

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Volume 18 No. 2 2026

DOI: 10.21315/eimj2026.18.2.9

ARTICLE INFO

Submitted: 18-06-2025

Accepted: 16-09-2025

Online: 30-06-2026

Medical Student Mobility Programmes Between Malaysia and Indonesia: A Descriptive Analysis of Opportunities, Policies and Regulations

Suhaila Sanip¹, Siti Soraya Ab Rahman¹, Noor Fadzilah Zulkifi¹, Dian Apriliana Rahmawatie², Suryani Yuliyanti², Rachmadya Nur Hidayah³

¹Medical Education Unit, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, MALAYSIA

²Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Islam Sultan Agung, Semarang, INDONESIA

³Department of Medical Education and Bioethics, Faculty of Medicine, Public Health, and Nursing, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, INDONESIA

To cite this article: Sanip S, Ab Rahman SS, Zulkifli NF, Rahmawatie DA, Yuliyanti S, Hidayah RN. Medical student mobility programmes between Malaysia and Indonesia: a descriptive analysis of opportunities, policies and regulations. *Education in Medicine Journal*. 2026;18(2):113–128. <https://doi.org/10.21315/eimj2026.18.2.9>

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.21315/eimj2026.18.2.9>

ABSTRACT

Medical student mobility between Malaysia and Indonesia presents a strategic opportunity for regional integration in health professions education. However, clinical placements across borders are often constrained by fragmented regulations, inconsistent assessment practices, and limited institutional interoperability. The current medical curriculum in Malaysia and Indonesia allows for medical student mobility programmes through several initiatives. These programmes can build the students' personal and professional development for future workplace challenges. This study aims to elucidate what opportunities are available, how policies and regulations shape medical student exchange programmes between Malaysia and Indonesia, and what the enabling factors and barriers are to their implementation. A qualitative descriptive analysis of relevant documents was carried out to answer the research questions. Activity theory was used as the analytical framework to analyse the data. There are many opportunities for student mobility programmes in general, but opportunities specific to medical students are limited. Within the ASEAN region, most opportunities are provided by the ASEAN University Network (AUN) and Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development (SEAMEO RIHED). Some policies and regulations govern and guide mobility programmes and credit transfer into the medical programmes between the two countries. As student mobility is encouraged within the region, a common framework has been established for seamless credit transfer between the sending and host institutions. Visa requirements and sustainable funding are seen as significant challenges that hinder effective implementation. More memorandums of agreement and memorandums of understanding are recommended between Malaysia and Indonesia to enhance medical students' mobility programmes. Mutual recognition of academic qualifications is also necessary to facilitate student mobility between the two countries.

Keywords: *Medical students, Exchange programme, Medical student mobility, Government policies, Regulations*

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

Suhaila Sanip, Medical Education Unit, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, 71800 Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia.

Email: suhaila.s@usim.edu.my

INTRODUCTION

Transnational mobility in medical education is increasingly recognised as a catalyst for global health competence, intercultural learning, and institutional benchmarking. Within Southeast Asia, Malaysia and Indonesia share strong academic ties, yet clinical placements remain underutilised due to regulatory and pedagogical misalignments. Student mobility refers to the movement of students between institutions, regions, or countries for educational purposes. Medical student exchange programmes, a type of student mobility for medical students, are structured initiatives that allow medical students to study, train, or conduct research in a different institution, often in another country, for a specified period. The motivations for medical students to participate in exchange programmes are multifaceted, encompassing both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Medical students are primarily driven by the desire for personal and professional development, cultural competence, as well as exposure to diverse healthcare systems and patient populations (1–3). The potential to contribute to society and support professional choices through community-based extracurricular activities is another motivational factor for medical students (4). These programmes offer unique opportunities for students to enhance their medical education through international experiences, which are increasingly important in a globalised world.

The medical curriculum in Malaysia offers numerous opportunities for medical student mobility, including exchange programmes with international universities, elective clinical placements in different countries, and participation in global health initiatives. These opportunities allow students to gain exposure to different healthcare systems, enhance their clinical skills, and develop a global perspective on medical practice. Additionally, students can benefit from cultural exchanges, which contribute to their personal and professional growth. At present, only the credit transfer programme is formally regulated by the Malaysian Medical Council (MMC). The regulation, as stipulated in the Standards for Undergraduate Medical Education (5), applies to medical students who want to transfer to a different university. No such rulings are available for other mobility programmes, such as clinical elective postings, or for a student seeking a short attachment at a different medical school without transferring to that school.

In Indonesia, medical students are encouraged to enhance their personal and professional development through academic and non-academic programmes. There are many ways in which medical schools provide opportunities, including clinical elective programmes, student exchanges, and early clinical exposure (6, 7). Medical schools are free to decide how they want to add a more tailored curriculum outcome, aside from the standard of competence, which has served as the reference for determining learning outcomes. Most schools have collaborated with other medical schools across Southeast Asia and worldwide, agreeing to mobility programmes as part of learning activities in both schools.

Medical student mobility in Indonesia has not been comprehensively regulated by the government. The most recent official rules concerning student mobility primarily pertain to programmes outside of medicine and health. In this context, student mobility serves as an alternative implementation of the Independent Campus Learning Programme (*Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* [MBKM]), which is considered a right that universities must uphold for their students. These guidelines are outlined in the national standards for higher education, established by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in Regulation Number 3 of 2020 (8). Medical students have the option to participate in the MBKM programme; however, participation is not mandatory under the regulations. Universities that offer student mobility programmes, specifically for health sector students, will earn more points in meeting their institutional performance indicators.

As the literature on medical students' mobility programmes is limited, findings from the students' mobility programme in general, which is deemed applicable to medical students, are also included in this manuscript. The literature from the ASEAN countries on student mobility, specifically on medical students' exchange programmes, is still limited, as students tend to go to countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and China for mobility programmes (9, 10). Student mobility within the ASEAN region is promoted and organised through the ASEAN University Network (AUN) (11, 12), which was established in 1995. The Student Mobility Pilot Project for undergraduates between Malaysia-Indonesia-Thailand (M-I-T) was launched in 2010 by the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development (SEAMEO RIHED) (13, 14). Unfortunately, these mobility programmes are not catered to medical education.

Most ASEAN mobility programmes occur between Malaysia and Indonesia (15) due to geographical proximity and cultural similarity. At present, the medical students' exchange programme between Malaysia and Indonesia is made possible mostly through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the universities during clinical elective posting. There are also other initiatives for medical students to go for exchange programmes in other countries without an MOU, such as through International Federation of Medical Students Associations (IFMSA) (16) and ERASMUS (3) exchange programmes. Therefore, not much is known yet about the outcomes of medical student exchange programmes. As the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) encourages student mobility, there is a need to study the feasibility of such programmes for medical education in Malaysia. This study aims to analyse the opportunities, policies, and regulations related to medical student exchange programmes between Malaysia and Indonesia using qualitative descriptive analysis. Specifically, the study aims to elucidate which opportunities are available, how policies and regulations shape medical student exchange programmes between Malaysia and Indonesia, and the enabling factors and barriers to their implementation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Student mobility in general has been shown to promote the student's personal growth, cultural awareness, and professional development (16, 17). The mobility programmes reported in the literature range from a short attachment in a research laboratory to a full study programme in a foreign country. Programmes lasting from one semester to one year were reported to yield positive outcomes, whereas shorter periods abroad can be detrimental (18–20).

Student mobility is important as it offers numerous benefits for students, such as independence, self-reliance, adaptability, and improved sociocultural awareness (21–23). It provides them with exposure to diverse cultures and educational systems, broadening their perspectives and enhancing their understanding of the world. Additionally, students gain supervised training, which is crucial for their professional development. Furthermore, student mobility can enhance employability and global competencies, making students more competitive in the global job market. In the long term, student mobility is perceived as capable of reducing poverty in low and middle-income countries (24).

The benefits of student mobility programmes extend to both the sending and host institutions. For the sending institutions, these programmes provide an opportunity to enhance their reputation and global presence by establishing partnerships with international universities

(25). This collaboration can lead to the exchange of knowledge, research opportunities, and the sharing of best practices. Additionally, the sending institutions can offer their students a more diverse and enriched learning experience, thereby attracting more students to their programmes.

For the host institutions, welcoming international students can bring fresh perspectives and ideas to their educational environment. It allows them to display their facilities and academic excellence to a global audience. Hosting international students also fosters cultural exchange and understanding, enhancing the overall learning experience for both local and international students. Furthermore, these programmes can lead to long-term collaborations and partnerships that benefit both institutions in terms of research, innovation, and academic excellence. Overall, student mobility programmes create a mutually beneficial relationship between sending and host institutions, promoting global cooperation and improving the quality of medical education worldwide.

While the motivations of medical students for participating in mobility programmes are diverse, they are not without challenges. Barriers such as limited positions, selection criteria, and a lack of support can hinder participation (4). Additionally, there is a disconnect between the motivations for internationalisation and the actual formats of these programmes, which often do not align well with the intended goals (26). Mobility programmes could also cause an unpleasant experience for the students if the programme is not well designed and the receiving institution cannot handle it (27). Cultural differences also posed some difficulty for students (28). It is also noted that student mobility benefited undergraduate students who travel closer to the end of their studies, compared to those who travel early (20). Travel restrictions, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, have posed significant challenges to student mobility (29). Fortunately, some institutions do offer online mobility programmes to benefit students who are not able to travel (22). Despite these challenges, exchange programmes remain a valuable component of medical education, offering students the chance to broaden their horizons and enhance their professional and personal development.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The medical student exchange programme between Malaysia and Indonesia can be effectively analysed using several theoretical frameworks. Activity theory conceptualises learning as a mediated, goal-oriented activity within a sociocultural system (30, 31). In this context, the mobile student (subject) engages in clinical training (object) shaped by tools such as logbooks, diagnostic equipment, and institutional protocols, while navigating Malaysia's and Indonesia's regulatory frameworks. The activity is further mediated by rules (e.g., temporary practice certificates, immigration permits), communities (host institutions, regulatory bodies, patients), and divisions of labour (student, supervisor, administrator), all of which influence the student's role and learning outcomes. Contradictions—such as mismatches between institutional expectations and legal constraints—highlight systemic tensions that can inform policy harmonisation and programme design. By framing mobility as a dynamic interaction within and across national activity systems, activity theory provides a robust lens for understanding how regulatory, cultural, and pedagogical factors shape transnational clinical education.

In understanding the motivations and behaviours of students participating in mobility programmes, psychological theories, such as self-determination theory (SDT) and social learning theory (SLT), provide valuable frameworks. SDT emphasises the role of intrinsic

and extrinsic motivations in driving human behaviour. According to SDT, individuals are motivated to satisfy three innate psychological needs such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These needs are particularly relevant in the context of student mobility programmes, where students are thrust into new and challenging environments (32, 33). On the other hand, SLT posits that learning and behaviour are influenced by observing and imitating others. In the context of student exchange programmes, SLT can help explain how students learn new cultural norms, behaviours, and attitudes by observing and interacting with their host environment (34, 35).

While SDT and SLT are distinct psychological theories, they can be integrated to provide a more comprehensive understanding of students' motivations and behaviours in mobility programmes. SDT provides insights into the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that drive students to participate in exchange programmes, while SLT provides insights into how students learn and adapt to their unfamiliar environment. SDT's emphasis on psychological needs can also be integrated with SLT's emphasis on social interactions. By integrating these theories, educators and program administrators can design exchange programmes that meet the psychological needs of the students.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative methodology. A descriptive analysis approach was undertaken to review relevant resources related to the medical students' exchange programme between Malaysia and Indonesia (36). Descriptive analysis of documents is a qualitative research method used to systematically examine and summarise the content, structure, and characteristics of written materials. It focuses on what is present in the documents rather than interpreting deeper meanings or relationships. This method is commonly used in policy analysis, historical research, and institutional studies to provide an overview of key themes, trends, and factual details. Unlike content analysis, descriptive analysis does not explore underlying themes or relationships. It focuses on what is stated explicitly rather than on implicit meanings. The READ approach including ready your materials, extract data, analyse data and distil your findings, is used for the descriptive analysis in this study (37). The documents reviewed are listed in Table 1. These documents were selected purposively to answer the research questions.

RESULTS

Medical Students' Exchange Programme Opportunities

At present, medical student exchange programmes between Malaysia and Indonesia are limited to universities that have a MOU. There are, however, several other key programmes and initiatives that support medical students' mobility outside of Malaysia and Indonesia. Since its inception, Erasmus+ has supported over 10 million students and staff through mobility programmes across Europe (38). In the United States, the Fulbright Program provides similar opportunities for international educational exchange (39). IFMSA fosters cooperation and collaboration among medical students through the Standing Committee on Professional Exchange and the Standing Committee on Research Exchange (40). These programmes are endorsed by many organisations, including the World Federation of Medical Education (WFME). The IFMSA Student Exchange Programme is a global initiative

that provides medical students with opportunities to participate in clinical and research exchanges. These exchanges allow students to gain valuable international experience, enhance their medical education, and develop a global perspective on healthcare.

There are many other opportunities for student mobility programmes that do not involve medical training that medical students can opt to join if they want. Within ASEAN, the AUN (11) and the Asian International Mobility for Students (14) provide structured exchange programmes if medical students want to apply during their gap year. The ASEAN University Network Credit Transfer System (ACTS) offers numerous opportunities for students to study abroad (41). The programme includes the University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP) Multilateral Student Exchange Program (UME), UMAP Bilateral Student Exchange Program (UBE), Super Short-Term Programmes (SSTP), and Virtual Exchange and Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL). These programmes aim to promote student mobility and cultural exchange within the Asia-Pacific region.

Policies and Regulations Governing Medical Student Exchange Programmes Between Malaysia and Indonesia

Policies on student mobility

Table 1 presents a comparison of relevant policies and regulations between Malaysia and Indonesia. MOHE has established comprehensive policies to facilitate student mobility (42–44). These policies include mechanisms for student transfers within and between institutions, as well as cross-border mobility. The MOHE ensures that incoming transfer students have the capacity to successfully follow the programme and comply with all relevant regulations. This framework is crucial for promoting international collaboration and enhancing the educational experiences of students through diverse learning environments.

The MBKM initiative by the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology aims to provide students with more flexible learning opportunities. This policy encourages students to gain diverse experiences by studying outside their home universities. The MBKM guidebook (45) outlines student mobility as an option within the MBKM framework. Student exchanges can occur between universities, both nationally and internationally, within the same study programme. These exchanges provide students with opportunities to enrich their experiences and gain diverse scientific perspectives from other institutions, each with its unique characteristics and learning resources that enhance student learning outcomes. Activities can take place either in person or online. The guidelines also specify responsibilities for both the host and sending universities. These responsibilities include preparing cooperation agreements between institutions, determining the number of students to be sent and received, converting credit hours, ensuring proper programme implementation through appointed supervisors from both the sending and receiving universities, as well as monitoring, reporting, and evaluating the program to maintain high-quality execution.

The fourth point of the MBKM policy stipulates that universities must allow students to voluntarily earn credits outside their campus for up to two semesters, which is equivalent to 40 credits (46). Additionally, students may take credits in other on-campus study programmes for one semester as part of their overall requirements. MBKM supports student mobility by offering various programmes, which are designed to enhance students' skills and competencies.

The activities that can be recognised for credit points in the MBKM programme include student exchange, internships or work practicums, teaching assistance in educational units, research, humanitarian projects, entrepreneurial activities, independent studies or projects, building villages or thematic real-world work lectures, and national defence. Students in the fields of health/medicine and education are given an exemption. This exemption does not imply a prohibition; rather, it is an adaptation to address specific needs, particularly regarding the number of credits. For medical students, the MBKM can be implemented in the form of elective student exchange programmes and internships at any healthcare provider or research projects. Students may then propose credit transfers for their MBKM activities. Most health study programmes have incorporated various activities required by the MBKM into their learning processes. Typically, the number of credits for off-campus learning activities exceeds 40 credits, and these activities often take place in multiple locations to ensure that all competencies required by the national standards are met. This differs from the standard MBKM programme, which typically consists of a 40-credit internship at a single workplace.

Table 1: A comparison of relevant policies and regulations between Malaysia and Indonesia

Themes	Malaysia	Indonesia
Policy on student mobility	• Compilation of Higher Education Quality Assurance Policies (2009–2020) third edition (42). • Guidelines for the Implementation of Mobility Programmes (Inbound) at Malaysian Higher Education Institutions (43). • Introduction of New Mobility Programmes (INBOUND), Education Malaysia Global Services (EMGS) (44). • Policy of ASEAN International Mobility for Students (AIMS) Malaysian Universities Member (47).	• <i>Merdeka Belajar – Kampus Merdeka</i> (MBKM) initiative by the Indonesian Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education (MoRTHE) (45).
Accreditation standards/medical education standards	• Standards of Undergraduate Medical Education (5).	• <i>Akreditasi Program Studi Pendidikan Profesi Dokter</i> by the Indonesian Accreditation Agency for Higher Education in Health (LAM-PTKes) (48). • Indonesian National Accreditation Board for Higher Education (BAN-PT) (49).
Visa requirement	• Introduction of New Mobility Programmes (INBOUND), EMGS (44).	https://evisa.imigrasi.go.id/ (50).
Credit transfer (UCTS)	• University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP) Credit Transfer Scheme (51). • ASEAN University Network Credit Transfer System (52).	

Medical education standard

The MMC stipulates that medical schools must have well-defined policies and mechanisms to facilitate student mobility, including student transfers within and between institutions and cross-border transfers. The medical school must ensure that incoming transfer students

have the capacity to successfully follow the programme and comply with all relevant regulations. Credit transfer is only allowed under the specific circumstances listed in the Undergraduate Medical Education Standards.

The Indonesian National Accreditation Board for Higher Education (BAN-PT) and the Indonesian Accreditation Agency for Higher Education in Health (LAM-PTKes) play crucial roles in ensuring the quality of higher education in Indonesia. BAN-PT is responsible for the accreditation of all higher education institutions, while LAM-PTKes specifically focuses on health-related programmes. These agencies set the standards and criteria for accreditation, including curriculum, faculty qualifications, and facilities. Accreditation by BAN-PT and LAM-PTKes is essential for institutions to gain recognition and credibility, both nationally and internationally. The scoring matrix used by BAN-PT and LAM-PTKes evaluates various aspects of higher education institutions and programmes. This matrix includes criteria such as academic quality, research output, community service, and institutional governance. Each criterion is assigned a specific weight, and institutions are scored based on their performance in these areas. The scoring matrix helps ensure a comprehensive and objective assessment of institutions, promoting continuous improvement and excellence in higher education.

Visa requirement

The visa requirements for both countries differ slightly in the type of visa, duration of stay, and additional application requirements, as illustrated in Table 2. For programmes lasting more than three months, students entering Malaysia must apply for a professional visit pass. For a shorter duration of stay, students entering Indonesia can apply for a study permit.

Table 2: Visa requirements for student mobility from both countries

Feature	Malaysia	Indonesia
Visa type	Student pass (Mobility)	Study Permit + Limited Stay Visa (VITAS) → Limited Stay Permit (KITAS)
Processing authority	Education Malaysia Global Services (EMGS), Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE)	Ministry of Education and Immigration
Duration	3–12 months (No extension)	6–12 months (Extendable)
Entry visa	Single Entry Visa (SEV)	Limited Stay Visa (VITAS)
Conversion upon arrival	SEV → Student Pass	VITAS → Limited Stay Permit (KITAS)
Additional requirements	Medical screening, insurance	Police registration (STM), Temporary Resident Certificate (SKPPS)

Credit transfer system

The UMAP Credit Transfer Scheme (UCTS) is a common credit conversion scheme that allows UMAP-participating institutions to transfer credits on a one-to-one basis. This scheme facilitates student mobility by ensuring that credits earned at one institution are recognised and transferable to another, promoting seamless academic progression. Within ASEAN, a similar credit transfer system, the ACTS, guides how credits earned during the exchange programme can be transferred.

Funding

There are several funding opportunities available to support student mobility between Malaysia and Indonesia. These funding opportunities help alleviate the financial burden on students and encourage greater participation in mobility programmes. The AIMS programme is funded by MOHE (53). Individual universities, for example, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (54) and Universiti Putra Malaysia (55) also provide other funding opportunities for mobility programmes. Most universities in Indonesia provide additional funding for exchange programmes or internships, which will help medical students plan and propose their student mobility activities. The MBKM initiative has been supported by government funding and scholarships, including the Indonesia Endowment Fund for Education (LPDP) (56), the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) programme (57), and corporate social responsibility initiatives by Indonesian companies. This led to an increase in the number of medical students applying for student exchange programmes abroad. A more comprehensive list of available scholarships is included in a document by the ASEAN Secretariat (58).

DISCUSSION

This study highlights the multifaceted enablers and barriers influencing medical student exchange programmes between Malaysia and Indonesia, framed through the lens of activity theory. Activity theory provides a useful heuristic to examine how institutional structures, tools, rules, and community dynamics interact to shape student mobility experiences.

Enabling Factors as Mediated Activity Systems

Malaysia and Indonesia's participation in regional networks such as UMAP and AUN (individual university rather than country participation) facilitates structured mobility through credit transfer schemes like UCTS and ACTS. These schemes act as mediating tools within the activity system, enabling students to pursue the object of mobility—clinical competence and intercultural learning—while navigating institutional rules and expectations. The recognition of some Indonesian medical schools under Malaysia's Medical Act 1971 further aligns the rules and tools, reducing systemic contradictions and legitimising credit transfers.

Mobility programmes outside the purview of the MMC, such as short-term exchanges and research attachments, represent locally adapted activity systems. These programmes offer flexibility in design and implementation, allowing institutions to tailor experiences to student needs without the constraints of formal accreditation. The low operational costs between Malaysia and Indonesia further support participation, functioning as enabling conditions that reduce financial barriers and promote inclusivity.

Barriers as Contradictions Within the Activity System

Despite these enablers, several contradictions persist. Limited clinical exchange opportunities suggest a misalignment between the object (clinical learning) and the division of labour within host institutions, where non-medical disciplines dominate mobility

offerings (11, 14). Language barriers between students and patients introduce tensions in the community and rules, potentially compromising patient safety. However, the presence of clinical supervision—an essential component of the division of labour—can mitigate these risks by scaffolding student engagement and ensuring ethical practice.

Visa processing time (59) and sustainable funding (15) for mobility programmes further disrupt the activity system. While AIMS programmes benefit from government support, AUN-led initiatives rely on institutional resources, creating contradictions between the rules and tools that limit scalability and sustainability. Addressing these tensions requires coordinated policy interventions that align regulatory frameworks, institutional roles, and pedagogical goals across both countries.

A visual representation of the activity system related to medical students' mobility in clinical learning according to Engeström (60) is provided in Figure 1.

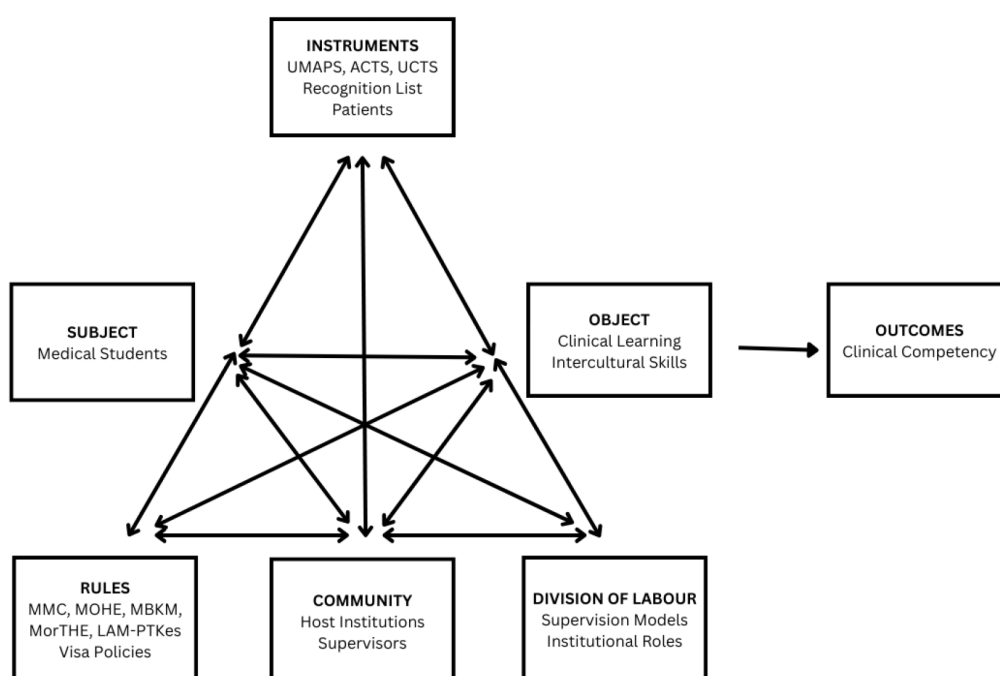


Figure 1: Activity system of medical students' mobility in clinical learning.

Practical Implications and Future Directions

To enhance student mobility between Malaysia and Indonesia, several strategies can be implemented. Partnerships and collaborations between institutions and countries through Memorandums of Agreement (MOA) and MOU can be established to facilitate student mobility. These agreements can outline the terms and conditions for student exchanges, credit transfers, and other collaborative activities, ensuring a smooth and mutually beneficial process. Designing flexible mobility programmes that do not necessarily involve credit transfers can provide more opportunities for students. These programmes can include short-term exchanges, internships, research attachments, and virtual mobility options, allowing students to gain international experience without the stringent credit-transfer requirements. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of virtual exchange

programmes. Recognising and promoting virtual mobility programmes can provide students with international exposure and learning opportunities without the need for physical travel. This approach can also be more cost-effective and accessible for a larger number of students.

More financial assistance in terms of government and institutional support can help alleviate financial barriers. Scholarships can cover tuition fees, living expenses, and travel costs, making it more feasible for students to participate in mobility programmes. Orientation programmes and language courses should be offered as they can help students adjust to new cultural and educational environments according to social learning theory. These support services can include pre-departure briefings, on-campus orientation sessions, and ongoing support throughout the students' stay.

A revision to the MMC's credit transfer requirements should also be made. Students from Indonesian universities with UNGGUL accreditation status should be allowed to transfer their credits to a Malaysian university without prior listing to the Second Schedule of the Medical Act. UNGGUL (Excellent) is the highest accreditation grade awarded by the BAN-PT. By implementing these strategies, Malaysia and Indonesia can enhance medical students' mobility, providing students with valuable international experiences and fostering greater collaboration between institutions.

Limitations of the Study

Qualitative descriptive analysis is a valuable approach for studying medical student mobility between Malaysia and Indonesia, particularly in exploring opportunities, policies, and regulations. However, it has several limitations that should be considered. The findings from this study cannot be generalised to other countries, even within the ASEAN region. The interpretation of policies and regulations depends on the researcher's perspective, which may introduce bias. Policies and regulations in Malaysia and Indonesia may differ significantly in structure and implementation. Comparing frameworks qualitatively may overlook quantitative differences in student mobility rates, funding mechanisms, or institutional capacities. Policies and regulations may be complex, ambiguous, or evolving, making interpretation difficult. Official documents may not fully capture informal practices or unwritten agreements affecting student mobility. The researchers also did not study the influence of macroeconomic factors, political shifts, or international agreements on mobility.

CONCLUSION

Medical student mobility between Malaysia and Indonesia holds transformative potential for regional health education. A harmonised, theory-informed framework such as an activity system can be used to design and implement safe, effective, and pedagogically sound clinical placements. Strategic collaboration among ministries, councils, and universities is essential to realise this vision and position ASEAN as a global leader in health professions education. There are many opportunities to enhance medical students' mobility among Malaysia, Indonesia, and other countries, including medical training exchange programmes. Both countries have well-defined policies on how student mobility programmes should be conducted. Despite the stringent credit transfer regulations by MMC, there are also other types of mobility programmes that medical students can participate in. Students should be encouraged to participate in mobility programmes due to the many benefits they offer

for their personal and professional development. The host and sending institutions should ease the administrative challenges and financial burden on students by providing additional support through a memorandum of agreement.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This study has received ethical approval from Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM/JKEP/2024-305).

REFERENCES

1. Rothwell C, Guilding C, Veasuvalingam B, McKeegan K, Illing J. Identification of multicultural learning experiences following an international cross-campus medical student exchange programme between the UK and Malaysia: a qualitative study. *BMJ Open*. 2023;13(10):e072808. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2023-072808>
2. Storz MA, Lederer AK, Heymann EP. Medical students from German-speaking countries on abroad electives in Africa: destinations, motivations, trends, and ethical dilemmas. *Hum Resour Health*. 2022;20(1):9. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12960-022-00707-2>
3. Żebryk P, Przymuszała P, Nowak JK, Cerbin-Koczorowska M, Marciniak R, Cameron H. The impact of ERASMUS exchanges on the professional and personal development of medical students. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2021;18(24):13312. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph182413312>
4. Fujii RNA, Kobayasi R, Enns SC, Tempuski PZ. Medical students' participation in extracurricular activities: motivations, contributions, and barriers. a qualitative study. *Adv Med Educ Pract*. 2022;13:1133–41. <https://doi.org/10.2147/amep.s359047>
5. Malaysian Medical Council. Standards for Undergraduate Medical Education [Internet]. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: MMC; 2022. [cited 2025 Feb 06]. Available from: <https://mmc.gov.my/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Standards-for-Undergraduate-Medical-Education-2nd-Edition.pdf>
6. Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) [Internet]. Yogyakarta: UGM; 2025 [cited 2025 Feb 6]. Exchange Program. Available from: <https://oia.ugm.ac.id/category/exchange-program/>
7. Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) [Internet]. Yogyakarta: UGM; 2025 [cited 2025 Feb 6]. Outgoing exchange program. Available from: <https://fkkmk.ugm.ac.id/outgoing-elective-program/>
8. Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia [Internet]. Jakarta: Kemdikbud; 2020 [cited 2025 Feb 6]. Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia nomor 3 tahun 2020 tentang standar nasional pendidikan tinggi. Available from: <https://jdih.kemdikbud.go.id/sjdih/siperpu/dokumen/salinan/Salinan%20PERMENDIKBUD%203%20TAHUN%202020%20FIX%20GAB.pdf>
9. Gümüş S, Gök E, Esen M. A review of research on international student mobility: science mapping the existing knowledge base. *J Stud Int Educ*. 2020;24(5):495–517. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315319893651>
10. Bista K, Sharma G, Gaulee U. International student mobility: examining trends and tensions. In: Bista K, editor. *International student mobility and opportunities for growth in the global market*. Hershey; 2018. p. 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-3451-8.ch001>

11. ASEAN University Network (AUN). [Internet]. Bangkok, Thailand: AUN; 2025 [cited 2025 Jun 11]. Available from: <https://www.aunsec.org/>
12. Soejatminah S. ASEAN university network in enhancing student mobility: a case of Indonesia. *J Interdiscip Stud Educ*. 2018;7(1):19–33. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jise.v7i1.1058>
13. Sirat M, Hambali Z [Internet]. Malaysia: The HEAD Foundation; 2020 [cited 2025 Jun 11]. ASEAN's intra-regional student mobility programmes and Malaysia's strategic intent [PowerPoint]. Available from: <https://digest.headfoundation.org/2020/10/16/aseans-intra-regional-student-mobility-programmes-and-malaysias-strategic-intent/>
14. Asian International Mobility for Students (AIMS) Programme [Internet]. Bangkok: AIMS; 2025 [cited 2025 Jun 11]. AIMS programme. Available from: <https://aims-rihed.net/>
15. Chao RY. Intra-ASEAN student mobility: overview, challenges, and opportunities. *J Appl Res High Educ*. 2023;15(5):1736–51. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JARHE-07-2019-0178>
16. Tzioti MK. IFMSA Research Exchange: a life-changing experience. *Int J Med Stud*. 2023;11(2):144–6. <https://doi.org/10.5195/ijms.2023.1863>
17. Campos LN, Rocha SWS. Student mobility and research capacity: a global health experience. *Int J Med Stud*. 2021;9(3):237–9. <https://doi.org/10.5195/ijms.2021.992>
18. Coker JS, Heiser E, Taylor L. Student outcomes associated with short-term and semester study abroad programs. *Front Interdiscip J Study Abroad*. 2018;30(2):92–105. <https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v30i2.414>
19. DeLoach SB, Kurt MR, Olitsky NH. Duration matters: separating the impact of depth and duration in study abroad programs. *J Stud Int Educ*. 2021;25(1):100–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315319887389>
20. Granja CD, Visentin F. International student mobility and academic performance: does timing matter? *Res High Educ*. 2024;65(2):322–53. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-023-09755-6>
21. Mohd Noor Z, Abd Razak A, Gisip J, Mustafa M. Impact of participating AIMS student mobility programme: a UiTM perspective. *Akademika*. 2020;90:39–49.
22. Wu A, Maddula V, Singh J, Sagoo MG, Chien CL, Wingate R, et al. Alternatives to student outbound mobility—improving students' cultural competency skills online to improve global health without travel. *Med Sci Educ*. 2021;31(4):1441–51. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40670-021-01332-9>
23. Elharram M, Dinh T, Lalande A, Ge S, Gao S, Noël G. Global health values of a multidirectional near peer training program in surgery, pathology, anatomy, research methodology, and medical education for Haitian, Rwandan, and Canadian medical students. *Ann Glob Health*. 2017;83(2):274–80. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aogh.2017.04.003>
24. Kwak J, Chankseliani M. International student mobility and poverty reduction: a cross-national analysis of low- and middle-income countries. *Int J Educ Res*. 2024;128:102458. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2024.102458>
25. Umemiya N, Sugimura M, Kosaikanont R, Nordin NM, Ahmad AL. Impact of a consortium-based student mobility programme: the case of AIMS (Asian International Mobility for Students). *J Int Coop Educ*. 2024;26(1):49–66. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JICE-08-2023-0020>
26. Wu A, Choi E, Diderich M, Shamim A, Rahhal Z, Mitchell M, et al. Internationalisation of medical education—motivations and formats of current practices. *Med Sci Educ*. 2022;32:733–45. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40670-022-01553-6>

27. Yang P. Compromise and complicity in international student mobility: the ethnographic case of Indian medical students at a Chinese university. *Discourse Stud Cult Polit Educ*. 2018;39(5): 694–708. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2018.1435600>
28. Nebukadnedzar MP, Karlina Ambarwati E, Wahyuna YT. International students' mobility program: experiences of Indonesian students. *PROJECT*. 2022;5(6):1218–22.
29. Mok KH, Xiong W, Ke G, Cheung JOW. Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on international higher education and student mobility: student perspectives from mainland China and Hong Kong. *Int J Educ Res*. 2021;105:101718. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2020.101718>
30. Qureshi SP. Cultural historical activity theory for studying practice-based learning and change in medical education. *Adv Med Educ Pract*. 2021;12:923–35. <https://doi.org/10.2147/amep.s313250>
31. Conn RL, Gormley. G.J., O'Hare S, Kajamaa A. Activity theory in health professions education research and practice. In: Nestel D, Reedy G, McKenna L, Gough S, editors. *Clinical education for the health professions*. Singapore: Springer; 2023.
32. Cho HJ, Levesque-Bristol C, Yough M. International students' self-determined motivation, beliefs about classroom assessment, learning strategies, and academic adjustment in higher education. *High Educ*. 2021;81(6):1215–35. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-020-00608-0>
33. Borodina D. International students' motivation to study abroad: why are you studying at a Hungarian University? *J Educ Black Sea Reg*. 2022;7(2):24–40. <https://doi.org/10.31578/jeds.v7i2.259>
34. Racicot BM, Ferry DL. The impact of motivational and metacognitive cultural intelligence on the study abroad experience. *J Educ Issues*. 2016;2(1):115–29. <https://doi.org/10.5296/jei.v2i1.9021>
35. Abacioglu CS, Epskamp S, Fischer AH, Volman M. Effects of multicultural education on student engagement in low- and high-concentration classrooms: the mediating role of student relationships. *Learn Environ Res*. 2023;26(3):951–75. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10984-023-09462-0>
36. Sandelowski M. Whatever happened to qualitative description? *Res Nurs Health*. 2000;23(4):334–40. [https://doi.org/10.1002/1098-240x\(200008\)23:4%3C334::aid-nur9%3E3.0.co;2-g](https://doi.org/10.1002/1098-240x(200008)23:4%3C334::aid-nur9%3E3.0.co;2-g)
37. Dalglish SL, Khalid H, McMahon SA. Document analysis in health policy research: the READ approach. *Health Policy Plan*. 2020;35(10):1424–31. <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapol/czaa064>
38. Erasmus+ [Internet]. Brussels: European Commission; c2025 [cited 2025 Feb 6]. EU programme for education, training, youth and sport. Available from: <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/opportunities/opportunities-for-individuals/students/studying-abroad>
39. Fulbright Foreign Student Program [Internet]. Washington (DC): Institute of International Education; c2025 [cited 2025 Feb 6]. Available from: <https://foreign.fulbrightonline.org/about/foreign-student-program>
40. International Federation of Medical Students Associations (IFMSA) [Internet]. Geneva: IFMSA; c2025 [cited 2025 Feb 6]. Student exchange program. Available from: <https://ifmsa.org/student-exchange-program/>
41. University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP) [Internet]. Tokyo: UMAP International Secretariat; c2025 [cited 2025 Feb 6]. Programmes. Available from: <https://umap.org/programs/>
42. Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) [Internet]. Selangor: MQA; 2021 [cited 2025 Feb 6]. *Kompilasi dasar jaminan kualiti pendidikan tinggi (2009–2020)*. Edisi ketiga. Available from: https://www.mqa.gov.my/new/document/compilationPolicy/2022/June/KOMPILASI%20DASAR%20JK%20PT%202009%20-%202020_FINAL%20MQA%20preview.pdf

43. Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (MOHE) [Internet]. Putrajaya: MOHE; 2022 [cited 2025 Jun 11]. Garis panduan pelaksanaan program mobiliti (inbound) di institusi pendidikan tinggi Malaysia. Available from: <https://jpt.mohe.gov.my/index.php/ms/penerbitan/59-buku-garis-panduan>
44. Education Malaysia Global Services (EMGS) [Internet]. Introduction of new mobility programmes (inbound). Kuala Lumpur: EMGS; 2023 [cited 2025 Jun 11]. Available from: [https://educationmalaysia.gov.my/get-in-touch/news/introduction-of-new-mobility-programmes-\(inbound\)](https://educationmalaysia.gov.my/get-in-touch/news/introduction-of-new-mobility-programmes-(inbound))
45. Kementerian Pendidikan Tinggi, Sains, dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia [Internet]. Jakarta: Kemdiktisainstek; 2024 [cited 2025 Feb 6]. Buku panduan merdeka belajar-kampus merdeka 2024. Available from: <https://dikti.kemdikbud.go.id/epustaka/buku-panduan-merdeka-belajar-kampus-merdeka-Morthe-2024/>
46. Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia [Internet]. Indonesia: Kemendikbud; 2020 Jan 24 [cited 2025 Feb 6]. Kemendikbud luncurkan empat kebijakan merdeka belajar: kampus merdeka. Available from: <https://www.kemdikbud.go.id/main/blog/2020/01/mendikbud-luncurkan-empat-kebijakan-merdeka-belajar-kampus-merdeka>
47. Ministry of Education (Higher Education) Malaysia [Internet]. Putrajaya: MOE; 2018 [cited 2025 Jun 11]. Policy of ASEAN International Mobility for Students (AIMS) Malaysian Universities Member. Available from: https://agri.upm.edu.my/upload/dokumen/20190218105928POLICY_OF_AIMS_MALAYSIAN_UNIVERSITIES_MEMBER_31052018.pdf
48. Lembaga Akreditasi Mandiri Pendidikan Tinggi Kesehatan (LAM PTKes) [Internet]. Jakarta: LAM PTKes; 2019 [cited 2025 Feb 6]. Buku 2 – Kriteria dan prosedur akreditasi – Pendidikan Profesi Dokter. Available from: <https://lamptkes.org/File-Unduhan-Instrumen-9-kriteria>
49. Badan Akreditasi Nasional Perguruan Tinggi (BAN-PT) [Internet]. Jakarta: BAN PT; c2025 [cited 2025 Jun 11]. Available from: <https://www.banpt.or.id/>
50. Directorate General of Immigration, Republic of Indonesia [Internet]. Jakarta: Immigration Department; c2025 [cited 2025 Jun 11]. The official e-Visa website for Indonesia. Available from: <https://evisa.imigrasi.go.id/>
51. UMAP International Secretariat [Internet]. Tokyo: UMAP; 2019 [cited 2025 Feb 6]. UMAP exchange program and UMAP credit transfer scheme (UCTS) users' guide. Revision 1.1 Available from: https://umap.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/UCTS_Users_Guide_Revision-1.1.pdf
52. ASEAN University Network (AUN) [Internet]. Bangkok: AUN Secretariat; c2025 [cited 2025 Jun 11]. ASEAN credit transfer system (AUNACTS). Available from: <https://www.aunsec.org/discover-aun/thematic-networks/aun-acts>
53. Ministry of Education (Higher Education) Malaysia [Internet]. Putrajaya: MOE; 2018 [cited 2025 Jun 11]. Guidelines for management of ASEAN International Mobility for Students (AIMS) Malaysian programme. Available from: https://agri.upm.edu.my/upload/dokumen/20190218110007GUIDELINES_FOR_MANAGEMENT_OF_AIMS_MALAYSIAN_PROGRAMME_31052018.pdf
54. Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) [Internet]. Bangi: UKM; c2025 [cited 2025 Jun 11]. Student mobility and exchange programmes. Available from: <https://www.ukm.my/pha/exchange/>
55. Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) [Internet]. Serdang: UPM; c2025 [cited 2025 Jun 11]. Sponsorship opportunity for mobility program. Available from: https://intl.upm.edu.my/mobility/sponsorship_opportunities_for_mobility_program-11947

56. Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, Republic of Indonesia. Collaborative Scholarship [Internet]. Jakarta: Kemdikbudristek; c2025 [cited 2025 Feb 6]. Available from: <https://lpdp.kemenkeu.go.id/en/beasiswa/kolaborasi/beasiswa-kolaborasi-kemdikbudristek>
57. Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, Republic of Indonesia [Internet]. Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA). Jakarta: Kemdikbudristek; 2025 [cited 2025 Feb 6]. Available from: <https://iisma.kemdikbud.go.id/>
58. ASEAN Secretariat [Internet]. The future of higher education student mobility in Southeast Asia: possibilities for an intraASEAN scholarship programme. Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat; c2025 [cited 2025 Jun 11]. Available from: <https://asean.org/book/the-future-of-higher-education-student-mobility-in-southeast-asia-possibilities-for-an-intra-asean-scholarship-programme/>
59. Md Amin R [Internet]. Malaysia: Ministry of Higher Education; 2025 [cited 2025 Jun 11]. Higher education policy and development in Malaysia [PowerPoint]. Available from: <https://umap.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Higher-Education-Policy-and-Development-in-Malaysia.pdf>
60. Engeström Y. Activity theory and individual and social transformation. In: Engeström Y, Miettinen R, Punamaki RL, editors. Perspectives on activity theory. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1999. p. 19–38.