Article

Internationalization in Architecture Higher Education: A Strategy of Studio Immersion from the Student Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Internationalization has become a requirement of higher education to adequately train future practitioners, including architects, in the global world. Studio immersion is an experimental type of curriculum and teaching where the studio is prepared, operated, and evaluated by educators and students from joined universities. In this paper, we investigate the perspective of students who have performed studio immersion, which consists of three Asian universities in batches 2022 and 2023, with a total of 147 students from Indonesia, Thailand, and Taiwan. We used mixed methods research to identify real obstacles and challenges and to determine to what extent this study benefits students. The results show that the students experience a progressive understanding of personal development, a broader meaning of architecture beyond technical and aesthetic systems but social and cultural, and an understanding of architecture as a multifaceted profession. The students reported their dissatisfaction with the pursuit of the university's reputation, studio dynamics, and uncertainty in the assignment's limitations. English interaction among students is not affected by

their early exposure to English for their generation. This type of studio immersion could create a new studio culture that is unique to a global learning experience.

INTRODUCTION

Internationalization of Higher Education Institutions

The term internationalization in higher education (HE) is currently complicated, whether ad hoc or fragmented since many purposes and educational players are involved. HE institutions see internationalization as a large time and resource commitment, but it is necessary to prepare future practitioners for a globalized society (Dupre, 2022; Ostwald & Williams, 2008; Yeravdekar & Tiwari, 2014). Almost all universities mention this term as their strategy not only to attract international students but also to show that they are part of global education (Wit, 2020). It has also evolved into a commercial term to inform the public that the quality of their learning is global or world-class (Bamberger & Morris, 2023). The strategy goes beyond student mobility, as its early intention of internationalization, but includes international accreditation, international programs, international exposure, or international recognition (Zolfaghari et al., 2009). HE institutions have developed strategies that involve diverse educational activities that involve educators and students from different countries, which are becoming more international, intercultural and global (Knight, 2008; Knight & de Wit, 2018). It is also intended to achieve the HE vision or mission of becoming a global university. There is currently an increasing number of internationalization activities since the use of technology for distance learning (Dupre, 2022; Hou & Kang, 2006; Knight & de Wit, 2018).

Given the various internationalization activities carried out by HE, the question arises whether this provides direct benefits to students. On the basis of earlier studies related to students' perspectives, several benefits were found. The benefits include increased awareness and comprehension of various national and international issues, networking opportunities, the development of social and emotional intelligence, and the creation of income for the future (Hayle, 2008; Trinh & Conner, 2019). In brief, the students believe that internationalization can help them become more globally competent in fostering inclusivity and diversity. Furthermore, the primary barrier to internationalization implementation, particularly in Asia, is the low proficiency of instructors and students in English (Sutrisno, 2019; Tek et al., 2023; Trinh & Conner, 2019). It is believed that internationalization can reinforce Western-centric education by ignoring the differences and cultural diversity of each nation's educational system (Ng, 2012).

The success of internationalization in HE is determined from two directions: one that is strategic from the government and university authorities and the second from educators (Dupre, 2022). The authority factor includes regulation, financial,

administrative, and infrastructure support from the university. Educators require leadership in terms of their ability and willingness to carry out internationalization (Dupre, 2022). Furthermore, the skills of educators and students are important for starting internationalization (Salama, 1999). A Cambodia-based study indicates that institutional leadership, policies, human resources, and institution type affect university internationalization achievement. Competency, networking opportunities, a sense of belonging, the nature of the profession, and demographic characteristics all influence educators' success levels (Tek et al., 2023). Data from Cambodia indicate that issues at the educator level and English ability were the cause of the internationalization handicaps.

Since the 1980s, internationalization in HE has become one of the strategies used to improve the awareness of students toward international exposure and strengthen the research and product knowledge of institutions in Asia Pacific. For example, in Indonesia, internationalization is accommodated by government regulations stated in the Constitution for Indonesia Higher Education Article 5 no. 12/2012 as a legal basis. The principles of internationalization include equality, respectfulness, the promotion of technological science, and human values, which refer to the interaction and integration of international dimensions in academic activity without losing their characteristic Indonesian values. The main strategy is to increase mobility in people, programs, and institutions (Mali, 2020). Although research on internationalization in Indonesian HEs has not been conducted much (Ota, 2023), it has practically been shown that educators' characteristics play a significant role in the successful implementation of internationalization in HE.

Internationalization in Architecture Education

Architecture education is a highly regulated sector internationally and nationally. To address professional, social, and cultural considerations, architecture education must have specific curriculum objectives, as mandated by the International Union of Architects/Union Internationale des Architects (UIAs). The primary goal of the UNESCO-UIA Charter for Architectural Education 2023 is to establish a global network of architectural education to address the challenges of the contemporary world ("UNESCO-UIA Charter for Architectural Education (Updated July 2023)," n.d.). At the national level, for example, the Indonesian Institute of Architects (IAI), a member of the UIA, must abide by UIA regulations, particularly those for educational goals. The goal is to equip young architects with nationally, regionally, and globally recognized competencies (*Berita IAI*, n.d.).

The core of the architecture curriculum is architectural design studio courses, which offer students continuously and progressively more advanced skills and integrated knowledge in architecture design during their studies. The design studio courses are key components where students practically apply design principles, spatial/form theory and techniques in defining architectural solutions. A studio is traditionally known as a place for students to apprentice to professional architects so that philosophical thoughts and ways to design can be shared with the apprentice (Hacihasanoglu, 2021; Webster, 2008). Currently, professional

architects play their role as tutors, reviewers or jurors with the same function, which is to conduct the way of thinking of students.

This shift in professional architects' role is to respond to the contemporary approach of learning, which involves placing students at the center of learning, while teachers play the role of facilitators (Crowther, 2013). This situation makes students independent learners when the world is widely open in front of them (Yeravdekar & Tiwari, 2014). In addition, to respond to the behavior and characteristics of students, which are changing drastically, especially in the globalization era and information technology advancement (Crowther, 2013), the learning process in the design studio needs to be more flexible and dynamic. This approach occurs when students actively engage with the learning process while teachers provide support, resources and guidance, which contrasts with the traditional operation of the architecture design studio (Ostwald & Williams, 2008).

The internationalization strategy in design studios often creates a dilemma for the schools of architecture. On the one hand, the school has a rigid curriculum in terms of a list of competencies to respond to certain requirements of international UIA and national standards, for example, IAI in Indonesia or the Architects Council of Thailand Regulation. The school has the responsibility to teach and train the students to become professional architects through the learning process that dominantly occurs in the design studio, which has international/national competencies and is implemented in the design studio activities.

On the other hand, while internationalization is something that must be undertaken in the studio, it could bring a dynamic architectural pedagogy with shifting methods and approaches. This internationalization studio is somewhat difficult to apply, especially because it involves international educators or students with different backgrounds (Munasinghe, 2008), since students are still learning the ability to design step by step, depending on the level of their design studio courses and the curriculum of the home institutions. The dynamic design of the studio could gradually omit the uniqueness of the studio in terms of the studio culture and method of design (Dupre, 2022). This uniqueness is the strength of a specific studio or the master architects, as in the traditional definition of a studio (Gray, 2013). Therefore, internationalization tends to generalize to studio culture.

Architecture Studio Immersion

Studio immersion is one experimental type of internationalization used in architecture learning to overcome the main challenge of the curriculum when it initially needed to match the studio syllabus among joined universities. Studio immersion is prepared, operated, and evaluated by educators from joined universities. The studio assignment and schedule were prepared together, and the studio group consisted of a mix of students and teachers, as well as project sites located in the city where the joined universities are located. In the case of this research, the students and teachers had a chance to visit the sites and do studio

work together and then continue the discussion and the studio critics online. Educators who are friends find it simpler to establish trust to build a new studio culture, and they are prepared to take on the roles of both teachers and organizers.

Starting in 2022, the architecture programs at Petra Christian University, Indonesia (PCU), and Silpakorn University, Thailand (SU), decided to implement an internationalization strategy through a type of studio immersion, and in 2023, Tunghai University (TU) started to join. Since 2024, the study of studio immersion has continued. The study involved is the first semester of the final year of each curriculum. SU and TU engage the studio in year five, whereas PCU does so in year four. In the studio, there are two assignments: one is group-based master planning design, and the other is individual work on architecture building design. Students work in groups of two or three mentors who serve as studio facilitators for the course of two assignments. The methods, approaches, management, operations and schedules of previous studies have changed as a result of this immersion study at PCUs and SUs becoming the first international study.

As shown in Figure 1, the studio immersion activities are related not only to the assignments but also to site visits, architectural excursions and social gatherings with colleagues and friends. Students and educators/tutors are mixed into 4 and 5 groups, with 5:5:1 numbers of PCU, SU and TU tutors in 2023, and the ratio of PCU, SU and TU students is 61:78:8.

site visit to Bangkok and Surabaya

studio discussion in Bangkok and Surabaya

Figure 1: Documentation of the studio immersion 2023

The purpose of this study is to identify students' perceptions in terms of their learning skills and architectural experiences, which include three universities from three Asian countries: Indonesia, Thailand, and Taiwan. The article aims to answer the research question of whether internationalization activity adds knowledge about architecture and provides skills for future careers. The research identifies the benefits, shortcomings, and challenges from the student's point of view. In the future, teachers and schools of architecture could respond better to the challenges that students face during the process of internationalization. This research will help Asian HE in identifying the best type of international involvement, especially for the school of architecture.

METHOD

This research was conducted with mixed quantitative and qualitative methods to explore the opinions of PCU, SU and TU students who are involved in this immersion study. The mixed method used in this study is an explanatory sequential design that consists of two phases (Creswell, 2014). First, the research starts with the quantitative methods that are followed second by the qualitative assessment to purposely choose respondents to confirm the trends found in the prior quantitative assessment. This mixed method has been proven to be effective in behavioral studies (Lopez-Fernandez & Molina-Azorin, 2011).

The main research question is whether internationalization activity adds knowledge about architecture and provides skills for future careers. Data were obtained through a Google form questionnaire distributed to all the students who participated in the immersion study in 2022 and 2023, with a total of 147 students. After the questionnaire was distributed, it was followed by interviews with specific students and educators. Descriptive analysis is used to analyze the questionnaire data, which are then divided into two categories: the Studio Operational category, which evaluates the students' agreed-upon implementation of studio management and development of soft skills during the studio, and the Comprehensive Understanding category, which evaluates the students' perceptions of their knowledge of architecture and their comprehension of architects as professionals after they finish the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Studio Operational

The primary barrier to conducting studio immersion found in this research is in contrast to the previous findings determined to be language as a medium of teaching? between the students and the educators (Ostwald & Williams, 2008; Tek et al., 2023). According to this research, language limitations do not prevent students from interacting and communicating (Figure 2).
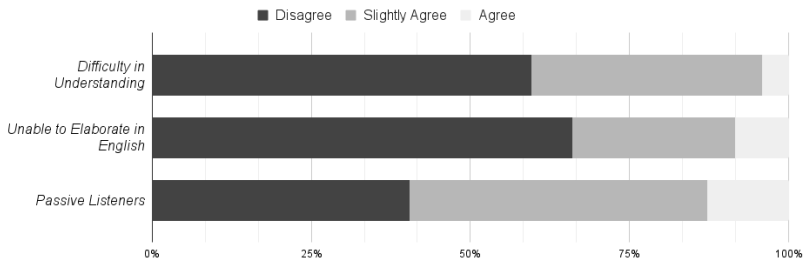
Figure 2: Language barriers

Not all students' involvement in studio immersion occurs through English language proficiency selection; only the PCU requires the equivalent of TOEFL 450. This is because PCU students participate in larger batches than SU and TU students do, necessitating selection to determine the student ratio. The graph demonstrates that student interaction and communication are unaffected even when students' English language proficiency is not comparable (as measured by language certificate scores).

In the tutorial activities between the students and tutors, almost half of the students perceive that their tutors place them as passive listeners due to their limited language skills (Figure 2). This result shows the lower power of the students to discuss and argue in English during the design jury (*The Analytics of Power: Re-Presenting the Design Jury on JSTOR*, n.d.). This contrasts with the previous table, where students are confident in their English to communicate and interact with other students. According to the interviews, this is because the tutors give out spoon-fed answers during the tutorial to limit the time of discussion, and then, the students feel that the tutors view them as passive listeners.
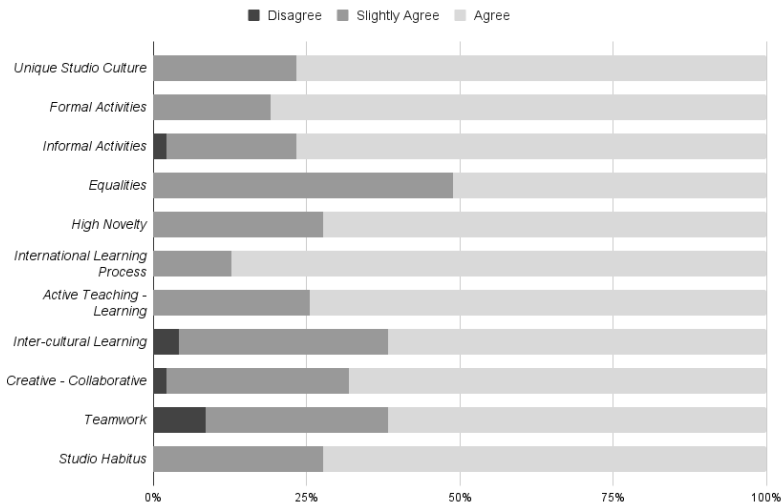

Figure 3: Student's perspective on Studio immersion

Compared with their previous studios, more than 70% of the students believe that studio immersion creates a unique studio culture, as shown in Figure 3. Studio culture is formed by beliefs, experiences, and places that are accommodated through architectural pedagogy (Gray, 2013). It is the process between students and teachers, when the educators are the providers while the students are the recipients (Crowther, 2013; Salama, 1999; Srinivasan, 2011). According to the questionnaire results, the uniqueness of studio immersion is clearly shown by the structured and unstructured activities (on and off campus), the variety of applied teaching methods, and the studio assignments. These could provide opportunities for students to explore the knowledge freely and provide their experience to the new type of studio (see Figure 3). More than 70% of the students believed that both structured and unstructured interactions with other students in their group significantly contributed to the success of the studio tasks (see Figure 3). Structured activities consist of scheduled studio discussions and site visits, specifically to Bangkok and Surabaya, by studio assignments. Unstructured activities are student-led activities that take place offline and online. In addition to the schedule of site visits, the students gather by themselves, as well as during online activities. Students also strongly agree with several studio-related activities that help them become more tolerant, cooperative, and adaptive (see Figure 3).

As the two cities selected as the locations for the studio's projects, Bangkok and Surabaya were visited by the students from the three universities. Together with the educators, the students completed the site survey, which focused on architecture as a dynamic to social and cultural change in contemporary society (Salama, 2021; *Un-Working,* n.d.). The students also engage in additional social activities unrelated to their studio tasks, such as going to movies, shopping and karaoking (see Figure 3). After the visit, the students engage in online social activities such as group gaming sessions or lighthearted conversations on Discord. This is what fosters student cooperation to facilitate engagement and communication (Webster, 2008).

With respect to the learning quality during the studio immersion, the students identified the four most positive things overall during the studio, namely:
- The experience of an international learning atmosphere with a global understanding
- The active learning process among students to understand architecture and urban conditions
- Educators have applied an intercultural learning approach in practice to make it more realistic and comprehensive.
- The design project in the studio assignments has high novelty value

Over half of the students believed that the three universities' studio management practices were different from one another. Since each studio has contributed to its unique studio management and culture over the years, named uniqueness or studio habitus (Gray, 2013), it requires adjustment and alteration when three studios join to create one studio immersion. The students felt unequal in their studio immersion management among the three universities. Since two universities conducted the first studio immersion in 2022 and the third university was added the following year, not all students experienced a strong sense of

equality among the studios from the three universities. The first two universities have the most influence over studio management and tasks, but all three universities have equal access to lectures and discussions.

Sixty percent of the students believed that teamwork with different backgrounds was more challenging than studio assignments were. Previous research has shown that the greatest problem faced by internationalization in studios is not cultural differences but the structure of the studio, communication and resources (Dupre, 2022). The students agreed that their efforts in maintaining good networks and communication within the group outweighed the difficulty of the studio assignments, particularly the first assignment, which was to propose a master plan. This is because the master plan is the first group assignment for the half-semester, meaning it is the first time working together on an assignment when you do not know your group members in advance. Nearly every student experienced this difficulty, but by the end of the study, they believed that their ability to interact and communicate with others had enabled them to overcome this difficulty (Figure 2).

The table 2 shows two types of opinions from the students: one focuses on satisfaction, whereas the other focuses on dissatisfaction (Figure 4). Students expressed satisfaction in terms of enhanced self-confidence, the ability to interact, and a sense of pride. The students also highlighted their dissatisfaction with the pursuit of the university's reputation, studio dynamics, and uncertainty in the assignment's limitations. Instead of fostering the students' architectural skills, the students believe that the university is using the studio immersion program to improve its standing among other universities internationally. It is parallel with the opinion that internationalization only follows the market lead, with less reaching the full potential of the students (Dupre, 2022).
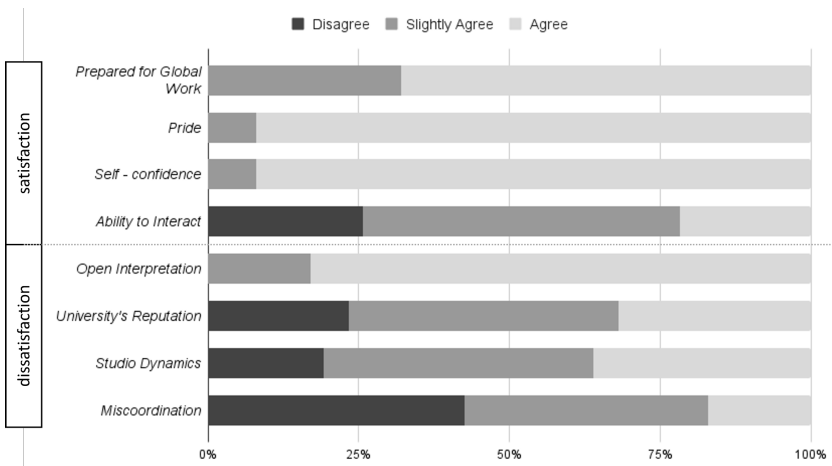

Figure 4: Studio Dynamics

Nearly half of the students agreed that the studio dynamics bring feelings of uncertainty/ambiguity that are particularly related to the project descriptions and limitations (Figure 4). Some researchers believe that internationalization studies make the curriculum overcome the disintegration of the planned curriculum (Dupre, 2022; Mostafa & Mostafa, 2010; Ostwald & Williams, 2008). The students feel that the studio is too dynamic, so it is not integrated with the school curriculum. This dynamism is due to the changes that occur in the studio, for example, changes in details related to assignment products and meeting schedules with the tutors. Students felt that these changes moved the studio further away from the original curriculum design.

According to the interviews, the three universities' worth as studio management educators admitted that this was a result of the limited time available to complete preliminary coordination for studio planning. As shown in previous research, internationalization should be carefully and thoroughly planned to achieve more coordination regarding the applied pedagogy (Munasinghe, 2008). Preliminary online talks are held to address the project's primary issues and find comparable sites (in terms of potential, challenges, and area) and then have less time to discuss in more detail, such as the brief narrative of the project, which includes the limitations, the drawing products and the per-group discussion time table. At the beginning of the study, students had difficulty adjusting to the level of dynamics of the studio immersion; however, in the end, they were able to understand that managing the immersion studio required special management regarding budgets, academic schedules and site visits from the three universities that sometimes could not fit all the students' expectations.

Comprehensive Understanding

Following the completion of the studio immersion, more than 90% of the students expressed pride in their participation and the quality of their work. Although it is obvious that there is a cultural difference between them (Killick, 2018), students now feel more confident in themselves because they have successfully communicated across cultures. Internationalization in the studio has faced many challenges in terms of cultural differences that could lead to tensions as well as focus (Gray, 2013; Salama, 2021). During the master plan design assignment, which is completed in groups, students are aware of cultural differences, but in reality, they can find their own way or methods to interact and even negotiate the design during the assignment of the master plan. In addition, almost all of the students feel very prepared to face the global world in their future careers.

Students are aware that setting up the studio immersion is more work than setting up a standard academic studio. The internationalization studio is exposed to a highly diverse range of architectural paradigms, real-world environments, and architectural theories (Crowther, 2013; Dupre, 2022; Salama, 2021; Srinivasan, 2011). Over 90% of the students thought that the success of this international study can be attributed to positive relationships between the three universities, particularly between educators who are involved in the studio and support from

various entities, such as the international office and university/department leaders, concerning internal administration, scheduling, finances, career development of the educators and the fulfillment of the strategic plan of the institutions.

After the studio immersion, the students have a deeper comprehension of what architecture means, which are the three most important thoughts from the students:

- Architecture is viewed as the result of social and cultural integration rather than just the aesthetics of buildings
- The sociocultural context of modern society, in which buildings are designed, can be used to understand architecture
- The studio provides assignments in a real societal context so that it helps interpret sociocultural conditions as an architectural background.

In addition, 90% of the students reported that they are becoming more aware that the architect profession is a multifaceted career that involves aspects from the technical and sociocultural domains as well as aesthetics. Students believe that they have a deeper understanding of critical thinking, which they may use for future self-improvement rather than only finishing the assignment in the studio. In previous research, the internationalization of design studies has revealed various architectural theories, in which educators need to apply the constructivist approach to communicate across cultures, whereas the learning experience urgently needs intercultural skills to understand contemporary society (Crowther, 2013; Salama, 2021; Srinivasan, 2011; *Un-Working*, n.d.).

Summary

This research aims to investigate the perceptions of students who finished their studies in 2022 and 2023. The goal is to determine whether internationalization activity adds knowledge about architecture and provides skills for future careers. According to the research findings, studio immersion broadens students' understanding of architecture to include the sociocultural context of contemporary society in addition to technical and aesthetic systems. Therefore, the profession of an architect is understood as a multifaceted profession. With respect to their future careers in an increasingly globalized world, students are confident in their capacity to overcome cultural differences. Their struggle to adjust to the new friends, teachers, and studio culture was demonstrated, and it was overcome by social interaction and communication, both formal and informal, which can foster networking and trust. The students believe that studio immersion has helped them become more confident, global and intercultural learners.

According to the findings, in regard to communication in the studio, students initially struggle with their English but eventually gain the confidence to engage with their peers. Their confidence is growing, especially through online informal activities, such as online gaming. Owing to their early exposure to English, the students are conversant in both English and worldwide communication via the internet and online gaming. Even though their English proficiency is not comparable, the interaction among students is not affected.

CONCLUSIONS

The question of identity and uniqueness of education becomes the greatest challenge for internationalization in HE as well as in schools of architecture. Some scholars have argued that internationalization could reinforce Western-centric education by ignoring the differences and cultural diversity of each nation's educational system (Jones, 2022; McAllester, 2024). However, HE acknowledges that despite the significant time and resource commitments needed, internationalization is a modern necessity to train future practitioners in a globalized society.

There is an opportunity for the school of architecture to implement internationalization in the learning process, especially in the studios. This is because the school is regulated internationally under UIA requirements for architecture curriculum goals, which means that all schools of architecture match in terms of the learning skills provided. The internationalization of studios is becoming more feasible for application in the modern world, where students encounter no boundaries in learning and engagement and more student-centered learning. Nonetheless, it is challenging to alter the studio culture that has grown over the years at each institution, as it has become unique in that it adds value to the entire educational process. The master architect, who primarily directs the design approach and style of the studio assignment, is credited with having expertise in the architecture project. As the spirit of collaboration is the foundation of the studio, the new studio culture that will be built over time will fulfill the main purpose, which is to be more relevant and connected in the increasingly independent world.

This type of studio offers a new strategy for architecture schools to apply internationalization, which is typically regarded as unachievable. Research immersion creates a unique characteristic in terms of its challenges, handicaps, benefits and shortcomings, whereas it also needs various types of support. The university's internationalization-supporting policies and strategies, as well as the instructors' openness to fostering a new studio culture, are crucial to the studio immersion program's success. The chance to study various national contexts and cultures that produce architecture is provided to the students to help them with their assignment.

The definition of internationalization in HE includes the meaning of process as well as strategy; it is not a target but rather how to pursue a common purpose together by undertaking specific actions/strategies that differ from one institution to another (Knight, 2008). It is possible that certain institutions are better suited for the type of studio immersion than others strongly depend on resources are; all have a common purpose of improving HE quality and tolerance in a world where people are more independent and connected (Knight, 2008; Knight & de Wit, 2018).

This research is limited to the perspective of the students only, but in the future, it could be expanded to the perspective of the leaders since this strategy of studio immersion initially to answer the global need to be equal and relevant. Additionally, the difference in internationalization in Asian compared with non-

Asian HE could be highlighted to allow for a more thorough analysis and implementation of the best possible strategy.

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