

## Mobile communication experience of students in exchange programs between Indonesia and the Philippines

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### ABSTRACT

The use of technology and mobile communication became prevalent with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, where activities such as student exchange between two universities can be conducted virtually. Mobile communication, in this case, is related to communication using cellular devices based on computer technology, but also the characteristics of mobile communication itself, which is mobility or its ability to be used anywhere and at any time. The study aims to examine the lived experiences of mobile communication on undergoing student exchange programs between Indonesia and the Philippines. The study was conducted using the qualitative method with in-depth interviews as data collection. The research's informants are students from universities in Indonesia and the Philippines. Data were interpreted through a thematic analysis. The research found that mobile communication positively affected the students' learning and experience, mainly how it helps them continue their education despite being disrupted by the pandemic. However, poor connection, English skills, and language barriers affect their academic performance. Recommendations are put forward for further studies to focus on how the language barrier affected students' learning and behaviors on mobile communication. Another further study that can be done is to explore mobile communication through theories in virtual exchange. They are polymedia and affordance theories. Academic institutions should help and monitor students' understandings that would help and allow the students to understand and learn more.

**Keywords:** Mobile communication; lived experiences; online learning; student exchange program; virtual exchange

### *Pengalaman komunikasi mobile mahasiswa dalam program pertukaran pelajar antara Indonesia dan Filipina*

#### ABSTRAK

*Penggunaan teknologi dan komunikasi menjadi lazim dengan munculnya pandemi COVID-19, di mana kegiatan seperti pertukaran mahasiswa antara dua perguruan tinggi dapat dilakukan secara virtual. Komunikasi seluler dalam hal ini tidak hanya berkaitan dengan komunikasi menggunakan perangkat seluler yang berbasis teknologi komputer, tetapi karakteristik dari komunikasi mobile itu sendiri yaitu mobilitas atau kemampuannya untuk digunakan dimanapun dan pada saat apapun. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui pengalaman komunikasi mobile mahasiswa yang mengikuti program pertukaran pelajaran antara Indonesia dan Filipina. Penelitian dilakukan dengan menggunakan metodologi kualitatif dan data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam pada mahasiswa dari Filipina dan Indonesia. Interpretasi data dilakukan melalui analisis tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan komunikasi mobile membawa dampak positif pada bagaimana membantu mahasiswa melanjutkan pendidikan meskipun terganggu oleh pandemi. Namun, faktor-faktor seperti koneksi yang buruk, kemampuan bahasa Inggris yang buruk, dan hambatan bahasa memengaruhi kinerja akademik mereka. Rekomendasi diberikan kepada mahasiswa untuk dapat memperoleh pengalaman yang optimal dari program pertukaran mahasiswa virtual. Untuk peneliti selanjutnya, studi tindak lanjut harus dilakukan tentang bagaimana hambatan bahasa memengaruhi pembelajaran dan perilaku siswa dalam komunikasi mobile, dan juga penggunaan teori polimedia dan affordance dalam menjelaskan fenomena komunikasi mobile dalam pertukaran virtual. Perguruan tinggi harus membantu dan memantau pemahaman mahasiswa yang akan membuat mahasiswa memahami dan belajar lebih banyak.*

**Kata-kata Kunci:** Komunikasi seluler; pengalaman nyata; pembelajaran daring; program pertukaran mahasiswa; pertukaran virtual

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## INTRODUCTION

Students can maintain their academic pursuits with the assistance of the Internet despite the COVID-19 pandemic because the 21st century marked the beginning of the technological age. Therefore, mobile communication plays a significant role in the educational efforts implemented during the pandemic. Mobile communication is essential in middle-income countries such as South East Asia, including The Philippines and Indonesia. Mobile devices are primarily used instead of laptops or personal computers for online learning, including for taking part in virtual exchanges, as is the case in the Philippines and Indonesia. It is because only approximately half of students in both the Philippines and Indonesia have access to a computer, and an even smaller percentage of students in both countries have access to the Internet (OECD, 2020).

Mobile communication is defined as electronically mediated message delivery comprising other types of technology (Ling et al., 2020). In other words, mobile communication is the act of sending images, data, texting, or talking through the use of a wireless network. Actions like chatting using Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp are only some examples of mobile communication.

In communication studies, mobile communication has seen more research on the topic (Kim et al., 2017). In addition, mobile communication research has addressed three main themes, namely the development of mobile phones and their applications, including internet access embedded in it, person-to-person interactions, and the rise of the smartphone, with the Internet being the critical point of people using mobile phones for online services such as location-based applications and social network services. Based on this, there are two identified primary directions of mobile communication research.

The first direction concerns media studies, considering the mobile phone as a new media form (Jensen, 2013). Mobile communication studies offer a new perspective on how the mobile phone as a media that is mobile to be transported anywhere where its users need not stop to communicate. On the other hand, the social context surrounding its use and the user is also on the move or mobile. Therefore,

communication is not merely an exchange of messages but a context transfer between mobile device owners (Luik, 2014). In this case, mobile communication studies center around mobile media, which Wei defines as:

“I define mobile media (which encompasses a range of hand-held devices from mobile phones, tablets, and e-readers to game consoles) primarily as a personal, interactive, internet-enabled, and user-controlled portable platform. It facilitates the sharing of personal and non-personal information among inter-connected users” (Wei, 2013).

Although mobile media itself is not novel, mobile communication has only recently become embedded into the structure of society as a resource that is taken for granted for communicating with others (Ling, 2012). This process started with the old cell phones and has continued since the turn toward smartphone technology. Although these have been the most popular mobile media designs, others today include smart watches, eyewear, and other wearables that constantly connect people (Ross & Campbell, 2021).

The second direction of mobile communication research is how the diffusion of mobile technologies affects society is the second direction. Mobile communication is incorporated into society, culture, health, and marketing to the extent that mobile technologies reshape many aspects of society. Therefore, the second direction embeds itself into applied communication fields such as interpersonal communication, health communication, and political communication (Kim et al., 2017).

Adapting to the change brought about by the global pandemic, students, teachers, and workers opted to use mobile communication to ease the difficulty of the work-from-home setup. In addition, mobile communication allowed foreign exchange students to learn virtually in the school of their choosing possible, regardless of the geographical constraints caused by the virus.

Exchange students are learners who travel to another country to live and study. Many students strive to become part of their local university's foreign exchange student program to build camaraderie and foster development in Southeast Asia. With travel restrictions

due to the pandemic, the exchange program is continuing but in a different format. It is a virtual format with the aid of the Internet. Virtual Exchange (VE) is an online program conceived to respond to the growing need for collaborating and studying with people from different cultural backgrounds. Drawing from previous definitions of virtual exchange and its other terms, O'Dowd defined the definition of virtual exchange. He said virtual exchange involves "the engagement of groups of learners in extended periods of online intercultural interaction and collaboration with partners from other cultural contexts or geographical locations as an integrated part of their educational programs and under the guidance of educators or expert facilitators" (O'Dowd, 2018). The main characteristics of virtual exchange are the development of foreign language competence, intercultural skills, and digital literacy. It matches the objectives of the World Economic Forum (WEF) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) concept of Global Competence in terms of improving 21st-century skills (Machwate et al., 2021).

Previous research on virtual exchange is focused on more than just the COVID-19 pandemic. The practice has been around for decades with different names, such as telecollaboration, online intercultural exchange, virtual exchange, internet-mediated intercultural foreign language education, globally networked learning environments, and e-tandem or teletandem (O'Dowd, 2018). The English language has been the primary mode of communication between Virtual Environments (VE) participants. This research showed that virtual exchange improved students' oral and written English language skills. Students master new digital tools for sharing, collaborating, and communicating, and a clear awareness of the cultural parameters, starting from personal introspection to the perception of the clash of cultures with the projection of living in a cult (Machwate et al., 2021). Participation in virtual exchange is joint among students pursuing degrees in teacher education, particularly those specializing in teaching English as a foreign language. It is because mastery of foreign language competence, good intercultural skills, and adequate digital literacy is essential for teachers in their line of work (Agustin et al., 2018; Baroni et al., 2019; Lenkaitis, 2020). A

prior bibliometric study on virtual exchange found that current literature mainly focuses on select countries, with Asia not represented much (Barbosa & Ferreira-Lopes, 2021).

Furthermore, the literature still needs to be improved in terms of using mobile communication theory in examining virtual exchange. Instead, mobile communication has been used as a theoretical framework for learning at the university level. A prior systematic review highlighted that most research on mobile learning in higher education focused on how mobile learning impacts student achievement, with language instruction as the most often studied subject matter domain (Crompton & Burke, 2018). Investigating attitudes toward mobile learning use in higher education found that almost all university students sampled had mobile devices, with 81.5% using mobile devices to study (Al-Emran et al., 2016). The attitudes have been mostly positive. Mobile learning is perceived as helping students develop technological skills conversational skills, find answers to their questions, develop a sense of collaboration, and allow knowledge sharing, which leads to increasing learning performance and, consequently, student learning outcomes (Al-Emran et al., 2016). A study on student perception of mobile communication during Covid-19 in Bangladesh found that the students mostly have a positive perception of using mobile technology for education and that mobile communication has helped recover the study gap during the Covid-19 pandemic (Biswas et al., 2020). Mobile communication is unavoidable to be embedded in student learning in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic (Naciri et al., 2020). A prior study suggested that virtual exchange was mainly aimed at fostering students' multicultural collaboration skills, focusing on coping with a health crisis (Barreto Belian et al., 2020a). The results were that the program positively impacted everyone, but there were also the challenges of difficulties in engagement.

Consequently, it is essential to investigate how mobile communication is used by students who are participating in virtual exchange programs in two countries in South East Asia, namely the Philippines and Indonesia. Specific research on the representation of mobile communication in the Philippines and Indonesia was published by Barendregt & Pertierra (2008)

in Katz's *Handbook of Mobile Communication Studies*. They stated that:

“In Indonesia and the Philippines, one cannot overstate the symbolic value of mobile phones. Cell phones are essential for a modern and hip lifestyle, especially among young urban middle-class members” (Barendregt & Pertierra, 2008).

Although mobile communication presents modernity in the Asian (precisely, South East Asian) context, these new modern technologies can coexist and even assist old beliefs. An aspect often overlooked in mobile communication scholarship is based on the Western experience of technological change (Barendregt & Pertierra, 2008).

Based on the background of this research, it is clear that there needs to be more knowledge in analyzing virtual exchange programs through the lens of mobile communication, especially in South East Asia. Thus, this study examines the lived experiences of mobile communication among exchange students undergoing student exchange programs between Indonesia and the Philippines. Students and educators will benefit from this research since it will determine the possible effects of being an exchange student, regardless of whether those effects are positive or negative. This study will also investigate students' perspectives who have attended both schools as part of an exchange program.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses the qualitative approach, in which the researcher used the phenomenology method. Phenomenology examines phenomena and interprets human experience. It attempts to understand human behavior and consciousness from the individual, subjective point of view (Treadwell, 2014). This study is phenomenological. It describes and examines mobile communication among exchange students between Indonesia and the Philippines.

This study was conducted on two universities in the Philippines and Indonesia from November 2021 to January 2022. The first university is the University of Mindanao (UM), located in Davao City, Philippines. This university offers programs for college exchange students in collaboration with their partner

schools outside the country, and one of them is Indonesia. The second university is Universitas Bhayangkara Jakarta Raya (UBJ), located in Bekasi City, Indonesia. This school also offers exchange student programs. These two schools were selected since they collaborated in implementing virtual exchange programs between the two universities.

The target informants of this study are the college exchange students of the University of Mindanao and Universitas Bhayangkara Jakarta Raya. The respondents currently study abroad virtually; thus, their primary way to attend classes is through mobile communication. They mainly utilize social networking sites and apps on their mobile phones as their tools for communicating with their classmates and teachers. Four informants are selected as participants of the study: two informants from UM (Participant 1 and Participant 2) and another two from UBJ (Participant 3 and Participant 4). In choosing the respondents, the researchers used the purposive sampling method. It is a sampling technique in which the researcher is the one to choose the respondents based on the characteristics of the population and the objective of the study (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). It relies on the researcher's judgment in choosing members of the population to be informants of the study.

In the gathering of data, the researchers utilized online platforms. After selecting the qualified participants, an official email was sent to the participants. The respondents were given adequate time to answer the questions through the mobile communication teleconference platform Google Meet. The researchers recorded the interview with the permission of the participants. The online interviews were done to maintain the respondents' and researchers' safety to reduce the potential risk of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thematic analysis is a data analysis method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning ('themes') within qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2017). This qualitative study used thematic analysis for the participants' responses. The researchers were able to analyze the data needed for the study by reading through the in-depth transcripts of the interview. After that, they identify the patterns of the meaning across the data via themes.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data analysis, three themes were found in describing the mobile communication experience of exchange students from Indonesia and the Philippines. The three themes discussed in this section are 1) usage patterns of mobile communication technology, 2) polymedia practices in online learning using mobile media, and 3) a deeper look into the virtual exchange experience as a consequence of mobile communication. These three themes align with mobile communication concepts found in previous research (Kim et al., 2017).

The first theme relates to usage patterns of mobile communication technology. There are three points of discussion for this theme, which explores the time spent on using mobile communication in the context of learning. Most of those who participated in the study admitted they spent significant time on their mobile phones. Because of the way the Internet is set up, they frequently spend time using their mobile phone. Participant 1 stated that he spends 7 hours and 26 minutes using his mobile phone, and he attributes this to the fact that he is constantly on the move, which requires him to check his phone all the time for updates from the two institutions where he studies. Participant 2 shared that he spends 10 to 12 hours using his mobile phone daily. Participant 1 stated that he spends 7 hours and 26 minutes using his mobile phone. Since the global pandemic outbreak, the typical person's time spent in front of a screen has increased (Sultana et al., 2021), making this a common theme among all participants since they are in self-isolation to avoid the risk of COVID-19. The participants allocate most of their time to using their mobile devices, such as smartphones and other electronic devices. They monitor their academic progress and ensure that they stay caught up on the most recent developments from their instructors.

Students now spend a different amount of time on their academic pursuits due to the shift from traditional classroom settings to online learning environments. During the interview, Participant 2 shared that he uses his mobile device for his studies for five hours per day, plus an additional three hours per day for his research activities. A fourth participant mentioned that because she is a virtual exchange

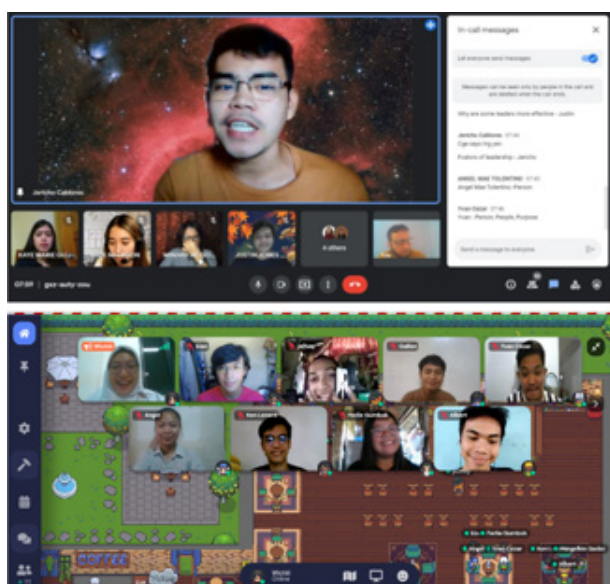
student, she is in front of mobile devices for about eight hours a day. Additionally, every one of the participants felt that the amount of time spent in each course utilizing mobile devices was sufficient for learning. According to participant 1, she could effectively manage and control their time, even though taking classes online consumes a significant portion of their schedule. It is reasonable to argue that most of the time spent on mobile devices is allocated to online classes because all participants frequently use their phones for their classes. It supports the argument that most of the time spent on mobile devices is allocated to online classes. In developing countries like Indonesia and the Philippines, mobile devices with an internet connection (smartphones) are cheaper to buy and maintain than computers, laptops, and tablets. Mobile devices are also more convenient to be used, as their mobility allows the user to take their devices anywhere and use them conveniently at any time (Biswas et al., 2020; Sanga et al., 2016). These reasons support why mobile devices are the primary device used for learning.

How do the participants view the quality of their use of mobile devices? During the synchronous sessions we held with the participants, the vast majority expressed that the quality of their experience participating in virtual exchanges was unaffected by the amount of time spent on their mobile devices. It did not make the experience any better, nor did it make it any worse. During the interview, participant 3 expressed her belief that the frequent usage of her mobile phone seems like it could be more practical but is adequate. Participant 1 echoed the sentiments expressed by Participant 3, stating that they do not believe it to be any worse. The time they spent using mobile communication did not impact the quality of their experience in the virtual exchange program in which they participated.

The advent of the information age was a significant driving force behind the development of various mobile communication platforms. It led to the second general theme on the ubiquity of mobile communication platforms, also termed polymedia practice in mobile communication research. During their time attending online classes, the participants described the many mobile communication platforms they utilized to stay in contact with

their classmates and instructors. They have all mentioned using Zoom, Google Meet, Google Classroom, and WhatsApp to communicate. The other respondents did not use a mobile platform called Outlook, which is very similar to Gmail and was introduced by respondent number three. Respondent number three used the Outlook app to make her time spent online more pleasant because she also uses it in her professional life. Another virtual meeting platform, Gather Town, was also identified. Examples of mobile communication platforms can be seen in Figure 1. It provides the ubiquity of mobile media or mobile communication platforms for an online synchronous session alone, which may be conducted using Google Meet, Gather Town, and Zoom (not pictured). Teachers have a say on which platforms to be used, but students can identify which are more effective for their learning. For example, Participant 1 commended their teacher's decision to use Gather Town, which gave him a taste of the looks of the metaverse. However, amidst the many features of the platform, he said it was not also the best experience in mobile communication:

“Learning through the Gather Town platform is fun because the display is not monotonous like other virtual meeting



Source: Primary data, 2021

**Figure 1** Use of mobile communication platforms such as Google Meet (top) and Gather Town (bottom) for synchronous online classes

platforms. It is also interactive because we can view and discuss the presentations more privately. However, it is unfortunate that this platform is not mobile-friendly and needs a stable internet connection and big internet data quota to be accessed.”

Polymedia theory was first established in computer-mediated communication to capture the expanding ecosystem of communicative potential due to convergence (Madianou, 2014). Polymedia practices in mobile communication might be seen, for instance, in the many applications utilized by the participants (Madianou, 2020). Users can navigate several platforms in one setting, as when the participants can use several platforms for mobile learning and move seamlessly between the platforms on their mobile phones (Williams, 2017).

Each one specified that these mobile communication platforms as useful apps because they get to explore new knowledge with their assistance. In addition, all participants agreed that these mobile platforms are practical tools for learning during an online setup. Participant 4 shared her experience that since she is not proficient in English, these mobile communication platforms have helped her improve her grammar and vocabulary. It is in line with previous findings that student exchange improves a participant's English language ability (Agustin et al., 2018). Using mobile communication platforms for the exchange program may also boost their English ability to become more fluent and communicate with others in English (Nanquill, 2020).

On the contrary, the inability to communicate through mobile devices would make the online experience of our responders more challenging. Participants 1 and 2 thought that the program would be very challenging. In contrast, participants 3 and 4 thought that they would be unable to do anything and that it would be challenging to continue studying. Furthermore, Participant 1 considered that the program would have been less exciting. Participant 2 believed that the program would also be challenging.

The last theme for discussion is to provide a deeper look into the virtual exchange experience due to mobile communication. The points to be discussed are the virtual experience in general, the communication gap that existed, and coping

mechanisms to address the challenges of virtual exchange using mobile communication.

When the global pandemic struck all over the world, many activities had to be placed on hold, and in order for educational institutions to survive, they made the switch to online learning. According to the interview, the participants had a range of reactions to their virtual experience. Participants 1 and 3 expressed the impression that their experience with the virtual transaction was nothing out of the norm. Participant 3 went on to explain why this was the case:

“I kinda feel bored because we [are] just talking with [the use of] these apps.”

On the other hand, participants 3 and 4 said that their experience was a not-to-be-missed opportunity participant 4 said in the interview:

“My virtual experience is fascinating, exciting, and fantastic.”

Similarly, Participant 2 added that:

“My virtual experience, so far, is amazing.”

From the three participants' comments above, we can see differing views on how each participant judges their virtual exchange experience. The variance of the participants' circumstances significantly impacts the range of responses they provide to this question, which was a central focus of this story's overarching theme. It can be explained using affordance theory. James Gibson, an expert in ecological psychology, is credited with developing the notion of affordance to illustrate that actors can respond in response to environmental cues (Purhita, 2019). The principles provided by affordance theory help us understand mobile communication's role in the educational process (Day & Lloyd, 2007). In this situation, every learner has a unique set of contextual factors that either encourage or deter them from supporting the potential affordances of mobile communication in their respective experiences of participating in virtual exchanges. The most crucial aspect of communication is that people comprehend the communicated message; unfortunately, this is often difficult to accomplish due to the circumstances. Every participant cited the language as the most challenging obstacle they faced while participating in a virtual exchange. Following what Participant 1 conveyed:

“It is more on the language because there are times that it is not the language that you speak that is the problem but on how we say it so they might misunderstand.”

Participant 1 was talking about how the regional tone of voice, his English accent, may have unintentionally come out as aggressive when they used it when speaking in English. He also worried that his foreign classmates might misinterpret his actions as ‘arrogant’ or ‘snobby.’

Participant 4 also agreed with participant 1's statement. She reported that:

“The challenge I got was to learn three languages [s]...three language[s] at once: Indonesian as my mother tongue, English as connecting language, and the...the third is the language of another country.”

It is important to note how the official and spoken languages of the two countries affect the communication between participants of the different institutions. The Philippines recognizes two official languages: Filipino (a standardized version of the Tagalog language) and English. However, in the Davao region, where the University of Mindanao is located, Cebuano is mainly used. In Indonesia, the official language is Bahasa Indonesia, and Universitas Bhayangkara Jakarta Raya is located near the capital city. It is the most used language of the people. The students of the University of Mindanao were more fluent in English than their Indonesian counterparts. Cebuano was the language of everyday communication for the younger generation. However, Filipino and English were their preferred languages because they are used as the mode of instruction in institutions (Dreisbach & Demeterio III, 2020).

On the other hand, language instructors and students, particularly in Indonesia, are concerned about improving their language skills. English language proficiency is mainly required for admission to college, completion of a bachelor's degree, and as part of job application to gain employment in Indonesia (Melvina & Julia, 2021). However, despite having spent more than ten years studying English from elementary school to college, most Indonesian students still have difficulty communicating orally and in writing (Dreisbach & Demeterio III, 2020). It is because English is

merely another subject to be taught in class and not practiced, unlike in the Philippines, where the English language is used outside of English classes.

Participant 4 encouraged herself to learn different languages to maintain her participation in the virtual exchange program and have a more meaningful connection with her teachers and classmates. According to the findings of the research conducted on the effect of students' exposure to other cultures and countries on their cultural intelligence, it is possible to assert that the students improve their cultural intelligence (Suharti & Pramono, 2016). It demonstrates how adaptable students are. Despite the challenges that they have encountered, they have been able to push through them and make necessary adjustments.

Learning is impossible without effective communication, which is why it is an essential instrument. In an online class, participants are more likely to encounter several challenges, whether brought on by the participants' poor internet connection or the language barrier. Most participants viewed communication as the key to successfully resolving any problem. For example, Participant 2 stated that if he missed a class because of a slow web internet connection, he could communicate with his professor and tell them that he does not have stable broadband connectivity. Participant 4 employed the same strategy as the previous participants in order to overcome the challenge posed by the language barrier:

“I think I overcome the language difference by trying to communicate with them.”

Similar to both participants, participant 1 did not merely adapt. He adjusted his tone so he could communicate with his peers efficiently. Though participant 3 did not find it difficult to adjust to the new virtual setup, she was concerned with the well-being of her friends since they are not proficient in the English language, which is the medium used for the virtual exchange program.

Nevertheless, all participants agreed that the virtual exchange program has positively influenced their use of mobile communication. Participant 1 stressed his enthusiasm for his participation in the virtual exchange program:

“I would say that it positively influences me since instead of being fixated on using

entertainment applications or mobile games, I was able to, umm, have good use of my mobile device.”

Participant 2 also agreed that the virtual exchange experience is a positive one for him, as he said:

“My experience was amazing. We were able to explore many things. It empowered me.”

Having positive experiences using their mobile phones can mitigate the adverse impacts of screen time during the Covid-19 pandemic (Sultana et al., 2021).

Student mobility is an essential program that must be implemented in order to strengthen international relations among educational institutions all over the globe. The mechanism of student exchange works to increase sociocultural awareness strategically. It is done along the lines of cooperation. As a result, it encourages the improvement of foreign languages, intercultural competencies, and digital awareness. Assessing the actual experiences of students who participated in virtual outbound programs is equally important to determine whether or if Virtual Exchange (VE) is adequate in meeting the requirements of the anchoring grounds, particularly during the difficult times of pandemics. The following suggestions, produced following the data gathered, are directed to students participating in virtual exchange programs.

The first piece of recommendation that has been provided is to leave opportunities for improvement. The acquisition of language competency is a time-consuming process due to the extensive skill mastery and vocabulary acquisition required to comprehend the various grammatical elements. Nevertheless, maintaining a good attitude and being open to improvements is essential to becoming fluent in a language. The right mindset is a catalyst for improvement.

The second piece of recommendation is to get some fundamental English training. Because it involves interaction between multiple parties, communication is a complicated process. Context clues are crucial in an intercultural setting since they help transcend knowledge barriers and make conversation easier. Since the English language is so widely used worldwide,



it is helpful to understand its grammatical structures and idioms.

The third recommendation is for participants to become familiar with the lingua franca of their respective partners. Knowing their lingua franca, or the language used for day-to-day interactions is a good indicator of whether or not a person is interested in constructing networks. They will feel more at ease while conversing with someone from a different cultural background if they learn some phrases in their language.

Enhancing one's capacity for social interaction and communication is the subject of the fourth recommendation. Confidence is the engine that drives communication, particularly in contexts with multiple cultures. Developing healthy self-esteem levels requires bravery and time—small steps matter. Long-term improvements in confidence can be made through working on social and communication skills.

The following piece of recommendation that has been supplied is to seek support. There is never a time when it is inappropriate to ask someone for help. If there is an idea or language we need help comprehending, we should seek assistance from a reliable individual. Make the bold move to engage in a conversation with somebody else.

Learning is complex, particularly in light of the current predicament. In conclusion, it is recommended that students develop their social networks. Find some friends and other people who will assist them along the way. The network of people from various cultural backgrounds becomes learning partners and assists in developing language skills.

The academic institutions that are co-hosting the student exchange program have been given five recommendations to improve the efficiency of the virtual exchange program. These recommendations are as follows: collaboration, an immersive mechanism, language proficiency, a multicultural environment, and active engagement are the five recommendations.

The first recommendation that should be considered is collaboration. Knowledge of other cultures, aptitude in digital skills, and fluency in a language can all be improved through collaborative projects. As explained in the

previous section, students engage in polymedia practices when negotiating to learn using mobile communication, translated into the various mobile communication platforms they use, all of which are digital tools for collaboration. Maximizing the use of these platforms for collaboration can lead to more effective results, as reported in previous research on virtual exchange to increase collaboration (Barreto Belian et al., 2020b).

An increased level of engagement makes the experience of using virtual platforms more immersive. The immersive mechanism is how we negotiate the reality that various internal and external elements intercept learning that takes place through mobile communication platforms. Communication, the ability to retain information, and a captivating interaction of ideas and culture are all essential components of interactive teaching methodologies. The students who were participants in this study have commended their teachers' efforts to make the lessons interactive despite being in a virtual setting. Future classes in a student exchange program should also make interactivity one of the priorities when conducting virtual or online classes.

Interaction makes cultural exchange possible, and language is the driving force behind establishing common ground. The language barrier is one of the main impediments highlighted in the findings. English proficiency is required because of the pervasiveness of its use in international settings, both for academic and professional purposes.

Teachers are also responsible for creating an environment welcoming to students of multicultural backgrounds. In this conversation, equity is of the utmost importance, particularly regarding the language used. Before students, teachers should also try to learn about their students' differing cultural backgrounds and respect them.

Last but not least, we suggest taking an active role. Students who participated in this research reported feeling bored due to the barriers of virtual exchange using mobile communication, where sometimes it gets tiring to stare at a small screen to study. Lessons should be mechanized by educational institutions in order to motivate students to participate actively and to invest in compelling resources. Engagements bring satisfaction and grit for excellence.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the study commenced, the mobile communication experience of Indonesian and Filipino exchange students participating in the virtual exchange between universities of the two countries relates to three themes, which are 1) mobile communication usage patterns; 2) mobile communication platforms for online learning; and 3) the virtual exchange experience itself.

Furthermore, using mobile communication in the virtual exchange program has positive effects on the students' learning experience. They were able to learn a new language and develop their communication skills. The mobile applications Google Meet, Google Classroom, Zoom, and WhatsApp, were the most common mobile communication platforms that the students commonly used to connect with their foreign classes.

Though there are many challenges in the online class setup, the students can cope independently. It is recommended then for students to make room for improvement, learn basic English, study the lingua franca, improve social and communication skills, seek help and build a social network. As for the education institutions such as universities that host and implement the virtual exchange program, this study put forward some recommendations regarding collaboration, an immersive mechanism, language proficiency, a multicultural environment, and active engagement. These are the five recommendations suggested being taken action.

In the interest of conducting subsequent research, a larger sample size should be used with more data collection techniques to achieve more valid results and interpretations. A comparable research methodology carried out in the future with a diverse variety of participants enriches the collection of data from multiple perspectives, which in turn provides more concrete results and analysis. It is not possible to evaluate the long-term effects of intercultural exposure on the participants in this study because the scope of the investigation does not allow for it. However, a subsequent study could be conducted as a longitudinal study that tracks participants throughout the virtual exchange program. Mobile communication concepts, such as polymedia and affordances, were also

present in this study. It is interesting to further explore these mobile communication concepts in future virtual exchange studies, as this is the first time they have been extensively researched.

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