



More Than Studying Abroad: The Impacts of Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) Program To Its Alumni and Society

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ABSTRACT

Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) is Indonesia's prestigious scholarship and one of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology's flagship programs. IISMA facilitates students to study at the world's top universities for one semester. The program's objectives include but are not limited to learning in a multidisciplinary setting, increasing cross-cultural understanding, and enhancing networks at an international level. The alumni are expected to actively participate at the organizational and/or community level after their return to Indonesia. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the impacts of the IISMA program on its alumni and explore their contributions to society. A survey based on five factors that are program satisfaction, acquisition skills, application skills, attitude changes, and behavioral changes will be used and distributed to the alumni of the IISMA program from the 2021 Undergraduate program and the 2022 Bachelor and Vocational program. In addition, the participants will be directly asked regarding the impact of IISMA in their personal and academic life. The findings of this research, with 103 respondents, shows that the program has significant impact across all variables with some differences which are the program is more effective for women and younger participants, less significant impact on academic for those who are involved in casual relationships, higher impact on application skills and behavioral changes on participants from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and higher impact on acquired skills and application skills on participants that are self-employed and those pursuing postgraduate education.

Keywords: *International student mobility, Scholarship, Social impacts, Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka*

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the number of students studying abroad has witnessed a substantial increase, reflecting the growing emphasis on international education and intercultural experiences [1]. The Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) program, funded by the government, is regarded as one of The Indonesian Ministry of Education's flagship programs. This program provides Indonesian students at bachelor level with the opportunity to study at 110 top universities in 26 countries for a semester (e.g. YALE University, UC Davis, Penn University, Korea University, Humboldt University) and the only one of its kind provided by the government. IISMA awardees are automatically accepted as exchange students in prestigious universities. As such, IISMA is a highly competitive and coveted program in Indonesia with an acceptance rate of less than 1% [2].

The objectives of the IISMA program encompass various areas, including multidisciplinary learning, cross-cultural understanding, international networking, and skills acquisition. It is hoped that by immersing the students in different academic and cultural environments, they will gain a broader understanding of various disciplines, enhance their ability to collaborate with individuals from diverse backgrounds, establish valuable connections with peers and professionals globally, and acquire essential skills that will benefit them both personally and professionally [2].

Upon their return to Indonesia, it is expected that the alumni of the IISMA program actively engage at both organizational and community levels. They are encouraged to apply the knowledge and skills they have gained during their international studies to contribute to the growth and development of their respective fields and communities. This

research seeks to examine the impacts of the IISMA program on its alumni and assess their potential contributions to society.

Based on previous research [1] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7] [8] [9] [10] [11], in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the program in achieving these goals, the following five factors are important: program satisfaction, acquired skills, application skills, attitude changes, and behavioral changes. These factors collectively provide a deeper understanding of how the IISMA program influences the personal and professional lives of its alumni, as well as the broader impact the alumni have on society.

It is crucial to evaluate the outcomes and benefits of international education programs such as IISMA as the rapid increase in international student mobility (ISM) continues. Since its launch in 2021, the numbers of awardees that IISMA accepted are growing each year. Starting from 970 awardees for IISMA 2021 [12], then became 1.565 awardees for IISMA 2022 [13], and the latest is 1.691 awardees for IISMA 2023 [14].

The increase of accepted awardees means that the government allocates more budget for program implementation. From the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology's 2022 Performance Report, the budget realization for Directorate General Higher Education, Research, and Technology reached Rp32.142.051.954.757 [15]. The Directorate General Higher Education, Research, and Technology together with Indonesia Endowment Fund for Education cover the IISMA program's fund. As governments invest in international student mobility initiatives, like the Indonesian government's investment in the IISMA program, it becomes imperative to assess their effectiveness and their contributions.

By exploring program satisfaction, acquired skills, application skills, attitude changes, and behavioral changes, this research aims to comprehensively assess the impacts of the IISMA program on its alumni and their potential contributions to Indonesian society. Understanding these outcomes will not only provide valuable insights for program improvement but also contribute to the broader scholarship on ISM and its societal significance.

1.1. International Student Mobility

The phenomenon of international student mobility (ISM) has witnessed a remarkable surge over the past few decades. According to OECD data in 2012, the number of students pursuing education abroad increased by a staggering 400% from 1975 to 2010, with more than 4.1 million students enrolled in universities outside their home countries in 2010 [1]. This trend highlights the global recognition of the benefits associated with ISM. Studies have shown that ISM not only benefits the individuals who engage in it but also has a positive impact on the educational institutions and the broader societies hosting international students [6]. The growing perception that ISM enhances capabilities and productivity by connecting individuals to global networks and collaborative opportunities has been a key motivator for this trend [4]. The percentage of international students in a university is also one of the main indicators for their position in the world ranking such as The QS World University Ranking [11].

1.2. Program Satisfaction

The available data suggests high levels of satisfaction among international students. For instance, based on Orr, Gwosć, & Netz (2011), a substantial percentage of students, such as 93% of those enrolled abroad, reported that their expectations were met to a very high degree [3]. Polish students, in particular, demonstrated high levels of satisfaction, with 91% noting improvements in language skills and 84% expressing satisfaction with the quality of education abroad [3]. Satisfaction with a program is usually correlated with the effectiveness of the program as such the goal of the program is achieved to a higher degree [8]. Hence, assessing program satisfaction is a crucial aspect of understanding the effectiveness of ISM.

1.3. Acquisition of Skills

Mobility is a transformative journey, enabling students to acquire new competencies, develop maturity and autonomy, and broaden their horizons [10]. This transformation can benefit students' regions of origin, as they return with diverse experiences, knowledge, and skills ready to be applied and shared [4]. Teichler (2011) highlighted that international experiences gained during or shortly after graduation have a significant impact on subsequent employment, even within one's home country, with a particular emphasis on cross-cultural skills [1]. Therefore, it is important to assess acquisition of skills as one of the impacts of ISM.

1.4. Application of Skills

ISM has a notable impact on the development of application skills and civic engagement. Paige et al. [7] found that a significant percentage of participants engaged in civic activities, such as voting in elections, making purchasing decisions based on social or political values, and playing leadership roles in improving quality of life. The experience of ISM also appears to inspire a culture of knowledge production, with a considerable percentage of participants publishing work or engaging in newer forms of knowledge creation [7]. In order to assess the impact of ISM, after the acquisition of skills, we also assess whether the skills were applied in multiple settings.

1.5. Attitude Changes

ISM has a profound impact on individuals' attitudes, particularly in terms of cultural openness and adaptability. Participation in ISM programs tends to make students more open to foreign cultures and different ways of working [1]. Cultural intelligence is enhanced as participants learn to navigate and bridge cultural boundaries [9]. Additionally, ISM fosters self-awareness and improvements in academic performance and communication skills [9]. These attitudinal changes reflect the broader impact of ISM on personal and academic development.

1.6. Behavioral Changes

International student mobility is associated with significant behavioral changes; students who study abroad during their university education tend to become more independent, approachable, and agreeable [1]. The act of moving away from home for university can foster independence and responsibility (Holdsworth, 2009). Volunteerism is another area where ISM participants exhibit notable engagement, particularly with educational and community organizations, as well as organizations addressing poverty-related issues [7].

In conclusion, the burgeoning field of international student mobility is characterized by its manifold benefits across various domains. This study focuses on program satisfaction, skills acquisition, application skills, behavioral changes, and attitude changes to comprehensively assess the impact of the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) on its alumni and society. The findings presented herein contribute to the growing body of knowledge on the transformative potential of ISM programs.

2. METHOD

In this study, we aim to explore the impacts of the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) program on its alumni and society. To conduct our analysis, we utilized a unique cross-sectional student survey dataset, specifically focusing on the IISMA Alumni of the 2021-2022 cohorts. Our dataset includes a total analytical sample of 103 respondents, who are among the 2554 alumni from the IISMA Undergraduate and Vocational programs in 2021 and 2022. Through this dataset, we intend to examine the effects of the IISMA program on various aspects, including academic outcomes, personal development, and behavioral changes experienced by the alumni. By analyzing the responses gathered from the survey, we hope to gain comprehensive insights into the multi-faceted impacts of the IISMA program on its participants and the broader society.

2.1. Variables

2.1.1. Impact Variables

The impact variables identified in the study are as follows: program satisfaction, acquisition skills, application skills, attitude changes, and behavioral changes. We use a 5-point Likert scale so the possible answer categories were "strongly agree"; "agree"; "neither agree or disagree"; "disagree"; and "strongly disagree." These variables represent the degree of the impacts of the IISMA program that we will measure.

Program satisfaction consists of four statements with good reliability ($\alpha = .70$): "I am satisfied that IISMA provided enough information about the program", "I am satisfied that IISMA provided appropriate host universities/institutions", "I am satisfied that there is no difficulties with the administration of the program", "I am satisfied that there is no difficulties with the credit recognition".

Acquisition skills consists of five statements with acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .62$): "During the IISMA program, I felt an enhancement of my academic knowledge" / "An increase in my self confidence and self-esteem" / "The

program has increased my general career prospects” / “My foreign language skills have developed considerably” / “A deeper knowledge and understanding of another country”.

Application skills consists of five statements with acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .60$): “Because of the IISMA program, I made friends with local people (Those who came from the host country)” / “Made international friends (Those who came from different countries)” / “Became more mobile (More keen to join activities in another city/country)” / “Became more entrepreneurial (Initiating a program or event)” / “Have more opportunities than I had before”.

Attitude changes consists of six statements with acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .64$): “After the IISMA program, I realized the importance of learning multidisciplinary knowledge (Outside my major)” / “Became interested in joining/participating in humanitarian activities” / “Became motivated to be a global leader with cross-cultural understanding and global competencies” / “Became motivated to stay connected with international students” / “Became inspired to pursue a higher career path” / “Became a better individual”.

Behavioral changes consists of six statements with good reliability ($\alpha = .70$): “After the IISMA program, I am actively learning multidisciplinary knowledge through camps, workshops, and higher education” / “Actively following/participating in humanitarian activities” / “Actively involved in supporting changes (Joining NGOs, participating in social campaigns)” / “Actively volunteering to support study abroad programs” / “Actively maintaining relations with international students” / “Actively applying for internships/jobs with the required knowledge and skills acquired through the IISMA program”.

2.1.2. Additional Impact Variables

In addition, we directly ask the participants for the impact of IISMA in their personal and academic life with one statement each: “Joining IISMA has had a significant in my personal life”, “Joining IISMA has had a significant in my academic life” with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”.

2.1.3. Sample

The sample in this study is the alumni of the IISMA program. The IISMA program was launched in 2021 as such the only available alumni are from the 2021 and 2022 Undergraduate batch and the 2022 Vocational batch. The researchers aim to examine the effects or impacts of the IISMA program on these groups of alumni and its influence on society.

2.1.4. Demographic Variables

The study collects several demographic information. These include the IISMA batch, host university, IISMA region, home university, study program, age, gender, siblings, religious identity, employment status, romantic relationship, and social-economic background. These variables serve to account for any potential confounding factors that may influence the relationship between the independent variable (IISMA alumni) and the dependent variables (academic impact, personal impact, program satisfaction, skills acquisition, attitude changes, and behavioral changes).

3. RESULTS

3.1. Descriptive Analysis

Overall, our participants agree that the IISMA program has a significant impact on their personal and academic life. They reported more personal impact than academic impact. Probably because these students already have a high level of academic results. They reported high agreement on program satisfaction, acquisition and application skills, and attitude change. They reported agreement that the IISMA program resulted in behavioral change.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Sample (N = 103)

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Range	N
Significant Impact on Academic	4.39	.74	1-5	103
Significant Impact on Personal	4.79	.46	1-5	103
Program Satisfaction	4.00	.72	1-5	103

Acquisition Skills	4.57	.39	1-5	103
Application Skills	4.30	.48	1-5	103
Attitude Changes	4.52	.42	1-5	103
Behavioral Changes	3.88	.56	1-5	103

Regarding demographic questions, majority of our respondents come from the 2022 IISMA batch (66%), the Europe region (43%), age 21 or 22 (72%), female (59%), first child (45%), Muslim (50%), currently an undergraduate student (53%), not involved in any romantic relationship (61%), and reporting coming from middle socioeconomic status (5 out of 10, 36%).

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of the Demographic Questions ($N = 103$)

		% from Total Respondents	Range	N
IISMA Batch			1-3	103
2021 Undergraduate		35%		
2022 Undergraduate		52%		
2022 Vocational		14%		
IISMA Region			1-5	103
America & Canada		9%		
Asia		20%		
Australia		4%		
Europe		43%		
UK & Ireland		24%		
Age			1-5	103
20		8%		
21		36%		
22		36%		
23		18%		
24		2%		
Gender			1-3	103
Male		40%		
Female		59%		
Others		1%		
Siblings			1-5	103
Only child		3%		
First child		45%		
Second child		35%		
Third child		17%		
Fourth or subsequent child		1%		
Religious Identity			1-7	103
Islam		50%		
Christianity		18%		
Catholic		18%		
Hinduism		3%		
Buddhism		4%		
Others		1%		
Prefer not to say		8%		
Employment Status			1-5	103
Undergraduate Student		53%		
Graduated S1 (Not employed)		20%		
Graduated S1 (Working)		23%		
Graduated S1 (Self-employed)		1%		
Graduate Student (S2)		3%		
Romantic Relationship				103
Not involved in any romantic relationship		61%		
Long-term relationship		24%		

Short-term relationship		5%		
Casual relationship		10%		
Social Economic Background			1-7	103
2		1%		
3		10%		
4		20%		
5		36%		
6		15%		
7		16%		
8		3%		
Disability			Open ended	
ADHD				1
No disability				102

3.2. Analysis

This study first reports a series of ANOVA or correlations between our impact variables and demographic variables in order to understand the degree of impact of the IISMA program. Secondly, the study reports multinomial linear regression to examine the relative impacts of program satisfaction, acquisition skills, application skills, and attitude change on behavioral change, significant impact on personal and significant impact on academics.

3.2.1. Impacts of IISMA Program According to Demographic Variables

In this section, we reported a series of ANOVA or a correlation between our impact variables and demographic variables. We find a significant difference between the IISMA impact on academic and romantic relationships ($F(3,99) = 4.16, p = .01$). In comparison, respondents who are involved in a casual relationship ($M = 3.70, SD = 1.34$) reported significantly less academic impact after IISMA in relation to those who are involved in short-term ($M = 4.80, SD = .45$) or long-term relationships ($M = 4.56, SD = .58$).

With regards to IISMA impact on personal and impact on academics, we found no significant difference across all our demographic variables.

For program satisfaction, we found three significant differences. First, those who joined 2021 IISMA Undergraduate program ($M = 3.70, SD = .87$) are less satisfied than respondents from 2022 IISMA Undergraduate ($M = 4.15, SD = .58$) and Vocational program ($M = 4.23, SD = .51$) ($F(2,100) = 5.60, p = .01$). Second, we found that the older the respondent, the lesser the satisfaction for the IISMA program ($r = -.23, p = .02$). Third, male respondents ($M = 3.80, SD = .82$) are less satisfied with the IISMA program than the female respondents ($M = 4.14, SD = .62$) ($F(2,100) = 2.85, p = .06$).

Regarding acquisition skills, we found no significant difference across all demographic variables.

For application skills, we find two significant differences. First, those who are currently undergraduate ($M = 4.35, SD = .46$), have a bachelor degree and not employed ($M = 4.11, SD = .54$), and have a bachelor degree and working as employee ($M = 4.23, SD = .41$), in comparison to graduate students ($M = 4.93, SD = .12$) and self-employed with a bachelor degree ($M = 4.60, N = 1$) are less likely to apply the skills acquired through IISMA program ($F(4,98) = 2.67, p = .04$). Second, we found that the higher socioeconomic status, the lesser the application of skills ($r = -.31, p = .002$).

For attitude changes, we found that respondents who are involved in a casual relationship ($M = 4.18, SD = .30$) in comparison to those who are involved in short-term ($M = 4.57, SD = .35$) or long-term relationships ($M = 4.56, SD = .45$) have less attitude changes after the IISMA program ($F(3,99) = 2.44, p = .07$).

For behavioral changes, we found that the higher the social economic status, the lesser the behavioral changes after the IISMA program ($r = -.25, p = .01$).

3.2.2. Multivariate Analysis

1. In order to understand the relation between our impact variables, we conducted a series of multivariate linear regression. In the first model, we predict change in behavior from program satisfaction, skills acquisition, skills application, and attitude change. Our model was significant ($F(4, 98) = 20.99, p = .00$) with $R^2 = .46$. In this model, skills application ($\beta = .41, p = .00$) and attitude change ($\beta = .39, p = .00$) significantly predict behavior change but program satisfaction ($\beta = .01, p = .86$) and skills acquisition ($\beta = -.04, p = .69$) do not.
2. In the second model, we predict IISMA impact on academics with all five impact variables. Our model was significant ($F(5, 97) = 3.64, p = .005$) with $R^2 = .16$. In this model, only skills acquisition ($\beta = .26, p = .03$) was significant in predicting impact on academics.
3. In the third model, we predict IISMA impact on personnel with all five impact variables. Our model was significant ($F(5, 97) = 2.88, p = .02$) with $R^2 = .13$. In this model, program satisfaction ($\beta = .20, p = .06$) and skills acquisition ($\beta = .24, p = .05$) significantly predict IISMA impact on personnel.

3.2.3. Open Questions

We also asked our participants “Please write down how IISMA has impacted you as an alumni and the society around you”. Seven participants did not fill in the open-ended questionnaire, 96 participants expressed very positive feedback regarding the IISMA program, and there were no expressions of negative feedback. The word confidence was mentioned 17 times, connection (9 times), skills (15 times), opportunity (17 times), better (16 times), social (13 times), global (15 times), world (19 times), and network (9 times).

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Conclusion

In summary, the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) program has demonstrated a significant and multifaceted impact on its alumni and society, transcending the traditional boundaries of studying abroad. This research has delved into five key factors to comprehensively evaluate the effectiveness of the program: program satisfaction, acquired skills, application skills, attitude changes, and behavioral changes. Furthermore, our findings reveal that IISMA's impact extends to unexpected domains, including romantic relationships, socioeconomic backgrounds, gender disparities, age groups, and career trajectories.

Our research indicates that the program has a significant impact on academic life, with IISMA alumni who are involved in casual relationships reported significantly less academic impact after IISMA in relation to those who are involved in short-term and long-term relationships.

Our research has uncovered a compelling association between the application skills and behavioral changes with socioeconomic backgrounds. The IISMA program seems to have a more pronounced impact regarding both application skills and behavioral changes on individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. It may be linked to how they considered the IISMA program a luxury because they perceive study abroad as an expensive activity that only the more affluent in society could afford [16].

Gender disparities also emerge as a noteworthy factor in the program's effectiveness. Our data suggests that the IISMA program is more effective for women than men. It may be linked to the finding that shows women tend to have higher achievement scores, and better academic performance correlates with a higher likelihood of studying abroad [17].

The age-related findings with a particular focus on the 20-24 age range shows that the IISMA program is more effective for younger participants. This could be because they are less influenced by family, financial, and career obligations, less risk averse, and more willing to seek new opportunities through study abroad than older participants [18]. We however do not have data on very young or very old international student mobility participants.

Our research indicates that the program has a differential impact on career trajectories, with self-employed alumni and those pursuing postgraduate education experiencing enhanced benefits than those undergraduate and not employed graduate students. This may be influenced by acquired skills and application skills; its intercultural experience can therefore imply a change in career prospects [17] with alumni leveraging their newfound abilities in entrepreneurial ventures or postgraduate studies.

Lastly, our research indicates that in order to change behavior of the alumni, the relevant aspect is skills application and attitude change. However, in order to maximize the impact on academic life, the relevant aspect is skills acquisition while maximizing the impact on personal life, the relevant aspect is program satisfaction and skills acquisition.

4.2. Discussion & Suggestions

This study is in support of studies by [19] [20] [21] in several variables, saying that international student mobility has an impact on personal life, acquisition skills particularly foreign language, attitude and behavior changes regarding social and cultural differences, and career prospects. However, it is in opposition of other studies by [22] [23] stating that international student mobility has a negative effect on students' academic achievement and diminished behavior changes regarding international work.

In light of these insights, program administrators and policymakers should consider tailoring program components to maximize the impact across diverse demographics. This could involve gender-sensitive program design, targeted support for older participants, and initiatives to promote entrepreneurial skills among alumni. Further research is warranted to explore the nuanced relationships between these variables and to inform the continuous improvement of the IISMA program, ensuring its lasting positive influence on alumni and society.

In sum, the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) program transcends the boundaries of traditional study abroad experiences, impacting academic, personal, and even career prospects of alumni's lives. This study shows that the program's effectiveness is influenced by various variables and demographic situations. These findings offer valuable insights for program development and underscore the program's potential as a catalyst for positive change in Indonesian society.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Shannon Ad Dawya initiated this article for the 2023 Kampus Merdeka Collaborative Journal Writing Project. She wrote and presented this article in the 2023 Brawijaya International Conference. Ayu Okvitawanli acted as a mentor. She guided the entire process of writing this article.

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