

**EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF STUDENT EXCHANGE
PROGRAMS ON PERSONALITY GROWTH AND SPEAKING
SKILLS DEVELOPMENT**

A Thesis

By :

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**LANGUAGE AND ARTS EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
FACULTY OF TEACHER TRAINING AND EDUCATION
SRIWIJAYA UNIVERSITY**

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Certified that the thesis entitled "Exploring the Impact of Student Exchange Programs on Personality Growth and Speaking Skills Development" is my own work, and I did not do any plagiarism or inappropriate quotation against the ethics and rules commended by the Ministry of Education of the Republic Indonesia Number 17, 2010 regarding plagiarism in higher education. Therefore, I deserve to face court if I am found to have plagiarized this work.

Palembang, July 2025

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated with all my heart to my dearest parents, Ismedi Musolini and Hernila, who have always prayed for me and supported me in every possible way physically, emotionally, and financially. Thank you for always doing your best to provide everything I need to reach my dreams, and for giving so much without ever asking anything in return. My siblings, my brother, my older sister, and my younger sister for always being there with their support, motivation, and for being the ones I could talk to whenever I needed to share my struggles or happiness during this journey. My family has been my biggest source of strength throughout this process. Last but not least, I would like to thank me for believing in me doing all this hard work, and never quitting.

MOTTO

“Brain, Beauty, Behaviour”

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The Writer



Rahmahridha

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EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF STUDENT EXCHANGE PROGRAMS ON PERSONALITY GROWTH AND SPEAKING SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

ABSTRACT

Participating in student exchange programs within Indonesia offers valuable opportunities for students to experience new academic environments while enhancing their personal and speaking development. This study explored the impact of the Student Exchange Program on personality growth and speaking skills development among English Education students in Indonesia. Using a quantitative method with descriptive approach, data were collected from 53 students through a structured questionnaire and a speaking test. The questionnaire measured eight aspects of personality growth and speaking skills development, while the speaking test assessed five components: fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and coherence. The results showed that all personality growth and speaking skills development indicators were rated as "Very High." The speaking test also revealed positive outcomes, with 75.5% of students rated as "Good," 17% as "Very Good," 5.7% as "Okay," and only 1.9% as "Poor." These findings suggested that the Student Exchange Program effectively supported both personal and speaking skill growth. Overall, the program aligned with the MBKM framework's goal of producing independent, adaptable, and communicatively competent graduates.

Keywords: *Student Exchange Program, Personality Growth, Speaking Skill*

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents (1) the background of the study, (2) the problem of the study, (3) the objective of the study, and (4) the significance of the study

1.1 Background of the Study

Since 2021, the development and implementation of curriculum policies in Indonesia have brought about substantial and far-reaching changes across the entire spectrum of the national education system. These changes have not only impacted the structure and content of teaching and learning but also transformed the educational experience at all levels from primary and secondary schools to higher education institutions (Arsyad & Widuhung, 2022; Chrisyarani et al., 2022; Meke et al., 2022; Sahertian et al., 2022). The Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) is a vast and diverse nation, composed of thousands of ethnic groups and languages. This cultural and linguistic richness contributes to the country's pluralistic nature, where interactions between various cultures are an inherent part of daily life. These intercultural exchanges are particularly noticeable in the field of education, where students from all corners of the archipelago come together to share ideas, experiences, and perspectives. The diversity found in Indonesia's population becomes a powerful force in shaping the educational experience, offering students the opportunity to learn about the many different cultures that make up the nation (Siregar et al., 2020).

One of the most effective strategies in this context is the implementation of student exchange programs. The student exchange program has attracted significant attention in universities around the world because of its positive impact on students' professional growth, which provide a unique opportunity for students to study at different universities. It is designed to enhance students' abilities to engage with global challenges, deepen their understanding of different cultures, and develop skills. The motivations for participating in student exchange programs are diverse. Students often seek personal development, improved communication skills, and

expanded perspectives through academic engagement in different cultural settings. Furthermore, they are eager to enhance their communication abilities, which can improve their future career prospects through participation in an exchange program (Zhang, F., & Wang, J., 2022).

In the context of education, cultural diversity is often viewed as a motivating factor. It encourages individuals to deepen their understanding of the various ethnicities, traditions, and customs that exist within Indonesia. This can foster a sense of national unity, as students begin to appreciate the shared values that bind them together despite their differences. By interacting with peers from different cultural backgrounds, students are given the chance to broaden their worldviews, enhance their social skills, and develop a more comprehensive understanding of Indonesian society as a whole (Siregar et al., 2020).

Recognizing the importance of such programs in enriching students' learning experiences, In Indonesia, one of the key initiatives under the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) framework is the Merdeka Student Exchange Program. This program is part of a policy established by the Ministry of Education and Culture aimed at equipping students with a broad skill set valuable for their future careers. The Merdeka Student Exchange Program offers Indonesian students the chance to unleash their creativity in new environments, allowing them to engage with diverse languages, cultures, ethnicities, and atmospheres. This initiative is designed to enrich students' learning experiences and foster personal and communication growth (Supriati, et al., 2022).

During the implementation of this program, each student is paired with a peer from a different cultural background. For instance, a student from the Javanese ethnic group will have the opportunity to interact and build friendships with students from other ethnicities outside the island of Java. This arrangement is designed to help students gain new perspectives, learn valuable life lessons, and experience the richness of Indonesia's cultural diversity. Through these interactions, students are expected to develop a deeper understanding of tolerance, respect, and appreciation for differences among individuals. These cross-cultural

experiences allow students to learn how to value diversity and live in harmony with people from different backgrounds while attending their academic courses. In addition to academic goals, the program also aims to strengthen national unity by encouraging friendships among young people from various parts of the country. It is hoped that these connections will inspire a stronger sense of love for the nation and increase awareness of the importance of unity in a diverse society. After completing the program, students are expected to become individuals with strong character and integrity. They should have a better understanding of Indonesia's cultural richness and be able to wisely use this knowledge to contribute to building a fair, independent, and prosperous nation. In terms of implementation, the program sends students to universities located on islands other than their own, where they take part in academic activities through one of three available program options (Fuadi & Aswita, 2021).

The *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) curriculum is designed to provide students with learning opportunities outside their regular study programs, allowing them to pursue activities that align with their personal interests and foster experiential learning. By encouraging students to pursue learning opportunities outside their regular study programs, MBKM aims to equip them with a broader set of competencies that are crucial for their personal growth. As a key component of this program, the Merdeka Student Exchange Program plays a significant role in preparing students for the challenges of the 21st century by offering them opportunities to engage in meaningful academic, social, and cultural exchanges with their peers from different regions of Indonesia. The curriculum structure is characterized by offering various optional learning activities and the possibility of credit conversion, with a maximum of 60 credits over three semesters (Yulianto, et al., 2023). Specifically, the Merdeka Student Exchange Program aims to enhance students' speaking skills, knowledge, and experiences. It also enables students to explore the diverse cultural landscapes of Indonesia while connecting with peers from different provinces (Tohir, 2020; Widana, 2020).

Student exchange programs play a crucial role in supporting educational initiatives, and their implementation requires careful management throughout various stages. This process includes recruiting prospective participants, providing orientation, managing placements, fostering development, and evaluating the learning outcomes of the exchange students. Under the MBKM policy, student exchanges aim to cultivate attitudes in students and graduates that align with the goals outlined in the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture (Permendikbud) No. 2020. These goals include fostering respect for cultural diversity, religious beliefs, and differing opinions or discoveries, as well as promoting equality in the workplace. Additionally, the program aims to develop social sensitivity and a sense of responsibility toward society and the environment as pointed by Andari, S., Windasari, W., Setiawan, A.C., & Rifqi, A. (2021).

Moreover, this exchange program presents students with the opportunity to step out of their academic comfort zones and explore new learning environments. Students are encouraged to step away from their home universities and immerse themselves in different cultural and educational settings. These experiences help students enhance their personal development by boosting their confidence, independence, and resilience. Research shows that such programs significantly contribute to personal growth by helping students develop important soft skills that are necessary for navigating an uncertain and fast-changing future. By interacting with peers from diverse backgrounds, students also gain a deeper understanding of social issues, and cultural differences (Suraya, et al., 2023).

This study is important because, as pointed out by Yoga Parwata (2021), it addresses an increasing need for the preparation of students with the necessary skills needed to survive in a changing world. With this focus on Student Exchange Program, this study has the potential to contribute substantially by developing essential competencies related to speaking skills, confidence, resilience, and cultural awareness, which would be crucial in students' lives for further success-both personal and professional (Yulianto, et al., 2023; Suraya, et al., 2023).

Therefore, this study does not attempt to measure the causal relationship statistically, but rather seeks to explore and describe the students' perceived impact of the student exchange program on their personality growth and speaking skills development. By focusing on descriptive tendencies, this research aims to provide insight into how students perceive the program's impact on their personal and communicative competencies.

Despite the growing number of studies on student exchange programs, much of the existing research tends to focus broadly on academic performance, intercultural competence, or general learning outcomes. Only a limited number of studies have specifically explored the dual impact of exchange experiences on both personality growth and the development of speaking skills, especially within the context of domestic exchange programs in Indonesia, such as the MBKM (Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka) initiative. Furthermore, while some previous research has examined personality traits or language proficiency individually, few have investigated how these two dimensions may develop in parallel as students navigate culturally diverse academic environments (Zhang & Wang, 2023).

This study aims to fill that gap by providing a comprehensive and focused exploration of how Indonesian university students perceive the impact of the exchange program on their personality growth (e.g., confidence, adaptability, emotional maturity) and their speaking skills (e.g., fluency, public speaking, interaction in real contexts). The novelty of this research lies in its dual focus, combining psychological and linguistic development as mutually reinforcing outcomes of the student exchange experience. Additionally, the integration of both self-reported data (through questionnaires) and performance based assessment (through speaking tests) strengthens the contribution of this study by providing a more perspective on student growth during exchange programs.

1.2 Problem of the Study

This study, titled **"Exploring the Impact of Student Exchange Programs on Personality Growth and Speaking Skills Development,"** seeks to fill this gap by investigating the ways in which student exchange program impacts students'

personality development and enhances their speaking skills. The study will focus on the following research questions:

1. How does participation in the student exchange program impact the personal growth of Indonesian university students?
2. How does participation in student exchange program impact the development of speaking skills of Indonesian university students?

This research aims at the integral impact of Student Exchange Program on students in the sphere of personal and academic development, with a greater emphasis on how the program benefits speaking skills and the development of all key aspects of personality. Addressing these areas, the presented study will contribute to the insights on the development of student exchange programs, serving as a powerful tool for developing skills and knowledge that are required in the globalized world a student lives in.

1.3 Objective of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to explore the impact of student exchange programs on the development of participants' personality growth and speaking skills. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Investigate the impact of student exchange programs on participants' personality growth.
2. Examine the impact of student exchange programs on participants' speaking skills development.

By focusing on these objectives, this study seeks to offer a comprehensive understanding of the benefits of student exchange programs.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to provide valuable insights into how Student Exchange Program impacts students' personal growth and the development of their speaking skills. In an increasingly globalized world, these skills are essential for success in both personal and professional spheres. This research will help us understand the impact of participation in the program on

students' confidence, independence, resilience, and other important aspects of personality growth. These qualities are critical for students to navigate challenges in a globalized world, and the study will show how exchange programs contribute to this development (Suraya, et al., 2023). Additionally, the study will explore how the program enhances students' speaking skills, particularly in cross-cultural communication. With effective communication being a key requirement in the global job market, the research will provide insights into how engaging in new environments and interacting with diverse peers boosts students' confidence and language proficiency in real-world situations (Yulianto, et al., 2023; Tohir, 2020). Furthermore, the research will contribute to the broader goals of Indonesia's *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) policy by providing evidence that supports the continued expansion of such initiatives, reinforcing their importance in preparing students for global challenges (Supriati, et al., 2022). This study will also fill a gap in existing research, as there has been limited exploration into the specific impact of exchange programs on personality and speaking skills, offering new perspectives on the holistic benefits of these programs (Suraya, et al., 2023). Ultimately, the findings will have long-term benefits, encouraging future students to participate in exchange programs, knowing the positive impact they can have on their academic and professional futures.

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