

STUDENTS' HINDRANCES BEYOND ACADEMIC MATTERS IN APPLYING FOR INDONESIAN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY AWARDS (IISMA) A Study at Politeknik Aceh

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ABSTRACT

The Indonesian International Students Mobility Awards (IISMA) is a prestigious program launched by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemdikbud). However, obstacles found that hampered the implementation of the program, especially at the Aceh Polytechnic. These obstacles both come from academic and non-academic factors. There, this study aims at administering factors that hinder the students of Politeknik Aceh from applying for IISMA program, and drawing possible solutions for the problems faced by the students. Moreover, this study also discussed about the relationship between Acehnese people's way of thinking and their traditions, norms and cultures. The students were asked to fill in online questionnaires through Google Form Application. The result of the research showed that the majority of the students have lack motivation and understanding about the program. Only few students indicate great enthusiasm and insight about the output of living in another country. Moreover, More than half of the participants admitted their anxiety of studying overseas. Possible solutions to overcome the problems had been drafted. Counseling services, mentorship programs, peer support groups, and cultural preparation programs are amongst the ideal resolution that could be conducted to both minimize students' anxiety and trigger their motivation to take part in IISMA program.

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BACKGROUND OF STUDY

As the international affairs for Aceh Polytechnic, we always encourage our students to be involved in the Indonesia International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) program. In this program, students have the opportunity to study and develop their academic and life skills at one of the ten best universities from each IISMA partner country. This program was launched in 2021 as an implementation of Permendikbud No.3 of 2020 concerning National Standards for Higher Education (Higher Education), which

gives students the right to experience studying outside their major for three semesters (DGHE, 2021).

Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) is a scholarship program initiated by the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) as part of the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) initiative. This program offers Indonesian undergraduate and vocational students the opportunity to spend one semester at a top university abroad. IISMA allows students to study at prestigious universities worldwide, providing them with exposure to different educational systems, cultures, and academic environments. Students can choose courses that may not be available in their home universities, allowing them to broaden their academic and professional knowledge. The program typically covers tuition fees, travel expenses, living costs, health insurance, and other necessary expenses, ensuring that students can focus on their studies without financial worries.

Beyond academics, IISMA promotes cross-cultural understanding and networking by immersing students in a new culture, enhancing their global perspectives and soft skills. The program is open to undergraduate and vocational students from Indonesian universities who meet specific academic and language requirements. Candidates are selected through a competitive process. Participants receive guidance and support before, during, and after their stay abroad, helping them adapt and make the most of their international experience.

The program aims to equip Indonesian students with the skills and knowledge necessary to compete in the global job market. By experiencing different academic settings and cultures, students are encouraged to think critically, creatively and innovatively. IISMA seeks to build strong connections between Indonesian and foreign universities, fostering long-term academic partnerships. IISMA is designed to be a transformative experience that not only enriches students' academic and cultural knowledge but also contributes to Indonesia's broader goal of internationalizing its higher education system and improving its global standing.

IISMA aims to prepare alumni who have knowledge, soft skills and cross-cultural understanding, as well as global networks and contribute synergistically to the national interest. Therefore, the Ministry of Education and Culture encourages all universities in Indonesia to encourage third year students who have a Grade Point Average (GPA) of at least 3.0 on a scale of 4.0 to take part in the program. In addition, candidates must meet a number of criteria set by the Ministry of Education and Culture, one of which is having

good English language skills which must be proven by certified test records: minimum official score IELTS - 6.0, TOEFL iBT - 78, Duolingo English Test - 100 or TOEFL ITP - 550.

Despite their academic record, we observed a number of underlying barriers preventing them from implementing the program. One of our brilliant students who has a high GPA and English score once said honestly that he was afraid of passing the IISMA selection series. "What if I pass the test, Miss? I'm not ready to go far from my homeland!" It is a sad reality to know that our students have low self-confidence and independence. These mental issues must be corrected before improving his academic peers.

Another bad dilemma we encountered was that again a number of our outstanding students reported that their parents did not allow them to take part in this program, and they did not even allow their adult children to travel outside Aceh without parental assistance. When asked the reason for this overprotective mindset, the students answered that their parents could not live away from their children. This overprotective parental attitude can hinder the child's process of independence in finding his or her identity. The higher the level of parental protective behavior, the lower the child's potential to be independent (Muliya, 2020). Apart from that, parents who are too protective also hinder children's adjustment to their environment (Hetharia & Huwae, 2022).

Referring to the problems above, this research was conducted to find out the root of the problems faced by students, whether the norms, traditions, culture or religion of the Acehnese people play a big role in creating overprotective parents and low self-confidence in students. . Then, after finding the root of the problem, researchers will try to provide a solution so that more and more Aceh Polytechnic students will take part in IISMA Kemdikbud in the coming years.

Previous research on overprotective parenting styles reveals that teenagers tend to have bad thoughts about themselves, are emotionally unstable, and behave aggressively (Hetharia & Huwae, 2022). Thus, the factors that cause parents to adopt overprotective parenting patterns are very diverse. A study that traced the roots of overprotective parenting patterns revealed that parental anxiety is the biggest factor that triggers parents to be overprotective towards their children. Furthermore, overprotective parenting is strongly associated with anxiety symptoms (Van Petegem et al., 2022). This research tries to look at other basic problems that cause overprotective parenting, and links them to the norms, culture, traditions and religion of the local community. Hence, we set three research questions to ease the data collecting process:

1. What are the roots of the various non-academic factors that prevent Aceh Polytechnic students from registering for the IISMA program?
2. How do the norms, traditions, culture and religion of the Acehnese people influence the perspectives of students and parents?
3. What are possible solutions to overcome the non-academic obstacles students face when registering for the IISMA program?

RESEARCH METHOD

This research involved third year students from all departments at Aceh Polytechnic as the research population, while only 4-5 students from each department were selected randomly as samples with the total of 24 students. Applying survey as the method, data collection was carried out using questionnaires instrument. Structured questioning procedures are considered a broader context in collecting data for research (Methods, 2019). Therefore, the questions were listed carefully to meet the quantity and quality of answers, thereby facilitating the process of transcribing data.



Picture 1. Research Flowchart

Theoretical Framework

Social Capital theory is regarded as a base for this study. The quality of social relationship and interpersonal interactions are generated through social capital (van Bakel & Horak, 2024). It is a reflection of human behaviour and motivation. Social capital is critical for social existence as it allows people to cooperate, coordinate and coexist (Claridge, 2018).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Non-academic Factors

Table 1. Response to: “Your knowledge/insight about the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) program”

Option	Percent
Very good	8,3
Good	41,7
Tolerable	45,8
Bad	4,2

Students’ understanding about IISMA program is at the medium level, the majority of them admitted that their knowledge about the program is good and tolerable. The number of the students who have ideal understanding is below 10%, however only below 5% of them have bad knowledge about IISMA.

Table 2. Response to: “You first learned about the IISMA program from”

Option	Percent
Program socialization	0
Teachers	70,8
Friends	8,3
Website/social media	20,8

The table shows great contribution of lecturers’ of Politeknik Aceh in promoting the program to their students. More than 70% of the students stated that they firstly knew/heard about IISMA is from their teachers. None of them knew the program through the socialization.

Table 3. Response to: “Have you ever participated in socialization about the IISMA program?”

Option	Percent
Yes	41,7
No	58,3

The table above pointed out the detail information regarding participation in socialization about the IISMA program. Out of all respondents, 41.7% indicated that they had participated in socialization activities about the IISMA program. This suggests that a significant portion of the population is aware of and engaged with the program. Conversely, 58,3% of respondents reported that they had not participated in any socialization activities related to the IISMA program. This indicates that there is still a considerable number of individuals who may not be fully informed about the program or its benefits.

Table 4. Response to: “Do you feel that the cost of language proficiency tests and administration of the IISMA program is a barrier to registering?”

Option	Percent
Yes	25
Maybe	33,3
No	41,7

The analysis of the result of the cost of language proficiency tests and the administration of the IISMA (Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards) program posed a barrier to their registration from the table below are:

Perceive Barrier; 25.0% of respondents indicated that they felt the cost of language proficiency tests and administration was a definite barrier to registering for the IISMA program. This suggests that a quarter of the respondents face financial challenges that could hinder their participation. Uncertainty: 33.3% of respondents were uncertain, responding with “Maybe.” This group might be influenced by various factors such as partial financial constraints or lack of clarity about the total costs involved. No Barrier: 41.7% of respondents did not perceive the costs as a barrier. This indicates that a significant portion of the population either has the financial means to cover these costs or does not consider them prohibitive.

Table 5. Response to: “Do you think that your family supports your desire to take part in the IISMA program?”

Option	Percent
Strongly supporting	20,8
Supporting	66,7
Less supporting	12,5
Very less supporting	0

The questionnaire aimed to gauge the level of family support students feel regarding their desire to participate in the IISMA program. The table illustrates that a significant majority of respondents (87.5%) feel that their family either strongly supports

or supports their desire to participate in the IISMA program. This indicates a generally positive perception of family backing among the participants. Indeed, students' success is crucially supported by parents' involvement and assistance at their back (Fisher & Lerner, 2014). The responsibility of educational activities belongs to all school environment including parents who play pivotal role in triggering students mood and motivation.

While 20.8% of respondents feel strongly supported, the majority (66.7%) feel supported but not strongly. This suggests that while there is a good level of support, there might be room for increasing the intensity of this support. Only 12.5% of respondents feel less supported, and none feel very less supported. This low percentage of less supportive responses shows that negative perceptions or opposition from the family are minimal.

Table 6. Response to: "Do you feel your social environment supports your decision to study abroad?"

Option	Percent
Strongly supporting	20,8
Supporting	62,5
Less supporting	16,7
Very less supporting	0

The table showed that a significant majority of respondents (83.3%) feel that their social environment either strongly supports or supports their decision to study abroad. This indicates a generally positive perception of social backing among the participants. While 20.8% of respondents feel strongly supported, the majority (62.5%) feel supported but not strongly. This suggests that while there is a good level of support, there might be room for increasing the intensity of this support. Only 16.7% of respondents feel less supported, and none feel very less supported. This low percentage of less supportive responses indicates that negative perceptions or opposition from the social environment are minimal

Table 7. Response to: "How much do you worry about different environments (e.g. culture, language, food and weather)?"

Option	Percent
Highly worry	8,3
Worry	54,2
Less worry	20,8
No worry	16,7

The table presents the responses to the question, "How much do you worry about different environments (e.g., culture, language, food, and weather)?" The results highlight varying levels of concern among respondents regarding different environmental factors when traveling or relocating. Below is a detailed analysis of the findings:

A small portion of respondents, 8.3%, reported that they are highly worried about adapting to different environments. This indicates that only a minority of the participants feel extreme anxiety or apprehension about challenges such as culture, language, food, and weather. The majority of respondents, 54.2%, expressed that they worry about different environments. This group represents the largest proportion, indicating that over half of the participants have notable concerns when faced with new cultural and environmental settings. This kind of anxiety is known as culture shock. The term refers to a pressure occurred when someone is in contact with a diverse culture (Winkelman, 1994). The host culture is functioning normally automatic, unconscious and effortless, while a new culture being run in a conscious effort which results in the stage of stress or burnout.

Around 20.8% of respondents indicated that they are less worried about these environmental aspects. This suggests that a significant portion of the respondents have some concerns, but these concerns are not as pronounced as those in the higher worry categories. Finally, 16.7% of the respondents reported no worry about different environments. This group appears to be comfortable or adaptable when faced with new or unfamiliar cultural and environmental conditions.

Table 8. Response to: “Do you feel less confident in communicating in a foreign language?”

Option	Percent
Yes	41,7
Maybe	37,5
No	20,8

The results reveal varying levels of confidence among respondents when using a foreign language. The analysis of the findings shows that a significant portion of respondents, 41.7%, stated that they feel less confident communicating in a foreign language. This group represents the largest proportion, indicating that a considerable number of individuals experience discomfort or lack of confidence when using a language other than their native one.

About 37.5% of respondents were unsure about their confidence levels, responding with "maybe." This suggests that this group may have mixed feelings or fluctuating confidence levels when communicating in a foreign language. They might feel confident in some situations but not in others, indicating a degree of uncertainty.

A smaller portion, 20.8%, reported that they do not feel less confident when communicating in a foreign language. This group appears to be comfortable and self-

assured when using a foreign language, suggesting a higher level of language proficiency or a more adaptable communication style.

Table 9. Response to: “Do you feel worried about your health while participating in the IISMA program abroad?”

Option	Percent
Highly worry	8,3
Worry	41,7
Less worry	29,2
No worry	20,8

The data reflects varying levels of concern regarding health issues among participants of the program. Below is a detailed analysis of the results:

Highly Worry (8.3%): A small proportion of respondents, 8.3%, indicated that they are highly worried about their health while participating in the program abroad. This suggests that only a few participants experience intense anxiety or significant concerns about health-related issues while being away from home.

Worry (41.7%): The largest group of respondents, 41.7%, expressed that they are worried about their health during the program. This shows that a considerable number of participants are mindful of potential health risks or challenges they may encounter while abroad.

Less Worry (29.2%): About 29.2% of the respondents reported that they feel less worried about their health. This group acknowledges some level of concern but does not view it as a major issue, suggesting a moderate approach to health awareness while abroad.

No Worry (20.8%): A notable 20.8% of respondents stated that they do not worry about their health while participating in the program. This group appears confident in their ability to manage their health or perceives minimal risk during their time abroad.

Table 10. Response to: “Do you find it difficult to divide your time between studying and preparing to register for IISMA?”

Option	Percent
Yes	20,8
Maybe	58,3
No	20,8

The results illustrate the participants' challenges in balancing academic responsibilities with the preparation required for IISMA registration. A minority of respondents, 20.8%, reported that they find it difficult to divide their time between

studying and preparing for IISMA registration. This suggests that while some participants struggle with time management, they represent a smaller portion of the overall group.

The majority of respondents, 58.3%, answered "maybe," indicating uncertainty about their ability to balance these tasks. This group likely experiences fluctuating levels of difficulty, feeling capable at times while overwhelmed at others. The high percentage reflects that time management is a potential concern but not consistently perceived as a severe issue. Another 20.8% of respondents stated that they do not find it difficult to balance studying and preparing for IISMA registration. This group appears to manage their time effectively or feels confident in handling both responsibilities without significant stress.

Based on the data from the tables, main non-academic factors have been identified as barriers that hinder students from applying for the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) program. The analysis reveals the following key points:

1. Limited Knowledge and Awareness of the IISMA Program:

A significant portion of students have only tolerable (45.8%) or good (41.7%) knowledge of the IISMA program, with only 8.3% having very good insight. This indicates that awareness and understanding of the program are not optimal. The majority of students first learned about IISMA from teachers (70.8%), with only 20.8% discovering it through websites or social media, suggesting limited exposure through digital or official program channels. Furthermore, 58.3% of students have never participated in any IISMA socialization events, highlighting a gap in program outreach and engagement efforts.

2. Concerns About Different Environments:

Cultural adaptation concerns are prevalent, with 54.2% of students expressing worry about adapting to new environments, such as language, food, and weather. Only 16.7% have no worries, suggesting that anxiety about unfamiliar environments is a common issue.

3. Language Confidence:

Language barriers significantly affect students, with 41.7% feeling less confident in communicating in a foreign language and 37.5% expressing uncertainty. This lack of confidence can deter students from applying due to fear of communication difficulties. A study examining the confidence level of students performing a foreign language argued

that there are three main reasons for students lack of confidence: minimum preparation, stage fright, and inferiority or low self-esteem (Rosyadi et al., 2022).

4. Health Concerns Abroad:

Health concerns also play a role, with 41.7% of students worried about their health while participating in the IISMA program, which indicates that fears about maintaining health abroad are notable.

It can be concluded that the findings suggest that students face multiple non-academic barriers when considering applying for the IISMA program. These include limited awareness and knowledge about the program, financial concerns, environmental and health worries, lack of language confidence, and time management challenges. Although support from family and the social environment is generally positive, the combination of these factors creates a complex set of challenges that may deter students from pursuing opportunities with the IISMA program. Addressing these concerns through targeted support, improved communication, and financial assistance could help mitigate these barriers and encourage more students to apply.

Students' Perception and Motivation for IISMA

Table 11. Response to: "Do you believe that attending the IISMA program will provide long-term benefits to your career?"

Option	Percent
Highly believing	54,2
Believing	37,5
Doubt	8,3
Not believing	0

The data suggests that the vast majority of students (54,2%), recognize the long-term career benefits of participating in the IISMA program, with over half expressing strong belief in its positive impact. Only a small fraction has doubts which about 8,3% of respondents, and no respondents outright dismiss the program's potential benefits. These insights highlight the perceived value of IISMA in enhancing students' career prospects, reinforcing the program's role as a valuable opportunity for professional growth and development.

The responses to an open-ended question generally showed their enthusiasm for IISMA. Below are their responses:

Student 1: "I am interested in joining the IISMA program to broaden my academic and cultural horizons through international experiences. This program provides a rare

opportunity to study abroad, interact with students from diverse backgrounds, and develop important global skills.”

Student 2: “The motivation and benefits that I will get if I take part in the IISMA program are However, the lack of permission from my family, especially my parents, made me choose not to continue this activity.”

Student 3: “The main motivation On the other hand, reasons for not participating in an IISMA program could be related to time constraints, additional costs that may be incurred even though it is mostly funded, or a preference for a different learning experience within the country. Some may also feel hesitant about living abroad for a long period of time or feel uncomfortable with significant environmental and cultural changes.”

Student 4: “The motivation to take part in IISMA is very interesting and useful to know the education system in other countries, as well as cultural and language differences.”

Student 5: “My motivation for wanting to join the IISMA program is that I want to get direct learning experience on the best campuses abroad and learn about the culture there and want to expand my friendships in the international world.”

Student 6: The motivation for attending IISMA is to gain international learning experience, improve language and communication skills, develop oneself through exposure to new cultures, and build a global network for a future career.”

Six participants responded similarly to the above quotes, 9 students gave irrelevant answers to the questionnaire and the rest 3 participant did not comment to the last question.

Discussion

It is important to highlight that none of the students knew about IISMA from the socialization of the program. Thus, the ministry of education through IISMA division program should increase their socialization for students, especially for Aceh Province. Since it is located at the northern tip of Sumatera, which is far from the capital city of Jakarta, it would be more precise if the socialization is conducted offline, so the students have the chance to meet the advisors face to face in order to fulfil their curiosity about IISMA as well as reduce their anxiety of fearing to live in other countries.

Referring to the result of the questionnaires, anxiety and lack of confidence are at the top rank of factors faced by the students that hinder their participation for IISMA. Therefore, it is substantial to address those problems seriously. Below are a number of

possible solutions from relevant researches that could be adopted in order to increase students' participation for future IISMA program.

Possible Solutions

Counselling Services:

Provide access to counselling to help students manage anxiety or fear related to studying abroad. This could include one-on-one sessions or group discussions. International students or international exchange awardee need counselling services to overcome the complexities of living in a new country (Ang & Liamputtong, 2008). By sharing their past experiences, the mentors would help students adjust the new environment, people, food, culture, language and religion.

Mentorship Programs:

The counselling services could be done through mentorship program by pairing students with mentors who have studied abroad and can offer advice, encouragement, and guidance. One of the most popular mentoring programs is school-based mentorship, where the mentoring is done during school hours: one or two hours per week. This type of mentorship program is believed as a proper way to provide advocacy and problem-solving for the juniors (Karcher et al., 2006).

Peer Support Groups:

Establish groups where students can connect with others who are considering studying abroad, share their concerns, and build confidence together. The main aim of peer support group is to practice self and stress management techniques with people who share similar experiences (Life, 2019). This kind of approach would help students lower their burden as they run the process together with their peers. It could also increase their self-confidence as they work, find fruitful information, and overcome obstacles together. Peer support plays an important role to help students cope with the transition period over the beginning of new living circumstances (Ammigan, 2024).

Cultural Preparation Programs:

Provide cultural orientation sessions that prepare students to live in a new country, reducing fear of the unknown. A research about cultural preparation program for American expatriates showed that cultural sensitivity training had a great effect on the performance of American expatriates working in Nigeria (Enatto, 2024).

It is essential to address solutions for students to reduce their fear of going abroad since they will acquire more benefits when they come back despite their fear (Doyle et al., 2010). Amongst the significant output of experiencing overseas study is to enhance professional growth, such as networking, leadership, self-autonomy, and to broaden one's horizon for creative thinking development and innovation (Wanger et al., 2020).

CONCLUSION

Students of Politeknik Aceh have lack supports and motivation to study overseas. Family and school environment play significant role to enhance students' enthusiasm as well as decrease their anxiety for living in a diverse country with unfamiliar culture, language, people, seasons, food, and religion. Offline socialization is essential to be conducted to facilitate students' curiosity, worries and fear of the program.

The teachers or lecturers had shown their great job in promoting IISMA to their students, which was admitted by the huge number of the students knowing about the program from their lecturers. However, knowledge about the program is not enough without triggering their motivation to participate in such prestigious platform.

Nonetheless, further research involving both parents and teachers should be conducted in order to address not only the perspective of students but also those of the parents and teachers. The fact that only students taken as the participants became the limitation of this study. It would be more adequate with a comparative study of diverse perspectives.

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