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## **Aligning Strategy, Management, and Pedagogy: A Grounded Theory of Sustainability Learning in Short-Term ASEAN Mobility**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Aligned with the ASEAN Economic Community's (AEC) vision for regional integration and sustainable development, universities are expected to advance internationalization through mobility, research, and community engagement. However, the sustainability learning outcomes of short-term mobility programs remain underexplored. This case study examines a six-week hybrid mobility initiative between an Indonesian private university and a Singaporean partner. Using a grounded theory approach and discussions with students and staff, the study explores how program design and institutional support shape outcomes. The findings indicate that students gained modest benefits, including social connections and introductory sustainability knowledge, but learning was constrained by compressed timelines and unclear roles. Staff highlighted the need for clearer prioritization and stronger alignment with institutional goals. The study proposes a model in which outcomes depend on the alignment of strategy, program management, and pedagogy, offering a framework to strengthen short-term hybrid mobility programs in ASEAN higher education and beyond.*

**Keywords:** ASEAN Economic Community, higher education internationalization, international student mobility, Indonesia, Singapore, sustainable development education

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## INTRODUCTION

With the development of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), universities have become key drivers of regional integration and socioeconomic development. Higher education institutions (HEIs) assume leadership roles in these efforts through internationalization initiatives such as student mobility, research partnerships, and community engagement (ASEAN, 2015). Among these, short-term international mobility programs have gained prominence as potentially powerful mechanisms for fostering sustainability-oriented mindsets.

Programs such as Passage to ASEAN (P2A), the ASEAN International Mobility for Students (AIMS) Programme, and the ASEAN University Network's Credit Transfer System (AUN-ACTS) operationalize this regional mobility by engaging students in intercultural exchanges across member states. These programs incorporate sustainability dimensions. For instance, P2A's 2022 virtual mobility in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) engaged over 200 students from more than 20 ASEAN institutions in collaborative SDG-focused activities (OIA UPNVY, 2023). Despite their expanding reach, however, relatively little is known about the processes and outcomes of such mobility schemes.

Indonesia actively participates in these ASEAN initiatives. Higher education internationalization plays a crucial role in Indonesia's national strategy to build capacity while enhancing its global reputation (Simek & Stewart, 2024). Since 2015, public and private universities have been urged to pursue recognition in international rankings such as QS and THE (Yamin, 2024), which evaluate institutional engagement in social and environmental sustainability based on the UN SDGs framework. Participation in ASEAN mobility programs supports this institutional mission.

In this context, the focal institution, a private university in Jakarta, has developed short-term regional mobility programs centered on community immersion and sustainability. Since 2021, it has partnered with regional institutions on initiatives related to circular design, inclusive care, urban waste awareness, social innovation, business development aligned with the SDGs, and green campus practices (Institutional documentation, 2024–2025). These mobility-based programs emphasize direct engagement with local stakeholders through field immersion, practitioner dialog, cross-cultural teamwork, and structured design-thinking processes linking disciplinary knowledge to real-world sustainability challenges.

Building on this trajectory, the present study examines a newer six-week hybrid International Student Mobility (ISM) program jointly implemented by a Singaporean and an Indonesian university. Unlike earlier immersion-focused models, this program combined online cross-border collaboration with a two-day in-person prototyping workshop. Students codeveloped sustainable fashion products, integrating virtual collaboration with physical design. This hybrid format offers a distinctive context for examining how international mobility is organized and how it may foster sustainability-oriented learning.

As higher education institutions face growing pressure to demonstrate the societal value of internationalization, scrutiny of the environmental and socioeconomic impacts of mobility programs has intensified. Although ISM has traditionally been framed as a pathway to global citizenship, scholars increasingly call for greater accountability regarding its broader consequences (Chankseliani & Kwak, 2025). While political, economic, academic, and sociocultural rationales remain influential (Knight, 2008), environmental considerations have only recently gained attention. Despite sustainability's prominence in rankings and SDG-aligned strategies, empirical research rarely examines how mobility programs concretely support sustainability-oriented learning.

Existing ISM research has primarily examined student adaptation and intercultural competence (Hernández-Torrano et al., 2024; Hong et al., 2025). Far less attention has been given to how short-term, hybrid mobility programs support sustainability learning and how institutional actors design and scaffold such outcomes. Addressing this gap, we explore how students interpret sustainability throughout their learning journey and how they perceive institutional roles in shaping that experience. We also examine how staff contribute to advancing regional sustainability goals. By linking participant experiences with organizational conditions, this study highlights the potential of short-term hybrid mobility to foster transformational learning in sustainability-oriented internationalization.

Hence, we ask the following research questions:

1. How do students experience their learning journey in the regional hybrid mobility program aiming to advance environmental sustainability?
2. How do students interpret institutional roles in deepening the learning experience from hybrid mobility programs?
3. What institutional support is needed to enhance sustainability-related learning outcomes in hybrid mobility programs?

We contribute to theory, practice, and policy in higher education internationalization by showing how short-term hybrid mobility can be intentionally designed to foster sustainability-oriented transformational learning. The next section reviews research on international student mobility outcomes, transformative learning in hybrid contexts, and the organizational conditions shaping program effectiveness.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### International Student Mobility Outcomes

Research on ISM has matured considerably. Early scholarship focused on student adaptation in traditional study destinations, but more recent work has expanded to diverse mobility types and a broader range of outcomes, including cultural, personal, professional, and societal dimensions (Hernández-Torrano et al., 2024; Roy et al., 2019). Studies of short-term mobility demonstrate that deliberate pedagogical design is required to foster intercultural competence (Jackson, 2014).

While earlier work emphasized intercultural development, recent studies extend ISM's impact to civic domains. Service-learning initiatives, for example, enhance social responsibility (Marco-Gardoqui et al., 2020; O'Flaherty et al., 2011). Chankseliani (2018) further argues that ISM participation can contribute to democratic transitions by reshaping mindsets. Building on this, Chankseliani and Kwak (2024) articulate a theory of change that explicitly links mobility experiences to broader societal transformation.

### Transformative Learning and Societal Impact

This emerging theory of change can be understood through three complementary perspectives, namely, critical realism, transnationalism, and transformative learning.

Critical realism emphasizes that the effects of mobility unfold gradually through the interaction of individual agency and structural contexts. Knowledge gained abroad contributes to socioeconomic and political change over time rather than through immediate causal effects (Almassri, 2024; Chankseliani & Kwak, 2025).

Transnationalism highlights how ISM generates cross-border social spaces in which ideas, practices, and resources circulate. Through these transnational networks, individuals bridge global and local contexts and contribute to development in both host and home societies (Chankseliani & Kwak, 2025; Tran & Phan, 2024; Vertovec, 2009).

Transformative learning, meanwhile, clarifies the internal processes through which such societal effects become possible. Encounters with difference, disorienting dilemmas, critical reflection, and dialog can shift individuals' frames of reference, leading to changes in perspectives and action (Mezirow, 1997; Tran & Phan, 2024). Importantly, research in education for sustainable development shows that such perspective transformation can be intentionally designed through structured dilemmas, guided reflection, and social exchange in supportive environments, often culminating in action-oriented commitments (Grund et al., 2024; Rodríguez Aboytes & Barth, 2020). Together, these perspectives suggest that ISM influences societies in relational, reflective, and cumulative ways.

If transformative learning constitutes a key mechanism through which such societal effects unfold, an important question concerns the pedagogical spaces in

which this transformation can occur. While traditionally associated with physical immersion abroad, transformative processes can also be cultivated in hybrid and virtual environments.

### **Hybrid Mobility and COIL as Transformative Spaces**

Collaborative online international learning (COIL) represents one such pedagogical space. By intentionally structuring intercultural dialog, collaborative problem solving, and reflective engagement, COIL operationalizes the core mechanisms of transformative learning in virtual settings. When intentionally designed, COIL can recreate key elements of disorienting encounters and discourse central to transformative learning.

Empirical studies demonstrate its potential. COIL fosters linguistic development and intercultural competence through active student and faculty engagement (Rakhshandehroo & Enkhtur, 2024). Virtual exchanges structured around the UN SDGs enhance intercultural and global competencies (Davies-Vollum et al., 2023; Falasca & Carnicero, 2024). Moreover, virtual mobility expands access to global learning for place-bound students and reduces the carbon footprint associated with traditional mobility (Grover et al., 2025), aligning transformative pedagogy with sustainability goals. At the same time, these largely positive accounts require closer examination of the institutional conditions that shape such outcomes.

### **Programmatic Management and Organizational Conditions**

Research shows that ISM effectiveness depends not only on pedagogical design but also on institutional structures and professional capacity (Jackson, 2014). Programs are often constrained by insufficient faculty training, weak coordination, and limited outcome assessment systems (Simek, 2024). Embedding internationalization across university life therefore requires strategic alignment and effective management.

Faculty and staff play a central role in this process (Harvey & Stiff, 1985). In international education, their responsibilities extend beyond administration to actively facilitate intercultural and sustainability-oriented learning through guidance, resources, and supportive environments (Simek, 2024). When supported by intentional management structures and intercultural training, they are better positioned to cultivate globally informed knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Cseh et al., 2024; Sugden et al., 2013; Wu et al., 2015).

Organizational systems theory provides a useful lens for understanding these dynamics. Universities can be conceptualized as open, adaptive systems in which strategy, governance, and staff competencies shape program design and learning outcomes through interconnected processes (Adams & Lanford, 2021; Scott & Davis, 2015; Von Bertalanffy, 1972). Applied to ISM, this perspective shifts attention from individual adaptation alone to the organizational conditions enabling transformative learning. Liu and Zou (2022), for example, show how convergent management during COVID-19 enabled coordinated learning by

integrating international and domestic students into regular institutional operations.

Adopting this systems perspective, we conceptualize hybrid mobility outcomes as emergent properties of alignment between pedagogical design and managerial capacity.

## **METHOD**

In the absence of established frameworks for hybrid mobility, this qualitative study employed a grounded theory design (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to explore how ISM programs can be structured to support transformative learning. By incorporating both student and staff perspectives, the study examines how pedagogical practices interact with managerial arrangements in shaping learning experiences. The analysis is interpreted through transformative learning and organizational systems perspectives.

### **Data Collection**

The study focused on a six-week hybrid ISM program jointly implemented by a Singaporean and an Indonesian university. The program combined cross-border online collaboration with a two-day in-person prototyping workshop in which students developed sustainable fashion products.

Participants were purposively recruited from Indonesian undergraduate students who joined the program. Data were collected through two online focus group discussions (FGDs), one individual student interview, and one staff interview with a mobility program organizer. In total, eight participants were involved, namely, three fashion majors (two female, one male), four business majors (two female, two male), and one male staff member.

Student sessions, conducted in English, lasted approximately one hour and took place online in July 2024. The 30-minute staff interview was conducted in Indonesia on campus. All sessions were audio-recorded.

Participants provided informed consent and were assured of voluntary participation and confidentiality. Ethical approval was granted by the authors' university (Approval No. 197/VRRTT/IX/2025). Data are not publicly available to protect confidentiality. In reporting findings, student quotations are coded as F (fashion major) and BM (business major).

This focused case design aims at analytical rather than statistical generalization. Consistent with grounded theory, emphasis was placed on the depth of meaning-making and process tracing within a bounded program context.

### **Data Analysis**

Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim using the Cockatoo transcription program and analyzed in NVivo to ensure systematic data management. The analysis followed the Straussian grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), selected for its capacity to generate theory inductively

from participants' lived experiences. This approach aligned with the study's exploratory focus on students' learning journeys, their interpretations of institutional roles, and the support required to enhance program outcomes.

Transcripts were verified against the recordings for accuracy and clearly labeled to distinguish individual contributions before being imported into NVivo. Coding proceeded hierarchically. Child codes captured specific accounts of program design, sustainability learning, intercultural collaboration, and institutional support, while parent codes reflected broader categories aligned with the research questions. The constant comparative method (Bingham, 2023) was applied iteratively across student and staff accounts.

Saturation was assessed at the level of conceptual categories rather than participant numbers. As analysis progressed, no substantially new properties of core categories emerged in later transcripts. Subsequent refinement clarified relationships among categories without generating additional thematic dimensions. Given the focused case design and shared program context, theoretical sufficiency was reached when the explanatory framework stabilized (Moura et al., 2022).

## RESULTS

### Learning Journey Experiences in Sustainability and Regional Integration

Seven interrelated themes emerged from the analysis: program participation rationale, role impact, perceived benefits, program challenges, sustainability perspective before/after, regional context perspective before/after, and intercultural experience impact (see Table 1). In reporting the findings, participant quotations are coded. PF denotes a fashion student who participated in an in-depth interview, PFGD refers to fashion students who took part in a focus group discussion, and PBMGD represents business management students who participated in a focus group discussion. These themes illustrate how hybrid mobility generated relational learning and modest perspective shifts while also revealing structural constraints that limited deeper transformation.

**Table 1: Student and Staff Perspectives on Hybrid Mobility Learning**

Code	Definition	Representative Quote		
		Fashion Students	Business Students	Staff
Program Participation Rationale	The reasons participants joined the program	PF1 "I joined to increase my connections and collect extracurricular points for graduation."	PBMGD1 "We have the opportunity to interact with people from a different background (...) and learn more	"I work in the internationalization unit running student mobility programs."

			about sustainability.”	
			PBMGD2 “Participation replaced our exam.”	
Roles Impact	Role of each group during program	<p>PFGD1 “I joined in the middle (...) so that’s what I know.”</p> <p>PF1 “We were assigned for (...) making the product.”</p>	<p>PBMGD1 “We helped to develop the prototype. (...) It’s a little bit different from what I expected.”</p>	“Facilitators assist students through the design thinking process (...) until they can find the solution.”
Program Benefits	Types of benefits perceived from program participation	PFGD2 “I get to learn about people and the different types of characters they have.”	<p>PBMGD1 “I get to make new friends and (...) delve more into sustainability.”</p> <p>PBMGD4 “I don’t think it was anything special. I think it was just basic group work that we did, college work. However, outside of it, I think it was great. We were able to connect truly well and keep in touch.”</p>	<p>“The students become more aware that all the problems we are experiencing are our responsibility in the end (...) They become more open to the roles they can play.”</p>
Program Challenges	Types of challenges perceived during program implementation	PF1 “Doing communication online... there’s not truly like the profile picture so I do not	<p>PBMGD1 “...job desks are not that clear.”</p> <p>“I don’t think we have the tools</p>	“The students don’t have the capacity to reach the output only from their own discipline.”

		<p>know which one is which.”</p> <p>PFGD2 “I do not think the interdisciplinary part was a problem because even though, say, they do not truly understand anything about fashion, they still try their best to help us.”</p>	<p>nor the support to actually realize these very innovative ideas.”</p> <p>PBMGD4 “I think 90% of the work we did, we finished in the last two days of us actually doing the project. (...) Zoom was a bit useless.”</p>	<p>“For short programs to be more impactful, we need to implement it in stages. This year we are focusing on the idea first.”</p>
<p>Sustainability Perspective Before/After</p>	<p>Shifts in knowledge, perspectives, and behaviors related to sustainability because of program participation</p>	<p>PF1 “I don’t think it changed much since in fashion we are encouraged to always see the sustainability side.”</p> <p>PFGD2 “It’s quite the same, even before this program, I would like to buy secondhand.”</p>	<p>PBMGD3 “Sustainability was not in my mind when I joined the program. (...) I learned new things, but it stopped at learning the new facts basically.”</p> <p>PBMGD4 “I think in terms of the design itself and I guess my thought process around the design.”</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>Regional Context Perspective Before/After</p>	<p>Shifts in knowledge, perspectives, and behaviors related to regional development because of program participation</p>	<p>PFGD1 ...[I would like that we develop] a mini collection and do the exhibition (...) we can introduce the final project to countries in ASEAN.</p> <p>PFGD2 “I want to be able</p>	<p>PBMGD3 “I would like to contribute more in finding ways to make sustainable profits, because as I say, currently, a lot of it is focused on growth, and I think one day there’s just not going to be enough people or numbers for us to continue growing.”</p>	<p>N/A</p>

			to make steps to make it more available for everyone, to make it more accessible, instead of it being this luxury”	
Intercultural Experience Impact	Cultural differences observed between Singaporean and Indonesian participants	PF1 “...the difference in the in terms of (...) working style.”	PBMGD2 “I’ve realized that yes, because Singaporean is mainly a corporate country. So most of 95% of the students are not going to be building their own business, but they’re going to be working for a sustainable business already. So being able to see it from that light means that if I were to work in a sustainable environment for the company itself, I can view it in the way where it is more toward the cost than the profits.”	N/A

**Program Participation Rationale**

Students and staff entered the program with different orientations. For staff, involvement formed part of their assigned professional responsibilities within internationalization efforts. Students, by contrast, were primarily motivated by instrumental considerations, including exam waivers, graduation requirements, and networking opportunities. As one fashion student noted, “*I joined to increase my connections and collect extracurricular points for graduation*” (PF1).

Business students additionally expressed interest in gaining exposure to sustainability concepts, which had not been central to their prior studies. Thus, while staff framed the program in developmental and institutional terms, students approached it largely as a pragmatic opportunity with potential networking and learning benefits.

**Program Benefits**

Students consistently identified social connection as the most immediate and tangible benefit. They valued meeting peers from different backgrounds and building relationships. One participant described learning about “*the different types of characters*” of their teammates (PFGD2).

However, several students characterized the academic component as resembling ordinary coursework. As one business student reflected, the project felt like “*basic group work*,” although the interpersonal bonds were meaningful (PBMGD). Business students reported gaining introductory exposure to sustainability concepts. However, this learning was described as foundational rather than transformative. Staff, in contrast, articulated broader aspirations, hoping that participation would foster long-term awareness of societal and environmental responsibility. This contrast reveals a gap between students’ relational framing of benefits and staff’s developmental intentions.

### ***Role Impact***

Students’ perceptions of their roles during the program were often ambiguous. Fashion students who joined the mid-program were assigned product-related tasks, while business students contributed to prototyping but experienced misalignment between expectations and responsibilities. One participant noted, “*We helped to develop the prototype (...) It’s a little bit different from what I expected*” (PBMGD1).

Staff emphasized the facilitation role in guiding students through the design thinking process. However, students’ accounts suggest that this facilitation did not always translate into clear role allocation, particularly for late entrants. The divergence between intended facilitation and experienced ambiguity points to coordination gaps within program implementation.

### ***Program Challenges***

Reported challenges largely reflected weaknesses in structural coordination within the hybrid format. Students expressed frustration about limited resources to translate ideas into tangible outputs. As one business student noted, “*I don’t think we have the tools nor the support to actually realize these very innovative ideas*” (PBMGD1). Although the design thinking process generated creative concepts, participants felt constrained during implementation.

Role ambiguity compounded these limitations. Fashion students described difficulties navigating online communication (PF1), while business students emphasized unclear task distribution (“*job desks are not that clear*,” PBMGD1). These coordination gaps culminated in the compression of work into the final in-person phase, with one student observing that “*90% of the work we did, we finished in the last two days*” (PBMGD4).

Staff acknowledged these constraints but framed them as structural features of short-term programming: “*for short programs to be more impactful, we need to implement it in stages. This year we are focusing on the idea first.*”

These accounts suggest that limited structural scaffolding constrained the depth of engagement and contributed to students’ modest assessment of learning outcomes.

### ***Sustainability Perspective Before/After***

Shifts in sustainability perspectives were largely incremental. Fashion students reported little change, noting that sustainability was already embedded in their training: “*I don’t think it changed much*” (PF1). Business students, who had less prior exposure, described increased awareness but framed it as learning “*new facts*” rather than rethinking assumptions (PBMGD3). Even when shifts were acknowledged, they were described as adjustments in the “*thought process*” (PBMGD4) rather than deeper transformation. Overall, sustainability learning reinforced existing orientations or introduced foundational awareness rather than producing substantive perspective change.

### ***Regional Context Perspective Before/After***

The program nevertheless stimulated aspirational thinking within a regional frame. Fashion students envisioned showcasing work across ASEAN countries and making sustainable fashion “*more accessible*” (PFGD2). Business students discussed contributing to “*sustainable profits*” (PBMGD3), reflecting elements of a triple bottom line approach that balances economic, social, and environmental considerations. These reflections indicate emerging regional awareness, although they remained exploratory rather than consolidated commitments.

### ***Intercultural Experience Impact***

The hybrid format also generated intercultural comparisons. Fashion students observed differences in working styles, while business students articulated broader structural contrasts. One participant noted that many Singaporean students expected to work within established corporate sustainability frameworks rather than build independent ventures (PBMGD2). This observation prompted reflection on how sustainability operates within corporate environments, encouraging reconsideration of cost–profit dynamics in established organizations. While such insights expanded comparative awareness, they did not culminate in clearly articulated transformative shifts.

### **Interpretation of Institutional Roles in Program Delivery**

Moving beyond individual learning experiences, we examined the institutional arrangements that structured these outcomes. Three themes emerged, namely, types of programs provided, the purposes attributed to these programs, and the significance of cross-institutional collaboration (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Student and Staff Views on Institutional Roles in Hybrid Mobility**

Code	Definition	Representative Quote		
		Fashion Students	Business Students	Staff
Types of Programs Provided	Insights on the types of short mobility programs to be provided by the institution	PF1 "...in fashion we are encouraged to always see the sustainability side."	PBMGD1 "...opportunities like this program is rather hard to come by..."  PBMGD4 "...the opportunity seemed kind of unique and interesting."	"Our short mobility programs this year focus on ideation of solutions to local community challenges."
Programs Purpose	How participants defined the purpose of the program	PF1 "...we were assigned for the, I think it was the sewing, like the making of the product. In addition, then for the SP team, they did most of the mock-up and like the idea for IBM I think they did the slides for the presentation and a part of the idea as well."	PBMGD3 "I think the most important part to fix is the mindset that all of us participants have, which is the mindset of, oh, we're doing this just for this class."  PBMGD4 "...we were actually making the product itself. (...) [We had to] incorporate some of the creative design into actual sustainability."	"Output of the programs is usually ideation, while most of the solutions need a sustainable product innovation prototype as an output to enhance the impact."
Cross-Institutional Collaboration	Perspectives on the role of cross-institutional collaboration in facilitating learning	PFGD2 "I got to get many new friends and to this day I still keep in contact with some of them. Therefore, I think that was a truly good experience overall because I get to learn about people and the different types of characters they have and I think that is truly a valuable experience to have."	PBMGD1 "I think the way we approach our work is a bit different."	"We collaborate with local and foreign universities. (...) We are trying to involve teachers who have expertise in the program and resources are limited."

### ***Types of Programs Provided***

Students and staff differed in their interpretations of the institutional portfolio of mobility programs. Fashion students noted that sustainability was already embedded in their curriculum (“*we are encouraged to always see the sustainability side,*” PF1), suggesting continuity rather than novelty. In contrast, business students described the program as a rare opportunity, emphasizing that such experiences are “*rather hard to come by*” (PBMGD1).

Staff framed these programs more strategically, highlighting their intentional focus on sustainability ideation: “*Our short mobility programs this year focus on ideation of solutions to local community challenges.*” While staff emphasized alignment with sustainable development goals, students evaluated program types primarily in terms of uniqueness and disciplinary relevance.

### ***Program Purpose***

Participants also differed in how they understood the program’s purpose. Students described it largely in terms of task execution and mindset. One business student suggested that the key issue was shifting participants’ perception that the project was “*just for this class*” (PBMGD3), while another emphasized the need to “*incorporate... creative design into actual sustainability*” (PBMGD4).

Staff, however, framed purpose in terms of output and impact, noting that programs should generate sustainable prototypes or innovations to “*enhance the impact.*” Thus, students focused on immediate learning processes, whereas staff emphasized longer-term developmental and institutional outcomes.

### ***Cross-Institutional Collaboration***

Interpretations of collaboration similarly diverged. Students experienced collaboration primarily at the interpersonal level, valuing friendships and differences in working styles (“*the way we approach our work is a bit different,*” PBMGD1).

Staff, by contrast, framed collaboration strategically, emphasizing partnerships with local and foreign universities and the deliberate involvement of faculty expertise to address resource limitations: “*We collaborate with local and foreign universities... we are trying to involve teachers who have expertise.*” Overall, students understood collaboration as relational and experiential, while staff viewed it as an institutional mechanism for program design, resourcing, and sustainability.

### ***Institutional Support to Enhance Sustainability Related to Learning Outcomes***

Building on reflections about program experiences and institutional roles, institutional support emerged as a critical determinant of sustainability-related learning. Three interrelated dimensions were identified, namely, personal

development opportunities, direct facilitation and structural coordination, and program design improvements (see Table 3).

**Table 3: Student and Staff Views on Support Needed to Enhance Sustainability Learning**

Code	Definition	Representative Quote		
		Fashion Students	Business Students	Staff
Personal Development Opportunities	The type of development opportunities participants hopes to have for enhanced learning through short mobility	PF1 “I think I would like to definitely try to incorporate like maybe more studies about abroad like the other cultures because now I’m kind of focused on sustainability.”	PBMGD1 “We helped to develop the prototype. (...) It’s a little bit different from what I expected.”	“We receive trainings generally provided by internal resources at our university. (...) This Year we received the (...) training in Singapore from the partner.”
Support Type	Support participants expressed to need for enhanced learning outcomes	PFGD1 “to create two garments for two days in one and a half days is kind of too short.”	PBMGD2 “I wish that there were more involvement from the teachers, not in the project itself, just to help manage the differences in terms of time, places, online availability, and such. In addition, briefing. Mandatory briefing in the start.”	“The already have policies at the institutional level related to internationalization and (...) SDGs. Many proposals are funded internally, but there should be programs that become a priority.”
Improvement Suggestions	Specific suggestions offered by participants to enhance program design	PFGD2 “I think it would be amazing if instead of starting in the middle of the semester, we	PBMGD3 “I think the most important part to fix is the mindset that all of us participants	Universities should include funds for professional development programs [such as] in project

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had a whole semester to do it so we can create more things, we could have more time to get to know the team members, we have more time to think about like a mini collection.”	have, which is the mindset of, oh, we’re doing this just for this class.”	management. This would help enhance the impact of projects handled parallelly.”
	PBMGD 4 “...establish better discussion and better connection (...) from the very start instead of the last two days, which was for me the only part that I find memorable.”	

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### ***Personal Development Opportunities***

Students expressed differing expectations regarding how short mobility programs could deepen sustainability learning. Fashion students, who already perceived sustainability as embedded in their curriculum, sought broader intercultural exposure: “*maybe more studies about abroad*” (PF1). Business students, meanwhile, desired stronger alignment between activities and disciplinary expectations, noting that aspects of the project felt “*a little bit different from what I expected*” (PBMGD1).

Staff emphasized the importance of training and partnership-based professional development. However, existing opportunities were limited and did not always equip staff with the competencies needed to design and manage sustainability-oriented hybrid programs effectively.

### ***Facilitation and Structural Coordination***

Students highlighted the need for more active facilitation and clearer coordination. Time constraints were frequently mentioned; as one fashion student observed, producing two garments in such a short period was “*kind of too short*” (PFGD1). Business students called for stronger instructional presence, including “*more involvement from the teachers... and mandatory briefing in the start*” (PBMGD2).

Staff similarly emphasized the importance of institutional prioritization and clearer project management structures. These perspectives suggest that immediate classroom facilitation and broader institutional coordination are mutually reinforcing conditions for sustainability-oriented learning.

### ***Program Design Improvements***

Participants also proposed adjustments to strengthen program impact. Students advocated for extended timelines and earlier engagement, suggesting that a full semester would allow “*more time to get to know the team members*” and develop stronger outputs (PFGD2). Others emphasized the need to shift participants’ mindset beyond completing a class requirement (PBMGD3) and to establish “*better discussion and better connection... from the very start*” (PBMGD4).

Staff recommendations focused on strengthening institutional capacity, particularly through professional development in project management, to “*enhance the impact of projects handled parallelly.*” Overall, both students and staff pointed toward the same underlying need for stronger alignment between pedagogical ambition and institutional support structures.

### **DISCUSSION**

Students experienced the hybrid mobility program as relational and modest in scope. Participation was largely shaped by pragmatic motivations, and learning gains centered on networking, comparative awareness, and introductory sustainability insights. Fashion students reaffirmed existing sustainability orientations embedded in their curriculum, while business students reported learning *new facts* rather than undergoing perspective shifts. Intercultural comparison generated awareness of different professional and sustainability contexts but did not consistently produce deeper mindset transformation.

These findings align with prior research showing that short-term mobility often results in incremental gains unless deliberately scaffolded (Hernández-Torrano et al., 2024; Jackson, 2014). Mobility alone does not guarantee transformative learning.

### **Institutional Framing and Meaning-Making**

Beyond individual experience, institutional framing shaped how participants interpreted the program. Students viewed the institution primarily as a provider of rare opportunities and project-based tasks, whereas staff framed mobility as a strategic instrument for sustainability and societal impact. Some students explicitly noted the need to move beyond a mindset of participating merely for class credit, echoing arguments that universities should foster holistic development (Wu et al., 2015).

This divergence reinforces recent ISM scholarship linking mobility to broader societal outcomes (Chankseliani & Kwak, 2025) while showing that such outcomes depend on structured learning conditions rather than participation alone.

## System Alignment and Structural Constraints

Enhancing sustainability learning requires stronger institutional alignment. Students emphasized clearer roles, more time, earlier engagement, and active facilitation. Staff highlighted the need for prioritization and project management capacity. These findings resonate with organizational systems theory (Adams & Lanford, 2021; Scott & Davis, 2015), suggesting that learning outcomes emerge from alignment among strategic priorities, managerial capacity, and pedagogical enactment.

At the regional level, ambitions associated with ASEAN mobility and institutional global aspirations were constrained by compressed timelines, coordination gaps, and limited scaffolding. This reflects a broader policy–practice gap in mobility initiatives (Bista et al., 2018), where strategic rhetoric can outpace delivery capacity. From a critical realist perspective (Almassri, 2024; Chankseliani & Kwak, 2025), student agency operated within these structural conditions, limiting cumulative and societal impact.

## Core Program Elements Shaping Sustainability Learning

A comparative analysis of student and staff accounts reveals that sustainability learning depended less on exposure or hybridity per se than on structured reflection and coordinated facilitation. Intercultural comparison functioned as a catalyst for awareness. However, without guided dialog and staged project design, insights remained descriptive rather than transformative.

Transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1997) helps clarify this pattern. While intercultural encounters created potential “*disorienting dilemmas*,” uneven embedding of reflective processes limited perspective transformation. Consistent with sustainability education research (Aamaas et al., 2019; Zhang & Gibson, 2021), intentional scaffolding and sequencing are critical, particularly within compressed timelines. Transformative pedagogy integrates emotion, cognition, and action (Zhang & Gibson, 2021), requiring structured reflection and facilitation to ensure that intercultural encounters translate into sustainability-oriented learning. Moreover, institutions must create enabling environments that align mobility initiatives with broader strategic missions and sustainability agendas (Tran & Phan, 2024).

Although COIL scholarship highlights the potential of virtual exchange to foster transformation (Davies-Vollum et al., 2023; Rakhshandehroo & Enkhtur, 2024), our findings suggest that hybrid formats do not automatically generate such outcomes. In transnational terms (Vertovec, 2009), the program created a cross-border space, yet without coordinated institutional scaffolding, idea circulation did not consolidate into sustained sustainability commitments.

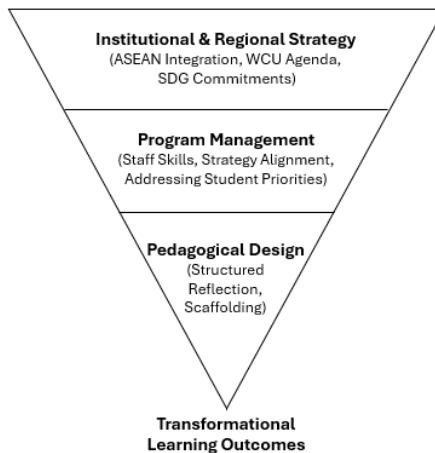
Across both immersion-based and hybrid formats within the institution, the depth of learning depended less on format intensity and more on the alignment of pedagogy, facilitation, and management. Hybrid mobility thus functions as an organizationally mediated learning environment rather than an inherently transformative experience.

## **Theoretical and Practical Contributions**

This study advances ISM scholarship in three ways. First, it integrates strategic, managerial, and pedagogical dimensions into a single explanatory framework. Whereas prior research often treats these levels separately, we conceptualize sustainability learning as emerging from their alignment. Second, we extend transformative learning scholarship by demonstrating how, in short-term hybrid mobility, transformational potential is mediated by alignment between reflection, role clarity, and institutional coordination. This shifts attention from exposure as a pedagogical trigger to the organizational infrastructures that sustain or constrain transformative outcomes. Third, we contribute to organizational systems perspectives in internationalization by showing that program management capacity plays a central role in translating strategic sustainability ambitions into lived student experiences.

Synthesizing these insights, we propose a multilayered model of sustainability learning in hybrid mobility programs. Institutional and regional strategies set direction, managerial capacity and project coordination provide enabling conditions, while pedagogical design, particularly reflective scaffolding, shapes immediate learning processes. Transformational outcomes emerge only when these layers are intentionally aligned.

Figure 1 synthesizes this multilayered alignment, illustrating how strategy, program management, and pedagogical design interact as interdependent conditions for sustainability-oriented transformation. By visualizing these layers as an inverted triangle, the model emphasizes that transformative learning rests upon coordinated institutional foundations.



**Figure 1: Inverted Triangle Model of Transformational Learning in Short-Term Hybrid Mobility**

## CONCLUSION

This study examined how hybrid ISM programs can foster transformative sustainability learning through the lived experiences of Indonesian students and staff. The findings indicate that student learning remained largely pragmatic and incremental, shaped by instrumental motivations, role ambiguity, compressed timelines, and limited structural support. Staff, meanwhile, emphasized the need for stronger alignment between strategic ambitions and program management.

These perspectives converge in a multilayered model in which strategy, program management, and pedagogy function as interdependent conditions for transformative learning. Institutional and regional sustainability agendas set direction, managerial capacity enables coordination and implementation, and pedagogical design shapes immediate learning processes. Without intentional alignment across these layers, mobility participation risks remaining relational rather than transformative.

For policymakers and higher education leaders in ASEAN countries, the findings suggest that sustainability-oriented mobility requires more than expanding exchange opportunities. Sustainability must be embedded strategically within internationalization frameworks and supported by clear learning outcomes aligned with the SDGs. At the institutional level, strengthening hybrid mobility requires clearer role allocation, staged timelines, embedded reflection, and enhanced faculty capacity in project management and sustainability pedagogy.

This study was limited to a single six-week hybrid program with a small participant sample, constraining insights into long-term impacts. Future research should examine multiple ISM programs across contexts, include broader stakeholder groups, and adopt longitudinal and mixed-method designs to assess lasting outcomes.

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## Author Contribution Statement

**Lea Simek:** *Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Resources, Validation, Writing: Original Draft, Writing: Review & Editing, Project Administration.* **Mita Adhisti:** *Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Resources, Validation, Writing: Original Draft, Writing: Review & Editing, Project Administration.*

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## **APPENDIX A: INDICATIVE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

### **Students**

1. Can you tell me about your experience in the program? What it was about and how you got involved?
2. What motivated you to join the program, and what were you hoping to gain from it?
3. How would you describe your learning journey during the program? What moments or experiences stand out to you?
4. What does “sustainability” mean to you? Has your understanding of it changed through your participation?
5. Were there times when you felt challenged or surprised in your learning about sustainability?
6. How did working with students from other backgrounds or countries influence your views on sustainability?
7. How do you see the university’s role in shaping your experience in this program? What kinds of support from staff or faculty stood out to you? Were there things you expected from the institution that weren’t there?
8. Looking back, what kinds of support would have made your learning easier, deeper, or more impactful? If you could suggest improvements for future programs, what would they be?

### **Staff**

1. Can you describe your role and responsibilities, especially in relation to mobility programs?
2. What mobility programs or initiatives have you worked on? What stands out about their design or delivery?
3. What policies or guidelines has the university set for mobility, and how do these shape your work?
4. How are sustainability or internationalization goals linked to the programs you support?
5. What opportunities have you had to build your skills for supporting mobility? How have these helped your work with students?
6. From your perspective, what kinds of learning do students gain through mobility? Have you seen links to intercultural or sustainability learning?
7. What challenges do you face in supporting mobility? What additional support or resources would help strengthen outcomes?

*Author bios*

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