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Effectiveness of the online exchange program for occupational therapy students to cultivate an international perspective

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Background: The significance of international academic and cultural exchange programs has increased in the occupational therapy (OT) field. In September 2022, an online international exchange program was conducted between Department of Occupational Therapy, Tokyo Metropolitan University (TMU) and Occupational Therapy Study Program, University of Indonesia (UI). This study aims to examine the effectiveness and usability of online international exchange program by analysing how the program influences students' self-recognition, participation motivation, and international perspective.

Method: The 1st and 2nd-year TMU and UI students were invited to join the six sessions (5 days) program. It consisted of lectures on OT and students' presentations. Video application system and some online network services were used for giving lectures, sharing information and communicating with each other on- and off-class. In order to examine the effectiveness and usability of the program, two surveys were conducted; 1) Questionnaires survey: International Posture (IP) questionnaire (15 items) before and after the program, and Questionnaire on the program (program expectation, 15 items) before the program, and Student Evaluation of Educational Quality Questionnaire (SEEQ) (30 items) after the program. 2) Group interview: participants were asked about the program reflection and self-recognition. Questionnaires data was analysed by descriptive analysis, and interview data was analysed qualitatively following the thematic analysis method. This study was approved by the ethics committee of the institution researchers' affiliate. There is no COI status to be disclosed.

Result: Total 10 (5 TMU, 5 UI) students joined the program. Seven students answered the questionnaires. Five students' IP scores increased, and three decreased. From Questionnaire on the program and SEEQ, students evaluated that the program contributed to improving academic learning skills and knowledge. However, they reported that interaction activities with partner university students did not reach a satisfactory level. Eight students joined the interview and mentioned reasons for joining the program: interests in English and overseas study, learning about OT. As an overview reflection, all participants expressed a sense of achievement even though they felt assignment load, English communication were a bit hard to follow. They preferred interactive communication among students and independent activities with minimum instruction for an effective educational structure.

Discussion: This online program could give an effective opportunity for professional and academic learning skills, English learning, and cultivating international perspective in OT field. The mutual communication and social interaction activities could be more actively included to improve the online program to develop an international perspective and to gain more diverse perspectives on their studies and research.