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RESEARCH ARTICLE

From frustration to enlightenment: experiences of student exchange program awardees in Taiwan [version 1; peer review: 3 approved with reservations]

Wolter Parlindungan Silalahi ¹, Friska Ria Sitorus ²

¹Department of Tourism, Institut Agama Kristen Negeri Tarutung, Tarutung, North Sumatera, 22411, Indonesia

²Department of Education and Human Potentials Development, National Dong Hwa University, Hualien, Hualien, 974301, Taiwan

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Abstract

Background: Studying abroad is one of the most exciting experiences for a college student who is running a student exchange program, as it creates opportunities to learn, work, solve problems, and ensure a secured life. However, Indonesians who are into student exchange programs face some difficulties in adjusting to their new environment. They experience awkwardness in the use of advanced equipment from technology and cultural aspects. This study investigates the experiences of two Indonesian students who participated for a semester at a Taiwanese university. It aims to explore the Indonesian student exchange program awardees' experiences by examining both the obstacles and benefits of attending the Taiwanese university.

Methods: This study used qualitative data analysis. Data were collected through a semi-structured interview, informal participant observations, and a set of open and closed-ended questions. Two Indonesian undergraduate students who belonged to the same major, year, and university were recruited to act as ambassadors.

Results: The two students reported facing some problems but felt more independent and became more adaptable. They met with new people and explored new places, and learned much in terms of teaching pedagogy and personal development from the 21st-century classroom pedagogy, which was important for their future carrier in education. Aside from being able to feel the 21st-century classroom environment, they were able to learn the host language and culture, which enriched their insights. Five main findings emerged: departure and journey, difficulties in settling in, inability to use technology facilities, meeting new people and exploring new places, and 21st century classroom environment.

Conclusions: Despite the challenges that are associated with being a student exchange awardee, there are vast opportunities for self-development and learning the ropes associated with teaching from the 21st-century classroom pedagogy.

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1. **Xuesong (Andy) Gao** , University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia
2. **Anna Riana Suryanti Tambunan** , Universitas Negeri Medan, Medan, Indonesia
3. **Gregory Siy Ching** , Fu Jen Catholic University, New Taipei City, Taiwan

Any reports and responses or comments on the article can be found at the end of the article.

Keywords

Experience, Qualitative Study, Student Exchange

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Corresponding authors: Wolter Parlindungan Silalahi (Silalahiwalter1@gmail.com), Friska Ria Sitorus (Friskasitorus969@gmail.com)

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Introduction

Education has a lot of interesting opportunities for humans that can give us better chances to obtain good careers and well-paid jobs. These opportunities can help to build peace, prosperity, harmony, happiness, stability, self-esteem, and wisdom in individuals. Studying abroad is what many student aim to take part in because they can get to know how to appreciate and respect other people's culture and see it as a reflection of their own (Lai, 2018), increase their personal growth, awareness, self-efficacy (Edmonds, 2010), immerse themselves in a new language, make new friends with local or international students, and gain experience from being international students. To be part of student exchange is a priceless experience that comes with a lot of advantages such as an international learning exposure that leads to enhanced intercultural learning, global awareness, self-development, language acquisition, and many other positive long-term impacts (Giedt et al., 2015). On the other hand, there are lots of adjustments to be made, such as adjustment to homesickness, lack of adequate finance, adaptation problems, prejudice, and housing and transportation related problems (Crockett & Hays, 2011). Also, vocational, physical health, social, and academic issues can occur (Yi et al., 2003). Other adjustments include learning style, study habits, educational background, culture and language proficiency (Andrade, 2006), lack of understanding of local context (Park, 2010), and punctuality (Razack, 2002). However, the student exchange program can contribute to diversity and internationalization of classrooms, colleges, and communities and to the enhancement of mutual understanding and appreciation of the differences around the world. Cheney (2001) stated that international interaction could generate two specific benefits namely mastering of English or other foreign language, and increasing international friendships. In addition, having discussions with international students makes significant, positive effects on critical thinking and promotes friendship, and many campuses develop peer pairing programs to match those running student exchange programs with local students (Summers & Volet, 2008).

Based on a study conducted by the International Educational Consultants Association, there were approximately 35,000 Indonesian students who studied abroad in 2019, for example, in Australia, United Kingdom (UK), Singapore, Europe, Canada, and Asia (Berita, 2020). Taiwan is one of the most highly educationally developed economies in the world (Guo, 2005, p. 134), and offers a lot of scholarships for undergraduate, master, doctor, double degree, and student exchange programs. Taiwanese universities are also highly favored by researchers.

This study aims to investigate the experiences of the awardees of student exchange programs. In Indonesia, student exchange candidates with Taiwan are elected based on reciprocal partnerships set up by Memorandum of Understanding signed by Taiwanese and Indonesian universities. It offers free tuition for only two students as awardees, and those who join the student exchange program have to support themselves. The case presented in this research was the first time for the Indonesian university (IU) to have a reciprocal partnership with a Taiwanese university and to send their awardees abroad. Therefore, this study focuses on the experiences of these two student exchange beneficiaries from Indonesia, who enrolled in the undergraduate program. This led to an investigation into the Indonesian exchange students' experiences at the Taiwanese university. This study is very important because it will benefit students in future who will study abroad as student exchange awardees, particularly for future students who have no previous foreign study experience background. It will also contribute to the education field of academicians, researchers, experts, or even the government, regarding the student exchange program, which affects life and study adjustment aspects.

Methods

Participants and context

Two college students, with the pseudonyms P1 and P2, consented to participate in this descriptive qualitative study. Participants were recruited after the researchers knew the information from their home university that both of the participants were chosen to be the first batch of student exchange ambassadors to represent their home university. During the spring semester of 2020 (February to June 2020). Initially, they were elected as the first and second rank of hundreds of college students who took the student exchange written test and interview from the committee at their home university. However, despite their outstanding performances during the selection test from the committee, it was discovered that they did not have any experience regarding going abroad, which include experiences of the flight system, the process of check-in, and how to find the gates at the airport. It was therefore the first time in their lives to apply for passports and visas, with this study's authors as volunteers, to guide them during preparation for departure and to welcome them in Taiwan. The exchange was to a national university in the east coast county of Taiwan. They officially registered for the student exchange program for one semester in an English department, and attended several courses such as fundamental Chinese, English writing, reading contemporary, western English literature, and critical approach to literature. Those courses were taught in English; the students were used to studying in full Bahasa Indonesia in their home university, in the western part of Indonesia. The students' characteristics are shown in Table 1.

Data collection

Data was gathered primarily through semi-structured interview questions (Table 2) that were administered to them after their exchange program. The purpose was to share their personal experiences in the Indonesian language for 30-60

Table 1. Profile of participants.

Name	Age, years	Semester/year	Major	Student status	Religion
P1	20	6 th /3 rd	English Department	Undergraduate	Catholic
P2	20	6 th /3 rd	English Department	Undergraduate	Muslim

Table 2. Semi-structured interview questions.

No	Questions
1	Would you please describe your personal information?
2	Would you please describe your experiences before leaving abroad?
3	How did you get elected as an exchange student representative?
4	What was your first impression of flight abroad?
5	Would you please describe your first experiences at a Taiwanese university?
6	How was your first experience following the student exchange program?
7	What were new things you found in classroom activities?
8	How did you deal with the assignments during the exchange program?
9	What culture shock did you have?
10	How did you interact with the local and international students?
11	What difficulties did you face in completing the study as an exchange?
12	What funnies stories did you have from the beginning in Taiwan?

minutes. The meeting was scheduled with participants, audio recorded, field notes made, and held in a location that was convenient to participants. Data were triangulated through an informal participant observation from P1 and P2.

A set of open-ended questions was used to explore their experiences during the interview (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Close-ended questions regarding age, religion, and other privacy questions were also collected. A WhatsApp group was created to allow for follow-up questions which were sent via WhatsApp to the researchers and participants. During the interview participants answered the questions without pressure.

As the second author was a doctoral student at the same university with the participants, informal participants' observations were conducted by the researchers to see the participants' emotions during the exchange program while spending time with the two participants outside of the interview, on and off campus, for instance while going to the library, eating at the cafeteria, riding bicycles, window-shopping, or studying in the study room.

Data analysis

The interviews were transcribed into English. Subsequently, themes for each interview were created to develop thematic grouping. A summary form of the interview was created and provided to the participants in order to obtain their feedback before the themes was finalized (Creswell, 2013).

Ethical considerations

This study was approved by Tarutung State Christian Religion Institute (Protocol number H.0206/F1000R/RSF/XII/2020). After due consultation, consent letters were provided by the home university and Taiwanese university.

Before the interview was conducted, the researchers sought participants' willingness by asking them to fill out an informed consent sheet. It explained the objectives of the study, assuring confidentiality by using codes and pseudonyms prior to the interviews, and asking the participants to sign the informed consent form. After the data has been transcribed and analyzed qualitatively, the recorded data sheets were archived for confidentiality reason.

Results and discussion

Five major themes emerged: (1) Departure and journey; (2) Difficulties in settling in; (3) Inability to use technology facilities (4) Meeting new people and exploring new places; and (5) 21st-century classroom environment. These themes are discussed narratively in the following sections.

Departure and journey

For the first time students were selected to be "student exchange program ambassadors" to represent their home university. Lecturers and staff were very excited because the university had succeeded in opening international doors, perhaps leading to an increase in the quality of their university through the international program. A week before the student's departure to Taiwan, the president of the university and staff gave an official "send-off party" at the home university. Motivational speeches were given, concluding with the tradition of giving the students tribe blankets called "ulos" as a symbol of blessings. At the time of departure, everyone, including the students' family members officially followed them to the airport in two of the university's official buses, a journey which took approximately three hours from the university to the airport. A printed banner on the bus explained that the students were being sent to Taiwan for student exchange programs.

P1: "I felt emotional when a lot of people accompanied us to the airport and it also became a big spur for both of us to do our best at the Taiwanese university".

P2: "My parents and family members came with me to the airport for the send-off and we took permission from my younger brother's school, so he could accompany us".

For the two students, it was the first time to fly by plane, so it was challenging for them to check in and transit at the airport. As they landed at Taiwan International Airport, they were confused about where to collect their luggage and ended up asking the airport employees for assistance. In addition, they did not have cash on them, so they tried to withdraw money at the airport's ATM machine, but this failed as their cards were not yet validated by their home bank for international transactions. This resulted in the students feeling sad and confused. They ended up borrowing money from an Indonesian student studying at the same campus with them. This student picked them up at the arrival hall, meaning that they could buy food and milk to sustain them until they reached their destination, approximately four hours from the airport.

P1: "We didn't eat for seven hours even though we had bread, we couldn't eat it because we felt dizzy from the flight".

P2: "I did not know what to buy because it was my first time seeing the international food".

Difficulties in settling in

Jenkins and Galloway (2009) investigated adjustment problems faced by international students studying in Taiwanese universities. Also Yi et al. (2003) found adjustment issues such as academic, physical health, financial, vocational, and personal/social issues in similar exchange programs.

The two students faced a lot of difficulties regarding understanding the local money because they did not change their Indonesian currency to Taiwanese currency when they were still in Indonesia; they thought that they would be able to use their ATM cards to get the Taiwanese currency, unfortunately, their cards were not identified. Upon reporting the case to the Indonesian local bank, but they were told that they have to wait for a couple of days. This led to both students being depressed and miserable as they did not know if there would be somebody to lend them money until their cards could be used. This culminated in P1 crying at the convenience store nearby their dormitory as she did not want to borrow money. P2 called her parents to ask that they send money urgently through her senior's ATM and asked her senior to borrow money in the interim. Therefore, due to P1's situation, they discussed their difficulties on the phone with one of their lecturers in Indonesia, and their lecturer was able to phoned their buddy to ask them to lend the students enough money to get by.

Even though the two students belonged to different religions, they did not want to be separated from each other. Therefore, when P1 went to pray at church, P2 would accompany P1 to the church and wait for P1 in the lobby. When P2 went to pray at the Mushola, P1 would accompany P2 and wait. The other students asked P1 and P2 a lot of questions about Indonesia, for example, why Indonesian people like spicy food and how Indonesian people deal with their hot weather since theirs was a tropical country. Luckily, all the friends they met in Taiwan respected the religious backgrounds of both P1 and P2. For example, when they had to eat at a restaurant together with their international friends, everybody was really helpful to choose a vegetarian food for P2 since P2 is a Muslim and it is forbidden to eat pork. This friendly attitude is referred to as international relations, which means the ability of people from different countries to collaboratively work together so as to establish a good relationship (Knight & Wit, 1997).

After living in Taiwan for one month, their home university asked P1 and P2 to take a photo in front of the logo of their university in Taiwan, so they could make a big banner in front of their home university stating that both of them had officially studied at the Taiwanese University as student exchange program ambassadors. Three months later, the IU

campus advised them to make a short video about their learning process, environment and others in order to provide an overview of the study process in Taiwanese university so that their friends at IU could find out what their studies looked like. This was for promotional purposes to the public and at the same time, to inform the public that the IU is implementing the “goes international” campaign. This promotion can make both universities have a market branding and become highly reputable (Sakamoto & Chapman, 2012), and this promotion could create good reputation for them that will lead to a competitive advantage (knight, 2004). After a couple of weeks, they became comfortable with many things in Taiwan that make them interested more than ever in sharing their life experiences in their Taiwanese university.

Inability to use technology facilities

At first, the students met with difficulties in getting water to drink at their dormitory, even though there were four dispensers in every corner of the floor; when they located them, they did not know how to use those dispensers, so they did not drink water that night. When they woke up the next morning, they had the bread that they brought from Indonesia for breakfast without drinking any water. They stayed hungry in the afternoon because they did not understand how to turn on the rice cooker so as to prepare lunch. After trying for four hours, P2 called their senior to teach them how to operate the electronic equipment in the dormitory area. Their first trial at cooking rice failed. Finally, they did not eat the rice, but ate more of the bread that they brought from Indonesia.

P1: “We got confused and just felt awkward, and so we laughed at each other even though we were very hungry”.

P2: “We were so grateful when our senior came to visit us and he brought us some food and drinks, we might have fainted if he did not”.

The two students were extremely pleased with the dormitory facilities and the condition of the rooms, which they described as comfortable, clean and safe. This made a great impression on the students, making them willing to stay for more than one semester.

P1: “I was so sad when my room was separated from that of P2, but I still managed to be excited because I had a roommate who was a local student to be my new friend, unfortunately, I do not feel totally comfortable with my roommate because she always turns on the air conditioner while sleeping, and I get cold every night. I went to the manager of the dorm to change my room, but he refused me”.

P2: “I do not have any specific problems with my roommate. I am a Muslim and have to pray five times every day, and she has no problem seeing me doing my habitual activities”.

The students were surprised to see that every student had bicycles which were parked properly in the parking lot, and after a short stay, their senior gave them a bicycle each. As at the first two weeks P1 used to hitch a ride with P2 because P1 was not good enough at riding a bicycle so she had to practice for about two weeks until P1 was able to ride herself.

The awardees felt awkward to explore the university facilities themselves, so their senior invited them to have a campus tour. This included visiting the library, which the senior left the students to explore by themselves. However, the students did not go anywhere as they felt awkward to go up to the next level of the floor, and instead they decided to sit and wait for the senior to come back and pick them up. In addition, the students did not know how to borrow books from the shelves or online through the library website. Their classmates helped them how to select and reserve books through the website. The library is usually open at 09:00 am to close at 22:00 pm, and most students come in the morning hours and stay until it is about to close. The library is very safe, meaning personal items can be left unattended.

P1: “I saw a lot of students searching for books through the computers that are available on every floor. Many students copied their books by themselves using the photocopy machines that are available on every floor”.

P2: “There are a lot computers provided in our library, we only sign in with our student id number and we can use unlimited materials, we also get 100 pieces of paper for free to print for every semester. This library provides a small room for individuals to study, and a big room for a group to have a discussion”.

Living in other countries, and exposure to other cultures generally creates goodwill and contributes to global peace and security (Guruz, 2008). Therefore, since these student exchange awardees were able to adapt to their environment, it is very likely that the Indonesian government or the education sector will be interested in hiring these two students who have the problem-solving ability to make decisions independently (Lai, 2018).

Meeting new people and exploring new places

The cafeteria nearby the student's department provides a buffet, where food must be weighed before paying for it as payment is based on weight and this kind of payment system was very new for the student's to adapt. Even though hundreds of students come to this cafeteria, the students reported that everything was kept neat, clean and orderly.

P1: "When I visited the buffet cafeteria alone, I was a bit nervous and I didn't know how to measure how much food I have already taken, finally, after I weighed my food, it was super expensive and I felt so worried about that, I wish I have taken just a little food".

P2: "Because I am a Muslim, I have to be careful to take own my food because beef and pork look alike on the stand".

Many restaurants in Taiwan open twice a day, including the restaurant near the student's college, which opens three hours per shift. The first shift is 11:00-14:00 pm, the second 17:00-20:00. Most of the local restaurants offer self-service, i.e. drinks, spoons, and sticks are gathered by the patrons and the patrons must clean their own tables. If people come late to the restaurant, they won't be served. All these rules are found in Taiwan and not in their home country Indonesia. The students reported that adjusting to local people's activities really helped them to more disciplined and organized.

P1: "I could not find mineral water in all the restaurants that I visited, but there was always black tea, jasmine tea and soup. I was surprised that most of the students eat in the restaurants every day instead of cooking at dorm".

P2: "I didn't expect Taiwanese food to be so bland, the menu had spicy written in them but for me the meals were not spicy at all. I also discovered that most of the restaurants did not have menu written in English, so I had to order orally from the waiters with gestures and showing them the food picture from my cell phone at the same time. What I really love buying from the restaurants are the delicious soft drinks".

Student exchange program awardees get the opportunity to make new friends with other international students and to also strike good friendship with the local students (Daly, 2007). They watch as many students do exercise at night even until mid-night and take showers after, they enjoy buying fried chicken pie and a big cup of Boba milk tea at night, to sleep so late at night and wake up at 12:00 am and most of them skip their breakfast and eat lunch later. If the students have to come to the class in the morning, they brought their breakfast to the classroom and they came to the class with free costumes such as short pants, with sandals.

In addition to that, they have a bus that always come based on their schedule. The bus is very convenient and the drivers are also friendly. The awardee used to say thank you after and smile getting off the bus. The students pay for their rides by tapping their student identity card to the monitor close to the driver.

P1: "Most of the passengers always say thank you and goodbye to the driver. We can only stop at the official bus stops, we cannot stop just about anywhere we like and this is totally different from what happens in my own town".

P2: "Trains and buses are widely used and the system is extremely well organized. We used App for the bus schedule, and we used the website for the train schedule, and it really helped us to navigate our transportation here".

They have an Indonesian students' community. At the beginning of the semester, this group of people got together in the auditorium to welcome the new students, they introduced themselves one after the other in front of their friends, revealing their personal profiles such as the name of their universities in Indonesia, their addresses, their majors and so forth and this is often the best moment for them to make more friends and to explore more about Taiwan. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many field trips from our university were cancelled. Due to welcome party cancelation, they found it difficult to get to know their fellow students from Indonesia so that their senior started inviting them to several activities outside the campus.

P1: "We went to the river, lake and ocean together which was fantastic. We rode bicycles and explored the inside and outside of the college together. In addition, I began to have more friends to go to church with every Sunday; the church was located far away from my dorm".

P2: "There is always a pray day every Friday at the mosque located in the city, which I normally attend as a Muslim. It takes about thirty minutes from my dorm, after praying I used to get free Indonesian food for dinner and I am so happy because it helps me to save money".

21st century classroom environment

The lecturers the students received were from Professors, who are experts in their various fields. Most of them graduated from outside Taiwan. These lecturers taught them in English even though in the first week they were a little confused by a Taiwanese lecturer whose English pronunciation is unclear. Their lecturers implored them to be active in class, for example, to participate in collaborative learning that encourages students to be creative to solve problems and develop a relationship with each other; by collaborating and working effectively with others in order to make a lasting positive impact on individual student learning (Saner et al., 1994). The lecturers applied a 21st century teaching method in class, for example, a student centered method whereby students are used as facilitators to explain the materials to their peers through the learning by doing method. In the reading contemporary class, the student's reported the lecturer bringing stickers to class that were given to students who delivered some questions, ideas, responses to the lecturer. Before the class ended, the lecturer would use the remaining ten minutes to give conclusions that helped the students to understand more about the class. In the critical approach to literature class, the students reported the lecturer starting the class with an e-learning system and follow-up with discussions that required the participation of about 4-5 students per group.

P1: "I felt very nervous, scared, and not confident because I never had classmates who came from various countries before. Fortunately, all the lecturers and classmates were very cool and friendly so that I became more comfortable".

P2: "I was initially not too shocked because there were a number of Indonesian students in the fundamental Chinese class, so I felt comfortable and not depressed. In another class, my Taiwanese friends were very friendly and helpful".

P1: "Our department is very big, but we never got lost on our way to the classroom".

The students reported having good classmates; when they had assignments they used to have a discussion in the library, study room and café. When the class of semester was over, they had their own farewell party with their classmates. The students reported feeling very emotional at the end of the semester because they had to say goodbye to one another.

The classroom is one of the most important platforms for students to acquire knowledge acquisition and skills development (Kim et al., 2019). The students reported that their classroom facilities supported the learning process. These facilities included air conditioners, fans, projectors, comfortable seats, good lighting and other equipment, which made the learning environment to be very conducive and this situation is totally different at their home university. Therefore, all the activities in the classroom, including e-learning, really enhanced their 21st century skills which includes critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity (Hadianto, 2019).

Conclusion

This qualitative study depicts the activities of two student exchange program awardees who were allowed to study abroad in Taiwan. It also examines the obstacles they faced during their one semester at the Taiwanese university. According to these awardees, the experience was a sure pathway to expand their friendship network to various countries in the world and with people of different backgrounds and cultural aspects. The student exchange awardees had a chance to introduce Indonesian culture to the foreigners that they met, through activities that were both inside and outside of the university. They also had the opportunity to meet some people in the Indonesian community in Taiwan, which formulated a network to work and discuss together, and to exchange experiences and knowledge among themselves. Moreover, they got a chance to meet with an Indonesian individual who is married to a Taiwanese individual; and this helped them to partake in the Halal food meant for Muslims.

In addition, the students had the opportunity to travel to several cities around Taiwan. It made them feel different when compared to their home country in terms of culture, weather, lifestyle, people, and transportation. Although it was not easy at first for them to live in Taiwan as strangers, but as time went by, they ended up adjusting to a whole new lifestyle altogether, in an unfamiliar environment, and to speak a new language which comprises both English and Chinese. They succeeded in completing the mission given to them to study for one semester at a Taiwanese university. Once back in Indonesia, the students were uncertain how to adjust the student experience to their old lives back home and they felt new to their old group of friends. They discovered that they had grown as ambassadors, and acquired knowledge about the 21st-century learning environment. In conclusion, they became independent, appreciative of their country, culture understanding, and they became more open to new ideas, assertive, and more confident in themselves.

Limitations and future research

Studies conducted in recent times to investigate the international student exchange programs have increased significantly. However, this study did not investigate the student exchange program awardees' experiences in terms of motivation, cultural background, personality, attitude and so forth toward living and studying as student exchange awardees at the

Taiwanese University. Therefore, for the sake of future research, this study suggests an in-depth research be done on other variables that relate to the international student exchange programs at the Taiwanese university.

Data availability

Underlying data

Figshare: Raw Data Wolter, <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.14131646.v2> (Silalahi, 2021).

Data are available under the terms of the [Creative Commons Zero “No rights reserved” data waiver](#) (CC0 1.0 Public domain dedication).

Consent

Written informed consent for publication of the anonymized interview transcript was obtained from the participants.

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Gregory Siy Ching

Research and Development Center for Physical Education Health and Information Technology, Graduate Institute of Educational Leadership & Development, Fu Jen Catholic University, New Taipei City, Taiwan

The current paper entitled "From frustration to enlightenment: experiences of student exchange program awardees in Taiwan" is an interesting study focusing on the study abroad experiences of two Indonesian students in Taiwan. However, as of the moment, the paper needs some reworking.

The Abstract can be improved. Participants were not clear. At first, two students were recruited as ambassadors - this is misleading. It should directly say there were two participants in the study (why was the term 'ambassadors' used - as later repeated in the Methods section) and this should be expanded.

The validity and reliability of the study might be affected since only two participants were interviewed. It would be hard to generalize the findings to all Indonesian students in Taiwan. However, the current study could be a starting point for a larger quantitative study, perhaps a survey generated from the current results.

The literature review should be expanded. There are also some studies done using a qualitative lens that the authors were not able to review. For instance: A case study on the international students' social adaptability in Taiwan: A qualitative study by Lewis *et al.*, 2012¹. Although it's not that new, the authors can still review it.

In general, the paper has potential but needs reworking.

References

1. Lewis A, Ching G, Su Y: A case study on the international students' social adaptability in Taiwan: A qualitative study. *International Journal of Research Studies in Psychology*. 2012; **2** (1). [Publisher Full Text](#)

Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it cite the current literature?

Partly

Is the study design appropriate and is the work technically sound?

Partly

Are sufficient details of methods and analysis provided to allow replication by others?

Partly

If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?

Not applicable

Are all the source data underlying the results available to ensure full reproducibility?

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?

Partly

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Study abroad, internationalization of higher education, research teaching nexus, academic identity

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Author Response 17 Nov 2021

Wolter Parlindungan Silalahi, Institut Agama Kristen Negeri Tarutung, Tarutung, Indonesia

Dear Prof Gregory Siy Ching,

We are so thankful for your generous suggestion for this study. We had revised this paper based on your suggestions, as follows:

1. The abstract: the writers had revised the participants' description instead of ambassador.
2. Since only two participants were interviewed that affects the validity and reliability, based on your suggestion we agree that it could be a starting point for a larger quantitative study.
3. The writer expanded the literature review in the introduction/background section.

Thank you~

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Report 22 July 2021

<https://doi.org/10.5256/f1000research.55075.r88855>

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Anna Riana Suryanti Tambunan

Department Language Education and English Literature, Universitas Negeri Medan, Medan, Indonesia

This study is fascinating to publish. I learned a lot from this article about the exchange experiences of Indonesian students studying in Taiwan. However, there are some things to consider, especially in terms of the language presented in this manuscript which is sometimes unclear. For example, in the sentence: "Studying abroad is one of the most exciting experiences for a college student who is running a student exchange program, as it creates opportunities to learn, work, solve problems, and ensure a secured life," in the Abstract. In this sentence, the true meaning of studying abroad versus student exchange programs is not clear. The author may focus on only one program, for example, the student exchange program in Taiwan.

In the Introduction section, it is also necessary to elaborate on the issues related to the student exchange program related to student frustration. It is recommended that the research questions appear in the last paragraph of the Introduction section.

Then in the Methods section, a detailed explanation of how to recruit participants, collect data, and analyze data should be given.

In the Discussion section, it is also necessary to add previous studies that support each finding. It would be better if it was elaborated according to the findings in the Discussion section.

Finally, in the Conclusion section, there should be implications for this research.

I hope my input will help the authors improve the article. Thank you.

Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it cite the current literature?

Partly

Is the study design appropriate and is the work technically sound?

Yes

Are sufficient details of methods and analysis provided to allow replication by others?

Yes

If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?

Yes

Are all the source data underlying the results available to ensure full reproducibility?

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?

Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: TEFL, Intercultural Communication, English language and Literature, English Teaching and Learning.

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Author Response 17 Nov 2021

Wolter Parlindungan Silalahi, Institut Agama Kristen Negeri Tarutung, Tarutung, Indonesia

Dear Prof Anna Riana Suryanti Tambunan,

Thanks for submitting your review, we have read your suggestions for our paper and revised our study based on your suggestions as follows:

1. The abstract: we have revised the election language presented in the manuscript.
2. The introduction: the writer has elaborated on the issues related to the student exchange program related to student frustration and proposed a research question of this study.
3. The methodology: the writers have revised the process of participants' recruitment to participate in our study.
4. Discussion: we have added previous studies that support our findings.
5. Conclusion section: we have revised the implications for this research.

Thank you Prof~

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Report 16 June 2021

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Xuesong (Andy) Gao

School of Education, University of New South Wales, Sydney, NSW, Australia

The manuscript reports on a study that examined an underrepresented group of students in study abroad. It has some interesting insights for readers, but I do not think that the manuscript can be indexed in the current format. I suggest that the authors attend to the following issues before they resubmit their work for reconsideration.

1. First of all, the manuscript requires substantial rewriting to improve the quality of writing. Just take the Abstract as an example: I do not understand whether a study abroad student is someone who is running a student exchange program. I also do not understand how an exchange program will ensure a secured life for its participants. Should the authors report how data were collected before talking about how data were analyzed? Can they elaborate on the problems the two students faced before talking about their feelings? Are the challenges associated with the participants or experienced by them? There are so many similar writing issues throughout the manuscript, which discourages this reader from making a positive recommendation.
2. As mentioned earlier, the Introduction section has a lot of writing issues. I hope that the authors can improve the quality of writing and reorganize it so that it can have a better argument development. I also suggest that the authors focus on developing an argument for the study. What do we know about study abroad students? What do we need to know about study abroad students? Since the study involved two Indonesian students in study abroad in Taiwan, the authors should highlight that previous research has focused on students in developed countries or English medium universities (or students from developed countries to other countries). I think that the study could potentially address an important void. See Li, J. & Han, H. (2020)¹ and Song, Y. & Xia, J. (2020)².
3. The manuscript needs research questions (or a research question) that are clearly motivated by the Introduction section. I think that the interview schedule can be included as an Appendix but needs to be described in the main text. More details on data analysis are needed. What did the authors do to enhance the quality of the analysis?
4. The results should be presented as answers to the research question. I believe that the authors should be more selective in choosing themes for inclusion. It is better to organize the presentation of findings into two groups: challenges and benefits. It is also important to develop sub-themes under the two major categories (challenges and benefits). For instance, under the category of challenges, the authors can present linguistic challenges, cultural challenges or social challenges, etc. Otherwise, I just found that the themes in the findings are not always relevant, for instance, departure and journey. We need findings that constitute significant insights into the two Indonesian students' experiences. The current findings as presented are highly descriptive and not sufficiently engaging.

5. I suggest that the authors include a Discussion section or add some discussion to highlight in what sense the findings constitute important knowledge contributions to the field. It is not clear to this reader in what sense the study advances our understanding of study abroad students. Limitations should be presented before the Conclusion and can be presented as the directions for further research.

I do hope the authors seriously consider my comments for revision. All the best wishes.

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1. Li J, Han H: Learning to orient toward Myanmar: ethnic Chinese students from Myanmar at a university in China. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*. 2020. 1-19 [Publisher Full Text](#)
2. Song Y, Xia J: Scale making in intercultural communication: experiences of international students in Chinese universities. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*. 2020. 1-19 [Publisher Full Text](#)

Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it cite the current literature?

Partly

Is the study design appropriate and is the work technically sound?

Partly

Are sufficient details of methods and analysis provided to allow replication by others?

Yes

If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?

Not applicable

Are all the source data underlying the results available to ensure full reproducibility?

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?

Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Language education

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Author Response 17 Nov 2021

Wolter Parlindungan Silalahi, Institut Agama Kristen Negeri Tarutung, Tarutung, Indonesia

Dear Prof Xuesong (Andy) Gao,

We thank you most warmly for your suggestions to improve the quality of the writing. The

writers have revised the paper regarding your suggestions as a reviewer as follows:

1. In the background part of the abstract, the writers have organized the idea of the sentences based on your suggestions, from "Studying abroad is one of the most exciting experiences for a college student who is running a student exchange program, as it creates opportunities to learn, work, solve problems, and ensure a secured life", to "This study investigates two Indonesian students who participated in a semester at a Taiwanese university. It aims to explore the Indonesian student exchange program awardees' experiences by examining both the obstacles and benefits of attending the Taiwanese university."
2. The introduction: we have revised the research question and the description of the participants' criteria. Previously, we didn't write these two points.
3. The result: we have organized the themes and sub-theme based on your suggestions.
4. Previously, we put the result and discussion in the same part. You suggested we separate them into different sections and we had revised it.
5. We have put the "limitations and future research" before the conclusion as suggestions as follows "Limitations should be presented before the Conclusion and can be presented as the directions for further research".

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

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