



Preparing English Education Department Students for Overseas Scholarship Application

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Abstract

In order to improve a college's reputation and presentation, it is critical to encourage more graduate students to study abroad to obtain a better education that is significantly enhanced in terms of knowledge and skills. A community service program was developed to help English Language Education students at Institut Agama Islam Negeri Lhokseumawe who are having difficulty finding scholarships. The program aims to improve their knowledge and skills in taking the TOEFL test as well as writing supporting documents such as a CV, essay, motivation/recommendation letter, and study plan. A comprehensive training program was developed, including strategies for answering TOEFL questions, scholarship document writing techniques, and scholarship application simulations. Furthermore, resource persons were chosen from professionals with experience obtaining scholarships, and teaching materials were tailored to the needs of the participants to ensure that the training was successful. Before submitting their application, it is strongly recommended that they list as many accomplishments as possible, in addition to demonstrating their proficiency with the English language.

Abstrak

Peningkatan reputasi pendidikan perguruan tinggi yang lebih baik sangat penting untuk mendorong lebih banyak mahasiswa/alumni untuk belajar atau melanjutkan studi di luar negeri. Oleh karena itu, diperlukan sebuah program pengabdian masyarakat dikembangkan untuk membantu mahasiswa Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris di Institut Agama Islam Negeri Lhokseumawe yang mengalami kesulitan dalam mencari beasiswa. Program ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan pengetahuan dan keterampilan mereka dalam mengikuti tes TOEFL serta menulis dokumen pendukung seperti CV, esai, surat motivasi/rekomendasi, dan rencana studi. Program pelatihan yang komprehensif dikembangkan, termasuk strategi menjawab soal-soal TOEFL, teknik penulisan dokumen beasiswa, dan simulasi aplikasi beasiswa. Selain itu, narasumber dipilih dari kalangan profesional yang berpengalaman mendapatkan beasiswa, dan materi pelatihan disesuaikan dengan kebutuhan peserta untuk memastikan keberhasilan pelatihan. Sebelum



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mengirimkan aplikasi mereka, sangat disarankan agar mereka mencantumkan sebanyak mungkin prestasi yang pernah diraih, selain menunjukkan kemahiran mereka dalam berbahasa Inggris.

Introduction

In the effort to improve a university reputation and presentation, it is important to make more students go abroad to gain a better education that is significantly gained there in terms of knowledge and skill that they have (Berg et al., 2023). This will support students to deepen their knowledge of matters associated when they return to their homeland. In addition, the experience of learning and living abroad will make it easier for them to adapt to an increasingly globalized world (De Wit, H. & Altbach, 2021). However, perhaps taking into account the currency exchange rates in the international world, the international expenses of students have become quite heavy; therefore, students are required to excel and obtain scholarships from abroad. For this reason, the students of the English Teaching Department are provided with the necessary basics in preparing themselves for scholarships from a variety of international universities (Galloway et al., 2020).

The scholarships from various countries are an excellent opportunity. Some major overseas scholarships that have international application rates include: Fulbright (U.S.A), Manaaki New Zealand Scholarships (New Zealand), Chevening (UK), Australian Awards Scholarships (Australia), and LPDP from Indonesia Government (All Overseas). There are at least 3 main components whose criteria can play an important role for large universities to decide who they are to sign for scholarships. These three components consist of: academic abilities, talents/qualities that are not written in the CV, and motivation.

It is essential to provide sufficient support for the university students to compete for scholarships to pursue their study. Scholarships and/or international universities will be available based on one's knowledge and ability to meet the requirements in these three components. Four major strategies can be used to acquire these three components: developing knowledge of the system in the country, location, and existence of the prospective scholarship; developing knowledge of the applicant (scholarship application); demonstrating their ability to speak in the international language fluently (English); and understanding intercultural communication.

As more and more students are choosing to study at a university in a foreign country for a variety of reasons, including advances in communication, transportation, and information and technology that are shrinking the world, as well as awareness that "international knowledge" and "intercultural skills" not only look good on a resume but also make candidates more appealing to employers all over the world. Moreover, the ability to communicate in at least two languages makes job seekers more competitive candidates for international business dealings.

In addition, practical aspects such as obtaining recommendation letters, preparing for interviews, and scheduling application deadlines must not be overlooked. Letters of recommendation should be from lecturers who can provide detailed and positive feedback on the student's abilities and potential. Interview preparation, a frequently overlooked aspect, is critical for scholarships that include this step. Mock interviews and feedback sessions can help students communicate effectively under pressure and present themselves confidently.

Thus, preparing English Department students for overseas scholarship applications is a multifaceted process that necessitates a strategic approach. By providing comprehensive guidance and support, educational institutions can help their students successfully navigate the complexities of scholarship applications. This preparation not only improves their chances of receiving a scholarship, but also provides them with invaluable skills and experience for their academic and professional pursuits abroad.

Method

This study employed a learning process method known as participatory learning and action (PLA). Chamber (2002), one of the foremost proponents of PLA, described this method as “*a growing family of approaches, methods, attitudes and behaviours to enable people to share, enhance and analyse their knowledge of life and conditions and to plan, act and monitor, evaluate and reflect*” (p.3). This method is applied in a way that allows for participants' gradual self-learning by through small-group participation, sharing and discussion with a skilled facilitator (Larsen, Sewpaul & Hole, 2013). For the benefit of English Language Education students at Institut Agama Islam Negeri Lhokseumawe who are having difficulty finding scholarships, a community service program was developed to improve their knowledge and skills in taking the TOEFL test and writing supporting documents such as a CV, essay, motivation letter, and study plan.

The program began with careful planning, including an initial survey to assess the participants' abilities. Thus, a comprehensive training was created, which included strategies for answering TOEFL questions, scholarship document writing techniques, and scholarship application simulations. Furthermore, resource persons were chosen from professionals with experience obtaining scholarships, and teaching materials were tailored to the participants' needs to ensure that the training was effective (Brewer & Cunningham, 2023).

Following Larsen and Hole (2013), an accessible and scheduled online course was designed using the Zoom Online Meeting as the platform. Three experienced facilitators were assigned according to their chosen topics and expertise i.e. introduction to English proficiency test (TOEFL), designing academic CVs and drafting academic essays. During the implementation stage, the program began with an opening session designed to increase participant engagement and create a conducive learning environment. TOEFL training was thorough, beginning with a theoretical presentation and progressing to

hands-on practice sessions that emphasized the participants' ability to answer questions in a limited amount of time. Intensive workshops were also held to help participants write effective CVs, essays, motivation letters, and study plans for scholarship applications. During the workshop, participants had the opportunity to attend individual consultation sessions, where they could receive personalized guidance from resource persons on how to improve their documents.

Following the training, a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation phase was carried out. Every day, an assessment of the participants' comprehension was performed to determine how effective the material presented was. Furthermore, at the conclusion of the training, a simulated TOEFL test was administered to assess the participants' skill development. The quality of participants' CVs, essays, motivation letters, and study plans is thoroughly evaluated, with written feedback assisting them in identifying areas for improvement. Surveys are used to measure participant satisfaction with the program, and the results will be used to improve future programs. A final report is then created to provide accountability and recommendations for similar activities in the future.

The program's follow-up phase is also important, as it provides post-training mentoring through online discussion groups and consultation sessions. This is to ensure that participants remain motivated and prepared when applying for scholarships. In addition, trainees form an alumni network to support one another and share information about future scholarship opportunities. With this structured and comprehensive approach, the TOEFL and Scholarship Mentoring training program is expected to have a significant impact on increasing students' chances of receiving the desired scholarship.

Result and Discussion

Essays and Personal Statements

The personal statement, or a collection of essays, is a critical component of the scholarship application. In a highly competitive field, it is crucial to provide applicants with compelling narratives that illustrate their academic aspirations, experiences, and objectives. The trick is to tell stories that are true, reflect the reasons behind your career and study choices, and make you look good.

The subsequent list of inquiries will assist you in contemplating these matters prior to commencing your writing. First, your responses should be as specific as possible and should directly reference your research, study, and career objectives. Secondly, distribute the primary concepts or themes that you wish to communicate throughout the essays in a manner that is consistent with your extensive experiences and future interests. Third, the word limit must be adhered to, as scholarships will verify compliance. Fourth, construct a general essay and subsequently modify the tone and examples of experiences or evidence to align with the inquiries of various scholarships. A slightly different style may be preferred by each scholarship committee. Lastly, incorporate a concise introduction and conclusion that establish your objectives and

alludes to the themes explored in the subsequent essays.

During the sharing session, participants were triggered with the following questions and these questions also guided the discussion that followed with an extended sharing segment. The questions were: “What is the primary focus of your research?” In this part, please describe your research strategy, with a focus on your primary area of interest. Please provide a rationale for your intention to enroll in a coursework-based program. Further, “what academic objectives will your proposed research assist you in accomplishing?” and “what objectives do you anticipate achieving through your proposed research? We need to have professional objectives in our mind, and this is in line to what type of education are you pursuing to facilitate these objectives, and how does it align with your overarching strategy. Moreover, question like “what are the experiences and contributions that distinguish your application? and “what experiences from your professional or academic life”, would serve as compelling evidence for your application.

Letters of Recommendation and CV

It is imperative that students obtain substantial letters of recommendation (LoR) from individuals who are intimately acquainted with them. It is more probable that a recommender who is acquainted with you will compose a more persuasive letter than an individual who provides numerous recommendations and may not have a specific connection to you. The content of a LoR is situational and contingent upon the individual being recommended, even if the well-known individual you approach has a connection to your research theme and can write a strong letter. It is imperative that you communicate the same concerns to your recommenders as you did with your SOP (Standard Operating Procedure). The following phrase is frequently used to provide the recommenders with this guidance: “Typically, the primary focus of a letter of recommendation for a student should be the individual’s capacity to function in accordance with the individual’s circumstances in relation to the program of study and eventual academic and professional objectives.”

Inquire with the individuals you intend to approach as recommenders regarding their confidence in their ability to compose a compelling recommendation for you once the application deadline arrives. It is highly advised that you ascertain the extent of this recommendation-making capacity prior to requesting that an individual compose a LoR on your behalf. If any of your recommenders are from the professional job market (i.e., not from academic/university), attempt to persuade them to compose the LoR on their company letterhead. It is not necessary to include a company logo. Ensure that the recommenders are informed of the program’s approval. Request two (2) or three (3) letters of recommendation. Please provide recommendations for the information that you would like to include in the letters of recommendation that have been written for you by individuals who are well-acquainted with you. In order to assist them in composing compelling letters of recommendation for you, it is advisable to provide them with

additional information regarding your future plans and interests.

The poster is titled "An Online Workshop" and "How to prepare for overseas scholarship application". It features a blue and white color scheme with a background image of a modern building. The poster lists the following details:

- Opening Speech:** Dr. Zantiqati, M.Hum, Head of English Department.
- Mentors:**
 - Ella Yuzar, M.App.Ling, Alumni The University of Melbourne (LSPSP Scholarship)
 - Fadkar Rahman, M.App.Ling, Student Monash University (Australian Awards Scholarship)
 - Anis Maridiah, MA, TESOL, Alumni WISLA Community College & Pribadi Indonesia (Bright Scholarship & ARI)
- Moderator:** Humairah.
- Topics:** Introduction for TOEFL, Academic CVs, Academic Essays.
- Live Via:** Zoom. Meeting ID: 826 1034 9703, Passcode: DSP2021.
- Registration Link:** https://bit.ly/Form_Register_Webinar
- Calendar Icon:** February-March 2024.
- Contact Information:** @tbi.iainhokseumawe, @edsa_iainism, edsaiainism@gmail.com.

Figure 1. Invitation to join the sharing and discussing session.

Further, when you are writing your curriculum vitae, it is essential to pay attention to a few key aspects in order to give yourself the best possible chance of being awarded a scholarship. Creating a curriculum vitae that is customized to each individual scholarship application is one of the most important things you can do. This involves highlighting the experiences and skills that are most pertinent to the program that you are applying for. Furthermore, in order to make your document easy to read and visually appealing, you should make use of a professional, fresh, and straightforward CV template. Utilizing the numerous free templates that are accessible on the internet, such as those offered by Canva, can assist you in developing an optimized appearance.

To ensure that your readers are able to easily follow your academic, professional, and personal journey, you should ensure that the information contained in your curriculum vitae is organized in a chronological order (Giltrow, Gooding, & Burgoyne, 2021). When describing accomplishments, it is important to make use of powerful action verbs and provide specific examples. Additionally, it is preferable to quantify the impact through the use of numbers, percentages, or other numerical values. By doing so, you will be able to more clearly highlight your contributions and strengthen the impression that you give to those who evaluate scholarship applications.

English Proficiency Test and Cultural Adaptability

The figure below shows the on-going session in which a facilitator was leading a discussion on how to prepare for the language proficiency test. The topic also covered the topic of the introduction for the intercultural competence which is essential to study abroad preparation. Before starting the interactive segment, the facilitator was present materials using the power point slides to illustrate the content of the discussion. Relevant videos were also played during the presentation to keep the session to be engaging and visualizing. The participants seem to be enthusiastic with the discussion. Frequently, they were asked to share opinions and to come up with questions. At the end of the workshop, all three facilitators joined in the same room and gave a free talking session for the participants in which they took turns to ask questions or share their views regarding the topic.



Figure 2. Workshop presenters offer guidance and spaces for practice.

In order to qualify for a scholarship in an international setting, students must participate in numerous mentoring activities. One of these activities is the enhancement of their language proficiency. Scholarships are designed to benefit students who have demonstrated exceptional academic performance and possess unique interests. They typically necessitate a score that is adequate in the TOEFL, IELTS, or GRE, which are international language tests that are in accordance with the standards of universities abroad (Rahman, Amanda & Nada, 2023).

Nevertheless, students are typically unaware of the importance of these tests in relation to their educational background in the absence of genuine and personal guidance. The faculty specialist may provide individual examinations and miscellaneous class compositions and tasks to connect the students' academic background and English

subject. The International Relations Office is undoubtedly the responsibility of the English Department, the sole institution on campus that primarily offers English courses. This office should offer a diverse array of task forces that are both qualified and guaranteed to be proficient in English. The English Department's situation is unique in that overseas scholarships do not evaluate competitors solely on the basis of their academic capabilities. Ultimately, the students will be placed in the academic and social environment of foreign countries, where they will encounter a multitude of challenges that will require them to quickly adapt.

Additionally, the quality and aptitude of students who travel abroad frequently serve as ambassadors or representatives of their home countries. In other countries, behaviour that is considered traditional or provincial may be perceived as abnormal. Consequently, it is impossible for international students to circumvent the phenomenon of "culture shock." The students must acquire 'cultural awareness' and 'cultural sensitivity' (Leung et al., 2020) in addition to their language skills, which encompass three components: (1) demonstrating a certain degree of awareness of one's personal culture and the existence of cultural differences, (2) learning about the culture of another person in a productive manner, and (3) demonstrating a certain level of understanding of the "cultural implications" of personal and social interactions.

There are numerous factors that students must take into account when preparing to apply for scholarship programs and grants from abroad. Applicants should take the international/public tests and submit the certificates as a "gateway" to their preferred destination, among other factors. This initial domain evaluates cultural adaptability and English language proficiency through the submission of at least one certificate of language proficiency test, including the TOEFL, IELTS, PTE-Academic, or iBT (JLPT for Japan). Bureaucratically, a sufficient score is determined by the comparative rate of the tests.

The 'measuring stick' is language proficiency, so applicants are encouraged to prepare themselves thoroughly in this regard. Consequently, this section pertains to the language proficiency assessments mandated by various nations, or, in certain instances, an English placement test. Computer-based English entry tests are implemented by numerous institutions. This is merely a fundamental assessment of one's English proficiency. A more recent development has been the implementation of formal English proficiency tests, including the IELTS and TOEFL. The administrators of the test administer standardized English tests in more than 100 countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. The objective of these assessments is to evaluate the following: reading, writing, speaking, and listening in the English language. In certain instances, students may be excused from providing language proficiency evidence due to the fact that their change program waives it.

English language proficiency is essential for studying abroad and an intensive preparation for it could determine for an academic success, especially in a country where English is used as medium of instruction. (Rose, Curle, Aizawa, & Thompson, G. (2020).

Typically, applicants are required to submit proof of their scores from a standardized language test, such as the TOEFL or IELTS, as the sole initial indicator of their language proficiency level when submitting their application forms to host institutions. Language proficiency is assessed through a variety of criteria during the application review process, such as the student's statement of purpose, the total score, and scores in other subjects (e.g., reading, writing, speaking, grammar, vocabulary).

Some universities waive the TOEFL or IELTS requirement for applicants who have earned a bachelor's degree from an English-speaking university in an approved English-speaking country (Rahman, Amanda & Nada, 2023). It is important to note that the test score is a significant component of the language requirement, despite the fact that it is not considered a final measure. In certain instances, universities administer their own English language assessments, such as the University of Cambridge English Language Assessment. Listening, reading, writing, and speaking comprise the four sections of the IELTS examination. The maximum marks for each section are as follows: 9 for both listening and reading, 8 for writing, and 7 for the speaking score.

To be eligible for an overseas scholarship, you should also demonstrate your ability to function effectively in a new culture (Haas, 2018) as it is crucial for increasing potential students' competence (Lokkesmoe, Kuchinke, & Ardichvili, 2016). Scholarships for study abroad often require evidence of cultural adaptability and sensitivity. For example, there are five distinguishing characteristics of "international students": a positive attitude, organization, confidence, open-mindedness, and strong language skills. Furthermore, the promotional materials for international internships and studentships state that the successful applicant must demonstrate adaptability, a local and international perspective, the ability to collaborate with people from various cultural backgrounds, and a respect for diversity. Furthermore, the entrepreneurship and synergy fostered by overseas scholarships are augmented by the experience that students in American and British universities gain from distant-water companies and agencies. We can also argue that prospective students should be familiar with cultural adaptability and domestic expertise when they arrive later, viewing this trait as differences in behavior, values, and customs that define a specific region.

When confronted with an alternative system, the student must follow the academic society's current knowledge in their field of interest. He must also be aware of the cultural values that are promoted. One of the experiences that overseas returnees have is the cultural diversity with which the student will interact after moving abroad. Cultural distinctions emerge as a result of students' affiliation with various academic societies and the university cultures of their respective regions. As a result, international students are frequently exposed to a wide range of academic concepts, including expectations for role function, communication, and behavior. They realize that the "correct" approach to a task depends on where it will be carried out. To ensure a smooth transition into the international academic environment, attitude necessitates global discourse. Unfortunately, the benefits of participating in universities, particularly for

those who have forfeited scholarships, are rarely recognized.

Conclusion

Through the dissemination of information, workshop, and practices to the English Department of Institut Agama Islam Negeri Lhokseumawe, the purpose of this community service paper is to assist students in preparing for the submission of scholarship applications for international study. In light of the broad scope of these scholarships, educational institutions are obligated to be ready to provide assistance to prospective applicants throughout the entirety of the application process. In order to provide students with the most effective assistance possible in gaining admission to the most prestigious universities located in other countries, we emphasized the significance of English lecturers participating in the process. This was done in accordance with the best practices that are known in this field.

The following are some considerations that students in the English Department might want to take into account. The first step for students is to assess their chances of being awarded a scholarship, given that the process requires time, effort, and dedication that they must put forth. It is recommended that individuals who believe they have prepared the application continue to broaden their international experience and take part in activities that demonstrate significant potential for leadership. Before submitting their application, it is strongly suggested that they list as many accomplishments as they possibly can, in addition to demonstrating their proficiency with the English language.

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