

## **International Mobility Program for Library and Information Management Education Students: Post-Exchange Experience Perspectives**

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**Abstract** Universiti Teknologi MARA is committed to providing quality education that is globally recognized. One such initiative is the student mobility program. The aim of this program is to open up opportunities for domestic students exposed to the international higher education environment and to prepare them to become global leaders in the future. This paper is an attempt to understand the post-exchange experience of library and information management education students and opts for a qualitative research approach, that is, interview sessions with program participants and document review. The results showed that most participants expressed high levels of satisfaction with the experiences and knowledge gained from the international mobility programs. This platform also enables the university's internationalization goal to escalate, the inter-university partnerships intensify, and thus, the presence abroad soar. It was hoped that more UiTM students, in particular, would participate in the exchange activities of global students and gain a new horizon of knowledge and exposure.

**Keywords:** International Mobility Program, Library, and Information Management Education, Outbound, Student Exchange Program, Undergraduate Students

## **1. Introduction**

Outbound exchange programs are educational programs that occur outside the classroom, typically in other locations. These can be educational trips or exchanges, internships, or other experiential learning opportunities. Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM), the largest public university in Malaysia, pledges to position its quality education as a globally marketable and renowned university by 2025 (UiTM, 2020). Graduates are expected to be well-balanced and competent at a global level. In line with UiTM's global positioning, international exchange programs provide a great opportunity for students to immerse themselves in a different culture, improve their language skills, and gain valuable life experiences.

To participate in an international exchange program, the candidates will typically need to be enrolled as students at a university or college that has a partnership with a university in the host country. Candidates will also need to meet any additional requirements set by the host university and their home university, such as minimum grade point average or language proficiency. If the candidates are students at UiTM and are interested in participating in an international exchange program with a university in Indonesia, for instance, they should contact the International Affairs Department at UiTM Global to learn more about the available programs and the application process (refer to UiTM Global Website, 2020). The International Affairs Department can provide candidates with more information about the specific requirements, deadlines, and benefits of participating in an international exchange program.

The precondition for exchange student candidates is as important as post-experience student feedback from exchange programs. Post-experience feedback can be a valuable resource for students who are considering participating in similar programs. Exchange program participants often have a unique perspective on the host country, university, and culture, and their feedback can help potential participants gain a better understanding of what they expect from the program.

Much research related to student mobility and exchange programs has focused on students in developed countries. However, the study of such a similar program is scarce in developing countries such as Malaysia. Thus, this study attempts to understand the post-exchange experience of library and information management education students under program code IM244. The study opts for a qualitative research approach to gather post-experience student exchange feedback, that is, the group interview sessions and review of the written report submitted by the program participants.

## **2. Literature Review**

The literature on student exchange programs discusses the benefits of the program on academic performance and career outcomes, as well as the challenges and difficulties faced by student participants. University educators have long recognized the importance of seeking knowledge beyond the confines of one's local classroom, that is, exposing students to people of different cultures and values (Roy et al., 2019). Such recognition began in the 1950s, as universities in North America and Europe responded to global economic needs through internationalization (Welch & Denma, 1997). International exchange programs are an example of a university's internationalization activity (Hermans, 2007).

The European Union Students' Exchange Program (ERASMUS) and University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP) are two well-known international exchange programs. ERASMUS was founded in 1987 as a platform for international staff and students to experience high-quality education in European countries (Welch & Denman, 1997). By contrast, UMAP is a university mobility platform offered by Australia to Asian countries in 1999 as a symbol of peace and trade expansion (Davis et al., 1999). The success of these exchange programs has inspired people worldwide to become involved in internationalization activities.

The student participants could gain proficiency in language acquisition, immersion in the local culture, and personal growth, in addition to academic and professional opportunities when they were in foreign countries. Opportunities to travel to English-speaking countries could greatly improve the ability of student participants from non-English-speaking countries or English as a second language to speak, read, and understand the language. Students can improve their communication skills (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2015). The programs have increased knowledge transfer from the host institution to the inbound students, as well as the student's ability to develop new skills as their stay has been extended (Di Pietro, 2015).

It is also expected that student exchange program participants will benefit from knowledge transfer (Di Pietro, 2015), the development of competencies such as soft skills (Handayani & Wienanda, 2020), adaptability to the host culture, and personal and professional development that can add value to participants' employability (Przytula et al., 2020; Roy et al., 2019; Osland, 2008). Thus, academic advantages and personal and professional development demonstrate participants' willingness to take on new challenges and adapt to new environments and can assist in developing a global network of professional contacts.

On the other hand, students participating in exchange programs may face challenges and difficulties such as homesickness, cultural differences, language

barriers, finances, academic challenges, and health and safety concerns. Many studies have found that the most significant disadvantages for Asian students are cultural impacts and financial difficulties (Memarpour et al., 2015; Chew & Croy, 2011). Adapting to a new culture can be difficult, and students may discover that certain customs, values, and social norms differ from those they are accustomed to. Furthermore, participating in a student exchange program can be costly, and students may need to find ways to cover tuition, housing, and other costs.

### **3. Methods**

Students in the Information School's Library and Information Management Program participated in a one-semester exchange student program. Students could pursue inter- or intra-faculty electives, minors, or degrees at their home university or partner institutions, or participate in the university's global exchange program.

The student participants were evaluated based on their post-exchange experience as library and information management students at an Indonesian university. This study adopts a qualitative research approach, which includes interviews with program participants and a document review. Throughout the program, all student participants received scholarships and financial assistance.

#### **3.1 Study Design**

An exploratory design with interviews and a document review was conducted. Students accepted into the library and information management program at the Information School in 2020/2021 were chosen to participate in exchange activities during their fourth semester. The exchange program involved 12 students. Only six students volunteered to participate in the interviews.

Individual interviews were conducted in September 2022 to investigate in-depth student perceptions of their exchange program experiences. The participants' perspectives on barriers, enablers, and their overall impressions of the exchange programs were discussed. The researcher conducted the interviews in Malay and English. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. The next step was to review the students' exchange program reports. To analyze both the interview transcripts and students' reports, the researcher used a traditional qualitative content analysis method (document review).

Transcripts and reports were used to infer coding categories. The researcher manually coded the text data into main and sub-themes, with themes marked beside the coded sentences and paragraphs, which were then organized into a tree structure.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1 Interview Findings: Satisfaction and Outcomes of the Student Mobility Program**

The purpose of this research was to gather feedback and assess the satisfaction level, achievement of learning outcomes, experiences, and challenges faced by participants in the Student Mobility Program. The data collected from the six participants provided valuable insights.

The findings were as follows:

#### **4.1.1 Satisfaction with the Experience and Knowledge Gained**

Most participants expressed high levels of satisfaction with the experience and knowledge gained from the Student Mobility Program. Four out of the six participants (67%) reported being "very satisfied," while the remaining two (33%) stated they were "satisfied" with their experience.

#### **4.1.2 Achievement of Desired Learning Outcomes**

When asked if they had achieved their desired learning outcomes from the program, the majority of the participants answered affirmatively. Five of the six participants (83%) reported that they had indeed achieved their desired learning outcomes, whereas one participant was unsure.

#### **4.1.3 Rating of Overall Experience**

Participants were asked to rate their overall experience of the Student Mobility Program. The results varied between 8 and 10 on a scale of 1 to 10. As illustrated in Figure 4.1.3, the average rating was 9, that is, highly positive experience. The highest rating was 10, indicating a highly positive overall experience.



Figure 4.1.3. Rating of the Overall Experience of the Student Mobility Program

#### 4.1.4 Personal Experience Since Returning from the Program

The personal experiences of the participants after returning from the program varied. While two participants (33%) mentioned no major changes and staying in touch with students during the program, two participants (33%) reported exploring the culture and places in the city, spending time with friends, gaining knowledge, and being excited to meet new people. Two participants (33%) mentioned challenges, such as jet lag, differences in teaching methods, and adjustment to cultural differences.

#### 4.1.5 Happiest Moments During the Program

The happiest moments during the program included walking around Bandung, spending time with friends, enjoying experiences with international students, visiting various places, and meeting lecturers and students.

#### 4.1.6 The Most Challenging Moment

The most challenging moments were identified as adapting to a new environment, language barriers, being far away from the family for the first time, settling assignments and presentations, and dealing with late instructions and sudden decisions causing expensive flight tickets.

#### 4.1.7 Issues Faced During the Program

Four participants (67%) reported no significant issues with the host university, peers, or family members. One participant (16.5%) mentioned family members

who had a COVID-19 test. Another participant (16.5%) mentioned issues with lecturers, difficulties in document preparation, and flight tickets.

#### 4.1.8 Meeting Expectations of the Program

The majority of participants, that is, four participants (67%) stated that the program met their expectations, while two (33%) were unsure.

#### 4.1.8 Likelihood of Recommending the Program

The likelihood of recommending a Student Mobility Program to others was generally high, with ratings ranging from 8 to 10. As illustrated in Figure 4.1.8, the average rating was 9, that is, highly recommended.

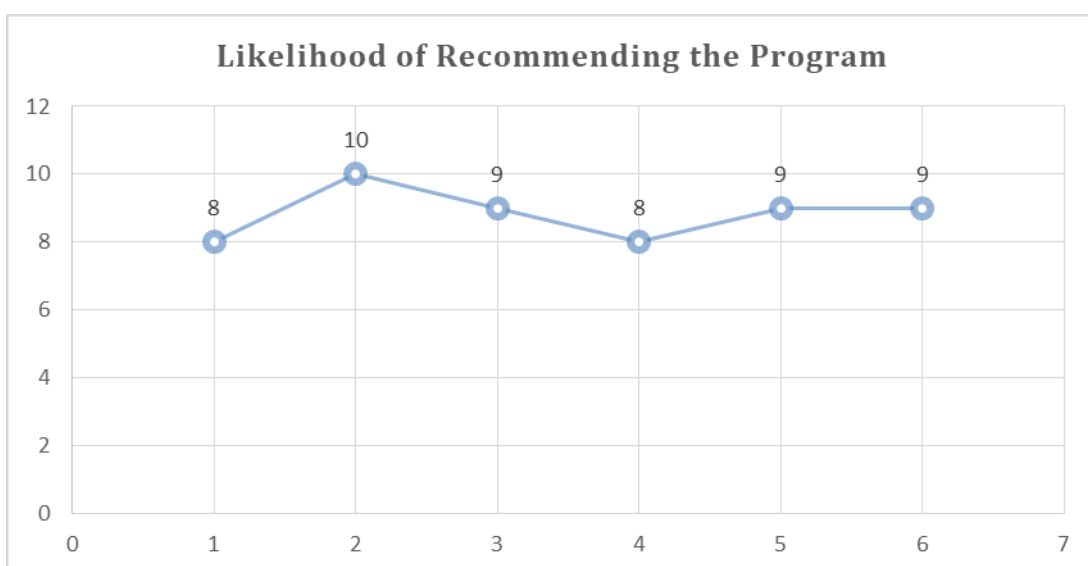


Figure 4.1.8. Likelihood of Recommending a Student Mobility Program to Others

Overall, the findings suggest that the majority of participants in the Student Mobility Program were satisfied or very satisfied with their experience and knowledge gained. Their desired learning outcomes were largely achieved, and their overall experience was highly rated. Personal experiences varied, with some reporting no major changes, and others highlighting positive experiences and opportunities for exploration. The happiest moments are associated with spending time with friends and experiencing different locations. The most challenging aspects include adapting to a new environment, language barriers, and adjusting to different teaching methods. No significant issues were reported by the host university, peers, or family members. The overall program met the

expectations of most participants and the likelihood of recommending it to others was high.

## **5. Discussion**

Based on the analysis, most participants expressed high levels of satisfaction with the experiences and knowledge gained from the Student Mobility Program. A significant number of participants reported being either satisfied or very satisfied with the program.

Furthermore, most of the participants achieved the desired learning outcomes. They acknowledged that they gained valuable knowledge from the program and their understanding of the subject matter improved.

When rating the overall experience of the Student Mobility Program, participants were mostly positive. Participants regarded their experience highly, with some rating it as perfects 10. This suggests that the program was well-regarded and positively perceived by participants as a worthwhile endeavor.

The participants' personal experiences since returning from the program varied. Some participants reported no significant changes, whereas others expressed positive experiences and a sense of personal growth. It was common for participants to mention exploring new cultures and places and spending time with friends as their happiest moments during the program. The program provided opportunities for participants to engage with international students and to experience different cultural settings.

However, some challenges highlighted by the participants included adapting to a new environment, language barriers, and adjusting to different teaching methods. However, no significant issues were reported by host universities, peers, or family members.

By and large, the program generally met participants' expectations. The likelihood of recommending the Student Mobility Program to others was high, indicating a positive perception of and satisfaction with the program.

However, our study had three major limitations. First, the interview findings were based on the participants' self-reported recollections, but recall bias should be minimal because the questions only asked about personal attitudes and opinions. Second, participation in the study was voluntary. As a result, less-motivated participants who may have more negative comments about the program may not be recruited to participate in the interviews.



## **6. Conclusion**

The Student Mobility Program indicates that it has been highly successful in meeting participants' expectations and providing valuable learning experiences. The majority of participants expressed a high level of satisfaction, with many reporting that they achieved their desired learning outcomes and gained valuable knowledge. The overall experience of the program was positively perceived, with participants rating it highly and considering it a worthwhile venture.

The program's impact on participants varied, with some reporting personal growth and positive experiences exploring new cultures and places. While there were some challenges in adapting to a new environment and language barriers, these were not significant issues and did not hinder the program's success.

Despite the program's success, it is essential to acknowledge the study's limitations, including potential recall bias in self-reported recollections and the voluntary nature of participation. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings.

Overall, the Student Mobility Program has proven to be a valuable and well-regarded initiative, fostering international collaboration, cultural exchange, and personal growth among participants. The positive feedback and high likelihood of recommendation by participants underscore the program's effectiveness in providing enriching experiences and acquiring knowledge. Moving forward, addressing the study's limitations and building on the program's strengths will further enhance its impact and ensure its continued success in the future.

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