

Strengthening Academic Capacity Through International Teaching and Learning Exchange

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Abstract

Building synergy and collaboration across communities is increasingly important for advancing the quality of higher education in today's global era. This study explores a teaching and learning exchange program between the Institute of Technology and Business STIKOM Bali, Indonesia, and Valaya Alongkorn Rajabhat University under the Royal Patronage of Thailand. Designed with a participatory approach, the program brought together a range of activities, including guest lectures, teaching demonstrations, cultural immersion, and institutional visits. The experience not only enhanced technology-based teaching skills but also boosted students' confidence in cross-cultural communication while opening opportunities for joint research and publications. These outcomes show that structured academic exchanges can create meaningful, long-term collaborations, enrich mutual understanding, and contribute significantly to strengthening international higher education networks.

Keywords: *academic exchange, cross-cultural learning, higher education collaboration, internationalization*

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Introduction

In today's globalized world, higher education no longer operates within national borders alone. Universities are increasingly challenged to collaborate, share expertise, and build networks that can enrich both teaching and research (Gilmour, 2024). For ASEAN, this need is even more pressing: the region's diversity offers enormous opportunities for learning across cultures, but it also calls for stronger efforts to create synergy and mutual trust among academic communities (ASEAN, 2023).

Collaboration in higher education is more than just student mobility or policy agreements. It is about building living communities of practice where lecturers, researchers, and students can exchange knowledge in meaningful ways. The idea of synergy emphasizes shared growth: when institutions work together, they do not simply add their strengths, but multiply them. Recent studies show that international partnerships have helped Southeast Asian universities strengthen research capacity, increase global visibility, and prepare graduates for a more competitive world (Zhong et al., 2025; Yong & Phuttha, 2024). Yet many of these collaborations still remain formal or short-term, often focusing on mobility statistics rather than deeper, sustained relationships. This reveals a gap in the literature: the academic communities know less about how long-term trust, pedagogical exchange, and co-created research can transform academic communities within ASEAN (Li & Chen, 2024).

To address this gap, the Institute of Technology and Business (ITB) STIKOM Bali in Indonesia and Valaya Alongkorn Rajabhat University (VRU) under the Royal Patronage in Thailand, initiated a teaching and learning exchange program. Rather than treating it as a one-time activity, both institutions designed the program as a platform for ongoing collaboration, with activities ranging from guest lectures and classroom observations to cultural exchanges and joint research. Early outcomes show not only improvements in technology-driven teaching and student confidence in cross-cultural communication, but also the beginnings of long-term research partnerships. This suggests that structured academic exchange, when rooted in genuine community building, can become a sustainable model for collaboration, strengthening both institutions while enriching the wider ASEAN higher education landscape.

Higher education in the global era is increasingly shaped by cross-institutional collaboration and knowledge exchange aimed at enriching teaching practices and strengthening research

cultures. Recent scholarship highlights how universities must address workload pressures, cultivate positive research cultures, and leverage collaborative technologies to enhance research and pedagogical capacity, underscoring that collaboration is not merely an administrative arrangement but a driver of quality and innovation in teaching and learning (Gilmour, 2024).

Within ASEAN, regional frameworks have moved beyond ad-hoc mobility to articulate an integrated higher education space oriented toward harmonization, internationalization, and people-to-people connectivity. The Roadmap on the ASEAN Higher Education Space 2025 and its implementation plans explicitly call for alignment in quality assurance, credit transfer, and digital transformation, so that cross-border academic initiatives can yield equitable learning opportunities and resilient institutional networks (ASEAN Secretariat, 2022; ASEAN Secretariat, 2021). These regional commitments matter because they provide a policy scaffold for designing exchanges that prioritize pedagogical improvement, interoperability of curricula, and sustained partnerships rather than short-term counts of incoming/outgoing students (ASEAN Secretariat, 2022).

Concurrently, the literature on internationalization and intercultural learning has shifted toward practice-centered models that foreground the human experiences of teachers and students engaged in collaborative teaching, virtual exchange, and community engagement. Evidence shows that structured exchanges, whether in person or online, can develop intercultural communicative competence, increase confidence in cross-cultural interaction, and strengthen technology-enhanced teaching (Helm, 2024; Higgins, 2024). Systematic reviews further indicate that effective programs adopt assessment tools (e.g., pre–post measures and reflective journals), intentional facilitation, and dialogic design to support trust-building and meaningful collaboration across cultures (Zuo, 2025; Guillén-Yparrea & Ramírez-Montoya, 2023). In higher education contexts, telecollaboration and virtual exchange have been shown to cultivate behavioral, affective, and cognitive dimensions of intercultural competence, especially when tasks are designed to sustain reflective dialogue and problem-solving (Gutiérrez-Santiuste & Ritacco-Real, 2023).

Against this backdrop, the present study examines a structured teaching and learning exchange between the ITB STIKOM Bali (Indonesia) and VRU (Thailand). Rather than offering a descriptive account of institutional arrangements or tallying mobility metrics, the study places

participants' lived experiences and pedagogical practice at the center. It evaluates changes in technology-enhanced teaching competence, cross-cultural communication, and emerging interest in research collaboration. In doing so, the study aligns with ASEAN's regional vision, harmonization, and internationalization for resilient partnerships, while contributing empirical insights about how trust-building and pedagogy can be intentionally designed and assessed within exchange programs (ASEAN Secretariat, 2022; ASEAN Secretariat, 2021).

Methods

This section outlines the methodological framework applied to address the identified challenges and fulfill the research objectives. It details the procedures used for data collection and analysis, including participant selection processes and the measures taken to ensure the validity and reliability of the research instruments. Additionally, it specifies the setting, timeframe, and duration of the program's activities. The section also describes the initial conditions prior to implementation and the anticipated outcomes that guided the development of the program.

Design

This study was structured as a two-week academic exchange program hosted at VRU, Pathum Thani, Thailand. The program was designed to integrate teaching, learning, and cultural immersion activities, emphasizing collaborative pedagogical practices and experiential learning.

Participants

The exchange involved one lecturer and four undergraduate students from the ITB STIKOM Bali. The students represented three study programs: Information Technology, Information Systems (International Class), and Computer Systems. Participants were selected based on academic performance, motivation for intercultural engagement, and prior exposure to technology-enhanced learning environments.

Procedure

The program comprised multiple activities, including guest lectures, teaching demonstrations, classroom observations, academic discussions, and cultural immersion sessions such as traditional Thai dance, cooking classes, and basic language lessons. Institutional visits were

also conducted to provide participants with insights into VRU’s academic and research facilities.

Instruments

Data collection employed three instruments: (a) structured observation sheets to capture classroom dynamics and teaching strategies; (b) daily reflective journals maintained by participants to document learning experiences and intercultural adaptation; and (c) pre–post self-assessment using a five-point Likert scale across three domains: technology-enhanced teaching competence, cross-cultural communication skills, and interest in research collaboration. Table 1 presents a summary of the instruments and their corresponding domains used in this study.

Table 1. Summary of instruments and domains

Instrument	Purpose	Domain
Observation Sheet	Capture classroom dynamics and teaching strategies	Technology-enhanced teaching competence
Reflective Journal	Document learning experiences and intercultural adaptation	Cross-cultural communication skills
Pre–Post Self-Assessment	Measure perceived changes before and after program	Teaching competence, communication, research collaboration

Data Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following open coding, categorization, and theme development. Changes in pre–post self-assessment scores were described narratively to highlight developmental trajectories and perceived learning gains.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical compliance was ensured through informed consent obtained from all participants prior to the program. Data confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing personal identifiers in all reports and publications.



Fig 1. Methodological flow diagram

Figure 1 illustrates the methodological flow adopted in this study. Table 2 provides an overview of the participants representing ITB STIKOM Bali in the program, followed by Table 3, which outlines the detailed schedule of activities implemented during the program from July 20 to August 1, 2025.

The program's analysis focused on qualitative insights, with reflections and discussion outcomes examined thematically to identify patterns in personal growth, intercultural understanding, and potential for collaborative research. Before the program, participants had limited exposure to intercultural academic settings and minimal opportunities for direct collaboration with international institutions. After completion, students demonstrated increased confidence in English academic communication, enhanced adaptability in multicultural contexts, and a deeper understanding of digital learning tools. Lecturers reported adopting innovative teaching strategies and strengthening professional networks with VRU colleagues.

Overall, the methods employed ensured comprehensive documentation and a thoughtful evaluation of both academic and community outcomes. The program functioned not only as a short-term exchange but also as a foundation for sustained synergy and collaborative initiatives between the two institutions.

Table 2. Participants of the program from ITB STIKOM Bali

Name	Study Programs	Position
Author	Information Systems	Visiting Lecturer
I Dewa Made Dharma Putra Santika	Information Technology	Student
Zarrin Nadhira Sigit	Information Systems (International Class)	Student
Ni Luh Putu Shinta Juliantari	Computer Systems	Student
Kadek Dharma Yudha	Computer Systems	Student

Table 3. Activities schedule of the exchange program

Time	Schedule	Lecturer and Room
Sun, July 20, 2025	Arrived DMK Airport	
Mon, July 21, 2025 9.30 – 12.00	Opening ceremony Introducing the Faculty of Science and Technology, Information technology and Computer Science Program	Sci-tech Innovation Space room
Mon, July 21, 2025 13.00 – 15.00	- Class Visiting: SCS334 Cloud Computing	Mr. Chavalit Koweerawong (Students sit-in on the class) Room 402 Faculty of Science Building
Tue, July 22, 2025 9.00 – 12.00	- Class Visiting: System Analysis and Design **** Lecture Exchange ****	Author Lecturer from STIKOM
Tue, July 22 2025 13.30 – 16.30	-Learning Basic Thai Dance	Sci-Tech Innovation Space room
Wed, July 23, 2025 09.00 – 12.00	VRU Tour, VRU tour Office of Academic Fishery, Nursery, Library	SCITECH Staff
Wed, July 23, 2025 13.30 – 17.00	-Thai Cooking Class	SCC by Lecturers of Home Economics
Thu, July 24 2025 08.30 – 12.00	- Class Visiting: Information Technology in the Field of Tourism **** Lecture Exchange ****	Author Lecturer from STIKOM
Thu, July 24, 2025 13.30 – 17.00	-Thai Traditional	Sci-tech Innovation Space room
Fri, July 25, 2025 09.00 – 12.00	Mocktail Class	SCC by Lecturers of Home Economics
Fri, July 25, 2025 13.30 – 16.30	Class Visiting: IT Research Methodology	Author Sci-tech Innovation Space room (Students sit-in on the class)
Sat, July 26, 2025 14.00 – 19.00	Thai Cultural Tour	Thai Costume Wat Arun, Lunch at Chao Praya Riverside, Grand Palace
Sun, July 27, 2025	Shopping Day	Chatuchak with Aj. Tata (Wisrut Kwankhoom)
Mon, July 28, 2025	Free Time	Holiday Visit Ayutthaya, Wat Mahathat , Wat Phra Si Sanphet, Lunch at Chao Praya Riverside, Bang Pa-In Royal Palace
Tue, July 29, 2025 9.00 – 12.00	- Class Visiting: Project Management	Dr. Pranomkorn Ampornphan from Computer Science Program Science & Technology Faculty, 4th Floor 402 (Students sit-in on the class)
Tue, July 29, 2025 13.30 – 16.30	- Class Visiting: How to Research and Publish **** Lecture Exchange ****	Author Lecturer from STIKOM
Wed, July 30, 2025 09.30 – 12.00	Making Thai Dessert Join SciTech Science Week and VRU Showcase 2025 event	Valaya's Building SciTech Science Week and VRU Showcase 2025
Wed, July 30, 2025 13.00 – 15.00	Learning Basic Thai Language	Dr. Nemi Unakornsawad Meeting Room
Thu, July 31, 2025 09.30 – 12.00	Join SciTech Science Week and VRU Showcase 2025 event	SciTech Science Week and VRU Showcase 2025
Thu, July 31, 2025 13.00 – 15.00	Learning Basic Thai Language	Dr. Nemi Unakornsawad Meeting Room
Thu, July 31, 2025 15.00 – 17.00	Farewell Ceremony Join SciTech Science Week and VRU Showcase 2025 event	Meeting Room SciTech Science Week and VRU Showcase 2025

Results and Discussions

Implementation of the Teaching and Learning Exchange Program

The teaching and learning exchange program between ITB STIKOM Bali and Valaya Alongkorn Rajabhat University was implemented over a two-week period as a structured academic collaboration. VRU served as the host institution, providing academic facilities, instructional support, cultural facilitators, and administrative coordination, while ITB STIKOM Bali contributed through visiting lectures, student participation, and collaborative academic activities.

Program implementation was organized into three interconnected components. The pedagogical component focused on reciprocal teaching and learning through guest lectures, classroom sit-ins, and academic discussions in areas such as Systems Analysis and Design, Information Technology in Tourism, Research Methodology, and Academic Publication. Active learning strategies, including guided discussion and short project-based tasks, were emphasized to encourage participation across differing academic and cultural backgrounds.

The cultural immersion component was integrated to enhance intercultural competence and communication. Participants engaged in structured cultural activities, including traditional Thai dance, cooking, and dessert-making classes, mocktail preparation, and basic Thai language lessons. These activities promoted informal interaction, reduced communication barriers, and strengthened mutual understanding.

The institutional networking component supported long-term collaboration through campus visits, participation in the SciTech Science Week and VRU Showcase 2025, and faculty meetings. These activities facilitated discussions on joint research, co-authored publications, and future exchange initiatives. Implementation challenges, particularly language differences and varying communication styles, were addressed through bilingual facilitation, small-group activities, and flexible discussion formats, ensuring inclusive and meaningful participation.

Results

Valaya Alongkorn Rajabhat University is a public university located in Pathum Thani Province, Thailand. Established in 1932, it is officially recognized by the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation of Thailand. Over time, the institution has

undergone several transformations in both name and scope. In 1974, it was known as a Demonstration Primary School under Royal Patronage, later renamed in 1992 as the Demonstration School of Rajabhat Phetchaburi Wittayakon Institute. In 2003, it became the Demonstration School of Rajabhat Valaya Alongkorn Institute before evolving into the present-day university. Academically, VRU comprises seven faculties: Education, Management Science, Science and Technology, Industrial Technology, Agricultural Technology, Humanities and Social Sciences, and Public Health. It also operates a Graduate School offering master's and doctoral programs, and the College of Management Innovation, which provides undergraduate, master's, and doctoral programs.

VRU supports academic activities through its comprehensive library, which offers a wide range of academic, cultural, and language resources, as well as recreational literature. Comfortable reading facilities allow students to engage in independent study. International recognition includes reviews and rankings from institutions such as University Rank, which assess universities based on fields of study, degree levels, tuition fees, and admission systems. The university's vision is to be an institution that excels in knowledge and technology, driven by innovation, and contributing to balanced and sustainable development through collaboration with diverse partners. Its mission covers five pillars: delivering inclusive, high-quality education; developing impactful research, innovation, and creative works; contributing to national economic, social, educational, cultural, and environmental progress; promoting good governance and operational excellence; and transforming into a Smart and Green University (ASEAN, 2023).

Academic Growth

The academic sessions covered Cloud Computing, Systems Analysis and Design, IT in Tourism, Research Methodology, Project Management, and Academic Publication. Students benefited from interactive, hands-on learning experiences that combined theory with practical exercises, strengthening critical thinking, problem-solving, and digital skills. Lecturers, meanwhile, explored innovative pedagogical approaches, including active learning and project-based methods, enhancing their teaching skills. These outcomes align with research highlighting the transformative potential of participatory learning in international programs (Nguyen & Tran, 2023; Gilmour, 2024). Figures 2 and Figure 3 present the academic engagement activities carried out during the exchange program.



Fig. 2. Class visiting (a) system analysis and design; (b) information technology in the field of tourism

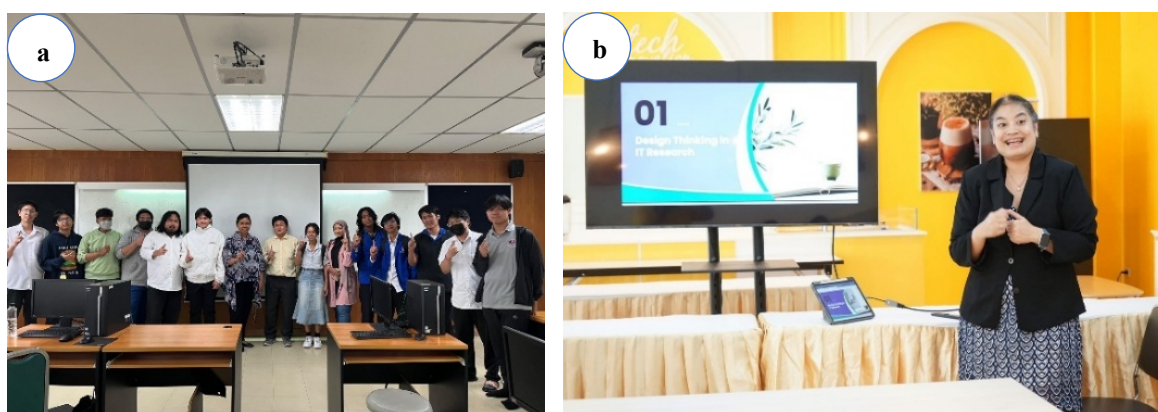


Fig. 3. Class visiting (a) cloud computing; (b) IT research methodology

Cultural Immersion and Intercultural Skills

Students actively participated in Thai cooking, mocktail preparation, dessert-making, traditional dance, and basic Thai language classes, which not only enriched their cultural appreciation but also improved intercultural communication and adaptability. Immersive experiences like these support evidence showing that cultural engagement is crucial for developing global competencies and cross-cultural confidence (Zhong, Liu, & Triatmanto, 2025; Yang & Zhang, 2023). Figure 4 illustrates the cultural enrichment activities undertaken during the program.



Fig. 4. Cultural activity: (a) learning basic Thai dance; (b) cooking class

Experiential Learning and Entrepreneurship

Educational excursions, including visits to VRU facilities, cultural heritage sites such as Wat Arun, the Grand Palace, Ayutthaya, and the Bang Pa-In Royal Palace, as well as economic exploration at Chatuchak Market, broadened students' perspectives on Thai culture, history, and entrepreneurship. These experiences reinforced the value of learning through real-world contexts and inspired entrepreneurial thinking, consistent with findings on international exposure fostering creativity and problem-solving in students (Nguyen & Tran, 2023; Li & Chen, 2024). Figures 5 and 6 illustrate the cultural and social activities that enhanced participants' intercultural understanding during the program.

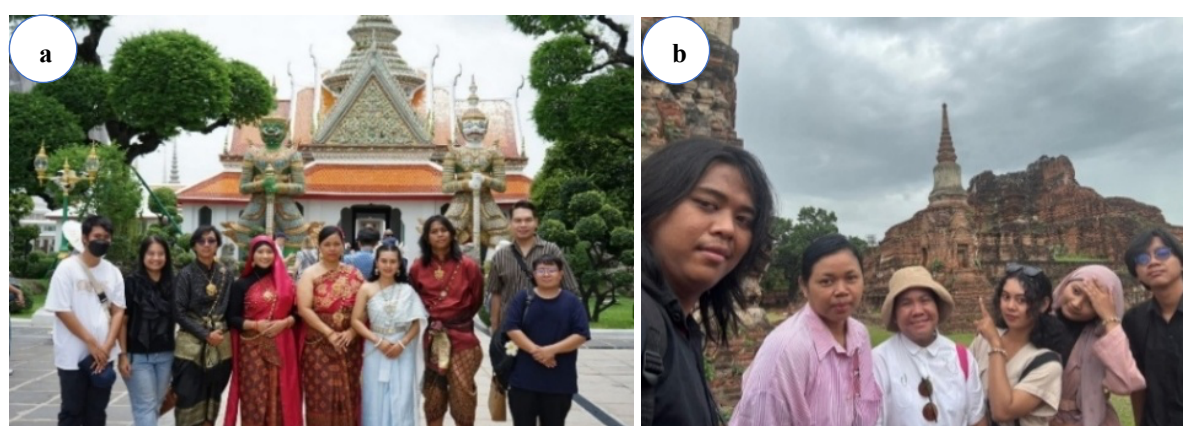


Fig. 5. Educational excursions: (a) Wat Arun ; (b) world heritage site



Fig. 6. City explore: (a) Chatuchak; (b) team dinner

Institutional Collaboration and Networking

The program strengthened institutional partnerships, resulting in joint research projects, co-authored publications, and plans for future faculty exchanges. Such collaborations reflect the long-term benefits of cross-border academic engagement in the ASEAN region, promoting

knowledge sharing, innovation, and sustainable academic networks (ASEAN, 2023; Wang, 2024).

Challenges and Solutions

Language barriers and differing communication styles were successfully addressed using bilingual facilitators and multilingual resources, ensuring that all participants could engage meaningfully. This approach demonstrates how thoughtful planning can mitigate common challenges in international academic programs (Zhong et al., 2025).

Overall, the VRU program provided a holistic learning experience that integrated academic growth, cultural immersion, and institutional collaboration. Students and lecturers returned with enhanced skills, broader perspectives, and strengthened networks, exemplifying how structured international programs can cultivate intercultural competence, innovative teaching, and sustainable institutional partnerships. It also brought meaningful benefits to lecturers, students, and the institutions involved. Lecturer from ITB STIKOM Bali gained valuable insights into modern teaching methods, particularly active learning, technology integration, and project-based approaches, highlighting how international collaboration can enrich pedagogical skills (Gilmour, 2024). Students engaged in diverse learning contexts, including guest lectures, group discussions, and cultural activities, which boosted their confidence in communicating across cultures and strengthened their adaptability in multicultural settings, echoing recent research on the positive impact of international academic programs on student development (Yang & Zhang, 2023).

The host university systematically documented the program's activities, capturing both academic sessions and cultural engagements through photographs and video recordings. These materials were disseminated promptly via VRU's official Facebook page, enabling the public to follow the program's development and observe participant involvement in real time. This online documentation effectively highlighted the collaborative initiative between ITB STIKOM Bali and VRU, broadened the visibility of the program, and showcased the interpersonal and intercultural connections established throughout its implementation.

For reference, the university's posts and video coverage are accessible at the following links:

<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1Ax8jt7QDp/?mibextid=wwXlfr>

<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/176p6VXsEx/?mibextid=wwXlfr>

<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1D7JWk8RAF/?mibextid=wwXIfr>
<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/171j1rnHAc/?mibextid=wwXIfr>
<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1CTsUfeXHZ/?mibextid=wwXIfr>
<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1BMT6jnfai/?mibextid=wwXIfr>
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<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1CLqKR7FVn/?mibextid=wwXIfr>
<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/17F6cM9De5/?mibextid=wwXIfr>

Figure 7 visually situates the exchange program within its institutional and human context. Unlike classroom photographs that emphasize instructional activities, this figure documents the formal initiation and closure of the program, underscoring institutional commitment, participant engagement, and reflective closure. The opening ceremony represents the establishment of shared academic intent, while the closing ceremony captures collective reflection, recognition of learning outcomes, and agreement on future collaborative actions. These events frame the exchange as a sustained partnership rather than a standalone visit.

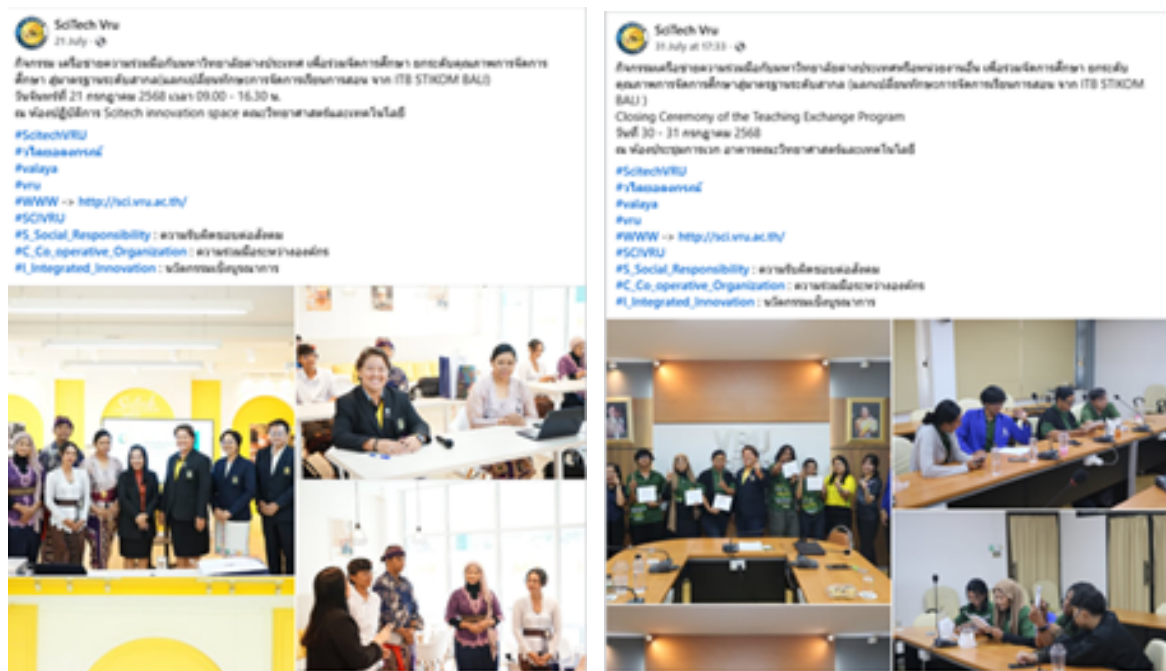


Fig. 7. Documentation of key stages of the teaching and learning exchange program: (a) Opening ceremony involving representatives from ITB STIKOM Bali and VRU, marking the formal initiation of academic and cultural collaboration; (b) Closing ceremony highlighting reflective sharing by participants and institutional leaders, symbolizing continuity and future collaboration plans

This documentation not only preserved memories but also highlighted the exchange of knowledge and culture, emphasizing the human connections and shared learning experiences that made the program meaningful (Li & Chen, 2024). The reporting focuses on the substance of the program and the changes experienced by participants. Four undergraduate students engaged in three main activity blocks:

1. Pedagogical block – guest lectures, classroom sit-ins, discussions on research methodology, and academic publication sessions;
2. Cultural immersion block – traditional dance, cooking classes, and basic Thai language lessons; and
3. Institutional networking block – campus facility visits and participation in the SciTech Science Week event.

The analysis yielded three key themes:

1. Theme 1. Strengthening technology-based pedagogical competence: Participants reported improved ability to use learning management systems (LMS), create simple data visualizations, and apply active learning strategies in mini-project tasks. The lecturer adopted project-based learning and structured discussion approaches during guest lectures on Systems Analysis and Design and the session on “How to Research and Publish.” These findings align with literature emphasizing the potential of participatory learning and technology integration to enhance engagement and problem-solving skills.
2. Theme 2. Confidence in cross-cultural communication: Participation in basic Thai language classes and presentation practice during guest lectures increased students’ confidence in asking questions and engaging in discussions in English, supported by bilingual facilitators. Adaptation to different communication styles was facilitated through structured feedback and multilingual support materials.
3. Theme 3. Networking and initial collaborative outputs: The program resulted in plans for joint publications, a draft manuscript for a co-authored book, and opportunities for future faculty exchanges. Personal connections among lecturers and students fostered sustained research collaboration and strengthened the international visibility of the study programs.

Challenges and mitigation: Language barriers and differing task expectations were addressed through paired assignments, glossaries of key terms, and rescheduled reflection sessions. These strategies ensured meaningful engagement for all participants throughout the program.

Discussions

Overall, these findings are consistent with regional studies on international collaboration that highlight its role in strengthening research and teaching capacity, as well as mobility research that identifies increased cross-cultural confidence as a critical outcome of international academic programs (Li & Chen, 2024; Yang & Zhang, 2023). The program also fostered stronger institutional connections, resulting in joint research projects, co-authored publications, and plans for future faculty exchanges, demonstrating the long-term value of cross-border collaboration within ASEAN (ASEAN, 2023; Wang, 2024). Challenges such as language differences and varying communication styles were effectively addressed through bilingual facilitators and multilingual resources, ensuring that all participants could engage fully. Tangible outcomes included the first draft of a co-authored book in progress. Overall, the program illustrates how structured international collaboration can enhance teaching practices, empower students, and build lasting institutional relationships, emphasizing the importance of intercultural competence, technology-enhanced learning, and inclusive strategies in advancing higher education across the region (Nguyen & Tran, 2023; Zhong, Liu, & Triatmanto, 2025; Yang & Zhang, 2023).

Conclusion

The teaching and learning exchange program between ITB STIKOM Bali and VRU has demonstrably strengthened pedagogical capacity through the adoption of active learning strategies and technology-enhanced teaching. It also enhanced participants' confidence in cross-cultural communication and opened pathways for collaborative outputs, including joint publications and plans for faculty exchange. Based on qualitative findings, we recommend: (1) integrating collaborative sessions into the regular curriculum; (2) implementing more systematic pre-post measurements for quantitative analysis (e.g., paired t-tests) in future cohorts; (3) developing cross-national pedagogical training focused on project-based learning and research literacy; and (4) establishing standardized digital documentation to improve dissemination and visibility of outcomes.

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program. Our deepest appreciation goes to the VRU faculty, staff, and students who shared their time, knowledge, and culture, making the experience both meaningful and memorable. We are also grateful to our colleagues and leadership at ITB STIKOM Bali for their encouragement and guidance, which made this international collaboration possible. Special thanks to the students and lecturers' participants, both from VRU and ITB STIKOM Bali, whose curiosity, enthusiasm, and reflections brought life to every activity. We would also like to take this opportunity to recognize all those working behind the scenes, from organizing cultural experiences to facilitating academic sessions, whose dedication strengthened the connection between our institutions and inspired a foundation for lasting collaboration and friendship.

Statement on Ethical Use of Artificial Intelligence

The authors affirm that this manuscript reports an original academic exchange program conducted by the authors and their institutional partners. All research design, participant engagement, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and conclusions are based on real activities, primary qualitative data (observations, reflections), and first-hand institutional collaboration.

Artificial intelligence tools were not used for generating research data, fabricating results, creating figures, or producing analytical interpretations. Where applicable, limited AI-assisted tools may have been used solely for language refinement (e.g., grammar or phrasing improvement) to enhance clarity and readability for an international audience. Such use did not alter the intellectual content, arguments, or scholarly contributions of the work.

The authors take full responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and integrity of the manuscript and confirm that it complies with ethical standards of academic authorship and publication.

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