

Enhancing English speaking proficiency: The journey of an international student's mobility in a non-native English country

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ABSTRACT

Student exchange programs are a very beneficial innovation in the current era, as they offer students an excellent opportunity to improve their English language skills and an invaluable learning experience abroad. Despite the benefits of overseas exchanges there are also unique barriers, including culture and limited exposure to the English language. Through this qualitative research using narrative inquiry and in-depth interviews, this study reveals that students faced initial difficulties such as shyness and barriers to communication. The main findings show how students faced language difficulties and improved their English by using tactics including daily vocabulary development and building confidence through interactions with local people. The findings reveal an emphasis on the transformative impact of international mobility on language acquisition and individual growth, as well as the need to highlight support for students in non-native English-speaking environments.

Keywords: *International Student Mobility, English language proficiency, Non-native English-speaking countries, Narrative Inquiry*

INTRODUCTION

The current International student mobility program has become one of the innovations in education in this era of globalization. Through this program, students gain a lot of experience and opportunities to learn and experience surviving in other countries. Students gain numerous advantages from International student mobility. One of these benefits is the desire for students to improve their English-speaking skills (Suryanto et al., 2022). Opting to spend a minimum of one semester in a foreign country has become a valuable complement to their degree, providing them with a comprehensive education (Stepanovienė, 2011). Sufficient English language skills are an important component for participating in International student mobility. English is often the main language of education and communication in many countries that are destinations for international student mobility programs. This is because English is an international language. Therefore, English language proficiency is the key to success for students who wish to take advantage of the international student mobility experience.

Embarking on the journey of international student mobility is a thrilling adventure filled with opportunities for personal growth, cultural immersion, and academic advancement. For students venturing to non-native English-speaking countries, this experience holds an additional layer of complexity and reward. English language proficiency is now essential in today's globally connected society, as it provides access to chances for international education, job progression, and cross-cultural communication. "Enhancing English Proficiency" explores the various methods that people can employ to enhance their proficiency in the English language, ranging from traditional classroom learning to immersive experiences and innovative technological tools.

Enhancing English proficiency is essential to achieving success and being more connected in today's international society, whether for work, education, or personal enrichment. In line with (Politechnika Śląska, Wydział Organizacji i Zarządzania, Zabrze et al., 2019), one of the most significant advantages of participating in international educational exchange is the opportunity to gain important experience while living in another country and studying at a university different from one's

own. Without question, the chance to advance language proficiency and have an edge in future job searches is one of the biggest benefits. However, there are special possibilities and challenges when navigating the complexities of learning English while residing in a nation where it is not the official language. Improving English ability in these kinds of settings can be a challenge as well as a special opportunity. Thus, the experiences, approaches, and results of exchange students who complete their academic programs in nations where English is not the official language provide insight into how they get past communication barriers, assimilate into the community, and develop their language abilities and viewpoints. Experiences with the international student movement might highlight the challenges faced by international students as they attempt to acquire English. The culture shock felt by students from other countries also affects the development of English. As for students who have a positive perception of the culture there, they will be more motivated to get involved in the program. In addition, students who have a negative perception of the culture there will find it difficult to adapt and difficult to add to their experience.

Moreover, the journey of enhancing English proficiency while studying abroad is marked by a series of strategic efforts and adaptive learning approaches. International student mobility often engages in diverse methods to improve students' language skills, leveraging both formal and informal settings. They attend language courses, participate in study group, and utilize language learning applications. Simultaneously, they immerse themselves in everyday interactions, engaging with locals, participating in community events, and practicing conversational English in real-world contexts. One significant advantage of studying in a non-English-speaking country is the necessity to use English as a *lingua franca* to communicate with fellow international students and locals who do not share the same native language. The term '*lingua franca*', which is widely used as the foundation for conceptualizing, researching, and teaching ELF, is critical to understanding ELF and its supporting ontological and epistemological assumptions (Alam, 2023). This constant practice in varied contexts helps students become more fluent and confident in their language use. Additionally, the experience of adapting to different accents and dialects further enhances their listening and comprehension skills, making them more versatile in their communication abilities. The cultural immersion accompanying International student mobility programs also plays a crucial role in language acquisition. By living in a different cultural setting, students gain a deeper understanding of cultural nuances and social etiquettes, often reflected in language use. This cultural awareness improves their linguistic competence and makes them more empathetic and effective communicators in multicultural environments. Furthermore, the academic environment in the host country provides another layer of language enhancement. Students are exposed to different teaching styles and academic expectations, often requiring them to engage in critical thinking, debate, and presentation in English. These academic challenges push students to refine their academic language proficiency, enriching their vocabulary and improving their ability to articulate complex ideas clearly and persuasively. While the journey of mastering English in a foreign country is undoubtedly challenging, the rewards are substantial. Exchange students return home not only with improved language skills but also with a heightened sense of independence, resilience, and global awareness. They learn to navigate unfamiliar environments, solve problems creatively, and interact with people from diverse backgrounds, all of which are invaluable skills in today's interconnected world.

METHODS

This research uses a type of qualitative research where this research focuses on the personal experiences of participants who carry out International student mobility in other countries. This method uses narrative inquiry research, based on experiences and a series of activities experienced by participants. According to Denos, Toohey, Neilson, and Waterstone (2009), narrative inquiry becomes a very important kind of research as praxis, where there is an ongoing, productive relationship between theory, research, and classroom teaching (as cited in Norton & Early, 2011).

The participants involved had a semester-long study abroad in International student mobility experience, where the research instrument was a direct and in-depth interview that we conducted focusing on their English learning experience in a foreign country, and how they can survive and be motivated to learn in a foreign country.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The interview results with both participants showed their student exchange experience in another country, so both participants felt there were differences in their learning environment. The following is what the participants said about their learning experience in a foreign country. Both participants, P1 and P2 are English education students who have the same learning experience. However, these two participants initially had different views in dealing with the process of student exchange abroad, they initially had difficulty adjusting to a country where they were not fluent in English. According to P1 in this student exchange, she felt different from his usual environment, P1 felt she was embarrassed to adjust initially, while according to P2 she also felt the same way, she felt awkward because there was no English and, in the environment, there also the interlocutors were less fluent in speaking English so it was quite difficult to adjust.

Participant 1 (P1):

P1 felt a challenge when facing a new environment in exchange students, especially in a country that is not a native English speaker, so the challenge when there P1 felt shy at first in the new environment, and P1 felt quite stiff and nervous in interacting with them because in a foreign country not a native English speaker.

"The main problem I faced was feeling shy if not approached by a local friend first, so when trying to speak, I ended up feeling stiff and nervous, also afraid of making pronunciation mistakes"

P1 feels that she should be able to find strategies to deal with the challenges she experiences so that she will feel comfortable undergoing exchange student activities and can develop her skills in a foreign country even though the country is not a native English speaker.

"I had to interact with my local friends first to build my confidence and keep trying to speak, even though I was not fluent because I was a little nervous because I was a little confused and the environment there was not a native English speaker."

P1 tried to get close to the local people there including exchange student friends there to blend in even though they were not native English speakers, so it was also quite difficult to try to speak English to them.

Participant 2 (P2):

P2 also feels the same way, the main problems and challenges in this student exchange are in the environment. The environment where P2 carries out this student exchange is an environment that speaks less English, so P2 feels it is quite difficult to use English as his daily language in studying there.

"The main problem is that I live in a non-English speaking environment, so I can't use English all the time there. Plus, it's hard to explain things in English when the person I'm talking to isn't very fluent in English either"

P2 has strategies for dealing with the challenges that occur in the learning environment there. P2 said that he continues to learn vocabulary every day to adapt to their learning environment there, so that P2 can communicate well of course with students and local people there. According to P2, increasing new vocabulary is a strategy that is effective enough to overcome the challenges of speaking English in a non-native environment.

"To improve my English in a non-English speaking country, I need to keep learning new vocabulary. This way, I can communicate and explain what I need better. Picking up new words, both easy and difficult ones, really helps me to improve"

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study explores the challenges and strategies of students participating in international mobility programs in non-English-speaking countries as they strive to enhance their

English language skills. Participants faced various initial difficulties in cultural adaptation and communication in environments where English proficiency was not widespread. These challenges included feelings of embarrassment, nervousness in interacting with locals, and the complexity of self-expression. However, through strategic approaches such as building confidence through local interactions and daily vocabulary acquisition, participants like P1 and P2 successfully navigated these hurdles. They emphasized the importance of persistence in speaking English despite initial discomfort, and the value of continuous learning to broaden their linguistic abilities. These insights underscore the transformative potential of international student mobility in cultivating language proficiency and personal growth.

Overall, the findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the unique dynamics at play in non-English-speaking environments within international education, offering practical implications for supporting future exchange students in their language learning endeavors. This research highlights the resilience and adaptability of students in overcoming linguistic challenges while enriching their global experiences.

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