

Study Abroad Benefits and Graduates Employability: Asian International Mobility for Students Programme (AIMS): Malaysia

Kebaikan Pengajian di Luar Negara dan Kebolehpasaran Graduan: Asian International Mobility for Students (AIMS): Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The multitude of existing research conducted within the field of study abroad generally reinforces the popular understanding that the practice not only broadens the mind, provides valuable experiences and enhances stagnating perspectives, but also contributes to a skillset that is becoming increasingly necessary for success in the globally focused world of today. Despite the evidence supporting their effectiveness, relatively few undergraduate students of Malaysia choose to participate in some form of study abroad programmes especially to the ASEAN countries. The following analysis will examine the potential reasoning of why this is so. In this context the focus is on the mobility programme on the short-term exchange and study abroad issues. Through the survey, this research examined the attitudes and inhibitions of undergraduate university students as they relate to studying abroad and to what extent these perceptions fall in line with the escalating importance of employability. Used as an exemplifying case of Asian Mobility for Students Programmes (AIMS), ten participating public universities under the AIMS-Malaysia furnished the sample of participants used in this study. Factors such as a student's previous international travel experience and awareness of available programmes are seen to influence these perceptions to some degree. The students highlighted the benefits of studying abroad as to have better understanding of cultural differences and new friends share the same highest mean. The students also developed their soft skills by being more independent, confident and improve their problem-solving skills. In addition, they also have better communication, self-assessment and personal skills. The finding also showed that the most important criteria that the alumni being hired for their first job after graduation are communication skills, high adaptability, analytical thinking and problem solving. These findings corroborate international student mobility programmes whilst providing additional insight through student testimony. Indeed, AIMS programme leverages the competency and employability of students, hence contributes to producing global citizens and ASEAN harmonization.

Keywords: Study abroad; AIMS programme; alumni; skills; harmonization

ABSTRAK

Banyak penyelidikan yang dijalankan berkaitan keberkesanan pengajian di luar negara. Pengajian di luar negara dalam konteks ini adalah program pertukaran pelajar. Melalui kajian ini, ia telah dapat dibuktikan dapat memperluaskan minda, memberikan pengalaman berharga dan memperluaskan perspektif pelajar. Ia juga menyumbang kepada kemahiran pelbagai yang diperlukan persediaan kerjaya mereka kelak. Artikle ini mengkaji tentang keberkesanan program mobiliti, iaitu Asian International Mobility for Students (AIMS) bagi mempersiapkan para pelajar untuk bekerja. Kajian ini meneliti sikap dan kecenderungan pelajar berkaitan dengan pembelajaran di luar negara dan sejauh mana persepsi ini selaras dengan permintaan sektor pekerjaan yang semakin meningkat. Para pelajar menekankan tentang faedah belajar di luar negara dari segi pemahaman yang lebih baik tentang perbezaan budaya disamping dapat memperolehi kemahiran lembut. Mereka menjadi lebih yakin dan ia dapat meningkatkan kemahiran menyelesaikan masalah mereka. Mereka juga mempunyai komunikasi yang lebih baik, berjaya membuat penilaian diri dan meningkatkan kemahiran peribadi. Temuan juga mendapati bahawa kriteria yang paling penting yang diperolehi alumni selepas tamat pengajian adalah kemahiran komunikasi, pemikiran analitik serta penyelesaian masalah. Penemuan ini menyokong program mobiliti pelajar antarabangsa justeru, ia dapat memberikan maklumat tambahan tentang keberkesanan program mobiliti untuk persediaan pelajar bekerja kelak. Program AIMS ini memberikan manfaat serta kebolehpasaran pelajar dan ia dapat menyumbang kepada keharmonian warga Asian.

Kata kunci: Program pertukaran pelajar; Program AIMS; alumni; skil; harmoni

INTRODUCTION

Personal and professional benefits of studying abroad are correlated with the positive experiences that study abroad programmes offer. Studying abroad engages and affects participants' worldview, personal development, cultural interests, and influences decision-making (Norris and Gillespie 2008). Students' intentions can be influenced by many factors including gender, parents' education, prior international experience, age and household income (Pope et al. 2014). Nyaupane et al. (2011) stated that motivational factors can be grouped into four categories: cross-cultural experience, academics, future careers and family heritage. Differences exist in how students perceive study abroad benefits. A modern economy needs a modern mindset to run it, and a modern mindset is a product of modern culture and values (Heng 2007).

Study abroad offers an opportunity for students to learn the competitive skills necessary for the global marketplace, in addition to enhancing global citizenship and world-mindedness (Douglas and Jones-Rikkens 2001; Fischer 2008; NAFSA 2008; Tarrant et al. 2014). A recent study found for instance that students who studied abroad reported a greater ability to understand moral and ethical issues, improved communication skills as well as enhanced overall academic performance in college (Luo and Jamieson-Drake 2015).

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) realises on the important of unity and harmonising the higher education in the nation. The ASEAN community in 2015, as agreed by the 10 member countries, connect countries and community towards mobility opportunity for students and academicians in ASEAN. In addition, cross-border education services will increase within the country. The cross -border student movement is arguable the most visible impact to this development. One of the reasons of the movement from their home country to others is to seek a better-quality education, which increases their chances for employment (Gribble 2008). According to the APEC University Association, approximately 7.2 million students are predicted to seek a degree abroad by 2025 (APEC 2014).

In the past five years there have been steady growths of ASEAN students studying abroad concurrently with the steady economic growth in the region. UNESCO's Institute of Statistic, Global Flow of Tertiary Level of Students recorded that in 2009 there were about 166,000 (UNESCO Global Education Digest 2009) ASEAN students going

abroad for studies and in 2013, more than 220,000 students from ASEAN countries studied overseas. However, in 2013 only 9% from the total outbound students from the ASEAN region went for the intra ASEAN mobility for tertiary level (see Table 1).

TABLE 1. Outbound Students in ASEAN and Intra-ASEAN Mobility for Tertiary Level

Country	Total Outbound Students	Intra-ASEAN Mobility	Percentage (%)
Brunei	3,361	309	9.19
Cambodia	4,221	1,468	34.78
Indonesia	39,098	6,579	16.83
Lao PDR	4,985	3,184	63.87
Malaysia	56,260	2,766	4.92
Myanmar	6,388	1,833	28.69
Philippines	11,454	507	4.43
Singapore	22,578	855	3.79
Thailand	25,517	1,036	4.06
Vietnam	53,546	2,003	3.74
TOTAL	227,408	20,540	9.03

There is a disparity (UNESCO Education 2014) in the directions of the students' flow in regards to intra-ASEAN mobility. For example, Malaysia only sent 4.9% of their students to ASEAN universities while Indonesia had sent the largest number of students in the region with more than 6500 students and most of them study in Malaysia. After Malaysia, Vietnam is the second country in the region in terms of students going abroad, but had scores lowest in percentage with only 3.74%.

Contrary to the number of outbound students, Indonesia and Vietnam show a relatively low levels of inbound students. While Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore recorded more inbound than outbound. For Malaysia the inbound and outbound ratio is almost 1:1.

ASIAN INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY FOR STUDENTS PROGRAMMES (AIMS)

Student mobility and international engagement are considered essential tools to gain and develop student's competencies in understanding social change and cultural diversity. At the same time, it provides professional / discipline-based knowledge and skills in an increasingly complex international environment (OHEC 2016). Realizing on the important of mobility programmes among students,

the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development (RIHED) stated the initiative to conduct the mobility programmes among the ASEAN countries. Based on the 17th SEMEO RIHED Governing Board Meeting di Kuala Lumpur in August 2009, a pilot project has been initiated with the cooperation of 3 countries, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand (MIT) in 2010. This programmes objectives are to create a mobility programmes with the spirit of ASEAN. It was conducted successfully and in 2013, the name MIT was renamed as AIMS. ASEAN International Mobility for Students Programmes. This is because more country joined the project and adding more disciplines. Brunei and Vietnam joined AIMS in 2013. Existing disciplines are International Business; Agriculture; Hospitality and Tourism; Language and Culture, Food Technology with additional new disciplines Engineering and Economy.

The core principles of AIMS are as follows:

1. Self-sufficiency and solidarity whereby each member country support its own participation in the programmes and moves forward together based on the academic readiness of the country
2. Balanced mobility where AIMS promotes both balanced mobility and reciprocity in which the agreed number of exchange students is based on mutual agreement among participating higher education institutions nominated by their respective governments.
3. Supporting mechanism in which the annual review meeting and the steering committee meeting are mechanisms which provide governments, institutions and students with the opportunity to update progress, address existing challenges and propose further improvements to the programmes (Sujatanond 2018).

TABLE 2. AIMS Inbound and Outbound Students by Countries 2010-2019

Country	Inbound	Outbound
Brunei Darussalam	60	29
Indonesia	1082	1023
Japan	965	1117
Malaysia	1027	1054
Philippines	279	177
Republic of Korea	250	277
Thailand	861	934
Vietnam	378	114
Total	4902	4725

Table 2 illustrates number of inbound and outbound students for the year 2010 – 2019. The three pioneering countries i.e. Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand have the highest numbers of students involved. Other countries which participated later have significantly smaller numbers except Japan.

However, in 2019 the Republic of Korea has shown a significant increase in the number of student mobility exchange as shown in Table 3. The number of inbound students is 121 which is 48.4%, whereas 116 outbound students equivalents to 41.9% of the total number of students involved since their participation in 2016. It is evident that the Republic of Korea has become an important player in AIMS.

TABLE 3. AIMS Inbound and Outbound Students in 2019

Country	Inbound	Outbound
Brunei Darussalam	6	6
Indonesia	207	256
Japan	123	93
Malaysia	143	135
Philippines	44	50
Republic of Korea	121	116
Thailand	126	112
Vietnam	21	14
Total	791	782

AIMS IN MALAYSIA

In the early 2010, Malaysia participated in M-I-T with 6 public universities. At that time, there were no firm criteria on the selection of universities by the ministry. Later, in 2018 there were 10 public universities participated as shown in Figure 1. The Department of Education Malaysia and the Committee of AIMS (Malaysia) under the Ministry of Education Malaysia introduced a policy to strengthen the AIMS (Malaysia). The committee was headed by the Department of Education Malaysia Director, assisted by the Executive Secretary and 10 International Office Directors and officers chosen by the university.

As stated in the AIMS (Malaysia) policy, the selection of member universities is based on eligibility for membership criteria, namely:

1. Must be a Malaysian university;
2. Must be nominated by MOE (HE) based on the member's flagship discipline;
3. The disciplines participated by each member university are determined by MOE (HE); and

4. Any changes of the discipline must be approved by MOE (HE) and AIMS committee members (i.e. representatives from the member university are appointed by the Director General of the Department of Higher Education) (Ministry of Education 2018).

discuss matters related to the students, curriculum, networking, students transfer credit and other matters.

AIMS is a fully funded programme and it is a Government-to-Government agreement between the ASEAN + Japan + the Republic of Korea. Financial assistance will be provided to facilitate students in the following matters:

The implementation of AIMS in Malaysia is influenced by the decision made at the AIMS steering committee level and SEAMEO RIHED as the secretariat for AIMS. The Steering Committee Meeting were held every year before the AIMS Review Meeting. The meeting is the platform for all member countries and representatives to meet and

1. Flight tickets to host country
2. Visa
3. Accommodation
4. Living expenses
5. Books and other related matters

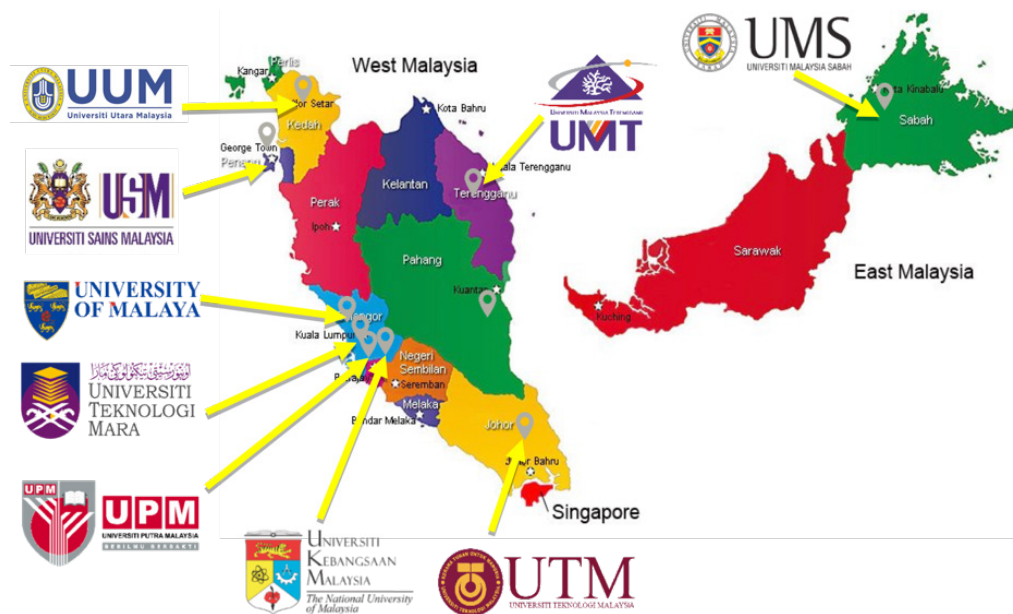


FIGURE 1. AIMS Malaysia Member Universities

Figure 2 shows the number of AIMS inbound and outbound students from 2010-2019. There were

a total of 1054 inbound students and 1027 outbound students.

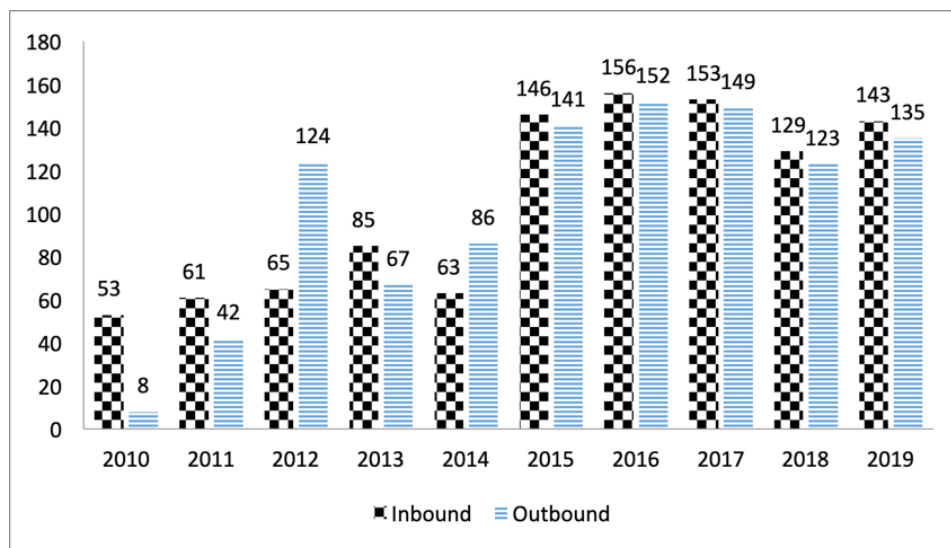


FIGURE 2. AIMS Malaysia Statistics 2010-2019

STUDY ABROAD

Student exchange plays an increasingly important role in the planning of ASEAN higher education. Following the Fourth ASEAN Summit in 1992, the ASEAN University Network (AUN) was developed in 1995 in order to “strengthen the existing network of co-operation among leading universities in ASEAN” by “promoting co-operation and solidarity among ASEAN scholars and academicians, developing academic and professional human resource(s), and promoting information dissemination among ASEAN academic community” (NUS 2016). Among its primary activities are student exchanges involving 30 universities in the region (AUN 2018).

There are key factors that drive student mobility in the ASEAN region. Economic growth is one of the main key factors that many ASEAN students choose to study abroad (British Council 2013). Apart from economic growth there are other factors that play a role. Firstly, the social and cultural background counts. This factor is most apparent for example in students from Brunei Darussalam to Malaysia and Indonesia and students from the Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam (CLMV) countries going to Thailand. Second, costs and exchange rate are also factors determining the location for studying abroad. For example, the cost of living in Malaysia is lower than in Singapore. This may drive Indonesian students to choose Malaysia as one of the favoured studies abroad destinations. Thirdly, English as the medium of instruction is also one of the drivers for intra-ASEAN mobility. Malaysia and Singapore are the two top destinations due to the availability of English-taught courses and the perceived quality of their higher education institutions.

ASEAN is a dynamic region with great diversity among member countries in terms of geography, culture, official languages, literacy rates and others. This diversity led to a richness of culture and resources. Despite all the differences, ASEAN countries share and emphasize on the development and harmonization of higher education through few channels. They promoted the ASEAN community towards the end of 2015. Student exchange and study abroad plays an increasingly important role in the planning of ASEAN higher education. The increase in internationalization and globalization of higher education particularly in the rapid development of cross-border higher education has underlined an urgent need to foster the students exchange and cross-border mobility programmes as one of the

elements in harmonizing the higher education in the region.

Malaysia is on its way toward becoming a regional educational hub, has focused on the multiple internationalization practices, particularly student mobility or exchange and research collaboration (Tham 2013). In order to create further harmonization through higher education, enhanced connections among ASEAN universities via improved research and collaboration opportunities, inbound/outbound student mobility supported and brings together a mutual awareness and greater sense of regional harmony (Jamshed et al. 2019).

SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES FOR 21ST CENTURY

The world is changing rapidly in a lot of ways, but the dominant change is in ICT. Changing technology has far-reaching implications for how we act and interact at work, in education, in civic life and at home. Furthermore, this change is in large part the driving force behind many of the other major changes, such as globalization and flexibilization. These changes have led many scholars to point to a new set of skills – the so-called 21st century skills – that are thought to be essential for people’s ability to function and participate fully in today’s world.

As stated by OECD (2016), “skills have become the global currency of the 21st century.” Many kinds of skills are important for the workforce, including technical or “hard” skills as well as “soft” skills.

The research conducted by Education Research Institutes Network (ERI-NET) concluded UNESCO Framework for Transversal Competencies consisting of five broad domains of skills, competencies, values and/or attributes. Each domain of transversal competencies is listed in Table 4.

TABLE 4. 21st Century Workforce Top Skills

Domain	Examples of key skills and competencies
Critical and innovative thinking	Creativity, entrepreneurship, resourcefulness, application skills, reflective thinking, reasoned decision-making
Inter-personal skills	Communication skills, organizational skills, teamwork, collaboration, sociability, collegiality, perseverance, self-motivation, compassion, integrity, risk-taking, self-respect

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Intra-personal skills	Self-discipline, ability to learn independently, flexibility and adaptability, self-awareness, perseverance, self-motivation, compassion, integrity, risk-taking, self-respect
Global citizenship	Awareness, tolerance, openness, responsibility, respect for diversity, ethical understanding, intercultural understanding, ability to resolve conflicts, democratic participation, conflict resolution, respect for environment, national identity, sense of belonging
Media and information literacy	Ability to locate and access information through ICT, media, libraries and archives, express and communicate ideas through ICT, use media and ICT to participate in democratic processes, ability to analyze and evaluate media content

It is becoming increasingly clear that knowledge alone is not enough to prepare students to thrive in the world. Employers are speaking out about their newly hired graduates and their lack of skills in the workplace. In order to truly have expertise, students must learn what to do with the information they learn. Can they use it to create something new? How do they know that it is making a sound argument? Can they communicate their knowledge? Can they work together to construct something greater than any one student? This paper will justify and explore the Skills necessary for a 21st Century Education: Creativity, Critical Thinking, Communication, and Collaboration through the internationalization of higher education especially in the case of AIMS programmes.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the perceptions of AIMS Alumni in relation to AIMS programmes. Specifically, this study aims to:

1. Identify the benefits of studying abroad
2. Investigate correlation between study abroad and employability at international companies.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions are as follows:

RQ1. What are the benefits of studying abroad to the students?

RQ2. Is there a correlation between study abroad and employability at international companies?

METHODOLOGY

This research adopts quantitative methodology. A survey using questionnaire was conducted involving 146 alumni of AIMS as respondents. Data were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 22.

FINDINGS

This research involved 146 respondents as shown in Table 5. 40 (27.40 %) respondents are male and 106 (72.60 %) female. Age range shows 134 (91.80 %) are between 20 to 25 years and remaining 12 (8.20 %) are above 25 years old.

TABLE 5. Demographic Data of Respondents

Item	Quantity	Percentage (%)
Respondent	146	100.00
Gender		
Male	40	27.40
Female	106	72.60
Age		
20 – 25	134	91.80
> 25	12	8.20

In relation to the first research objective, the survey reveals findings on benefits of AIMS to the respondents as illustrated in Table 6 below.

TABLE 6. The Benefits of AIMS Programmes

	A lot	Just a little	Mean
Better language skills	96	2	3.63
Better communication skills	112	1	3.74
Better personal skills	115	1	3.76
Improved my sense of cooperation	116	0	3.78
Better self-assessment skills	110	4	3.71
Better problem-solving skills	105	2	3.69
Better understanding of cultural differences	131	0	3.88

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New friends	130	0	3.88
More independent	130	1	3.87
New perspectives of my studies	124	2	3.82
Increased chances of getting a good job at home	90	11	3.50
Increased chance of getting a good job abroad	83	17	3.41

Findings show that the highest mean score of benefit attained by participants is shared by 'Better understanding of cultural differences' and 'New friends' (3.88). It is followed suit by 'More independent' (3.87). Third is 'New perspectives on my studies' (3.82). The lowest mean is 'Increased chance of getting a good job abroad' (3.41).

Meanwhile, findings related to the second objective that is correlation between study abroad and employability at multinational companies are shown in Table 7.

TABLE 7. Important Criteria that You were Hired for your First Job after Graduation

Item	Very Important	Important	Less Important	Mean
Communication skills	34	9	0	2.79
Ability to adapt	26	17	0	2.60
Analytical thinking and problem solving	31	11	1	2.70
Planning and organizational skills	24	18	2	2.50
Foreign language skills	15	14	12	2.07
Critical thinking	28	14	1	2.63
Computer skills	21	17	4	2.40
Intercultural competence	19	18	5	2.33
Experience of living/study abroad	16	12	13	2.07
Innovative potential & entrepreneurship skills	13	18	9	2.10

Communication skill has the highest mean 2.79, followed by 'Analytical thinking and problem solving' (2.70) and 'Critical thinking' (2.63). The lowest three criteria are 'Foreign language skills' and 'Experience of living/ study abroad' (2.07) and 'Innovative potential and entrepreneurship skills' (2.10).

In terms of types of organizations where respondents work, the findings show that 79 respondents (54 %) work in private sector; 52 respondents (36 %) work in international companies and; 15 respondents (10 %) work in government sector as shown in Figure 3.

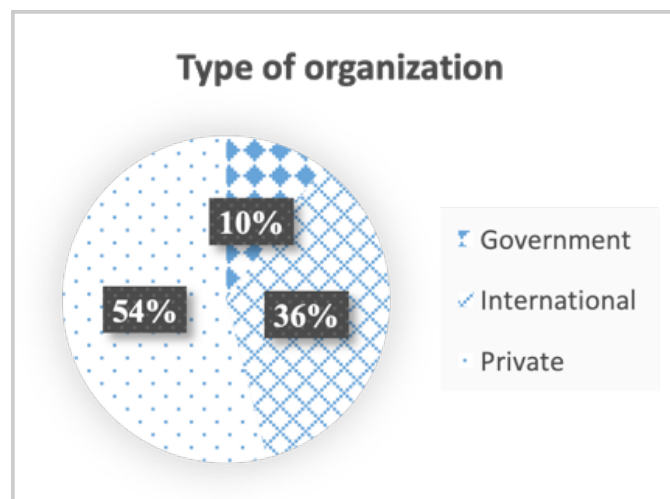


FIGURE 3. Types of Organizations Respondents Employed

Another finding is characteristic of internationalization that respondents carry in their job as shown in Table 10.

Table 8 shows that job with ‘Characteristics of internationalization’ has the highest mean with 3.21 followed by ‘Cooperation with branches abroad’

TABLE 8. Characteristics of Internationalization that are Carried in the Job

No	Item	Very Relevant	Relevant	Less Relevant	Not Relevant	Mean
1	Job with characteristics of internationalization	16	22	3	2	3.21
2	International business contacts	13	18	9	4	2.95
3	Cooperation with branches abroad	17	16	9	8	3.14
4	Customers abroad	13	24	4	13	3.12
5	Part of the staffs is from abroad	17	17	5	14	3.09
6	International travel	12	14	8	0	2.71
7	I moved abroad for my current job	4	10	16	0	2.12
8	My job does not have any characteristic of internationalization	5	17	7	0	2.30

(3.14); ‘Customers abroad’ (3.12); ‘Part of the staffs is from abroad’ (3.09); ‘International business contacts’ (2.95); and ‘International travel’ (2.71). The lowest two characteristics of internationalization are “I moved abroad for my current job” (2.12) and “My job does not have any characteristic of internationalization” (2.30).

A correlation analysis between “Job characteristics of internationalization”, “Participation motives” and “Benefit of AIMS programmes” was conducted

in order to identify correlation between all elements shown in Table 9. It can be concluded that “Participation motives” and “Programmes benefit” has moderate significant correlation. Second, “job characteristics of internationalization” and “participation motives” also has moderate significant correlation. However, there is no significant correlation between “benefit of AIMS programmes” and “Job characteristics of internationalization”.

TABLE 9. Correlation between “Job characteristics of Internationalization”, “Participation Motives” and “Benefit of AIMS Programmes”

		Correlations		
		all benefits	all characteristics	all motives
all benefits	Pearson Correlation	1	.242	.560**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.118	.000
	N	145	43	142
all characteristics	Pearson Correlation	.242	1	.414**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.118		.006
	N	43	43	42
all motives	Pearson Correlation	.560**	.414**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.006	
	N	142	42	143

The discussions below are some of the results from the students who participated in the survey. 146 students gave their comments and those comments agreed that AIMS bring beneficial, widen their perspectives and making them a better citizen.

DISCUSSION

General perception is that studying abroad contributes to enhancing student’s knowledge and

competencies. It is also perceived that it increases the level of employability of graduates. This perception is supported by statements by few respondents that worth noting, such as:

‘To become better and better, and give more opportunities to other students to participate in this programmes in order to enhance their skills and build a student with high skills levels from Malaysia as an example to other countries.’

Alumni 04/2019

‘Providing an exchange opportunity for students to explore and experience other countries. By understanding

cultural of different races, a better leader will be born from this programmes.'

Alumni 41/2019

'As more candidates are able to explore the outside world, the AIMS alumni and the new candidates are definitely going to bring change to the world.'

Alumni 77/2019

Besides those statements that reflect the benefits of AIMS, it is worth to be more specific in answering the two research questions.

RQ1. What are the benefits of studying abroad to the students?

The respondents stated what they benefit most from the AIMS programmes are better understanding of cultural differences and making new friends (both 3.88). They also agreed that they become more independent (3.87) and participation in the AIMS programmes has led them to new perspectives on their studies (3.82). This is followed by 'Improved my sense of cooperation'; 'Better personal skills'; 'Better communicative skills'; 'Better self-assessment skills' and others. All respondents strongly believe that AIMS programmes are highly beneficial to them as it improvised their understanding on cultural differences, aware of the importance of making new friends especially in new environment which also requires them to be more independent in their life. As a result of new experience attained from the mobility programmes, their perspectives on studies have changed to a more positive tone. These findings are consistent with Costello (2015) and Soto (2015) who concluded that positive outcomes from study abroad participation include a positive change in attitude, personal growth and cultural awareness. Students can compare their homes to the host country, and these comparisons help them to broaden their horizons and better understand where they come from (Soto 2015). Indeed, study abroad participants gained real-world knowledge, a global world view, self-confidence and intercultural skills development (Brandauer & Hovmand 2013). In addition to technical skills, organizations value soft skills such as communication and cross-cultural competencies (Harder et al. 2015; Kimberly 2010).

The least two benefits of AIMS programmes, where respondents believe that mobility programmes have increased chances of getting a good job at home or abroad is partly contributed by different field of studies of respondents. This is consistent with findings of earlier research by Toncar (2006) who found that differences in motivating factors between business and non-business students. Business students tend to take a more pragmatic

approach towards international opportunities and view studying abroad as a more attractive option than taking classes on campus.

Arguably the high level of mean for each element in Table 8: The benefits of AIMS programmes are consistent with the findings of research by IIE Center for Academic Mobility Research and Impact (2017). The research found that study abroad has an overall positive impact on the development of a wide range of 21st century job skills. Of the 15 skills surveyed, the largest portion of respondents reported developing a broad range of cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal skills to a significant degree through study abroad, namely: intercultural skills, curiosity, flexibility & adaptability, confidence, self-awareness, interpersonal skills, communication, problem solving, language, tolerance for ambiguity, and course or major-related knowledge. Teamwork, leadership, and work ethic were also reportedly developed or improved, but less significantly. The only skill area that was not developed or improved through study abroad was technical or software skills, with respondents largely noting that these skills were mostly developed through the academic programmes on their home campus and were not a focus of their study abroad programmes.

RQ2. Is there a correlation between study abroad and employability at international companies?

From Pearson correlation test it proves that there is a correlation between study abroad and employability at international companies. The level of correlation is moderately significant as reflected in Participation motives and programmes benefit; and Job characteristics of internationalization and Participation motives. Students that have experienced study abroad have a bigger opportunity working in an international company or being exposed to the way the international company operated. It is important to understand the potential benefits stemming from the experience of studying abroad. Their character will be different from those students who have not been exposed to studying abroad.

According to a survey conducted in the UK which relies on interviews with 11 mobility managers of several universities, participation in study abroad programmes strongly enhances employability. Their research reveals that one interviewee was able to report results from a survey of graduates who had spent one year abroad during their university studies: 87% of respondents stated that their experience abroad contributed to making their job interview

more successful. Furthermore, 75% of respondents indicated that their current employer would be more likely to offer a job to someone who had studied abroad. Another interviewee was told by a chief executive of Lloyds TSB that the company looks for global graduates when it recruits employees (Pietro 2019). Another study by Fielden (2007) found that 29% of the employers who responded feel that graduates with overseas study experience are more employable.

Arguably, the skills and competencies of students who study abroad depend on how well the students can reflect, articulate, and manage their travel experience and exposure attained from the mobility programmes. They should be able to communicate effectively, having soft skills and enhances whatever that have gained to contribute to their potential employees (Harder et al. 2015). The working environment from two different countries will be different due to the different cultural and belief. For example, students gained new multicultural insights, acquired possibilities of new collaboration, further developed technical, cognitive, interpersonal and other skills (Kelleher 2013).

It is believed that correlation between study abroad and employability at international companies is moderately significant mainly contributed by the age of respondents who majority fresh graduates (91.80 %) age between 20 – 25 years. Undoubtedly international companies do not hire many fresh graduates as stated in Figure 2. The result would be different if more respondents are in the second age category that is more than 25 years old as outcomes of any programmes will only be more apparent after five years of graduation. Therefore, it suggested that further research is required to investigate how AIMS programmes alumni establish themselves in their professions respectively.

CONCLUSION

Study abroad programmes are beneficial to students at they gained benefits in terms of knowledge and skills that increase their employability level. In order to ensure successful study abroad programmes, academics and university administrators must clearly strategize and publicize their study abroad programmes at early stage of their studies. This allows students to embed it into their academic programmes plan.

Arguably, international exposure and experience make the participants better than those who did not participate in the programmes. Promotion and knowledge sharing among those who have participated in this programme should be a continuous activity as their experience would attract other students to participate. Alumni of study abroad programmes should be appointed as student ambassadors who are assets of the university as they can actively involve promoting the programmes. Being able to be hired by multinational and international companies would be more meaningful for the graduate, university and the nation. A good example is the Bologna Process which provides strategic mission on modernization of the international relationships of partner countries' universities, enhances academic mobility and correspondingly increases the attractiveness of higher education systems in the European continent. Therefore, it is imperative for ASEAN to ensure the consistency of internationalization and regional development policies, which must be based on the principles of equity and enhanced academic mobility among member countries. ASEAN nations must attend together to one higher education forum, which may lead toward harnessing unification and harmonization of tertiary education in the region.

As important as they are, the benefits of international exposure in education and practical experience go beyond students. The higher education institutions also benefit from internationalization. It results in more revenue generation, cross-fertilization of academic and research intellectual knowledge and stronger brand standing. The advantages to nation-states are manifold too. It strengthens politico-diplomatic ties between countries, fosters goodwill and brings about familiarity and understanding of foreign people. The presence of foreign students also helps generate development of businesses and support services around higher education institutions to cater to this.

However, the most obvious conclusion is that the job-upon graduation-challenge is a mutual concern for both students and universities. HEIs need to start thinking beyond the obvious career advisory services and deliver support in the language of modern students: easy to grasp, visual, available 24/7 and digital. In the meantime, careers advice has globalized too: current day students want to understand what skills employers are looking for in particular countries and sectors, and how to ensure they understand the cultural differences that

play a role in job hunting. If students understand why a North American resume does not include a date of birth and why someone's age matters in a CV aimed at a European employer, we are helping students make the transition in life that probably has most impact in how they view their study experience and eventually what turns them into "Brand Ambassadors" for their HEI.

In bridging the gap for the students, the role employers can play should not be disregarded. Employers are an important piece in this puzzle. Furthermore, employers strongly believed that the HEIs are in the driver's seat when it comes to the design and delivery of the curricula. For institutions, the challenge now is to come up with solutions that make a connection with employers and prepare their students for the global job market. This study shows that mobility students are expecting studying abroad to have an impact on their career and employability, this is especially true for the degree students who are studying a full program.

In conclusion, internationalization is the *Zeitgeist* of the present graduate labor market. The whole exercise of international education hinges on the added value that it presents. As has been discussed in this paper, the advantages of international education in a globalized world are manifold and cannot be overstated. The higher education institutions must stay abreast of the developments in academics, research and recruitment in other countries, and collaborate internationally. Globalization necessitates trans-national networks and exchanges across the board and higher education institutions are no exception to this.

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