

Developing Soft Skills of International Students in Graduate Music Programs

Nicha Pattananon¹, Lim Sin Mei², Siriluk Charoenmongcolkij³, Chuchat Pinpart⁴
and Krit Niramittham⁵

Lecturer, Faculty of Music, Bangkokthonburi University, Thailand

Corresponding Author, E-mail: ¹nicha.musiced@gmail.com

Received May 28, 2023; **Revised** March 29, 2024; **Accepted** March 30, 2024

Abstract

This Article aimed to study the application of soft skills development methods in the management of education for international students in graduate programs in music. This research is qualitative. The sample was 6 Ph.D. graduates international students in music graduate programs in Thailand. They were selected by purposive sampling method. The instrument for collecting data was an interview guideline–analysis data by Content Analysis.

The research results were found as follows; The soft skills in this study were problem–solving and creativity skills, readiness to learn and critical thinking skills, adaptability skills, self–motivation and positive attitude skills, communication skills, and teamwork skills. All soft skills can develop through in–class study and by living in different environments when they study abroad.

Keywords: Soft Skills; International Student; Graduate Music Program

Introduction

From the changes in society and the need for suitable work skills for the changing times. In addition to occupational skills, that are cognitive skills and operational skills. Soft skills are also very important. It is also a skill that matters only what the organization or organization cares about.

Soft skills are a group of skills whose needs from entrepreneurs change with changes in technology. Life For example, during the COVID–19 pandemic, technology skills at work have become an important skill that no matter which organization or organization, It is necessary to use competent

personnel to use technology in their work. Communicate with colleagues as they work from home. Unable to work in a normal workplace The use of technology has become very necessary in this situation.

The same goes for music instruction. Teachers are unable to conduct regular classes. Teachers must use technology to teach online, whether using applications for meetings or teaching. With online communication channels with students and when situations arise that require changing behaviors or practices in music teaching, these will become new practices that form the basis of further music instruction (Ghazali & Bennett, 2017).

Therefore, preparing soft skills for graduate students who will graduate as future academic personnel is important, and the curriculum must develop learners' different soft skills. Recognizing the importance of this issue, we conducted a study on the soft skills of international students studying music graduate programs in Thailand. Moreover, the application of methods to develop soft skills in the management of education for international students in graduate programs in music. To bring knowledge to develop graduate students further.

Research objective

To study the application of soft skills development methods in the management of education for international students in graduate programs in music.

Literature review

Soft skills are very important for every student who wants to improve their potential in university courses. The importance of soft skills depends on context and personal perception. *Soft skills* are related to personal gathering, attributes, and positive abilities that enhance relationships. Soft skills refer to a set of skills that define how we interact with others. Soft skills play an essential role in the workplace and their career success. These skills apply to all fields of work and are often behavioral traits inherent in a person. Soft skills are as essential for everyday life as they are for work. Examples of soft skills include communication, critical, structured thinking, and problem-solving skills. Creativity, teamwork, negotiation skills, Self-management, Time Management, Conflict Management, Culture of awareness, general knowledge, responsibility, good manners and etiquette, self-esteem, socializing, honesty, compassion, work ethic, project management, and business management. Modern universities should

provide the development of the soft skills needed for students to succeed academically and professionally at work (Abdoli et al., 2013).

Research on the importance of developing soft skills for learners by higher education teachers found that soft skills can be achieved through effective and quality transfer and teaching, with soft skills contributing to career development to be ready and effective for the organization (Tang, 2018).

Skills required for a job can be defined as skills, such as practical skills and understanding of the workforce or attributes that make graduates more likely to be employable and successful. The skills needed to do these tasks should be developed together.

Teaching and learning experiences to enhance graduates' abilities will result in graduates being able to find employment after graduation, and developing soft skills is a condition that employers evaluate to recruit personnel. According to many educators, employment attributes or qualities identified as soft skills are the ability to build work relationships and habits that benefit the organization (Gill, 2018).

The music industry is one of the most competitive industries in the world, and to succeed in this field, aspiring musicians need more than just technical skills. While proficiency in playing an instrument or singing is crucial, it's only one piece of the puzzle. The music industry demands various soft skills, enabling individuals to interact effectively with others and build successful careers. In this literature review, we will explore the importance of soft skills in music and examine how they impact career success.

Effective communication is one of the most critical soft skills in a music career. Musicians must communicate effectively with other professionals to create successful musical projects. For instance, a songwriter must communicate their musical vision to a producer or other musicians, while a performer must communicate with their bandmates to achieve a cohesive performance. Haans and Pieters (2016) found that communication skills are essential for success in the music industry, as they enable musicians to create positive relationships with other professionals and communicate their musical vision effectively. In addition, good communication skills can help musicians manage conflicts effectively, which can lead to better outcomes for all parties involved.

Collaboration is another critical soft skill in the music career. Many musicians work in teams to create successful musical projects, and the ability to work collaboratively is essential. According to Yoon and Kim (2018), musicians must work effectively with other professionals and create successful musical

projects. Collaborating with others can lead to new ideas and approaches and better outcomes. Furthermore, good collaboration skills can help musicians build positive relationships with other professionals, leading to more opportunities in the future.

Time management is a critical soft skill in a music career. Musicians must manage their time effectively to meet project deadlines and maintain a successful career. According to Alyami et al., time management skills are essential for success in the music industry, as they enable musicians to prioritize their tasks effectively and meet project deadlines. Time management skills can also help musicians balance their personal and professional lives, leading to a healthier work-life balance.

The music industry is constantly changing, and musicians must be able to adapt to new musical trends and technologies to maintain a successful career. According to Martin, Collie, & Nagy (2021), adaptability is a critical soft skill in the music industry, as it enables musicians to stay current with new musical trends and technologies and maintain a successful career. Adaptability can also help musicians overcome challenges and setbacks, which are common in the music industry.

Entrepreneurship is a critical soft skill in the music career. Musicians must be able to promote their music effectively and manage their careers to achieve success. According to Akeke et al. (2022), entrepreneurship skills are essential for working in the music industry, as they enable musicians to effectively promote their music, manage their finances, and navigate the music industry. Entrepreneurship skills can also help musicians identify new opportunities and pursue them to advance their careers.

Leadership is another critical soft skill in the music career. Musicians must be able to lead their teams effectively to create successful musical projects. According to Hivile & Henrika (2015), leadership skills are essential for success in the music industry, as they enable musicians to create a vision for their musical projects and inspire others to achieve it. Good leadership skills can also help musicians build positive relationships with other professionals and create opportunities for themselves and others.

Conceptual Framework

This research is qualitative. The researcher framed the research concept. Details are as follows:

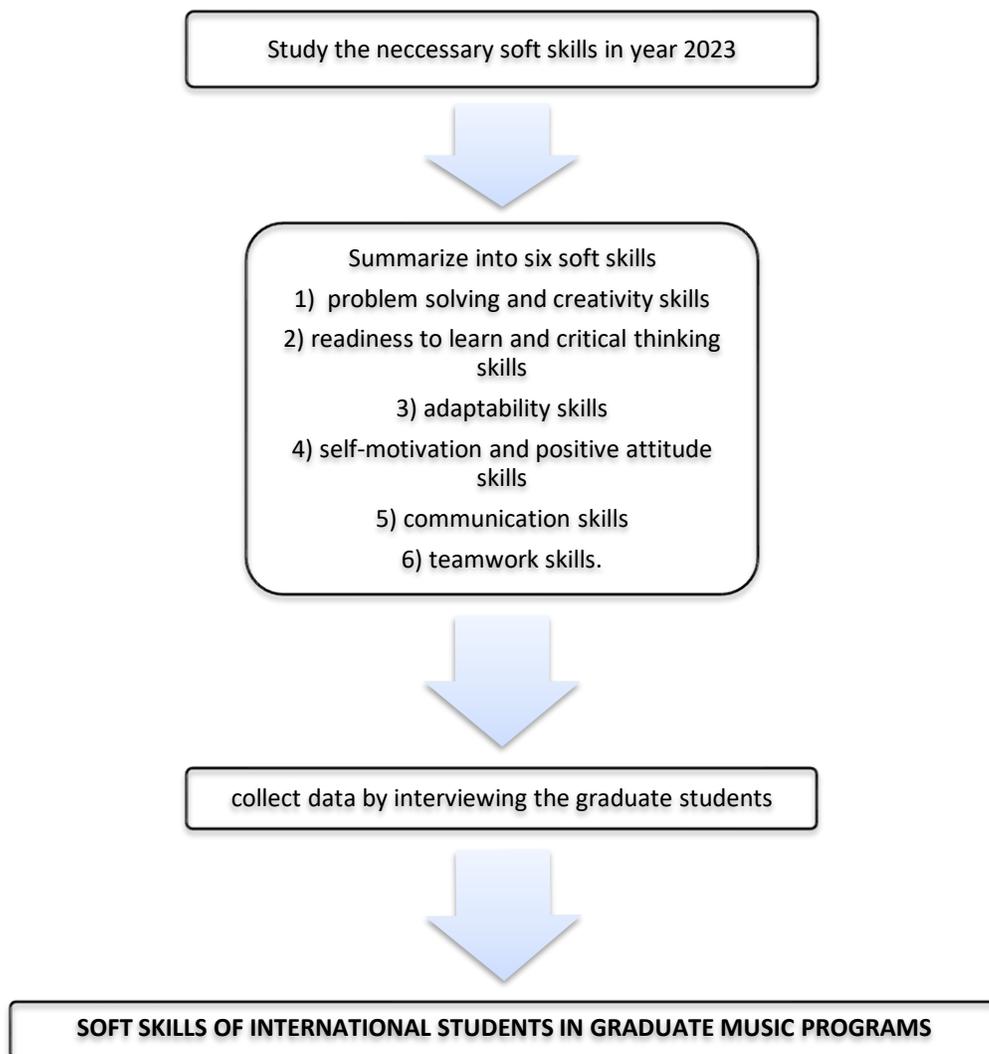


Figure 1 Conceptual framework for research

Research Methodology

This qualitative research collected data by interviewing 6 PhD graduates' international students in music graduate programs in Thailand.

Inclusion Criteria

- 1) The key informants must be an international student.
- 2) The key informants must have studied in Thailand and have a period of stay in Thailand of not less than 3 months.

3) The key informants were a graduate who holds a PhD in music from an educational institution in Thailand.

Data Collection Tools

The researcher used an interview form to collect data on applying soft skills development methods to international students in graduate programs in music. The topic in the interview guideline was the development of six soft skills, including problem-solving and creativity skills, readiness to learn and critical thinking skills, adaptability skills, self-motivation and positive attitude skills, communication skills, and teamwork skills.

Research findings

From interviews with six PhD graduates, it was found that studying graduate abroad helped develop soft skills in various areas as follows

1) Problem solving and creativity skills

Studying abroad exposes students to diverse cultures, perspectives, and academic approaches. This exposure challenges students to think creatively and find innovative solutions to problems. Interacting with colleagues from different backgrounds encourages students to consider multiple viewpoints, broadening their problem-solving skills. This can open up new ways of approaching problems. This exposure can also inspire new ideas and concepts, leading to creative solutions to existing problems. It also exposed them to new techniques, tools, and methods used in their field of study, which can improve their ability to solve problems creatively. Studying abroad also helps develop creativity by providing opportunities for hands-on learning experiences. Studying abroad also introduces new art, music, and cultural expressions that can inspire creative thinking.

The students will try to solve the problem by themselves. In terms of study, they need to read literature and understand what the professor says in the course. They also search for solutions to problems through the internet. Secondly, they will ask classmates for help or discuss and exchange problems with classmates. Thirdly, they consult and discuss with the tutor. Generally speaking, problem-solving needs to consider one's ability and seek help from others. In terms of creativity, it is a comprehensive ability. Postgraduate students must have rich knowledge, wisdom, and personality in

their studies. New ideas need to be generated during learning. This is a complicated process. Students must be stimulated to be curious, observant, and imaginative about new knowledge.

2) Readiness to learn and critical thinking skills

Studying abroad will expose the student to a different cultural environment. This intercultural experience broadens horizons, makes them more open and inclusive, and enables reflection and understanding of perspectives and perceptions in different cultural contexts. A diverse learning environment that will interact with students from different countries and backgrounds. This diversity leads to exposure to different ways of thinking, learning styles, and problem-solving methods that stimulate learning and thinking.

Teaching methods such as group discussions, practical projects, and research reports encourage active participation, critical thinking, and independent research and cultivate students' learning and thinking abilities. Readiness to learn is the willingness to engage in learning and take ownership of education. On the other hand, critical thinking is the ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information to make informed decisions. Pursuing a post-graduate degree abroad requires a high level of readiness to learn and critical thinking.

3) Adaptability skills

Adaptability is the main index of soft skills. This is a necessary ability for students studying abroad. The students can complete their studies only when they get used to the foreign living environment, language, and teaching methods. After spending two to three years in Thailand, their adaptability has greatly improved.

Pursuing a post-graduate degree abroad requires significant adaptability skills since it involves moving to a new country and adapting to a new culture, educational system, and way of life. Studying abroad necessitates adapting to a new environment, cultural norms, and educational systems. Students will face numerous challenges, such as language barriers, different teaching styles, and unfamiliar customs. Adapting to these situations enhances flexibility, resilience, and the ability to thrive in diverse settings. These adaptability skills are highly valued in today's globalized world.

4) Self-motivation and positive attitude skills

Because studying abroad requires setting clear learning goals on their own, while having a study plan helps cultivate and maintain positive motivation. At the same time, they all need to arrange

their own lives, so they need to adjust their state and attitude, and their self-control ability is also exercised.

Life studying abroad is a process of continuous self-motivation. We will often encounter academic difficulties. If we are intimidated by difficulties, we cannot complete our studies. Therefore, in the whole learning process, we learned to encourage ourselves so that we have to overcome difficulties, constantly beyond our confidence and determination, to establish a positive attitude towards life.

Students can overcome obstacles and setbacks more effectively by maintaining a positive attitude instead of viewing difficulties as roadblocks. This is a chance to develop problem-solving skills and build resilience. This positive mindset also impacts interactions with others, creating a supportive and encouraging atmosphere. A positive attitude can inspire and motivate, creating a collaborative and uplifting learning environment.

5) Communication skills

Due to the need to communicate with people from different national backgrounds, even the exchanges with Chinese students are from different provinces, and communication is exercised. If student does not enhance their ability to communicate with people, they will be lonely studying and living abroad.

The overseas study enables us to learn to help each other and communicate with tutors and classmates academically. During thesis discussions, academic exchanges, and continuous improvement with tutors in writing papers, soft skills in communicating with others have been significantly improved.

6) Teamwork skills

Teamwork is very important to work in research and paper writing. The scope of knowledge and ability of a person is limited. Only by uniting more members can our research work be carried out smoothly. Working together as a team can become a great wisdom. All the learners who can successfully obtain a doctoral degree must have experienced and formed a strong sense of teamwork.

Working in teams with fellow students from diverse cultural backgrounds brings a range of perspectives and ideas to the table. It fosters an environment where individuals must effectively communicate, collaborate, and pool their strengths to achieve common goals. This exposure to multicultural teamwork enhances the ability to adapt to different working styles, negotiate conflicts, and build consensus.

International students often need to work as a team when studying abroad, complete class assignments and seminars. Teamwork is a group ability. Promote common goals through cooperation. Mobilize the resources of team members and the ability to motivate team members.

Discussion

According to this research, communication skills development in graduate students is important and developed during their overseas studies. This encourages them to continue working after graduation, aligning with their academic results. According to the research, communication skills development in graduate students is important and developed during their overseas studies. This encourages them to continue working after graduation, in line with the academic results of Haans and Pieters (2016) found that communication skills are essential for success in the music industry.

The research findings found that teamwork skills can develop during the overseas study, which is similar to the results of the study on collaboration skills of Yoon and Kim (2018); musicians need to work effectively with other professionals and create successful musical projects.

New knowledge from research

This research found that coming to study abroad of international students and gaining knowledge and study skills also helps develop soft skills necessary for future careers. The skills developed in the students come from more than just studying in the classroom. However, it is caused by the students living in a foreign country and encountering different environments such as climate, geography, food, lifestyle, various facilities, and different cultures. These are just as important in developing soft skills as in the classroom.

Conclusion

Graduate students take problem-solving and creativity skills as an important part of learning because studying abroad pushes them to unexpected situations and unfamiliar environments, and they can develop problem-solving skills in different situations. This also forces them to be ready to learn new knowledge in the limited time to stay abroad.

Studying abroad necessitates adapting to a new environment, cultural norms, and educational systems. Students will face numerous challenges, such as language barriers, different teaching styles, and unfamiliar weather and facilities. The different language greatly improves communication skills, and with all these conditions, international students tend to maintain a positive attitude, work in a team and live with others.

Recommendation

Based on the results of the research, the researcher made the following suggestions:

1. Suggestions for utilization of research results

The result from this research could use to promote the benefit of international students studying abroad with the chance to improve their knowledge and soft skills, which are becoming more important in working in the future. Higher education institutions could use the research findings to plan their course and provide activities encouraging students to improve their soft skills.

2. Suggestions for future research

The future study might point out and design the research to focus on each skill. Researchers might research the activities that can enhance the soft skills abilities of international students. The other soft skills not mentioned in this research are also interesting topics for study.

References

- Abdoli, A.S., Baharuddin, A., & Chan, P. (2013). Important Soft Skills for University Students in 21th Century. In 4th *International Graduate Conference on Engineering, Science, and Humanities* (pp. 1088–1093). Malaysia; Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.
- Akeke M. N. G., Oche P. E., Akuegwu B. A., & Ushie P. U. (2022). Entrepreneurial skills for business education graduates' employability in Cross River State, Nigeria. *Educational Research and Reviews*, 17(4), 138–144.
- Alyami, A., Abdulwahed, A., Azhar, A., Binsaddik, A. and Bafaraj, S. (2021). Impact of Time-Management on the Student's Academic Performance: A Cross-Sectional Study. *Creative Education*, 12, 471–485.

- Ghazali, G., & Bennett, D. (2017). Employability for music graduates: Malaysian educational reform and the focus on generic skills. *International Journal Of Music Education, 35*(4),588–600.
- Gill, R. (2018). Building employability skills for higher education students: An Australian example. *Journal of Teaching and Learning for Graduate Employability, 9*(1), 84–92.
- Haans, R., & Constant, P. (2016). Thinking about U: Theorizing and testing U-and inverted U-shaped relationships in strategy research. *Strategic Management Journal, 37*(7), 1177–1195.
- Hivile, T. & Henrika, S. (2015). Expression of the leadership abilities of a music teacher. *Pedagogy, 119*(3), 134–146.
- Martin, A. J., Collie, R. J., & Nagy, R. P. (2021). Adaptability and high school students' online learning during COVID–19: A job demands–resources perspective. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12*, 702163.
- Tang, K. N. (2018). The importance of soft skills acquisition by teachers in higher education institutions. *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences, 41*(1), 22–27.
- Yoon, S., & Kim, H. C. (2018). Feeling economically stuck: The effect of perceived economic mobility and socioeconomic status on variety seeking. *Journal of Consumer Research, 44*(5), 1141–1156.