

MSAI Policy Document
**RECOGNITION OF EXCHANGE PROGRAMMES BY
EDUCATIONAL COUNCILS**

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Policy Statement

Introduction: India has emerged as one of the fastest-growing nations in the world, with remarkable advancements in the field of healthcare. The increasing number of medical students in the country presents a significant opportunity to capacitate them in a manner that equips them with the necessary tools to tackle the challenges that may lie ahead. Hence, it is imperative to curate a medical education system that provides students with optimal learning experiences. By leveraging the benefits of globalization in healthcare, India can enhance its healthcare infrastructure and workforce. Exchange programs for Indian medical students, therefore, represent a vital asset that, if duly recognized and explored, can bring about significant progress in the development of future doctors. Given the high level of sophistication and complexity associated with medical education, it is crucial to provide Indian medical students with a comprehensive understanding of global health issues. This approach will ultimately produce better-equipped medical professionals to serve the country.

MSAI position:

In 2016, the Medical Students Association India (MSAI) introduced an academic exchange program in collaboration with the International Federation of Medical Students Association (IFMSA) Standing Committee on Professional (SCOPE) and Research Exchange (SCORE). Over the years, this initiative has provided more than 800 Indian medical students with the opportunity to participate in clinical or research internships abroad for a period of four weeks. The feedback received from the students, as reflected in their testimonials and post-exchange evaluation forms, has been overwhelmingly positive, attesting to the impact of these programs on their personal and professional growth.

These exchange programs have enabled Indian medical students to experience intercultural learning, research methodologies, and clinical skills from a global perspective, while fostering cooperation and solidarity among participants. Moreover, the academic quality of these exchanges has been consistently high, as evidenced by the positive feedback received from students.

However, the coordination of these exchange programs has also highlighted particular challenges and barriers participants face. Therefore, MSAI advocates for greater recognition of exchange programs for Indian medical students and the need for further development and facilitation of these programs within India. Such initiatives have the potential to create better future doctors, who possess a sense of solidarity, open-mindedness, adaptability, and the ability to contribute to the development of the Indian healthcare system.

Call to Action:

MSAI calls on:

1. The Government to:
 - Include a clause giving students the opportunity to experience the healthcare system in a different country for a month.
 - The scope of elective postings should be in foreign universities, and exchange programs as offered by MSAI India should be included.
 - Provide financial support to medical students applying for these programs.
 - Draft policies that actively promote medical schools to become part of such programs.
 - Provide recognition of National Exchange Programs from the Public Health sector.

2. National Health Organizations and Medical Associations to:
 - Advocate for the importance of exchanges for medical students to share and exchange culture, knowledge, and experience tends to prepare future healthcare workers to work in a global environment.
 - Provide funding and investment opportunities to youth-led organizations working on Student exchanges and provide scholarships to support students whose engagement in these programs/opportunities is restricted by financial barriers.
 - Endorse and accredit learning opportunities like IFMSA SCOPE exchanges.

3. Healthcare education institutions/Universities to:
 - To promote a more liberal and flexible learning environment to optimize the quality and growth of future healthcare professionals.
 - Endorse and accredit learning opportunities like IFMSA SCOPE exchanges.
 - [Create official partnerships with Organizations and institutions that organize Student Mobility programs such as IFMSA and its National Member Organizations]
 - Help in promoting IFMSA Exchanges as well as raising research awareness and opportunities.
 - Offer financial support in the form of grants to increase the accessibility of the international exchanges.
 - Offer attendance hassle free to the students for the entire duration of exchange and also consider the time taken in visa processing.
 - To host exchange students and promote intercultural learning.

4. Doctors to:
 - Advocate for international exchange opportunities in their respective institutions.
 - Volunteer to tutor exchange students.
 - Take part in the organization and logistics of Student exchange opportunities and help improve the cultural aspect of exchanges.
 - MSAI Calls on Medical Students to:
 - Participate in Exchange Programs, thus improving their academic course and formation.
 - Advocate for international exchange opportunities in their respective institutions.
 - Set an example during their international exchange Programs and share their experiences with their peers and colleagues.

Background information:

According to a study by (Mohammad M. Alshardan & Abdulrahman J. Sabbagh from King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences, King Fahad Medical City, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia) in which a total of 86 students were studied via a cross sectional survey study. The study group was divided into Group A (participating in Exchange Programs) and Group B (non-participating in Exchange Programs) with group B acting as a control.

The majority of students in Group A believed that the program improved their clinical confidence when dealing with patients (82.5%), their clinical skills (85%), their communication skills (87%) and their involvement with the medical team (80%). Most of the students who participated in the program also agreed that it improved their clinical knowledge (87.5%), improved their grades in college (45%) and affected their future career choices. More than one-half of the students stated that the program improved their awareness of research. The exchange program significantly improved academic performance and research awareness from the participants' viewpoint. (Table 1)

Questions	Agree		Neutral		disagree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Improvement of confidence when dealing with patients	33	82.5	3	7.5	4	10
Improvement of confidence of participant's clinical skills	34	85	5	12.5	1	2.5
Improvement of participant's communication skills	35	87.5	4	10	1	2.5
Improvement of participant's involvement in the medical team	32	80	5	12.5	3	7.5
Improvement of confidence of participant's clinical knowledge	35	87.5	4	10	1	2.5
Improvement of participant's grades	18	45	15	37.5	7	17.5
Raised the participant's research awareness	21	52.5	7	17.5	12	30
Program affected the choice of participating in a local or abroad residency program	31	77.5	4	10	5	12.5

Table 1

It also showed a significant improvement in the student's perception of their academic performance compared with the improvement in research awareness ($P=0.028$). Compared with the students in group B, the students in group A were more certain that the program improved their confidence in their clinical performance, academic performance and awareness of research, and that the program affected their choice of future specialty ($P<0.0001$) (Table 2)[1]

Groups	Clinical Performance	Academic Performance and Research awareness	Choice of future speciality
Group A (Participating , n=40)	16.3 +/- 2.5	11 +/- 2	3.6 +/- 1.3
Group B (Non-Participating , n=46)	8.3 +/- 1.8	6.8 +/- 2.1	1.2 +/- 0.7

Table 2

International exchange programs: benefits on communication and effective doctor-patient relationships

Based on a study conducted to analyse the learning effect for German medical students from the LMU Munich, Munich, Germany, of participation in the medical exchange program with Jimma University, Jimma, Ethiopia which allowed the effects of exchange programs to be given a theoretical grounding by considering them in light of Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory. The process of interacting with local people raises awareness of the difference between one's attitudes and opinions and those of the local people, i.e. learning is triggered by differences. Participants were confronted with challenges and situations of crisis, which resulted in a learning process.

This is particularly evident in regard to the doctor-patient relationship. The associated "crisis" was the participants' questioning of their own position by reflecting on that of the Ethiopian people. Therefore, this process can be characterised as mirroring. There is a change in perspective, which plays an important role in successful learning, especially in sociocultural contexts. Through the experience of a different kind of doctor-patient relationship in Ethiopian hospitals, German participants gained an insight into the importance of this area for medical practice.

Thus, the exchange program participants benefited in areas of competence that appear to be particularly important for clinical practice. Both areas that showed significant outcomes—the doctor-patient relationship and the professional interaction with other doctors—are characterised by interaction. The close connection between the learning process itself and what is being learned is noteworthy because it shows that the participants improved their interaction through interacting, i.e. through sociocultural learning [2].

Discussion:

Impact of Medical Student Exchange Programs on Student's Clinical and Research Performance :

Based on the above studies the conclusion drawn is that Medical student exchange programs positively affects at least students' perception of their confidence, attitude and future career choices. And largely help improve their :

1. Clinical skills and knowledge.
2. Communication Skills

3. Team building and cooperation within a medical team.
4. Academic performance.
5. Research Awareness.

Impact of Medical Student Exchange Programs on Doctor Patient Relationship.

This is particularly evident in regard to the doctor-patient relationship, Medical student exchange programs compels students to go through circumstances where they question their own position by reflecting on that of the patients of the host country. This process can be characterised as mirroring as per the study mentioned above. There is a change in perspective, which plays an important role in successful learning, especially in sociocultural contexts. Hence, students clearly show improved skills in doctor-patient relationship and the professional interaction with other doctors which are ultimately characterised by interaction with different people and that is what exchange programs uniquely provide [2].

Why Indian Medical students should take up Exchange Programs:

- **Low costs of studying abroad:**
 - Perhaps the most appealing characteristic of student exchange programs is their low cost. Many Indian students are unable to afford to study abroad since it costs thousands of dollars. When students participate in a student exchange program, they can have the experience of studying and living in a foreign nation for a fraction of the expense [3]
- **Experiencing different styles of education**
 - Every country has its unique method of imparting knowledge to students. When a student from one country goes overseas, they are exposed to different ways of learning, which they are likely to bring back to their own.
- **Exchange Creates Lifelong Benefits for Participants:**
 - Medical students who participate in student exchange programs benefit from exposure to the values, practices, and ways of doing business in their host country. This exposure is provided by teachers, students, families, and volunteers from all walks of life. As a result, the communities that host the exchange participants form their own international alliances and gain a better understanding of various cultures and beliefs. This experience leads to personal growth and development, as well as a true world outlook.
- **Exchanges and Personal Growth:**
 - Living on your own in a foreign place, away from home and your parents' protective gaze, helps medical students grow as individuals. Participating in a student exchange program improves self-confidence and self-esteem, develops decision-making and independent thinking skills, and increases knowledge and acceptance of diverse cultures and viewpoints.

- **Exchanges Bring Resources to Communities:**
 - Medical students participating in student exchange programs bring back valuable experience and skills. These programs significantly improve the quality of human resources, as the dynamic and challenging conditions faced during the exchange lead to substantial personal gains in terms of knowledge and skills acquired. The knowledge and skills gained from the exchange program can be shared with their peers, thus benefiting the community as a whole.

- **Global Health and Exchange Programs:**
 - Global health is a fundamental aspect of medical education. Despite growing interest, medical education programs worldwide have been unable to provide sufficient exposure to global health issues. Student exchange programs offer an excellent opportunity to develop international health education for medical students and professionals. By bringing together interested individuals and providing the necessary resources and platforms, it is possible to create programs that offer exciting global health education opportunities for medical students and professionals.

Conclusion:

From a medical student organization's perspective, student exchange programs offer a wide range of benefits. These programs provide an excellent opportunity for medical students to gain experience in a foreign country while minimizing the financial burden. Student exchange programs also expose medical students to different learning styles and increase their knowledge and acceptance of diverse cultures and viewpoints. This experience leads to personal growth and development and a true world outlook. By participating in student exchange programs, medical students can also bring back valuable experience and skills that benefit their communities as a whole. Finally, student exchange programs offer an excellent opportunity to develop global health education for medical students and professionals.

Reference:

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3. <https://www.giet.edu/post/all-you-need-to-know-about-student-exchange-programs/>
4. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7580321/#ref3>

