

Cultural Integration Through Peer Collaboration: How PAL Programs Facilitate the Adaptation of Burmese Biomedical Science Students in Thailand

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The Asian Conference on Education 2025
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This study investigates how Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) sessions facilitate the cultural adaptation, intercultural competence, and personal development of Burmese international peer-mentors at a Thai university. Using a mixed-methods approach, quantitative data were gathered through structured questionnaires, while qualitative insights were derived from semi-structured interviews with peer-mentors. Findings reveal that PAL sessions significantly enhance peer-mentors' understanding of Thai culture, helping them adjust to local communication styles and social norms. Additionally, the sessions improved the mentors' leadership and communication skills, contributing to their personal and professional growth. However, language barriers and the need for more structured cultural adaptation resources were identified as challenges. This research provides valuable insights into the dual role of PAL programs in promoting both academic and cultural integration, emphasizing the need for enhanced intercultural training to support international students' success. The findings offer practical recommendations for improving PAL frameworks in higher education settings.

Keywords: peer-assisted learning, cultural adaptation, intercultural competence

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Introduction

Over the past four decades, higher education institutions in Thailand have significantly expanded international programs, fueled by the dismantling of geopolitical barriers, the reduction in air travel costs, and the widespread global connectivity enabled by the internet and social media. The growing significance of cross-border organizational relationships has heightened the importance of intercultural competence, prompting many educational institutions to establish international partnerships and offer projects supported by intercultural curricula to cultivate this competence among students (Syring, 2016). A scheme that promotes intercultural competence is one that encourages students to contribute to and value the learning of their peers (Cajander et al., 2012). An example of a scheme of this capacity is peer-assisted learning (henceforth PAL), in which empirical evidence indicates that PAL effectively boosts students' motivation, academic self-concept, performance, and retention (Ning & Downing, 2010; Öz, 2024; Yaoyuneyong & Thornton, 2011). These sessions provide a structured environment that fosters collaborative learning, intercultural dialogue, and mutual support among participants. However, the specific role of PAL sessions in facilitating cultural integration for international peer-mentors remains underexplored.

In Thailand, despite the nation's efforts to position itself as a leading destination for higher education through internationalization initiatives, many international students continue to experience challenges such as language barriers, cultural disparities, and social isolation (Chaiyasat, 2024). These challenges can significantly hinder their integration into Thai society (Snodin et al., 2021), thereby reducing the potential advantages of cultural exchange. Burmese students, who comprise a substantial segment of Thailand's international student population, frequently face challenges in cultural adaptation due to difficulties in social integration, academic adjustment, and experiences of discrimination (Rhein, 2016). Burmese students volunteering as peer mentors navigate the dual roles of cultural learners and guides, offering a unique perspective on cultural integration.

This study investigates how PAL sessions contribute to the cultural adaptation of Burmese international peer-mentors in Thai universities, focusing on the mechanisms that promote intercultural competence, social integration, and personal growth. Grounded in theories of intercultural competence and collaborative learning, this research seeks to illuminate the dual benefits of PAL programs: enriching the cultural understanding of mentors while simultaneously enhancing their leadership and communication skills. By focusing on the experiences of Burmese peer mentors at Rangsit University, this study addresses a critical gap in the literature and offers practical insights into fostering inclusive and supportive educational environments.

Program Description

The PAL program embodies the university's mission of “Creating a giving and sharing society,” connecting mentors from four major courses with mentees from six smaller courses over a 10-week period. The program focuses on Thai students enrolled in General Education English courses and aims to facilitate cultural exchange while developing intercultural competence among participants.

Burmese peer-mentors play a key role in the program, dedicating two to three hours per week to supporting mentees. These mentees, whose English proficiency is at a CEFR level of B1 or lower, participate for at least 30 minutes weekly. Mentees select their mentors online from a

pool of mentors, all of whom possess a CEFR level of B2 or higher. Each session lasts a minimum of 30 minutes, with mentees working in groups of up to five students.

At the end of the program, the Burmese peer-mentors complete questionnaires to reflect on their experiences. Additionally, 15 peer-mentors are randomly selected to participate in semi-structured interviews, offering qualitative insights into their cultural adaptation, intercultural interactions, and learning experiences within the PAL sessions. This systematic feedback collection supports a detailed assessment of how the program fosters cultural integration and personal development for the mentors.

Research Objectives

This research aims to explore how PAL sessions facilitate the cultural adaptation of Burmese international peer-mentors to Thai culture. It seeks to identify and analyze the processes within these sessions that promote cultural exchange, enabling peer-mentors to engage with Thai cultural norms, practices, and social dynamics. Additionally, the study evaluates the development of intercultural competence among Burmese peer-mentors, focusing on their ability to interact effectively and sensitively in a culturally diverse academic setting. It also investigates the personal and professional growth outcomes experienced by these mentors, such as increased confidence in intercultural communication, enhanced leadership skills, and improved academic performance. Furthermore, the research examines the level of satisfaction among Burmese peer-mentors regarding the support and resources provided by the university, while gathering their recommendations for improving the PAL framework. Ultimately, the study aims to offer evidence-based recommendations for implementing effective PAL sessions that support both academic and cultural integration, addressing the unique challenges faced by Burmese peer-mentors adapting to Thai culture.

Research Questions

The study explores the role of Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) sessions in fostering cultural integration among Burmese international peer-mentors adapting to Thai culture. Specifically, the research is guided by the following key questions:

1. How do PAL sessions facilitate the cultural adaptation of Burmese international peer-mentors to Thai culture?
2. What impact do PAL sessions have on the intercultural competence of Burmese international peer-mentors?
3. How do PAL sessions influence the personal and professional development of Burmese international peer-mentors?
4. What are the levels of satisfaction among Burmese international peer-mentors regarding the support and resources provided by the university for their cultural adaptation, and what recommendations do they suggest for improvement?

These research questions aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of how PAL sessions can serve as a conduit for cultural exchange, personal growth, and professional development, offering valuable insights for fostering inclusive and supportive environments in higher education. The findings are expected to contribute to academic discussions on best practices for enhancing cultural integration through peer-assisted learning frameworks.

Literature Review

Educational inclusion is a pivotal component of the integration process, with schools playing a significant role in facilitating the integration of migrants (Klemenčič-Mirazchiyski et al., 2022), particularly in contexts where international students engage in learning and teaching as peer-mentors. Research highlights the significance of cultural diversity in educational environments, affirming and expanding the advantages of university diversity experiences in preparing students for a global society (Gurin et al., 2004; Nelson Laird et al., 2005). PAL transforms traditional student-teacher dynamics by promoting reciprocal knowledge and skill development among students of similar social groupings, thereby enhancing collaboration, engagement, and satisfaction (Castelyn, 2018).

Peer-Assisted Learning: A Tool for Academic and Cultural Growth

PAL involves students taking on both teaching and learning roles, with its structure categorized based on the academic relationship between students and the student-to-teacher (Espinosa et al., 2024). Research has shown that PAL is a peer-facilitated learning enhancement model designed to impact the way students learn complex content in a specific course (Huang et al., 2015; Iwata et al., 2014; Sha et al., 2023). Although the academic advantages of PAL are well-established, research on its role in cultural integration, particularly regarding the adaptation experiences of international peer-mentors, remains limited.

Cultural Integration and Intercultural Competence

Cultural integration involves incorporating and navigating social norms, beliefs, and practices in diverse settings. Byram (1997) posits that intercultural competence consists of five components—attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness—arguing that knowledge and attitudes are foundational for enhancing skills and fostering critical cultural awareness. Intercultural communication breakdowns stem from (1) differing communicative resources that hinder the construction and understanding of linguistic and pragmatic meanings, and (2) contrasting sociocultural norms that obstruct the perception, expectation, and execution of appropriate communicative acts in social contexts (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990; Clyne, 1995; Rehbein, 1994; Sarangi, 1994; Thomas, 1984; Varonis & Gass, 1985)—all of which can happen in a PAL scheme. Therefore, incorporating intercultural competence into PAL sessions offers a crucial framework for promoting mutual understanding and facilitating exchange. Engagement in intercultural programs has been shown to substantially improve respect for and appreciation of cultural diversity (Block et al., 2015).

Challenges for International Peer-Mentors

International students face a wide range of challenges, including securing housing (Lee & Rice, 2007), managing homesickness (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007), adapting to sociocultural differences in foreign educational systems (Hellstén & Prescott, 2004), and overcoming language barriers in English proficiency (Bai, 2016), all of which can adversely impact their mental health and academic success if not adequately addressed. These challenges highlight the critical need for programs such as PAL schemes to offer structured opportunities that foster meaningful interactions between international and local students throughout the acculturation process (Bai, 2016). In addition to the support provided by informal peer networks, structured university-based PAL initiatives more comprehensively address adaptation challenges by fostering social

networks that positively influence students' learning, academic success, and retention throughout their studies (Huijser & Kimmins, 2005).

Role of PAL in Facilitating Cultural Exchange

Cultural exchanges serve as catalysts for language learning, mediators between diverse linguistic and cultural groups, developers of learning communities, providers of authentic information, promoters of resolving conflicts, and creators of multifaceted learning experiences (Wang, 2013), and PAL initiatives may create this platform for such cultural exchanges to take place. Language learners can deepen their understanding of different cultures and improve their perceptions of language learning through meaningful experiences (Jung et al., 2019), such as PAL, that reflect real-life communicative contexts. Studies have shown that these programs are particularly effective in enhancing student interaction, through its socializing impact, and have been proven effective in helping students achieve desired learning outcomes (Idris et al., 2019; Jeanneau & O'Riordan, 2020; Urbanovska & Pleschová, 2024).

Addressing Research Gaps

Despite the growing global adoption of PAL initiatives, a notable research gap persists regarding its role in supporting the cultural adaptation of international peer-mentors in Thailand. Current literature primarily emphasizes academic benefits (Glynn et al., 2006; Huang et al., 2019; Yaoyuneyong & Thornton, 2011), frequently neglecting the socio-cultural aspects and the distinct needs of diverse participants. This study seeks to address these gaps by exploring how PAL sessions at Rangsit University enable Burmese peer-mentors to adapt to Thai culture, thereby contributing to cultural discourse.

The literature reviewed highlights PAL as a promising tool for promoting cultural integration and intercultural competence, particularly among international peer-mentors. This study will build on existing findings to explore the mechanisms through which PAL supports cultural exchange and adaptation, offering practical insights for enhancing such programs in higher education.

Methodology

This research utilizes a participatory action research design, conducted over a ten-week period during Term 1 of 2024 at Rangsit University in Thailand. The study explores the role of PAL sessions in promoting cultural exchange and fostering intercultural competence among Burmese peer mentors at the university's PAL center. To achieve a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences, a mixed-method approach integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods was employed.

Population and Sample

The target population consists of 32 Burmese students, aged between 18 and 22, who voluntarily assumed roles as student managers in the PAL center. The participants represent diverse educational and regional backgrounds, with English proficiency levels ranging from intermediate to advanced.

Research Design

A combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques was adopted. Quantitative data were gathered through a structured questionnaire designed to measure participants' perceptions of cultural exchange, cultural awareness, and personal growth. For qualitative data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of 15 participants to examine their experiences related to intercultural competence, communication challenges, and personal development.

Data Collection Instruments

Data collection for the study involved two primary instruments: a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire, administered to all 150 participants, included 30 Likert-scale items rated from 1 to 5. It was designed to assess participants' interactions with peer mentors, their levels of cultural sensitivity, and their overall satisfaction with the PAL sessions. Additionally, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of 15 participants. These interviews explored their intercultural experiences, communication challenges, and the benefits derived from their participation in the PAL center, providing rich qualitative insights to complement the quantitative data.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines were rigorously followed throughout the research process. Participants provided informed consent, with assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. Their participation was entirely voluntary, with the freedom to withdraw from the study at any point without repercussions. Additionally, cultural sensitivity was prioritized to ensure respect for the participants' diverse backgrounds.

This dual-method approach enabled the study to generate valuable insights into how PAL sessions facilitate cultural exchange and enhance intercultural competence among Burmese students at Rangsit University.

Data Analysis

This study utilized both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to thoroughly examine the role of PAL sessions in fostering cultural exchange and enhancing intercultural competence among Burmese students in Thailand.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative component of the study involved analyzing data collected through structured questionnaires using descriptive statistical methods. This analysis aimed to outline the demographic characteristics of participants and their responses to Likert-scale items addressing cultural exchange, intercultural competence, and personal growth. Metrics such as mean, median, and standard deviation were calculated to represent central tendencies and variability within the dataset.

Furthermore, inferential statistical techniques were applied to uncover significant associations between primary variables, including participants' satisfaction levels with the PAL sessions and their perceptions of intercultural competence development. Tools such as Pearson's correlation

coefficient and regression analysis were employed to identify potential correlations and predict outcomes, enriching the understanding of the data's implications.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data, gathered from semi-structured interviews with selected participants, underwent a detailed thematic analysis to identify significant patterns and insights. This process involved four key stages. First, the researcher familiarized themselves with the data by thoroughly reviewing interview transcripts to understand participants' narratives and experiences. Second, relevant phrases and statements were coded based on their alignment with the study's objectives, focusing on areas such as intercultural competence, peer interactions, and communication challenges. Third, the codes were grouped into overarching themes that encapsulated the study's primary findings, highlighting how PAL sessions facilitated cultural exchange and enhanced intercultural competencies. Finally, these themes were interpreted collectively to develop a comprehensive narrative of the participants' experiences, linking the findings to the research objectives and theoretical framework. This analytical approach provided in-depth insights into the role of PAL sessions in promoting cultural integration and personal development among Burmese students.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure the dependability and trustworthiness of the research instruments applied in this study, extensive evaluations of validity and reliability were conducted.

Validity

The questionnaire's validity was verified through expert assessment and the Item Objective Congruence (IOC) method. Three specialists in education and second language pedagogy examined the content validity of the questionnaire items. Each item was rated based on its relevance to the study's objectives, using a scale of +1 (relevant), 0 (uncertain), and -1 (irrelevant). Items scoring +1 were considered well-aligned with the research aims, affirming the instrument's effectiveness in measuring the intended constructs. Following the review, all items were deemed suitable and congruent with the study's goals, thus establishing the questionnaire's content validity.

Reliability

The reliability of the questionnaire was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha to measure internal consistency. A preliminary test was conducted involving 40 participants who shared demographic characteristics with the study's primary sample but were not included in the main study. The Cronbach's Alpha value for the questionnaire was 0.94, reflecting an excellent degree of internal consistency. Given that a value of 0.70 or above is generally regarded as acceptable, this result indicates that the questionnaire reliably captures consistent responses among participants.

By ensuring both the validity and reliability of its instruments, this study reinforces the precision and consistency of its data, enabling robust and credible conclusions.

Results

Questionnaire

The questionnaire distributed to Burmese peer-mentors in the PAL program assessed their motivations, personal growth, and perceptions of the academic support provided within the program. The responses, measured on a Likert scale, provided insight into the participants' emotional resilience, community impact, and the team environment at the PAL center. Below is a summary of the key findings based on three main themes: Motivation and Emotional Resilience, Personal Growth and Community Impact, and Academic Support and Team Environment.

Motivation and Emotional Resilience

The responses regarding motivation and emotional resilience indicate that the peer-mentors are motivated to continue their volunteer work, even amidst the political unrest in Myanmar. The mean score across items in this category was 3.37 (SD = 0.89), reflecting a moderate level of resilience and motivation. Mentors expressed a strong sense of purpose in their role, with one item scoring 3.53 (SD = 0.72), while another item concerning the emotional impact of the political situation on their well-being scored 3.69 (SD = 1.03). Despite challenges, participants found that volunteering helped them cope with stress, with a moderate score of 3.06 (SD = 0.95) for this item.

Personal Growth and Community Impact

The results for personal growth and community impact demonstrated high levels of satisfaction, with an overall mean of 3.63 (SD = 0.80). The peer-mentors reported significant personal growth and a strong connection to their cultural roots, reflected in a mean score of 3.72 (SD = 0.92) for personal growth and 3.63 (SD = 0.75) for cultural connection. Mentors also noted that their roles helped them develop leadership skills, scoring 3.72 (SD = 0.81), and they expressed a sense of accomplishment and purpose in helping others, with a mean score of 3.63 (SD = 0.83). This section highlights the positive impact of the mentoring experience on both the personal and community levels.

Academic Support and Team Environment

In terms of academic support and the team environment, the peer-mentors reported a moderate level of satisfaction, with an overall mean score of 3.49 (SD = 0.85). Although many mentors felt that their academic performance benefited from volunteering (3.50, SD = 0.95), they also recognized that balancing mentoring responsibilities and studies could be challenging (3.31, SD = 0.99). However, they expressed satisfaction with the support they received from the PAL center, particularly regarding the safe and inclusive environment provided (3.59, SD = 0.76), and the recognition and respect they felt from peers and supervisors (3.75, SD = 0.84).

Semi-structured Interviews

The semi-structured interviews with Burmese peer-mentors revealed key themes related to their experiences in the Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) sessions. These themes reflect the mentors' cultural adaptation, communication challenges, personal growth, and cultural exchange.

Cultural Adaptation and Understanding

The PAL sessions played a vital role in helping Burmese peer-mentors adapt to Thai culture. Participants noted that interactions with Thai students allowed them to better understand local customs, particularly around politeness and respect. One mentor highlighted this by stating, “My sessions have taught me a lot about Thai culture, especially their polite way of communicating and how much they value respect. I have adjusted my teaching by using examples that match their culture.” Through these interactions, mentors gained valuable insights into Thai norms, which enhanced their cultural awareness and ability to engage effectively.

Language and Communication Barriers

Despite the cultural benefits, language barriers emerged as a significant challenge for many mentors. Several participants expressed difficulty in communicating with Thai students who were hesitant to speak English or struggled with proficiency. As one mentor explained, “The language barrier some Thai students don’t really wanna socialize in English.” However, mentors often employed strategies such as adjusting their communication styles or asking follow-up questions to navigate these barriers and facilitate more meaningful engagement with their mentees.

Personal Growth and Confidence Building

The PAL sessions also fostered personal growth and boosted the confidence of the peer-mentors. Many participants felt that their communication skills and leadership abilities improved as a result of guiding their peers. One mentor shared, “Helping others and seeing their progress boosts my self-esteem and sense of accomplishment.” These experiences not only built the mentors’ confidence in cross-cultural interactions but also enhanced their empathy and adaptability, key traits that contributed to their professional and personal development.

Cultural Exchange and Mutual Learning

A strong theme of cultural exchange and mutual learning emerged from the interviews, as both mentors and mentees shared their cultural backgrounds. This exchange deepened intercultural understanding and fostered a supportive learning environment. One mentor recalled a particular instance of cultural exchange, saying, “A Thai student enthusiastically shared stories about Songkran, the water festival, explaining its cultural significance and how it’s celebrated across the country.” Such moments of mutual learning not only enriched the participants’ knowledge but also strengthened the cultural bonds within the PAL sessions.

Discussion

Interpretation of Key Findings in Relation to Research Questions

RQ1: How do PAL sessions facilitate the cultural adaptation of Burmese international peer mentors to Thai culture?

The PAL sessions were instrumental in facilitating the cultural adaptation of Burmese international peer-mentors. Interview responses highlighted how direct interactions with Thai students allowed mentors to better understand local customs, particularly around respect and

politeness, as reflected in the literature on intercultural competence (Byram, 1997). One mentor mentioned that “My sessions have taught me a lot about Thai culture, especially their polite way of communicating and how much they value respect.” This is consistent with findings from the literature, which emphasize the role of structured cultural exchange programs in improving understanding of diverse cultural norms (Wang, 2013). By learning about Thai cultural practices, such as the significance of hierarchy and respect for elders, the peer mentors were able to adjust their behaviors and communication styles to better align with their surroundings. Moreover, the informal, reciprocal nature of learning within PAL sessions mirrors the collaborative approach emphasized in intercultural communication research (Block et al., 2015). Mentors adjusted their teaching to incorporate Thai-specific examples, enhancing the learning experience for both parties and promoting mutual cultural exchange.

RQ2: What impact do PAL sessions have on the intercultural competence of Burmese international peer-mentors?

The impact of PAL sessions on the intercultural competence of Burmese international peer-mentors was substantial. The mentors reported increased sensitivity and adaptability in their communication, in line with Byram's framework on intercultural competence, particularly the development of “skills of discovery and interaction.” One mentor stated, “The sessions have improved my intercultural competence by teaching me to adapt to Thai communication styles and learning preferences.” Another mentor emphasized the importance of learning the “subtle ways Thai students express their thoughts,” underscoring the development of critical cultural awareness.

These findings echo the literature, which highlights how engagement in intercultural programs improves cultural awareness and empathy (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990; Byram, 1997). The sessions provided a platform for real-life application of intercultural competence, where peer mentors adapted to Thai social norms and communication styles, enriching their intercultural experiences.

RQ3: How do PAL sessions influence the personal and professional development of Burmese international peer-mentors?

The PAL sessions had a positive influence on both the personal and professional development of Burmese international peer-mentors. As noted in the literature, PAL initiatives often serve as platforms for developing leadership and communication skills (Yaoyuneyong & Thornton, 2011). Many mentors reported gaining confidence in both academic and social settings, as well as improving their leadership abilities. For instance, one mentor shared, “Helping others and seeing their progress boosts my self-esteem and sense of accomplishment.” Another mentioned that the sessions had helped them “grow by improving [their] communication and cultural awareness.”

These outcomes are consistent with previous research indicating that peer mentoring programs not only benefit the mentees but also contribute to the mentors' development in terms of communication, empathy, and leadership skills (Castelyn, 2018). PAL sessions encouraged the mentors to step out of their comfort zones and develop interpersonal and professional skills that are transferable to other contexts.

RQ4: What are the levels of satisfaction among Burmese international peer-mentors regarding the support and resources provided by the university for their cultural adaptation, and what recommendations do they suggest for improvement?

The satisfaction levels of Burmese international peer-mentors regarding the support and resources provided by the university were mixed. While many mentors felt that the university provided adequate support, such as access to training sessions and materials, some expressed a need for more targeted cultural adaptation resources. One mentor noted that “the training sessions, teaching materials, and mentor collaboration have been most helpful.” However, another mentor suggested that “the university could provide more cultural exchange workshops or activities to help mentors better understand diverse backgrounds.”

These findings align with the literature on the importance of structured support in easing cultural adaptation challenges (Huijser & Kimmins, 2005). While the PAL program provided essential resources, additional workshops or informal events focused on cultural adaptation could further enhance the experience for international mentors.

Implications for Practice

The findings suggest several practical implications for enhancing the cultural adaptation of international peer mentors through PAL sessions. First, intercultural competence training should be a key component of PAL programs to help mentors navigate the complexities of cultural exchange. Additionally, universities should consider expanding cultural exchange workshops and informal networking opportunities to foster deeper cultural understanding. Regular feedback mechanisms, such as reflection sessions, could provide mentors with more opportunities to share their experiences and receive guidance on overcoming challenges.

Contributions to Existing Research

This study contributes to the existing research on peer-assisted learning by highlighting its dual role in fostering both academic and cultural integration among international students. While previous studies have focused primarily on the academic benefits of PAL, this research adds to the literature by demonstrating how PAL sessions serve as platforms for intercultural competence development and personal growth among peer mentors. Furthermore, the study addresses a notable gap by exploring the specific experiences of Burmese students in Thailand, a population that has received limited attention in previous research.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

One limitation of this study is its reliance on self-reported data from interviews and questionnaires, which may introduce bias. Future research could benefit from longitudinal studies that track the cultural adaptation and professional development of peer mentors over time. Additionally, expanding the sample to include peer mentors from different cultural backgrounds would offer a more comprehensive understanding of how PAL programs facilitate cultural integration across diverse contexts.

Further research is also needed to explore the long-term impact of peer mentoring on both mentors and mentees, particularly in relation to their intercultural competence and academic success. By addressing these areas, future studies can provide deeper insights into how to optimize PAL programs for international students in higher education.

Conclusion

This study highlights the critical role that PAL sessions play in facilitating the cultural adaptation, intercultural competence, and personal development of Burmese international peer-mentors at a Thai university. The findings demonstrate that PAL programs not only foster a deeper understanding of Thai culture but also enhance peer-mentors' leadership, communication, and empathy skills, contributing to their overall personal and professional growth. Despite some challenges, such as language barriers and the need for more targeted cultural adaptation resources, the peer-mentors expressed satisfaction with the support provided by the university. This research offers significant contributions to the understanding of how structured peer-learning environments can serve as catalysts for cultural integration, especially in higher education contexts where international students face unique adaptation challenges. The insights gathered underscore the importance of expanding intercultural training within PAL programs to maximize their benefits, suggesting that with proper institutional support, PAL can be an effective tool for fostering inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The authors declare that ChatGPT was utilized solely for proofreading and language refinement, and that no AI technologies were used to generate, analyze, or interpret the research content, data, or conclusions.

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