

AIMS Students Mobility Programme in Thailand: Empirical Evidence on the Wider Sphere of Students' Perceptions

Program AIMS di Thailand: Bukti Empirikal pada Sfera yang Lebih Luas dalam Mengenalpasti Kepelbagaian Persepsi Pelajar

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ABSTRACT

The number of students participating in Asian International Mobility for Students (AIMS) programs has increased enormously over the years. The reasons are diverse and may range from personal growth to better employability prospects, together with improvement in foreign language skills and intercultural awareness. AIMS programs receive generous funding from Bahagian Education Malaysia (BEM) of the Ministry of Education, Malaysia, therefore their outcomes should be measured and evaluated. This paper focuses on students' experiences and their lesson learned as an alumnus of AIMS program. Reports submitted by the students were analysed using Leximancer and Spider-web Configuration. The content analysis done using Leximancer shows nine variables that are "orientation", "Thailand", "internship", "training", "water", "people", "food", "excursions" and "important" that according to the students are of important in terms of their experiences and satisfaction of the AIMS program. While the Spider-web Configuration shows five items that make the AIMS program worth it and pays off for students to participate. In particular, the students' international experiences caused them to reflect deeply on matters of different styles of education, gain valuable knowledge in their major and develop communication skills. In addition, they could live independently in another culture for an extended period, develop confidence and self-understanding, learn another language, gain a unique cultural experience and make new lifelong friends. The students' reflections also offer the university sector some points to consider with respect to student mobility programs, particularly in how participants are supported in interpreting their overseas experience.

Keywords: AIMS program; AIMS alumnus; experiences lesson learned; Leximancer; Spider-web Configuration

ABSTRAK

Bilangan pelajar yang mengambil bahagian dalam program Asian Mobility for Students (AIMS) telah meningkat dengan pesat sejak tahun kebelakangan ini. Ini adalah dari keinginan peribadi, penawaran prospek pekerjaan yang lebih baik, disokong oleh keupayaan pelajar mahir dalam bahasa asing dan kesedaran antara budaya. Program AIMS adalah di bawah pembiayaan dari Bahagian Pendidikan Malaysia (BEM) Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia. Artikel ini memberi tumpuan kepada pengalaman pelajar dalam pembelajaran mereka dan sebagai alumnus program AIMS. Hasil daripada laporan yang dikemukakan oleh pelajar, dianalisis dengan menggunakan Konfigurasi Leximancer dan Spider-web. Analisis kandungan yang dilakukan menggunakan Leximancer menunjukkan sembilan pembolehubah iaitu "orientasi", "Thailand", "latihan", "latihan", "air", "orang", "makanan", "lawatan" dan "penting" pelajar adalah penting dari segi pengalaman dan kepuasan pelajar terhadap program AIMS. Walaupun konfigurasi web Spider menunjukkan terdapat lima item yang membuat program AIMS ini bernilai dan bermanfaat kepada para pelajar yang menyertainya. Khususnya, pengalaman antarabangsa pelajar yang terkesan dengan pelbagai gaya pendidikan yang berbeza, mendapat pengetahuan yang berharga dalam kemahiran utama mereka dan mengembangkan cara mereka berkomunikasi. Selain itu, keupayaan para pelajar ini menjalani kehidupan dalam budaya lain bagi tempoh yang panjang, menjadikan mereka berkeyakinan dan memahami diri dan mempelajari bahasa lain. Para pelajar juga memperoleh pengalaman budaya yang unik dan akan menjadi pengalaman berharga untuk mereka sepanjang kehidupan. Refleksi para pelajar ini juga dapat membantu pihak universiti dari segi input bagi merangka program yang lebih berkesan berdasarkan pada pengalaman pembelajaran para pelajar di luar negara ini.

Kata kunci: AIMS program ; Pembelajaran, Konfigurasi web spider; Leximancer; AIMS alumni

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, internationalization has moved more and more to the forefront as a keyword of university policy at universities across the globe. As globalization has encompassed more and more national university systems in a transnational system of cooperation and competition, more and more universities have made it a priority to join “the global flow” of education and research.

This can be seen through an increasing number of students at all levels nowadays are traveling internationally or having domestic intercultural encounters in an effort to enhance their global understanding. Educational travel can open up worlds for students that they may not readily discover themselves. If done well, it can lead to intellectual growth, spiritual awakening, and a sense of connectedness with something greater than oneself and one's immediate surroundings—be that nature, other people, or both.

Student mobility or study abroad plan may generally be described as a program where students choose to spend one or more academic terms overseas at another institution. The sense of “study abroad” and “student mobility” are often used as synonymous words, because there is no significant distinction between the two. Study abroad programs typically require full-time students from a particular institution to study at another institution for a period of time typically at a partner institution and they are considered as the same as students categorized as studying abroad because they too registered for classes at other institution that is not in their motherland (Kalia & Arora 2012).

In terms of benefits, the classification of mobility and study abroad students may not explicitly indicate any significance to students but may rather have some value for the university in terms of management and categorization of students' data records. This also provides value for each institution's potential plans and policies when deciding the numbers of each group of students that can be accepted to study in each academic term or year. In accordance with the global trend and movements, student mobility and enculturation are significant in the present setting of the tertiary education. University students are expected to acquire diverse soft-skills and competency in their educational pursuits, other than getting a degree (Ling & Lau Kui-Ling 2019).

Mobility initiatives for students have evolved internationally and are being used as a tool for improving education. This plays a role as support for the educational system in improving the overall cultural and content structure of the academic system

so that it is more credible and holistic that will fit the demand of the working industries. Besides that, this also inspires the students to become more internationalized and become more acquainted with international education. In addition, student mobility aims at having a positive impact on personal growth on the education system, schools or among the students themselves. This also allows students to explore, understand and appreciate cultural diversity. It also helps to broaden the personal and educational perspectives of skilled graduates of universities who will become the driving force of national, regional, and global workforce. This can also lead to productive human resources and bring about standardization of education and international development of universities (Codina, Nicolás, López & Hernán 2013).

Student mobility programs are a key component of higher education institutions around the world's international development strategies, from Asia, North America, Australasia and Europe. The programs contribute greatly in assisting graduates in living and working more effectively in this globalized and interconnected world and this can be seen in several studies done by Daly (2011), Asoaka and Yano (2009), Wiers-Jenssen (2008) and Norris and Gillespie (2008). Based on the studies done, it shows that students' mobility programs are one of many tools that can be used to develop student's international communication skills, language skills, and cultural awareness to support the students and prepared them as professionals in the future of global workforce. As the modern world has changed, so does the contemporary working environment. Students today had to accommodate and prepare themselves for the labor market way before they are graduating. To say reversely, our dynamic world needs multifaceted-competent workers who will lead the world forward. Thus, student mobility programs had significantly empowered students with the skills necessary for the challenges in the modern-day working society.

According to Codina, Nicolás, López, & Hernán (2013), the students who had participated in the students' mobility program are equipped with the competencies gained from the program experiences can contribute greatly to the world, much more than other players in the higher educational fields. Studying abroad could facilitate personal development, students will experience a unique culture and lifestyle while living abroad independently. Study by Gilmartin, Raimi-Abraham, Espadas-Garcia and Gul (2016), shown that the scholars will feel more empowered, confident, and independent and have an increased sense of initiative

after their international experience. Studying abroad is anticipated to facilitate professional development. Study by Gilmartin, Raimi-Abraham, Espadas-Garcia and Gul (2016), which involve a pharmacist students, were belief to possess the chance to spot, compare, and contrast different healthcare practices between their host and residential countries, with the potential to find out unique and innovative ways of practicing pharmacy and advance their academic knowledge. The study also find out that studying abroad is anticipated to reinforce international mobility, which helping the students in making an informed decisions regarding their future work opportunities within the host country after spent time at that country. Also the international friendships and networking can facilitate future visits to the host country, and students may have increased motivation to think about future employment or training opportunities either within the host country or elsewhere abroad. The study also highlights that studying abroad is anticipated to extend employability and career prospects. The unique experiences of those students make them more competitive candidates within the pharmacy manpower. The professional contacts made will assist with future opportunities for employment, research, and further education within the pharmacy field. This study underlines the advantages of international mobility programs can ultimately contribute to developing a competent and assured globalized student in their field of study (Gilmartin, Raimi-Abraham, Espadas-Garcia and Gul 2016).

Universities round the world seek to internationalize students to arrange them for an increasingly globalized world. Outbound mobility experiences (OMEs) are recognized joined of the foremost effective ways to foster independent thinking, cultural sensitivity, and a way of 'world mindedness'. In Australia, the upper education encourages the undergraduate and post-graduate students to participate in OMEs. The study by Jones, Power, Gray, Downey, Hall and Truong (2016) suggest that the university has to do more to make awareness, explain the professional and employability benefits, and build a travel culture where students are encouraged to grow their international skills and communication competencies. This research shows that the students mobility indeed an important part in students enhancement and future career.

In Malaysian setting, several study explore the advantage of the mobility program. Ministry of Higher Education did encourage the scholars to participate in OMEs. The study by Singh and Jack (2018) identified three sets of advantages linked to specific economic, educational, social and cultural

pull factors: academic success, building knowledge and skills, and contributing to home country on return.

A study by Azzwan, M. D., and Azhar, A. E. (2017) suggested that the mobility students gaining new living experiences and new foreign friends. One study by Ling, W. N., & Lau Kui-Ling (2019) examines that the students learnt and exposed themselves through intercultural communication within the host country had impacted their real-life experiences in terms of interactional behavioral changes. The students' perspectives indicated that they had improved under the mobility programs in terms of language proficiency, enculturation, self-dependence and self-development. This information and intercultural skills may be utilize for employability purposes.

This poses an interesting point for the authors. Therefore, an in-depth qualitative analysis was done to determine the quality and impacts in terms of experiences of the alumnus of a student mobility program and in this paper, ASEAN International Mobility for Students (AIMS) Program in Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT).

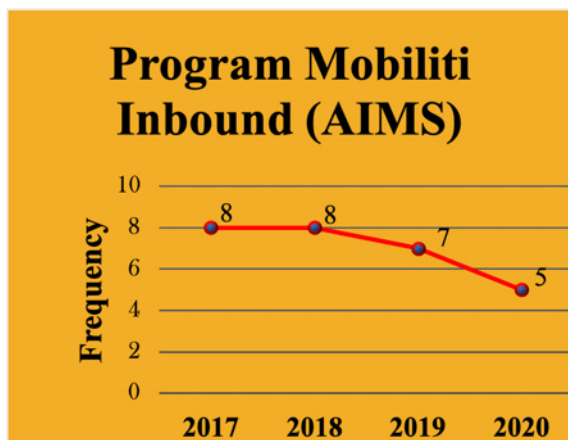
ASEAN MOBILITY FOR STUDENTS (AIMS) PROGRAM IN UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA TERENGGANU (UMT)

The Asian International Mobility for Students Program (AIMS) is a collaborative and multilateral student exchange program that involves government and higher education institution (HEIs) to enhance student mobility in Southeast Asia and beyond. Meanwhile, ASEAN International for Mobility Students (AIMS) formally known as M-I-T. Malaysia- Indonesia-Thailand was formed in 2009 with the spirit to harmonizing higher education environment among countries in Southeast Asia region. It is a collaborative effort from the higher education ministries of the three countries and SEAMEO Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development (SEAMEO RIHED) which act as secretariat for the student mobility program among the countries. It started as a pilot project involving the three countries but eventually expanded to several other countries in the region. Due to the expanding number of member countries, the name was changed to ASEAN International Mobility for Students (AIMS) in 2012 and subsequently changed to Asian International Mobility for Students (AIMS) in 2018. At present, the number of member countries has grown from 3 to 10 countries involving 10 study fields (Nordiana 2020).

Malaysia was a pioneer in the Malaysia-Indonesia-Thailand (M-I-T) Student Mobility Pilot Project which was initiated in 2009 through the participations of the governments of the three countries. It was developed as a precursor to expanding a student mobility programme to the Southeast Asia region and beyond which is now known as AIMS Program. This program has since been joined by Japan and Korea. Initially, six public Malaysian universities involved namely Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) and one comprehensive university (Universiti Teknologi MARA). The universities were selected based on their niche study fields.

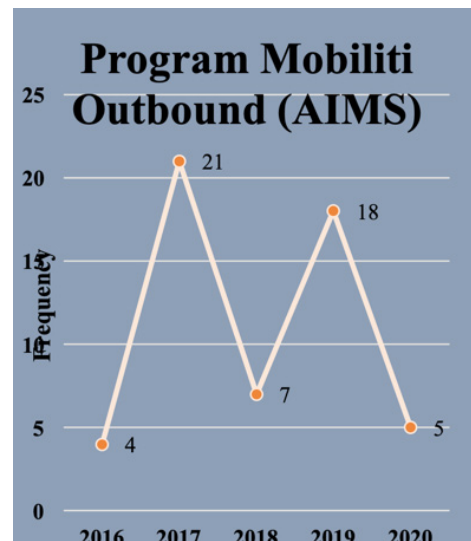
Due to the increasing growth of students under the AIMS program and demands, three new study fields were introduced that were Environmental Science and Management, Biodiversity and Marine Science. With that notion, two more universities were invited to participate in the AIMS Malaysia that are Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) and Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) in 2015.

Since 2017, UMT received about twenty-eight inbound AIMS students from Thailand, Indonesia and Philippines. As UMT niche extending to Tourism and Hospitality in 2018, starting 2019 UMT starts receiving the inbounds students from Korea under this niche.



GRAPH 1. Inbound AIMS mobility at UMT

As for the outbound students, about fifty-five individuals across faculties have already benefited from the AIMS Program at UMT. These numbers justify, by themselves, the extended literature around this mobility phenomenon and the recommendations for the need of evaluating its qualitative effects (Huják 2015), the need of balancing the paybacks and value created with such program.



GRAPH 2. Outbound AIMS mobility at UMT

An important aspect to think through is mobility's relevance to these students' future professional careers. Indeed, internationalization goals include both blurring national borders and preparing students for career paths in a globalized world, making international careers increasingly desirable and a natural consequence. As several writers (e.g., Huják 2015; Paige et al. 2009) argue, the positive impact of online communication of host universities in a future global career and employability aspirations appears to indicate that the foreign skills gained or developed during student mobility are an important consequence. This research seeks to examine the assumptions of students about the effect that mobility experience may have on their professional careers, along with the skill set that was gained or built during that time. A qualitative exploratory approach has been adopted which includes reports submitted by the AIMS Program alumnus who spent one semester at Chiang Mai University and Kasetsart University, Thailand.

STUDENTS' EXPECTATION, MOTIVATION AND PERSPECTIVES OF AIMS PROGRAM

Following the Fourth ASEAN Summit in 1992, the ASEAN University Network (AUN) was established in 1995 with the goal of reinforcing the existing network of cooperation between leading ASEAN universities by fostering cooperation and solidarity between ASEAN scholars and academics; developing academic and professional human resources and facilitating the dissemination of information among the academic community of ASEAN (NUS). Hence,

the primary objective of the AIMS system with the ASEAN University Network (AUN) initiative was to foster a holistic approach that would connect cultural awareness, interpersonal interactions, linguistic difficulties, intellectual development and professional opportunities together (Nordiana 2020).

With the mission and vision of the ASEAN University Network (AUN), the AIMS program was initiated to provide a rich platform in the student mobility program's content structure that includes speaking a new language, improving communication skills and enriching personal development through independence and trust (Nordiana 2020). AIMS provide an opportunity for students to learn about themselves and improve their cultural horizon within the ASEAN essence. Still, the impact of mobility experiences on professional and employability skills remains a matter of doubt (Coleman, 2015; Paige et al. 2009). While some studies (e.g., Bracht et al. 2006; Engel 2010) report positive impacts in their professional development from intercultural learning among students, others argue that exposure to a new environment is insufficient to impact their careers (Alfranseder et al. 2011; Ishak et al. 2008). Moreover, several studies (e.g., Lesjak et al. 2015; Van Mol & Ekamper 2016) concluded that students are motivated primarily by experiential objectives (personal growth) and not by academic or professional goals (professional growth).

Based on this, therefore it is crucial to understand students' perceptions and perspectives about the AIMS program especially concerning their self-development in terms of their readiness in facing the IR4.0 working society.

IR4.0 WORKING SOCIETY

It is pretty obvious that Industry 4.0 or Industrial Revolution 4.0 (IR 4.0) is present everywhere. It is not just a forecast; it is existing and has great impact on human labour and jobs market. In essence, IR 4.0 is a higher level of automation and interconnectivity, which means that sensors, machines, workpieces, and information technology (IT) systems are connected along the value chain. Smart machines collaborate with workers on the assembly line; smart transport systems transfer goods from one place to another; and smart devices gather and analyze real-time data. As a result, IR 4.0, on the one hand, will enable faster, more flexible and more efficient processes to produce higher-quality goods at reduced costs. On the other hand, it will modify the profile of work, digitalize the workplace and cause employees to

face a challenge in keeping up with the industry (The World Economic Forum, 2018). It is evident that workers will need to acquire different and all new sets of skills relevant to the future, such as flexibility, adaptability, innovation, ICT and digital skills, etc.

In today's society, the importance of innovations is highly emphasized. Innovations are seen as solutions for many global problems; for social and environmental issues, as key elements for organizations and companies to survive in the changing world, boosters for the economy, and as a trendy concept highlighted in many policies. As a result, there seems to be an urgent need for professionals who are capable of participating in innovation processes and who can contribute to the creation of innovations.

Malaysian university students will eventually face this future of work. In order for them to be ready in facing this future, the mobility program can be seen as a training ground to face this. The World Economic Forum (2018) in its biennial 'Future of Jobs Report' listed ten critical skills for Future of Work for year 2020 and beyond. These critical skillsets - complex problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, people management, coordinating with others, emotional intelligence, judgment and decision making, service orientation, negotiation, and cognitive flexibility as core skills that are required to survive and to thrive in the future workplace. Without these critical core skills, not only will graduates fail to secure future jobs, but they will also fail to contribute to the Industry 4.0 economy and society in a productive manner. Without a doubt, these critical skills are challenging for the younger generation to acquire without sustained and directed effort. In fact, failure to learn these skills will decrease the job preparedness level of the younger generation of future employees. Career preparation is the bridge or preparatory stage that signals the transition from 'campus life' into the working world. It is highly likely that students at universities who are not ready for future careers will be doomed to the lower rungs of the future job market. A study by Rahmat, Adnan, and Mohtar (2019) indicate that there is a need for Malaysian university students to be groom to face the Industry 4.0 skillsets and they need to be ready to look for future careers based on the critical skills that they have (or have not) acquired. From the study, the actual career readiness level of Malaysian university students still need to be improve to ensure they could thrive for the Industry 4.0 era and the future World of Work.

In Industry 4.0, the graduates are expected to be socially competent, adaptive competent, digital competent and must have a high level of personal competence. Mobility program such as AIMS program become part of the initiative to prepare the students to face this future work. As they will face real challenges and real problem in the real world rather than just learning from the theories or in the classroom.

METHODOLOGY

Considering the proposed study objectives, a qualitative exploratory approach was adopted with the purpose of assessing students' perceptions and expectations on the impacts of mobility on their experiences in Chiang Mai University and Kasetsart University, Thailand. Record analysis is a structured method for document review or assessment— both written and electronic (computer-based and internet-transmitted) content. Like other qualitative research analytical methods, record analysis demands that evidence be analyzed and understood to obtain meaning, comprehension, and scientific knowledge creation (Corbin & Strauss 2008; Rapley 2007). The reports submitted by the students after participating the AIMS Program in Thailand were analysed using Leximancer.

To automatically identify and map themes and concepts in textual data, Leximancer employs proximity values for text mining and artificial learning (Smith & Humphreys 2006). The software uses details regarding word frequency and co-occurrence to classify groups of words that continue to be used in the text together. In that word strings are not required, this approach differs from standard content analysis; instead, Leximancer identifies what concepts exist in a set of texts, allowing the automatic coding of concepts in a grounded fashion.

Terms which very often occur are regarded as concepts. The software includes an interactive concept mapping facility which provides an overview of the data set's conceptual structure which helps the author interpret. Concepts that often co-occur within the same two-sentence coding block forcefully attract each other when the map is clustered, so similar concepts tend to settle in proximity. Concept clusters are grouped by theme circles to sum up the main ideas in clusters. Each theme is named after the most prominent concept in that group, which is also indicated by the largest dot in the theme cluster. Using the concept map and rank-ordered concept lists, the authors can read instances of specific concepts to understand their

relationships. Thus, the map visually represents the strength of association between concepts and provides a conceptual overview of the semantic structure of the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The approach for this paper was to conduct an initial (automatic) general review of the most commonly occurring principles. The specific feature words (and not, etc.) were omitted in Leximancer that include a standard set of excluded words. General terms were removed (such as paper, reviewed, suggested, showed, outcomes) that were commonly used in the reports but did not add meaning to the concept maps. Therefore, the combination of both singular and plural words; finally, the terms religion and cultures were integrated because there were so closely positioned in the semantic space. Figure 1 shows the diagram of the principles and topics in general.

Figure 1 shows the principles arising from the grounded study within the semantic terrain defined by the diagram. It is possible to determine the closeness of their contextual relationship to other concepts when looking at the role of the individual concepts. The map also displays key themes (groups of semantic concepts), shown by a circle. The themes are numbered in rank order, with the most prominent theme, Orientation, ranked 1 and Water, the least prominent theme, ranked 7. The importance of a term is shown by the scale of its dot in the data set: the more prominent it is, the greater the dot. If a term sits next to one of the concepts marked on the map, the theme is more generally aligned with it. Likewise, the more important the position of a term on the "bubble", the more thematically it is discussed.

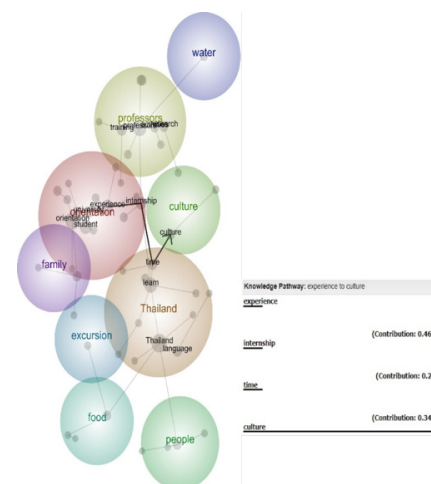


FIGURE 1. Concepts Map Emerged from the Leximancer Analysis.

In Figure 2, the concept map uses the space between concepts nodes as a metaphor for the ‘distance’ (i.e. similarity and differences) between the concepts themselves. Prompting that each concept is defined in the Leximancer thesaurus by a list of weighted words which two concepts may be differed by comparing their respective word lists. The ‘pathways’ box provides a graphical interpretation of such contrasts. By clicking two concepts, and in this case the Experience and Culture, exemplifies the pathway between them. These relationships between concepts are best thought of as correlations. Based on the knowledge pathway between the two concepts, it reveals that these words’ connection is somewhat weaker, with a measure of association of 0.34. In other words, the culture is not the students’ priority.

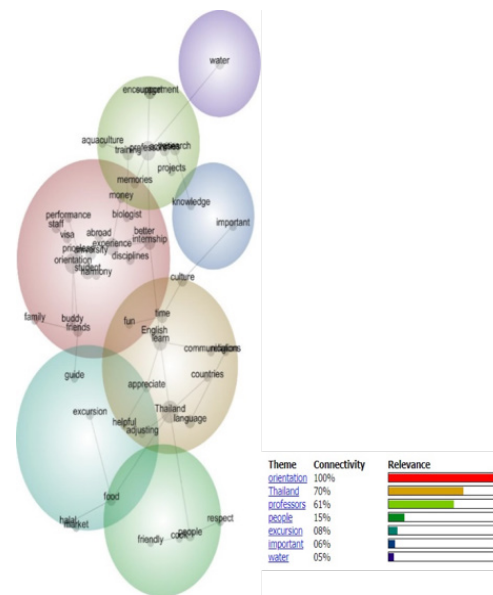


FIGURE 3. Concepts Pathway between Experience and Research.

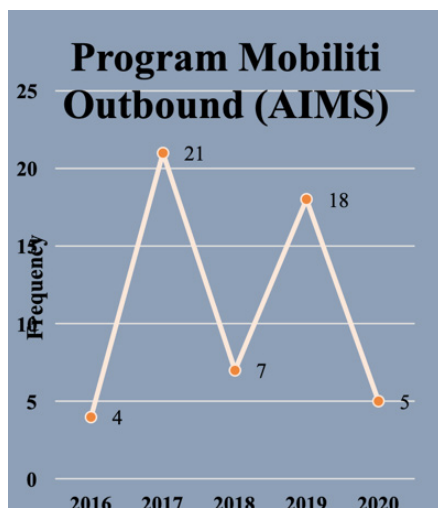


FIGURE 2. Concepts Pathway Graphic between Experience and Culture.

A similar procedure was also used between Experience and Research (Figure 3). In this case, the connection is somewhat good “strength”, with a measure of association of 0.63. In other words, the students had quality experience in terms of study in the host university.

Figure 4 also shows a weak correlation between Experience and People with only 0.14. This shows that meeting new people is not necessarily part of their experiences while at the Host University.

In terms of Orientation, Figure 5 shows an exceptionally strong correlation between Experience and Orientation with 1.0. This shows that the orientation day organized by the host university was extraordinarily memorable.

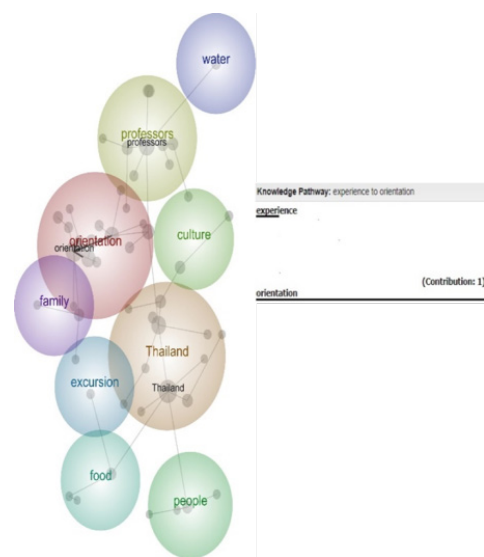


FIGURE 4. Experience and People Concepts Pathway

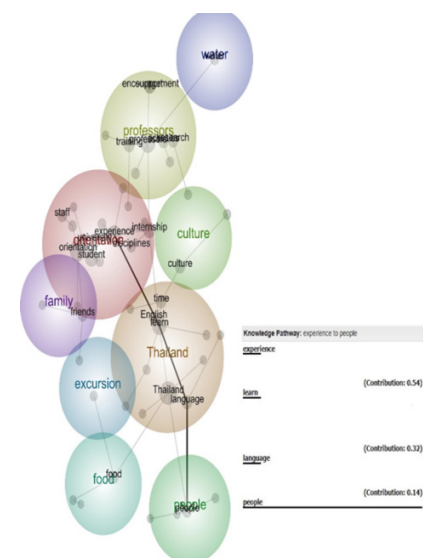


FIGURE 5. Experience and Orientation Concepts Pathway

A spider-web configuration was created to illustrate the ratings on the most memorable experience the students had while participating in the AIMS Program at Chiang Mai University and Kasetsart University, Thailand (see Figure 6).

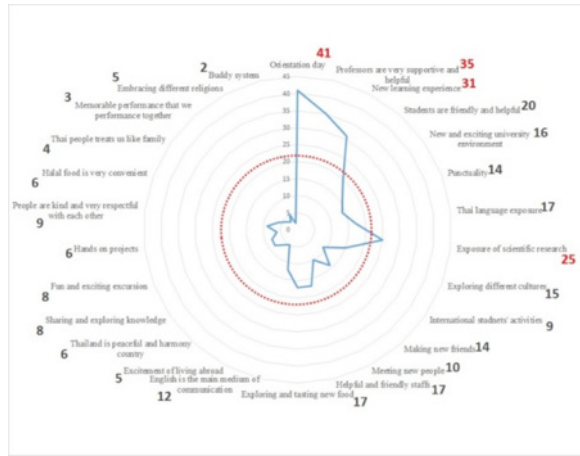


FIGURE 6. Spider-Web Configuration Based on the Frequency of Words Occurrences in the Data Text

From the spider-web configuration, it shows that majority of the students have memorable experience during the Orientation Day and memories of the helpful and supportive professors at both Chiang Mai University and Kasetsart University, Thailand. Based on Figure 6, it can be concluded that the students who participated in the AIMS Program in both Chiang Mai University and Kasetsart University agreed that their best moments are involving in learning and education experiences.

From this finding, it indicates that UMT students' gain quite a personal experiences during their day at the universities. The relationship between the lecturer and students were treasured the most in their experience while study abroad. This indicate that personal touch from the academic staff helps the mobility students to excel and to adapt with the teaching and learning at the host university. This indirectly created a relationship competency where they able to build a good rapport with the new people. In short they actually learning to build on their relationship sensibly. They also build their personal qualities such as coping strategies, resilience and adaptability to the new environment with the help of this lecturer–student relationship.

They also experience the different ways of learning and education at the universities they participated. This experience could be a benchmarks for the host and home universities in shaping the students experience. Even though the cultural experience is not the main theme in this findings, the learning and education experience indirectly relate

to the culture of the university as the students might need to adapt to the ways of teaching and learning at a particular country. As every university from different country might have different approach in teaching and learning. All of this experience regardless whether it is a cultural or learning and education experience could help the UMT students to be prepared for the working environment in the era of 21st century.

CONCLUSION

The effects of the international mobility activities varied considerably for individual students, ranging from clearly positive effects in terms of progress in competencies and personal growth to considerable negative or adverse effects indicating that the experience had hardly been beneficial for the student or, even worse, that it had been damaging.

Despite its exploratory nature and scope, this study provides rich empirical evidence on the wider sphere of students' perceptions in regards with student mobility program. These perceptions can be viewed as fundamental for the future participants of the student mobility program and for the way forward on how the student mobility program should be conducted. While existing literature tends to position the development of professional skills as a second-order reason for spending a semester at another university, this study shows that AIMS program students ignore the implications for future careers, and in some cases, mobility can only trigger international plans within the academic stage. Overall, students seem to pay clear attention to what's memorable for them, and that may give AIMS program secretariat all the reasons to pay attention to a deeper assessment of the intangible aspects of' mobility applicants. Universities should provide engaging learning experiences to optimize the potential skill development, while training their students to take full advantage of mobility internationally, in order to foster these important implications and outcomes of AIMS mobility. Once again, the evaluation of learned and existing expertise is important to determine the effectiveness of mobility initiatives.

The findings of this study provide insights into the Malaysian higher education policy makers especially university administrators to manage the changes and accommodate the needs of the mobility (outbound) students in order to help them get the best experience from their study abroad program.

This research presented evidence that intercultural experience had a positive influence

on students' attitudes towards academic mobility programs. More specifically, it was identified that having friends from other cultures and attending intercultural events could be accepted as predictors of a student's willingness to study abroad. Therefore, academic institutions could employ these two intercultural contact forms to motivate UMT's students in joining academic exchange programs.

Finally, the research identified several suggestions for implementing intercultural pedagogical practices in mobility programme, that includes;

1. Acknowledge anxiety and offer support
2. Be mindful of different thresholds of anxiety
3. Affirm students' self-identity
4. Model tolerance for ambiguity

We argued that learning outcomes should not exclusively be based on student motivations or policy objectives but also on empirical data demonstrating what students are learning in real-life intercultural contacts. Not only does this allow for setting more realistic learning goals, it can also contribute to implementing these goals effectively into teaching materials. In defining what novice learners should learn in study and placement mobility, it is also important to take in the learning experiences of students who have already participated multiple times in study and mobility and have had more opportunities to learn from intercultural contact. If more research was directed at this group of experienced students, intercultural education in student mobility contexts could be more firmly based on intercultural learning that has taken place over a longer term, bringing it more in line with findings that identity processes continue to evolve well beyond the mobility experience at hand.

The nature of intercultural experience: the research context interest in what constitutes culture, its deep-rootedness and its unspoken assumptions has increased over recent decades as the phenomenon of 'sojourning' (taking up temporary residence in another culture) has become more common. The findings of this study are contextualised concerning the nature of intercultural as well as cross-cultural experience, the stresses of studying abroad, and the interaction between home and host cultures in student adaptation. Cross-cultural experience and intercultural experience tend to be used interchangeably in the literature. Although they are not mutually exclusive, they embrace different focuses. The notion of cross-cultural experience inherently stresses boundary crossing, differences

and diversity; intercultural experience, on the other hand, 'encompasses both domestic and international contexts and implies cultures interacting'. This study takes the view that cross-cultural is embedded within the intercultural experience. Its primary focus is, therefore, upon the latter. Although individuals may experience both cross- and inter-cultural experiences simultaneously when they are exposed to different cultural environments and in encounters with different people, the tensions caused by their attempts to manage cultural differences tend to be more overwhelming in the initial phase of these intercultural experiences. As they adapt to the new environment, they may gradually notice that they have, either consciously or subconsciously, become 'one of them'. However, certain aspects of cultural beliefs and values may be beyond modification or 'integration' and will never be completely abandoned for others. Thus, individuals may develop 'proficiency in self-expression and in fulfilling their various social needs' in the host culture, whilst continuing to experience a sense of boundary or 'otherness' when confronted with conflicting values and beliefs. This area of tension between the locus of self (belonging) and simultaneous sense of otherness (alienation) requires further systematic, empirical research in the context of internationalisation.

The research findings challenge the notion that international students' intercultural adaptation is linear and passive (in the sense that it is externally expected) and point to the presence of a complex set of shifting associations between language mastery, social interaction, personal development and academic outcomes. It is the management of this amalgam, as well as the availability of differentiated and timely support which results in intercultural adaptation, and the successful reconfiguration of 'identity'. Moreover, this research suggests that personal, pedagogical and psychological factors are as important as organisational and social cultures in influencing students' adaptation, and ultimate success.

The research does, on the one hand, reinforce the 'richness and fragmentation' of intercultural experience, as described by Kim (2005). On the other hand, as senses of belonging and alienation co-exist, and as learners initially fear and then appreciate new ways of learning, we begin to see how the international student as agent of his or her own success creates a coherent trajectory out of these fragments and contradictions. The cross-cultural is not only within the intercultural: it is within themselves.

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