

# **THE INFLUENCE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY PROGRAM TOWARDS DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENT'S GENERIC SKILLS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper reviews the influence of international student mobility program towards the development of students' generic skills which includes Communication Skills, Critical Thinking & Problem Solving Skills, Teamworking Skills, Information Management & Lifelong Learning Skills, Entrepreneurship Skills, Leadership Skills and Proactiveness Ethics & Integrity. This paper concludes by citing the previous research on impact of student mobility and based on review of development theory.

Keywords: International student mobility, Generic Skills

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Malaysia nowadays through The National Higher Education Strategic Plan (PSPTN) has focus at comprehensive internationalization efforts in the making of Malaysia as a regional hub. This strategic plan emphasis on enrolment of international students in higher education in Malaysia and Malaysia targets to has 200,000 international students by 2020.

Hao Wei (2012) stated that the volume of merchandise trades between countries will facilitates international student mobility across border. The students from developing country will evaluate economic and educational situation in developing country to determine as their potential destination to study. But only economic factor will take into account when choosing destination in developed country. But, it is different for style of choosing among international students from developed country. They always take consideration on value educational factors for developed countries as possible destinations, while equally weigh educational and economic factors for developing countries as possible destinations. Thus, Malaysia should pay more attention on matters above to attract international students to study in this country.

The Ministry of Education (former as Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia) also put international student mobility as the main indicator for the internationalization of higher education. It has significant economic and academic implications, and is expected to grow considerably during the coming years (Ministry of Higher Education, 2011). This 'welcoming' agenda may help attracting talent from other countries to further their study or working in local companies after finishing short-term mobility program in this country.

Marianne D. Sison and Linda Brennan (2012) also

mentioned that in the longer term, student mobility has led to improvements in international trade opportunities, networks and relationships for the host and home countries. Students develop lasting networks and friendships in their host countries. They also develop a tolerance and understanding of the cultural mores of their host country. These combine to produce 'global citizens' capable of taking their place in a variety of cultural contexts, not just those with which they are experienced. From above statement, we know that students are able to be an ambassador of their own country and create a networking at their level of community. So, it is a never waster investment when we are sending abroad as long as they are able to adapt with other cultures and appreciate their own culture.

Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) is very committed in supporting the National Higher Education Strategic Plan (PSPTN) which is to host international students in this country for study and introducing the *internationalization at home agenda* to create a supportive environment to international students. In year of 2013, UTM has 5,043 international students at both campuses; Johor Bahru and Kuala Lumpur (Zaini, 2013). In other hand, UTM also introduced an international student mobility program to give benefits for international students from international institutions to study at UTM for a short term and also to local students for experiencing study at university abroad. In my opinion, local students must take this opportunity because Malaysia has a good relation with other countries and a good reputation as developing country, so there might be no difficulty or harmful for Malaysia students to study abroad.

## **1.2 INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY PROGRAM**

International student mobility program is a program which allow students to go overseas for the purpose of study in a long

term or for a short term. It involves two ways of student mobility program which are 'outbound program' and 'inbound program'. Outbound program means that students traveling abroad to other countries while inbound program applied to students who are coming from other countries. The aim of international student mobility program is to enhance education quality and diversity, which as so necessary in view of the harmonization process.

International student mobility program which commonly practiced in European countries become popular in this country since decade ago. Nowadays, lots of higher educations in Malaysia offer this program to their students. UTM offers international student mobility program to foster internationalization and create partnerships with overseas universities and education providers (UTM Office of International Affairs, 2009)

The students are encouraged to participate in student mobility program at least once throughout their study in the university. International student mobility programs content academic activities as well as cultural and social activities during their stay abroad for minimum seven (7) days to one year with or without credit transfer. Best reasons to persuade or encourage students' participation are- by joining this program, students can experience their personal growth especially in communication skills, maturity and independent. Besides it can globalize students' academic experience.

Theresa Kuhn (2012) done a study in 2012 on 'why educational exchange programs miss their mark: cross-border mobility, education and European identity'. This study aimed at solving arguing that the international exchange programs in higher education are 'preaching to the converted'. Finding showed that participating in Erasmus exchange program does not strengthen European identity among students because students who are already very likely to feel European. This against some thought of scholars and policy-makers who put high hopes in the role of cross-border mobility and interactions as harbingers of a common identity among the European public.

On top of benefits to the students when joining

international student mobility program, this program may create a mutual understanding between both home and host institutions. Learning best practices by one another will provide a great standard of procedure on settling guideline to international student mobility program. Besides, conducting and hosting international students may also enhance staffs' competencies especially in dealing with diversity of culture.

### **1.3 GENERIC SKILLS**

UTM has developed a 'UTM Student Development Multidimensional Transformation Model'. Each component in the model explains that each department in UTM provides services and activities which lead to development of student's academic achievement, social and personal as well as career development. It is also an integrated and consistence effort to produce a quality and balance student in term of physical, emotion, soul, intellectual and social (JERIS). As a result, UTM will produce holistic graduates who can contribute to development and sustainable for the nation and international. (Mohd Tajudin Ninggal, 2010).

Apart of UTM Student Development Multidimensional Transformation Model, UTM is also introduced "Generic Skills & UTM's Students Attribute". Generic skills are the general skills, knowledge, abilities and traits that students should possess to succeed in study and career. It is also known as 'core skills' and 'employability skills'. Some skills enable someone to function effectively especially in critical thinking and problem solving. There are seven (7) generic skills used in UTM which are Communication Skills, Critical Thinking & Problem Solving Skills, Teamworking Skills, Information Management & Lifelong Learning Skills, Entrepreneurship Skills, Leadership Skills and Proactiveness Ethics & Integrity.

By developing student development model and these gneric skills, it shows that UTM is committed to graduating competent and versatile graduates with a high moral and ethical

value to serve for the God and mankind. Hence, there must be an appropriate development program to support and help contributing development of students' generic skills. A quick review to UTM's tagline is innovative-entrepreneurial-global has revealed that UTM a leading-research university in engineering put internationalization as a main agenda to compete with other top institutions in the world. With this international student mobility program should be the appropriate program for student development.

#### **1.4 INFLUENCE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY PROGRAM**

In my opinion, there is an influence from participation in international student mobility program towards development of generic skills among the students. According to the Human Capital Development Theory, human capital is a very important factor in nation development in terms of economic and social. Besides, the success depends in large part on the people with higher level of competence. In response, the people are becoming valuable assets. In the economic perspective, the capital refers to factors of production used to create goods or services. The human is the subject to take charge of all economic activities such as production, consumption, and transaction. Thus, it can be recognized that human capital means one of production elements which can generate added-values through inputting it.

By reviewing explanation of this theory, we should agree that putting value to a human capital will benefits an organization and nation. Furthermore, by adding value to the human capital through development program helps producing a great human capital with required competencies, skills and knowledge. Therefore, international student mobility program can be a good program for a student development program so the students will be valuable to the country.

This idea is supported by a previous study by Russell King

et. al (2010) has listed an issue that students and mobility managers believe that study abroad brings benefits to students on their languages, intercultural skills, flexibility of outlook and etc. Student mobility also can improve career prospects, but limitation of this study has identifies when concrete survey evidence is scarce. Evidence from employers is mostly anecdotal. Another research done by Dwyer & Peters (2014) shows that most of students who joined study abroad program for long term had a great improvement in their self development.

Talking about travelling abroad, there must be lots of challenges will be faced by students who travel. Each of the challenge, may lead them to polish their generic skills especially in communication skills. Communicating with other citizens is not only involves one way communication, but involves many skills of communication such as talking, listening, negotiating and presenting. With diverse style of communication in other countries will influence students' style of negotiating and encourgae them to apply a critical thinking skills when comes to solve a different culture conflict.

Besides, enjoying a study abroad program encourage students to maintain their interest to continue learning independently in the acquisition of new knowledge and skills because world itself is like a book. Someone who travels or lives at one place, only reads one chapter. There are lots of thing to explore and participate in this program is a good way to train the students to be more confident when facing the real challenge after finish their study in UTM.

## **1.5 CONCLUSION**

Undoubtedly, a traditional way to get a higher score in study must always be a concentration in the classroom besides lots of revisions. And it do helps to improve students' value. But, in the

new era of internationalization, everything is challenging and competitive. Thus, they need value-added generic skills that go beyond disciplinary knowledge. Hence, the generic skills are needed because of they need to remain competitive, acquire new knowledge, skills and abilities.

Students should be able to prepare themselves with an outside classroom experience like international student mobility program so they can higher up their own generic skills with minor supervision by the teachers because they are using their own critical thinking abilities to solve problems. Otherwise, sitting in the same classroom will not get any value added to compare with other graduates.

Student mobility program is an appropriate developing program to achieve it because it is a mixture of formal and informal learning process and experience to the students. Participation of the students outside the classroom and exploring the world with their own perspective allow them to polish their skills especially the in communication and critical thinking.

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