

Fostering Leadership and Cultural Integration: Burmese Team Leaders' Role in Peer-Assisted Learning Among Science and Technology Students

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Abstract

This study examines how Burmese Team Leaders, specializing in science and technology disciplines, develop leadership skills and facilitate cultural integration through peer-assisted learning (PAL) sessions at Rangsit University, Thailand. A participatory action research design was employed to investigate how PAL sessions enhance intercultural competence (IC) and foster collaboration among international students and their Thai peers. The study involved 40 participants, all of whom completed a questionnaire designed to assess their experiences with cultural exchange, leadership development, and IC. Of these, 15 participants were selected for semi-structured interviews to provide deeper qualitative insights into their challenges and growth during the program. Results highlight that PAL sessions serve as a vital platform for reducing cultural barriers, building cross-cultural communication skills, and fostering leadership capabilities among Burmese students. Despite facing challenges such as language differences and cultural adaptation, participants demonstrated notable improvements in confidence, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities. The findings emphasize the potential of PAL programs to support the professional and personal growth of international students in science and technology fields, while offering practical recommendations for creating inclusive academic environments that prioritize leadership training and cultural exchange.

Keywords: peer-assisted learning, cultural integration, intercultural competence, Burmese Team Leaders, higher education, international students

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Introduction

Background of the Study

Intercultural competence (henceforth IC), defined as understanding one's own culture coupled with openness and effective engagement with diverse cultures (Deardorff, 2011), has become essential in globalized societies. Increasing ethnic diversity in educational settings and workplaces highlights the critical role IC plays in fostering inclusive environments, enhancing students' academic and professional success, and improving employability in a globalized economy (Busch, 2009; Holmes & O'Neill, 2012; Penbek et al., 2012). Consequently, higher education institutions worldwide strive to nurture culturally inclusive environments that facilitate intercultural integration and cross-cultural adaptation among diverse student populations (Schachner et al., 2019; Ward & Stuart, 2015). In Thailand, where the number of international students has grown significantly due to strategic location, supportive government policies, and affordability (Jampaklaya et al., 2022; Yin et al., 2015), challenges related to language barriers, cultural adaptation, and social isolation remain prevalent, particularly among Burmese students, who constitute a significant portion of Thailand's international student body (Chemsripong, 2021).

The Influence of PAL on Promoting Cultural Understanding

Peer-assisted learning (henceforth PAL), which involves collaborative learning and peer mentoring, offers structured support that has proven beneficial for academic success and socio-emotional well-being (Williams & Reddy, 2016). PAL programs facilitate cultural understanding by providing platforms for meaningful interaction between local and international students, thus enhancing mutual respect and reducing cultural barriers (Cifuentes & Murphy, 2000; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009). Despite the established academic benefits of PAL, the extent to which these programs promote cultural integration and IC among international student leaders remains less explored (Meletiadou, 2022). In Thailand, Burmese student leaders who participate in PAL programs often serve critical roles as cultural bridges, aiding in the adaptation processes of their peers while developing their own intercultural and leadership skills.

Research Problem

While existing literature extensively documents the academic and social benefits of PAL, a significant gap remains regarding the effectiveness of PAL in fostering IC and facilitating cultural integration among international students serving as peer mentors, particularly Burmese Team Leaders at Thai universities. Understanding how PAL contributes to the cultural adaptation and intercultural skill development of these international student leaders is crucial for enhancing program effectiveness and inclusivity.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to investigate how PAL sessions support the cultural adaptation of Burmese Team Leaders in Thai higher education contexts. Specifically, the research aims to explore how PAL sessions facilitate Burmese students' integration into Thai culture through peer interactions and collaborative activities, examine the development of IC among Burmese Team Leaders participating in PAL programs, identify personal and professional growth outcomes focusing on leadership, confidence, and cross-cultural

adaptability, and understand the specific cultural adaptation challenges faced by Burmese Team Leaders and their strategies for overcoming these challenges within PAL environments.

Research Questions

This study addresses the following questions:

1. How do Burmese Team Leaders perceive their roles in promoting cultural integration within the Thai academic environment?
2. What specific challenges do Burmese Team Leaders face in adapting to Thai culture, and what strategies do they use to overcome these challenges?
3. In what ways do Burmese Team Leaders' experiences in PAL centers contribute to their personal and professional development in a cross-cultural context?
4. How effective are PAL programs in supporting the cultural adaptation of Burmese Team Leaders, and what improvements could enhance their effectiveness?

Significance of the Study

This study could potentially hold significant implications for educational practice and policy, as it provides valuable insights into the cultural integration process within PAL contexts, offering practical recommendations to enhance peer mentoring programs for international students. By emphasizing the role of structured peer-supported environments in promoting cross-cultural understanding and leadership skills, the research contributes to the broader academic discourse on IC. Additionally, findings from this study can guide institutions in developing more inclusive and culturally responsive educational policies, benefiting both local and international student communities. Ultimately, this research supports the creation of globally connected and culturally aware academic communities that prepare students effectively for international professional environments.

Literature Review

Increasing diversity in educational environments underscores the importance of promoting cultural integration and IC among students. Intercultural education emphasizes inclusivity and mutual understanding, essential for supportive learning environments, especially in contexts with substantial international student populations (Pérez-Jorge et al., 2023). PAL, characterized by structured collaborative learning and peer mentoring, effectively supports international students' integration, offering academic and socio-emotional benefits (Williams & Reddy, 2016). However, PAL's role in enhancing cultural integration, particularly for international peer mentors, remains underexplored (Meletiadou, 2022).

PAL and Its Role in Integration

PAL fosters academic success through student collaboration, improving academic performance, cognitive abilities, self-reliance, and socio-emotional well-being (Carr et al., 2016). Moreover, PAL environments enable meaningful interactions that foster multicultural understanding, sensitivity, self-confidence, and mutual acceptance by encouraging the open exchange of diverse perspectives (Cifuentes & Murphy, 2000; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009). International peer mentors, such as Burmese Team Leaders, gain deeper insights into the host culture through interactions with local students, enhancing their IC and integration (Montgomery & McDowell, 2009).

Cultural Integration and IC

Cultural integration involves assimilating necessary beliefs, norms, and practices for effective intercultural interactions (Berry, 1997). IC encompasses the skills, attitudes, and knowledge essential for effective engagement with culturally diverse individuals (Byram, 1997), including interpreting differences, openness, and critical reflection on cultural assumptions. Structured cultural exchange programs significantly enhance these competencies (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). Social support from peers is crucial for international students' adaptation, offering emotional resilience and a sense of belonging (Mustaffa & Ilias, 2013; Şener, 2011). PAL provides structured yet informal spaces for cultural interaction, easing adaptation and reducing social barriers (Newsome & Cooper, 2016).

Challenges Faced by International Students in Cultural Adaptation

International students commonly face language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and social isolation (Montgomery & McDowell, 2009). In Thailand, language limitations hinder academic integration and social interactions for international students (Snodin, 2019). For Burmese students, differences between Myanmar and Thai cultural norms compound these challenges, contributing to isolation and slower adaptation. Although peer networks ease cultural adaptation (Howe et al., 2023), international students often maintain closer bonds with peers from similar backgrounds, limiting cross-cultural interactions (Bochner et al., 1977). Therefore, structured programs like PAL that actively promote intercultural interactions become vital.

The Role of PAL in Fostering Cultural Exchange and Integration

PAL significantly boosts academic achievement, enhances social-emotional development, and builds interpersonal skills while being adaptable to diverse contexts (Topping & Ehly, 2001). Pairing mentors from various cultural backgrounds within PAL sessions promotes intercultural communication skills and global perspectives among participants (Leask, 2009). PAL's collaborative nature creates a conducive space for international peer mentors to share experiences and learn from each other, fostering mutual respect and understanding. However, further research is required to detail PAL's specific role in supporting cultural adaptation for peer mentors, such as Burmese Team Leaders, to refine practices and maximize intercultural benefits.

Gaps in Existing Research

Despite extensive research on PAL's academic benefits, studies on its role in fostering IC and cultural adaptation are limited. Most literature emphasizes PAL's impact on academic performance and retention rates (Salomone & Kling, 2017), with less attention to its capacity for facilitating cultural integration (Meletiadou, 2022). Understanding PAL's effectiveness in cultural integration can guide educational institutions in developing inclusive learning environments that better support international students.

This study addresses this gap by exploring how PAL sessions facilitate cultural integration for Burmese Team Leaders at Thai universities, assessing their intercultural development, adaptation challenges, and strategies for overcoming these issues. By focusing explicitly on IC, the research aims to offer actionable recommendations to enhance PAL programs' effectiveness in international education contexts.

Methodology

Research Design

This study utilized a participatory action research (henceforth PAR) approach, complemented by a mixed methods design to thoroughly explore how PAL sessions foster cultural exchange and IC among Burmese student managers (Team Leaders) at Rangsit University, Thailand. The study was conducted over a period of 10 weeks during Term 1 of 2024. By combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies, the research effectively captured participants' comprehensive experiences and perceptions.

Population and Sample

The study's population comprised 40 Burmese students aged 18 to 22 who volunteered as student managers at Rangsit University's PAL center. Participants represented diverse educational backgrounds, regional origins, and had varying levels of English proficiency ranging from intermediate to advanced.

Data Collection Instruments

Quantitative data was collected through a structured questionnaire consisting of 30 Likert-scale items (rated from 1 to 5) assessing aspects such as cultural exchange, IC, personal growth, and leadership development. Additionally, qualitative data was obtained through semi-structured interviews with 15 selected participants. These interviews explored in-depth insights into IC, communication challenges, and personal and professional development arising from PAL participation.

Validity and Reliability

Validity

Content validity of the questionnaire was established through an expert review process utilizing the Item Objective Congruence (IOC) method. Three educational and language pedagogy experts rated each questionnaire item for relevance, assigning scores of +1 (relevant), 0 (unclear), or -1 (irrelevant). Items achieving a score of +1 demonstrated strong alignment with research objectives, confirming the questionnaire's appropriateness and ensuring it accurately measured the intended constructs.

Reliability

The reliability of the questionnaire was determined by calculating Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for internal consistency. A pilot test involving 40 students, who shared demographic characteristics with the main study participants but were not part of the primary sample, yielded a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.893. This result indicates a high internal consistency, confirming the questionnaire's reliability in capturing consistent and dependable responses.

Data Collection Procedures

Questionnaires were administered electronically to all 40 participants, ensuring ease of access and confidentiality. The semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with 15 randomly selected participants, each lasting approximately 30-45 minutes. Ethical considerations were strictly followed, including obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring anonymity, confidentiality, and allowing participants the freedom to withdraw without penalty at any point during the research.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize demographic information and Likert-scale responses related to cultural exchange, IC, and personal growth. Inferential statistics, including Pearson's correlation and regression analyses, were employed to identify significant relationships between key variables.

Qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed through thematic analysis. This involved an initial familiarization with the data, systematic coding of transcripts, identification of recurring themes, and interpreting these themes to provide deeper understanding and meaningful insights into participants' experiences in PAL sessions.

Results

Questionnaire

To gain insights into the experiences of Burmese Team Leaders in the PAL program, a structured questionnaire was administered to all 40 participants. The questionnaire aimed to assess the impact of PAL sessions on motivation, emotional resilience, personal growth, leadership development, cultural adaptation, and academic support. The survey contained 30 Likert-scale items (ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) categorized into three main themes: (1) Motivation and Emotional Resilience, (2) Personal Growth and Community Impact, and (3) Academic Support and Team Environment. Furthermore, each question in the questionnaire were rated in terms of satisfaction as defined by Brown (2010): Highest (4.51 – 5.00); High (3.51 – 4.50); Moderate (2.51 – 3.50); Low (1.51 – 2.50); and Lowest (1.00 – 1.50).

Motivation and Emotional Resilience

This section explored how external factors, particularly the political situation in Myanmar, influenced the participants' motivation to engage in the PAL program. The findings revealed that Burmese Team Leaders demonstrated a high level of commitment despite external challenges. Participants reported feeling motivated to volunteer ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 0.94$) and believed their role had a positive impact on their community ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.86$). The sense of purpose gained from volunteering was also highly rated ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 0.84$). Additionally, participants acknowledged that volunteering helped them cope with stress related to the situation in Myanmar ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.01$), though the political unrest significantly affected their emotional well-being ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 0.95$). The majority of respondents expressed an intention to continue volunteering in the future ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 0.92$) and recommended participation to other Burmese students ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.93$).

Personal Growth and Community Impact

The questionnaire results underscored the importance of PAL sessions in fostering leadership development and personal growth among Burmese Team Leaders. Respondents strongly agreed that their participation in the student management team enhanced their leadership skills ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.79$) and provided opportunities for personal development ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.88$). Additionally, they reported a strong sense of accomplishment in managing the PAL center ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 0.86$) and felt that their contributions were making a meaningful difference ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.86$). Furthermore, many respondents indicated that their participation helped them stay connected to their cultural roots ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 0.95$) while also fostering a rewarding experience ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.84$). The need for increased university support for Burmese students in the PAL program was also emphasized ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.86$).

Academic Support and Team Environment

The survey also examined the extent to which the PAL program provided an academically and socially supportive environment. Participants generally agreed that their role in the PAL center had a positive impact on their academic performance ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.86$) and that their responsibilities as student managers did not interfere with their studies ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 0.95$). The responses further indicated that the PAL center fostered a sense of emotional support from peers and supervisors ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 0.89$) and provided a safe and inclusive environment ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.87$). Recognition of their role by the university was perceived positively ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 0.88$), and respondents expressed satisfaction with the training and resources provided ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 0.89$). Overall, participants expressed a high level of satisfaction with their experience as student managers ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 0.86$).

Interviews Results

The semi-structured interviews provided valuable insights into the experiences of Burmese Team Leaders in PAL sessions. Thematic analysis identified key themes related to leadership development, cultural integration, challenges encountered, adaptation strategies, and overall professional growth.

Leadership Roles and Responsibilities

The participants described their roles as pivotal in maintaining structured and effective PAL sessions. Their primary responsibilities involved organizing study groups, facilitating discussions, and ensuring that both students and mentors remained engaged in the learning process. One team leader noted, “We arrange discussions and ensure that all assigned tasks are completed”, highlighting the managerial aspect of their role. Others emphasized the need for efficiency in learning environments, with one stating, “Managing students and mentors effectively contributes to a productive learning setting”. Additionally, in instances where mentors were unavailable, team leaders stepped in to fill this role, demonstrating adaptability and leadership.

Facilitating Cultural Integration

Many team leaders viewed their role as essential in fostering an inclusive and culturally diverse learning environment. They actively promoted intercultural exchanges through

structured group activities, discussions, and informal social interactions. One participant remarked, “I help peers feel comfortable, valued, and engaged by organizing inclusive activities”. Another emphasized the significance of fostering mutual understanding, stating, “I encourage cultural exchange through collaborative activities and assist international students in adjusting to their new environment while respecting their identities”. Such efforts underscore the role of PAL leaders in bridging cultural gaps and creating a welcoming atmosphere for all students.

Challenges in Leadership

Despite the rewarding aspects of their roles, participants highlighted several challenges, with student engagement, mentor availability, and language barriers being the most pressing. Maintaining student motivation posed a significant hurdle, as one participant explained, “Keeping learners engaged and motivated, particularly when tasks are challenging, is one of the most difficult aspects”. Scheduling conflicts also proved problematic, with another respondent noting, “Students arrive at inconsistent times, and the lack of structured appointments disrupts the flow of sessions”. Language barriers further complicated interactions, making effective communication more difficult, particularly when students hesitated to participate in discussions.

Adapting to Thai Culture

Adapting to Thai culture emerged as a central theme in the interviews, with varying levels of adjustment among the participants. Some team leaders actively engaged with Thai traditions and language to better connect with students. One participant stated, “Since becoming a team leader, I have learned basic Thai phrases and cultural norms, which has helped me establish stronger relationships with students”. Others relied on observational learning to understand Thai social etiquette and communication styles. However, adaptation was not without its challenges; some struggled with the indirect nature of Thai communication and the hierarchical structure within academic settings. These cultural differences required leaders to develop heightened sensitivity and adaptability.

Personal and Professional Growth

The leadership experiences within PAL sessions contributed significantly to the personal and professional development of participants. Many respondents reported enhanced communication skills, improved problem-solving abilities, and increased confidence in managing diverse groups. One team leader reflected, “This role has strengthened my adaptability, patience, and leadership skills, which will be invaluable in my future career”. Others acknowledged that exposure to cross-cultural teamwork had prepared them for professional environments that require IC. “Managing students from different backgrounds has improved my ability to navigate diverse work settings and communicate effectively across cultures”. These experiences reinforced the importance of leadership development within an international educational context.

Enhancing Cultural Exchange in PAL Sessions

Although PAL sessions were generally perceived as effective in fostering cultural exchange, participants identified several areas for improvement. Many suggested incorporating structured activities that facilitate deeper cultural interactions. One team leader

recommended, “Providing more targeted training on cultural awareness and communication skills would enhance collaboration among students”. Another advocated for a mentorship-based model, stating, “Pairing students from different cultural backgrounds in structured mentorship programs would help strengthen cross-cultural relationships and promote better integration”. These recommendations highlight the potential for refining PAL sessions to maximize their impact on IC.

Future Leadership Aspirations

The majority of participants expressed a desire to continue in their leadership roles due to the personal fulfillment and professional advantages they gained. “This role has significantly strengthened my ability to lead, communicate, and adapt in a diverse setting”. Some team leaders also recognized the career benefits of their experience, with one noting, “I see this leadership role as a stepping stone for future professional opportunities in multicultural work environments”. A few, however, cited academic workload as a potential barrier to continuing in the role, demonstrating the need for institutional support to balance responsibilities effectively.

Summary of the Findings

The findings from both the quantitative and qualitative analyses highlight the significant role that PAL sessions play in fostering cultural integration and leadership development among Burmese Team Leaders at Rangsit University. The questionnaire results demonstrate that participants generally perceive PAL sessions as effective in improving their IC, with notable gains in communication skills, cultural awareness, and leadership abilities. The statistical analysis indicates a positive correlation between participation in PAL and increased confidence in cross-cultural interactions. Meanwhile, the qualitative data from semi-structured interviews provide deeper insights into the personal challenges and adaptive strategies of the Burmese Team Leaders. Language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and initial discomfort in assuming leadership roles emerged as key challenges; however, participants reported overcoming these difficulties through peer collaboration, mentorship, and structured support within the PAL framework. The interviews further reveal that the program not only enhanced participants' ability to navigate Thai academic and social settings but also cultivated a sense of belonging and professional preparedness. Overall, the findings underscore the effectiveness of PAL in supporting international students' cultural adaptation while equipping them with essential skills for academic and professional success.

Discussion

Interpretation of Key Findings in Relation to Research Questions

This study aimed to explore how Burmese Team Leaders in PAL sessions at Rangsit University adapt to Thai culture, develop leadership skills, and overcome cultural challenges. The findings provide insights into their roles in fostering cultural integration, their challenges and coping strategies, their professional growth, and the overall effectiveness of PAL programs in cultural adaptation.

RQ1: How do Burmese Team Leaders perceive their roles in promoting cultural integration within the Thai academic environment?

Findings from both the questionnaire and interviews indicate that Burmese Team Leaders view their roles as crucial in fostering cultural exchange and integration. Participants emphasized that PAL sessions serve as a bridge between local and international students, allowing them to engage in meaningful discussions and group activities that encourage cultural understanding. Many participants noted that their responsibilities involved ensuring inclusivity, mediating cultural differences, and creating an environment where both Thai and Burmese students felt comfortable expressing themselves. These findings align with previous research highlighting the importance of structured peer-learning environments in promoting cross-cultural competence (Montgomery & McDowell, 2009). Additionally, these results reinforce the arguments made in Section 5 (Literature Review) regarding the role of PAL in enhancing multicultural understanding and reducing social barriers (Cifuentes & Murphy, 2000; Leask, 2009).

RQ2: What specific challenges do Burmese Team Leaders face in adapting to Thai culture, and what strategies do they use to overcome these challenges?

Challenges such as language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and difficulties in maintaining student engagement were frequently reported. While the majority of Burmese Team Leaders had an intermediate to advanced level of English proficiency, communication with Thai students was sometimes hindered by differences in language structure and expressions. Additionally, some participants struggled with adapting to Thai social norms, such as indirect communication styles and hierarchical academic settings. To address these challenges, participants employed several coping strategies, including learning basic Thai phrases, observing Thai cultural norms, and actively seeking peer support. These findings are consistent with studies emphasizing the role of peer interactions in facilitating cultural adaptation among international students (Şener, 2011). Furthermore, the challenges identified resonate with discussions in the Literature Review regarding the struggles of international students with language barriers and cultural adaptation (Montgomery & McDowell, 2009; Snodin, 2019).

RQ3: In what ways do Burmese Team Leaders' experiences in PAL centers contribute to their personal and professional development in a cross-cultural context?

Participation in PAL sessions significantly contributed to the personal and professional development of Burmese Team Leaders. The majority of participants reported improvements in leadership skills, problem-solving abilities, and confidence in managing diverse student groups. Many also highlighted the role of PAL in enhancing their IC, enabling them to navigate cross-cultural interactions more effectively. These outcomes align with prior research demonstrating the positive impact of peer mentoring on leadership development and employability (Leask, 2009). Notably, several participants expressed that their experiences as PAL leaders had increased their career readiness, particularly in international or multicultural work environments. These findings support arguments in the Literature Review that PAL fosters leadership capabilities and provides a structured environment for developing IC (Meletiadou, 2022; Williams & Reddy, 2016).

RQ4: How effective are peer-assisted learning centers in supporting the cultural adaptation of Burmese Team Leaders, and what strategies could enhance this process?

Quantitative results indicate that participants generally found PAL sessions effective in fostering cultural exchange and leadership development. However, some areas for improvement were identified. Several participants suggested incorporating structured cultural awareness training within the PAL program to help both mentors and mentees better understand each other's backgrounds. Others recommended a mentorship-based model that pairs students from different cultural backgrounds for more targeted cultural exchange. The need for greater university support was also highlighted, particularly in terms of resources, training, and recognition of the contributions made by PAL leaders. These results validate findings discussed in the Literature Review regarding the effectiveness of PAL in promoting cultural adaptation while also pointing to gaps that need to be addressed for greater inclusivity (Meletiadou, 2022; Salomone & Kling, 2017).

Implications for Practice

The findings suggest several practical implications for improving PAL programs and fostering cultural adaptation among international students. First, universities should consider implementing formal training programs focused on intercultural communication and leadership development. Providing PAL leaders with structured guidance on handling cross-cultural interactions could enhance their ability to support mentees more effectively. Second, institutions should foster more structured opportunities for cultural exchange, such as mentorship pairings and cultural workshops. Third, greater institutional recognition and support for PAL leaders, such as financial incentives, leadership certificates, or academic credit, could increase participation and retention rates among international peer mentors.

Contribution to Existing Research

This study adds to the growing body of literature on the role of PAL in cultural integration and leadership development. While previous research has focused primarily on the academic benefits of PAL, this study highlights its broader impact on IC and social adaptation, particularly within the ASEAN context. The findings reinforce the argument that PAL programs can serve as powerful tools for fostering inclusive and culturally diverse learning environments (Topping & Ehly, 2001). Furthermore, the study contributes to discussions on how international students, particularly those from Myanmar, navigate cultural adaptation in Thai higher education, an area that remains underexplored in existing literature. The Literature Review also highlighted the adaptability and long-term benefits of PAL programs in fostering social and emotional development (Topping & Ehly, 2001), reinforcing the practical implications of this study's findings.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

While this study provides valuable insights, it is not without limitations. First, the sample size was limited to 40 participants, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Future research could expand the sample to include a more diverse range of international students across different disciplines. Second, data collection relied on self-reported measures, which may introduce response biases. Future studies could incorporate longitudinal designs to track participants' progress over an extended period and examine long-term impacts. Additionally, comparative studies across different universities and cultural contexts could provide a broader

understanding of how PAL programs function in diverse academic settings. Finally, exploring gender differences in cultural adaptation and leadership within PAL programs could offer new perspectives on how international students experience and navigate their roles in PAL.

Conclusion

This study highlights the critical role of Burmese Team Leaders in fostering leadership development and cultural integration through PAL sessions at a private university in Thailand. Findings indicate that PAL sessions effectively enhance IC, bridge cultural gaps, and empower international students with leadership skills, despite challenges such as language barriers and cultural misunderstandings. Participants developed coping strategies, improved communication, teamwork, and adaptability, reinforcing the transformative impact of PAL beyond academic support. However, the study identifies areas for improvement, including structured cultural awareness training and increased institutional support. By refining PAL initiatives, universities can further promote inclusive, globally connected academic communities, preparing students for success in multicultural environments.

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