

What does it take to be an effective educational adviser in Indonesia and Thailand?

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Abstract

Structured group interviews with Thai and Indonesian educators indicate that expatriate advisers require a wide range of personal and professional qualities to be effective: they must have expertise, be able to establish and maintain good relationships with people, be well organised and effective teachers, and transfer information and skills that are applicable and of benefit to the nation.

None of these qualities is simple or uni-dimensional. The study shows, for example, that 'expertise' has several elements including technical expertise, cultural knowledge, language ability and expertise in education. More recent research with Indonesian medical educators indicates that different professional groups may have quite different expectations of advisers from other groups in the same country.

Practical implications of the findings are in overseas project design, management and placement of personnel, professional development of experts, and in the design, implementation and evaluation of teaching and training.

The Context

Australia provides substantial technical and educational assistance to developing countries in the Southeast Asian region. The Australian Government, through the Australian Development Assistance Bureau (AIDAB), finances a large number of expatriate advisers in the region and spends over a quarter of its \$A1 billion annual aid budget there. Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand have been the principal recipients of Australian aid in the region.

Many expatriates work as teachers in formal education, training or advisory roles. It is reasonable to ask about the qualities of effective teaching and training activities that these roles demand. Such enquiry could lead to the development of a body of advice about teaching and training that can inform advisers about their important role and may also be useful in the management of foreign aid personnel. What qualities then, do local staff expect from their expatriate teachers and advisers, and how might the advisers go about their teaching duties? This article will examine both questions.

Expectations

A study carried out in 1989 in Indonesia and Thailand sought the views of 204 teachers and academics on the important personal and professional qualities of expatriate 'experts' and advisers teaching in these two countries (Cannon, 1991(a)). The 252 qualities identified in the study can be grouped as follows:

Relationships: The way in which teachers relate to their students. Personal qualities are crucial because of their fundamental importance in any relationship.

Expertise: Professional expertise as well as expertise in the culture, understanding of local issues, and ability in the local language.

Organisation: The ways in which teaching has been organised and prepared.

Instruction: All matters directly concerning teaching, learning, assessing learning, and feedback to students.

Course Content: The content of the curriculum.

Precedence was given by respondents to qualities of expertise and relationship.

In a more recent study of senior medical educators (Cannon, 1991(b)) these qualities were examined in detail. For the purposes of this study, the personal and professional qualities indicated in the base-line data indicated above were edited and simplified into a list of 99 different items. Respondents in the study (n=52) were participants in two professional development programmes led by the author in 1991 at the University of Indonesia Medical Faculty in Jakarta. Respondents were asked to indicate the level of importance they attached to each item on a questionnaire.

The questionnaire was structured in such a way that respondents could indicate, using a seven-point scale, whether a quality was "least important" (one or two on the scale), through "moderately important", to "most important" (six or seven on the scale). Table one summarises responses to the questionnaire which asked: "How important do you think each of the following qualities are if an adviser is to be an effective teacher in Indonesia?" It lists only those items with a mean score of 6.00 and above on the scale; that is, those considered to be "most important".

Table 1: The 'Most Important' Personal and Professional Qualities: Views of Indonesian Medical Educators*

Rank Order	Qualities and Characteristics	Category
1	Should be an expert in their field	Expertise
2	Competence in teaching	Instruction
3	Professional	Expertise
4	Knowledge of theory and practice	Expertise
5	Explains matter systematically and efficiently	Instruction
6	Should transfer their knowledge and skill	Instruction
7	Material well prepared and distributed to students	Organisation
8	Good verbal communication	Instruction
9	Improve our knowledge and competency	Instruction
10	Has clear purpose	Organisation
11	Willing and able to pass on knowledge	Relationship
12	Chooses right teaching strategies	Instruction
13	Creative	Expertise
14	Competent in planning and implementation	Organisation
15	Up to date with applicable knowledge	Expertise
16	Can assist planners and solve the problem	Expertise
17	Motivating personality	Relationship
18	Teaches with exercises and practical application	Instruction
19	Is motivated to develop participants	Relationship
20	Able to think positively every time they face a problem	Relationship
21	Co operates with colleagues	Relationship
22	Productive	Relationship
23	Approach people as a friend, not as a boss	Relationship
24	He should be disciplined	Relationship
25	Experience in teaching in their discipline	Expertise
26	Responsibility for programme achievement	Relationship
27	Aware of role as adviser	Organisation
28	Can give simple and practical examples	Course content
29	Goodwill	Relationship
30	Helpful	Relationship
31	Good English	Expertise
32	Dedication for promoting participants	Relationship
33	High level of education	Expertise
34	Co operative with counterpart	Relationship
35	Expert should be flexible	Relationship
36	Activities promote 2 way communication	Instruction
37	Enthusiastic	Relationship

[* The qualities listed are those rated by all 52 respondents as 'most important' from a longer listing of 99 items. On a seven point scale (1-7), all of the items listed above have means of from 6.00 (item 37) to 6.48 (item 1) and standard deviations of 0.92 (item 1) to 1.27 (item 34).]

From theory to practice: meeting expectations

The following discussion seeks to explain each of the categories shown earlier in the terms of the qualities identified in the studies and in the literature.

Expertise

'Expertise' is a principal consideration in determining personal and professional effectiveness. The four kinds of expertise identified were technical expertise, expertise in education, cultural knowledge and understanding, and language ability.

Technical expertise in the profession

The study showed that the kind of expertise required is a blend of formal qualifications and professional experience, including developing country experience and, in vocational areas, relevant industrial experience. Technical expertise requires three key qualities: being up-to-date; competence or academic excellence; and comprehensiveness, for example a high level of education, industrial experience; and a broad knowledge of Asia.

Expertise in Education

Competence in, and understanding of, teaching, curriculum, the national education system, research methods and student learning characteristics are seen as important.

Cultural knowledge and understanding

In both Indonesia and Thailand, respondents identified 'understanding of the local culture' and 'understanding us' as important qualities. However, such understanding, they cautioned, must not lead the foreigner to try to *behave* like a Thai or Indonesian.

Language ability

One route to greater cultural understanding is through language learning. This kind of expertise is seen as important in the first study only by the Indonesian respondents. To them, language ability has two dimensions. The first dimension is an appreciation of the adviser's ability to be able to speak Bahasa Indonesia. This ability is seen as a means of enhancing communication and as an indication of cultural interest and understanding. The second dimension of language ability is the capacity to speak clear English. Again, this was raised only in Indonesia. However, the Indonesian medical educators in the second study placed greater importance on the ability to speak good English than on the ability to speak Bahasa Indonesia. This may reflect their greater facility with English than, say, teachers in some of the remoter locations included in the base-line data.

Learning about the cultural component of expertise, including dealing with some of the specifics of the country and the education system can be achieved

through culture-training programmes. Methods used include language learning, information giving, cultural sensitisation techniques, cultural assimilators, role playing and supervised real or simulated second-culture experiences.

Relationships

Studies of teaching effectiveness consistently draw attention to the importance of the quality of the relationship that is established between teacher and taught. The quality of relationships established is most important for the adviser working in Southeast Asia, and was particularly emphasised by the Thais in the first study. Four primary components of 'relationship' were identified in the study.

These components are personal qualities, attitudes, relationships with others and leadership.

Personal qualities and characteristics

These qualities include *physical attributes* such as good appearance and being in good health and *personal qualities* including personality, responsibility, politeness, patience, enthusiasm, tolerance, sincerity, versatility and flexibility. Dress was mentioned as an important element of behaviour and indicator of attitude. Scanty, tourist-like clothing is sometimes considered an affront to Asian modesty.

Attitude

Attitude is closely connected to the personal qualities of advisers, both to the people with whom they work, the work itself, and to the country generally. The following attitudes, among others, have importance: goodwill, accepting participants as they are, respect for people from developing countries, a concern for the human environment, not being paternalistic, and being positive and optimistic.

Relationships with others

The way the adviser relates to the people with whom he or she comes into contact, including students, counterparts and other advisers is seen as particularly important. Specific aspects mentioned include a willingness to help, being friendly, attentive, and co-operative.

Leadership

Leadership refers to the distinctive way in which the adviser relates to others. Elements of leadership include technical qualification, administrative ability, interpersonal relations, motivation, and political skill.

Organisation

Careful organisation, planning, and preparation are acknowledged hallmarks of good teaching. There are three major 'players' in organisational matters: the aid-provider, the adviser and the host institution in the developing country.

Table 2: Components of organisation, planning and preparation

Administrative Preparation	Educational Preparation
<p>By Adviser</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishing reliable communications with host Clarifying roles and purposes Prior site inspection Preparation for work in a different culture <p>By Overseas Host Institution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Photocopying/printing facilities Rooms and equipment Transportation Release of and support for staff to attend activity Location of course 	<p>By Adviser</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Timetabling Content, approach, and methods of instruction Prior discussion with participants about educational context and needs <p>By Overseas Host Institution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Selection of appropriate staff: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) as counterparts for advisers (b) as participants (i.e. needs, qualifications, job-relevance and future employment, language skill, etc)

The two related, but distinguishable, aspects of organisation are: educational planning and preparation, and administrative planning and preparation (see Table two). Without careful organisation few of the other factors can operate. Whole projects and individual courses have failed because of a lack of attention to organisation by one or more of the aid-providers, the host institution or the adviser. The following principles are presented for consideration when an instructional activity is being planned:

- Respect participants' knowledge and culture.
- Develop and implement interactive teaching methods.
- Engage participants in the design, development, implementation and follow-up of the activity.
- Focus on the development and application of problem-solving strategies.
- In all activities, seek ways of building and strengthening interpersonal relationships.

Instruction

Instruction is defined to include teacher presentation and explanation, class interaction and participation, learning, assessment and feedback. Competence in teaching was rated very highly indeed by the medical educators. An important feature of instruction is the extent to which it facilitates effective communication. *Communication* is of particular importance to respondents in both studies. It is important in two ways. First, to be able to speak the language is seen as a means of better communication and of cultural understanding as well as an indicator of interest in the country. Second, effective communication is seen as an integral part of the whole process of instruction.

Key difficulties in instruction include the adviser's lack of skill in the local language and lack of awareness of language difficulties created by pace, accent, and the use of metaphor and of colloquialisms. The problem of lack of skill in the language of the host country can be partly resolved by replacing formal presentations with more interactive problem-based learning. This has the additional benefit of reducing the 'risk' of creating and transferring 'packages' of Western technology - a practice strongly criticised by many commentators. Contract learning is a means of establishing personal commitment and relevance of course work to local needs and practice and is also a means of counteracting pressures to lecture at an audience. In contract learning participants, with assistance from the consultants, specify what they will do, how they will do it and when.

The instructional process - according to results from the first study - has the following further characteristics:

- *Motivation of students. Contract learning is one instructional approach to help foster motivation another is to ensure that clients experience success on tasks that are important and relevant to them early in a consultancy.
- *Selection and use of up-to-date and appropriate methods and media.
- *Systematic and effective explanation; active, practical teaching methods.
- *Assessment, feedback and support to students that includes pre-testing, the identification of students' background, their strengths and their weaknesses; monitoring of student progress; constructive criticism; and after-course consultation and follow-up.

Course Content

What is taught is usually left to the professional judgement of individual advisers or to course-planning teams of advisers and counterparts. This may ignore a variety of critical issues such as those raised by Newble and Cannon (1991). The criteria put forward by Newble and Cannon for selecting course content include the philosophical, psychological, professional and practical characteristics of the participants'.

Philosophical criteria focus on theoretical, methodological and value positions. For example content should emphasise the practical rather than the theoretical and should provide participants with resources to critically assess the relevance, applicability and impact of new ideas for their own and their country's needs.

Psychological criteria relate to the application of psychological principles and learning theory to teaching.

- Content should be carefully integrated to avoid fragmentation and consequential loss of opportunities for participants to develop 'deep' approaches to learning.

- Content selection must provide opportunities to emphasise and to develop higher-level intellectual skills such as reasoning, problem-solving, critical thinking and creativity.

- Content should relate to the development of attitudes and values as well as intellectual and practical skills.

Professional criteria recognise that courses for the professions may require explicit legal and professional requirements:

- Content must provide the kinds of theoretical and practical experiences required for professional practice.

- Content should include attention to professional ethics.

- Content should take account of local standards and procedures of professional practice.

Practical criteria concern the feasibility of teaching something and may relate to resource considerations:

- Content could be developed from local needs, experience, case studies, materials and resources.

- Content may be derived from one or two major texts because of a lack of suitable alternative materials.

- Content could be influenced by the availability of a 'key' teaching resource: library materials, computer equipment, laboratories, people, patients, physical environment, etc.

Participants' criteria relate to the characteristics of the participants on a course. Participants' criteria may effect the choice of content in a variety of ways:

- Content may be selected to reflect the needs, interests and experience of the group and their organisation.

- Content should be matched to the intellectual and maturity level of participants.

- Content might take account of the diverse life experiences of participants.

Summary and Conclusion

The qualities thought to be important for effective expatriate teaching are both numerous and complex. To bring some order to the complexity, they have been assigned to five categories. These are expertise, relationships, instruction, organisation and course content.

Professional behaviour, which is the most distinguishing characteristic of the adviser in the developing country, evolves from a core of fundamental personal and professional qualities that support complex and dynamic interactions with others in both the national and the international setting. It is these interactions which lead ultimately to constructive solutions of problems, to meetings the needs of the people and the country, and to providing benefits that foreign aid is meant to deliver.

Understanding the perceived importance of professional and personal qualities has a number of potential applications. First, the information can be helpful to project managers and aid providers in the design of development projects and activities. For example, there are direct applications in the management of foreign aid personnel. These applications include selection for adviser and project leadership positions, the placement and management of staff, and the professional development of personnel in the field. A study of the identified qualities can also be an instructive guide to the adviser charged with the responsibility of designing, implementing and evaluating teaching or training activities in Indonesia and Thailand.

Broad similarities exist between Indonesia and Thailand, but there are also some potentially important differences. One of these differences is the relative importance assigned to the quality of relationships. Further work is required to validate these findings in the two countries studied and to explore these differences. The follow-up study of medical educators also cautions us to be conscious that different groups within a country may have different expectations, attitudes, and needs. In other words, advisers must always be cautious of generalisation and stereotyping while overseas - just as they would be in their own country.

References:

Cannon, R.A.,(1991(a)) 'Expatriate "Experts" in Indonesia and Thailand: Professional and Personal Qualities for Effective Teaching', *International Review of Education*. In Press.

Cannon, R.A.,(1991(b)) 'Expatriate Advisers in Indonesia: A Case Study of Professional and Personal Qualities for Effective Teaching in Medical Education', Paper presented to the *National Conference on Professional Cross-Cultural staff Development*, Adelaide, 2-4 October, 1991. 9pp.

Newble, D.I. and Cannon R.A. *A Handbook for Teachers in Universities and Colleges*. Revised Edition. Kogan Page, London, 1991.

Further Reading

Issues concerning cross cultural contacts are discussed in both of the following recommended books:

Bochner, S., editor, *Cultures in Contact, Studies in Cross-Cultural Interaction*. Pergamon, Oxford, 1982.

Furnham, A. and Bochner, S. *Culture Shock: Psychological Reactions to Unfamiliar Environments*. Methuen, London, 1986.

For its insights into the problems of advisers working in developing countries, especially those working in rural development and education, the following is suggested:

Wout van den Bor, *The Art of Beginning*. Pudoc, Wageningen (Netherlands), 1983.

On the specific matter of developing interactive and problem-based approaches to teaching, the following is suggested.

Boud, D., editor, *Problem Based Learning in Education for the Professions.*, The Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia, Kensington, N.S.W., Australia, 1985.

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