differences and try to understand their cultural expressions.
Skills and action	Cross-cultural adaptation	18-21	20. Despite the pressure, I can adjust myself to adapt to new environments.
	International academic skills and actions	22-26	24. I can skillfully use information technology and tools to find international data resources for academic research.
	Open mind	27-29	29. I want to understand how people from different cultural backgrounds view the world.
Attitudes	Cultural confidence and inclusivity	30-32	31. I respect people from different countries, cultural backgrounds and customs.
	Global citizenship	33-36	43. I believe that regardless of where people are from, their beliefs or willingness, they are all part of a community with a shared future.
Values			

### Research Results and Discussion

A total of 47 participants completed the questionnaire, resulting in an effective sample size of 47, with a response rate of 100%. Through reliability and validity tests, the Cronbach's alpha for the scale reached 0.977, and the KMO was 0.810, suggesting that the global competence scale designed for the private university teachers in Guangxi has relatively high reliability and validity. The average scores for the nine competence factors are as follows: world knowledge (3.40), understanding global issues (3.33), international academic knowledge (3.42), cross-cultural communication (3.83), cross-cultural adaptation (3.87), international academic skills and actions (3.18), open mind (4.09), cultural confidence and inclusivity (4.27), and global citizenship (4.06). Overall, this indicates that teachers performed best in attitudes and values, with average scores above 4.00. Additionally, according to the skills and action dimensions, they also did relatively well in cross-cultural communication and adaptation, but got the lowest average score in international academic skills and actions among the nine factors, suggesting that the teachers had weaker academic abilities. Furthermore, the teachers got average scores below 3.5 in all three factors within knowledge dimension, indicating a need for the teachers to enlarge their knowledge.

Table 2

*Measurement Result of Global Competence of the Private University Teachers*

Dimensions	Factors	N	Minimum	Maximum	Average	Standard error	Standard deviation
Knowledge	World knowledges	47	1.00	5.00	3.4043	0.12339	0.84595
	Understanding global issues	47	1.00	5.00	3.3298	0.13668	0.93702
	International academic knowledge	47	1.00	5.00	3.4184	0.13002	0.89137
Skills and action	Cross-cultural communication	47	1.00	5.00	3.8340	0.12140	0.83230
	Cross-cultural adaptation	47	1.50	5.00	3.8670	0.12743	0.87360
	International academic skills and actions	47	1.00	5.00	3.1787	0.14256	0.97734
Attitudes	Open mind	47	1.00	5.00	4.0851	0.13353	0.91543
	Cultural confidence and inclusivity	47	1.00	5.00	4.2695	0.13474	0.92376
Values	Global citizenship	47	1.00	5.00	4.0638	0.12177	0.83482
	Valid cases	47					

### Knowledge

Knowledge refers to teachers' understanding of fundamental information about major countries (including both Eastern and Western ones), concerning their history, culture, economy, and politics, as well as

comprehension of global issues such as the environment, economic crises, and health concerns. It also encompasses familiarity with internationally recognized theories, cutting-edge issues, and research methods in their professional fields.

According to world knowledge factor, there were five items, with an average score of 3.40. For the item “I am aware of climate change and global warming issues”, the respondents got the highest average score (3.45); and for the items “I understand international conflicts” and “I know about gender equality issues around the world”, they got the lowest score (3.32); “Neutral” was the most common choice (41.28%). According to understanding global issues factor, there were four items, with an average score of 3.33. For the item “I can analyze the impact of economic development on the environment”, the respondents got the highest average score (3.40), while getting the lowest average score (3.26) for the item “I can understand global health issues and explain them well”; “Neutral” (36.7%) and “Agree” (32.45%) were the top choices. According to international academic knowledge factor, there were three items, with an average score of 3.42. The average score for “I am familiar with internationally recognized theories in my field” is 3.51, while “I am familiar with cutting-edge issues in my field” scores 3.45, and “I am familiar with international research methods in my field” scores 3.30; “Neutral” (41.84%) and “Agree” (31.91%) were the top choices.

These results above indicate that after participating in the international education program, the teachers performed not so well in knowledge dimension, and the weakest in world knowledge. As a teacher in a private university, the author attributed this to the significant variation in individual interests and the broad scope of knowledge. And private universities in Guangxi also lacked training on international academic knowledge for teachers. Moreover, as a participant of the international education program, the author noticed that this program primarily focused on discipline-specific knowledge, lacking interdisciplinary teaching.

### **Skills and Actions**

Skills and actions refer to the ability to engage in cross-cultural communication with foreigners, including language application and cross-cultural understanding, as well as the capacity for self-adjustment and adaptation in cross-cultural environments. This dimension also encompasses international academic skills and actions, such as habits of reading foreign literature, awareness of domestic and international research trends, utilizing information technology for academic research, and participating in international academic exchanges.

According to cross-cultural communication factor, there were five items, with average scores distributed as follows: 3.85, 3.96, 3.83, 4.17, and 3.36. For the item “If I encounter communication barriers, I will seek alternative ways to facilitate communication (such as using body language, re-explaining, or translation software)”, the respondents got the highest average score (4.17); the combined percentage of the choices “Neutral”, “Agree”, and “Strongly Agree” is 91.49%. According to cross-cultural adaptation factor, there were four items, with average scores distributed as follows: 4.04, 3.83, 3.83, and 3.77. For the item “I can adjust my behavior to meet the needs of a new environment”, the respondents got the highest average score (4.04); the combined percentage of the choices “Neutral”, “Agree”, and “Strongly Agree” is 93.08%. According to international academic skills and actions factor, there were five items, with scores distributed as follows: 3.11, 3.30, 3.09, 2.98. For the items “I am confident in engaging in dialogue with colleagues abroad” and “I can proactively participate in international academic exchanges”, the respondents got two low scores (2.98 and 3.09); “Disagree” (21.28%) and “Neutral” (38.30%) were the top choices.

The results indicate that the teachers showed confidence and proactivity in cross-cultural communication and adaptation. For example, they were adept at utilizing available resources and tools to resolve communication challenges and actively adapted to new environments. However, their performance in international academic skills and actions was relatively weak, particularly lacking confidence when communicating with foreigners.

Several factors may contribute to this discrepancy. On one hand, they have experienced the importance of cross-cultural communication and adaptation during their study abroad, which encouraged them to proactively address new challenges. For instance, some teachers, despite with limited English, actively overcome communication barriers in Thailand. On the other hand, international academic skills and actions require not only strong language abilities but also international academic experience, but the teachers lacked access to international academic exchanges in private universities. Additionally, the international education program did not offer sufficient training on academic skills or organize activities for academic exchange.

### **Attitudes**

Attitudes refer to an openness to understand and experience the lifestyles, cultural traditions, and worldviews of people from different cultural backgrounds, as well as a confident, equitable, and inclusive attitude toward the people, cultural traditions, or religious beliefs of one's own country and others.

According to open attitude factor, there were three items, with average scores distributed as follows: 4.13, 4.09, and 4.04. And the combined percentage for the choices "Neutral", "Agree", and "Strongly Agree" is 94.32%. According to cultural confidence and inclusivity factor, there were three items, with average scores distributed as 4.36, 4.21, and 4.23. And the combined percentage for the choices "Neutral", "Agree", and "Strongly Agree" is 94.32%.

As reflected in the high proportions of the choices, the results indicate that the teachers showed a strong international attitude, such as their openness, cultural confidence, and inclusivity. Two factors may contribute to this positive outlook: cultural diversity and cultural exchange activities. First of all, China is a multi-ethnic country, and Guangxi is a multi-ethnic province, which provide the teachers with a rich multicultural experience. This background fosters an openness to other cultures and traditions. Secondly, this international education program in Thailand included a variety of cultural exchange and experiential activities, such as cooking Thai cuisine, making floral offerings on Thai Teachers' Day, visiting temples and other ancient architectures, participating in handicraft workshops in rural Northern Thailand. These experiences allowed the teachers to deeply experience Thai culture and also had more opportunities to share Chinese culture.

### **Values**

Values refer to the perspective of viewing oneself as a global citizen in a globalized environment, encompassing a sense of responsibility to contribute to other countries, a mission to protect the global environment, and an awareness of a community for a shared future.

With only one factor world citizen in this dimension, there were four items with average scores as follows: 4.06, 3.77, 4.15, and 4.28. For the item "I believe that regardless of where people are or their beliefs, they are already part of a community of a shared future", the respondents got the highest average score (4.28); and for the item "I feel a sense of responsibility to do something when I see people in other countries living in harsh conditions", they got the lowest score (3.45); and the combined percentages for the choices "Neutral", "Agree", and "Strongly Agree" is 94.15%.

The results indicate that the teachers recognize strongly their identity as global citizens, particularly valuing the awareness of a community of a shared future. However, their sense of responsibility to help people in other countries is comparatively lower. The results can be probably attributed to two aspects. On one hand, the concept of a community of a shared future is a significant idea promoted in China amid rapid globalization; thus, many university teachers in China accepted well this concept. On the other hand, the lower sense of responsibility to help others may reflect the teachers' lack of confidence in their abilities. In fact, many surveyed teachers had limited opportunities for cross-border living and study, resulting in a lack of relevant experience in helping people from other countries.

### **Suggestions**

Based on the survey results and discussions, it is evident that the teachers in Guangxi private universities possess a strong international attitude and values, as well as relatively good cross-cultural communication and adaptation. They are proactive in cross-cultural contexts. However, they lack international knowledge and academic skills. Therefore, the following recommendations are made to enhance the global competence of the teachers.

#### **Suggestions for Optimizing the International Education Program**

To enhance the international education program, it's essential to focus on both interdisciplinary teaching and foreign language training, which will broaden teachers' knowledge and improve their cross-cultural communication and international academic skills. Specific recommendations include: (1) to develop courses centered around interdisciplinary themes such as global environmental issues, international conflicts, world health, and cutting-edge technological innovations; (2) to implement group projects that bring together the teachers from diverse academic backgrounds to collaboratively tackle real-world problems, which will foster cooperation, enhance communication, and promote knowledge and skill exchange among the teachers; (3) to organize interdisciplinary workshops, academic skills training, and academic conferences both on and off-campus, which will provide the teachers with opportunities to enhance their professional abilities, interdisciplinary skills, and international academic abilities; (4) to develop targeted foreign language courses focused on professional learning and academic writing to help teachers improve their skills in using foreign languages for research and writing or to encourage their participation in class discussions and extracurricular activities to build their confidence in cross-cultural communication.

Furthermore, diverse cultural exchange activities should be organized or promoted to enhance the teacher's international attitudes and values: (1) to organize various cultural exchange events, such as local festivals and international cultural days, to encourage teachers to engage with and deepen their understanding of different cultures; (2) to expand extracurricular activities beyond cultural experiences: For the teachers' professional development, some activities like visits to institutions, businesses, and communities can be arranged; (3) to organize the teachers to participate in local community service and volunteer projects when they are studying abroad, which will enhance the teachers' sense of social responsibility and global citizenship awareness.

#### **Suggestions for Other Cultivation Strategies**

From the individual perspective, the teachers should be responsible for improving their global competence. Firstly, the teachers should expand their international knowledge by regularly reading international news and professional journals to stay informed about global issues and educational trends. They also should actively



improve their foreign language proficiency by using the language in professional learning, research, and daily life. Thirdly, they can incorporate global perspectives in teaching or innovate teaching methods by using multicultural materials, integrating global topics into course design, and doing international case studies to enhance both students' and teachers' global awareness. Last, they can engage in various continuing education like teaching skill workshops, academic conferences to stay updated on research trends.

From the perspective of the employer, Guangxi University of Foreign Languages should provide support for the teachers. Firstly, it should create policies that support teachers in enhancing their international competencies, such as providing resources, time convenience or financial support for the teachers to participate in international activities, study abroad, etc. Secondly, it can strengthen cooperation with overseas institutions and facilitate high-quality overseas training opportunities to help teachers develop their global competence in international environments. Thirdly, it also can encourage teachers to participate in local international events like China-ASEAN Expo and Yongjiang Forum, which offer volunteer opportunities to increase their engagement in international activities.

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