



## Research Article

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# Skill Development of Undergraduate Students through International Exchange Program

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## Abstract

*The international exchange program plays an important role in improving soft skills and helps graduates' to be confident to compete in job market. Student can achieve a vast academic knowledge apart from extra-curricular and co-curricular skills through attending exchange program. Therefore, this paper aims at studying the development of students acquired soft skills and the barriers they face to achieve the goal through the exchange program. The data obtained from 87 students who participated in exchange program in different countries of Asia. Besides descriptive statistics, factor analysis was performed to identify the achieved soft skills through exchange program. This study reveals that, a large number of students were attending in exchange program at their own cost and most of the students were from the year 3. Indubitably, Exchange program helps to improve students' soft skill such as; communication skill, team building ability, adaptability with situation. Moreover, lectures delivered to the students were found interesting. Results of the study are expected to motivate students attending in international exchange program and will offer a right direction to the students to get an expected outcome*

**Keywords:** Collaboration, Exchange Program, Factor Analysis, Soft Skills

## 1. Introduction

Learning is a complex process because of individual's ability to learn and way of learning. The goal of learning is to make sense of and using new information and experiences. During student life a student can get experience of new information from his/her institution as well as more experience of technology and culture can be gathered through exchange program. A student from developing country like Bangladesh some time spends a lot to attend in the exchange program for gather more experience and knowledge. However, there is no literature to find the impact of exchange program on the Bangladeshi students through exchange program. According to Earley *et. al.* (2006), cultural intelligence signifies the ability to adopt with new culture, gaining cross-cultural knowledge through knowing how things are operated nationally and internationally. Therefore, international experience is working as the key force of increasing cultural intelligence (Thomas & Inkson, 2004). Now days, Employers are focusing to recruit the employees who have a good understanding about cultural issues, ability to manage international relationships and know how to adopt with diverse workforce beside subjective knowledge [Earley, *et. al.* (2006), Atalar (2020), Ledwith & Seymor (2001), Mak, *et.al.* (1999)]. In the same way, academic institutions have acknowledged the significance of global perspective by introducing international elements into their program outcome [Harvey & Bowers-Brown (2004), Cranmer (2006)].

The term internationalization and globalization can be described in various ways (Knight, (1997), (2004)]. In this study, internationalization is defined as a systematic way that required continuous efforts to strengthen the relationships between national cultures (Crossman & Clarke, 2010). On the other hand, globalization denotes itself as the world system (Marginson, 2000) that emphasizes upon homogeneity (Gosling & Mintzberg, 2003). Therefore, business is not limited within a nation and as a result, it has to be connected with international suppliers or customers and, the companies demanding employees who have such abilities [Gupta & House, (2004), Rossen, *et.al.* (2000), Stohl (2001)]. Literatures show that, the ability of working with intercultural teams has a positive impact on critical thinking, ability to solve problem, decision making, creative and innovation, communication, cooperation and financial management [Cacioppe, (1998), De Anca & Va 'zquez (2007), Dubrin, *et. al.* (2006), Tung & Thomas (2003)].

The universities are promoting internationalization of their curriculum for the students over the years (Webb, 2005). In order to create balanced graduate, universities as "cultural institutions" are adopting frequent changing context including culture for making positive contributions to students (Welch & Denman, 1997). However, the internationalization in universities has been exaggerated since 1950's to respond cultural forces associated with global economy [Welch & Denman (1997), Goby (2007)]. Among the area of internationalization, international exchange programs are being frequently promoted among the students of universities [Hermans (2007), Leask (2007)].

It was Australia who first introduced international exchange program to Asian nations as a symbol of peace and expansion of trade (Davis *et al.* 1999). ERASMUS was launched in 1987 with the hope of staff and student mobility within the universities (Welch & Denman, 1997). The Success of ERASMUS not only inspired Australia to offer University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP) but also leaded Australian youth ambassadors for development programmer, AIESEC for better cultural understandings (Davis, *et. al.*, 1999). Realizing the effect of exchange program, Colleges and Universities of USA also offered exchange program for the intensification of internationalization (Crossman & Clarke, 2010).

According to Hillage & Pollard (1998) and Rothwell & Arnold (2007), employability are the skills and abilities which help a graduate to be employee or continuing employment. Graduate employability is one of the key parameters to evaluate performance of both an individual and an institutional level (Harvey, 2001). That is why; the universities are focusing and offering subject oriented knowledge, effective knowledge, skills as well as attitudes to its graduates [Leckey & McGuigan (1997), Cox & King (2006)]. Effective knowledge is the responsibility, positive to work, ability to work as a team as well as independently and interpersonal skills (Cassidy, 2006). It is

expected that, international exchange program would be able to increase knowledge transfer and develop competencies among the graduates [Di Pietro (2015), Chan & Dimmock (2008), Teichler (2004)]. Moreover, international experience has impact on learning and adoptability of cultural sensitivity, personal and professional development which influences employability (Osland, 2008). Przytuła *et al.* (2020) found that exchange program filled the cross culture gap. Handayani and Wienanda (2020) showed that international exchange program improved soft skill of the students. Roy *et al.* (2019) classified the learning outcome through exchange program into three categories – cultural outcome, personal outcome and career outcome.

Nowadays undergrad students from Bangladesh are also joining in various international exchange program. Bangladeshi students are attending international exchange program in a regular basis however, the impact of this program on the participants is still hardly found in literature. Thus, the objective of the study is to evaluate students' perception regarding acquisition of soft skill through international exchange program.

## 2. Methodology

This study is a cross sectional study to explore the skill achieved through exchange program.

### 2.1 Data Collection

Data were collected from the students who participated in different exchange programs through mail. A number of 87 students of different universities of Bangladesh were interviewed with a semi structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was finalized after pilot test and based on expert opinion.

A total of 500 students participated in exchange program were requested to participate in the survey, therefore, the response rate is over 17%. Email interview usually gets a low response [Manfreda, *et. all.* (2008), Tuten (1997), Jones & Pitt (1999)].

### 2.2 Analytical Tools

Descriptive statistical analysis was used to explore the personal determinants of attending in exchange program and factor analysis was used to explore the achieved soft skills through exchange program.

### 2.3 Factor Analysis

Factor analysis is a statistical analysis for reducing variables into fewer. Goal of the analysis is to maximizing the common variance from all variables and keep the variables into a common score. Though different types of methods can be applied to extract the factors, this study used principal component analysis.

### 2.4 Principal Component Analysis (PCA)

PCA, at first, formed a factor which maximizing variance of the variables. After that, the variance explained by the first factors is removed and then again maximizing variance of the variables to form second factor. The process continue till forming the last factor.

### 2.5 Factor loading

Factor loading is the correlation between the study variable and factor. Factor loading indicates the variance explained by the variable of the particular factor.

## 2.6 Eigenvalues

Eigenvalues is also called characteristic roots. Eigenvalues indicates variance explained by the factor out of the total variance.

## 2.7 Factor score

Factor score is the row and columns, which can be used as an index of all variables and can be used for further analysis.

## 2.8 Criteria for determining the number of factors

According to the Kaiser Criterion, the eigenvalue greater than 1 is a good criterion to select a factor and this study selected such 4 factors.

## 2.9 Rotation method

Among the different rotation method, varimax rotation method was used in the study for maximizing the squared correlation of items related to the factor.

# 3. Result and Discussion

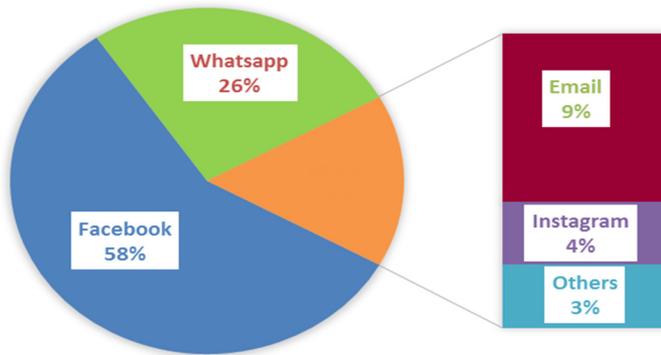
## 3.1 Background characteristics of the participants

In Table 1 it is found that, among the respondents 54% were female and more than 56% participants were from first and second year of their academic session. About 87% participants were attendant in the less than 2 week's duration of exchange program.

Most of them (94.3%) have communication with their friends with whom introduce during the program. More than 54% respondents were attended using their own fund. About 57% respondents were using Facebook as a medium of communication with their friends of exchange program, whereas 26% wire using WhatsApp as a tool of communication (Fig 1).

**Table 1:** Characteristics of the participants who attended in exchange program

Variables	Categories	Number of students (%)
Gender	Male	40 (46.0)
	Female	47 (54.0%)
Academic Year	less or 2 <sup>nd</sup> year	49 (56.3%)
	3 <sup>rd</sup> year or more	38 (43.6%)
Duration of the program	Less than or equal 2 weeks	76 (87.5%)
	More than 2 weeks	11 (12.5%)
Connected with program friends	Yes	82 (94.3%)
	No	5 (5.7%)
First visit to abroad	Yes	74 (85.1%)
	No	13 (14.9%)
Funded Status	Self-funded	47 (54.2%)
	Partially funded	28 (32.1%)
	Fully funded	12 (13.7%)



**Figure 1:** Medium of communication used to connect with program friends

### 3.2 Criteria for the appropriateness of Factor Analysis

Table 2 represents the adequateness of the sample and validity of factor analysis of the data. Kaiser Mayer Olkin measure represents that the sample size is adequate to run the factor analysis as the value is 0.839 (> 0.6).

**Table 2:** KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure	Bartlett's Test		
	Approx. Chi-Square	Degree of freedom	P value
0.839	815.38	153	0.001

Bartlett's test indicates that correlation matrix is not an identity matrix as p value <0.01. There is no perfect correlation between the items (Appendix Table A1) though they may significant. Thus, all the criteria are indicating that, it is possible to run factor analysis for the data.

### 3.3 Factors extraction

Table 3 presents the percent of total variation which is explained by each component. It is observed that, first four variable has eigenvalue more than 1. And these variables can explain about 65% variation of the total. That is, the components can be reduced into four components. The observed variables are categories into the latent component based on the highest loadings for a component.

**Table 3:** Total variance explained by the factors

Component	Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	Variance (%)	Cumulative (%)	Total	Variance (%)	Cumulative (%)
1	7.20	39.99	39.99	4.52	25.131	25.131
2	2.01	11.18	51.18	2.83	15.742	40.873
3	1.48	8.22	59.39	2.54	14.136	55.009
4	1.01	5.61	64.99	1.80	9.985	64.994

Note: Only the selected components are present in the table

The four components can be defined as personal skills teaching method collaboration and

satisfaction were the achievement for attendee from an exchange program (Table 4). Timlin (2017) found that, the exchange program is developing students' personal, civic, academic, and professional skills. The personal skills are the linear combination of different culture acquisition, learn how to face real life problem, teamwork skill, adaptation with situation, understanding global job market requirement (Petzold, 2017), communication skills, self-esteem presentation skill.

**Table 4:** Rotated Component Matrix

Latent Component	Observed variables	Component			
		1	2	3	4
Personal Skill	Different culture acquisition	0.81	0.19	0.04	0.07
	Learn to face practical life related challenges	0.76	0.15	0.31	-0.08
	Teamwork	0.75	0.11	0.22	-0.24
	Adaptation with situation	0.72	0.13	0.27	-0.12
	Global market requirement	0.70	0.28	0.20	0.29
	Communication skill	0.60	0.34	0.16	0.45
	Self esteem	0.59	0.15	0.58	-0.05
Teaching Method	Interpersonal presentation skill	0.58	0.32	0.27	0.16
	Lecture are interesting	0.13	0.77	0.24	-0.13
	Learning with fun	0.28	0.59	0.17	0.14
Collaboration	Academic knowledge with proper example	0.10	0.53	0.46	-0.01
	Friendship develop	0.39	0.13	0.82	-0.26
	Peer group to solve problem	0.35	-0.01	0.76	0.01
Satisfaction	Helpful to each other	0.38	0.20	0.70	-0.07
	Satisfy with the arrangement	0.07	0.43	-0.03	0.69
	Effective for learning	0.02	-0.23	-0.02	0.81
	Do not feel boar	-0.12	0.41	-0.11	0.72
	Want to suggest friends to join in exchange program	0.37	0.34	0.06	0.71

In exchange program, the participants found the classrooms a very interesting place of teaching and learning are filled with fun and enjoyed the lecture which was delivered with an appropriate example and eventually, students got interest in it. Miglietti (2015) also found that, international educational exchange had a significant impact on teaching in the classroom. According to their perception, this is a platform offers students' with great opportunity for collaboration that leads to friendship development group to solve problem and help each other. Sato, et. al. (2018) also expressed that international exchange among Asian youths would contribute to understand each other lifestyle. The participants were satisfied with the exchange program due to its' perfect arrangement and making the environment – a place of effective learning which raises interest in them to join again as well as to suggest their friend to join in exchange program.

#### 4. Conclusion

The social media should consider as a media of communication to collect information or data. Facebook, a very common and popular social media can play significant role to collect data or information quickly rather than any other digital communication media or traditional methods. Study reveals that, 58% of respond of exchange students' priority go to Facebook as communication media whereas, the priority of other respond is 26% through WhatsApp, 9% through email, 4% through Instagram and 3% for other way of communication.

It is found that 32.1% students are participated in exchange program through partial-funded and 13.7% students are fully-funded to participate international exchange program.

It should be mentioned here that, the 70% of the students of Daffodil International University (DIU) are from the rural areas of Bangladesh whose socio-economic status is not that much solvent.

That's why, many meritorious and insolvent students are not getting the opportunity to join the international exchange program due to pecuniary troubles. The findings of this research also express and indicate that, concentration should be given to the meritorious and insolvent students so that they could get the opportunity to attend in international exchange program with full funded scholarship or full grant from government or non-government organization for the betterment of the nation.

The significant achievement of student exchange program is to enhance the personal skills, interpersonal skills, communication skills, and soft skills, know the techniques and approaches and methods of teaching, collaboration or making friendship with the global student, increase their global network to learn foreign culture and experience. Therefore, it can be claimed that, if an institute or community wants to create graduate for global job market with soft skills along with their academic knowledge needs to involve their students with international exchange program.

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**Appendix:** Table A1. Correlation matrix between items

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7	Factor 8	Factor 9	Factor 10	Factor 11	Factor 12	Factor 13	Factor 14	Factor 15	Factor 16	Factor 17	Factor 18
Factor 1	1.00																	
Factor 2	0.03	1.00																
Factor 3	0.43	0.14	1.00															
Factor 4	0.35	0.04	0.52	1.00														
Factor 5	0.31	0.16	0.31	0.61	1.00													
Factor 6	0.33	0.04	0.35	0.55	0.48	1.00												
Factor 7	0.31	0.05	0.21	0.38	0.65	0.42	1.00											
Factor 8	0.38	0.01	0.32	0.50	0.49	0.47	0.60	1.00										
Factor 9	0.26	0.01	0.29	0.42	0.58	0.47	0.54	0.57	1.00									
Factor 10	0.21	0.14	0.41	0.23	0.45	0.36	0.36	0.38	0.45	1.00								
Factor 11	0.41	0.06	0.27	0.27	0.27	0.33	0.33	0.42	0.34	0.44	1.00							
Factor 12	0.38	0.06	0.45	0.60	0.42	0.52	0.35	0.38	0.25	0.31	0.56	1.00						
Factor 13	0.29	-0.08	0.41	0.67	0.50	0.58	0.52	0.53	0.48	0.32	0.29	0.65	1.00					
Factor 14	0.25	-0.11	0.31	0.44	0.56	0.55	0.58	0.62	0.67	0.52	0.31	0.34	0.61	1.00				
Factor 15	0.35	-0.14	0.26	0.35	0.35	0.46	0.42	0.58	0.58	0.43	0.42	0.35	0.38	0.58	1.00			
Factor 16	0.47	0.14	0.37	0.32	0.29	0.35	0.28	0.40	0.29	0.41	0.47	0.30	0.27	0.33	0.54	1.00		
Factor 17	0.05	-0.10	0.11	0.25	-0.01	0.15	-0.20	-0.08	-0.08	0.00	0.26	0.43	0.21	0.01	-0.04	0.03	1.00	
Factor 18	-0.11	-0.07	0.04	0.20	0.12	-0.04	-0.18	-0.10	-0.02	-0.13	-0.21	0.05	0.03	-0.10	-0.10	-0.07	0.44	1.00

Note: Factor1: Academic knowledge with proper example; Factor2: Lecture are interesting; Factor3: Learning with fun; Factor4: Communication skill; Factor 5: Different culture acquisition; Factor6: Interpersonal presentation skill; Factor7: Teamwork; Factor8: Self-esteem; Factor9: Adaptation with situation; Factor10: Helpful to each other; Factor11: Peer group to solve problem; Factor12: Want to suggest friends to join in exchange program; Factor13: Understand requirement of global market; Factor14: Learn to face practical life related challenges; Factor 15: Friendship develop; Factor16: Satisfy with the arrangement; Factor17: Do not feel boar; Factor18: Effective for learning