

Research Article

Student Perceptions and Experiences of Internationalization Initiatives at Universitas YARSI

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Abstract.

This qualitative research investigates students' experiences and the perceptions of Universitas YARSI regarding the activities of university internationalization. Thematic analysis of a focus group discussion (FGD) with students of different faculties found that students predominantly perceive the internationalization process as an important step forward to improve the university's global reputation and equip the students with important experience of working with international standards and practices. They view it as a way to access the opportunities of partnering with universities and researchers abroad. Nonetheless, students also stressed the substantial difficulties in continuing to participate in internationalization activities. Financial constraints, including travel and accommodation costs, emerged as a major obstacle. Furthermore, students indicated the desire to receive more support and recognition from the university on behalf of the internationalization project. Administratively and bureaucratically challenging factors, such as visas, were also reported as obstacles. To enhance internationalization efforts, students proposed several solutions. They requested more funding and backing from the university, such as financial aid. They further stressed the importance of increased communication and publicity of the university's programs and resources through social media and the university's website. In addition, it was pointed out that students thought it was important to simplify administrative procedures to make enrolment simpler, and that building partnerships for giving credit for study abroad was suggested. These results highlight the validity of the university's internationalization efforts in relation to student needs and expectations. Through the recognition of the existing challenges and the application of the presented solutions, Universitas YARSI will be a better inclusive and supportive context to facilitate participation in internationalization activities to finally contribute to the vision of Universitas YARSI as a globally recognized institution.

Keywords: higher education, internationalization, student experiences, student perceptions

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1. INTRODUCTION

Internationalisation has taken a prime role in the development of higher education in how the universities aim to increase their global competitiveness and how students can increasingly build a heterogeneous and vibrant learning experience [1]. At Universitas YARSI, the pursuit of internationalisation is a key strategic priority, with the university implementing a range of initiatives to foster cross-border collaboration, student and faculty mobility, and integrating international perspectives into the curriculum [2, 3].

Nevertheless, the achievements of these projects are ultimately tied to students' perceptions and experiences as these are the core beneficiaries of internationalisation initiatives. This study aims to understand the students' understanding and involvement at Universitas YARSI in the internationalisation projects implemented at the university and to list the difficulties that students experience when involved in these projects.

The existing literature implies the importance of student perceptions and experience when determining the success of internationalisation initiatives. Moreover, for example, international students, who themselves are subject to the barriers and facilitators of internationalisation, can make invaluable contributions by reporting to the rest of the study on the processes by which they manage to come to grips with the peculiar difficulties of being a student in a foreign country [4]. In addition, domestic students' activities with international classmates and activities can provide insights into the generic effect of internationalisation on the campus population [4]. To what is the reality on the ground as seen by students at Universitas YARSI of the university's internationalisation programme, what obstacles does the student face in the programme, and how can the university enrich its strategies for a more effective response to students' expectations and needs? In order to answer these research questions, this study takes a qualitative direction, meaning using a focus group discussion with students from different faculties at Universitas YARSI. The results of this work can be used to inform the design of more inclusive and productive university internationalisation strategies that respond effectively to the demands and viewpoints of the students.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been increasing focus on internationalisation in higher education due to a combination of motivations such as the (assumed) requirement to educate students in

a more globalized society, the (perceived) urge to build the reputation and competitiveness of an institution, and the potential (never realized) for cross-cultural exchange and interaction [5, 6]. Internationalization initiatives in higher education can take many forms, such as student and faculty exchange programs, joint research projects, the integration of international curricula, and the recruitment of international students.

The benefits of internationalisation for students are well documented in the literature. Internationalised experiences can expand students' vision, improve ability to communicate across cultures, and introduce students to different ways of teaching and learning. Additionally, the bringing/presence of international students on campus can add to the richness of the learning environment for all the students, helping enhance cultural sensitivity and global perspective [4].

Nonetheless, the work also points out the difficulties students are apt to meet when responding to internationalisation schemes. For international students, schooling changes, communication across language differences, and a lack of belonging can prevent them from fully participating in and benefitting from internationalisation activities. However, the experience of their domestic students could be different from that of the international students, and they may experience difficulties coping with international students or have no reasonable chance to participate in internationalisation events actively [4].

This is echoed in a study examining faculty perceptions of international students in Turkey, which identified various benefits and challenges of having international students on campus [5]. The advantages involved better academic and disciplinary performance, greater diversity of the learning context, and a more competitive learning context. The challenges, on the other hand, included difficulties with adaptation to the educational system, language barriers, time management issues, and social isolation.

Although the current literature is useful in that it yields significant insights into the general trends and issues of internationalisation in HEIs, there is still the need for context-specific research that probes student perceptions and experiences within the specific landscape of Universitas YARSI.

This work also holds the possibility of playing a role in the global discussion around internationalisation by contributing to the literature with insights from an Indonesian point of view currently underrepresented in the literature. In exploring Universitas YARSI's model and its pedagogical impact, this research offers practical advice for other

institutions wishing to function within similar contexts and navigate the challenges of global engagement.

3. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing a focus group discussion to explore students' perceptions and experiences of internationalisation initiatives at Universitas YARSI. The focus group discussion involved a diverse group of 12 domestic students from various faculties at the university. The participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique to ensure representation of different academic backgrounds, levels of engagement with internationalisation activities, and cultural/national backgrounds.

The focus group discussion was conducted in Bahasa, Indonesia and lasted approximately 90 minutes. The discussion was led by investigators, who employed a semi-structured interview protocol to investigate the following major themes:

- Students' awareness and understanding of the university's internationalisation initiatives:
- Experiences participating in internationalisation activities (e.g., student exchange programs, international events, collaborations with global partners).
- Perceived benefits and challenges of engaging with internationalisation efforts.
- Suggestions for improving the university's internationalisation initiatives

The focus group discussion was recorded, transcribed, and analysed using a thematic analysis approach. Themes were drawn out by a coding and categorising process, with the focus being to capture the overriding themes of the common story of the participants.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Awareness and Understanding of Internationalization Initiatives

Results show a fairly high degree of student awareness of Universitas YARSI's globalization efforts. Most participants described important programmes like study abroad, international conferences, and the presence of international students at the institution. This awareness suggests that the university has achieved

a significant impact in disseminating the information it has, which is an essential initial step in creating an engagement among students [7, 5]. Nevertheless, some of the

subjects claimed to have an insufficient understanding of these programs' specific and strategic aims. As one student remarked:

"I know the university is trying to become more international, but I'm not sure what the overall plan or purpose is."

Although there was a high level of awareness of these programs, participants did acknowledge a range of degrees of understanding of the *raison d'être* and strategic aims of these. Several students reported the programs as ones they felt lucky, although not everyone understood the higher-level aim of these programs, like international ranking enhancement or long-term partnerships. This finding corresponds with Spencer-Oatey and Dauber's (2019) evidence of the need to effectively articulate an institution's internationalisation intention to meet stakeholder expectations [8].

4.2. Experiences of Participating in Internationalization Activities

Students' experiences with internationalisation initiatives varied significantly. Those who participated in exchange programs, international research collaborations, or campus events involving international students reported overwhelmingly positive outcomes. They also pointed out advantages (e.g., better language abilities, improved cross-cultural competence, wider academic and personal experience scope). One participant described their exchange semester in Malaysia as "a transformative experience" that deepened their understanding of diverse cultures and educational systems. They also derived a new respect for collaborative learning and seeing the world from an international perspective due to this chance to teach and learn with peers from all walks of life. They also highlighted the role of interaction with people of different cultural/academic backgrounds in stimulating them to think about tasks in a more flexible/open way. Such exposure allowed them to understand better how different cultural contexts shape communication styles, teamwork dynamics, and decision-making processes.

On the other hand, students described, in most cases, low or no direct participation in internationalisation initiatives. These students reported a high interest in involvement but also reported barriers, including lack of information, finances, and perceived lack of institutional support. Lack of information in relation to active programs was another of the most quoted challenges. Students indicated that announcements about programs were not widely publicized or were communicated through channels that did not reach a larger audience.

Financial difficulties also became a critical barrier, where students pointed to the high costs related to international activities. The nearly equal amount of costs incurred in travelling, stay, program fees, and, of course, all required documents like passports and visas were, unfortunately, far out of the financial reach of the majority of students. For those from economically deprived backgrounds, even smaller sums required to pay for application fees or language proficiency tests presented huge obstacles.

Lack of institutional support was another common theme. Although the university promoted the concept of internationalisation as one of its goals, students did not receive enough support and guidance to face the challenges of these processes of participation.

As a further note, many participants also reported that internationalisation programs were largely available only to a limited number of students, typically students with high levels of English proficiency, access to funds, or prior experience overseas. As a result, less linguistically proficient students and those in financially constrained positions often felt at the margin and less than represented in the university's attempt to create a globally engaged campus. The disparity gave the effect that internationalisation was not actually a campus-wide effort but rather a venture for those who lived in a position to flourish in a similar environment. These inequalities are representative of concerns in the literature regarding socioeconomic and cultural disadvantages that prevent fair inclusion in global activities [8, 9].

4.3. Perceived Benefits and Challenges of Engagement

Participants highlighted a variety of advantages obtained from participating in internationalisation activities. These included enhanced critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, increased appreciation for diverse perspectives, and improved employability in a globalized job market. These results are consistent with the literature suggesting that internationalisation is associated with the individual and academic growth [2, 5].

However, participants also raised significant challenges. Some noted a perceived overemphasis on attracting international students, often at the expense of fostering meaningful integration between domestic and international students. As one student stated, "There is still a wide gap between us. This comes in concurrence to Hudzik's urging for the integration of all international students and scholars into campus residential and higher education experiences [8]. Additional concerns included exacerbating inequalities, with internationalisation efforts benefiting primarily privileged students, and insufficient support for those interested in participating in international activities.

Also, a challenging issue arose in creating an efficient credit transfer process among universities, which impedes the student mobility and restricts the usefulness of the exchange of higher education between different countries.

4.4. Suggestions for Improvement

To address these challenges and enhance the inclusivity and effectiveness of its internationalisation efforts, students proposed several actionable recommendations:

Firstly, they emphasized the need to improve communication and information sharing. Students expressed the importance of better communication concerning the objectives, possibilities, and support offered for the internationalisation process. This could involve leveraging accessible platforms such as social media and the university website. Improved ease of access would allow the university not only to increase awareness but also to produce trust and engagement with students. Therefore, the institution should demonstrate concern for creating equal access for all students to the internationalisation opportunities, thereby playing a part in an inclusive and educated campus community.

Additionally, participants suggested enhancing integration and interaction within the university community. They proposed developing a greater number of meaningful intersections between domestic and international students and between students and faculty to create a more inclusive campus environment. The university could be empowered to feel much safer, with students and faculty on campus, and a stronger and more helpful community, by bringing in more integration and interactions. These attempts would foster intercultural respect and appreciation and equip the entire academic community with the necessary intercultural competencies that are becoming more and more relevant in the current world.

Moreover, students recommended providing targeted support for those interested in international opportunities. This includes offering increased financial assistance, language support, and personalized guidance to help overcome barriers that disproportionately affect underprivileged students. By way of targeted assistance, the university has the potential to mitigate inequalities, which currently make it impossible for a proportion of students to take up its internationalisation programmes and, equally important, to facilitate a much wider range of students to gain valuable life-changing international experiences. It would offer a platform for implementing a fairer, more accessible academic culture and help realise the global engagement and student achievement objectives that the university is trying to achieve.

Furthermore, participants highlighted the importance of ensuring inclusive and equitable access to internationalisation efforts. They urged the university to prioritize initiatives that reach students from all backgrounds, particularly those who are educationally disadvantaged. As much as the university is interested in inclusivity and fair access, the activities for internationalisation should also give students of different socioeconomic backgrounds

the same chance to gain from the action. This will guarantee heterogeneous and representative student involvement, which, in turn, will guarantee the university's endeavour to make a truly global, equitable academic community.

Lastly, students proposed developing partnerships with peer universities to facilitate credit transfer and address mobility constraints. These collaborations may enable credit transfers and provide more seamless processes for student exchange programmes. Through collaborative efforts for credit transfer, Universitas YARSI will optimize administrative procedures for students on abroad exchange programmes. This should improve the students' mobility and show how seriously the university is about achieving truly global learning experiences.

5. CONCLUSION

The results of this study highlight the important influence of student attitudes and practice on the success of internationalisation efforts at Universitas YARSI. Although students do well in acknowledging the importance of such efforts to expand local exposure and develop relevant skills, they also encounter relevant limitations, i.e., financial barriers, administrative burdens, limited access to opportunities, etc. These challenges limit equal access and restrict the opportunity for internationalisation efforts.

In an effort to overcome these challenges, the university has to take a more student-centric model of internationalisation. This involves expanding information sharing on opportunities, working with focused financial and institutional redress, strengthening the credit transfer process, working together with sister universities, and nurturing academic engagement between domestic and international students. By aligning its strategy with the desires and requirements of its student community, Universitas YARSI has the potential to develop an inclusive and effective internationalisation framework.

Ultimately, the achievements of internationalisation plans depend on the university's capacity to equip every student to participate in and gain out of these plans. By doing

so, Universitas YARSI will be in a better position to build its global standing and help students succeed in a more connected world.

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