Enhancing VPET Students' International Experience through the Hidden Curriculum

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Need for Internationalisation

- Prepare students in the globalised world of 21st century to:
  - gain global perspectives;
  - appreciate multiculture;
  - develop a balanced value; and
  - acquire international experiences

  so that they will be able to live harmoniously and work successfully, and becoming responsible global citizens in the future. (Koo, 2015)

- One of the 21st century competencies a local institution demands on graduates is
  - Global awareness, appreciation of socio-cultural differences. (extracted from the strategic plan of a local VPET provider, 2016)

Acquiring Learning Experience

- ***Formal curriculum***
  - Intended learning outcomes, topics, planned experience, learning activities and assessment.
- ***Informal curriculum***
  - Additional activities (e.g. co-curricular activities) organised by institution, but not assessed.
- ***Hidden curriculum***
  - Lessons learned but not openly intended, unspoken values, norms, beliefs.

(Green, 2015; Leask 2015)

Hidden Curriculum

- [Those] "**not included** in the official curriculum" (Schubert, 2008)

- "The hidden curriculum, deals with the tacit ways in which knowledge and behaviour get constructed, **outside** the **usual** materials and formally **scheduled** lessons." (Pinar, 2008)

- [Learning which is] "**not intended** by curriculum developers and are **not stated** as objectives in the curricula." (Print, 1993)

Hidden Curriculum

Acquiring Learning Experience through Hidden Curriculum

- Activities other than formal and informal curriculum
  - Students' experiences gained through activities arranged by themselves
  - Students' interactions with their peers
  - Special projects
    - Student helpers
    - International Student Ambassador (ISA) Scheme

Context of Study

The VPET Institution

- A Vocational and Professional Education and Training (VPET) provider with 13 member institutions.

- Offer programmes to school leavers and working adults of Hong Kong from certificate to degree level.

Strategic Direction

- Internationalisation of its products and services: people, curriculum, project collaborations with international partners and infrastructure support.

- Internationalisation of curriculum: enrichment of curriculum with more international content and recognition by overseas/ professional bodies.

ISA Scheme: Aims

International Student Ambassador (ISA) Scheme

- A unique scheme established in 2014/15 to enhance VPET students' international learning experience:
  - *Enhance* students' cross cultural awareness;
  - *Strengthen* students' social and communication skills to accommodate different cultural situations;
  - *Extend* students' social network beyond their campus, institute and Hong Kong;
  - *Prepare* students for the globalised workplace after graduation; and
  - *Support* the internationalisation activities of the institution.
- *53 ISAs* contributing to the scheme

Selection, appointment & training

Appointment at the International Fortnight Opening

Leadership training

Leading a tour (practicum)

Etiquette training

Experiences

Campus Visit

Incoming Student Exchange Programme
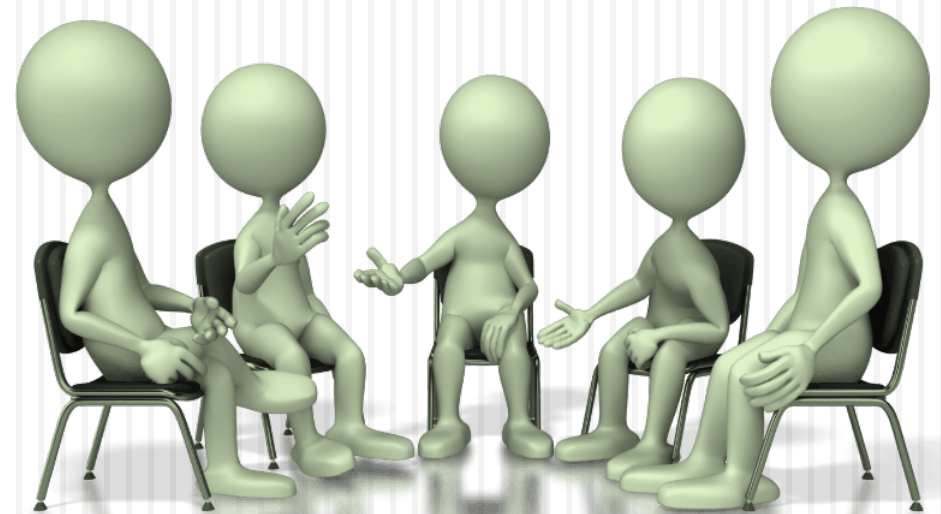

International Event

International Event

Non-local Student Orientation Camp

Objectives of Study

- *Studies* how a group of ISAs acquired international learning experience through the hidden curriculum;
- *Reports* the achievements accomplished by these ISAs in terms of leadership, communication and presentation skills and teamwork skills as well as international exposure;
- *Identifies* the difficulties encountered by students in acquiring international learning experience; and
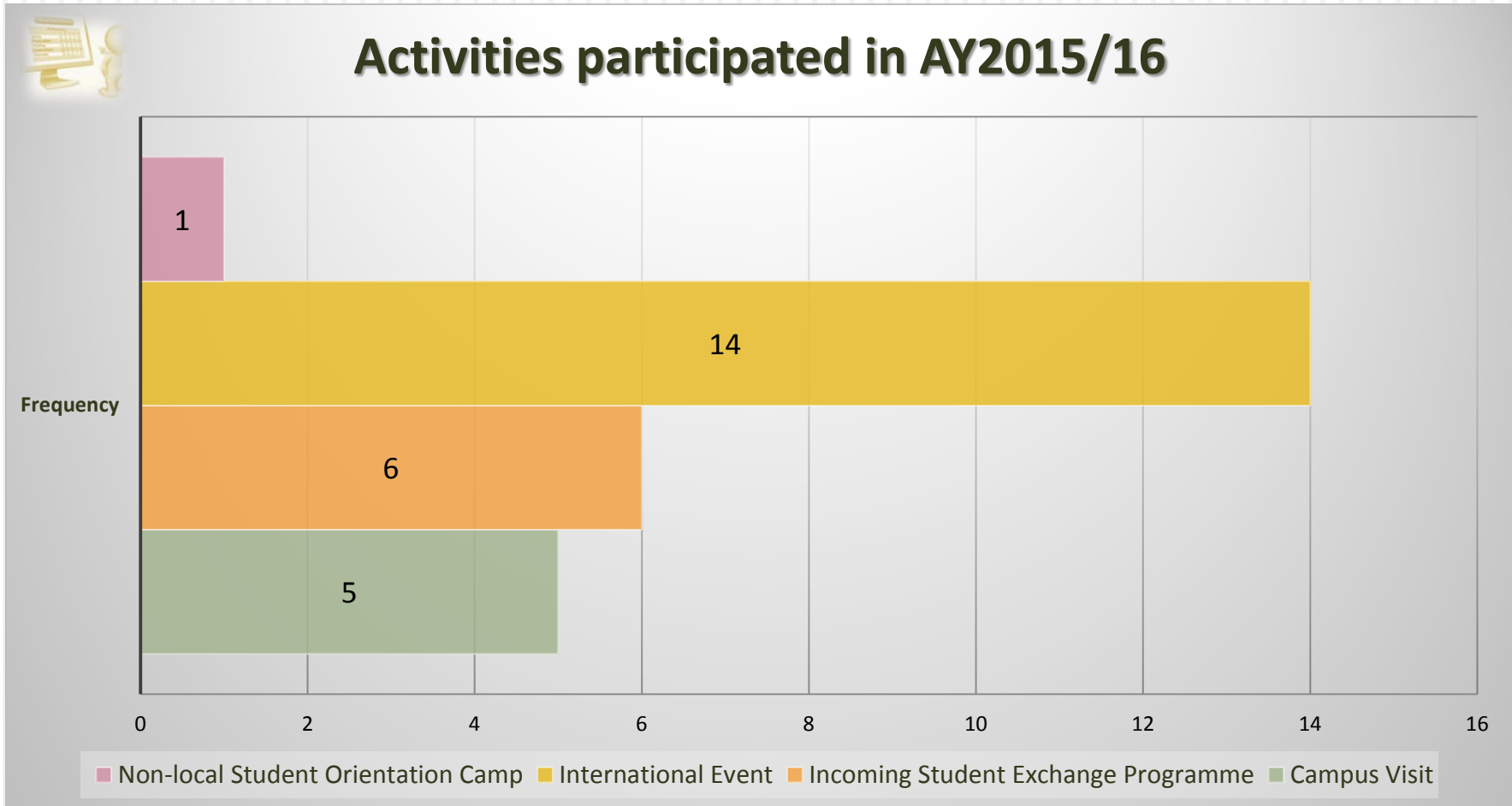- *Suggests* measures that can enhance students' international learning experience.
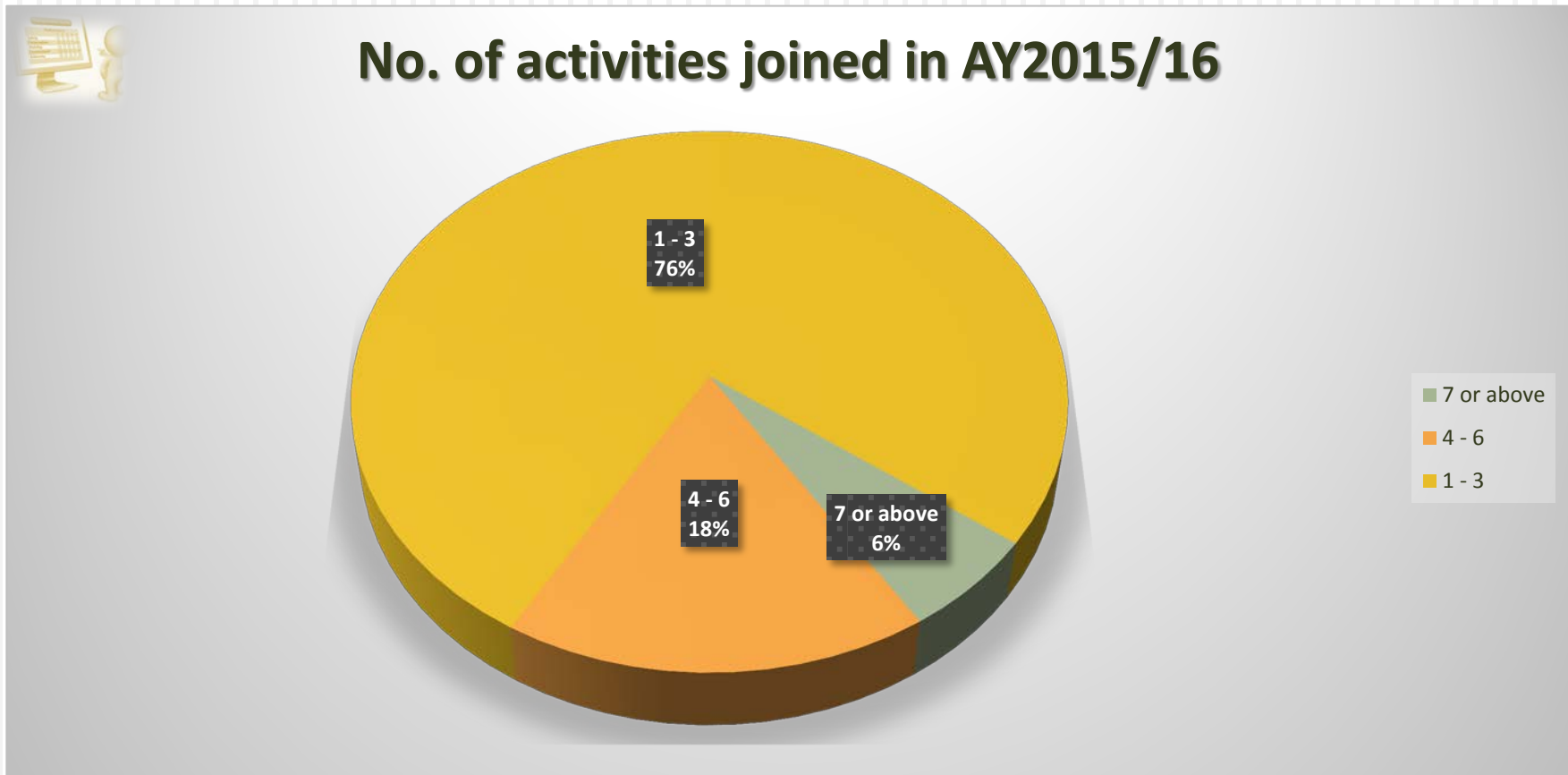
Methodology

Results

Activities participated in AY2015/16

Frequency

- 1 — Non-local Student Orientation Camp
- 14 — International Event
- 6 — Incoming Student Exchange Programme
- 5 — Campus Visit

Remark: No. of activity available & offered: 13

Results

No. of activities joined in AY2015/16

1 - 3
76%

4 - 6
18%

7 or above
6%

Legend:
- 7 or above
- 4 - 6
- 1 - 3

Remark: *Total no. of hours contributed by ISAs: 537 hr (average: 33 hr)*

Results

Key skills (leadership, communication and presentation skills, team skills, cultural awareness) **strengthened**

Agree
94%

Strongly agree
6%

0% 0% 0%

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither Disagree Nor Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
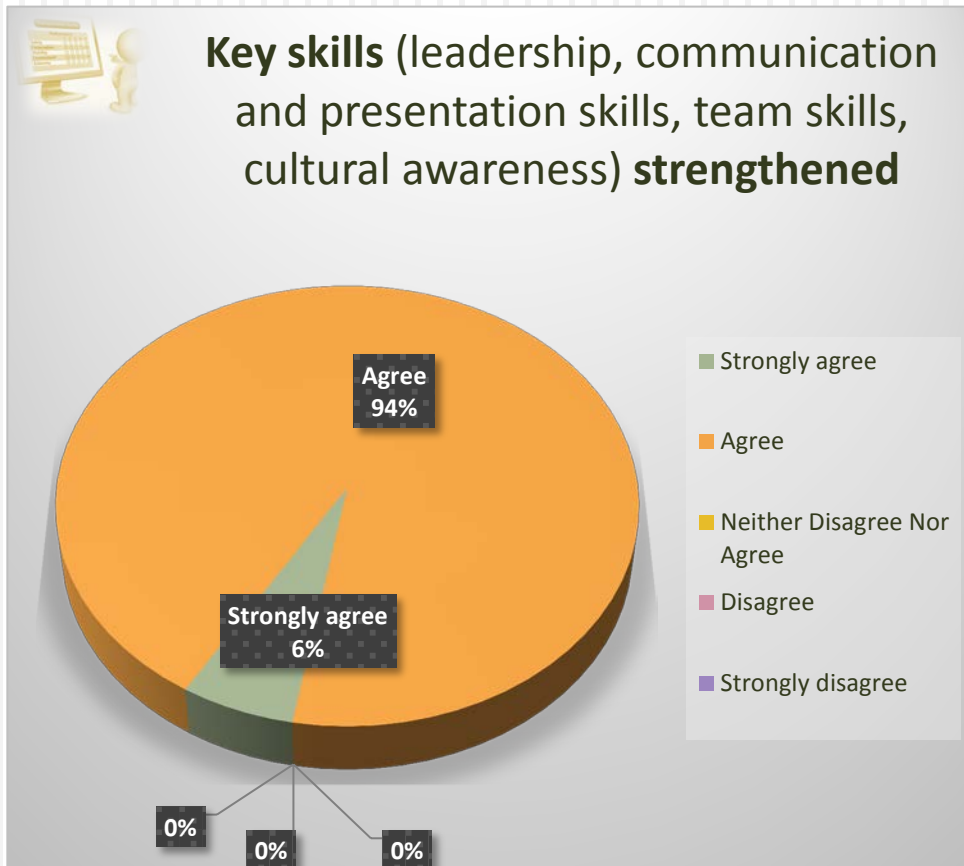
- *"… to plan activities and try, [that] made us different… The experiences we gained are better and our skills are getting better."*

- *"The International Fortnight…. I needed to introduce the people [using English]. I was brave [in comparing with the past] to use different language to do introduction."*

- *"We are more confident in using English in presentations."*

- *"I become happier to communicate with foreigners. I am eager to learn and understand them more."*

- *"We… are now more proactive to start dialogues with people."*

- *"Through activities… they told me about the culture of their country, their living, how they communicate, what wordings they would use."*

Results

Key skills (leadership, communication and presentation skills, team skills, cultural awareness) **strengthened**

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither Disagree Nor Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Agree
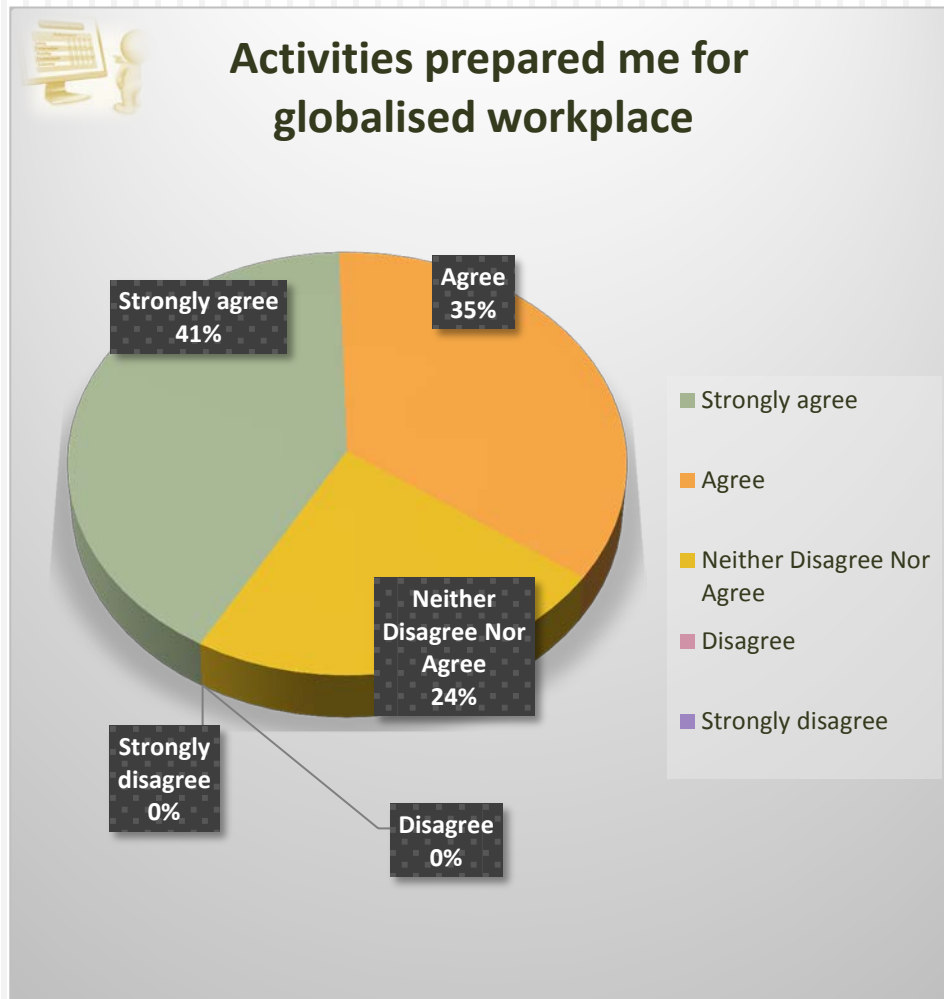94%

Strongly agree
6%

0%   0%   0%

- *"In each activity, no matter the exchanges or our own ISA activities, definitely our social networks are extended. We have WhatsApp and facebook groups."*

- *"I use facebook to keep contacts with the exchange students I met in the O'Camp."*

- *"I met a Norwegian girl studying in my institute who… have same interest… We do share ideas. I really appreciate her artwork as displayed in her facebook."*

- *"We still have contacts [those who have returned to their hometown]. When they have new photos uploaded to the social media, we will ask them questions and chat."*
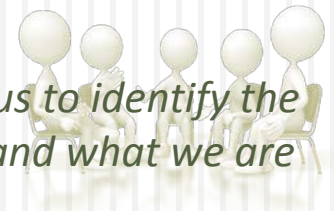
Results

Activities prepared me for globalised workplace

Strongly agree
41%

Agree
35%

Neither Disagree Nor Agree
24%

Strongly disagree
0%

Disagree
0%

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither Disagree Nor Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

- *"When you get use to communicate with these people, you will not afraid anymore. When we enter the workplace, we will feel they (foreigners) are gracious."*

- *"Through the scheme, we learned communication skills and different cultures. So when we go to work, we will not afraid..."*

- *"When we work in hotels in the future, we will meet people from different countries. This (ISA experience) will help us to provide better services to our customers."*

- *"We have opportunities now to meet more foreigners and learn more about their culture. We are more confident in facing our work in the future."*

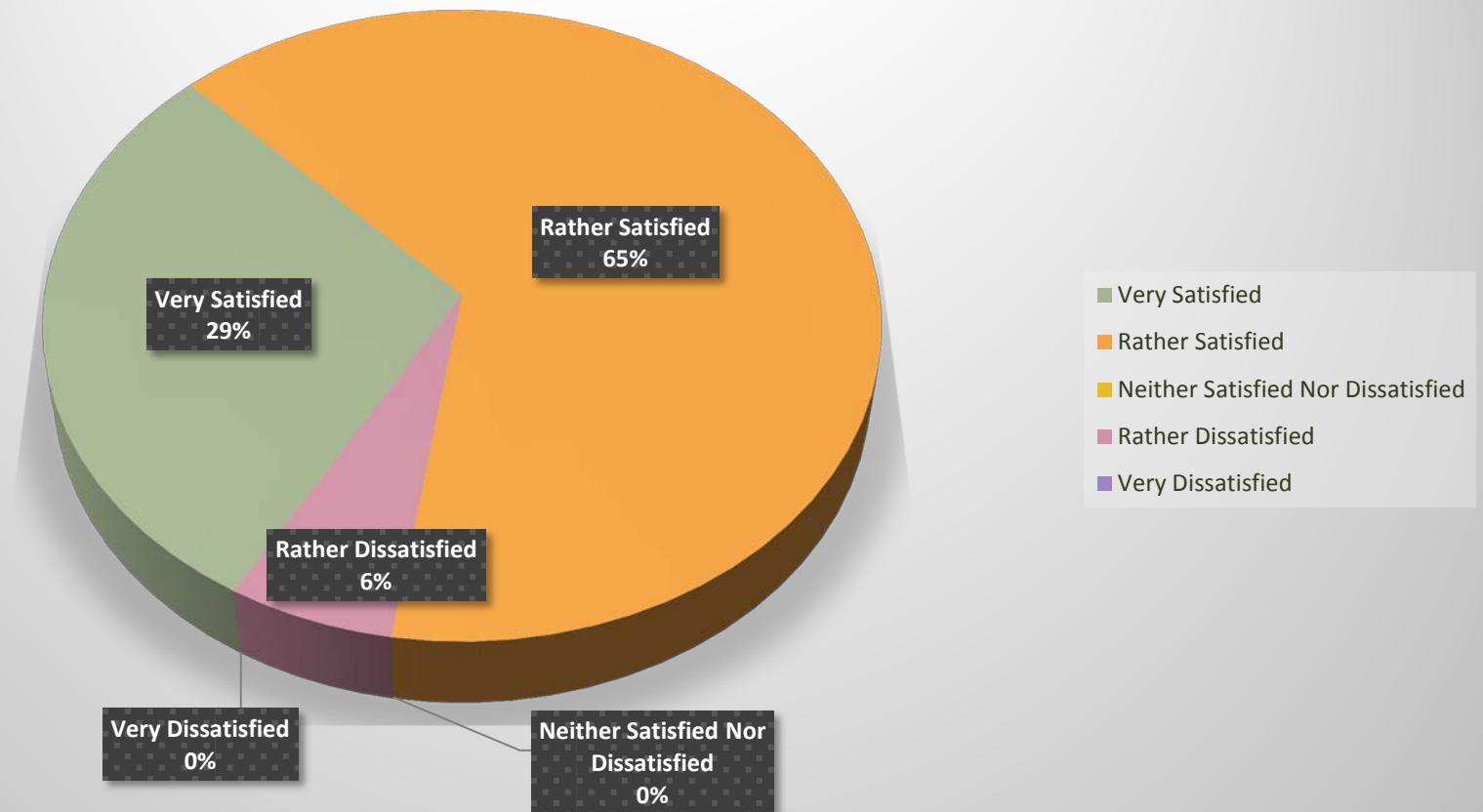- *"Activities [for ISAs] help us to identify the roles we are suitable for and what we are lack of. "*

Results

Overall experience as an ISA

Difficulties

Difficulties encountered by students in acquiring international learning experience:

- ISA activities **clashed** with study affecting participation (3)
- **Level of English** affected communication with non-local students (7)

Difficulties

Difficulties encountered by students in acquiring international learning experience:

- *"The biggest issue is **time**... difficult to accommodate... **timetable**."*

- *"The **timetable** of year three is so dense ..., [activities of the scheme] clashed with our part-time job or when we have projects to submit."*

- *"**Time** is not sufficient! Our programme demands a lot of projects. Lot of work and sometime it (ISA activity) clashed with our time-table.... So could not participate."*

- *"**Time** is an issue. Some (ISA) activities are in series. It may require participation on different dates and I could only join on a particular date."*

Difficulties

Difficulties encountered by students in acquiring international learning experience:

- *"At the beginning, I was **tongue-tied**."*

- *"That was the first time to **speak to** a group of foreigners. I was so nervous at the beginning."*

- *"... I was the main coordinator, a lot of planning was required. However, **things kept on changing** [during the event], things were different from what we planned."*

- *"When you have people (exchange students) in your group who did not want to follow what you have planned, you would not know [how] to accommodate their request... **difficult to judge**."*

- *"... for one task, I received **different instructions**, I did not know who I should follow."*

- *"Some activities are more straight forward. When the situation was **complicated**, might be a bit difficult."*
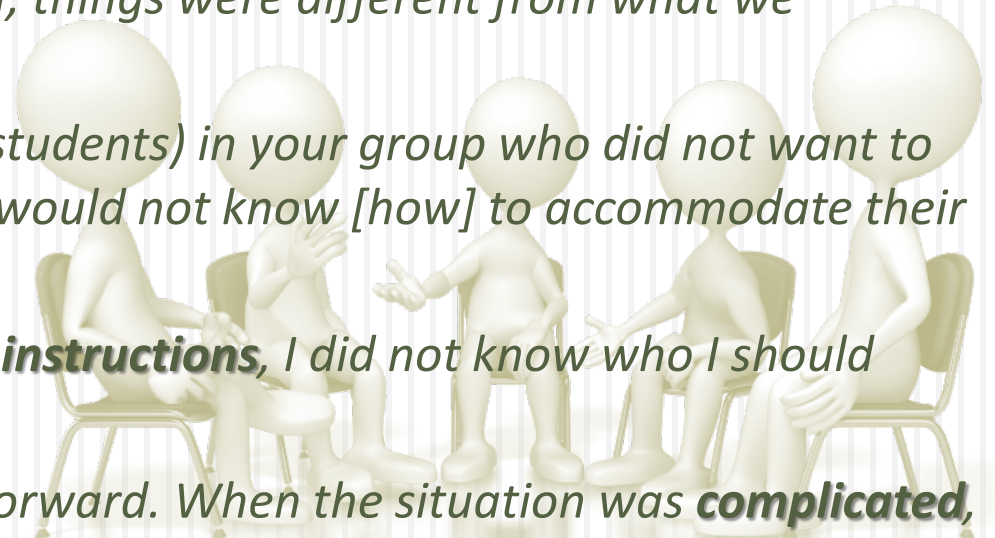
Measures

Measures to enhance students' international learning experience:

- *Group ISAs* according to department / campus to lead activities (2)
- Announce ISA activities as *early* as possible (1)

Measures

Measures to enhance students' international learning experience:

- *"[Activities with] **longer duration** [offer better opportunity] to talk to the exchange students."*

- *"Activities conducted **in a series** are better… so that we can keep meeting the same group of people for deeper communication."*

- *"Activities can be **more informal**, may not be academic. E.g. Outing during Mid-autumn festival, Halloween.."*

- *"We need **more** activities and gatherings **for ourselves** (ISAs), e.g. having dinner or BBQ together. "*

- *"**Small group** activities provide better interaction. People in smaller groups have better commitment."*
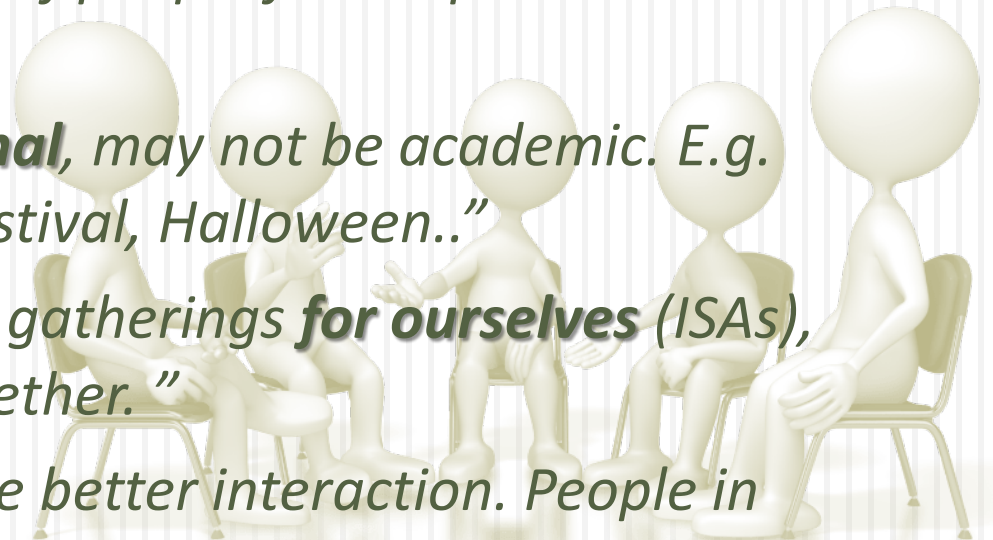
Measures

Measures to enhance students' international learning experience:

- *"Give us **autonomy** to organise activities."*

- *"Different ISAs can look after [plan] **different kinds** of activities, e.g. cultural type, hiking,…"*

- *"We can initial ideas, organise something we are of interest… more **authority**."*

- *"We can initiate an **informal platform**, start with a facebook group. "*

- *"**New ISAs** can draft an annual personal plan when they first enter the scheme."*

- *"**Training** is important, even participating in activities among ISAs (experienced and new)."*

Discussion

- Have we achieved the aims for establishing the scheme?

- How can we plan our activities to accommodate the packed time-table of students?

- What activities should we offer to students to enhance their leadership and teamwork skills?

- …