

Long-term Impacts of Tourism Student Exchange Program

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Abstract

The student exchange program certainly provides added value and benefits that contribute to sustainable tourism development as part of educational tourism. Purpose of this study to identify the long-term impact of tourism student exchange programs in ASEAN. Student exchanges allow students to gain in-depth insight into global perspectives and cross-cultural understanding, especially related to tourism studies. This study uses a qualitative method by interviewing seven informants enrolled in the program from 2018 to 2019 to Thailand and Malaysia. Descriptive analysis of the first code cycle is used to analyse and answer the research objectives. As a result, students sense long-term changes from the program, such as improving communication in foreign languages, self-confidence, sense of independence, responsibility in decision-making or participant actions, priorities for the future, and intercultural understanding.

Keywords: educational tourism, student exchange, long-term impact, long-life learning

INTRODUCTION

On average, countries in ASEAN such as Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam and most of others relatively have easy access to visit with a warm climate that encourages many foreigners involves in tourism activities (Maga & Nicolau, 2018). What distinguishes tourism student exchange programs from other tourism activities are personally acquired experience that also leverages relationships with a wide range of people including locals and other foreigners (Tomasi et al., 2020).

Increasing student visits while studying and traveling also increases awareness of increasing sustainable tourism development, including culture with the role of higher education. This trend is contained in various articles discussing the role of Universities in sustainable development including various declarations and agreements to support the goals (Karatzoglou, 2013; Leal Filho, 2011; Lozano et al., 2013; Shields, 2019). According to (Marciniak & Winnicki, 2019) the increased of international students' mobility happens due to students' want to acquire knowledge about other cultures, grasp other teaching systems, language, or even because of pure curiosity and the desire to experience an adventure. The benefits of completing part of the studies overseas also leverage the potential of student's exchange to work as labor. Moreover, participation in exchange programs shapes students' personality and worldview.

Globalization is one of the factors that led to a significant increase in students' exchange programs abroad and contribute to diversity and internationalization of classrooms, colleges, and communities and to the enhancement of mutual understanding and appreciation of the differences around the world (Cheney,

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2001; Silalahi & Sitorus, 2021). This could occur since a student exchange program would bring value to the participants and local development through experiential learning. Experiential learning is transformative combination of personal growth through learning the well of life by extracting social experiences from the process. (Tomasi et al., 2020).

From various student exchange programs offered to ASEAN students, AIMS or Asian International Mobility for Students is a program that offers student exchange to Asian countries for one semester or a duration of approximately six months. This program is managed by the SEAMEO RIHED (Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organizations). AIMS offers high-quality and multi-cultural programs for the Asian community that can promote adaptability and impact good characteristics on the students who are its participants. AIMS program designed in 2008 by the SEAMEO RIHED organization with the involvement of the governments of Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand who made the student mobility scheme (aims-rihed.net).

This research is a preliminary study that focuses on identifying the long-term impacts of student exchange programs, particularly in personality and worldview of participants. The study is focused on investigating the exchange program experienced by Indonesian participants who did temporary studies in Thailand and Malaysia for one semester.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Educational Tourism

Students who contribute to changes in views and behavior are those who are exposed to foreign cultures longer than their own. (Hottola, 2004; Pabel & Prideaux, 2012). What separates educational tourism from ordinary tourism activities is that learning through experience is personal, memorable, and transformative, contributing greatly to the satisfaction of the experience and the participants' quality of life (Roberson Jr, 2018). Educational tourism is also useful for reducing most of the negative impacts of tourism (Sharma, 2015). There are several benefits from the educational aspect provided through educational tourism experiences, some of which are (Bodger, 1998): 1) Provide a personal experience directly from the incident, location, or things that cannot be duplicated; 2) Offer opportunities for individuals in the group to explore a specific subject, which is usually not possible in an ordinary education system; 3) Provide an opportunity to combine an individual's free time with a more focused and meaningful learning experience for the individual; 4) Provide deep meaning through exposure to daily routines and cultural values of an environment to drastically change the perspective and attitudes of participants; 5) Provide a space for communication, knowledge, and enthusiasm in an ideal location and can be very satisfying for the individual who shares that knowledge.

Aside from being part of educational tourism, student exchange programs are useful tools to increase collaboration between two universities that benefit both universities and local development (Atalar, 2020). It gives students the opportunities they cannot get or are not available at their home location (Pabel & Prideaux, 2012). Visited cites offers positive factors of exchange activities i.e. cultural view, economic perspective, and also academic benefits apart from providing better opportunities for students to find work (Niser, 2010; Pabel & Prideaux, 2012).

Exchange Program Impacts

International exchange programs typically entail students spending one or two semesters in a host institution of another country as part of their degree (Atalar, 2020; Engle & Engle, 2003). Exchange programs also provide experiences that allow participants to think critically and reflect on their own learning experiences (Bolen, 2007; Tomasi et al., 2020). Educational tourism, especially student exchange programs abroad, can provide various benefits in a fairly short period (Tomasi et al., 2020).

Several improved long-term capabilities that felt by participants enhance communication in foreign languages, self-confidence, sense of independence, responsibility in decision-making or participant actions, and intercultural understanding (Adina & Andrianto, 2021). International student exchange is a chance for

students to learn about new cultures languages and is an opportunity to study or work in an international environment. The following are some of the changes that participants felt during the process of the exchange program (Marciniak & Winnicki, 2019): 1) Deepen knowledge in different languages and environments; 2) Increase international knowledge 3) Develop other language skills; 4) Improve critical thinking and personal learning abilities; 5) Increase self-confidence and adaptability; 6) Encouraging cultural diversity; 7) Describe students in preparation for work in a different environment and social in the future.

A previous study also mentioned that through the mobility program, two communicators strive to reach a mutual understanding; one-way mobility should create a joint account, thus leading to intercultural communication, which views the international student as a cultural carrier between countries (Yun, 2015).

Long Life Learning

As stated by (Ankomah and Larson, 2004; Sharma, 2015) educational tourism is categorized into several dimension such as cultural, ecology or natural or rural tourism, historical and programs. Those dimensions have the possibility of leading to a term called “Life Long Learning”. A previous study suggests that lifelong learning is an important key to success in a society with a high desire to learn (El-Bishouty et al., 2006). Learning does not restrict to the physical class with four by four wall and to formal education in formal institutions, it is an activity which happens throughout life, inside or outside home (El-Bishouty et al., 2006).

Lifelong Learning (abbreviated as LLL) is a learning process that occurs throughout life, with the aim of increasing self-ability and competence towards oneself and civil society (Sharma, 2015). The ability to learn and adapt to social and environmental changes is another key to the success of lifelong learning (Tatarinceva et al., 2018). The Aim of Lifelong Learning are Increasing civil position, intellectual and professional abilities, improvement the quality of life (Tatarinceva et al., 2018).

To achieve these aims, participants need to use their intellectual abilities in order to learn in an optimal way. From the research of Adina and Andrianto (2021) exchange students from Indonesia who were in Malaysia and South Korea at the stability stage were finally able to adapt to the destination country and all the skills learned were still carried away when they returned home. In the application of the learning program, each participant has a different learning style with the environment so that there needs to be an explanation and choice in the application of learning methods (Tatarinceva et al., 2018). In individual learning will use intellectual power to compensate for the weakness of intelligence so that it meets the standards of their way of learning (Tatarinceva et al., 2018)

METHODS

The research method used in this paper is descriptive qualitative research. Descriptive research is done when you want to describe an individual, group, activity, event, or situation. Descriptive analysis aims to produce what (Clifford Geertz; 1973; Leavy, 2017) are called 'thick descriptions' of social life that provide details, meaning, and context from the perspective of the people who experience it. The researcher collected data through literature studies and interviews with 7 (seven) key informants. From the previous research data obtained, the researcher will analyze the interview data with a theoretical analysis of prior research, which is then compiled in a descriptive form which finally gets the results and conclusions.

Key informant criteria from AIMS participants following the objectives of this study include 1.) Individuals of Indonesian origin who have studied at Indonesia University of Education and are majoring in the tourism program for at least 1 (one) year; 2.) Individuals who have participated in the AIMS program either in Malaysia or Thailand organized by the SEAMEO RIHED organization and finished the program: 3.) Individuals have participated in the AIMS program within the last 5 (five) years (AIMS alumni 2017-2021). There are 7 (seven) resource persons, in the AIMS student exchange program research from the SEAMEO RIHED organization to get in-depth but varied answers.

Table 1. List of Informants

Number of Resources	University Destinations	Year of Departure
1	Universiti Teknologi MARA Puncak Alam, Malaysia	2018
3	Universiti Teknologi MARA Puncak Alam, Malaysia	2019
3	Prince of Songkla University, Thailand	2019

Source: research data, 2021

All informants are Indonesian participants, female, and Indonesian University of Education students majoring in the Tourism Marketing Management program. Most informants have never participated in overseas studies. They have never traveled abroad before, though one informant who is the participant of an exchange student in 2018 at Universiti Teknologi MARA has had a short international study experience of under two weeks in another ASEAN country. Furthermore, below is a discussion related to the long-term impacts of the student exchange program, which was taken and processed from interview data compiled previously.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Several positive impacts received by the participants' are; the development of foreign language competencies, improved self-confidence (Marciniak & Winnicki, 2019), the emergence of a sense of independence, a sense of responsibility through decisions made or behavior (Attaalla, 2020), changes in priorities in the future, and intercultural understanding (McKay et al., 2020). From the results of the interview data, it is found that all the informants experienced an improvement in foreign languages competencies, most importantly in the English language. This happens because of demands to use English communication in daily routines and the classroom. The informant said:

"...When I committed to joining this (student exchange), I must be able (or adapt) to do anything because it is required whether, in communication or being adaptive with other people even though they are from different countries and different cultures, different language, I needed to force myself, 'It is okay, I can do this, I need to try, no need to be shy, do not be afraid and that was it. There is a lot of group work, so I need to push myself to be able to do this. It was memorable since I could communicate with people who speak a different language from me." (Informant 7, 11/10/2021)

"I feel like I was not fluent (in English) at first. So being able to talk spontaneously in English is way more difficult. Still, after studying (in an exchange program) for one semester, I felt the impact a while ago, in the sixth semester, where I took an English class (in-home university). I feel like, 'okay, this is normal. I have done this before; It even felt like I could read the atmosphere and go on. I always hesitate before talking or answering a question (in English). Still, now I know what I need to say or what I am trying to deliver in the presentation because I have done this before, and I need to do it again felt easier. Put together the words and everything. My skill (in English communication) has been upgraded." (Informant 9, 12/07/2021)

Self-Confidence

There are various merits provided from students exchange programs, and some have a long-term impact on the participants, some of which are; increasing self-confidence (Marciniak & Winnicki, 2019), the emergence of a sense of independence (Atalar, 2020), and priority changes in the future (McKay et al., 2020). The development of participants' self-confidence can arise because of the experience of adjusting to a new and different environment and challenging participants to exceed their capabilities during student exchange programs (McKay et al., 2020). It is found that completing exchange program activities have become an

achievement that the informants were proud of and encouraged the resource persons' self-confidence. The informant said:

"So, in the beginning, I felt insecure, because it was difficult for me to express what I was thinking and what I was feeling, so I just listened to them (other participants) more and more because they were native (in English)...and so finally the level of self-confidence shows itself as time goes by because the environment is very supportive... that is how it is, they (other participants who are native speakers in English) boosted me up by asking questions, so it also added to my confidence." (Informant 6, 10/07/2021)

"Hmm, yes, confidence has a big impact on me because um, what do I feel now - I feel that way now because I - well, what is the name - now back in Indonesia like 'Oh yeah, that means I can go through it all what is the name- In Thailand, right, it is hard, it is difficult, the lessons are also difficult, adaptation is difficult, but I can do that and then when I come back here, I feel like 'Well, now you do not have to be shy anymore, you have to have confidence' because what is it? - Confidence is everything. If you can rely on yourself." (Informant 7, 11/07/2021)

Sense of Independence

The student exchange program can provide significant independence capabilities to participants, especially participants who have never lived far from their families before (Opengart, 2018). From the interview data processing results, the interviewee felt that there was an encouragement that demanded the resource person to become a person who could depend on himself. The informant said:

"... Before AIMS, I was never truly lived far away from my parents, so by being lived individually forced me to adapt on how to survive life (on my own), things like that, it is more like managing your finances, and then you become more -you know- which ones need to be prioritized, which ones don't because usually before AIMS was introduced in my life, things are always provided for me..."
(Informant 6, 10/07/2021)

"Changes behavior? I felt more independent and braver because I cannot rely on anyone, so I have to be able to talk to other people myself, I have to be able to negotiate there (in a foreign land), and I feel better... I can have adventures in Malaysia because I live alone; we (participants with other participants) need to talk to outsiders when we do not know which way to go... So be braver, look for information on your own, to be independent. That is it."
(Informant 2, 30/06/2021)

Responsibility in Decision-Making or Participant Actions

The responsibility for making a decision arises from participants' experience in facing difficulties during the duration of the student exchange program (McKay et al., 2020). One of the informants said they required the resource person to prioritize spending in their new environment with a limited amount of money. The informant said:

"...Because the result of our duration abroad to study in a long time plus we were given the scholarship to arrange how for one semester the money is enough, in my opinion, it is difficult to account for, so when I was given the responsibility- Yes after I When I returned to Indonesia, I was given responsibility. I was even more careful. I felt a greater sense of responsibility. I will tell my parents (about AIMS) that there is a scholarship; yes, if, for example, they are given extra money, it is for family gifts, not for me to live. So how do you use the scholarship money to be enough for one semester? That is what makes rich even more responsible, more thorough, is it like 'Is this need necessary or not, this need is not important. So you can better organize your primary, secondary, tertiary needs. So

when I go back to rich Indo, I think I can apply that after I get home, basically if you are given the responsibility to be more careful, more detailed, the main thing is to know better what we do with the money...."

(Informant 5, 01/07/2021)

"... Such individual things like I can manage my finances and at least be responsible for myself, right, maybe at home, the food is already prepared, or 'Let us eat blah-blah-blah. If it is there, won't everything have to be arranged by yourself..."

(Informant 6, 10/07/2021)

Intercultural Understanding

Through the interview data processing results, the researcher found that cognitive abilities emerged through observations made by the resource persons on their environment, conversations carried out with other parties, and through 'intercultural communication' courses taken by the resource persons. Resource persons understand that tolerance is needed in addressing differences. One of the speakers realized the importance of patience and appreciation for other cultures and observed Indonesian culture. A desire to eliminate discrimination against other ethnic groups, such as Papuans. The informant said:

"Em, (I am) open-minded because I see many kinds of people, good people, bad people, kind people, looks like evil people. Like, oh my god hijabi but naughty, yes, that is how it is um oh my god okay. However, suppose it is a personal account. In that case, the first is open-minded, the second is 'do not judge people because you are open-minded, so do not judge people because 'okay, let people live their life, they make choices' there must be a reason before they choose something there must be a reason, so they are richer, keep calm and observe people, so I prefer to observe people because there are required to adapt, so come back here like 'Okay, observe more person.'" (Informant 8, 11/07/2021)

"...So it took me when I arrived in Indonesia too, at first when I was with my friends, for example, I felt like I had a point that I was right, and I did not want to listen to people's opinions because I felt I was right, but since I passed That is how it is, and I think it turns out that everyone has a different point of view, right, it is like I have a different point of view from there, the way I understand my friends has changed since I came home, I have become more 'Oh yeah I understand,' sometimes I already feel that my problem is, for example, 'Why is it that his problem will be lighter and there is nothing wrong with what I am doing. After I passed AIMS, I realized that that is a different thing. We cannot judge like that as if we were the most correct, so it is okay that it brings a pretty positive effect too...."
(Source Person 6, 10/07/2021)

"I am more like this, what happens if you want to learn about other people's cultures like theirs. It's like I've been in the same class with many people like European Germans, Chinese, Koreans and they are really really different and their culture also greatly influences how they behave, how they think, I'm more careful from there too about their opinion - what is their culture because here it seems like they think more - sorry - 'n' words like [N] are like that, I - my friends, it's really easy to say that, while there they say 'n' The word is very, very sensitive and even my lecturers don't dare to talk about it, then I also think that we too have very different cultures but we never think about what appreciation is or what the difference is, we are lacking It's really hard to know about it and it's really hard for me to understand what to do about it, really hard to understand, and with Indonesians it must be really hard, especially since we have Papuans, Papuans like that and I, It's easy for my friends around me to talk about them without knowing their history like that, I'm more digging now, I'm rich about people's cultures." (Informant 9, 12/07/2021)

CONCLUSION

Through the adaptation process and finishing the whole student exchange program, participants get numerous benefits that impact participants' behavior, personality, and worldview, leading to long-life learning. Several improvements that were felt and shown by participants are enhanced in a foreign language, self-confidence, the development of independence, and a sense of responsibility for participants in determining decisions or the responsibility of their actions. Participants also achieved intercultural communications through observations of a multicultural environment, conversations with foreigners with different backgrounds or perspectives, and some courses are taken. Participants are also aware that cross-cultural understanding makes them more tolerant of diversity and aware of and critical of discrimination in their environment. Participants become global citizens or 'global citizens' through this understanding, a necessary capability in a multicultural environment.

By that remark, this research suggests that exchange student participants are expected to have full preparation before departure to the destination country. It is better if participants find out about cultural differences or norms that will be faced to look for alternatives that help participants adapt quickly. In addition, participants are encouraged to prepare for the changes experienced mentally. The learning received by participants depends on the willingness to adapt and develop. There are some limitations in this research; the interviews were only conducted with informants who came from Indonesia and studied at the Indonesian University of Education in Bandung (UPI); despite other Indonesia universities that are members of AIMS, this research also only focuses on student exchange who visited Malaysia and Thailand. The emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic had the impact of delaying the departure schedule for the next AIMS program in 2020, resulting in the last interviewee being a student exchange participant in 2019.

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