



BLEKINGE INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

BTH

Analyzing the Impact of Differences in Academic Cultures on the Learning Experiences of Overseas Master's Students.

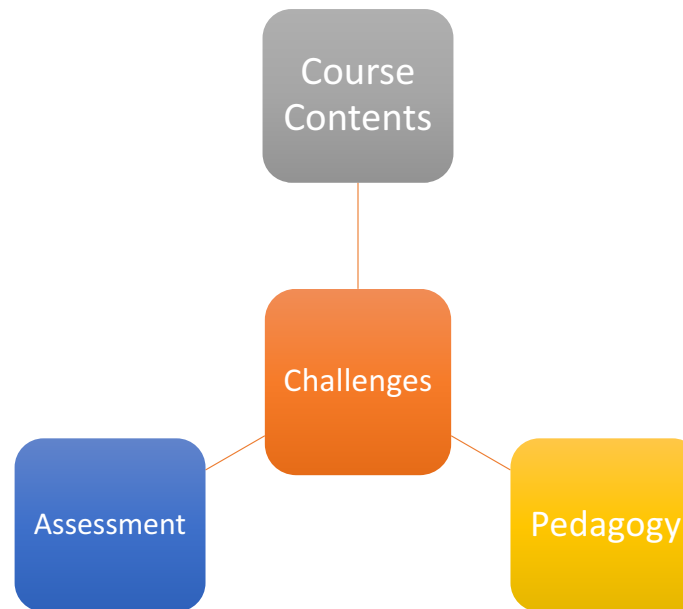
Javier Gonzalez-Huerta & Simon Poulding

<http://www.gonzalez-huerta.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/laralardom2017.pdf>

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Goal

- Analyze problems faced by overseas students @BTH that limit the ability of students to engage in the MSc in Software Engineering.

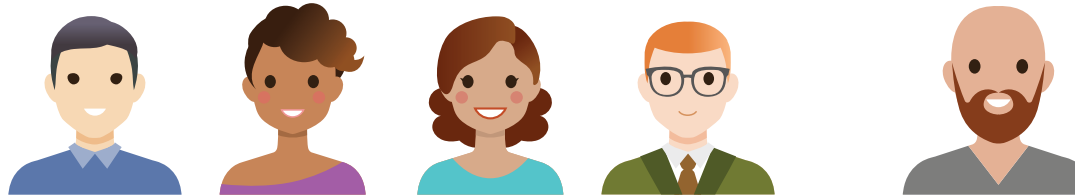


Research Questions

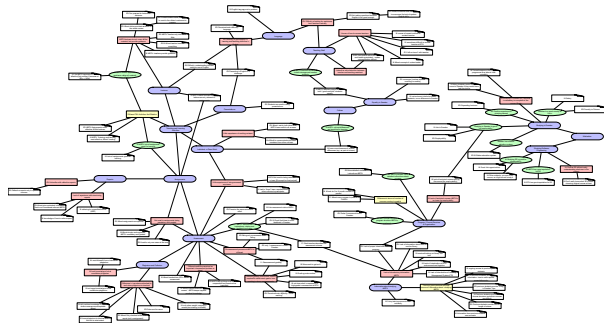
- **The main research question was: What is going on here?**
- But we have more scientific research questions:
 - **RQ2:** What are the differences in academic culture between BTH and partner universities in China and India?
 - How it affects to students on the MSc degree on Software Engineering?
 - **RQ2:** How do students perceive the impact -- both positively and negatively -- of these differences on their learning at BTH?

Method

- Focus Group Interviews



- Thematic Analysis



Focus Group

- 60 minutes interview
- Video and audio recorded
- 4 -6 participants coming from the same university
 - They will have similar experiences
 - Being in a familiar environment will promote participation
- Contacted by the researchers (which have been also their teachers in some courses)

Ethical Considerations I

- *Subsequent Student Assessment:*

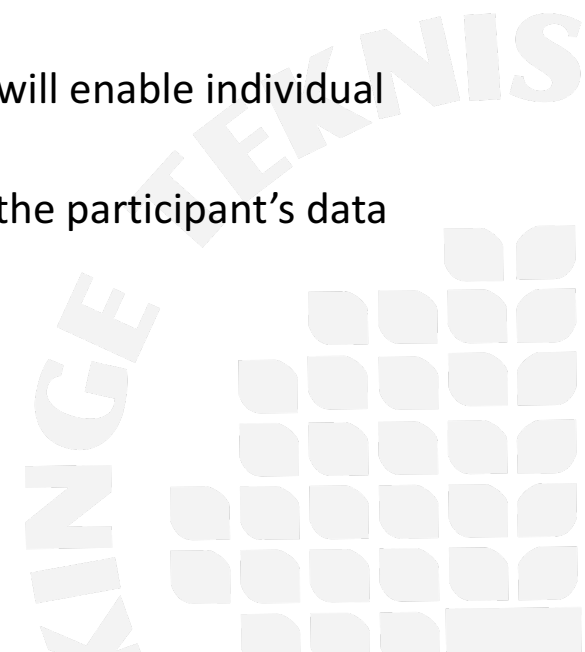
- We may be lecturers and/or examiners for some of the participants in the future.
 - will act differently based on their participation in and their input to the focus group?
 - may we privilege participants over non-participants by discussing (including revealing our opinions on) the nature of assessment at BTH?
- The use of focus groups rather than interviews, is likely to minimize any subsequent bias towards individual students.



Ethical Considerations II

- *Data Privacy:*

- The data we obtained (video recording, audio recording, transcripts etc.) is kept securely;
- we will not make it available to others;
- it will be deleted when no longer required.
- Any report or other publication will not use the data in a manner that will enable individual participants to be identified.
- At any stage, the participant may withdraw from the experiment, and the participant's data will be deleted.



Thematic analysis

- Our original intention was to apply Grounded Theory
- Analysing the 1st interview we realized that "the theory" was accessible in the "surface"
- We applied Thematic Analysis instead

Thematic Analysis: What it is? How it works?

- Thematic Analysis technique to find patterns and hierarchies of themes in qualitative data
- Process
 - *Phase 1:* Familiarise with the data
 - *Phase 2:* Initial Coding
 - *Phase 3:* Organise data in themes
 - *Phase 4 and 5:* Refinement of the coding and theme organisation



The Study

Analyzing the Impact of Differences in Academic Cultures on the Learning Experiences of Overseas Master's Students.

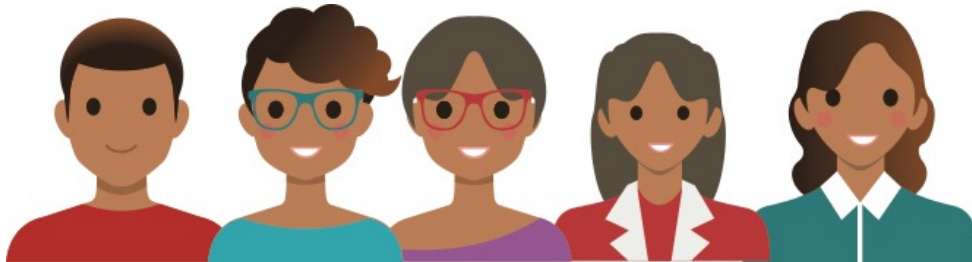


Participants

- *Group C1*: 4 students from the University of Science and Technology, Beijing, China. (out of 11 students)

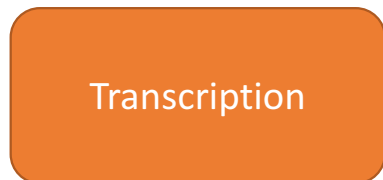
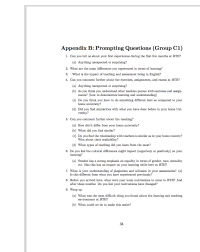
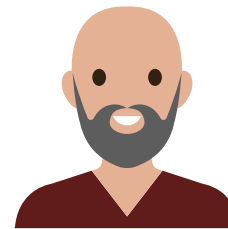


- *Group I1*: 5 students from the Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University, Hyderabad, India. (out of 11 students)



Structure of the Study: Group C1

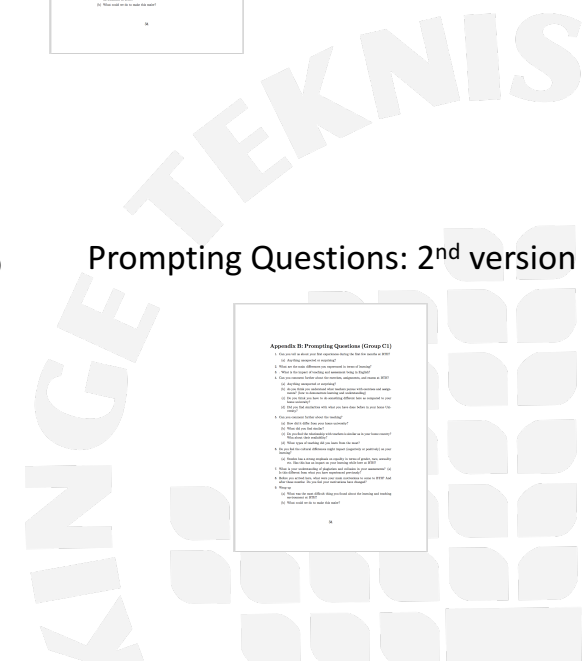
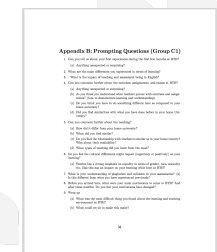
Prompting Questions: 1st version



1st Thematic Map

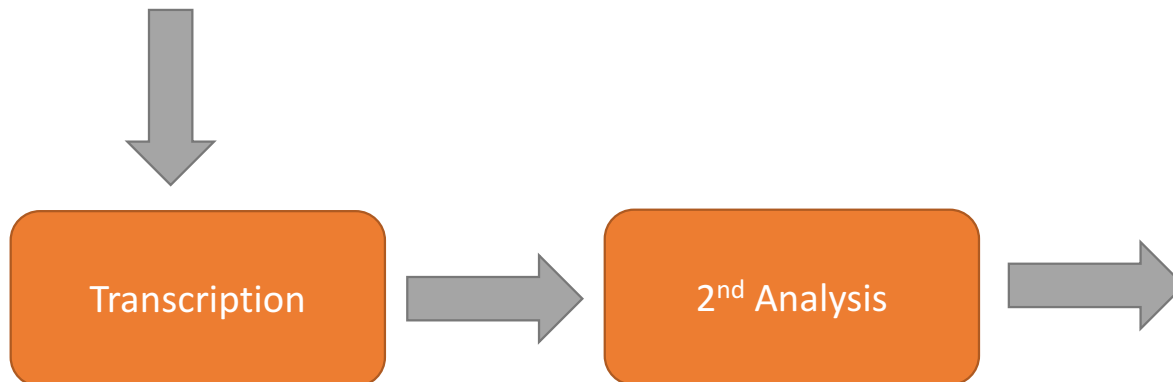
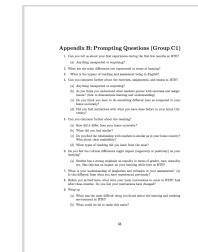


Prompting Questions: 2nd version

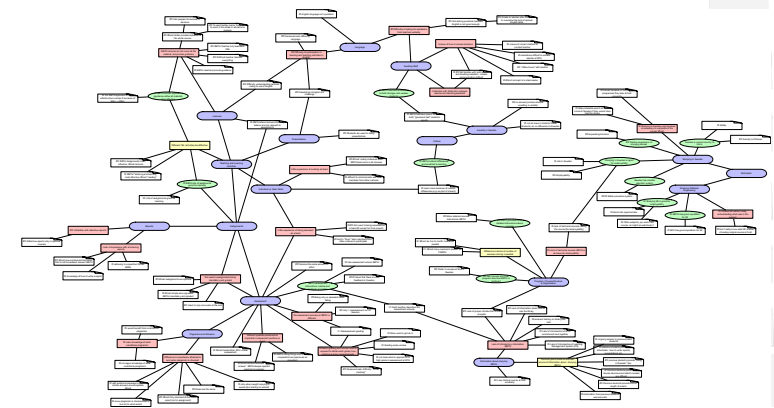


Structure of the Study: Group I1

Prompting Questions: 2nd version



2nd Thematic Map





Results of the Analysis

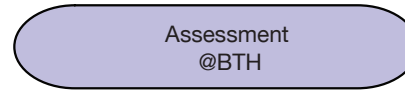
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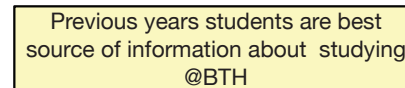
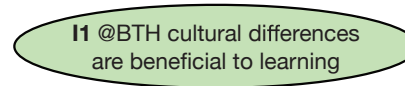


Legend

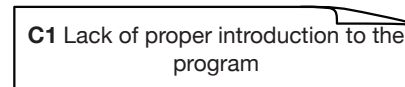
Main themes that are general pedagogical topic areas
(e.g., teaching and learning activities or assessment)



Sub-themes that typically correspond to academic
differences between BTH and partner universities



Codes derived from the transcript of the focus groups



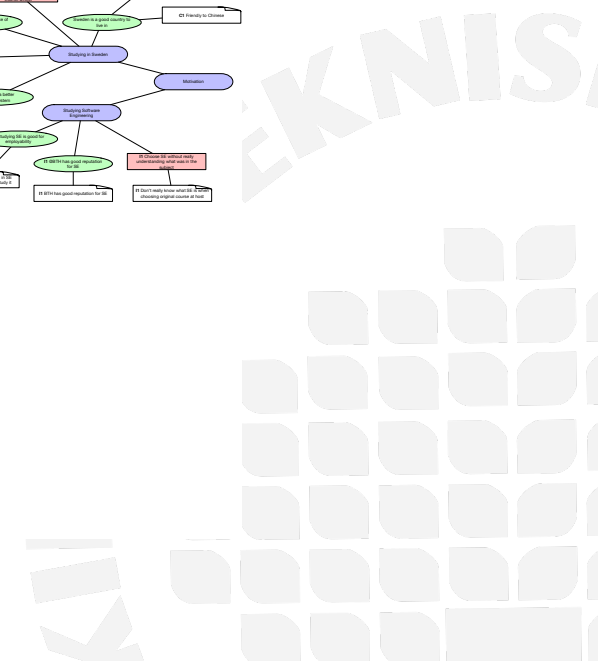
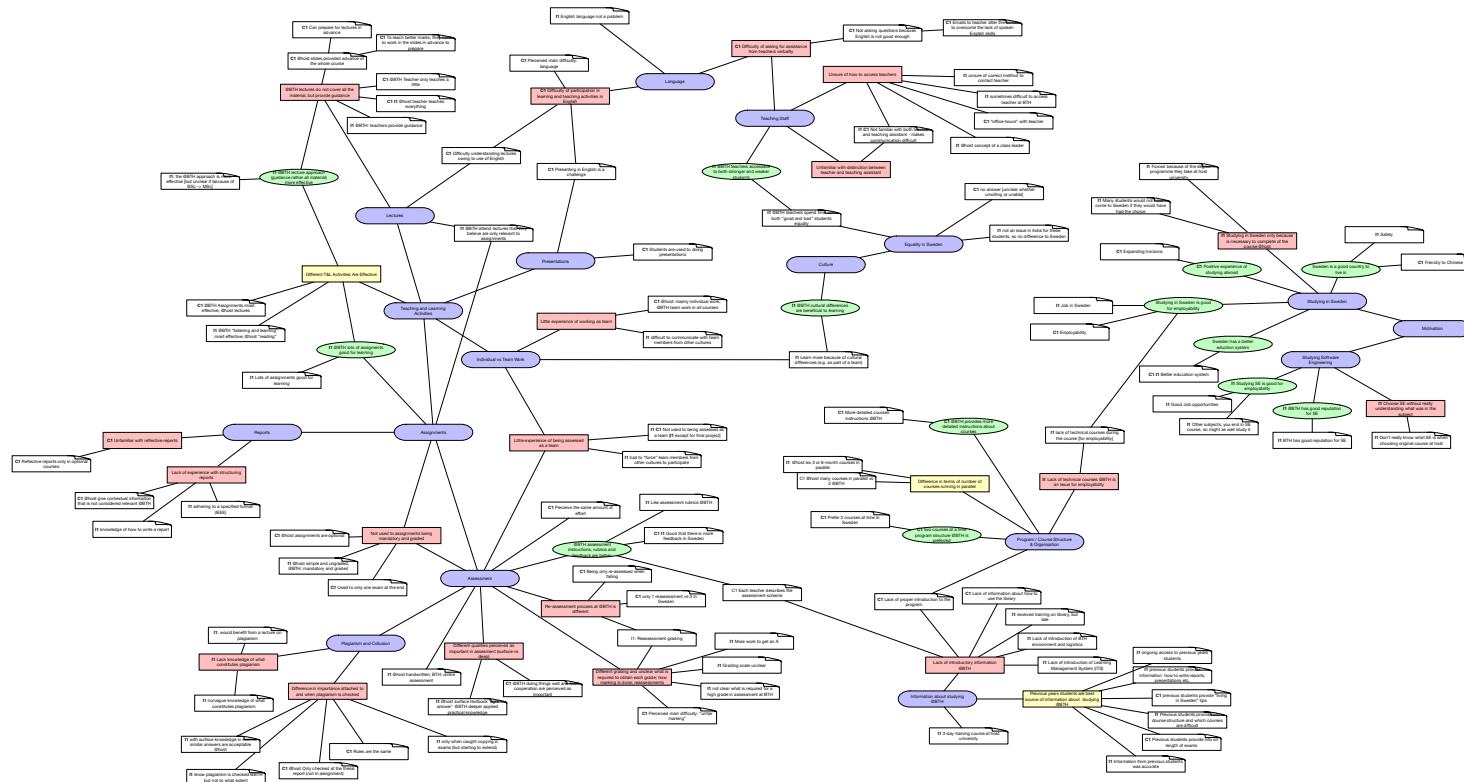
C1 Indicates Chinese group 1 & I1 indicates Indian group 1

Positive impact

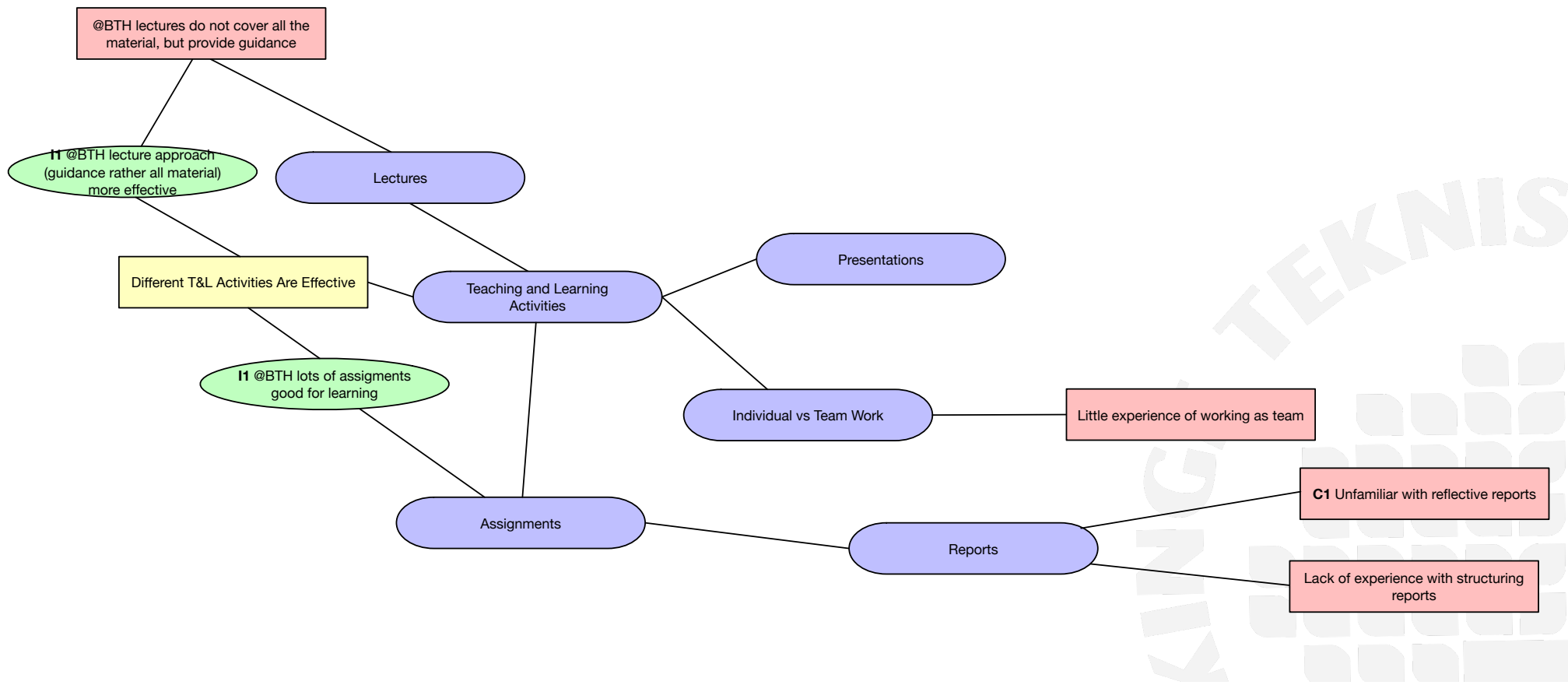
Neutral impact (or unclear)



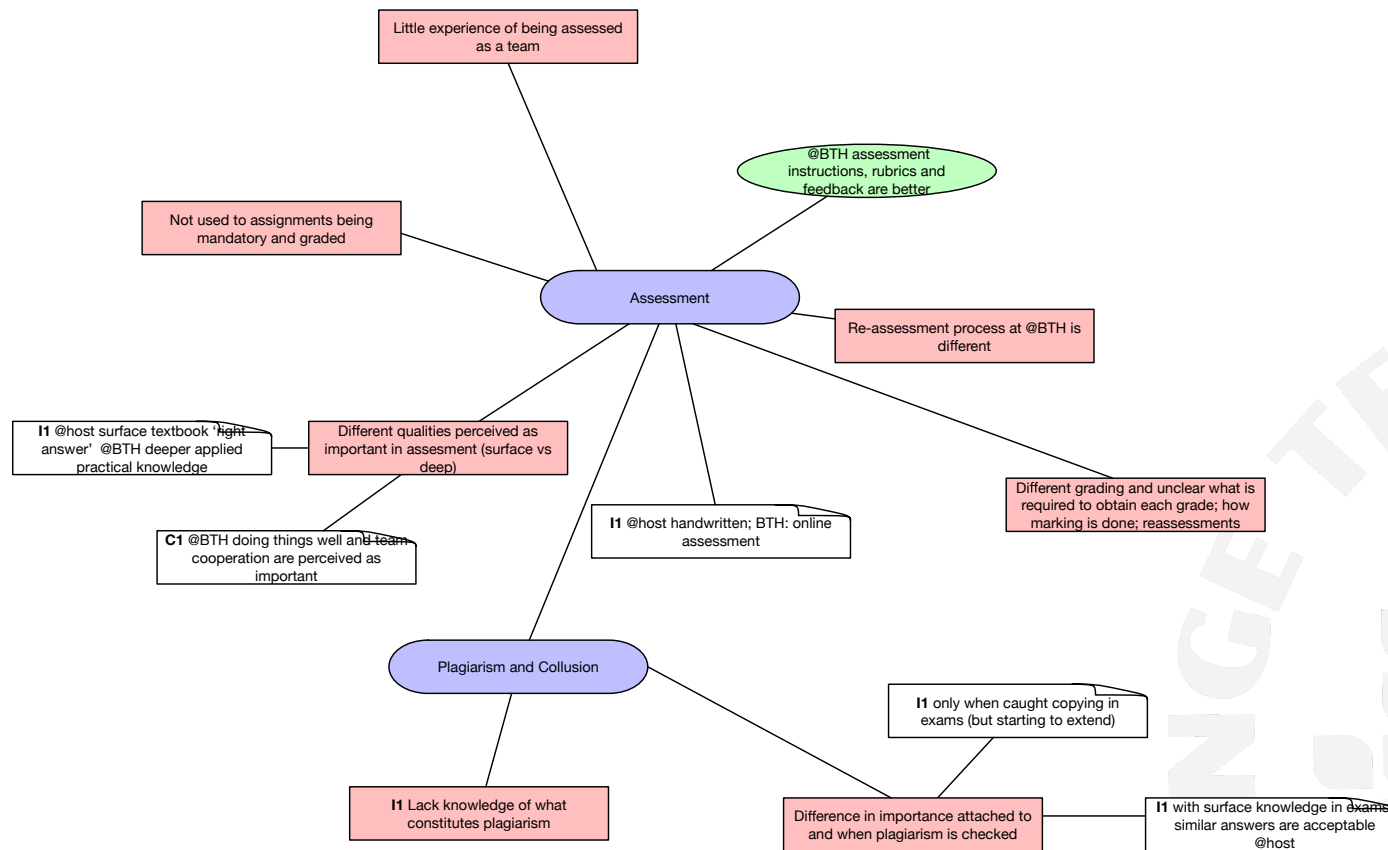
The Thematic Map



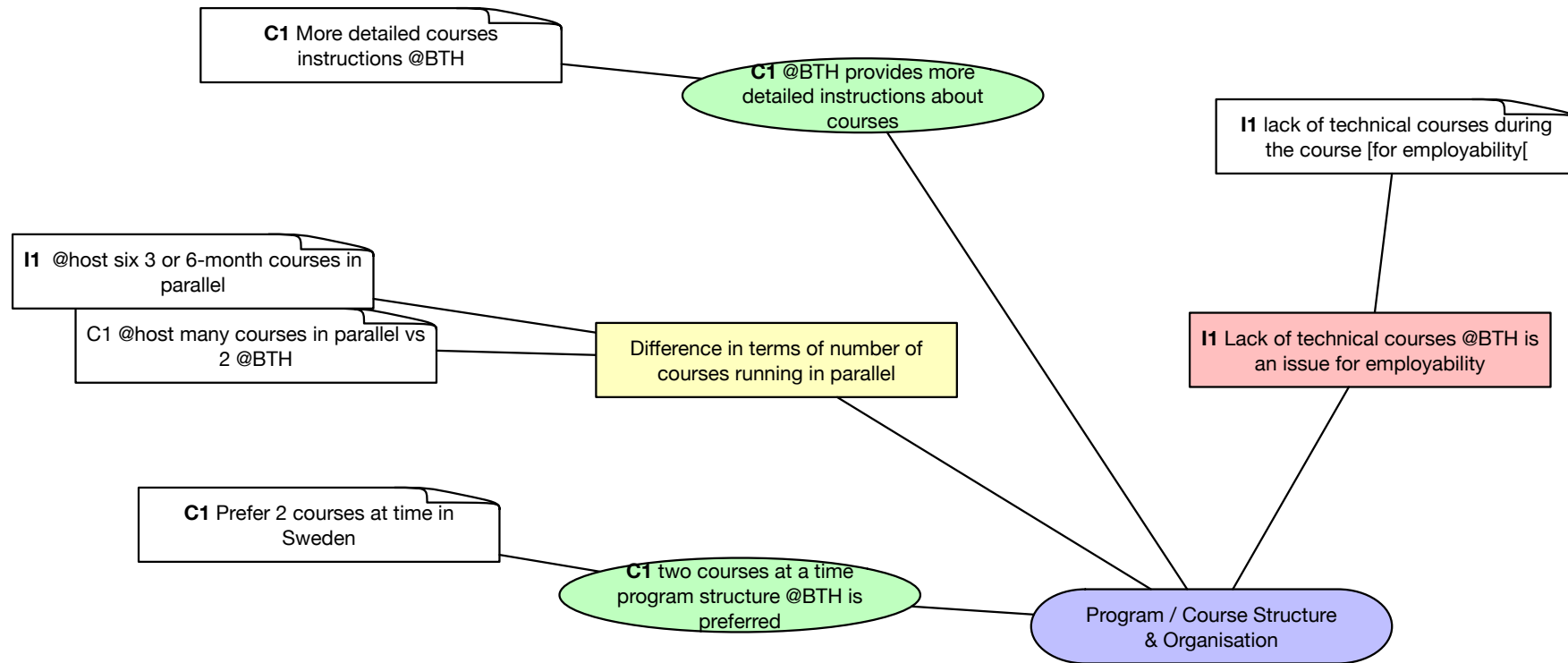
Teaching and Learning Activities



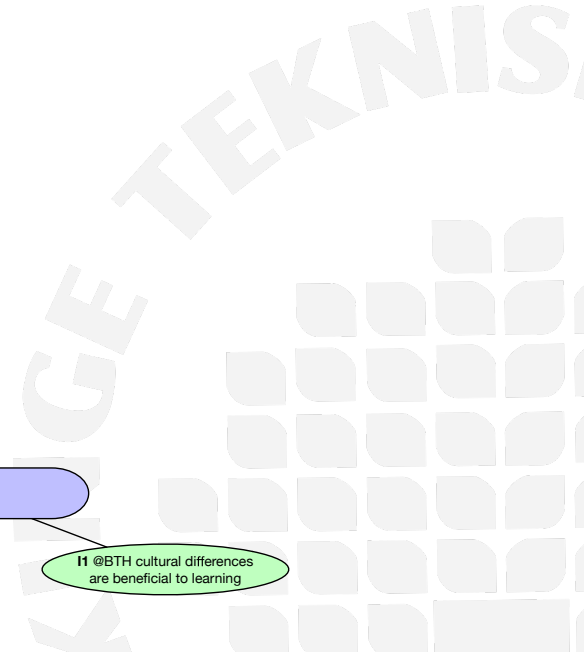
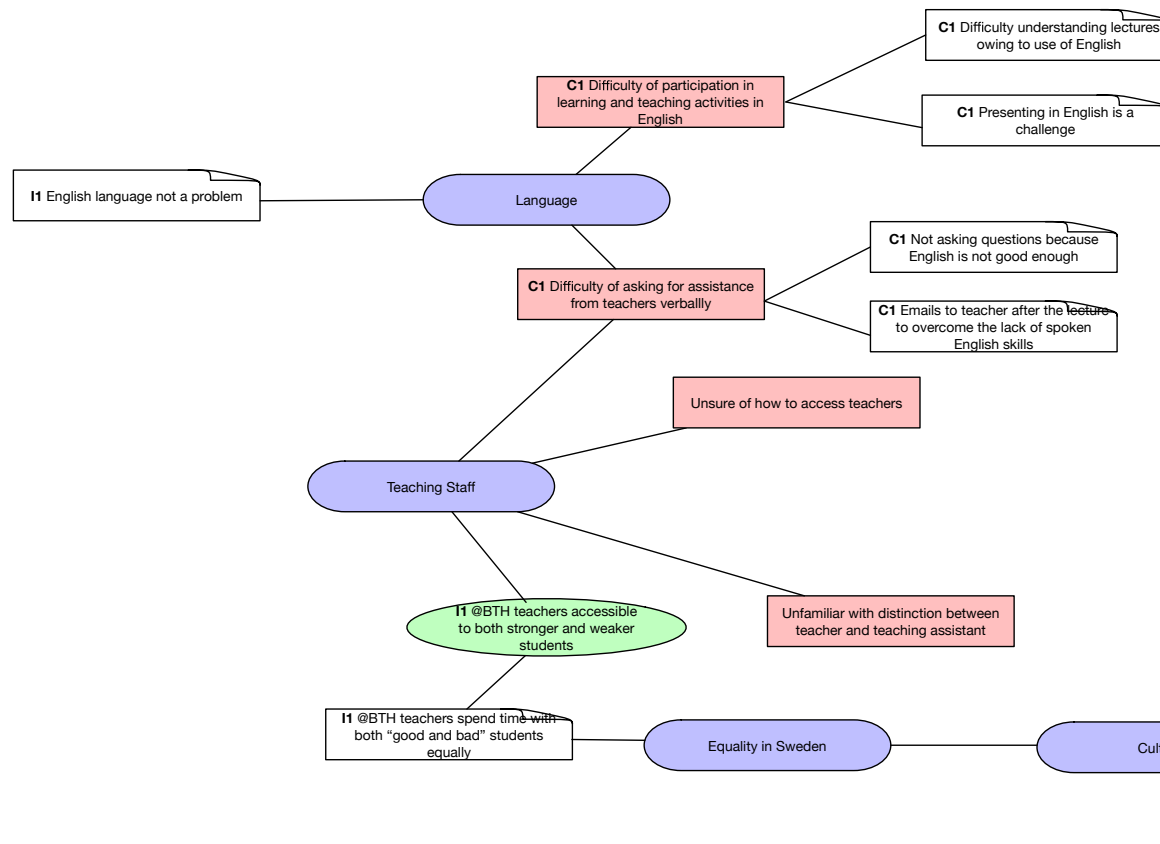
Assessment



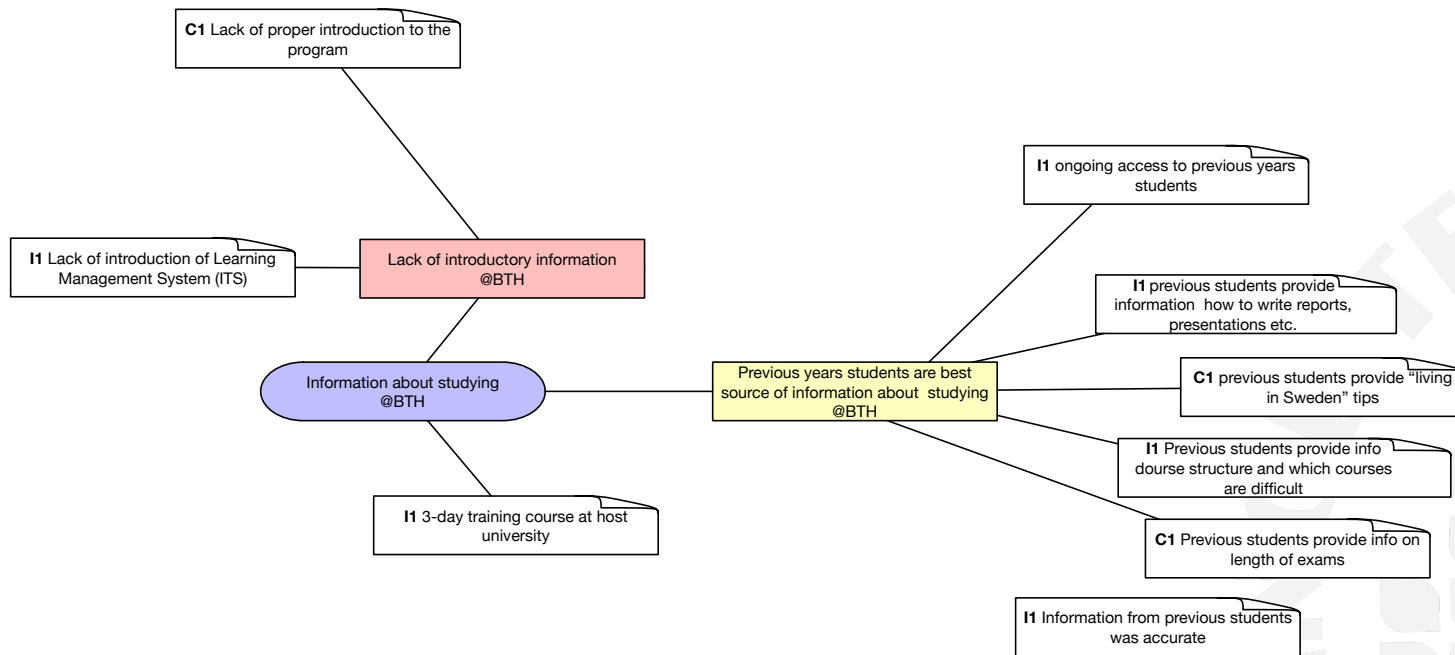
Program and Course Structure



Language and Culture



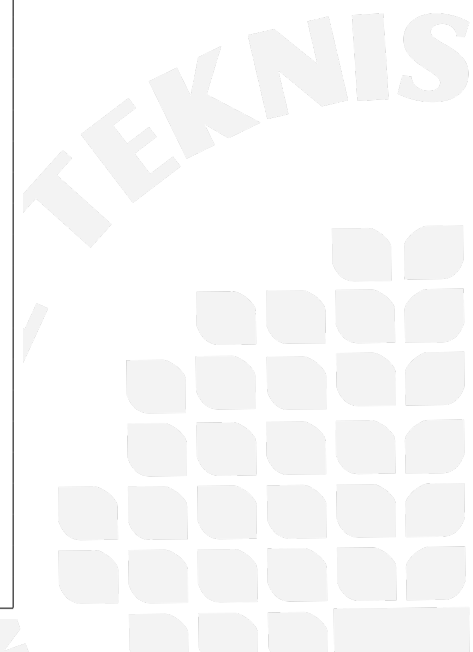
Information about Study @BTH





Main Results

Academic Difference	Impact
Unsure of how to access teachers for assistance	-
Unfamiliar with distinction between teacher and teaching assistant	-
Difficulty of asking for assistance from teachers verbally (C1 only)	-
Teachers are accessible equally to both stronger and weaker students (I1)	+
Difficulty of participation in learning and teaching activities in English (C1 only)	-
At BTH, lectures do not cover all the material exhaustively, but instead provide guidance	-
Different teaching and learning activities are regarded as the most effective	neutral
At BTH often required to work as a team, but little experience from host university	-
At BTH often assessed as a team, but little experience from host university	-
Many more assignments at BTH - and this is good for learning (I1 only)	+
Unfamiliar with how to write reflective reports (C1 only)	-
Lack of experience with structuring report assignments	-
At BTH, assignments throughout the courses are mandatory and are graded	-
At BTH, assessment instructions, rubrics, and feedback is much clearer	+
Re-assessment process at BTH is different	-
Marking and grading process at BTH is different, and unclear to students	-
Different qualities are perceived as being important in assessment: show deeper learning at BTH	-
Difference in importance attached to plagiarism and when it is checked	-
Lack knowledge of what constitutes plagiarism (I1 only)	-
Cultural differences at BTH are beneficial to learning (I1 only)	+
BTH provides more detailed instructions about course structure and organisation (C1 only)	+
Difference in the number of courses running in parallel	neutral
Two courses at a time is better structure for the programme at BTH (C1 only)	+
Lack of introductory information at BTH	-
Previous years' students are the best source of information about studying at BTH	neutral





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Threats to the Validity

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Main Threats to the Validity

- **Validity:**
 - Mitigated by choosing a well know method to analyze this type of phenomena
- **Reliability:**
 - Subjectivity is rooted in this type of studies
 - Mitigated by fully transcribing the interviews and cross validating the classification and coding
- **Generalisability:**
 - With this study we do not aim for any kind of generalisability, but to understand the phenomena

Other Threats to the Validity

- Reluctance to express opinions in front of peers
- Reluctance to talk about certain problems in front of the professors
- Participants biased by their opinions regarding the courses taught by the researchers
- Reluctance to talk about unethical or compromising problems
- Language barriers
- Presence of the Class Leader



Future Work

Analyzing the Impact of Differences in Academic Cultures on the Learning Experiences of Overseas Master's Students.





Future Work

- To continue this work by conducting additional focus groups with cohorts from other universities
- We would also like to strength the reliability of the conclusions by interviewing
 - Program managers
 - Collaboration projects coordinators
 - Teachers both here and in their home universities



Future Work

Replications in other Settings / Universities?

You are more than welcome onboard!!!





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