

## ***“Think globally, act locally”*: ‘Glocalization’ in Taiwanese Higher Education**

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### **Abstract**

*The expression of “Think globally, act locally” directs listeners to actively participate in the process of globalization and internationalization. This study focuses on teachers’ and students’ perceptions of what this rhetorical phrase means to them and what actions should be instructed in the classroom. Three research questions asked in this study are: first, what are the participants’ perceptions of what the expression “Think globally, act locally” means? Second, what skills / knowledge do the participants’ think they require so they are able to “Think globally, act locally”? Third, what courses should be offered to students so they may “Think globally, act locally”, or so-called “glocalization” to take place, in answer to this intention? The results of the study suggest that institutions should articulate more specific global competencies for their students overall. Syllabi should be revised to include positive learning outcomes that reflect the spirit embedded in this phrase.*

**Key words:** globalization, glocalization, higher education, Taiwan

### **1. Introduction**

While universities in Taiwan are making ever greater efforts to obtain a spot in the “world-class” ranking of institutions of higher learning, what are the teachers’ and students’ active roles in that higher education? To ensure the effectiveness of academic programs in a globalized society, it is vital to take into account both teachers’ and students’ understandings of what globalization/ localization (“glocalization”) means to realize the problems, challenges and realities they may actually face upon graduation. Are teachers and students truly ready to take on the challenges of “glocalization” both inside and outside the classroom? This paper explores Taiwanese university teachers’ and students’ awareness of what it means to “*Think globally, act locally*”. It also attempts to locate the skills and types of curricula needed for “glocalization” to occur that will allow university students to communicate more effectively. The three research questions asked in this study are: first, what are the teachers’ and students’ perceptions of what the expression “*Think globally, act locally*” means? Second, what skills / knowledge do teachers and students think they require so they are able to “*Think globally, act locally*”? Third, what courses should be offered to students so they may “*Think globally, act locally*” or so-called “glocalization” to take place in answer to this overall intent?

An online questionnaire was designed for approaching more teachers from different universities, and the survey system was closed when 50 participants completed the online questionnaire. In addition, a questionnaire (N = 520) containing both open-ended questions (for qualitative purposes) and closed-ended questions (for quantitative purposes) was distributed at six southern Taiwanese universities. Lastly, two follow-up teacher and student focus interviews were conducted. Results show that one-tenth of the teacher participants and less than one-third of students have ever heard of, or even reasonably understand, the concept of “*Think globally, act locally*”. Significantly, most participants in this study are highly interested in knowing more about such an issue and are also motivated to take part in future institutional coursework introducing them to the overall concept.

The study suggests that students should be educated in such a way, and with such knowledge and skills, as to contribute competitively in an era of “glocalization” through a fuller understanding.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Globalization and Education

Globalization, a buzzword for more than a decade, still remains a prominent hot button issue. Although some worry it has become cliché (e.g. Held et al, 1999; Denis, 2010), some believe it has had both positive and negative impacts on society (e.g. Denis, 2010; Yang, R. & Qiu, F-F., 2010); many scholars would strongly agree that the idea of globalization is ubiquitous, yet it remains influential. This is true not only in the fields of economics, science, politics, culture, but also in the job market as well as in higher education (Rothenberg, 2003; Ramalhoto, 2006; Wu, 2004; Douglass, 2005; Denis, 2010; Schröttner, 2010; Brown, 2003).

What is globalization? Rothenberg (2003) defines it as “the acceleration and intensification of interaction and integration among the people, companies, and governments of different nation (p.3). Yang and Qiu (2010) states that “globalisation is a powerful transformative force. It accelerates cross-border mobility of people, capital and knowledge” (p. 21). Others (e.g Rothenberg, 2003; Tong & Cheung, 2010; Lee, 2008) consider globalization in a particular sense, such as in *Americanization* or westernization, or even *McDonaldization*, and think it is a form of imperialism that spreads English language primacy over non-English speaking nations. Apart from negative criticism, the notion of globalization still retains great impact on the economic, state-of-the-art technologies, telecommunications, media, culture, and higher education throughout the world. The impact of globalization on higher education is the focus of this paper.

*The White Paper of the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia* (2010) states:

‘Globalization’ has also become a specialized term in higher education that relates to how individual institutions seek to ensure the effectiveness of their academic programs in global society....Globalization affects the educational needs of today’s postsecondary graduate by altering the knowledge, skills, and abilities graduates need to be effective in their chosen profession and to benefit society as a whole” (p.5).

For educational institutions, it is now vital to respond to the twin phenomena of globalization and internationalization so they may be integrated into the curricula. This step is necessary in order to prepare college and university students to meet future career needs or to become informed globalized citizens. Carnoy (2005) expresses that globalization has substantial impact on knowledge formation especially the knowledge that is provided by and then correlated to higher levels of education.

Due to the rapid development of telecommunications and the Internet, Ramalhoto (2006) elaborates the importance of teaching students to be critical toward all sources of information, and a university institutions should add a “Trans-disciplinary integrated knowledge (TIK)” to its discipline structure for establishment of a system for managing globalization and technological scientific change (p. 349). Others have proposed that students should develop certain key values and skills including critical thinking and empathy and an awareness of the forces shaping the world today (Broom, 2010). Tsui and Tollefson (2007) suggest that technology and English are two inseparable skills for students to acquire. The changing of the global marketplace places a premium on scientific and technical knowledge and these are normally associated with the use of English language skills. In addition, to be able to interact with people from different nation, the issues of intercultural commutation should not be overlooked. To assist students to become integrated global citizens, the concepts of understanding different cultural values, beliefs / norms, and how to communicate meaningfully and successfully should also be incorporated into the curricula (Wu, 2004; Flammia & Sadri, 2011; Nguyen, 2011).

### 2.2 Globalization to Localization to Glocalization

To be truly globalized, Blackmore (1999) states localization is a valid response; the aspects of what constitutes global and local should be viewed as different characteristics of the same phenomenon. In relation to the effects of the globalization phenomena on educational concepts, Schröttner (2010) expresses that “both the volume and the speed of global flow have intensified the entanglement of the local and the global, thus many local developments have enormous global consequences and vice versa” (p. 51).

Teasdale (1997) acknowledges the tensions and discontinuities between the local and the global and suggests searching for a new way of synchronizing or blending the diverse cultures of knowledge in order to equip students with skills for the modern world. Douglass (2005) claims that although the trends of globalization located within instructional technologies create new markets and force a reform in higher education, “all globalization is in fact subject to local (or national and regional) influences” (p. 1). He suggests that in order to have a better understanding of the complexity of globalization toward the future of higher education, institutions should analyze the rapid growth of market needs and the strength and weakness of each institute to make certain changes for finding its individual niche or to broaden its services in order to survive.

Regarding globalization and localization in an educational context, Luk-Fong (2005) and Tong & Cheung (2011) suggest taking Robertson’s (1995) notion of ‘glocalization’, a term which combines ‘global’ with ‘localization’, into account. Glocalization presents the twin relationships that may occur between globalization and localization, and it is a way for progressive advancement to occur thus enhancing the quality of life. ‘Glocalisation’ (or, glocalization), as explained on the Wikipedia website, is a portmanteau of globalization and localization. By definition, the term “glocal” refers to those individuals, groups, divisions, units, organizations, and communities which are willing and able to “*think globally and act locally.*”

Luk-Fong (2005) uses the development of a guidance curriculum in a Hong Kong university as an example of “a mix of ‘east’ and ‘west’, or as a representation of globalisation-localization enmeshed. The appearance of two separate curricula (i.e. Eastern and Western) in place of one integrated guidance curriculum seems to reflect a desire to identify one’s own unique characteristics as reflected in the process of glocalisation” (p. 86). She also suggests that while implementing the integrated curriculum, the students’ emotional feelings, mental processes, and individual behaviors must also be taken into account. Nevertheless, the example of mixes of globalization-localization in curriculum development, as provided by Luk-Fong, best offer a theoretical framework for facilitating the actual implementation of the guidance/ moral/ civic education curriculum in Hong Kong as a response to globalization.

### **3. Methodology**

To ensure the effectiveness of the academic programs offered in a globalized society, it is vital to take into account both the teachers’ and the students’ perceptions of globalization / localization (“glocalization”) in order to gain an overall picture of the problems, challenges and realities students may face upon graduation. This paper explores Taiwanese university teachers’ and students’ awareness of what it really means to “*Think globally, act locally*”. It also attempts to determine those skills and those types of curricula needed for “glocalization” to occur. The three research questions are asked and discussed in this study.

A mixed method was employed for the present study. For the present study, in order to utilize SPSS software and to obtain accurate statistical figures from the results, the structured questionnaire consisted of multiple-choice questions, and rating scales were adopted. Multiple-choice questions were used to obtain background information about the respondents, and the rating scale items were designed in order to make it simpler for respondents to complete, and so that they will allow for simpler computer analysis to take place. Two open-ended questions were asked in the questionnaire to provide more qualitative data in order to enhance the validity of the study. Additionally, two focus interviews were conducted afterwards. An online questionnaire was designed for approaching more teachers from different universities, and the survey system was closed when 50 participants completed the online questionnaire. In addition, a questionnaire (N = 520) was distributed at six southern Taiwanese universities. Among the 520 collected questionnaires, 503 are valid and were computed utilizing SPSS 19.0 version. Lastly, two focus interviews, one to the teachers and one to the students, were conducted to probe more in-depth views from both individual participants representing each group of participants.

### **4. Results and Discussions**

Both the online and paper questionnaire surveys were comprised of three major sections. Section One sought to elicit background information about the respondents. Section Two was aimed at exploring Taiwanese university teachers’ and students’ awareness of what it means to actually “*Think globally, act locally*”. Section Three attempted to determine the skills and types of curricula needed for “glocalization” to occur in order that these students communicate effectively. The results of the survey are reported as follows.

#### 4.1 Background information of the participants

A total number of 553 participants, 50 teachers and 503 students, responded to the online questionnaire and paper questionnaire respectively. The sample of teachers comprised 27 males and 23 females; 41 of them were Taiwanese and nine were of other nationalities. Of these, 9 taught at national universities, 22 taught at private universities, 6 taught at national universities of technology and 13 taught at private universities of technology. The last question in this section was offered to find out the number of years of teaching experience each participant possessed. The results show that four ticked from one-to-three years, four ticked from three-to-six years, five ticked from six-to-nine years and 37 ticked from ten-years-and-more.

The sample of student participants consisted of 136 males and 367 females. They were from six different universities and were categorized into four categories. The numbers of the participants in each category are 110 from the national universities, 202 from the national universities of technology, 99 from the private universities, and 92 from the private universities of technology. The last question in this section is to find out the percentage of academic study years each of the participants had. The results show that 177 freshman, 162 sophomore, 129 junior, 7 senior, and 28 graduate students responded to the survey.

#### 4.2 Awareness of what it means to “Think globally, act locally”

To find out whether participants are aware of the overall expression of “*Think globally, act locally*”, the researchers purposely designed an open-ended question as the first question in Section Two of the questionnaire survey. The question was “What is your reaction, or things that you can think of, when you see or hear the phrase of “*Think globally, act locally*”? Five-out-of –the-50 teacher participants responded that they do not know what the expression means or that the idea is vague / not clear to them. Yet, most of the teacher participants stated that it is about “Global Warming”, “the Green Movement”, “globalization and localization”, “glocalisation”, “trying to think about world issues and how you can bring awareness to your classroom”, or “to apply a global perspective to the local industry”. According to the student responses, 200 out of the 503 student participants stated that they either “didn’t know”, or “never heard of” the expression “*Think globally, act locally*”. Some students think it is about “global issues”, “the global village”, “globalization”, “global warming”, “international business”, “state-of-the-art technologies”, “the Internet”, “McDonald’s”, “cultural issues”, or “about studying English”. Some students provided quite valuable insight, such as in Quote 1: #343 wrote: “It is about adopting international concepts on one’s own country and lives”; or, as in Quote 2: #416 wrote: “It is about being more internationally and culturally active with people around the world”.

To ascertain an actual statistical comparison of participants perceptions toward the expression, the results of the survey Questions 2 and 3 indicate most of them either “have not heard of”, or “understand” the concept in some manner. See Table 1 for the mean score, standard deviation, and percentage. To clear up any possible misunderstandings of whether teachers and classmates or friends have discussed the topic of “Think globally, act locally” or not, Questions 4 and 5 were asked as part of the survey. The mean score shows that most teachers have discussed such an issue previously with their classes ( $M= 3.14$ ); the mean score of student ( $M= 2.5$ ) indicates that it is somewhat discussed.

To determine the teachers’ and students’ interest in knowing more about the idea of “*Think globally, act locally*”, and whether they want to know the impact of the concept on society, some related questions were included in the questionnaire survey. The results are both quite positive; the mean score are 4.56 (teachers) and 4.60 (students) respectively.

#### 4.3 Skills/ knowledge needed for ‘Think globally, act locally’ to occur

To answer Research Question Two, relating to what skills/ knowledge do teachers and students think they need to be able to “*Think globally, act locally*”, several related questions were also incorporated in the survey. The mean scores in this section are significantly high, the average mean score for both teachers’ and students’ questionnaire is 4.0 and above. Table 2 presents the statistics. It is worth mentioning that teachers are quite interested in questions regarding multi-cultural aspects and global mind-set found in teaching, the mean score are 4.56 and 4.60 respectively. Students are highly interested in questions concerning foreign language skills, multi-culturalism, and the global mind-set, the mean scores are 4.4 respectively.

Although nearly one-tenth of teacher participants and one-third of the student participants in this study claimed that they are unfamiliar with the concept of “*Think globally, act locally*”, they indicated in the survey that they appear to be interested in learning more about the issue as a whole despite having a limited understanding of it. Participants also agreed that to achieve a complete understanding of that idea, it is vital to enhance the skills and knowledge of foreign languages, cultural issues (both multi-cultural and local cultural), the global mind-set, and knowledge about both foreign and Taiwan products.

#### 4.4 Institutional coursework toward the notion of ‘Think globally, act locally’

The last section of the teacher survey intends to find out teachers attitude toward whether the institutional coursework which would cover the issue of “*Think globally, act locally*” should be offered, or not; and, if teachers are interested in teaching the related courses. The results are rather positive with the mean scores of 3.72 and 3.52 respectively. The same section in the student survey aims to find out whether students would like to take institutional coursework which would cover the issue of “*Think globally, act locally*” or not. In addition, if students were likely to enroll in such courses, what topics/ issues would they anticipate there to be on any proposed syllabus. The mean score ( $M = 3.6$ ) indicates that students are exceedingly interested in taking such course.

In one open-ended question, the researcher asked both the teacher and student participants to suggest topics / issues to be discussed in the course, many wrote down several valuable comments and suggestions which are included below. The following are direct quotes from the teachers and students.

Quote 1: T #1 wrote: “Global Warming, Green Movement, Biodiversity Conservation, No Nuke Country, Environmental Stewardship, Sustainable Development.”

Quote 2: T #14wrote: “language and culture, international relationship and global events.”

Quote 3: T #43wrote: “The impact of globalization. How local businesses may cope with the impact of globalization. How can the government reduce the impact of globalization on local businesses”.

Quote 4: S#85 wrote: “The newer innovation information about foreign country, it should be focused on specific topics. Besides, enrich the background knowledge of Taiwanese culture. These two objects should be emphasizing at the same time.”

Quote 5: S#94 wrote: “Why should we do that? How should we do that? I hope teachers can tell us in the class.”

In addition to these quotes, many participants wrote that they would like to know more about foreign languages/ English, marketing/ international trade, cultural issues (international & domestic), environmental issues, international relationships, a better understanding of Taiwanese culture and products along with their strengths and weaknesses, the global mind-set & global issues, more discussions on “*Think globally, act locally*”, citizenship literacy, etc. The list is not exhaustive, and it is limited to the majority’s concern. Interestingly, the majority of suggested topics/ issues by the student participants are identical to the scholars’ recommendations discussed in this paper.

#### 4.5 Interview data

In order to probe more in-depth views regarding the idea of glocalization from the teacher and student participants, two focus interviews were conducted. One of the questions was “if you were to paraphrase the idea of “*think globally, act locally*”, how do you say it?” Although the teachers expressed that this is a difficult question to answer, they did provide some essential comments.

It means that if you are to be a responsible citizen in your community, you should think how to make the entire world a better place by first making your local neighborhood a better place. (Participant T1)

To establish organizations/clubs/associations such as the Mini-United Nations model to conduct activities that are global-oriented. (Participant T2)

My interpretation would be “thinking from international perspective and act adaptively to local culture”. (Participant T 3)

The first thing that comes to my mind is the fine line between the need to have a more “Global” perception/point of view of our place on the planet, and the need to translate this view into our own, local environment (trying also to maintain a good equilibrium between globalization and local culture). (Participant S1)

Another question asked was “what changes would you suggest the school should do for global activities, local activities, and curriculum, in terms of “think globally, act locally”? Due to the limitation of the space, only those responses regarding the curriculum are reported below.

Design curricula that are knowledge-based and task-based (rather than language-based) with a medium of instruction that uses PBL (Problem-Based Learning). (Participant T 9)

Understand what is most needed in our current society, in terms of both knowledge and practical skills, in order to become happier and more effective global citizens. Of course we have to keep in mind the particular needs of Taiwan as a country before looking to the “outside”, yet many valuable skills are dearly needed and are simply lacking in the current educational system. (Participant S9)

## 5. Conclusion

The present study shows that perhaps the institutions and educators have neglected the fact that students are not yet ready to be global citizens. Although globalization seems to be a common topic of discussion nowadays, how educators and administrators should implement this concept into the higher-education curriculum is still much in question. On the other hand, any recognition of the importance of localization will play another vital role for universities as well. To solve the tension between the influence of globalization and the need for localization in education reform, Yang (2001) claims that “localization of education will make Taiwanese people [better aware of] their own culture roots so as to give them points of reference that enable them to determine their place in the world” (p. 18). Hence, to equip Taiwanese university students with the concept of “*Think globally, act locally*”, educators and administrators, especially in the area of higher education, should re-think their strategy relating to curriculum design to permit construction of courses that would help students not only for the future career needs, but also to prepare them to become globally compatible citizens.

Ultimately, the significance of this study lies beyond the pressing notion of English language hegemony in an Asian setting; instead, it is the determination of this paper that the dual notions of globalization and localization are truly held in balance by both students and their teachers. It is a relevant point for educators since data points to students’ real interest in sharing local Taiwanese culture with others while at the same time embracing multiculturalism on their own terms. Although geographically isolated as an island, Taiwan still remains connected to the rest of the world in its forward ways of thinking.

**Table 1. Teachers’ and students’ awareness**

Questions	<i>M</i>	Student data ( <i>N</i> = 503)		Teacher data ( <i>N</i> = 50)	
		<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Q2 I have heard of the expression ‘Think globally, act locally’.	1.8	0.42	1.70	0.84	
Q3 I understand the meaning of the expression ‘Think globally, act locally’.	2.32	0.61	1.86	0.95	

Note. *M*: mean; *SD*: standard deviation

**Table 2. Skills/ knowledge needed for ‘Think globally, act locally’ to be realized**

		Student data (N = 503)		Teacher data (N = 50)	
What do I need to carry out ‘Think globally, act locally’?		M	SD	M	SD
Q13	I have to improve my foreign language skills.	4.4	0.67	4.32	0.91
Q14	I have to expand my knowledge.	4.3	0.67	4.46	0.81
Q15	I have to enhance my discipline.	4.3	0.68	4.24	1.04
Q16	I have to know about multi-culturalism.	4.4	0.67	4.56	0.61
Q17	I have to know more about Taiwanese culture.	4.3	0.69	4.46	0.76
Q18	I have to enhance my global mind-set.	4.4	0.67	4.6	0.61
Q19	I have to know more about Taiwanese industries / products.	4.0	0.73	4.22	0.96
Q20	I have to know about foreign industries / products.	4.2	0.72	4.16	0.87

Note. M: mean; SD: standard deviation

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