

# INVESTIGATING STUDENTS' FOREIGN EXCHANGE EXPERIENCE ON THEIR ENGLISH LEARNING JOURNEY

## THESIS

Submitted by:

**TEUKU M. 'ARSYI MATURIDI**

**NIM. 210203048**

Student of *Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan*  
Department of English Language Education



FAKULTAS TARBIYAH DAN KEGURUAN  
UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI AR-RANIRY BANDA ACEH  
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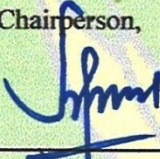
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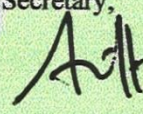
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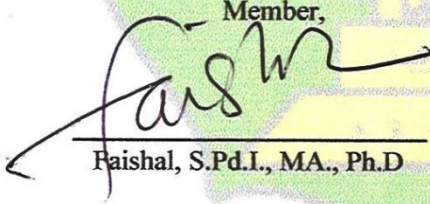
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Certified by:

The Dean of Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan  
Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh



  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Prof. Safrul Muluk, S.Ag., M.A., M.Ed., Ph.D  
NIP. 197301021997031003

**DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY**  
**(Declaration of Originality)**

Saya yang bertanda tangan di bawah ini

Nama : Teuku Muhammad 'Arsyi Maturidi

NIM : 210203048

Tempat/ tanggal Lahir: Tangerang, 09 Januari 2002

Alamat : Gampong Meunasah Papeun, Kureng Barona Jaya

Menyatakan dengan sesungguhnya bahwa skripsi yang berjudul:

**Investigating Students' Foreign Exchange Experience on Their  
English Learning Journey**

Adalah benar-benar karya saya, kecuali semua kutipan dan referensi yang disebutkan sumbernya. Apabila terdapat kesalahan dan kekeliruan di dalamnya, maka akan sepenuhnya menjadi tanggung jawab saya. Demikianlah surat pernyataan ini saya buat dengan sesungguhnya.



Banda Aceh, 7 Januari 2024

Saya yang membuat surat pernyataan,

Teuku M. 'Arsyi Maturidi

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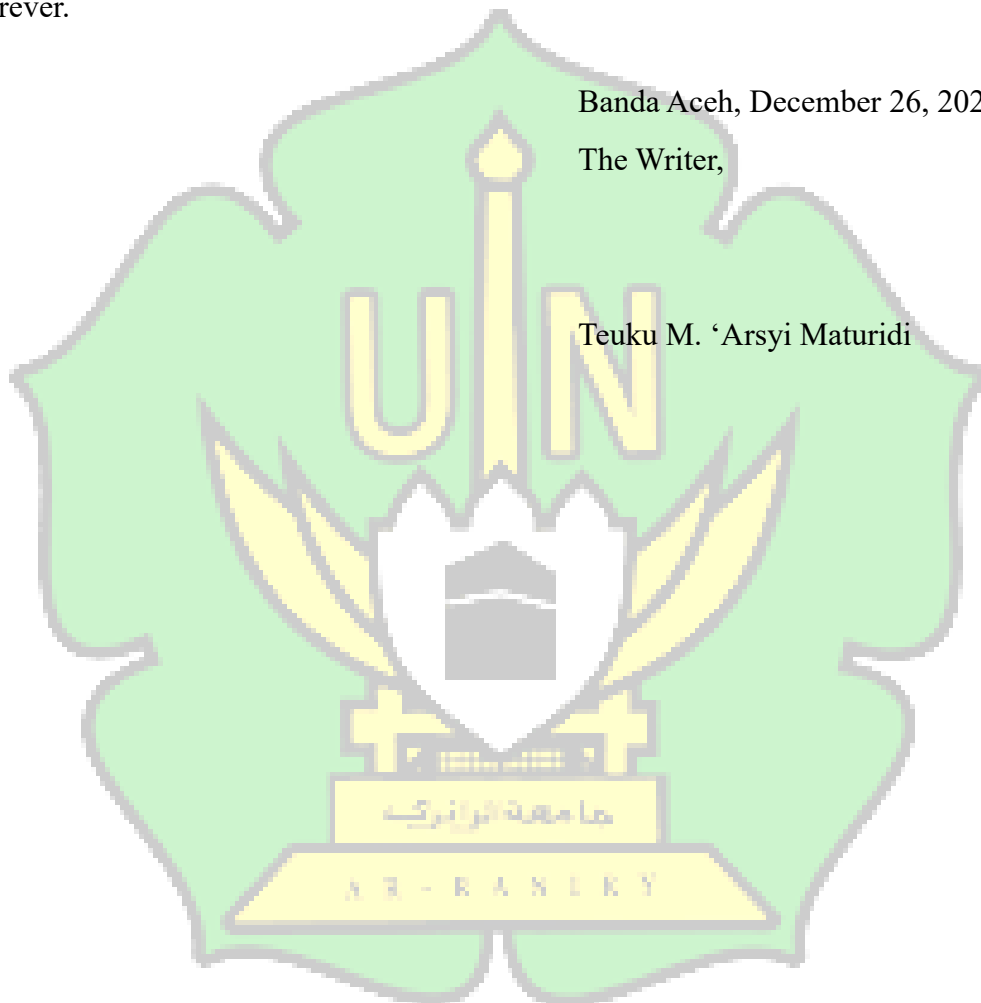
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The Writer,

Teuku M. ‘Arsyi Maturidi



## ABSTRACT

Name : Teuku M. 'Arsyi Maturidi  
Reg. No. : 210203048  
Faculty : *Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan*  
Major : Department of English Language Education  
Thesis Working Title : Investigating Students' Foreign Exchange Experience on Their English Learning Journey  
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English proficiency is essential for students to face a rapidly changing world today. Teachers and students are rushing to find the most suitable way to enhance English proficiency. This study investigated students' foreign exchange experience in their English learning. The KL-YES exchange program is one of the leading exchange programs in the world. For decades, it has brought thousands of students from various countries, including Indonesia, to the United States. In Indonesia, the Bina Antarbudaya, a partner of AFS International, organizes the program. This qualitative study focused on 10 alumni of Aceh's last five batches of the KL-YES program, their foreign exchange experience, and its impact on their English learning through the lens of Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT). I employed semi-structured interviews to collect the data. I also used thematic analysis to analyze the data. The research findings identified several challenges, strategies, and impacts of the foreign exchange experience on students' English learning, such as improving their listening comprehension and oral proficiency through exposure to different accents and vocabularies in an English-speaking country. This study provides an option for language learners, language teachers, or stakeholders to explore exchange programs as a tool to enhance English learning.

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## **CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, I present the background of study on what motivated me to dive into this issue further by providing context and research gap. Furthermore, I also present the research questions, significance of the study, scope and limitation, as well as terminologies to provide a clear information about this research.

### **A. Background of Study**

The importance of English proficiency is not debated. It has become increasingly crucial and needed in today's globalized world. It stands in a powerful position among other fundamental skills needed in the workplace or on the world stage. Moreover, English is a lingua franca across diverse regions, so English proficiency is crucial to international communication (Jenkins, 2015).

The study is fundamentally based on sociocultural theories of language acquisition, which emphasize the importance of social interaction in cognitive development, which is essential for language learning (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). According to these theories, language learning is not solely a cognitive factor but is deeply influenced by social and cultural factors. Engaging in meaningful conversations with other speakers of the language provides learners with authentic language input, scaffolding their understanding and facilitating the learning of linguistic structures (Swain et al., 2015).

The use of direct interaction with other speakers of the language to improve English skills is not a brand-new product (Masgoret & Gardner, 2014). The immersion program is one of the examples. The students are fully immersed

in the environment of the target language, which positively impacts their language skills (Taguchi, 2015). Exposure to the target language environment in second language acquisition is highly needed as it provides authentic language practice, which is crucial for accuracy and fluency in language comprehension (Derwing & Munro, 2015).

Foreign exchange programs have become a growing trend as a result of globalization (Gurlek, 2016). It helped the students enhance their language skills by accessing the target language environment directly (Gautier & Chevrot, 2015). By enrolling in these programs, students can develop their language skills such as speaking, grammar, and writing, which improves English proficiency (Pinar, 2016).

Many developed and developing nations believe that foreign exchange programs provide a unique opportunity for students to play an important role in English language learning (Dewaele, 2015). In Indonesia, many universities have started to promote foreign exchange programs in their curriculum, mostly as an option for students to consider (Asli et al., 2017).

Through the U.S. Department of State, the United States government established a program called the Kenned-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (KL-YES) for high school students since 2003 (AFSIndonesia, 2025). The KL-YES program has enabled more than a thousand Indonesian students to have a foreign exchange experience in the United States (Bina-Antarbudaya, 2024).

This study investigated the impact of KL-YES as a foreign exchange program in the United States on students' English learning. It dived deep into the experience of the program alumni from Aceh, during their time in the United States and its impact on their language learning.

Previous research has investigated this issue, such as Arianti (2020) who investigated six EFL students of Widya Gama Mahakam University of Samarinda that participated in SEAMO exchange program which showed developments in students' oral proficienct, vocabulary and pronunciation. Howewer, the existing research has focused on the students at the university level in Samarinda. Therefore, I believe a study for exchange alumni of the KL-YES program experience for high school students are necessary to be conducted to enrich and broaden the knowledge in this issue.

I was motivated to conduct this research due to my experience in the United States as an exchange student of the KL-YES program. During the program, I received many influences in language learning.

Therefore, I committed to investigate this issue further to determine whether the fellow alumni of the program could provide additional insights into how their foreign exchange experiences could have played roles in their English learning journey.

## **B. Research Questions**

Based on the background presented, this study focused on the following research question: In what ways did Students' Foreign Exchange Experience influence their English learning?

## **C. Significances of The Study**

The result of the research could give a broader explanation of the foreign exchange experience and its impact on English learning. In addition to that, here are several other significances to put in mind:

### **1. Pedagogical Implications**

This research surely enriched the pedagogical knowledge of language teaching. It could also investigate further to create new methods in language teaching.

### **2. Practical Significance**

#### **a. For English Students**

The result of this study could greatly influence the decision-making of students in determining their English learning strategies. It could even lead to the choosing of schools or English learning method with partial or fully funded foreign exchange programs, both virtual and non-virtual, featured in the curriculum.

#### **b. For English teachers**

The result of this research provided fresh insights into the mind of English teachers in school on the variation in English learning. It is important for teachers to have a fresh and updated option to help students keep up with the global world.

c. For Educational Institutions

This research enriched the options and variation in English language learning. It supports international cooperation with overseas institutions or foreign teachers to initiate programs such as this. These are good for schools and students.

d. To other researchers

The result of a research always raises new questions about the issue. This research helps other researchers in the future to provide information gathered and analyzed in this research as a reference. Other than that, this research eventually opened the possibility for other researchers to conduct further investigation on other foreign exchange programs currently available.

#### **D. Scope and Limitation**

This research focused on the experience of KL-YES exchange program alumni from Aceh with the experience of residing in the United States of America, where English is the first language, for more than 6 months.

#### **E. Terminologies**

##### **1. Foreign Exchange**

Foreign Exchange program is a program that provided students from a university the chance of studying in another university (Suryanto, Ayuza, & Othman, 2022).

This particular research focused on a foreign exchange program for high school students called the KL-YES program. The alumni of the program are be the primary source of data for this research.

## **2. Students**

The term “students” in this research refers to the students who participated in the KL-YES exchange program in the United States. Which currently are the alumni of the program.

## **3. Experience**

The word experience means a direct involvement of someone in an event as a basis of knowledge (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). In this particular research, the term experience would refer to the student’s participation in the foreign exchange program, the KL-YES program as defined earlier.

## **4. English Learning**

Language learning is defined as the process of acquiring proficiency in a new language (Duggan, 2020). In this particular research, English learning refers to the process of acquiring proficiency in the English language. I focus on the learning of English language for the alumni of the KL-YES foreign exchange program. The research dived deep on the experience of the alumni of the

program and its impact on the course of their English learning after having the experience of foreign exchange program.

