

# Rethinking of international exchange and intercultural learning into Indonesian pre-service teachers in the pandemic recovery: A narrative inquiry

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## Abstract

One of teacher education goals is to produce interculturally competent educators; teach students in multicultural classrooms and prepare them in an increasingly globalized world. In response to this critical need in teacher preparation, international exchange attempts at developing those competencies. It is in accordance with Walters and Walters' (2009) principle, "Learning globally, teaching locally,". Despite the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic significantly restricted international student mobility over the past two years, many elements of life as it was before the pandemic are now returning. Certain pandemic rules remain in place, but students are now willing to travel abroad. Thus, this study explored the incorporation of international exchange and intercultural learning into seven Indonesian pre-service teachers who mobilized in the Czech Republic. The data collected in this study were, questionnaires, participant diaries, and semi-structured interviews. The instruments were distributed during and after the program. This study utilized narrative analysis to comprehend the participants' stories. The results showed that through direct interaction with international communities, the participants become more culturally responsive human beings and in particular, as future educators. Future studies need to examine a longitudinal study on how the international experience shapes the participants' careers and ability to develop global consciousness in both objective and subjective metrics.

**Keywords:** intercultural understanding, narrative inquiry, pre-service teacher, study abroad

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## INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, classrooms are becoming culturally and linguistically more diverse (Santoro, 2014; Kim & Choi, 2020). Cross-cultural exchange has increased as a result of numerous global trends (Khawaja et al. 2014) and the responsibilities of teachers are broadening; they are now perceived to go beyond the restricted limits of academic knowledge in order to comprehend and interact with students in the sociocultural settings (Moorhouse & Harfitt, 2019). Consequently, the

goal of teacher education is to develop interculturally competent instructors (Trilokekar & Kukar, 2010; Sardegna & Dugartsyrenova, 2021) possessing a collection of profound intellectual, social, and skills-oriented qualities that support effective communication across a range of cultural contexts, academic settings, and global connections (Marx, 2015). According to Fives and Buehl (2012), there are five categories in which teachers' attitudes toward cultural diversity can be categorized: (1) self-perceptions of their own cultural identity, (2) ideas about the cultural

environment, (3) views on a cultural component (4) viewpoints on culturally competent teaching strategies and methods, and (5) attitudes on students from varied cultural backgrounds.

Numerous studies have demonstrated a strong correlation between intercultural awareness into foreign language learning (Young et al., 2019; Mirzaei & Forouzandeh 2013). These experts underlined that failure to recognize cultural differences might result in miscommunication and failing in language classes as well as in more general communication situations. Being able to interact effectively with people from various cultural origins is one of the primary objectives of teaching a second or foreign language. Calls have been made to develop interculturally competent teachers who can communicate from various viewpoints as classrooms become more diverse (Zeichner et al., 2015).

Some notable studies have identified three main goals of international experiences for teacher training (Baecher & Chung, 2019; Medina et al., 2015): intercultural exposure (to provide opportunities to interact in the host country community); second language learning (focusing on speaking skills); and pedagogical practices (to afford students opportunity to reflect on their study abroad experiences and how they relate to their professional growth as language teachers). In detail, for example, Santoro's (2014) research on the experiences of 14 PST from Australia who took part in a study abroad program in Indian schools showed that, instead of only promoting cultural understanding, the experience also maintained unfavourable stereotypes about race, culture, and poverty. In 2017, Hauerwas et al. reported that communication experiences abroad have positive effects such as improving intergroup relations, stimulating empathy and learning, understanding how cultural influences on expectations in the classroom can lead to personal growth when dealing with cultural differences and a newfound sense of self.

International exchange programs had been promoted decades ago. However, after the COVID-19 break of almost two years, issues facing international higher education become more serious (Oleksiyenko et al., 2021) as border

limitations have interfered with global networking, collaboration, and mobility. Students' intentions to study abroad have been required to change in consideration of the problem. Based on a survey conducted by QS (2020) with more than 20,000 respondents, approximately half of the prospective international students (47%) intended to postpone their plans to study abroad until 2021 and more than 20% would either choose another country or withdraw their study abroad schedule. Another remarkable thing is that many institutions all over the world have chosen to provide online courses to students from different countries (Yıldırım et al., 2021) to prevent problems with health safety. Nevertheless, an international virtual exchange could not offer the same advantages as physical mobility. For example, virtual international students would lose essential social and cultural aspects of studying abroad, such as living in another country, interacting with the locals, taking part in campus life, and learning about different cultures (Tsiligkiris & Ilieva, 2022). The importance of face-to-face communication, particularly in an international setting, is one of the key lessons that can be gained from the pandemic. Thus, institutions are now reimagining how best to approach international education in this recent restricted condition.

Several studies reimagined and investigated the possibility of international mobility during the pandemic (McIntosh & Lakey, 2022; Kim & Choi, 2020; Di Pietro, 2022). Despite several measures to safeguard students, faculty, and staff, it is discovered that many colleges are still committed to giving students valuable worldwide learning opportunities (Di Pietro, 2022). In 2021, the Indonesian Ministry of Education also initiated an international student mobility scheme namely the Indonesian International Students Mobility Awards (IISMA) for undergraduate students. This program is incorporated with more than 30 countries in the world and more than 70 partner universities. There were 955 undergraduate students in 2021 who had completed this program and the upcoming 1,151 vocational and undergraduate students in 2022.

There is limited research that looks into the experience of international exchange for

Indonesian students in this post-pandemic phase, especially for pre-service teachers. While most previous researchers investigate options that could replace international student mobility for developing intercultural understanding (Liu & Shirley, 2021; Krishnan et al., 2022; Shadiev, & Dang, 2022), this study on the other hand explores such things during the pandemic recovery. This study explored the incorporation of international exchange and intercultural learning into seven Indonesian pre-service teachers who mobilized in the Czech Republic within a semester. It addressed how being members of a racial and language minority in a foreign country and having been taught in a multicultural environment had a positive impact on the participants' understanding of the value of multicultural education. Their development of intercultural competencies was investigated before, during, and after the study period. The findings would contribute to the relevant literature on whether higher education should keep up this initiation or not.

The following research questions, therefore, form the foundation for the study:

- What to expect and prepare for studying abroad during the pandemic?
- How is Indonesian pre-service teachers' cultural understanding acquired from a short-term study abroad experience in the Czech Republic?

## METHODS

This study explores seven Indonesian pre-service teachers (Figure 1) who joined the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) program in the Czech Republic within a semester, particularly 18 weeks from late September 2021 to early February 2022. This research applied a qualitative methodology to observe a specific topic based on assumptions and theory. The purpose of this study is to find out how pre-service teachers form intercultural understanding during a short-term study abroad process. Such competency develops over time involving the components of experience, cognition, and development. To frame the experiences, the research design of this study uses

a narrative inquiry. Barkhuizen et al. (2014) defined narrative inquiry as a technique to combine, analyze, and present storytelling as research data. Narrative research can be generated from oral, written, or multimodal narratives with several characteristics: produced by the storyteller who has something to recount, situated in a particular time and place, developed over time, purposeful, and meaningful.

Name (pseudonym)	Gender	Student classification	Major (home university)	Faculty (host university)
Lily	Female	5th-semester	English education	Faculty of Arts
Rose	Female	7th-semester	English education	Faculty of Arts
Fressia	Female	7th-semester	English education	Faculty of Arts
Violet	Female	7th-semester	English education	Faculty of Arts
Iris	Female	7th-semester	English education	Faculty of Arts
Ione	Male	5th-semester	English education	Faculty of Arts
Calla	Male	7th-semester	English education	Faculty of Arts

**Figure 1.** Participants' Information

Data collection strategies in this study included questionnaires, participant diaries, and semi-structured interviews. This study uses thematic analysis to investigate three contents of narratives: interview transcript and written diary. Thematic analysis is a repetitive and reflective method of organizing qualitative data by probing for generating categories or themes and is ideal for use in an interpretative framework (Barkhuizen et al., 2013). It enables the investigation, comparison, and systematization of diverse types of data from study participants in a recursive and reflective way into themes formed from the meanings derived from their interpretation Creswell (2000). In general, it includes repeatedly scanning the data, categorizing and coding data extracts, and rearranging them under thematic categories. Sensitizing, creating themes, and data synthesis are three processes in interpreting qualitative data, according to Creswell (2000).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **What to expect and prepare for continuing study abroad during the pandemic: insight from Indonesia**

Two years after the COVID-19 pandemic first began, it continues to be a shadow looming over the current and future plans. As a result, some study abroad destinations are not accepting or limiting international students at their universities

until further notice. However, some countries that closed their borders to tourists earlier started to open for students with a fair number of precautions. Taking into account internationalization importance, in 2021, the Indonesian ministry of education initiated a study abroad program with a robust risk management and support system in place ([kampusmerdeka.kemdikbud.go.id](http://kampusmerdeka.kemdikbud.go.id)). Almost a hundred home universities and 73 partner universities from over 30 countries around the world participated in this program. The host country's conditions, access to healthcare, other safety concerns, and the program's student support policies are taken into consideration when deciding whether to allow the mobility program. Socially remote lecture halls and classrooms, hybrid classes, and even online classes when necessary are included in these safety measures. Health precautions like using a mask in public places, washing hands thoroughly, and avoiding large gatherings are highly advised. Due to constantly shifting country-specific immigration criteria, case statistics, cultural norms, and the nature of travelling during the pandemic require the participants to maintain a high level of flexibility and adaptability (Wu & Sun, 2020; Yıldırım et al., 2021).

The following narratives are participants' experience testimony of what to expect and prepare for studying abroad during the pandemic. It also states what it was like to live abroad with many restrictions and rules. The testimony was derived from an in-depth interview with the seven participants after the study period with several guiding questions: How can you be confident to go abroad in the middle of a pandemic? What do you expect and prepare for your stay? What is your overall experience of studying abroad during the pandemic? Do you think the pandemic obstructs your willingness to learn and explore your host country?

At first, I worried about the worst scenario that might happen during my study abroad period, for instance, being infected by the virus or being confused with the health system in the host country. Yet, I chose to trust the government and the host university representative. I always

followed the health guidelines during my study period because the pandemic is not over yet. Wearing a mask was mandatory except in an open area. I tried my best, but sadly one of my Indonesian fellows got covid and transmitted it to three people including me. This scenario had been highly considered and anticipated actually, so it was easy to decide what to do next. We confirmed our positive test results to the dorm receptionist. On the same day, we got three quarantine rooms with the help of one of our fellows. We did self-quarantine for two weeks. Food and other needs were set by our other Indonesian friends for several days, then we did it by ourselves because we thought we could. I felt sad because of this, I missed classes and some events, but to be honest I didn't find it difficult because the procedure was pretty clear. The Indonesian KBRI in Prague also provided us with basic needs like rice, cooking oil, sugar, a bunch of Indomie instant noodles, and medicines. Thank God, during the program, this happened only once. I think this is definitely possible to happen, and we were pretty prepared for it. (Lily, interview)

The most important thing is to stay safe but never stop enjoying and discovering new things while studying. I had tried an online exchange program before, but the experience could not be compared with an on-site exchange program. I always communicated with my representative from the host university, KBRI, and sometimes International Office (IO) from my home university. I kept them updated and this made me feel safe throughout the journey. Keep an open mind, the pandemic is not an impediment but something that lets us change our routine. Normal activities changed but they didn't go away. There was still so much to live on even with a pandemic on the way. (Rose, interview)

Very unexpected because Europe COVID cases decreased in the past months, however, there was a sudden outbreak after that. Some classes were hybrid and one who felt unhealthy could access the online meeting. The number of students allowed to have face-to-face meetings was limited. It was not a big deal since it didn't last long. We still could explore many things in the city and college. I knew many local and international friends and we often hung up together either in a cafe or restaurant, of course with health protocol and in a small group. The pandemic didn't stop me from being able to learn in a wider community. (Freesia, interview)

Sometimes at the weekend, I travelled to other cities and countries and at that time, only some countries nearby were restricted at the nationally or regionally scope. I love travelling and exploring historical places, so, you know, central Europe is very rich in it. I took this opportunity to learn a lot of things: doing couch surfing, having a look around the historical landmarks, trying local foods, and attending local national events. A negative COVID-19 test result, vaccination and/or a booster shot, or a mandatory quarantine time after arrival to the destination are usually the entrance requirements for the host country or city. I had to provide extra money though, but this is the only way to keep safe. I think financial planning is urgent to consider for one who wants to study abroad during the current pandemic. (Ione, interview)

I wasn't certain to take this opportunity at first, but the scholarship provider had made sure that this program was well prepared for the health risk and others. Before my departure, I conducted research on the COVID-19 trends in my host country, including case counts, vaccination rates, the healthcare system, and public awareness of the pandemic. I brought basic medicines, enough health masks, and extra money for the expected unexpected things. I prepared for the worst and did what I could to prevent it. (Iris, interview, September)

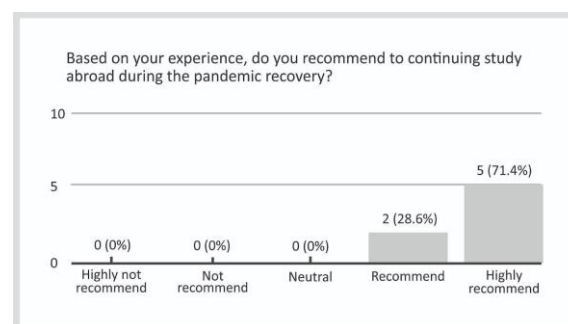
While studying abroad during a pandemic may look different, it remains a valuable experience to learn. As had always been true of studying abroad, the ability to have a safe and successful experience depends as much on preparedness and actions as it does on the program's support. (Violet, interview)

Despite the fact that each member faced a variety of difficulties, including health risks, restricted activities, adjustment to pandemic routine, financial issues, and learning paradigm shift, they did gain positive attitudes towards their overall study abroad experience. They also had committed the expected and unexpected things before they went abroad. Some of them were well prepared for instance Iris who researched the COVID information in the host country and prepared medical tools that would be useful. It can be stated that every participant found the best problem-solving to their obstacles as the university and program representative also provided them options and helps if needed.

From the questionnaires acquired (figure 1), two of seven participants recommended

continuing the study abroad program, while five of them highly recommended it. Their reasons were confirmed at the interview session, Rose said that it is recommended as long as considering the advantages and obstacles as well because the pandemic still exists. She added that studying abroad is one of her biggest dreams and she can't miss the chance. Calla also supported this statement that the pandemic does not stop him to get experience abroad. He suggested the program provider prepare additional funding for the students who might be ill during the program and medical check-ups if needed. Lily who was infected by the virus during her stay stated strongly that it is not recommended to go abroad during the pandemic if someone has a disease background or is physically weak. However, she still recommends the study abroad program in this pandemic recovery. Additionally, she said:

Studying abroad during the pandemic is a decision to consider carefully, and should involve a discussion with parents or guardians, as well as the home university and the organization that plans for the study abroad program. A meaningful and honest conversation will help ensure everyone's safety.



**Figure 2.** Questionnaire of Recommendation to Study Abroad during the Pandemic Recovery

### **Cross-cultural exposure acquired from a short-term study abroad experience in the Czech Republic**

Independence and the possibility of personal growth have long been associated with international exchange. It is frequently viewed as a direct experience in which one quits from the comfortable zone of home to observe the world from a different perspective and emerge in some

way transformed from the journey (Santoro, 2014). The importance of multicultural teacher education is becoming more widely recognized as a result of the significant increase in students and society from linguistically and culturally varied backgrounds (Kim & Choi, 2020). The focus is starting to shift to providing pre-service teachers exposure to various cultures and educational systems on a global scale.

In the responses to questionnaires (figure 2 & 3) and in in-depth interviews, several students said they had been more conscious of different cultures and values after their stay in the Czech Republic than they were before. The majority of the participants had never experienced studying abroad and only one of them had been abroad to have a short cultural festival. 6 of 7 of the participants had been familiar with cultural understanding theoretically from a course in their home university. As pre-service teachers, all of them also had practised teaching in a diverse background of students from different races in Indonesia. This background would give an overview of how they develop their cultural understanding in an international community, not only nationally.

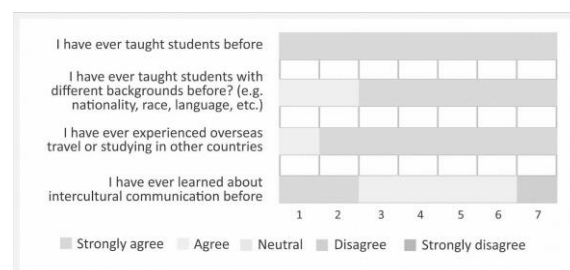
According to the data gathered, it is easier for the participants to communicate with people from multicultural backgrounds. As stated in the questionnaire, the first statement the students were asked to consider was: 'I can describe my own culture and identity'. The responses scale was all 'strongly agree' and 'agree'. This means, they already had self-awareness of their own culture. Cultural awareness is frequently misunderstood to be concerned with what other people do and do not do. Although it undoubtedly plays a role, self-awareness is equally crucial for cultural awareness (Lu & Wan, 2018). Below are some notable participants' insights about self-awareness of culture:

Because Indonesian are so diverse, not every individual is able to think this way. I think I am aware of some noticeable Indonesian cultures or habits. We usually work in harmony as a crucial element for productivity. In addition, even when we disagree with what someone is saying, we tend to be indirect, soft, and polite. I do not

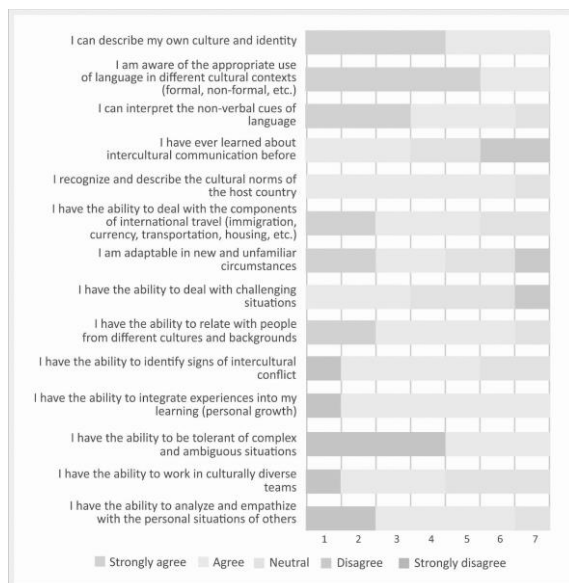
know if it is actually applicable in Europe. (Ione, interview)

What I know of common European people is that they are more individualistic, even though not all. While Indonesian is more collectivistic, interdependent, and group-centric. People around me usually glorify cooperation and collective achievement. Maybe because I live in a small village, this norm is still very strong. The dominance in Indonesian culture is primarily based on age. The primary factor affecting respect levels is typically age. (Rose, interview)

For me, Indonesians really appreciate other people and tend to please others. Sometimes people consider it negatively as a "people pleaser", but I don't think so. This is just how it works. I live on an island called Java, and the people here are very generous, friendly, and polite. We will say "it's good" even though it's not, just to appreciate things. For example, we will respond favourably to individuals who demonstrate respect in the proper way and express our enthusiasm for them (Freesia, interview)



**Figure 3.** Participants' Background of Intercultural Identity



**Figure 4.** Questionnaire Result of Intercultural Learning after the Study Period

The general findings show that after completing the international exchange program, participants began to feel more at ease around people from various cultural backgrounds. In accordance with this, they stated that they had altered their viewpoint to one of greater tolerance on a personal as well as a professional basis. All of them also could engage with the local communities and work or discuss in culturally diverse teams. Only one participant was not easily adapting to a new environment. It is confirmed that it was only the first few weeks of the study period and later the courage to engage and adapt started to form.

The results of this study are in line with those of other investigations (Saricoban & Oz, 2014; Marcus & Moss, 2015; Santoro, 2014) and revealed a significant positive relationship between intercultural competence and their study abroad experience. It is demonstrated that although Indonesian pre-service teachers experienced various different cultures, they negotiated, actively participated in the teaching and learning process, and developed more confidence and self-efficacy. Additionally, they were required to appreciate multiculturalism and how to communicate with people from different backgrounds. Specifically, four themes from the narratives data emerged: 1) adjustment to a new environment, 2) cultural stance in real life, 3) cognizance of diversity, and 4)

rethinking of becoming a culturally responsive future educator. The data were derived from questionnaires, diary entries, and interviews that were later classified by theme. The following lists are the guiding questions for the interview and diary entry:

- Interview: Did you have any pleasant or unpleasant experiences during your international exchange? Please reflect on these situations, how did you feel at that time? Did the circumstances affect how you interpreted cultural differences? Have these experiences changed your point of view as a future educator?
- Diary entry: Give a brief explanation of a situation in which you experienced cultural exposure or any of your interesting stories. How did you think, feel and act? Did anything shock you? Did you feel comfortable? What can you reflect on from your experience?

*Adapted from Barkhuizen et al., 2013.*

#### *Adjustment to A New Environment*

Four out of the seven participants who took part in the interviews highlighted how difficult it was to adjust to a new culture and society and the language barrier. The majority of them stated that they had never socialized intensively with people from other countries. Additionally, they mentioned that they were anxious and nervous about studying abroad because it required them to live in a foreign culture and have frequent interactions with local students and lecturers. However, after some initial weeks passed, they adjusted themselves to the community. Here is a development example of Freesia on her experience in the initial and last weeks:

I always dreamt of going and living in Europe and started planning hard for it but realizing that this is the first time I go abroad, I feel nervous about living in a new place and meeting new people. I am aware that there will be many things beyond my control while studying abroad in the Czech Republic and travelling throughout Europe. But this is such an important chance for me to step outside of my comfort zone (Diary, October 7th, 2021)



During my first week of joining classes here, I have communication difficulties with the lecturer and colleagues. I passed the English proficiency test requirement, but this doesn't mean I can easily interact in English. While hanging up with my friends in the class, I always became the passive speaker, my other Indonesian friends were more like leading the conversation. So embarrassing to just smile and be quiet while the others seemed to enjoy the talk. The same thing happened too when my local friend invited me to go to a cafe. I asked my roommate, who is Indonesian, to accompany me. I talked very little. However, I realized that in a smaller group, I can engage more, even though still felt awkward and nervous. (Diary, October 9th, 2021)

For real, my life overseas has been significantly easier as a result of my increased ability to adapt. More individuals are continuously interacting with me in my dorm, at school, and in daily life. I'm learning so much! I've also observed that when I have to talk, I no longer get nervous as easily, and I feel much more at ease attempting complex language patterns in the discussion. (Diary, December 2021)

I firmly feel that stepping outside of the ordinary educational environment and into a new opportunity for exploration has so much worth. My experience living in the Czechia for a semester courageously place me out of my comfort zone. Glad that I immersed myself in the culture as much as I can; by hanging out with local and international friends, visiting their homes, travelling to other cities and countries, couch surfing, making more friends, being active in class discussions, and many more. The most memorable moment was that there are times during this discussion when there may be misunderstandings or confusion. But there is also always something to learn. I finally understood how to use the norms of communication when I became aware of a cultural difference I had never noticed before. (Diary, January 2022)

Freesia remarked in the interview that developing self-growth may be facilitated by understanding a different language and culture. She became more independent as a result of developing positive attitudes toward learning a new language, experiencing unfamiliar cultural situations, and interacting with locals in casual and personal interactions. However, what Freesia experienced did not applicable to every participant.

Three of the participants stated that they easily adjusted themselves to the new environment and community. For instance, Ione claimed that he did not encounter any difficulty in communicating with new local or international friends. He added, "I would describe myself as one who opens to new experiences, so I really enjoyed experiencing unfamiliar country, people, and culture. I could easily make friends and built good connections with them. Living in a local community and developing close relations with locals was exciting."

Overall, participants learned constructive attitudes regarding communication with individuals from other cultures, despite facing difficulties like language barriers and adjusting to a new environment. The interview with Freesia demonstrated that this international exchange also provided participants with a chance to live in local society, develop intimate relationships with locals, collaborate with others, and comprehend various societies (Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011; Kim & Choi, 2020).

### *Cognizance of diversity*

Based on their diary entries and interview, all of the participants believed that the city they lived in showed people living peacefully despite their many races, faiths, nationalities, backgrounds, and cultures. They obtained a conscious understanding of cultural richness as a result of the socialization process. Participants conformed to 'acceptance' of variety as a result of their real-life experiences in cultural diversity (Eren, 2021).

The international exchange program was considered powerful to improve awareness of cultural differences and intercultural learning. Before entering the program, all the participants mentioned having limited direct contact with individuals of other races and cultures. However, when they engaged with culturally different individuals in Europe, they learned to appreciate the reality of cultural variety and began to reflect on it. Rose, for instance, expressed altering her perception as follows:

In my host city in the Czech Republic, I saw



with my own eyes a huge number of students from various racial and cultural origins, as well as the lecturers. We were from various nationalities. Being around them encouraged me to consider how cultural understanding truly works. Because I witnessed it, the variety became more tangible and realistic. (Rose, interview)

Some participants claimed that their experiences as minority foreigners gave them a unique chance to sympathize with racial and other differences in general as pre-service teachers. They will most likely recognize the significance of implementing intercultural education in their native nation in the future. For example, here is Calla's claim that indicated his consciousness of diversity:

As a minority, I felt welcomed during my stay in the Czech Republic because. They did not make a fuss about barriers of race, language, and nationality. During the class, sometimes we discuss a range of issues, including different cultures in the Czech Republic as well as around the world. I believe that this sort of hospitality stems from their education, which heavily promotes cultural diversity.

#### *Cultural Stance in Real Life*

Going abroad may be a thrilling experience that fosters different world perspectives, fosters cultural curiosity, and encourages a willingness to explore new things (Marcus & Moss, 2015). However, it may also create a feeling of loss. One thing that could happen is culture shock (Yang & Sheldon, 2018) and it may take time to form, it frequently impacts people living overseas in unpredictable ways. Not just being unfamiliar with social norms, tends to have an influence long after individuals have become comfortable in new environments.

First, one could feel pleased with the new environment, lifestyle, people, and even the food. Some of the participants had this euphoria, as stated below in Violet's testimony. Following this, the exhaustion of miscommunications may occur regularly. Small things like messing up cards or missing trams can cause anger. This feeling will frequently be lessened as individuals get more accustomed to and at ease with the cultures,

people, food, and languages of their new surroundings. Acceptance does not imply an understanding of new cultures or circumstances; rather, it indicates the recognition of the new surroundings. From the interview, all the participants experience these stages. Here is detailed testimony of some of them derived from the diary entries:

It's my first week in the Czech Republic and I've already made so many memories. Meeting new people, experiencing a new culture first-hand, visiting the beautiful historical landmarks of the city, trying the local foods, and going to the campus. All good. (Violet, October 2021)

My classes were overwhelming and nerve-racking: my professor expects a lot of me, and it was a reminder that this trip is not simply a vacation. Other than that, the language barrier quickly gave me the opportunity to experience what it's like to desperately want to communicate something but be unable to do so. (Freesia, November 2021)

I discovered that learning to appreciate the culture as it now exists was the best approach for me to comprehend my new surroundings. I usually discuss with my local friends to be able to adjust to my environment more quickly. (Violet, November 2021)

#### *Rethinking of Becoming A Culturally Responsive Future Educators*

Foreign language education holds a distinct role in general education in terms of the multicultural perspective. In this context, instructors must be competent and intentionally encourage their students to understand different cultures in the classes (Saricoban & Oz 2014). Open-mindedness and cultural sensitivity have also been recognized as critical characteristics of intercultural communication ability (Genç, 2018) of language learners.

There were many individuals from various cultures around me. That I live with them and often engage with them. We were respectfully discussing various topics. As a result, it gives us varied points of view. I learned and saw that individuals of many social backgrounds can live harmoniously. I'm becoming more accepting of differences. (Violet, interview)

Furthermore, all participants stated that their foreign learning environment was culturally diverse. They also had a course which discussed education in several countries including the Czech Republic and Indonesia. Indirectly, they also learned and compared theoretically how different country has different system and norms. Their remarks show how teachers' attention and concern for students are valued in terms of addressing all the students' academic needs, changing instruction to match the students' needs, and thereby enhancing students' overall academic performance.

I understood there is a multicultural world, and I became conscious that I will have to teach these various students in the future. From now on, I'll have to learn a lot of new things. As a pre-service teacher, I want to study multicultural education through a range of resources and texts, as well as look for solutions to Indonesia's own version of multicultural education. (Calla, diary, January 2022)

## CONCLUSION

One of teacher education goals is to produce interculturally competent educators. In response to this critical need, international exchange attempts at developing those competencies. Thus, this study explored the incorporation of international exchange and intercultural learning into seven Indonesian pre-service teachers who mobilized in the Czech Republic. According to the findings, participants substantially enhance their cross-cultural understanding and global awareness, improve their learning and teaching knowledge and abilities in multicultural contexts, and build comparative knowledge of education systems. The study's weakness is that the participants' experiences are not generalizable or applicable to other, larger programs. Aside from that, using self-reported data to assess study aspects raises the possibility of bias. Future studies should explore the relationships between objective and subjective metrics. It is also needed to examine a longitudinal study on how the international experience shapes the participants' careers and ability to develop global consciousness.

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