Exploring the Impact of Virtual Student Exchange Program on Personal and Speaking Proficiency Development of Indonesian EFL Students

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Abstract

Previous studies have shown that studying abroad affects the second language (L2) learning outcomes. However, it has yet to be proven whether a short-term experience, such as participation in a virtual student exchange program has a measurable impact on L2 or foreign language development. The present study aimed to examine the improvement of English learners speaking skills after participating in a six-week international virtual student exchange program on Asian culture. It is a collaboration among health education institutions in Indonesia, Thailand, Japan, and The Philippines. This study employed quantitative and qualitative methods. Ten Indonesian EFL students were involved in this study and their speaking proficiency was measured before and after participating in the virtual program. A structured interview was also conducted to yield more information on their experience in the program. Statistic findings indicated a significant difference between the students’ speaking proficiency before and after the program (Sig. = 0.004 < 0.05), which meant that their English-speaking proficiency improved over six weeks. The statistical findings are consistent with the student's report stating that they felt more confident and comfortable speaking in English upon participation in the program. In conclusion, these findings extend our understanding that a short-term virtual student exchange experience significantly impacts the speaking proficiency and personal development of Indonesian EFL students; and imply that efforts to support such international virtual programs should continue.

Keywords

Virtual student exchange
EFL students
personal development
speaking proficiency

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Introduction

Globalization has major implications for the higher education sector, particularly on the mobility of students and faculties, knowledge and information, education access, and sharing of policies and practices. Internationalization is one of the strategic plans of universities to continue to exist in the field of education while at the same time responding to the challenges of globalization, revolution 4.0, and the needs of stakeholders (Mali, 2020). Internationalization enables universities to develop their institution through the exchange of knowledge and culture, development of human resources – notably the lecturers; improvement of education quality, research, and community service, and the increase of competitiveness and reputation of universities at the national level and globally (Richardson & Munday, 2013).

Nowadays, with the rapid development of technology, an interconnected network, global awareness, and communication skill are increasingly seen as important individual assets. With the current work market requiring university graduates to possess interpersonal-intercultural skills and foreign language proficiency to be able to interact in global settings, higher education institutions are emphasizing their programs on internationalization. Strategically, internationalization can offer students, faculty members, and universities many valuable benefits. It helps students to socialize with other students from different social, economic, cultural, linguistic, and national backgrounds (International Office ITEKES Bali, 2022); can grow critical thinking leading to innovation, encourage international collaborations among students and faculty members and stimulate new approaches in teaching and learning methods. As important as they are, the advantage of international exposure in education practical life go beyond students and faculty members. The higher education institutions and the management also benefit from the internationalization as it results on awareness of international issues, understanding of how education system operate across countries and cultures, also increase of revenue generation, exchange of academic and research, and stronger institution brand standing (Yeravdekar & Tiwari, 2014).

Internationalization in universities is carried out through various programs such as international student and staff mobility, visiting lecturers/professors, joint research and publications, international conferences, and others (Barragán Codina & Leal López, 2013). In Indonesia, the accelerating rate of internationalization has focused attention on academic collaboration, particularly joint research, joint degree, and international student exchange programs.

International students exchange program is a program that is provided by universities, in which the students from a home university are provided with the chance to study to host universities in other countries through a formal exchange agreement between the home and host universities (Suryanto et al., 2022). There are many benefits that students can gain from participating in an international
student exchange program, among others are establishing international friendships and networks (Hendrickson, 2018). Several studies have explored the impact of study abroad experience on students’ intercultural communication and cross-cultural adaptability (Nguyen, 2017; Yusup & Gemiharto, 2022), and other studies also found that study abroad experience enhances personal development, better understanding and respect towards cultural differences, increased level of self-esteem and global mindedness (Maharaja, 2018).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the international student exchange program or study abroad can no longer be carried out physically. The worldwide lockdown and traveling restrictions forced universities to find an alternate way to conduct the student exchange program. The international student exchange is modified into a virtual program at the Institute of Technology and Health Bali (ITEKES Bali), Indonesia. The virtual student exchange program is found to be cost-effective because the students only need good internet access and facilities such as a laptop or PC to participate in the virtual program. This is completely different from physical student mobility which requires much larger funds for airplane tickets, accommodation, and living expenses during the period of living abroad.

In the implementation of the international virtual student exchange program, students are divided into several groups. Each group consists of students from ITEKES Bali partner universities: Thailand, Japan, and the Philippines. Due to their various mother tongues or national languages, English is then the lingua franca or language of instruction used in the virtual student exchange program. Thus, communicating and learning in English is a must for them.

Many studies claimed that learning a language in a country where it is spoken is very helpful for language acquisition, especially for the development of oral skills (Llanes et al., 2016). Other studies also stated that students who take part in student exchange programs have the opportunity to practice their English because the program mostly applies the idea of English as an international language (McKay, 2018), where English acts as a communication tool (Takehara et al., 2018), lingua franca (Llanes et al., 2016; Martin-Rubió & Cots, 2018) and also as a medium of teaching (Zhang, 2018). This means that students get many opportunities to practice and use their English when participating in a student exchange program which facilitates their acquisition of English (Thompson, 2018).

Kenne (2014) concluded that students’ personal growth and confidence facilitated the students develop a personal, life-changing interest in the target language. As the students developed personally, the real communicative interactions with other students and people in the target community allowed them to develop a sense of language-self within the target language. The language-self is believed to affect the second language acquisition as the students attempt to keep their new identity.

Although many people believe in the benefits of this short-term studying abroad or exchange program in improving students’ language skills, many are also skeptical and found the opposite. Language barriers have been identified as one of the key difficulties for non-English speaking overseas students in participating in the international students exchange program. Academic and social success need fluency in English as a means of international interaction (Meng et al., 2018). A study found that international students remain discouraged by such a perceived barrier to using their English for successful communication with English speakers while
expressing hesitancy to engage in existing opportunities of interactions to practice their English skills to make social adaption (Wright & Schartner, 2013). Language becomes a challenge for students as it can distance them from their surroundings, particularly their teachers, acquaintances, and other university members (Gautam et al., 2016).

Unlike the study abroad or immersion program as mentioned above, the short-term virtual student exchange program is a modified program due to the Covid-19 pandemic, in which the participants of this program do not physically attend lectures abroad but attend lectures virtually from their respective homes with students from various universities and different countries. Student participants of this program had the opportunity to interact with students and lecturers from several Asian countries through virtual platforms, such as zoom meetings and google meet, also many kinds of social media, such as Line, WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram. Given the potential effect of language acquisition experience on students’ English proficiency; the difference in nature between the offsite and virtual student exchange programs raises questions about the effectiveness or impact of this virtual program on students’ personal and English-speaking development. Hence, this study aimed to investigate the personal and speaking proficiency development of Indonesian EFL students participating in the short-term international virtual student exchange program on Asian culture utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data to have a deeper insight into the process.

Method

This study was quasi-experimental. The experimental research method is a research method used to find the effect of something that is treated on another in conditions that can be controlled (Sugiyono, 2016). Quasi-experimental uses all subjects in the study group (intact group) to be given treatment, not using subjects taken at random. This study used 1 group of respondents with a mix-method, quantitative and qualitative. This study combines an in-depth qualitative analysis of students’ experiences in the virtual mobility program with quantitative documentation of learning outcomes.

The subjects of this study were 10 EFL Indonesian undergraduate students from various majors: Nursing, Pharmacy, Nursing Anesthesiology, Midwifery, and Food Technology at the Institute of Technology and Health Bali (ITEKES Bali); participating in a six-week international virtual student exchange on Asian culture in 2022. All were native speakers of Bahasa Indonesia, had 9 years of experience in learning English in Bali – from primary to high school; and none of them had previous study abroad or virtual mobility experience.

First, the participants of the virtual student exchange program were tested to measure their speaking skill before the program started, and then, a second speaking test was conducted after the virtual program. The speaking skill rubric used was adapted from EIC Speaking Assessment Rubric (Syahidah & Umasugi, 2021) and has been proven to be valid through content and construct validity (all items < r critic = (0.666) and reliable (Cronbach’s Alpha 0.974). After that, all these students were also participated in a semi-structured interview and were asked some questions aiming to elicit underlying factors which may explain the effectiveness of
the virtual program on their personal development and improvement in English-speaking proficiency.

The collected data were then classified and analyzed using different methods. First, the quantitative data – both the results of pre-test and post-test of speaking skill were analyzed statistically using descriptive statistics. Tests of normality were conducted to determine if the data sets were well-modeled by a normal distribution. The test of normality implemented in this study was the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk. Based on the results of the tests of normality, a further analysis was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference between the data before and after the virtual program. Since both data sets (pre and post-test) were found not normally distributed, then a further analysis was administered using the Wilcoxon Sign Rank Test. Second, the qualitative data from the interview were transcribed, classified, and then analyzed through content analysis.

Results

Results of Qualitative Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Descriptive Statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N Minimum Maximum Mean Std.Deviation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre 10 50 78 68.60 7.367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 10 54 80 71.60 6.786</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N (listwise) 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 showed the number of participants in this study, a total of 10 Indonesian EFL students participating in the international virtual student exchange program in 2022. It was found that the mean of the pre-test was different from the mean of the post-test. These findings showed that there was a difference between the result of the speaking test before and after the students participating in the virtual program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Test of Normality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kolmogorov-Smirnova</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistic df Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre .275 10 .030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post .307 10 .008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The result of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test on the pre-test data showed that the p-value was 0.30 (p < 0.05), which meant that the data set was not normally distributed. Another test using the Shapiro-Wilk test also found that the data set of the pre-test was not normally distributed (p = 0.009 < 0.05). The result of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test on the post-test data showed that the data set was not normally distributed (p = 0.008 < 0.05), and similarly, the result of the Shapiro-Wilk test also found that the data set was not normally distributed (p = 0.002 < 0.05). Since both data sets (pre and post-test) were found not normally distributed, then a further analysis was administered using the Wilcoxon Sign Rank Test.

Table 3. Wilcoxon Sign Rank Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranks</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Rank</th>
<th>Sum of Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre Negative</td>
<td>0a</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Positive</td>
<td>10b</td>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>55.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ties</td>
<td>0c</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

The results of the Wilcoxon Sign Rank test showed that there was no decrease in value from the pre-test to the post-test (as shown in the negative ranks section), which meant that all participants experienced no decrease in their speaking proficiency. It was also found that all participants’ speaking proficiency improved over the virtual mobility period which was shown by the increasing mean of 5.50.
Table 4. Statistics Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post - Pre</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td>-2.879b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

A further statistical test revealed that there was a significant difference between the participants’ marks on the speaking test before and after the virtual mobility (Sig. = 0.004 < 0.05). This statistical result revealed that there was a significant difference in the participants’ speaking proficiency before and after the virtual program which means that there was a significant positive effect of the virtual student exchange on the Indonesian EFL speaking development.

Table 5. Attitudes towards English and Others

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English-related changes</td>
<td>1. Motivated to improve English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Less fear of making mistakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Using English for communicative purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. More tolerance for grammar mistakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Comprehensibility rather than accuracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. More confident and comfortable speaking English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture and way of living</td>
<td>1. More interest in the culture and traditions of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. More tolerance for cultural differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. More tolerance for differences in opinions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Able to identify the good from others that might be implemented to own self (i.e. philosophical values, etc.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 shows the changes in students’ attitudes toward English and the Culture of others after participating in the virtual exchange program. The changes are classified into 2 classifications; the English-related changes and culture and way of living. As shown in Table 5, all EFL students reported that the virtual program influenced them in many ways. Students generally expressed positive opinions towards changes they experienced and felt. All of them mentioned that the virtual program motivated them to improve their English and be more confident and comfortable in speaking English as they were less afraid of making mistakes and more tolerant of grammar mistakes. They also stated that they felt it was acceptable to make some grammar mistakes.
as long as they understand each other and the communication happens as it was aimed. Two participants even stated their wish to improve English proficiency to achieve their goal of being a global nurse and being able to work abroad, specifically in neighboring English-speaking countries, such as Singapore and New Zealand. They mentioned their wishes as follows:

“I want to improve my English so I can speak English better because I want to work abroad, maybe in Singapore or New Zealand”. (Participant 1).

“I really want to speak English very well, so I can work abroad. I think it’s amazing to work abroad, get international experience, also good salary”. (Participant 2).

In terms of their attitudes towards culture and way of living, all students also reported that they became more interested and tolerant of others’ cultures and traditions. They found some similarities and differences in cultures among the four countries – Indonesia, Japan, Thailand, and the Philippines.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6. English-Speaking Proficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clasification</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Speaking | 1. Better fluency  
2. Better pronunciation  
3. Quick response (less thinking about grammar)  
4. Easier/smooth communication |
| Others | 1. Learning new words and collocations  
2. Vocabulary used in the right context  
3. No change in grammar knowledge |

As can be seen in Table 6, issues that were regarded as gains by the Indonesian students were their speaking skills. The speaking development is ranging from better pronunciation and fluency to providing quicker responses and easier communication in English. Other gains mentioned by the students were learning new words or collocations and using vocabulary in the right context. Although students experienced positive changes in their speaking proficiency, however, in terms of grammar, participants did not refer to a common change. They mentioned no significant change in grammar knowledge.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7. Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clasification</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Linguistics challenges | 1. Various accents  
2. Fast speech  
3. Insufficient language proficiency |
| Social challenges | 1. Unfamiliar with cultural references  
2. Timid or shyness  
3. Busy (limited time for further interaction outside the program) |

Table 7 shows that students experienced both linguistic and social challenges during participating in the program. Linguistically, accents and speech velocity were considered as the challenge by most of the students, and some mentioned they were
challenged by their insufficient language proficiency of themselves and participants from other countries. They further reported that they also experienced difficulties on some occasions due to unfamiliarity with the culture; hesitancy of Japanese and Thai students in communication due to their shyness; and struggle to allocate enough time for further interactions and fostering friendships due to the hectic campus schedule and study assignments.

Table 8. Coping with Challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linguistics challenges</td>
<td>1. Askings for clarifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Finding different words/phrases to explain something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social challenges</td>
<td>1. Getting used to reading and using facial expressions and body language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Finding some common grounds such as hobbies or interests for conversation topics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8 shows that regardless of the challenges, these students found ways to cope with those challenges. They reported that they became used to asking for clarifications when they could not understand what the speakers said to them and found other words/phrases to explain something or express their minds. They also mentioned that they became accustomed to reading and using facial expressions and body language to smother their conversation with students from other countries. In addition, they also stated that to get to know more about their fellow participants, they implemented the strategy of finding some common ground between them, such as talking about hobbies and interests. Four students mentioned that their interest in Korean drama and Korean boy bands and girl bands made them closer as they exchanged stories and conversations on Korea-related matters, and shared some information on virtual concerts or merchandise and fans-clubs of those Korean boy bands and girl bands.

**DISCUSSION**

The positive impacts of the virtual exchange program on the speaking development of the participants of this study are consistent with the findings of other studies on the offsite short-term study abroad or exchange program. Hernandez (2016) found that a group of students who participated in a study abroad program in Spain improved their speaking proficiency although the students reported that they did not engage in extensive social interaction with native speakers throughout the duration of the study abroad program.

Kaya (2021) conducted a similar type of study in which she explored the language development of a group of EFL learners participating in the Erasmus program for a second language acquisition experience where English is not used as a first language. In this study, the students studied in European countries and some of these countries present only restricted exposure to English in their social and academic lives. Despite the less exposure to English, the students were found to experience greater gains in their speaking skills. It was further suggested that the nature or quality of the interaction, rather than the quantity of interaction, may determine the effectiveness of language learning.
The findings of this current study further suggest that it was somehow easier for beginner students to make measurable speaking proficiency gains on the oral assessment than those with more advanced proficiency. The fact that all students participating in this virtual program come from Asian countries, in which English is not their native language, makes it apparent that they most likely did not engage in long conversations but rather short and possibly only discuss study-related topics and hobbies. Hence, in terms of the quality of interactions, students with more advanced English did not experience enough long and in-depth conversations to allow them to progress in their oral skills.

The Indonesian EFL students in this study reported that they improved in fluency because they felt more confident and comfortable speaking in English. All students reported that they had regular contact with participants from other countries, both within the program platform and outside the program. Often, they exchanged opinions and ideas with either the lecturers or participants from other countries when they worked on group projects, and they used any means of communication, including incorporating body gestures/body language when needed, particularly with participants from Thailand and Japan. Outside the virtual program, they often communicate with other participants through social media, such as Line, and exchange comments on Instagram and Facebook. Even after the program ended, some of them remain in contact with these participants as they foster friendships and closeness to each other.

In addition to fluency, students also realized that another improvement they gained was the expansion of English vocabulary. They learned new words or colloquial mostly from the Philippines students because they spoke better English compared to students from Indonesia, Japan, and Thailand. All these Indonesian students also gave affirmative responses that participants and lecturers from other countries contributed to their language learning. They were also appreciative that the lecturers often took on an English teacher–like role by speaking slower with them and engaging them in discussions about their campus life, culture, traditional food, and customs.

In terms of grammar, all Indonesian students believed that they experienced no change in their grammar knowledge. They mentioned that at the beginning of the program, they felt forced to think and give responses quickly. The nature of class engagement and discussion in the program was rather intense and rapid due to the involvement of the Philippines students. The Philippines spoke considerably better English than other students in this exchange group, hence motivating other participants to improve themselves. The Indonesian students further mentioned that they became accustomed to giving responses quicker than before. Instead of thinking too much about the grammar, they braved themselves to express their mind, got engaged, and did their best not to be left out of the discussion. Grammar was no longer holding them back because they finally managed to use English for a communicative purpose. If they could understand each other and no misunderstanding happened, they considered it a successful communication, and to them, it was an achievement. This result showed that the Indonesian EFL students have reshaped their perception of using English because they stated less afraid in making mistakes during their interaction in English and emphasized that intelligibility is more important than accuracy. This means, they shifted from accuracy to fluency. (Kaypak & Ortaçtepe, 2014) concluded a similar result in which the participants of their study shifted their focus from accuracy to comprehensibility, which aided them achieve their goal of successful and meaningful interaction in EFL communities.
Although all these students reported positive experiences with the other participants in the program, however, it appears that the virtual program was too short for most to have developed strong, personal relationships with the other participants. They also reported some challenges they had to undergo during the program. For various reasons, they reported that they found it difficult to develop a close relationship with students from Japan and Thailand. Some mentioned it was due to their personality, such as being timid or shy, but mostly mentioned that it was due to the language barrier. The Thai and Japanese students seemed to have difficulty expressing themselves in English, and their thick accents often raise mispronunciation which made them hard to understand. Hence, body gestures and asking for clarifications were the other things that they practiced often when interacting with students from these two countries. Although at the conversational level, they succeeded, however, they admitted that it would be difficult to discuss further with them, notably discussing something which requires explanations or thought-provoking conversations.

The findings of this current study are also comparable with other studies which found the international exchange program benefits the participants, particularly in intercultural competence and personal development. Nguyen (2017) examined possible gains and factors influencing such gains in students’ intercultural competency upon participation in a short-term program in Texas, USA. The results validated the potential for short-term study abroad programs ranging from two to five weeks to have significant impacts on students’ self-perceived personal experience, specifically intercultural competence.

Maharaja (2018) investigated the impact of a semester-long study abroad on the development of intercultural competence and personal growth of 150 college students who have studied in different countries. The findings of this study showed that studying abroad increased intercultural competence and personal development, in which participants reported they gained a better understanding of their native and other countries’ culture and cultural differences, increased their level of self-esteem, global-mindedness, patience, assertiveness, maturity, self-awareness, flexibility, and adaptability.

Consistent with the findings of Nguyen (2017) and Maharaja (2018) participants of this study also reported that they gained more interest and a better understanding of other's cultures, more tolerance for differences in culture and opinions, also personal choices, and increased adaptability. They mentioned that before joining the program, they did not aware that asking questions such as marital status and religion was considered impolite in Japan, Thailand, and the Philippines. They thought that Asian countries have similar views on taboos and politeness. In Indonesia, particularly Bali, asking about someone’s marital status or belief/religion under many circumstances was acceptable and considered as a part of small talks in the community. Although nowadays, a growing number of people, particularly the younger generation in Indonesia think that asking such personal questions is impolite, however, in general, the culture remains the same. The students further commented that this fact is interesting because they now realize that although they are all Asians and share many similarities in culture and traditions, however, there are also differences on certain things and they respect it as it is.

Another fact was apparent when some students explained that they were surprised to know that LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people are widely accepted in Thailand. Although same-sex marriage remains illegal in Thailand, the government and society's acceptance of LGBT is undeniable. LGBT can live openly
and co-exist with straight people in Thailand. This condition is completely different compared to the condition in Indonesia. LGBT in Indonesia is more tolerated that accepted. Despite recent events that have promoted the rights, general acceptance, and empowerment of the Indonesian LGBT community, discrimination, rejection, and even condemnation remain (Susandi et al., 2018). The students further stated that although it remains difficult for them to understand the LGBT, however, they all agreed that they become more tolerant of people’s differences and personal choices; and are flexible and adaptive to uncomfortable situations.

**CONCLUSION**

Statistical findings indicated that all Indonesian EFL participants improved their speaking proficiency during the six-week virtual program (Sig. = 0.004 < 0.05), and these findings are consistent with the student's report stating that they felt more confident and comfortable speaking in English upon participation in the program. In terms of personal development, this study found that the students gained more interest and a better understanding of other’s cultures; more tolerance for differences in culture and opinions, also personal choices, and increased adaptability. In conclusion, results of this study confirm that a virtual short-term student exchange experience can indeed have a positive measurable impact on foreign language development, particularly speaking proficiency, and personal development.

Although this virtual program can have a measurable effect on EFL development, program coordinators should continue to consider how to best maximize the potential of the virtual environment to improve EFL learning for all participants. Recognizing the fact that it can take a substantially longer time for the participants to develop a strong and close relationship with their fellow participants, the virtual mobility programs should also find a better way to increase communication among the participants before attending the virtual program. The participants can be put in an online chat group such as Line or WhatsApp, where they can discuss their likes and dislikes, hobbies, favorite TV shows, and other things that they’re interested in.

Students also must understand that language learning during the virtual program is not automatic and requires them to take a proactive role in their language learning. Students should actively involve and engage in any discussions during the virtual program – be it with their fellow participants or lecturers. Given the importance of social interaction in speaking skill development, students should also expand their interactions outside the virtual mobility platform, such as through social media.

Although this study confirms that the virtual student exchange experience has a positive effect on the learners’ speaking proficiency and personal development, however, some considerations must be taken into account. This study is limited only to participants of virtual student exchange held by the Institute of Technology and Health Bali and its partner universities, thus different results might be found in a study with a bigger size of participants or different backgrounds. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the linguistic progress and personal development made by the students during virtual student exchange programs, subsequent research should consider expanding and triangulating the methods of data collection and assessment within the same research design.

From the viewpoint of language educators and the management of universities, this study is useful in their decision-making about the importance of international
The results of this study imply that efforts to support such international virtual programs should continue.

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