

Impact of Participating AIMS Student Mobility Programme: A UiTM Perspective

Impak penyertaan Program Mobiliti Pelajar AIMS: Perspektif UiTM

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ABSTRACT

ASEAN International Mobility for Students (AIMS) programme offers an opportunity for students of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Malaysia to study abroad while undertaking degree programmes in a local university. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of students' participation in AIMS programme at a prominent higher education institution in Malaysia. The study explores the impact of the programme on participants by highlighting personal and professional development. The participants in this study were 40 respondents who participated in the AIMS programme at the institution. This study adopts a mixed methods research designs which integrates both quantitative and qualitative data to measure participants' experience. Data was collected and analysed from a questionnaire, observations, written report and video-recording to understand students' learning experiences, cross-cultural skills, communication skills and critical thinking skills. The results show that AIMS programme develop positive social impact on students' personal cross-cultural learning experiences and real communication skills, developments which are hard to gain in a monogamous campus social context. The study also identifies the real-life skills set they acquired which can be used in their academic and their personal lives. The number of students' outbound involvement in AIMS at the institution is low, due to limited fields offered in AIMS programme and also limited budget. Therefore, a proper planning and continual revision on the course offered by each member institutions is recommended and an increase in financial support is desirable to support a larger student participation in the programme.

Keywords: Internationalisation; mobility; social impact; personal development; cross-cultural experiences

ABSTRAK

Program ASEAN International Mobility for Students (AIMS) menawarkan peluang kepada pelajar Institusi Pengajian Tinggi (IPT) di Malaysia untuk belajar di luar negara sambil mengikuti program ijazah di universiti tempatan. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji impak penyertaan pelajar dalam program AIMS di institusi pengajian tinggi terkemuka di Malaysia. Kajian ini meneroka kesan program tersebut kepada peserta dengan menyoroti perkembangan peribadi dan profesional. Peserta dalam kajian ini adalah 40 orang responden yang mengikuti program AIMS di institusi tersebut. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah penyelidikan campuran yang menggabungkan data kuantitatif dan kualitatif untuk mengukur pengalaman peserta. Data dikumpul dan dianalisa dari soal selidik, pemerhatian, laporan bertulis dan rakaman video untuk memahami pengalaman belajar pelajar, kemahiran silang budaya, kemahiran komunikasi dan kemahiran berfikir secara kritis. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa program AIMS memberi kesan sosial yang positif terhadap pengalaman pembelajaran silang budaya peribadi pelajar dan kemahiran komunikasi sebenar, perkembangan yang sukar diperolehi dalam konteks sosial kampus yang monogami. Kajian ini juga mengenal pasti kemahiran kehidupan sebenar yang mereka perolehi dan dapat digunakan dalam akademik dan kehidupan harian mereka. Jumlah penglibatan pelajar dalam AIMS di institusi adalah rendah, kerana bidang yang ditawarkan dalam program AIMS adalah dan kos pembiayaan adalah terhad. Oleh itu, perancangan yang terperinci dan semakan berterusan mengenai kursus yang ditawarkan oleh setiap institusi anggota AIMS disyorkan dan peningkatan kos pembiayaan adalah wajar untuk menyokong penyertaan pelajar yang lebih besar dalam program ini.

Kata kunci: Pengantarabangsaan; mobiliti; impak sosial; pembangunan diri; pengalaman silang budaya

INTRODUCTION

International student mobility programmes has received prominent response amongst students in the last decades. This shows that internationalisation has challenge different types of fields around the world.

Cultures, politics, economies and even education are challenged due to the open of boundaries in various diciplines.

Developments in the field of international higher education globally have impacted strategies for internationalisation of higher education in

Malaysia. The internationalisation of higher education plays a major role in the political economy, social development and academic performance of a particular country in the region and globally (Munusamy & Hashim 2019). In addition, Ndanusa et al. (2015) highlighted the impact of international students' enrollment on the economy of Malaysia and the great potential of the sector if fully integrated into the country's tourism as edu-tourism, which is crucial in boosting the country's economy. This has stimulated countries around the world, including Malaysia, to compete in becoming one of the world's leading education hubs. This contributes to a highly competitive landscape in the international higher education marketplace, which universities have much to gain from the benefits of successful international mobility programmes.

The growth in the internationalisation of higher education is driving the expansion of tertiary systems and institutions globally. This trend also entails cross-border collaboration and intensifies student mobility which strengthens economic integration within the Asian region. International student mobility programmes have become one of the global agendas amongst the nine Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Malaysia, namely Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), University of Malaya (UM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP), Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) and Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS).

One of the prominent international mobility programmes is the ASEAN International Mobility for Students (AIMS) programme. The AIMS programme was established following a successful pilot project of the Malaysia-Indonesia-Thailand (M-I-T) Student Mobility Programme. The M-I-T pilot project was launched in 2010 in collaboration with the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia; the Directorate General of Higher Education, Ministry of National Education, Indonesia, the Office of the Higher Education Commission, Thailand and the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development (SEAMEORIHED). The successful implementation of the pilot project had led to its expansion which began in 2012 under a new name as AIMS with Vietnam joining as a new member. The main purpose of AIMS

is to create a vibrant student mobility programme for citizens of all its 11 Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) member countries. This educational programme is the core programme set by SEAMEO RIHED to cultivate globalised human resources within the region. SEAMEO RIHED, envisioned student mobility to be the key strategic elements of cooperation leading to the development of a harmonised higher education environment among Southeast Asian countries (SEAMEO RIHED 2010).

Additional Southeast Asian nations were then invited to join the efforts of the three existing countries, and collectively develop a regional Southeast Asian student mobility programme. Since then, AIMS member countries have mobilised 1,200 students across the region, with more than 10 field offerings of 500 courses amongst seven countries to include four new members; Vietnam, South Korea, Japan and Brunei Darussalam, respectively (Hou, et al. 2017). To date, most HEIs in Malaysia are making the efforts towards enhancing higher education regionalisation in Southeast Asia through AIMS. Various courses were offered in AIMS mobility programmes by host institutions in member countries. Among the fields offered under AIMS are, Hospitality & Tourism, International Business, Food Science & Technology, as well as Language & Culture.

Some key activities had been conducted to support the mobility programme starting from the establishment of the framework for the M-I-T pilot project which was proposed in 2007. The proposal was endorsed at the 43rd SEMEO Council Meeting in March 2008. It is approved for implementation in 2009 before running in full force in 2010. The fruitful outcomes of the M-I-T pilot project had made it possible to be expanded and opened to all Southeast Asian nations. Review meetings were held to discuss and monitor the programme implementation. Participating universities from each member country were chosen by their respective ministry responsible for higher education.

The benefits of the AIMS programme are immense. It provides benefits not only for member countries but also to higher education institutions as well as students. For the country, it will enhance the visibility and recognition of Southeast Asian higher education and build a reputation as a country that is able to deliver international education which will encourage international students to enroll. As for higher education institutions, through this mobility

programme, it allows the institutions to actively engage in a regional exchange programme and develop on-going networks for future opportunities in international programme among member countries (SEAMEO RIHED 2012). Thus collaboratively, it is to help develop better quality human capital amongst the graduates and economy of the respective country in the ASEAN region.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), just like other HEIs in Malaysia, has responded to the global demand of internationalisation. UiTM has taken the initiatives to provide students with opportunities to study abroad besides acquiring cultural knowledge and competency of certain countries through AIMS programme. In 2018, a total of 102 UiTM students participated in AIMS programme at host universities in Indonesia, whilst 38 students in Thailand, 18 students in Korea, 13 students in Japan and 2 students in Vietnam respectively (OIA 2018). Student mobility programme helps to strengthen the relationship between countries and establish collaboration between the participating universities in the region. The trend in participating in regional student mobility has been largely conducted with universities in neighbouring countries such as Indonesia and Thailand. As most HEIs heavily consider the quantity of mobility students to indicate financial gain, students' views on their developments is pertinent to show that the mobility programme had a significant influence on students' personal and professional life as highlighted in studies by Azzwan & Azhar (2016) as well as Lesjak et al. (2015).

Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to examine the impact of students' experience in the AIMS programme at UiTM. The study also explores the various impacts the programme have on participating students by highlighting their personal and professional development as they embarked on AIMS programme.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Universiti Teknologi MARA has fully supported the increased access of international mobility for the students to actively engage in the programme with UiTM's partner universities. The ASEAN International Mobility for Students (AIMS) programme, formally known as M-I-T, aims to

create a vibrant student mobility programme for citizens of all SEAMEO member countries including Malaysia. The programme is designed to foster inter-university cooperation and internationalisation through exchange of students. This programme aligns with the university's global aspiration in promoting its institutional internationalisation strategy. As in the study by Tanhueco-Nepomuceno (2019), internationalisation is necessary for institutional growth and national economic interests. Through student mobility particularly exchange programme universities may increase collaborations among universities (Atalar 2020). Do & Pham (2016) also emphasized on franchising and twinning agreements, whereby having branch campuses between Southeast Asian countries and foreign higher education institutions influence the increase of international student mobility which the development of excellent national academic systems attracted more foreign students into the country. The impetus and motivations to participate in international mobility programmes are shaped, by the determinants of intra-European student mobility, taking into account students' personal background and motivations (Van Mol & Timmerman 2014). Reputable HEIs in the country, is the leading factor. Hence, Malaysia has set a Blueprint for Higher Education (2015-2025) targeting Malaysian institutions to be included in the regional and global ranking (Chandravathani 2019). Key initiatives include collaborating with other agencies and ministries, increasing the number of postgraduate and international students, and strengthening marketing and promotion strategy (Education 2015) to strategically market HEIs in Malaysia.

A study by Dolga et al. (2015) observed that the students are attracted to the international mobility programmes due to several reasons such as the need to get new experiences, the need to learn about new cultures as well as the need to meet new people. Students' experience, especially those study, living and their social functions within academic and social context of a host country need to be understood.

Furthermore, Watson and Wolfel (2015), highlighted a positive link between language and culture during study abroad from a Second Language Socialization perspective, especially for students from Malaysia and UiTM. This is because, high level of knowledge in intercultural competency is significant in determining high level of attitudes and skills of the students according to Matei (2019). Another recent study by Gesing and Glass

(2019), suggested that students' experiences and expectations on programme selection may varied by region of origin. They added that short-term mobility study is among the top choice of students from North America and Europe, high-income regions.

Nonetheless, there are various explanations which have been suggested in the literature on the impact of international student mobility programmes. Prazeres et al. (2017) have demonstrated that students' international career plans are influenced by their lifetime mobility aspirations. Their study has revealed that in the case of Erasmus Mobility programme, whereby the exchange students had improved their language skills, professional, academic and relational skills which may later affect the possibility to identify scientific and professional opportunities in their career. In addition, Roy et al. (2018) had broadly classified the impact of student mobility programme into three main areas which are cultural, personal, and employment or career outcomes. From their findings, it is difficult to determine the influence of short-term mobility programmes on career prospects. However, it has recently been shown by De Sandes-Guimaraes et al. (2019) that international exchange experience has an impact upon the structure of ST&I (Science Technology and Innovation) systems which therefore led to the importance of internationalisation policies for universities and governmental decision makers to be reinforced. Therefore, students gain large benefits from studying abroad in terms of intercultural competencies, as well as experience better quality in education, training and specialization as reported by Amendola and Restaino (2017). This is echoed by Chwialkowska (2020), who revealed the practical implications of exchange study programme provided by academic institutions to give students important insights has helped maximize their cross-cultural learning.

In the case of Malaysian students, it was proven that there has been an improvement in students' confidence skills, develop the chance to be independent, provide high opportunity to travel and visit other countries are among the positive outcomes of the international mobility (Azzwan & Azhar 2016). The ASEAN community, therefore, able to benefit from regional and globalisation members with cooperation from member states (M. Huda 2019). Thus, students gained and benefited from regional and global international mobility programmes.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on the constructivist paradigm which used a phenomenological strategy to explain the experience students encountered in international mobility programme. Constructivist researchers focus on understanding and reconstructing the meanings that people (including the researcher) hold about the phenomenon being studied (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Constructivists create knowledge through interaction between the researcher and participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), using dialogue and reasoning as the primary methods of investigation. Phenomenology is effective in studying a small number of subjects as in the study to identify the core of their experiences with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2003) and to produce patterns and identify relationships of meaning that build new knowledge (Moustakas, 1994).

The study was conducted by integrating both quantitative and qualitative data in a mixed methods research design. According to Almaki (2016), a mixed methods research provides a greater depth and breadth of information which is not possible by utilising just a singular approach. Additionally, it provides opportunities for researchers to have a well-informed information generated by both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Furthermore, a mixed method approach also provides researchers with a greater scope to investigate educational issues using both words and numbers, to the benefit of educational establishments and society at large.

The survey for this study was implemented in 2019 through a web-based platform. The platform offers easy access and convenience for participants to participate in the survey. Electronic survey is fast, efficient and 'free', with are added advantages over the traditional data collection method, including ease of analysis for vast amounts of data (Balch 2010). Andrews et al. argues that Web-based surveys are superior to email surveys in many aspects, and also an excellent tool to invite individuals to participate in Web-based surveys (2007). The survey was posted as a structured online questionnaire using Google platform.

The survey aims at the students who took part in AIMS Programme to acquire information on their demographic characteristic such as gender, faculty background, the host country and their programme background. In addition, questions to describe their experience during AIMS programme were also asked.

The participants in this study are students in the Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) (N=40), who have benefited from the AIMS Programme. Sampling with regards to gender 82.5% female and 17.5% male respectively, with an average age of 22 were recorded. A large student participation was also identified from the following faculties: Faculty of Hotel, Tourism and Management, Faculty of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Education and Faculty of Business Management. This set of data was analyzed to evaluate participants' views on four main aspects: learning experiences, cross-cultural skills, communication skills and critical thinking skills. This is to capture the essence of students' learning experience in short- or long-term international mobility programmes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Universiti Teknologi MARA has been actively sending its students abroad under AIMS programme since its inception in 2010. Relevant faculties had been fully supportive by selecting and nominating their students to participate in the programme. Figure 1 shows the total number of outbound students that attended AIMS partner universities by field of study for years 2010 to 2018. A total of 151 students participated in the programme with the most number of participants are from Food Science & Technology area (64 students), followed by International Business (46) and Hospitality & Tourism (41) respectively.

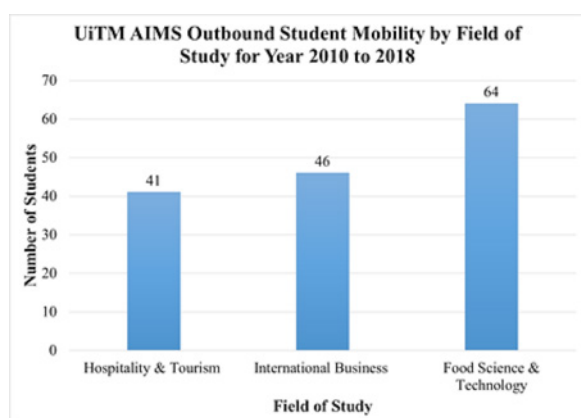


FIGURE 1. Outbound Student Mobility by Field of Study under AIMS at UiTM for Year 2010 to 2018.

Based on the results, Food Science & Technology emerged as having the highest number of students with a total of 64 participants. It is important to note that this number could reflect that there was a

growing interest among the students from the faculty of Food Science and Technology on the advantages in participating international mobility programmes. The number of university partners offering the area of study could also have an effect on the options and opportunities for the students.

Figures 2, 3 and 4 present the number of UiTM outbound students who went to AIMS partner universities according to field of study for years 2010 to 2018. In Figure 2, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia accepted the highest number of UiTM outbound programme with a total of 28 students in Hospitality & Tourism. Meanwhile, Binus University or Bina Nusantara University, Indonesia emerged with the highest number of UiTM AIMS students with 34 students in International Business as shown in Figure 3. Nevertheless, Figure 4 illustrates the number of UiTM AIMS outbound students in the field of Food Science & Technology. Bogor Agricultural University, Indonesia received the highest number of UiTM AIMS outbound students with 29 students from year 2010 to 2018. However, Mae Fah Luang University, Thailand accepted 26 UiTM AIMS outbound students for the same period.

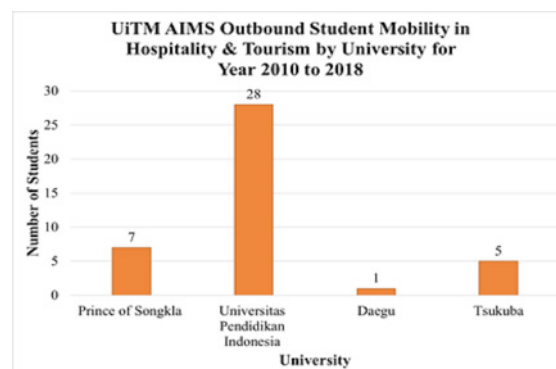


FIGURE 2. Outbound Student Mobility by Field of Study under AIMS at UiTM for Year 2010 to 2018.

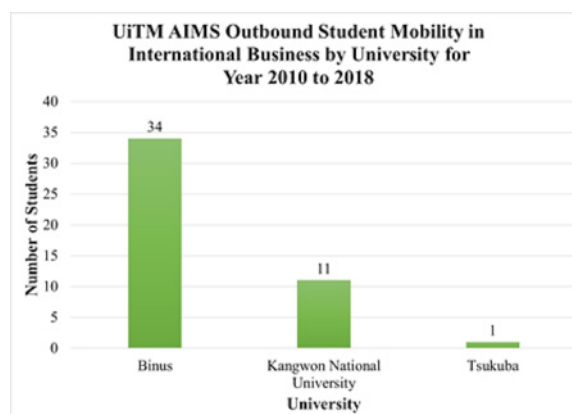


FIGURE 3. Outbound Student Mobility by Field of Study under AIMS at UiTM for Year 2010 to 2018.

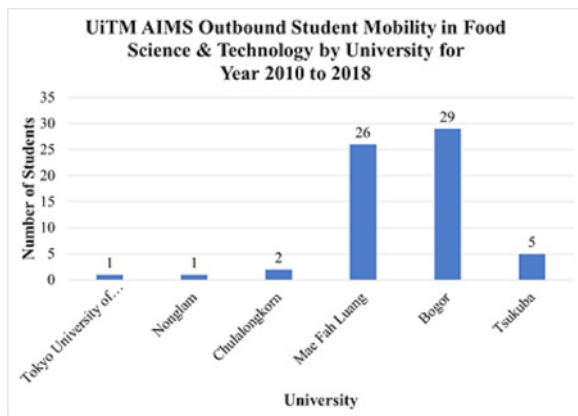


FIGURE 4. Outbound Student Mobility by Field of Study under AIMS at UiTM for Year 2010 to 2018.

Based on the results, it can be seen that Indonesia received the most number of students from Malaysia for the AIMS programme with a total of 91 students which was more than 60% of the 151 total students. This could be due to its geographical location being closer to Malaysia and mainly due to having more similarities and familiarities in the culture and language than other countries. Exchange rate and cost of living could also be one of the factors that affect the students' decision-making process in deciding their destinations for mobility programmes. The decision to spend a study period abroad are socially and biographically embedded and can only be understood by taking into consideration the macroeconomic context (Van Mol & Timmerman 2014). Nonetheless, another factor that could also play a major role in the students' decision is family influence. There could be parents or other siblings who helped the students to decide which country to choose for mobility programme based on the factors aforementioned. It could also be assumed that safety of the students is of utmost importance for their families. With regards to safety, a country's background in terms of social and political security and peace is taken into consideration when deciding. Other than that, a university's reputation is equally important as the deciding factor to choose their destination for the programme.

The study composed of an integration of both quantitative and qualitative data, which were collected and discussed. The quantitative data was presented based on the survey on students' experience who had completed their programme under AIMS. On the other hand, qualitative data was obtained from observations and information from the students' written report and video-recording of their experience throughout their study abroad.

A survey was conducted on AIMS students who completed the programme in 2019. A total of 40 respondents participated in the survey. As shown in Figure 5, the AIMS partner universities attended by the respondents were Kangwon National University (12), Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (7), Daegu Catholic University (5), Tsukuba University (3), Mae Fah Luang University (1), Binus International University (2), Prince of Songkla University (1), Bogor Agricultural University (7), Tokyo University of Agricultural technology (1) and Nong Lam University (1).

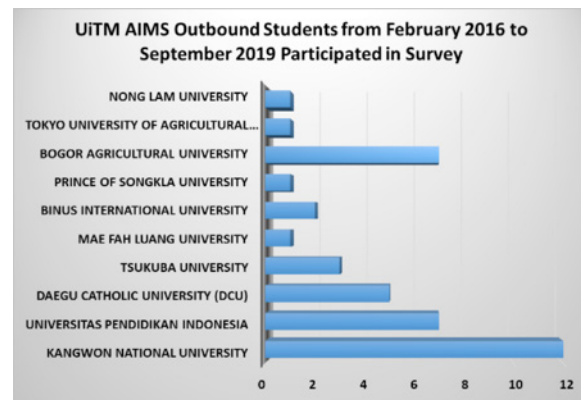


FIGURE 5. UiTM AIMS Outbound Students from February 2016 to September 2019 Participated in Survey.

1. Observations and information from the students' written reports as well as videos were also analyzed and recorded. The feedback is crucial in supporting the quantitative data. Ten questions were posed on topics that describe the students' satisfaction from attending AIMS exchange programme as follows:
 2. gained new learning experiences;
 3. gained cross cultural exposure;
 4. being able to adapt and act in new situation;
 5. communicating more skillfully;
 6. being more confident and self-reliant;
 7. improved critical thinking skills;
 8. being able to respect, interact and work with people from other backgrounds and culture;
 9. helped to better understand and appreciate own cultural values;
 10. encouraged to make new friends without prejudice; and
 11. enhanced personal network at global level.

The participants provided their responses based on a 5-point Likert scale that expresses how much they agree or disagree with the questions. The following

paragraphs detailed the observations and experiences that the students had obtained after successfully completed the AIMS programme.

1. Gained new learning experiences

Based on the survey, 87.5% of the students strongly agreed that the AIMS programme provided them with new learning experiences and opportunities while 12.5% agreed to the question. Going abroad definitely offered one of a kind experiences which cannot be obtained by staying locally. International mobility programmes offer new perspective in life (Jovanovska et al. 2018). Students are able to venture into things that they have not done before. Hence, the students see that it is important for them to 'get out from their comfort zone'. By doing so, will they gain new experiences and experience new meaning in their lives.

2. Gained cross cultural exposure

With regards to cross cultural exposure, 85.0% of the students strongly agreed to the question and only 15.0% agreed that the programme had given them immense cross-cultural exposure. This unique experience allowed the students to learn more about other cultures which would strengthen their sense of tolerance and understanding of another culture. Thus, international mobility programme affects students' experience and perception of other cultural practices tremendously (Richardson & Munday 2013). By having a firsthand global experience in cultural diversity, students will embrace the differences and acknowledge that people from different culture actually have some similarities and that it brings people together. This seems to support the idea that interacting with native speakers in cultural contexts plays an important role in developing cultural awareness the participants gain while abroad.

3. Being able to adapt and act in new situation

The impact of the programme on the students' ability to adapt and act in new situation was strongly supported by 75.0% of the responding students, whilst 25.0% agreed. Adapting to new situation is crucial as it allows a person to adopt 'adaptability' skill and easily adjust to new life by developing life competency (Amendola & Restaino 2017). This helps the students to be more resilient in their new 'adopted' environment. In order to succeed, adaptability is the

key to thrive and survive especially when living in a foreign country.

4. Communicating more skillfully

Students were able to communicate skillfully with 87.5% of them strongly agreed and the remaining 12.5% agreed. Through the AIMS programme, students had the opportunities to meet people of different backgrounds and this require them to communicate effectively. Cross-cultural setting allows students to come together and communicate effectively thus, enhance understanding of different people and cultures (Genç İter, 2016). Communicating effectively is the key in adapting and surviving in a new environment. Students are able to understand cultural nuances through language use. Thus, students have to sharpen their communication skills.

5. Being more confident and self-reliant

Out of the 40 responding students, 80.0% strongly agreed that they have become more confident and self-reliant after completing the programme. However, only 20.0% of the responding students agreed. One can surmise that being in a new place demanded that a person to be self-reliant in adjusting to new situation and thus, helping to build confidence. Through international mobility programmes, students develop and become more confident and independent. They are able to make own decisions and become more reliable and convinced they could succeed in life (Jovanovska et al. 2018). Students have the ability to develop self-confident and self - reliant to fit in their new environment.

6. Improved critical thinking skills

The AIMS exchange programme required students to take courses at partner universities according to selected fields of studies. It offered some level of critical thinking with 60.0% of the students strongly agreed and 40.0% agreed. Adjusting to new situation, meeting people of various backgrounds, accepting different opinions and making logical judgements required a person to evaluate and analyze all options reasonably. Through mobility programmes, students become more receptive and open towards other people's ideas. Students are able to develop their own critical thinking skills which enable them to deal with problems (Genç İter 2016), by reasoning well. Being in a different situation and environment forces the students to rely on their own reasoning and thinking ability.

7. Being able to respect, interact and work with people from other backgrounds and culture

Adjusting to new life that is far away from home has always been a challenge to those who has never travel abroad. One could easily assimilate to a new place by opening one's mind and being responsive to learning about other cultures. In the survey, 85.0% strongly agreed and 15.0% agreed that the AIMS programme gave them the chance and enable them to respect, interact and work with people of different backgrounds and cultures (Watson & Wolfel 2016). Intercultural and cross-cultural competence is imperative for students to adjust and integrate themselves seamlessly when joining international mobility programmes (Matei 2019). Gaining knowledge of other culture as well as foreign language competency also contribute in enhancing international competence of the participating students in mobility programmes.

8. Helped to better understand and appreciate own cultural values

Going abroad and living in a different culture could bring a feeling of longingness which could lead to better understanding and appreciating own cultural values. A total of 85.0% of the responding students strongly agreed while only 15.0% agreed that the AIMS programme helped them to be more understanding and appreciative of their own cultural values. Living abroad allowed a person to see the different values whether positive or negative of own culture and that one can learn something from it. Engaging in international experiences could cultivate students as global citizens that readily accepting foreign cultures and practices (Richardson & Munday 2013). Besides, as highlighted by Atalar (2020), these kind of programmes help in developing good relations among countries, and develop better understanding between nations of the participating students.

9. Encouraged to make new friends without prejudice

Making new friends without prejudice is a difficult task whenever one is abroad. By participating in AIMS programme, 85.0% of the students strongly agreed and 15.0% agreed that the programme encouraged them to make new friends without judging a person based on his or her appearance and background. Gaining friendship is an experience that is unique to each individual. It could be a relationship or friendship

that lasts forever and provides opportunities for future partnerships (Huang et al. 2014).

10. Enhanced personal network at global level

International mobility opens a wide range of opportunities that enhance networking at global level. Traveling abroad increased the chance of meeting new people with different knowledge, expertise and resources. 82.5% strongly agreed and 17.5% agreed that from their participation in the AIMS programme, their personal network with people around the world had increased. Additionally, mobility programme serves as a platform to foster international networking which could further intensify mobility opportunities for students and universities. As a result of participating in mobility programme, students are able to grow personally and professionally (Lesjak et al. 2015). This will lead to future benefits for the student beyond their degree which could give an added advantage in their professional employment and career. Thus, making connections as early as possible in college life is crucial. Generally, the ability to travel, meet others, network and greatly expand knowledge in this way is something that happens later in a research career.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF STUDY

The study has great influenced on programmes and courses offered at the institution. This study has an implication on curriculum and instructions of taught courses and pedagogical approaches in the university. Therefore, academicians at the institution need to develop new approaches and activities in order to gain a competitive advantage over other institutions. This will enable students participating in international mobility programmes to immerse and adapt well in host institutions. Therefore, mobility programmes had a profound effect on policy decision-making in the academic education system of the institution which needs to be addressed.

The findings in this study support the calls for more evidence-based decision-making in the area of study abroad programme courses offered by AIMS Programme. This is due to learning gain in a study abroad environment do not happen by accident and that it cannot be explicated to some degree.

A thorough assessment and data analysis are invaluable tools to investigate benefits and gains from study abroad, especially the language and cultural

socialization variables involved in those benefits and gains. Furthermore, the findings of this study also suggest that an ethnographic or longitudinal study could be important to fully understand the socialization variables at work and how study abroad programme developers can leverage these processes to promote learning gains and benefits for the participants. Some evidence-based leveraging activities which are implied by this study could be further improved by future studies to include the following at three phases of the programme, namely at pre, during and post :

1. Develop (Pre-Programme) assessment analysis to “match” students with lodging situation or institution abroad with students’ strengths
2. Assess teaching strategies at host institutions (During-Programme) to increase language contact during cultural activities or when navigating daily life in a dormitory and classroom environment
3. Develop (During-Programme) progress checks that encourage reflection and continue to promote the importance of language contact and cultural sensitivity at host institution
4. Work (During-Programme) with host institutions to provide and encourage structured language and cultural contact opportunities outside of class such as during community service, peer coaching, or travelling or other non-academic activities, along with reflection exercises that could be used for mentoring, reinforcement of programme goals, and benefit analysis.
5. Use student performance data (Post-Programme) to assess the effectiveness of study abroad programmes at host institutions and improve goal alignment with home programme in the institution.

CONCLUSION

The study was conducted to examine the impact of UiTM students’ participation in the AIMS programme. Using data from an academic semester abroad programme, this study explores students’ learning experience as well as several socialization aspects of the during-immersion experience in AIMS programme. Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that students gained personally and professionally. The students developed high level of confidence which influenced their academic development. Moreover, students who participated in AIMS also developed better communication and interpersonal skills to prepare themselves for working environment. These skills are important to meet the required characteristics of 21st Century employees

which befits characteristics that employers sought after.

However, the scale of students’ involvement in AIMS from the institution are low, due to limited fields offered in AIMS programme and limited funding by the institution. Hence, more fields of study and an increase in funding to sponsor students is highly recommended to allow a higher participation rate among the students. AIMS international mobility programme enables the institution to develop better image and branding of its global graduates. Hence, the institution is able to communicate more effectively with stakeholders including faculty, students, alumni, employers, and others through its reputable graduates. Thus, it is essential for the institution to strive on developing distinctive identities, as well as brand identity, image, and reputation of its graduates.

Results of the study also draw attention on student mobility programmes developers and institutions implementing it in order to improve efficiency. Furthermore, it may be used to support evaluation on the usefulness of funded mobility programmes to increase revenues for the institution and help boost the country’s economy.

The study revealed a significant role international mobility programmes play in students’ core competences and their development which benefits them tremendously. The implementation of AIMS as an international mobility programme help to strengthen economic integration and cultivate globalised human resources within the region.

The experience and exposure in different learning environment and culture allowed students to develop real-life skills whilst participating in mobility programmes such as AIMS. The mobility students developed high social skills and confidence level in order to adapt well in their new environment during the programme, which entails the ability to transfer ‘adaptability’ skills to their working environment. Other than that, the students have also developed positive personal characteristics in cross-cultural learning experiences and real communication skills. This development in social context is hard to gain in a monogamous campus environment such as at the institution.

Internationalisation in HEIs helps to increase quality human capital in the country based on global graduates and at the same time boost brand image and reputation of the institution. Therefore, this will heighten local and international employability rate amongst graduates from reputable HEIs.

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