CHALLENGES IN INTERNATIONAL SERVICE LEARNING

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Abstract

Benjamin Franklin said: "Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn". His statement emphasize the importance of involving students in their learning experience. International Service Learning, therefore, is regarded as a shift from traditional educational approach, which values the learning in a more meaningful way. With a real world experience, students in International Service Learning is argued to perform better, in their social, interpersonal, and intrapersonal skills (Cook-Sather, 2002; Larsen & Searle, 2017; Pratt & Danyluk, 2017, Carnicelli & Boluk, 2017). However, although international service learning has been conducted with adequate preparation, some issues are still identified (Darby, Ward-johnson, & Cobb, 2016; Larsen & Searle, 2017). In accordance to that, this paper highlights the challenges in the ISL program which administered by Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, University of Muhammadiyah Malang in qualitative method. In doing so, ten students involved in ISL program conducted in Thailand were selected as the research participants. In the results, the paper identify the challenges in three phase, namely pre-departure, during the implementation, and post-program. Furthermore, the paper provides the way to cope those challenges on each phase.

Keywords: International Service Learning, Internship, Challenges, Experiential Learning

INTRODUCTION

John Dewey (1916), father of service learning, believes that students should be exposed with a real experience to perpetuate democracy. In his view, students can learn at best when they involve themselves in a real experience so that they can survive in real world. This is the opportunity for the students to synchronize what they have learnt in the classroom with the real situation in the real life. In this regard, service learning has been expanded overseas so that students are given opportunities to engage in a greater context (Carnicelli & Boluk, 2017; Larsen & Searle, 2017; Smolcic & Katunich, 2017). There are three dimensions in international service learning, namely service learning, study overseas, and international pedagogy (Krishnan, Masters, & Wang, 2017). In accordance to that, international service learning is defined as an educational method which integrates community service and academic learning in an international context. It can be conducted through work integrated learning and Studentship which provides opportunities to improve functional and practical skills (Brail, 2016).

In response to this, University of Muhammadiyah Malang is one of universities which provides students with the International service learning. The international service learning which conducted since 2015 offer a rewarding experience for the students to participate in an international program which challenge their capacity. Furthermore, the program which is administered by Faculty of Teacher Training and Education designed for students with various educational major to engage in schools and other educational institution in Thailand. As there were a

high demand on the program, the eligible students were selected based on criterion such as administrative matters, language (English) and also the students' motivation. To complete the program, the selected students need to stay overseas for a month and involve in the target community. More specifically, the international service learning program targeted schools in South Thailand which mostly are Muslim institutions. However, although international service learning has been conducted with adequate preparation, some issues are still identified (Darby, Ward-johnson, & Cobb, 2016; Larsen & Searle, 2017).

In line with the idea, the paper provides insights into the implementation of International service learning catered by Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, University of Muhammadiyah Malang. In doing so, the paper will analyze program conducted in 2015 when the program was firstly conducted. Through the participants' voices, it is hoped that the current research will inform about international service learning conducted in Islamic educational higher institution.

METHOD

The current research employed quantitative approach which the data is presented not in numerical analysis. Since the aim of this research is to identify the challenges in the implementation of International Service Learning, the research involved ten participants who participated the program. The ISL program itself was conducted in 2015 in Thailand. Furthermore, the participants were selected from various background, not necessarily students from English Language Department in the University of Muhammadiyah Malang.

In collecting the data, the research used two instruments, namely questionnaire and interview. Open ended questionnaire was created and distributed in order to identify and classify the challenges experienced by the participants along with the way to cope with the challenges. Moreover, In addition, semi-structured interview was employed in the present research with the purpose of exploring the challenges identified from the questionnaire. The interview was conducted in order to confirm the result of the questionnaire and to gain data that may missed in the questionnaire.

FINDINGS
Challenges in International Service Learning and its strategies

The challenges and the students' strategies in the implementation of International Service Learning is classified into three phases, namely challenges in pre-departure, during the program in Thailand, and post- program.

5.1. Pre-departure
5.1.1. Passport

Based on the questionnaire, 6 respondents stated that one challenge in preparing the pre departure document is passport. Deeply elaborated in the interview, one of the respondents complained that it took a week to get passport while the operating hours of immigration office is limited. In addition to that, the number of passport applicant is also restricted to certain number, not based on the service hour. The following excerpt supports the view:

> "It takes about a week to get passport and the office opens from 08.00 to 15.00. I got there at 9, but the officer said they have sufficient number of applicants for that day. So, I have to get back again tomorrow. It was so disappointing."

To deal with the issue, participants mentioned that they shared their experience with their friends so their friends can avoid the same issue. In addition to that, they also stated that they come early to get the number of the line earlier. By doing that, they stated that their passport could be

processed within the time frame. The statement supports the idea

> "I prepared all the required documents for passport, and I come very early to get the queue number. I also shared my experience with my friends so they do not have the same problem."

5.1.2. Sickness

Although most Students did not have any problems with health in the pre-departure process, there is one intern who experienced this issue. She said that she got sick before departure, and it worried her so much because the student's parents might prohibit the intern to join the program. The following excerpt support the idea:

> 'I was sick before my departure, and it was a bit serious so my parent began to worry and they warned me not to join the Studentship in Thailand. I hoped that I get well and recovered as soon as possible'

In regards to this issue, the Students had a medical treatment prior to their departure, the intensive one. She stated that her family supported her during the process, so the treatment worked well. Another point to consider regarding this is that Students take initiative to provide themselves with needed medicine. They did this because they worried if they could not find the suitable medicine if they got sick. They preferred to have the familiar medication.

> 'Luckily I got better after staying a while at my hometown. Then I bring all my medicine with me, so I will not get sick anymore, hopefully.'

5.1.3. Safety issue

In terms of safety, Students involved in the international program 2015 admitted that they were worried about their safety, given that the location in which they will conduct the program is reported as a conflict zone in Thailand. Although they did not know exactly where they will have the program, they were aware that they will be placed in South Thailand which was in conflict. The view is highlighted in the following excerpt:

> "I was uncertain with our safety because we know from Internet that our program is conducted in dangerous area."

To deal with this, the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education UMM administer meetings prior to the program and encourage Students to stay connected. By keeping contact, Students updated any information regarding the program or the country. These solutions indeed stated by Students as a useful action to avoid any issues regarding safety. However, five Students mentioned that the meting administered by the faculty is not sufficient, as they expected to have more frequent meeting for the student. The excerpt below support the statement:

> 'We were gathered to discuss many things (including security issue) but it was not enough. We need more meetings like this actually'

5.1.4. Language anxiety

Four Students admitted that they worried of language barrier in their Studentship program in Thailand because they knew that the people do not

speak English well. In addition to that, they also knew that people in some parts of Thai speak in Malay, which is quite similar to Bahasa Indonesia. However, the use of Malay language is an issue for them because they did not accustomed to use the language. The interview excerpt below supports it:

> 'We were anxious about the use of language because we worried that we cannot communicate effectively with Thai people.'

To cope with the issue, students commented that they learn learnt English and Thai. Students, who do not speak English well, learnt English from their peers. At the same time, they also learnt Thai language from their Thai friends. They learnt simple expressions to make their communication effective with the locals. Although it was not an easy task because Thai language is tonal language, the learning process helped to familiarize themselves with English and Thai, which ease them in communication process. One of the Students stated:

> 'Before our departure, we had English practices for those who are not from English Department. We want to make sure that we are ready for that. We also had Thai language lesson to equip us with the local language. It was hard because Thai is tonal language which complicate the learning experience'

5.1.5. Religious issue

Another challenge faced by the Students in their International program in Thailand was concerning religion. There are two issues in this field, namely worried of the availability of mosque

for praying and the issue in outfit. At first, access to mosque becomes challenge because Students do not really sure about the place, whether they can easily find mosque for praying.

> 'We wonder whether we can easily find a mosque to pray in Thailand. We are not sure about it because we need to pray for five times a day.'

To cope with this, Students tried to ask their Thai friends and they googled from the Internet. The following statements support the view:

> 'We search the information from Google but the information is not clear, still. So we asked our Thai friend to know more about this.'

As the second challenge regarding religion, one intern confirmed that she worried of her outfit as she is a non-Muslim and she does not wear hijab as how the Muslim women normally wear. The following excerpt support the idea:

> 'I was confused with what to wear, because I am a non moslem and I don't wear hijab.'

In regards to this, the intern contended that she prepared the appropriate outfit for the program, but not necessarily the hijab. She mentioned in the interview:

> 'I prepared a very polite outfit, but I did not prepare any hijab because I would not wear it. I am not a Moslem anyway.'

5.1.6. Financial issue

The next challenge in International Service Learning 2015 is financial matter, as Students need to prepare some money to support them. There are

two respondents who addressed financial matter since they only have a limited budget to participate in the program. One of the research participant said:

> 'It's quite expensive to join the program, but I really want to join this.'

To solve the issue, the two respondents stated that they were lucky to have family to support their intention to join International Service Learning. In the interview, one respondent stated:

> 'My family agreed to support me especially dealing with funds, so I can join the program and survive there!'

5.2 Challenges in the target community and its solutions

There are eight challenges occurred during the ISL implementation in the target community

5.2.1. Insufficient staying permit

As a crucial document to go abroad, visa play roles as the official permit letter to stay in the target country. The visa in this case is essential to be processed within the period of ISL. Student who involved in ISL had a problem with visa because they were only granted two week visa instead. This become an issue because to finish the ISL program, they needed to stay at the target country for a month. Based on the interview, it was found that the students were granted only two week visa because they departed from Malaysia by train. Different case would have been applied if they

traveled by airplane from Indonesia. The students preferred to travel by train from Malaysia because they wanted to have the cheapest cost for transportation. They had no idea that their decision would have significant impact. Some students also mentioned that they did not realize that they could only stay at Thailand for two weeks until they pass the security guard which warned them about their staying period. The following excerpt support the idea:

> 'When the officials in the border warned me that I had only two week visa, I was shocked and confused about what to do. Our program would last for the whole month and I had only two weeks'.

To solve this issue, host organization helped them to extent the visa. They decided to have a road trip to Malaysia to have the visa extended. It took two days so they had to arrange accommodation in Malaysia. Indeed most students said that they enjoyed their escape to Malaysia for a while. This was conducted during school holiday, so the program was not disturbed significantly. They commented:

> 'We decided to take a road trip to Malaysia to extend our visa. It was a great experience because it seems that we had a holiday in Malaysia'

5.2.2. Health Problem

Since South Thailand has different climate, some students got sick during the ISL process. It

was so hot that some students were dehydrated and could not effectively participate in ISL program. It is proven by the following student's statement:

> 'I had a difficult time to adjust myself with the climate. I got sick because I did not take enough water when it was really hot. I got dehydrated because it was really hot in Thailand. I got dizzy as well.'

In order to deal with this issue, students took medicine they have prepared. They mentioned that it was quite difficult to find medical clinic in the target country so they relied on the medicine they have prepared from home. Furthermore, they also warned the other students to take drink a lot of water and not to be exposed with the sun in a long term. The following student comment support the idea:

> 'Luckily I brought some medicine from home so I can use them when I got sick. I avoided going out during the day and I learn my lesson to drink a lot of water'

5.2.3. Communication issue

Students participate in ISL 2015 mentioned that they had to struggle to communicate with local people. Most of the students are not familiar with Thai language. English as global language cannot be spoken well in South Thailand because majority of local people cannot speak English. In fact, even if they tried to speak English, the students who participate in ISL 2015 could not understand well. It was because of the different tone produced by Thai people when they speak English. Additionally, although some people in South Thailand speak

Malay which is quite similar to Bahasa Indonesia, the students said that they still had a problem in their communication. The Malay language the students familiar with is quite different with the Malay language spoken by people in South Thailand.

> 'I had a problem communicating with the locals. I speak in English, but they could not understand. They speak in Thai but I could not understand. I understand a bit when they speak in Malay. But only a bit, because it seems that the Malay language is different.'

To solve this issue, they began to use sign language in communicating with people who could not understand English or Malay. They said that it works, but they could not communicate effectively as if they use verbal language. The following excerpt highlights the idea:

> I have to use sign language to communicate with locals who could not understand English or Malay. It helps the interaction, but I cannot communicate well'

5.2.4. Food

The next issue faced by the students who participated in ISL program in Thailand in 2015 was regarding food. In the interview, the students mentioned that at the beginning of the program, they need to adjust themselves with the food served by the host family. It was because of the Thai cuisine which mainly is spicy and sour. As the result, some students had a digesting problem at the beginning. They said that:

'My host family serve food that mostly are sour and spicy. I got stomach ache at the beginning try to adjust with the flavor.'

However, it took some time for the students to adjust themselves with the local food. They mentioned that they even like Thai food at last. The view is highlighted in the following excerpt:

'I finally like Thai food, it was yummy. I could adapt myself at last'.

5.2.5. Religious issue

Students participated in ISL mentioned that they had three religious issue. The first issue was about the fact that some students who lived in an Islamic boarding house are required to pray and cite Al-Qur'an together in a mosque. At the beginning, it was hard for students to get used to this. However, as the time goes by, the students gradually accepted this as a habitual activity that positively affect their religion. They mentioned in the interview:

'I was asked to pray together and recite Al Qur'an at the mosque because I live in an Islamic boarding house. It was hard at the beginning, but I finally accept it.'

The second issue faced by students in ISL regarding religion is regarding praying time. In Thailand, praying time is not easy to be identified because there are only few mosques which is essential to inform the praying time. Information of praying time is crucial because most students are moslem. It means that they need to pray in a specific time. One of the Students commented:

'I lived in a place which is far from mosque. Different form Indonesia, the mosque here indeed is not easy to find.'

To deal with this situation, students who experienced ISL 2015 preferred to google out the information from internet. The view is highlighted in the following excerpt:

'We relied on information in internet about praying time in Thailand.'

The last issue regarding religion in the implementation of ISL 2015 is difficulty in finding halal food. Based on the interview, halal food is hard to find when they wanted to eat out. They have been warned by the host family that most street food in Thailand are not halal, so they had be cautious. They mentioned in the interview:

'When we are out, it was hard to find halal food. Our host family have warned us about this.'

In order to deal with this issue, students prefer to limit their will to eat out. In addition, when they are out, they would ask the recommendation from the host family. One of the student stated:

'Because there were only limited number of halal restaurant, we prefer not to eat out very often.'

5.2.6. Teaching issue

One of the programs in ISL 2015 required the students to teach children in Thai school. As students enrolled in Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, they are prepared to teach English

and Bahasa Indonesia. The teaching problems they face in school occurred in two areas: teaching schedule and teaching materials. In detail, teaching schedule becomes the first issue because students participated in ISL 2015 unexpectedly arrived at Thailand during the school holiday. In accordance to that, the school would start two weeks after their arrival. As the consequence, they managed the time by exploring the school well and assisting the school especially in terms of administrative matter. One of the students mentioned that they were asked to help the school to run a workshop for teachers. They mentioned in interview:

> 'It was too bad that we arrived at Thailand during school holiday. For two weeks we explored the school so we know the situation better. We also helped the school in their administration.'

The second issue they face when teaching is regarding materials. Initially, the students participated in ISL 2015 have prepared the materials they need to deliver the lesson at school. However, it turned out that they have to adjust the materials based on the students' level. This occurred because the students at school have a low proficiency in English. The student teacher accordingly, find difficulty in selecting appropriate materials for the lesson. In addition to that, the language barrier makes the interaction in the classroom less effective. As a result, some teachers need to use sign language to communicate. It is proven by the following student's statement:

> 'Although I have prepared materials from Indonesia, I still need to find

more suitable material because the students level of English is very low..I also find it difficult to communicate because we could not understand each other. So I use body and sign language instead'

5.2.7. Personal problem

Personal probelm occurred in the implementation of International Service Learning 2015 occurred in the students' relationship. One of the Students admitted that she had a problem with her team mate which troubled them to get along together. She said that:

> 'My team mate and I could not get along together well. I did not know why, she ignored me.'

To deal with the issue, the student preferred to avoid intense interaction with the person she had the issue with. The following excerpt support the idea:

> 'I try to be cool, so I just avoid her. I don't want to disturb her.'

5.2.8. Data collection

Students participate in ISL 2015 are required to report their program to the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education UMM. In accordance to that, the students need to gain data from the school to support their report. In this regard, the data they got was in Thai, so they had a problem comprehending them. They commented:

> 'We had a problem with the data we got from school. They are all written in Thai, so we cannot understand anything.'

As the solution to this issue, the teacher in host institution assisted the students to translate the document into English. In fact, one of the students in the ISL was from Thailand, so as the native of Thai language, she helped her friends to translate the document into Bahasa Indonesia. It is based on the following statement:

> 'Luckily I have a nice teacher at school. She assisted me to translate the document into English. My friend from Thailand also help us to translate into Bahasa Indonesia.

5.3. Challenges post program and its solutions

Students participated in ISL also faced challenges after the program is implemented. The challenges covers the following points:

5.3.1. Cultural adaptation

The challenge in the International Service Learning 2015 is the Students' cultural adaptation in their taste, since they were used to have Thai cuisine, which sour and spicy. When they returned to the home country, they had a problem to adapt their taste. They mentioned in the interview:

> 'I tasted the Indonesian cuisine to be so plain, because I missed the sour and spicy taste'

The Students also mentioned that they need to re-adapt the language they used, as they were accustomed to speak in Malay in Thailand. However, this is not a big issue since the intern stated that they needed short time to cope with this. The following excerpt support the view:

> 'I mixed Bahasa Indonesia and Malay once I arrived here, but it

was not very long'

5.3.2. Missing data

Students are required to write a report by the end the program. This responsibility required them to also display data gained in their Studentship. In this case, one of thesStudents mentioned that he had a missing data that he forgot to gain from school. The following excerpt support the view:

> 'When I was completing my report, I realized that I missed data about the school. I forgot to ask from my teacher in Thailand.'

He solved this by reconnecting with the school via online media such as Facebook and email. He emailed one of the teachers in the school and interacted with him via online social media. The intern stated:

> 'At first I got panicked because it was just impossible to get back there to get the data. But then, I tried to contact the teacher via Email and Facebook to reconnect and ask for the missing information. Although I have to wait for days, but the data finally completed'

The second challenge regarding the report is on its template, because the students did not get the fixed template in writing their report from the committee. This is quite troublesome for them because they did not have guideline in report writing. One intern admitted:

> 'My friends and I were confused because we did not really sure how should we write the report for the

international program, whether it has different template with the normal program.'

To solve this issue, Students decided to have their own format in their report. They have discussed it with the committee and the committee did not mind if they have the report in different format.

> 'After we discussed it, we decided to use the template in the normal program. It was easy, because we used the same template in the other Studentship program.'

DISCUSSIONS

International Service Learning have become demanded globally for its benefit in improving cultural awareness, the civic engagement and global citizenship (Larsen & Searle, 2017). Indeed, the benefit may vary depends on the type of the service learning program and the diverse situation between host and the target institution. The diverse situation may occur in the forms of different culture, habit, and environment. In fact, the service learning also being advocates as an educational approach for students with disability (Schreiner, 2016). In diffrerent context, study also revealed that ISL in Canada provides opportunity to transformative learning which may shape reconciliation with indigenous community (Pratt & Danyluk, 2017). In accordance to that, Brail (2016) classified the effects of ISL to students into three domains: functional, practical and transferable skills.

However, all participating parties in ISL pose challenges in different forms (Kricsfalusy, Zecevic, Assanand, Bigelow, & Gaudet, 2016).

The findings from the current study suggest that there are a number of challenges in the implementation of ISL. In fact, the challenges occurred before the program starts, during the program, and after the program finished. The students who participated in the ISL program experience challenges which varies from personal to cultural challenges. Referring that, there are few points that the researcher discuss.

Communication is regarded as the major challenges in ISL for host and target country (Larsen & Searle, 2017). It is also identified as significant challenge in the present study because the students tried to communicate with various efforts. Riley and Douglas (2016) also identified communication constraint in the ISL program in Canadian context. The current research reveals that the students involve in ISL program tried their best to communicate by the efforts to learn and use Thai language, use English when appropriate, and lastly, use the body language. In regards to this, students in ISL need to negotiate the meaning in their communication (Riley & Douglas, 2016). Furthermore, having ISL experience also expose the students with the reality that they may not use international language well when they are abroad. This idea confirm that students with ISL experience would value different language skill so they they will not discriminate people based on the language they use (Brail, 2016). In addition, face-

to-face interaction and communication provide insights to real world situation which is not covered in text books (Mansker et al., 2010).

In the current research, cultural issues also occurred in the form of habit and food. The same issue also revealed that cultural norms also becomes challenges in the implementation of ISL (Larsen & Searle, 2017). This is regarded as a culture shock because the students need to face different situation and culture with their own culture. It is also supported by the view that ISL students may experience anxiety in their adaptation process with the culture in the host institutions (Darby et al., 2016). Despite the fact that the students involve in ISL experience cultural challenge, they said that they enjoyed the experience as they adapt themselves with the food and habit in the host institutions. The same notion also identified in Pratt and Danyluk's study (2017) which admitted that students participated in ISL were surprised at the beginning, and enjoyed their experiences at last.

One of the challenge in ISL program occurred in the school setting. This is because the students in ISL is pre-service teachers who will teach in the host institutions. In the implementation, the pre-service teachers were anxious with the fact that they need to significantly adjust the lesson plan they have created. The same reaction also identified in the urban education as the students have never been exposed with different educational institution abroad (Weber, 2017). As the consequence, the pre-service

teachers are encouraged to find relevant resources as the teaching materials. In this regards, they need to tailor their method, materials, and resources based on the students' need (González-Carriedo, López De Nava, & Salas Martínez, 2017). In addition to that, ISL also shows positive effect on the interpersonal and intrapersonal skills which can be proven from their civic engagement. This refer to their challenge regarding time when they started ISL program not in the perfect time for it was holiday. Their civic engagement was trained by their voluntary involvement in the school program. Furthermore, ISL is also suggested as it transform students' attitudes towards challenges in the host community (Barrera, Willner, & Kukahiko, 2017).

The students in ISL program also experience challenge in the data collection. They firstly had difficulty in translating the documents from Thai to Bahasa Indonesia. Luckily they have their mates from Thailand and teachers to help them deal with this issue. In addition to that, they also mentioned that they missed some important data which they solved by using online communication. In this regards, they use Facebook to gain more data through their personal interaction and communication with host institutions. In fact, Facebook is the preferred to improve virtual and intercultural connection (Hsu, 2017).

The current research obviously revealed the challenges in the implementation of ISL. Interestingly, the challenges that the students experienced indeed train their problem solving skills in the real world context. Each challenge

which occur in the program has been solved by the students in different ways. The same result also identified in the study which impose positive effect of ISL in Malaysia particularly in problem solving skills (Sivalingam & Yunus, 2017). Additionally, challenges in students' participation in ISL also give insights of flexibility in the program. It means that although the program has been carefully planned, adjustments will exist in various forms. Adjustment in ISL is indeed inevitable (McElwain et al., 2016).

CONCLUSIONS

ISL which is promoted globally is argued to positively affect the students in various elements. To achieve this goal, however, students need to be able to cope, handle and solve challenges they have experienced in their program abroad. The study have revealed the challenges occurred not only in the host country, as the students also have to deal with issues in their own country. Their interpersonal, and intrapersonal skills are trained through ISL program when they are capable to deal and solve their challenges individually and collectively.

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