

STUDY AND INTERNSHIPS ABROAD: TOOLS TO DEVELOP THE FRENCH SECTION OF A THAI UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

Since the new millennium, the number of foreign exchange students worldwide has increased significantly. A study published by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2014, p.344) shows that, between 2000 and 2012, this number increased by 114%. At the same time, international exchange programs and internships abroad have continued to expand. As Bian (2013, p.451) noted, "for a student, the principal purpose of mobility is to enrich one's knowledge, broaden one's worldview and prepare for a future professional life." Furthermore, with these experiences abroad, the majority of students will further develop their language skills.

The aim of this article is to share our experience regarding three different programs developed in partnership with French institutions, and the steps we took to both implement and improve them.

In the first part of the article, we shall introduce the context of our study. Then, we will describe the three main programs: summer language trip, exchange programs and internships. We will explain how partners were selected, the obstacles we encountered, and the solutions implemented, as well as the benefits and limitations of each program. Finally, we will attempt to demonstrate how these programs have had positive effects on the French section of our university.

Conclusion: The study & internship programs implemented between MUIC and France during the last 10 years have had identifiable positive effects on our students; they learned to be more independent, more responsible and became more open to the world. Thanks to these programs, they improved their language skills and were encouraged to continue their French studies. These programs directly contributed to increasing the value of the French language at our college.

Keywords: exchange programs, internships abroad, language study.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the new millennium, the number of foreign exchange students worldwide has increased significantly. A study published by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2014, p.344) shows that, between 2000 and 2012, this number increased by 114%. At the same time, international exchange programs and internships abroad have continued to expand. As Bian (2013, p.451) noted, "for a student, the principal purpose of mobility is to enrich one's knowledge, broaden one's worldview and prepare for a future professional life." Furthermore, with these experiences abroad, the majority of students will further develop their language skills.

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2. THE CONTEXT: FRENCH LANGUAGE IN THAILAND AND AT MUIC

2.1. French language in Thailand

Thailand's official appreciation of foreign languages began during the reign of king Mongkut (1851-1868), who himself attained considerable mastery of English and supported its propagation within royal circles. Just before the Second World War, though, the teaching of French rose to a position of prominence in Thailand, and Thai diplomat were required to learn both English and French. The use of the French language began to decline after 1945, but Boontham (1976, pp.120, 121) explains that, thanks to the francophilia of the Thai royal family, French was still being developed at schools and universities from 1950 onward. Until the National Education Act in 1999, Tantiratanavong (2007, pp.30, 31) points out that French was the first optional foreign language taught in schools. However, with educational policies being focused on students, schools had more autonomy to choose which languages they would make available. As a consequence, the diversity of languages on offer increased. Today, Chinese has become the most common foreign language taught after English. Japanese courses, also popular with young people, are present in all universities in Thailand. German and more recently Spanish stand as additional options for high school and university students. As a result, French no longer retains the cachet which it formerly possessed even 20 years ago. According to data from the Cultural Services of the French Embassy, the number of learners in high schools and universities were estimated at 40,000 persons learning French in 2013 versus 55,000 in 2004. In a country where the French language is in decline, it is crucial to develop various tools adapted to a new generation of learners, and to share experiences between high school and university teachers.

2.2. Mahidol University International College

Founded in 1986, in Nakhon Pathom, Thailand, Mahidol University International College (MUIC) offers courses in sciences, business management, tourism and hospitality management, social sciences, cinema, television and animation, to more than 3,400 students of whom 20% are foreigners. It is important to note that all of these courses are taught in English by professors from more than 20 different countries. At the end of their fourth year, students obtain a bachelor's degree. In its mission statement, MUIC aims to prepare global citizens for the 21st century, fostering in them the ability to transform knowledge into action and to make meaningful contributions to society (see website page in reference list). In order to promote a global citizenry, the college has implemented active exchange agreements with over 100 universities in North America, South America, Europe, Oceania and Asia. In Europe, it has developed 38 agreements with foreign universities, including 6 in France. In 2012, MUIC welcome 150 international students for an average period of 5 months and our partner-universities received 80 students generally for a duration of 4 months.

2.3. A second foreign language at MUIC

Upon entry to the university, students also have the opportunity to commence the study of a second foreign language, choosing among Chinese, Japanese, Spanish, German, French or Thai; two consecutive courses of 40 hours must be taken. After completing a basic curriculum of 120 hours for one academic year, more motivated students can further pursue language minor program via eight 40-hour courses (320 hours total). Note that students can abandon these minor programs whenever they desire. Therefore, the implementation of summer language trips, exchange programs with universities and internships abroad could contribute significantly to motivating and encouraging students to continue their language studies.

The tables below clearly show that French is not the most commonly chosen second foreign language at MUIC. However, its position at our university remains stable. Chinese is the most popular language in the Elementary program, but more significantly also, in the Minor program. At the Elementary levels, Spanish, introduced in 2008, attracts many students which has caused a decline in the number of students studying other languages, with the exceptions of Chinese and Thai. In the Minor program, attendance in German, French and Japanese courses have remained similarly stable during the last two academic years, while Spanish has progressed quantitatively.

Number of students per language at MUIC. 1st trimester. 2012-2013.

Langue	Chinese	Japanese	Spanish	German	French	Thai
N	352	124	193	85	97	33
%	40%	14%	22%	10%	11%	4%

Number of students per language in the Elementary Program at MUIC
1st trimester. 2012-2013 (Elementary I, Elementary II, Elementary III).

Langue	Chinese	Japanese	Spanish	German	French	Thai
N	182	96	161	56	64	33
%	31%	16%	27%	9%	11%	6%

Number of students per language in the Minor Program at MUIC
1st trimester. 2012-2013 (Pre-intermediate I, Intermediate I, Intermediate IV).

Langue	Chinese	Japanese	Spanish	German	French	Thai
N	170	28	32	29	33	0
%	58%	10%	11%	10%	11%	

Data provided by the Office of Academic Affairs (OAA). Mahidol University International College, Nov. 2013.

In a Thailand-centric context where the learning of French is losing momentum, and in the specific environment of our International College (with a large number of languages being taught and concurrent development of new minors), it has become necessary over recent years to implement various tools to encourage our learners. Study and internships programs in France, which we will later present in detail, were implemented to develop cross-cultural sensibilities, to increase students' self-confidence, to improve their language skills, and to prepare them for a professional life open to the world. From an educator's perspective, the aim was also to promote the French language and to encourage continued participation in the associated minor program.

2.4. Qualitative interviews

Beginning 2009, we began to interview students regarding their opinions about the available study and internships programs in France. The objectives of this qualitative survey were to both evaluate students' levels of satisfaction and to identify possible problems in the various programs.

Students were interviewed for 40 minutes and were requested to answer 35 questions divided between four parts:

- 1. Student's personal profile.
- 2. Their situation prior to departure (i.e., their decision process and preparation for the trip).
- 3. The trip itself (arrival, accomodation, studies/internships, life in the city, cultural adaptation, personal likes and dislikes).
- 4. The result of the trip (personal experiences with French culture and language, their motivation in learning French, professional perspectives, others).

In all, 32 students responded to a questionnaire about the summer language trip, 9 students answered a questionnaire regarding international university exchanges, and 4 students participated in the internship abroad interviews. The results of these interviews are presented in sections 3 and 4 of this article.

Limitations

There do exist several limitations to these qualitative interviews. The sample' sizes (N₁=32, N₂=9, N₃=4) are small, and do not pretend to be representative of any larger population. We are compelled to add that the majority of the interviews were organized within a month after students returned to the college, and that in the immediate aftermath of their time abroad, some students may still have been over-enthusiastic about their experiences and linguistic progress. Additionally, even though students were given precisely formulated questionnaires, their answers could have been unconsciously influenced by the interviewer who in fact was their French language instructor. Finally, the author of this study is perfectly aware that students' intrinsic motivation cannot be fully measured in such a short period of time.

3. THE PROGRESSIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF STUDY & INTERNSHIPS ABROAD PROGRAMS TO PROMOTE FRENCH LANGUAGE AT MUIC

Two partners have been crucial in developing our programs in France. Firstly, the International Relations Office (IRO) of our University has greatly assisted in facilitating the necessary agreements with foreign universities, and has consistently encouraged exchanges by keeping students well-informed and implementing different systems of scholarships for language courses, academic exchanges and internships abroad. Additionally, the *Service de Coopération et d'Actions Culturelles* of the French Embassy in Thailand has been a great help by providing advice, grants for academic exchanges and assistance for obtaining visas. Before presenting our programs, I would like to sincerely thank these two key partners.

3.1. A summer language trip in Nice

The MUIC French section, in cooperation with the University of Nice Sophia-Antipolis, has organized an 80-hour intensive French course every August since 2003. This one-month study abroad trip aims to increase students' language skills, and to give them a better understanding of some French socio-cultural realities. This trip abroad is, for most of our students (who range in age from 17-21 years), a first experience towards autonomy and independence.

Several factors contributed to our selection of Nice as the destination for our summer language trip, not the least of which is the excellent reputation of the International Language School at the University of Nice itself. Having visited the university of Nice during the previous year, we were able to secure a specific agreement to allow French students the opportunity for their own student exchange trip to Thailand. Therefore, by developing this summer course, we hoped to increase both the motivation of students and the enrollment in the pre-intermediate minor class, which open every September at MUIC.

As early as January, we begin promoting the summer trip to Nice, informing students and parents of the total cost, and details regarding accommodation, visa requirements, and other pertinent organizational issues. Foreign language teachers present the program during their classes, including presentations by students who have previously travelled to Nice. We also ask exchange students from Nice who are currently at MUIC to offer their own perspectives on the city of Nice and the benefits of a foreign language exchange program. By the terms of the M.o.U., our college accepts two business students from the *Institut Universitaire de Technologie* of Nice during two trimesters. In exchange, the University of Nice pays the Summer Language School fees for the 4 most accomplished students of French from MUIC. Our International Relations Office will also reimburse the cost of accommodation for the two best students in the French program. We find this scholarship system to be an extremely effective contribution towards increasing the number of students enrolled in the summer language program.

From 2003 to 2013, the MUIC French section has organized 10 trips to Nice for a total of 102 students including 71 elementary and 31 pre-intermediate students. Due to the number of participants in the program, a strict organizational schedule must be maintained, as one teacher must be responsible for managing the logistics of each trip.

After a first presentation meeting in January, a second administrative meeting is organized in April-May (flight to France, 6 forms to fill, visas, financial matters, insurance). A third and final meeting takes place a week before the departure to Nice. Security regulations are explained in detail, and a question-and-answer session offers students the ability to ask for advice and receive information on opportunities for tourism available during their stay. Harris *et al.*, (2011, pp.18-30) gave us many ideas to better prepare our summer language trip, to deal with logistics and security and to ensure that students remain committed to their studies and act in a responsible manner during their time abroad.

Obstacles and solutions to improve the program

From interviewing 32 students and visiting them twice during their summer in Nice, it became apparent that they encountered some difficulties both engaging in conversations with local population and maintaining their motivation to explore the host culture.

The host families

During the first two summers in Nice, our students were housed in a university dormitory, and, as might be expected, were predisposed to interact largely among themselves. French language was utilized in class, but oral communication with native speakers remained limited. Therefore, from 2005, we proposed to place students - through an agency in Nice - with host families. Students accepted this decision and, we found, did

not come to regret it. Through interviews with students after their return to Thailand is that, we were able to ascertain that this change to the program had the effect of increasing their opportunities to speak French in daily life, and to observe the behaviors and customs of the Frenchs more closely. The students reported greater exposure to French cuisine, which itself proved an important facilitator for socialization and emotional involvement with their surroundings and host families. Dufon (2000, p.91) considered this "socialization of taste" to produce generally positive effects, due to its propensity for facilitating communication and creating indelible food-based memories.

Overall, students rated their stay with French host families highly, although, a few unfortunate experiences were reported. It sometimes became necessary to provide encouragement to students by phone, or in more extreme cases to contact the placement agency to find a new host. Some of the Thai exchange students are young and often over-protected by their parents; as a consequence, their adjustment to the host culture proved a more challenging task than they had expected. For them, this travel to France represented a first, and at times difficult, step towards autonomy.

Despite this, our conclusion remains that placing the students in a homestay provided many positive opportunities for oral communication and cultural understanding. Later, Cadd (2012, pp.229-240) convinced us to go further, and we experimented with a new method to encourage students to engage with native speakers in France.

Special tasks outside the classroom

The objectives of these tasks are to encourage students to interact with French people and to discover the cultural diversity of the French Riviera. These tasks are prepared in cooperation with the Summer Language School of Nice, and more particularly with the instructors in charge of the classes there. We were lucky to find two teachers who opted to participate in this project.

In preparation for this exercise, the objective of each task is explained to students, who have been previously informed that transfer to this 4-credit course is dependent on attending the 80-hour course at the university of Nice, passing a formal language test, and fulfillment of the 3 following tasks:

- 1.- Introduce yourself to at least three French persons of different ages.
- 2.- Identify a food dish that is not readily available in your country. Go to a restaurant, where that food can be found and ask a server or a cook information about that dish.
3. - Select a museum, castle, village, handicraft, or a similar object which is representative of the local culture. Find at least two members of the culture and ask information about about you have selected.

For each task, a precise guideline is provided in English. Students are required to meet a foreign language instructor before taking any action. The interviews must also be recorded by the students.

At this time, only 12 students have participated in this new task-centered which was introduced in August 2012. In our interviews, students reported that, at first, they were anxious to attempt these tasks, but by persevering in them, they gained increased confidence. In fact, some completed the tasks feeling eager to do more.

The students who have the opportunity to participate in this summer trip can improve their French language skills if they have the will to communicate with native speakers. This experience will also give them first-hand information regarding the culture and the daily life of the French. This one-month summer trip, which for 70% of our students is their first experience abroad without a parent or a relative, is a true first step towards personal autonomy, which in human terms represents without a doubt the most valuable reward to be reaped from a first trip abroad.

3.2. University exchange programs

During the period between 2002-2007, MUIC tried to develop student exchange programs with several French universities, but this did not succeed for a variety of reasons. The potential partners had different academic calendars, courses were not available in English, the system of evaluation and notation was different, and the barrier of the language was concluded to be insurmountable. However, in 2008, the first exchange agreements were finally arranged with French higher education establishments (*Grandes Écoles*) which, in many aspects, share similarities with our college. In this section, we will present each of these programs, and we will explain the obstacles encountered and the solutions implemented to sustain these

exchanges.

3.2.1. *The French business schools: obstacles and solutions*

EUROMED Management Marseille signed an exchange agreement with our College in 2008. This business school offers BA & MBA curriculums in English in order to internationalize and to attract more foreign students. Since then, our university has received 5 students from this school and sent over 4 for an average duration of 3 months. The 4 Thai students who essentially lived on the Luminy campus, did not find it necessary to use French; their business courses were in English and 80 international students were seated in class with them. In addition, Euromed only proposed two French Elementary courses which were not eligible for transfer to the MUIC French Minor Program. We could only recommend this exchange to business students who had no knowledge or a very limited knowledge of French (< 80 hours). As language lecturers, we were initially disappointed by this situation. But, as Rohrich (1993, p.4) mentioned, we must understand that, for most students, the target language is not their primary reason for studying abroad. The 3 MUIC students we interviewed were satisfied with their experience in Marseille. They wanted to "have a break" from MUIC and had a bit of an "on holiday" experience. Considering that so many foreigners were on campus, they did not have much opportunities to speak French, except when travelling.

In 2009, we decided to look for a more "francophile" business school for students enrolled in our minor program. We needed to find a business school providing courses in English, and also offering French courses similar to those at MUIC. In 2010, we entered into a partnership with Brest Brittany Business School. Four of our students were able to benefit from this exchange. They took French courses in a language school, belonging to the same network as the business school, and passed the DELF (1) B1 exam. In addition, they attended business courses in English. This second partner understood that a long-term relationship with our college, must necessarily include the implementation of suitable French courses. Moreover, at least for the moment, few foreign students come on exchange to this institution, and the language of communication on the campus is still primarily French. In terms of language acquisition, this second exchange is much more beneficial to our students. The two students we interviewed were quite satisfied with Brest. They felt welcome at the Business School and they truly appreciated the language school's educational faculties as well. Perhaps the sole downside was that, due to the season which they went to study (from January to April), it was a bit difficult for them to adapt to the weather.

(1) The Diplôme d'études en langue française or DELF for short, in English: Diploma in French Studies, is a certification of French-language abilities for non-native speakers of French. It is composed of four independent diplomas corresponding to the first four levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: A1, A2, B1 and B2.

DELF B1: *At this level, the user becomes independent. He/she can maintain interaction: he/she can understand and maintain a discussion and give his/her opinion. He/she is capable of dealing with situations likely to arise in daily life.*

DELF B2: *The user has a degree of independence that allows him/her to construct arguments to defend his/her opinion, explain his/her viewpoint and negotiate. At this level, the candidate has a degree of fluency and spontaneity in regular interactions and is capable of correcting his/her own mistakes.*

3.2.2. *A program in French with an engineering school: challenge and solution*

The School of Industrial Biology (*l'École de Biologie Industrielle, or EBI*) in Cergy-Pontoise signed an agreement with our college in 2008. Even though, we had few scientific students in the French program at that time, two of them did go to study at EBI for six months in 2009-10, and one studied for a full academic year in 2012-13. This exchange was a challenge insofar as, unlike business schools, the language of instruction was French. Therefore, a significant preparation was necessary. A French trainee stationed at Mahidol University in 2008 carried out, in cooperation with the engineering school, a 3-month program of French on Academic Objectives to aid our students with lexical and oral activities, as well as guidance on understanding a scientific lecture, taking notes, answering examinations, etc. Mangiante, Parpette, (2011, pp.91-94, pp.99-120, DVD-rom) provided the background for improving our first preparational program for Thai scientific students. Moreover, before starting at EBI, students took 40-hours of intensive French in language schools (such as AF Paris and, Cavilam Vichy), and during the academic year, they had 4 hours per week of study with a French teacher.

For the students, the first two months were problematic both linguistically and culturally. In interviews, a few months after the exchange, a student told us that he had had enormous difficulties understanding science courses that he attended in French. He related that he understood many words, but he could not put

together the meaning of complete sentences, and as a result felt discouraged. As he was alone, he found it necessary to ask for help, but through perseverance, was eventually able to meet the significant challenges his studies presented. After four months, he had become much more enthusiastic and had developed sufficient confidence and language skills to attend the second year's engineering courses without much further difficulty. Another student told us that, upon arriving in France, she did not know how to cook and that she felt totally lost. One assumes that, she may have gleaned the basics thanks to her roommate, who was majoring in food sciences. This same student eventually concluded that this experience, though difficult and upsetting at the outset, was ultimately beneficial in that she was prompted to use her own ingenuity and search for solutions to the problems which she faced for essentially the first time in her adult life.

For evaluation, even though questions were in French, foreign students had the right to answer in English. But our students were baffled by the French marking system based on a total of 20. In the *Grandes Écoles*, 12/20 is an acceptable mark, and even honourable for certain difficult courses. In Thailand, as in the United States, students are evaluated on 100-point basis and 60/100 (D) is considered the minimum, albeit poor, passing grade. The marks the students received in France were much lower because of this difference in the notation systems which naturally led to frustration. We had to explain these differences to the Science Program Director of our college so that he could, if necessary, weight the grades of the students to better match our local marking system.

L'École de Biologie Industrielle (EBI) in Cergy-Pontoise, where the number of foreign students remains low and where the language of instruction is French, is undoubtedly our most successful exchange program if the linguistic progress of our learners is considered. The two first students, who spent six months at EBI, had made significant progress in both oral comprehension and expression. After a 10-month stay in France, the third student was able to communicate in French spontaneously and passed the DELF B2 (see p.6) diploma five months later. He had a better understanding of the French society, and was considering studying for a Master's degree in France or in Quebec.

Unfortunately, few scientific students choose the French minor. Since 2008, 12 EBI students came to our university while only 3 MUIC went to study in Cergy-Pontoise. The terms of this agreement, which is unbalanced, will therefore have to be renegotiated.

3.3. Internship programs: learning French at the workplace

For students majoring in Tourism & Hospitality Management (THM), we first tried to develop exchange agreements with French-speaking universities. In France, the programs proposed by the *écoles hôtelières* are very different from those at MUIC. Furthermore, language was a barrier for both partners. The attempts we made in Switzerland were not successful, largely because large hotel schools had already developed their networks.

As fourth year THM students were required to do a three-month internship, we decided to look for hotels in France. At this time, we are in partnership with two hotels. The opportunity to do an internship in France sharply increased students' motivation, as they quickly understood the value of an internship abroad in terms of leveraging themselves on the international marketplace. They prepared a French *résumé (curriculum vitae)*, complete with a stated professional objective and a letter of motivation, and they took the DELF B1 examination (see p.6) prior to their departure for France. To assist the THM students in their preparation, we designed an online course focusing on hotel and restaurant management. We also used different textbooks on French for Specific Purposes (FSP) including "*hôtellerie-restauration.com*" by Corbeau *et al.*, (2006). A year later, we modified the first online version following discussions with one hotel manager who made helpful suggestions for improving the course.

The administrative element of internships is consistently time consuming for teachers and students. We have to prepare administrative documents, including internship agreements (*convention de stage*) signed by five different parties, which are required for obtaining a French visa. Experience taught us that it was necessary to delegate a maximum number of these duties to students who generally go to France in pairs.

Since 2010, the two hotels have received six students from our college for three-month internships. Students were all the more motivated by the fact that their tasks are varied (reception, restaurant, kitchen, and household), and that they felt like useful members of the hotel staff, thanks to their level of language skills (in this context, English and in some cases Mandarin). Additionally, they received a compensation of 436 € per month (in 2013), and were housed and fed by the hotel.

The 4 interviewees have all confirmed to us that they were a bit lost at the beginning of their internships, but that their levels of comprehension and oral expression improved markedly over the weeks. It is surprising to

see the degree to which these students had consolidated their knowledge by practicing French in the workplace. Whereas before leaving, most of them spoke with difficulty and preferred to use English, we observed that they expressed themselves much more easily after their return and that they were speaking of their experiences with enthusiasm. It truly seemed that some students had made much more progress in French outside the classroom.

Resnick (1987, pp.13-20) was one of the first scholars to analyze the differences between a formal educational system and a more informal system based on the workplace. According to her analysis, there are, at least, four type of differences. First, practice sessions in school are for the most part individually-centered, while many of the activities outside the classroom are shared socially. Students in a classroom setting are still judged on the basis of individual tasks or tests whereas many activities at work require collaboration; success depends on the collective performance of several individuals. Second, schoolwork emphasizes mental activities, whereas real-world scenarios often require a blending of mental and physical acumen. Third, according to Resnick, school learning is based on the manipulation of symbols. The world outside school often makes use of objects or events to develop specific skills. Fourth, while, school learning aims for the acquisition of general skills and principles, those practicing a language outside of a school develop situation-specific competencies.

Learning a foreign language at the workplace is very often informal. A young person will often learn by observing or listening to those in senior positions. If a supervisor sees that one of his or her subordinates is not able to complete an activity, he or she will repeat it, or place that individual with a more experienced employee. Our young Thai interns had the opportunity to work with and to learn from different employees at their hotel (including those in reception, restaurant, bar, kitchen, and household areas). The fact that they were part of a team also proved very positive, because although they were not working in the same service during the day, they could still help each other and discuss individual problems with the language and the culture. So far, the internship program we have initiated with the two French hotels has been quite satisfactory. It seems that Tourism & Hospitality students have made gains not only in language, but also in personal maturity and professionalism. They definitely feel more confident with oral communication, and perceive the experience as advantageous in terms of seeking future employment.

4. STUDY AND INTERNSHIPS ABROAD: TOOLS TO ENHANCE THE FRENCH SECTION OF OUR UNIVERSITY?

Interviews we conducted indicated that the majority of students they were satisfied with the summer language trip in Nice. They could recognize the progress that they had made in learning French, especially in terms of oral communication, as well as the benefits gained from living with their host families and in the first interactions they had during their visit.

For the French section of our college, this summer trip would prove to be a crucial factor encouraging students to continue learning French. From 2003 to 2010, among the 90 elementary students who registered for the French Minor, 54 had previously taken the language summer course in Nice representing 60% of the French Minor Program.

Moreover, we observed that in this group of 54 students, 43 finished the program of 8 courses and passed the DELF B1. Notably, the withdrawal rate of 19% was quite low. During the same period, 36 students registered without taking the summer course and 23 completed the program and succeeded the B1 exam. In this second case, the withdrawal rate was higher (36%). Although, we must be careful with figures and it is obviously difficult to measure the importance of this language and culture summer course as it pertains to the motivation of our students, we remain convinced that this program is a good tool to encourage our learners and to promote the French section of our college.

Concerning the university exchange programs, greater contrasts exist. The 3 study exchange programs signed between our university and those in France are undeniably valuable for students; they contribute significantly to students' personal and professional development. But, as we have already discussed, the linguistic environments of three French universities are very different. At the business school which we analyzed first, students did not make much progress in French while at the second, their knowledge of French proved very useful, and French courses were available despite the primary instruction language being English. The engineering school was simultaneously the most challenging for the students, and the most rewarding in terms of their language progress. These exchange programs which are not primarily focus on language development are therefore still quite valuable for the French section.

The opportunity to do an internship in France has strongly motivated tourism and hospitality students to

complete the French minor program and to take the DELF B1 examination. The first two students were very satisfied, and promoted the new hotel internship among their peers. The second group was enthusiastic as well. After their experiences in Bordeaux, both students were able to interact in French with more spontaneity. Three of these students found a job in first-class international hotels in Bangkok and the fourth one pursued a Master's degree in England. We can therefore conclude that these hotel internships have had positive effects on our French minor program.

5. CONCLUSION AND PERSPECTIVES

The study & internships programs implemented between MUIC and France during the last 10 years have had identifiable positive effects on our students; they learned to be more independent, more responsible and became more open to the world. Thanks to these programs, they improved their language skills and were encouraged to continue their French studies. These programs directly contributed to increasing the value of the French language at our college.

The one-month language trip to Nice was also an important factor for the success of the French Minor Program. The situation for university exchange programs is more complex, because, as Altbach & Teichler (2001, p.18), mentioned "there are no commonly held goals for exchange and, as a result, no way of assessing results". As foreign language teachers, we must identify, in cooperation with the Office of International Relations of our university, what the most appropriate exchange programs are for our learners. We must guide and advise the students on the basis of their 4-year plans. If a student truly desires to learn French, we need to make sure that he or she will be in an environment where many opportunities exist to communicate in French. Study environments where the language of communication is English are becoming more and more frequent among French business schools, and this trend might expand to include other higher education establishments.

Internships in French hotels have probably generated the most enthusiasm among learners who understand the benefit of such experiences for their résumé. This track will therefore be developed in cooperation with our Tourism & Hospitality Management Division, a group of hotels, and a French Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Mahidol University international College has successfully forged relationships with French partners. Looking towards the future, we hope that these kinds of international exchanges can also be developed in concert with other Francophone countries.

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