

Beyond the Exchange: The Transformative Way to Global Learning and Personal Growth in Taiwan

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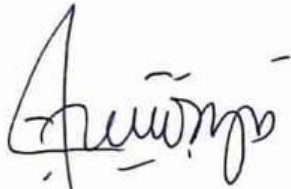


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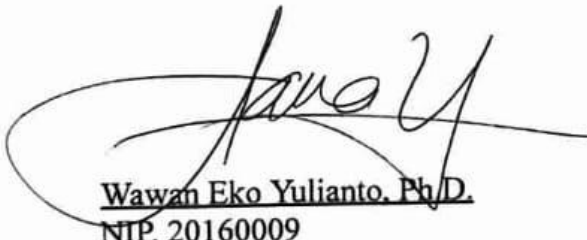
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ABSTRACT

Beyond the Exchange: The Transformative Way to Global Learning and Personal Growth
in Taiwan (July 2025)

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This creative nonfiction thesis takes a reflective narrative approach to explore a transformative five-month student exchange experience in Taiwan. It explores five key themes, including the personal and academic journey, cultural and educational appreciation, emotional and intellectual growth, self-transformation, and experiential learning. The work applies relevant educational theories, such as Mayer's multimedia learning principles, realia, and personalization, to real-life classroom experiences in Taiwan. In addition to sharing academic and cultural insights, this thesis also reflects on the writing process itself. It highlights the challenges of combining academic theory with personal storytelling and explains how feedback helped to refine the narrative structure. Furthermore, it emphasises the transformative growth in self-awareness, adaptability, and confidence that happened during the exchange program.

Keywords : student exchange, cross-cultural experience, experiential learning, reflective writing

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

The International Credit Transfer (ICT) program connects Universitas Ma Chung and Da-Yeh University. Joining the ICT program felt like starting a new journey. It took me to a different country, where I experienced classrooms, cafeterias, and discussions that changed how I viewed learning and culture. It brings myself to a new environment that I had previously met only through books, television, or social media posts.

Through the ICT program, I could transfer academic credits back to my home university, dependent upon mutual agreement between the institutions involved (MoECRT, 2023). Without this program, my experience in Taiwan would have been only being a tourist, missing the wider relation and insights that come from engaging with the local culture and educational system.

When arriving in Taiwan, I immediately saw the differences in environment and culture. This journey was the start of a new chapter in my life that was filled with unfamiliar streets, new friendships in a new environment, language barriers, and cultural habits that helped me grow into a new version of myself. At first, my goal was academic success, but as time passed, I began to befriend students from diverse cultural backgrounds, each giving unique needs and perspectives to our interactions.

I joined the program not only to earn credits but also to gain a fresh perspective on education and life. I wanted to challenge my comfort zone and experience new learning approaches, daily life situations, and cultural habits firsthand.

During my five-month stay as part of the ICT student exchange program, I met some people who were neither my teachers nor my friends, yet they contributed to my learning experience. In Taiwan's peaceful atmosphere, I gained more than just academic knowledge. The warmth and kindness of the Taiwanese people made me feel welcome and left a lasting impression on me.

I also had challenges like trying to order lunch in Mandarin while the seller explained the menu in English as best they could. I also learned from teachers who used hands-on methods. Each day taught me something new about another culture and how I can adjust to different situations.

While the tea stands and lantern-lit streets caught my heart, my curiosity raised beyond these experiences. I became intrigued by the educational system in Taiwan and made me understand how it ran. How did teachers build connections with students in classes conducted in both English and Mandarin, especially when not all local students were fluent in English? What did it truly mean for them to "understand"?

During my time in Taiwan, international students, including myself, participated in service-learning activities. While teaching in nearby elementary schools, some of my Taiwanese friends helped translate the material from English to Mandarin. I realized that this journey was about more than just a new teaching-learning experience, but it was about the key principles of cross-cultural exchange.

I found how life in Taiwan impacted people's perspectives, behaviors, and aspirations. I also learned that their education system is more than just textbooks, but it includes the conversations, laughter, and friendships that grow despite language barriers, all of which are key components of cross-cultural exchange.

Learning from real-life situations proved to be a simpler yet more valuable experience. Every interaction with my Taiwanese friends and lecturers provided me with new insights. This journey was not just about earning credits, but it was an essential part of my personal growth and the exploration of my goals and aspirations.

1.2. Project Objectives

This creative nonfiction thesis wants to go beyond simple storytelling of places and photographs. The objective is to develop a comprehensive story detailing the experiences I gained at Da-Yeh University as an ICT student. The following goals guide this project:

1.2.1. Narrate My Personal and Academic Journey

This thesis seeks to provide a reflective perspective on my life's journey by combining my personal experiences with academic learning. I want to share my struggles and successes, allowing readers to know the beauty of Taiwan's diverse landscapes and the challenges of adapting to a new educational environment.

1.2.2. Appreciate Taiwanese Culture and Educational Values

This work looks at how culture and education in Taiwan affect the classroom. It focuses on teaching methods that use real objects to help students learn language and concepts, which I found very impactful. By sharing my experiences, I want to show how these methods helped me understand better and made me more interested in learning.

1.2.3. Reflect on Emotional and Intellectual Growth

This project is a space for thinking about feelings. It looks at how facing different cultures, feeling homesick, and being involved in school and community work helped me become stronger and more understanding. Living in another country was tough, with many ups and downs and times when I missed home. These challenges were not just challenges to learning, but they were also important experiences that helped me grow as a student and as a better person.

1.2.4. Explore the Redefinition of Self Through Travel

Instead of telling a straight story, this project looks at how living and studying in another country changed who I am. A key moment for me was when I took part in a Christmas singing competition during a Christmas event for the Faculty of Language.

This experience made me see that learning happens outside of the classroom too. It was through these surprising moments that I understood the bigger purpose of education that includes everyone and engaged learners in an interesting way.

1.3. Project Significance

I hope to encourage teachers and students to recognize study abroad programs as transformative experiences that can give their lives a positive impact. By writing my story, I want to inspire others to explore the world around them and embrace the opportunity to learn about different cultures, especially to take the chance to study abroad.

This work is meant to inspire students, teachers, and anyone who hasn't studied abroad or visited Taiwan. It also addresses those who might not understand the feelings

involved in studying in another country. I shared my thoughts on missing home, adapting to new experiences, and being strong emotionally.

This work shows that studying abroad is not just about getting grades, but it's also about handling challenges, being brave, and growing as a better and mature person. I'm highlighting small but meaningful moments of learning, the work highlights the effects of global education on both our minds and hearts.



CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1. Theoretical Framework

Using real-life objects in language learning really improved my education. Realia means bringing actual items into the classroom to make learning more engaging and easier to understand. Bhatti et al. (2021) pointed out that using real objects in language lessons helps students stay motivated and remember what they learn, especially when it comes to grammar and vocabulary. I remember this well from a small class called Fun English Grammar, which had about fifteen students. Instead of just using textbooks, the teacher brought in game materials, like a special board game with vocabulary cards and colorful pawns, to help us practice grammar. Each turn, we had to make a sentence based on where we landed, and the teacher gave us immediate feedback. This fun and hands-on approach helped me understand grammar better. It was through interacting with objects, classmates, and the game rules that grammar really made sense to me. I felt more confident during tests and understood how grammar works in real conversations. This experience showed me how effective realia can be in making lessons more meaningful and memorable.

Understanding my experiences in Taiwan can be significantly enhanced through several educational theories that provide insight into how learning shows in diverse environments. One of the most relevant theories is Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, which says that learners understand better when information is presented using both words and pictures (Mayer, R. E., & Fiorella, L. (2021). This theory explains why certain classes I attended in Taiwan felt more engaging. For example, when

visual aids, such as slideshows and videos, were incorporated into lessons, I felt less overwhelmed and quickly understood the material. The effective use of multimedia resources in my classes not only caught my attention but also facilitated a deeper understanding of complex concepts, especially in a new learning environment.

Other than multimedia learning, the principles of segmentation and personalization added a more important role in my educational experience. According to Mayer (2020), the segmentation principle suggests that breaking down complex material into smaller and manageable parts helps students understand and absorb information more effectively. Personalization, on the other hand, refers to making educational matters to meet students' needs according to their diverse backgrounds while using a conversational, friendly, and easy-going manner. It makes it easy for both international and local students to feel more relatable. In Taiwan, my lecturers often adapted their teaching styles to connect with students from diverse backgrounds, which increased my motivation to learn and participate actively in class. For example, the 10-minute breaks after each credit hour allowed my classmates and me to process the information better before moving on to new topics, ensuring we understood and remembered the material better.

Bilingualism and translanguaging theories also resonate deeply with my experiences in Taiwan. Translanguaging, as stated by Liu, Lo, and Lin (2020), involves the use of multiple languages in communication and learning, giving people the chance to use all of their language skills. When the lecturers switched between English and Mandarin in class, it made me realize the rich diversity of culture and how important it is to be flexible in how you talk to people. This experience broadened my understanding of language as a dynamic

tool for connection and communication. It also highlighted the importance of cultural context in shaping communication styles and learning processes.

In summary, these educational theories, such as the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, the principles of segmentation and personalization, the use of realia, and translanguaging, provide valuable frameworks for understanding my experiences while learning in Taiwan. They show how effective teaching strategies can improve engagement, create meaningful connections, and foster personal growth in a multicultural learning environment. By reflecting on these theories, I can better appreciate the impact of my time in Taiwan on my educational journey and personal development.

2.2. Formal Framework

Travel memoirs are a unique work that often blend narrative with reflection. It's allowing writers to talk deeply about their personal growth through lived experiences in foreign cultures. This creative thesis uses a reflective tone, which is important for telling the personal development I had during my time in Taiwan. The travel memoir format is particularly interesting to me because it emphasizes personal growth and gives me a way to talk about the unsaid things and thoughts that come up when I have new experiences. It allows me to share not just the events of my journey, but also the insights and reflections that came from it.

The narrative structure of travel memoirs typically involves three key elements, awareness, conflict, and realization. These things show up in my journey in Taiwan, where I had to deal with cultural differences and many challenges that helped me grow as a person. For example, I learned more about other cultures and ways of life by spending more

time with my Taiwanese and international friends. I also heard that they were having trouble with English. They really want to learn English and make friends with people from other countries, but sometimes their poor English makes them nervous to talk to people or actively participate in class.

Characterization of the self is also an important aspect of memoir writing, as it allows readers to connect with the author on a personal growth. In my work, I show my developing identity as I adapt to new environments and challenge my comfort zone. This journey of self-discovery isn't just about the things I did and saw outside of the class, it's also about the changes I went through inside of myself. The tone of my writing shows how challenging my life has been by showing both the good and bad things about living in a different country.

Moreover, the setting of Taiwan plays an important role in shaping my understanding of culture and education. The vibrant landscapes, rich traditions, and diverse communities I met provided a background for my reflections. Each experience, whether it was walking the streets of Changhua, Yuanlin, Taichung, or Kaohsiung or coming to local festivals, contributed to my growth and understanding of what it means to be part of a global community. This experience turns my travel memoir into more than just a story of what happened, but it turns into a deep look at identity, interaction and how living abroad can change people.

My personal journey has been told in the travel memoir genre, which allows me to combine story with reflection and lead to lots of experiences. I want people to have a better understanding of my time in Taiwan and how it changed my life by focusing on the themes of awareness, conflict, and realization.

2.3. Studies on Earlier Works

To write this reflective memoir, I looked at two earlier works that relate to my growth while studying abroad. Darcy Palder's essay "New Cities, Important Experiences" (2022) and Kristin Addis' article "How Study Abroad in Taiwan Inspired Me to Start My Own Travel Company" (2023) inspired me. They helped me understand how everyday experiences abroad can lead to personal growth.

Palder's essay (2022) talks about her time studying in Hong Kong and how being in a new, culturally rich place changed her emotionally and intellectually. She explains how her new surroundings made her think differently about identity, communication, and belonging. This really connects with me. At first, I saw my student exchange to Taiwan as just a new academic chance.

But same like Palder, I realized it was more than that, it was a time for discovery. By exploring different cultures, living in a place with a new language I should use, making friends from various cultural backgrounds, and sometimes feeling lost, I began to reflect on how I learn and who I am. Palder's detailed descriptions reminded me that small moments, like classroom talks and daily routines, can give us deep insights into ourselves.

Kristin Addis's article (2023), which also focuses on her time in Taiwan, resonated with my experience too. She pointed out that important lessons often happen outside the classroom, like in shops, on the streets, and through random conversations. One part that stood out was how a simple chat with a street vendor inspired her to start a travel company.

This reminded me of my own experiences at campus events, like the Christmas carol competition. Singing English songs with classmates in the park seemed fun at first,

but later I realized it showed me that learning a language and connecting with others can happen beyond textbooks, through laughter, music, and shared experiences.

Addis's friendly writing style influenced how I wrote mine. Her articles felt honest and relatable, not academic or distant. This encouraged me to write more sincerely. Like Addis, I learned that feelings of confusion, amazement, frustration, and joy were not distractions from my story, but part of it. Whether I was dealing with homesickness, overcoming a language barrier, or enjoying time with new friends at a singing competition in the cold Taiwanese weather, these emotions helped me understand what studying abroad truly means.

In this way, both Palder and Addis's works showed me that memoirs don't need big events to be meaningful. They reveal honesty, small changes, and emotional aspects. Their writings helped me see that my journey doesn't have to be dramatic to be impactful, I just need to reflect honestly on what moves, challenges, and changes me. That's what I wanted to include in this creative project, not just memories, but the emotional truth behind them.

CHAPTER III

PROCESS OVERVIEW

3.1. Project Description

This creative nonfiction thesis shares my five-month journey as an ICT awardee at Da-Yeh University in Taiwan. It emphasizes how I adapted to a new culture, reflected on my experiences, and explored new teaching methods like using real-life objects and bilingual instruction. It is not simply an ordinary story of events, but it is told as an exploration of cross-cultural learning, self-discovery, and personal growth. The thesis wants to show real-life experiences that reflect broader themes of multiculturalism in education, adaptation in foreign environments, and the good sides of intercultural connections.

Rather than writing simple travel reports, this work combines reflective storytelling with educational insights, creating a lot of experiences that involve a multicultural environment. This journey brings to life because it happens between peaceful classrooms, aesthetic street ways, cheerful elementary students, quiet moments of solitude in the dormitory, all of them serving as a perfect background for exploration, reflection and personal growth. I began to experience a new understanding of learning, communication, and living abroad.

A small part of each story shows personal growth and how even ordinary things can give me new and deep insights, such as enjoying local dishes like cold noodles or duck rice, walking down the streets, or finding out how to communicate across a language barrier. These small interactions also became my journey's important points, because it's highlighting the connection and empathy in new environments. Through this work, I hope

to motivate readers to appreciate the challenge of their own educational journeys and how important it is to value different points of view.

This project is meant to show the struggle it can get to study in a multicultural environment by using personal experiences and more ideas like culture exchange and new ways of teaching that involve the students. The writer wishes to make people interested and open-minded, so that they will try something new and appreciate the beauty of cultural diversity. I think it could make people think about their own experiences and how talking to people from other cultures can help us understand the world better.

3.2. Formal Elements of the Work

Each moment reflects a different phase in the process of realizing something: admiration, confusion, growth, and understanding. A good example of the exciting and confusing moment is the crowded night markets, because we have to get used to a new culture. There are so many sights like claw machine games, sounds like shooting range games, and smells like street-food stalls that it's hard to know where to start. The peaceful dorm room is a perfect spot for self-reflection and healing because I can deal with all the feelings and thoughts that come up during this life-changing journey.

This creative thesis is like a reflection on a vacation. As an exchange student, I'm having a hard time in Taiwan, but it's all personally and academically important to me. There are important events that could have happened in the classroom, during service-learning, or in everyday life. Each part shaped how I saw about language, learning, and getting to know people from different cultural backgrounds.

3.3. Stages of Creation

3.3.1. Stage 1: Initial Framing and Exploration

In the beginning of my writing journey, I focused on writing everything in a chronological order. I started from the days leading up to my trip to Taiwan, describing my arrival at the airport where my friends and I got lost. I wrote about my first experience riding the HSR train, which was exciting but also a bit funny when I stumbled as the train suddenly sped up. I also remembered our first night in the dorm, where the International Relations staff greeted us with a delicious meal of chicken katsu. At that time, I was just recalling events as they happened, without much thought or reflection.

This process of describing my experiences helped me gather the basic details of my journey. However, I soon realized that not every event was important to the main themes I wanted to discuss. I didn't need to include everything in order. Instead, I started to focus on the moments that were truly relevant, those that showed my personal growth, how I adapted to a new culture, and what I learned about education. This shift in focus helped me move on to the next stage of developing my themes.

3.3.2 Stage 2: Emotional and Structural Challenges

Finding the right way to share my story turned out to be more emotional than I expected. I didn't realize how hard it would be to balance being honest with making sure my experiences made sense to others. At times, I held back. I would write for a moment, like crying alone on the balcony after calling home, but then I'd question myself: "Does this make me look weak?" or "Is this even important?"

I often went back to rewrite parts that felt either too intense or too unclear. The reflections were the toughest. I wanted to express my true feelings, but I didn't want to

come across as just rambling. For instance, I initially described my culture shock using big, dramatic phrases, but they didn't feel right. So, I changed them to simpler words that sounded more like me. Instead of saying I was "culturally disoriented," I wrote, "I felt out of place, even when people were kind." It was gentle, but more authentic.

I also aimed to connect with my readers, maybe a student who has never traveled abroad or someone dreaming about Taiwan but unsure of what to expect. I wanted to convey that yes, it's beautiful and exciting, but it can also be confusing and lonely at times, and that's perfectly okay. I wrote with them in mind, hoping they would understand that it's normal to struggle, to question yourself, and to grow at your own pace.

In the end, I stopped trying to sound "perfect." I allowed the story to be honest, even when it meant revealing the messy parts. And honestly, that's what made it feel real, not just to me, but hopefully to anyone who reads it. If even one person feels seen or understood because of it, then it was worth writing.

3.3.3. Stage 3: Thematic Reconstruction

As I continued writing, I realized that just following a timeline wasn't enough to convey my story. Instead of simply writing events in the order they happened, I began to ask myself: Why did this moment matter? What lessons did I learn from it?

One of the first changes I made was to ask a friend for help with translation when I taught elementary students. While the children knew some English words, they often struggled to fully understand their meanings. When my friend translated the instructions into Mandarin, the students were able to understand better and became excited to join in the games I had prepared to teach them about adjectives and adverbs. This experience showed

me the importance of clear communication and how it can raise the enthusiasm for learning.

Other than that, I started rewriting my messy class notes into a neat journal. This wasn't just about keeping things organized, but it gave me a chance to slowly think back on my day, and see what really mattered to me. This simple practice showed me that even a little reflection can make learning feel more personal and important.

Additionally, I decided to organize my stories by themes, such as language adaptation, various learning methods, and exploring culture new rather than by days or weeks. I removed some parts that didn't offer much reflection, like a lengthy description of my first dinner in the dorm. While it was a pleasant moment, it didn't show any significant change or growth.

This thematic approach allowed me to highlight the emotional truths behind my experiences. It felt more authentic because life abroad isn't a neat timeline, but it's filled with unexpected moments. I wanted my readers, especially those dreaming of studying abroad, to see these deeper parts, not just a series of events, but the meaning behind them as experienced by someone who lived through it.

3.3.4. Stage 4: Integration of Educational Insights

I started to think more deeply about my learning by connecting specific moments in class to ideas I had learned before, like Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning and the Segmentation Principle. One example was in my Introduction to Communication class, where our teacher showed random images on the screen to encourage us to practice speaking spontaneously. Each student had to stand in front of the class and create a short

speech or story based on the picture. This activity made the class fun and intellectually engaging, it pushed us to think quickly and speak clearly under pressure.

At first, I thought it was just a fun and creative exercise, but later I realized it was a great example of multimedia learning and the use of real-life objects. The images used as concrete prompts, helping us connect abstract language skills to something real and surprising. This kind of interaction engaged multiple senses and helped us remember the language better, just as Mayer's theory suggests.

I also noticed that the teacher gave us short breaks between turns to think and reset, which fits with the Segmentation Principle. These pauses helped us avoid thinking overwhelmed and allowed us to process the task more effectively. What seemed like a simple speaking activity turned out to be a well-designed method that made learning English more memorable and enjoyable.

These theories didn't affect the story from the start. At first, I was just writing what happened, what I saw, felt, and experienced. However, during the revision stage, I went back to important moments and realized that some classroom practices I had observed, like using real objects, giving 10-minute breaks, or mixing languages, connected with educational ideas I had learned before.

That's when I began to use theories like Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning and the Segmentation Principle into my writing. I didn't include them just to make it knowledgeable, but I wanted to use them to better understand my experiences. For example, when I remembered how lecturers used board games to teach vocabulary, I recognized this as a clear example of the realia method. I hadn't noticed it during the class,

but while reflecting and writing, I saw how these tools made complex grammar easier to understand.

So, bringing in these theories became part of the process of rewriting my work. It allowed me to go beyond just telling what happened and to provide thoughtful insights that make this memoir meaningful both emotionally and educationally.

3.3.5. Stage 5: Refinement and Story Selection

In the fifth stage, I decided not to include every experience I had in Taiwan on purpose. Instead, I focused on stories that fit with my larger goals, which were to look into inclusive education, the exploration of personality, and the learning that could be gained in other ways than just ordinary classes.

This process of choosing helped to create this story. Eventually, my creative thesis turned into some important parts. Each part was an exploration in how I thought about teaching, learning, and new environment adaptation.

By carefully choosing which experiences to write about, I hoped to make a story that would connect with readers and make them think about their own educational paths and how cross-cultural experiences can change people.

CHAPTER IV

PROCESS NOTE

This chapter reflects on the writing process behind this creative nonfiction thesis. It describes the emotional, conceptual, and theoretical ways I took while writing a personal story based on my educational and cultural experiences as an ICT student in Taiwan. Instead of just detailing what I wrote, I focus on how and why my writing changed into its final version.

4.1. Personal and Academic Journey

The personal journey refers to the process of individual development through personal life experiences that shape character, values, and perspectives (Smith, 2023). In my case, this included overcoming personal disappointments, adapting to life abroad, and finding meaning in both the challenges and joyful moments. Emotional resilience has shaped my journey from failing the IISMA selection to joining the ICT Program.

These experiences taught me to value small victories, embrace solitude, and connect with others through kindness. Moments like standing alone on a dorm balcony during finals, navigating language barriers while ordering food, or finding warmth in a bowl of convenience store pasta—all of these shaped my outlook and character.

On the other hand, the academic journey is an individual's experience in formal education, which includes the learning process, academic achievements, and intellectual challenges (Lane, 2022). My academic experience in Taiwan involved adapting to a bilingual classroom, participating in project-based learning, and collaborating with peers from diverse backgrounds. I encountered new teaching styles and actively engaged in

classes that blended language learning with multimedia, realia, and performance-based activities. These academic moments not only pushed me to improve my language and communication skills but also deepened my understanding of global learning environments.

When I began writing this thesis, I narrated the events in the order I experienced them. I wrote about the journey from the moment I got on the plane in Indonesia to my first day at Da-Yeh University. However, I realized that this technique did not align with the way I imagined my academic experience. My time abroad was a journey of growth, both academically and personally. The new educational system pushed me out of my comfort zone. I collaborated on group projects with friends from diverse cultural backgrounds in a dynamic learning environment.

Each interaction was a valuable lesson, teaching me different perspectives and problem-solving skills. It was also challenging for me to adapt to English lectures and daily life, as well as Mandarin interactions. I needed to improve my language skills and learn to communicate effectively in a setting where both English and Mandarin were used. For example, in class, our teachers would explain things in English but sometimes switch to Mandarin to explain the points. I was able to understand what they were saying in both languages. I also began learning basic Mandarin phrases for everyday use, such as ordering food or asking for directions. This experience made me realise how language can help people from different cultures to communicate.

These experiences demonstrated to me the importance of a global learning environment. I began to see education as more than just grades and exams; it is about broader experiences that shape our perspective and help us see the world in a more nuanced

way. Learning is a journey where challenges help me to develop within myself and my academic growth.

This realization led me to change my writing style. Instead of telling events, I began to reflect on their deeper meanings. I tried to write my experience into an honest story. This section is a reflection on the lessons I learned and the transformations I experienced while in Taiwan. I want to explain how studying abroad has made me a more open-minded person.

4.2. Cultural and Educational Appreciation

Cultural Appreciation refers to the ability to understand, respect, and enjoy cultural values different from one's own (Sherefetdinova, 2024). In intercultural contexts, this means becoming aware of and responding to the social norms, beliefs, and values that shape interactions and interpretations. During my stay in Taiwan, I encountered these elements in daily life and classroom environments. For instance, it was common for Taiwanese lecturers to prefer being addressed by their names instead of using titles like "Sir" or "Ma'am," as the latter were considered overly formal and even rude in their context.

I also noticed that many locals avoided personal topics such as religion, age, or race, even during casual conversations or festive events. Despite celebrating Western holidays like Christmas, they still preserved traditional values rooted in Chinese culture, such as during Lunar New Year celebrations, where dumplings symbolized family and fortune.

This kind of cultural mindfulness extended to public behavior and classroom manners, where silence and independence were often respected. From adapting to these

social cues to engaging in multicultural classrooms, I developed a greater appreciation for Taiwanese culture and a deeper awareness of how culture shapes learning experiences. These everyday encounters mirror the indicators noted by Sherefetdinova: I navigated intercultural contexts, observed social norms, learned about beliefs surrounding hierarchy and politeness, and respected their values, such as non-intrusiveness and communal celebration.

Educational Appreciation is the awareness and gratitude for learning opportunities and the deeper meaning of education in life (Fuentes, 2024). In Taiwan, I was exposed to teaching styles that helped me fully understand this concept. I became aware that learning does not have to feel rigid or isolated. Instead, it can be meaningful and enjoyable. I felt grateful for the way classes welcomed students from different cultures and how learning was approached through creativity and inclusivity.

An important part of my classes was the use of realia, or real objects, which made learning more interesting. In my "Fun English Grammar" class, we played board games to learn grammar rules. This practical approach made learning enjoyable and effective. Bhatti et al. (2021) state that using real objects can help students remember things more effectively and feel more motivated. I realised that using real objects in lessons made them more interactive and helped students remember what they learned. This experience taught me that the most effective way to learn is through practical, real-life experiences.

The "Introduction to Western Literature" class was an enjoyable experience. We learned about Greek myths through texts and videos by combining reading with visual storytelling. It is making the learning experience more interesting. We also took on direct roles and acted as the characters. This teaching method aligns with Mayer's Cognitive

Theory of Multimedia Learning (Mayer & Fiorella, 2021), which says that students learn more effectively when material is presented in both verbal (spoken or written text) and visual (images or animations) formats, rather than in a single format. By using printed texts (verbal), animated videos (visual), and actively engaging with the stories (experiential), we gained material in many ways.

This process reduces cognitive overload and enhances understanding. This approach made it easier to remember character personalities, plot structures, and moral lessons, because I was not just reading passively. However, I was also visualising, acting, and experiencing the material emotionally.

The breaks between sessions were a great idea, as they reflect Mayer's Segmentation Principle (Mayer, 2020). This theory says that breaking down material into smaller parts enables students to process complex ideas more effectively. They also provide students with a chance to reflect on what they have learned, making the material more memorable.

The classes provide more than just knowledge; they demonstrate how culture influences the educational process. Lecturers create a rich educational environment by using interactive learning, multimedia, and lessons that adapt to students' needs. Taiwan's unique blend of culture and education has made me a better, more open-minded individual.

4.3. Emotional and Intellectual Growth

Emotional growth involves the development of managing and understanding one's own emotions and those of others (Antoniadou & Crowder, 2021). During my student exchange experience, I encountered significant emotional challenges such as homesickness,

loneliness, and self-doubt. These challenges affected my mood and personality, especially during stressful periods, such as finals week, when I would stand on my balcony alone, crying with a high fever.

However, as Antoniadou and Crowder (2021) suggest, confronting these emotions allowed me to cultivate self-awareness, adaptability, empathy, and confidence. For example, instead of suppressing my feelings, I began writing short stories and communicating openly with my family, which helped me constructively process my emotions. This aligns with my travel memoir reflections, where I recount overcoming the emotional difficulty of adapting to a new environment, such as looking for unfamiliar food apps in Mandarin or enduring moments of loneliness, and how these moments finally gained me resilience and personal growth.

Intellectual growth refers to the advancement of critical, analytical, and creative thinking skills (Akpur, 2020). The diverse cultural environment and interactive teaching methods during my exchange significantly contributed to this growth. In my Analysis and Creation for English Advertising class, I applied critical and analytical skills by examining advertisements from different cultures, including a detailed analysis of the Indonesian noodle brand Indomie. This exercise made the learning process relatable and engaging, illustrating Mayer's Personalization Principle (Mayer, 2020), which states that personalized learning enhances understanding.

Moreover, the use of multimedia, realia-based activities, and bilingual instruction in classes such as "Fun with English Grammar" and "Introduction to Western Literature" enhanced my creative thinking and problem-solving abilities, as reflected in my travel memoir. The collaborative projects, service-learning with elementary students, and

navigating language barriers required analytical thinking and adaptability, deepening my intellectual development.

Together, these emotional and intellectual experiences demonstrate that growth in both areas is essential for comprehensive learning and self-development during international academic exchange.

4.4. Transformation and Redefinition of Self

This section explains how studying abroad changed me. It shows moments when I realized that growth and learning happen not just in classes, but also in everyday experiences.

I used to think that education was something you did only in the classroom, and that learning only happened through textbooks and lectures. However, my mind changed when I began participating in university activities, especially the Christmas carol competition. I learned something important: you can learn in many different ways, like from other people, different cultures, and by thinking deeply about yourself. The Christmas carol competition was a big moment for me. Singing "Last Christmas" with my group on campus was fun and helped me face my fears. It also helped me become more confident and improve my friendships.

Every moment is related to a new understanding of myself as an Indonesian student and global citizen living in a new environment. I felt very homesick, but it made me who I am today, even though it was hard. It made me more adaptable and taught me to consider how others feel. These changes were just as significant as the academic knowledge I gained.

My time in Taiwan has had a significant effect on me. Education helps us grow, and every experience contributes to this growth. I learned to adapt, like when I started using public transportation. I also work in a group with friends from different cultures, which helps me become more flexible, especially in IMICE classes when we have to deal with new situations, such as forming a new group for each new topic. These challenges have made me braver and more confident. They show me the problems I have had to deal with and how these have made me the person I am today.

As I also wrote in my travel memoir, "I became more independent. I learned how to manage my time, my finances, and even my feelings. I discovered what it truly means to be a guest in someone else's country. I learned to listen, observe, and adapt to new surroundings. I grew not just as a student, but as a friend and a new version of myself."

This proves that transformation didn't come instantly but through real, lived experiences. From crying over Indomie that didn't taste right, to standing alone on a balcony asking if I'd done my best that day, I grew in quiet moments of reflection and adaptation. I truly embraced the journey, and it changed me.

These experiences taught me about the impact of personal identity on the learning process. I saw myself not only as a student, but also as a cultural ambassador and an active participant in the exchange of communication between different cultures. For example, during a Christmas carol competition and as part of my service project at elementary schools, I taught some Indonesian words.

I have changed my communication style to connect more effectively with others. For instance, I made my English easier to understand by using gestures to help young children. I also used basic Mandarin and English to talk with local sellers and cafeteria

staff. These moments taught me how to adapt my speech to fit the person I am talking to, which helps communication work better and makes it easier for us to understand each other.

This is reflected in the line from my memoir: "I went to Taiwan to earn credits, but I came home with confidence, stories that will last a lifetime, and a deeper understanding of who I am."

Throughout the journey, my self-perception underwent a shift. At first, I was just an exchange student. But eventually, I saw myself as a bridge between cultures, someone who could influence and be influenced by others. I redefined my role, not just academically, but also emotionally and socially, as someone capable of thriving in new, unfamiliar spaces while still holding onto the essence of who I am.

4.5. Experiential Learning and Reflective Practice

Experiential learning was at the core of my journey, reflected in this memoir. A stand-out moment was during the service-learning project at Sanchun Elementary School, where we made a spinning wheel to teach English adjectives and adverbs. However, the children were puzzled when we first introduced it. Our approach was not working that much. At that moment, we had to adapt. We spoke more slowly and used hand gestures to explain the materials. We also had our Taiwanese friend to help us translate for the children. This experience reminds us that education is a shared journey.

I also experienced this learning-by-doing when I got lost on the bus routes in Taiwan, ordering food with broken Mandarin, or even when I mistakenly used a dryer thinking it was a washer. These moments might seem simple, but they reflect learning through direct experience, precisely as described by Andresen, Boud, and Cohen (2020).

Whether it was participating in a K-pop competition, joining cultural festivities, or volunteering at elementary schools, each act added depth to my academic and personal development, proving that education is not confined to the classroom.

That event reminded me of translanguaging theory, as stated by Liu et al. (2020), which aims to enhance understanding and participation by utilizing multiple languages. We observed this in our classroom, where children became more engaged when hearing the instruction in Mandarin after we had explained it in English.

Reflective practice followed closely behind every experience. I now realize that reflection enriches education. This process not only provides valuable memories but also allows me to evaluate, learn, and grow. Every moment in class contributes to my memoir writing and personal growth. I recognized the other value in teaching and learning, and I understand that each challenge allows both me and others to grow.

Even the smallest moments, like skipping dinner in my dorm due to a bad day, or standing alone on a cold balcony after final exams, became chances for me to look inward. In hindsight, these quiet, personal reflections were as vital as the most active classroom moments. They gave me clarity, strength, and direction, truly embodying what Thompson and Thompson (2023) meant by understanding and improving one's personal and professional practice.

4.6. Reflections on the Memoir Writing Process

Writing my creative nonfiction thesis was a meaningful but challenging phase. I chose this format to share real stories from my exchange experience in Taiwan. Even

though my student exchange happened almost two years ago, the memories still feel fresh. It was my first time living abroad, and I wanted to keep those moments through writing.

I thought about writing a short story, but I knew my real-life experiences would be more impactful. Finding the right balance between personal stories and academic theories was a challenge. I had to avoid making the writing too formal or too informal, and arrange my ideas carefully.

I received lots of valuable feedback from Pak Ginting and Pak Wawan. They encouraged me to think like a reader, not just a writer. For example, Pak Ginting encouraged me to define each theme and explain how the theories supported my story. Then, Pak Wawan asked me to describe my feelings more clearly, especially when I mentioned crying over something "silly." That detail helped me write more honestly. This advice helped strengthen each section of my narrative.

Through this process, I learned that writing isn't just about telling stories, but it's about finding the meaning. I became more aware of mixing reflection and theory. Most importantly, I realized how much I've grown, not just as a student, but as a person who has become more independent, emotionally stronger, and able to connect with people from different backgrounds.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

5.1. Conclusions

This creative nonfiction thesis, "Beyond the Exchange: The Transformative Way to Global Learning and Personal Growth in Taiwan" tells of a transformative five-month journey during my participation in the International Credit Transfer (ICT) program at Da-Yeh University. It explores how my experiences in Taiwan changed my approach to learning, interaction, and worldview.

At first, I was excited and very interested in the new school and working with students from other countries. I learned to work in groups and understand lectures in international classes, which enriches my international learning experience. I learned a lot about different cultures and innovative teaching methods in Taiwan. Using real-life materials, such as board games and classroom simulations, made learning more engaging and effective. Professors adapted their teaching methods to combine English and Mandarin, showing how culture influences education.

The experience also helped me to grow as a person. I felt homesick, but I learned to acknowledge and manage my feelings by writing in a journal and talking to my family. These challenges taught me to be strong and to understand myself better. They showed me that growth often comes from dealing with things that make us uncomfortable. Moreover, I have changed the way I am. I went from seeing myself as just a student to seeing myself as someone who participates in community conversations and is aware of diverse cultures. Events like the Christmas carol competition and volunteering allowed me to build

meaningful connections by combining English, gestures, and basic Mandarin. Real-life experiences have shaped my understanding of education. Activities like service projects and teamwork have shown that we can learn a lot from real-life experiences.

In this memoir, I combined real experiences with things I had learned on campus, showing that I learned by doing. I went to Taiwan to study, and I also learned a lot about the culture and how to apply what I learned to real-life situations.

5.2. Suggestions

For students considering studying abroad, especially in Taiwan, I encourage them to make the most of every moment. Taiwan is not just a small country with a strong Chinese cultural heritage; it also offers many new cultures and customs to explore. Living abroad teaches many valuable experiences and life lessons, as I have written about here. Growth can emerge from unexpected situations, so stay open-minded and curious, allowing even challenging moments to become meaningful.

Educators designing international programs should adopt student-centered and culturally responsive teaching methods. Using real-life materials and explanations in different languages can make learning more fun and help students to grow as individuals.

Finally, this thesis aims to show the benefits of creative nonfiction in encouraging deep reflection and explaining the relationship between culture, education, and personal growth. Future research could explore the diverse experiences of students in similar programs or develop reflective writing in intercultural education.

This thesis aims to show that every moment, whether joyful or challenging, has the potential to shape the learning journey.

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APPENDIX

Beyond the Exchange: The Transformative Way to Global Learning and Personal Growth in Taiwan

A Travel Memoir by Diva Angelica



Picture 1. Kaohsiung Trip with The Chinese Language Center at Da Yeh University



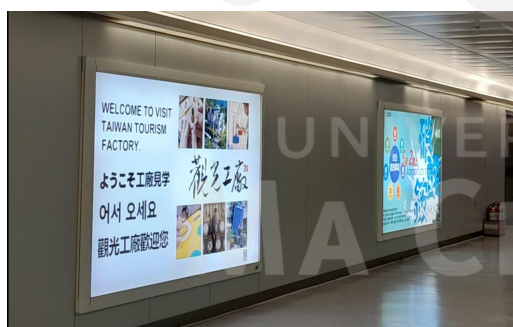
Picture 2. Strolling Around with Da Yeh International Relation Staff at One of The Biggest Temple in Taiwan

When I failed the IISMA selection process, I didn't cry, but I did think about how I could have done better. My sadness was so overwhelming that I was numb, despite putting all my effort into the application. I was disappointed and in disbelief, thinking that perhaps studying abroad wasn't right for me at that time. I had almost given up on that dream.

Then, the International Relations staff at Universitas Ma Chung informed me that registration for the ICT Programme was still open. It hadn't been on my list at all, but I saw it as a second chance and decided to take it. At the time, I thought studying abroad meant classrooms, speaking English, and tourist attractions, never expecting crowded trains or crying over Indomie. But it was in these unexpected moments, without a plan, that I found the best way to improve myself.

Studying English Literature at Universitas Ma Chung had always been my way of learning about other cultures through language, but I wanted more real-world experiences. The IISMA program was my first step, and even after the intense disappointment of not getting in, I knew I couldn't give up. The ICT program with Da-Yeh University in Taiwan then appeared as a ray of hope, and I applied with a mix of enthusiasm and cautious hope. When the acceptance letter arrived, I realized failure could be temporary and lead to something better.

As I packed my belongings, I felt a mix of nervousness, fear, and excitement. I knew the journey would be challenging, but also understood that within those challenges, I would find strength and new experiences. With each item packed, I felt lighter, letting go of fear and doubt, ready to discover not only new places but also new parts of myself.



Picture 3. "Welcome to Taiwan" Sign



Picture 4. Taiwan's HSR Station

I left Indonesia on 7 September 2023, feeling excited but also nervous. As the plane landed, my heart was racing. The air felt different and fresh, filled with new experiences waiting to be explored. So, I got off the plane and as soon as I got out of the arrivals gate I was like, "Wow, this is totally different!"

There were signs in both English and Mandarin, and seeing the words "Welcome to Taiwan" made it all feel real. My eyes widened, and I couldn't stop looking around with a wide smile. I was like, "Wow, this is totally different!" It wasn't just a trip, it was the beginning of a whole new chapter of my life. I pulled out my phone to take photos of whatever was in front of me and share some with my family group.



Picture 5. Da Yeh University's Faculty of Language

However, we arrived during a national holiday, so the campus was closed. There were no administrative offices open to help me get an ID card or provide bus fare discounts to let us stroll the Changhua District. Thankfully, the campus' cafeteria was open at that time. But still, it was just me, my friends and a lot of curiosity.



Picture 6. First Meal I Bought at Campus' Cafeteria

The first few days passed quickly, a blur of adaptation. The bus system felt difficult, requiring a bus app to check schedules. My two semesters of Mandarin at Ma Chung University weren't enough to read bus routes, but aided daily activities. I remember feeling confused while standing at the bus stop, looking at the timetable.

Ordering food was another adventure. I struggled to pinpoint my dorm's location on the FatPanda app and communicated with drivers in broken Mandarin. Before ordering, I'd translate menus, hoping to get the food I expected. Every meal was a gamble, but also a chance to laugh at my mistakes.

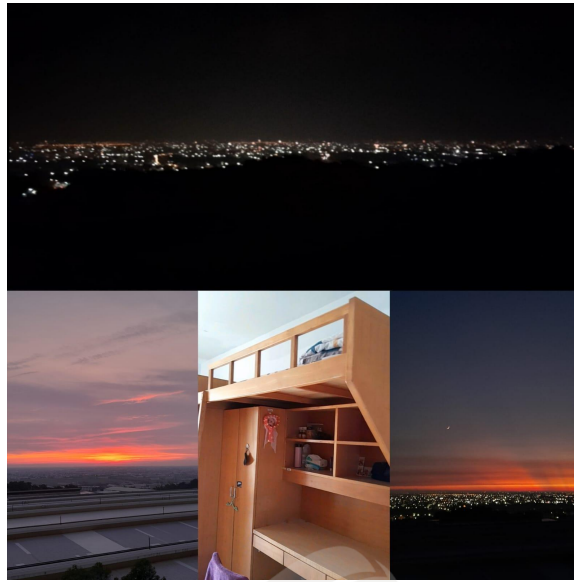
My friends and I shared culinary adventures, like buying vegetarian and vegan food from a pientang restaurant. I'm not a fan of vegan food and found it bland. In that moment of shared confusion, however, we grew closer.



Picture 7. Taiwanese Food

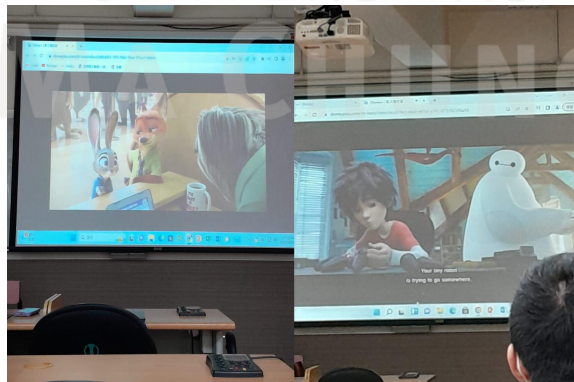
The streets are calm and peaceful. Claw machines are everywhere, their prizes calling to us as we walk by. The night market is filled with the delicious smell of sizzling oil and the cheerful sounds of games. I can smell that delicious aroma, a wonderful mix of spices and street food, making my mouth drool.

My dorm room, a cozy space filled with the comforting scents of minimarket food and the freshness of new beginnings, feels like a second home. I had always dreamed of having a bunk bed and my own study desk, and finally, I had both. My room was on the 6th floor, giving me a beautiful view from the window that I could enjoy every day. It became my quiet corner, a space to study, rest, and simply be myself, far from home yet full of warmth.



Picture 8. Dormitory Situation

In the midst of it all, I felt something beautiful. It was a feeling that made me feel all warm and positive inside, reminding me that every challenge is an opportunity to learn something new. Every day brings new adventures, and I'm excited to welcome each one with open arms.



Picture 9. Learning English Through Zootopia and Big Hero 6 Movies

My classes at Da-Yeh were such a fun mix of challenges and surprises. I chose to take only English-based classes, which often meant I stayed with my friends, which was really nice. I noticed that there were only a few courses that I took that were different from

my friends. One of them was the course "Learning English Through Movies," where Zefanya and I were the only students from Ma Chung, which was a bit sad, but also really interesting.

I remember the day we watched Simpson, Big Hero 6, Zootopia, and Ice Age, thinking it would be a relaxed class. But, you'll be happy to hear that the professor announced a change in the rules for the extra point. Instead of singing the film's soundtrack, we had to submit all our notes, which was a bit of a bummer. I felt a bit challenged at first, but I thought, "Oh, that's okay", because luckily I'd taken notes on the material.



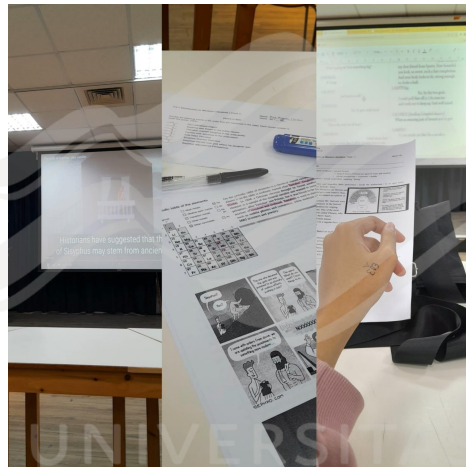
Picture 10. Service-learning at Sanchun Elementary School

In "Fun with English Grammar," Mr. Hoffman uses all sorts of fun activities to help us learn, like board games and cards. At the time, the class felt engaging, but after reflecting on it further, I realised that this method is similar to the Realia Method, as described by Bhatti et al. (2021). I found it so much easier to remember and apply what I learned about grammar when I used real objects and interacted with my classmates.

For our service-learning project, Hanny and I created a spinning wheel game to teach adjectives and adverbs at Sanchun Elementary School. Mr. Hoffman provided all the necessary tools and materials for the project. We completed it overnight, as the last class

ended in the afternoon. We are scheduled to teach the following day, and fortunately, we had already prepared all the materials beforehand, so we are ready to go.

When we first introduced the game, the children looked confused. "Wait, how do we play again?" one of them asked, confused. Their English skills were limited, but that didn't stop our friend Angelo. He stepped in to translate, making sure everyone could join in the fun. When children finally understand the rules, they get excited. That moment taught me that learning is often found in the simplest interactions.



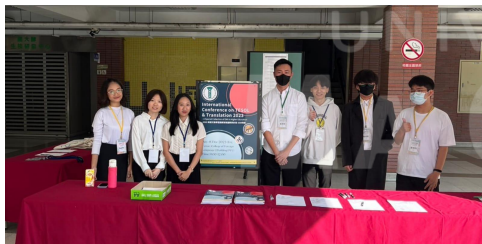
Picture 11. Introduction to Western Literature's Class

I'm so grateful to the other classes that helped me grow, not just in my studies but as a person too. In "Introduction to Western Literature" class, I rediscovered my love of Greek mythology. The combination of printed texts and animated YouTube videos brought the stories to life, and we all had a great time taking part in the fun role-play, laughing and learning at the same time.



Picture 12. English Listening and Speaking's Class

In "English Listening and Speaking", we had the most amazing time creating improvised short stories based on random images, which really pushed me out of my comfort zone. Meanwhile, at IMICE, we had the amazing opportunity to learn how to conduct business meetings, plan incentive packages, host business promotions at online conferences, and create exhibitions. We chose Pepero as the product to showcase, and despite the language barrier, we did brilliantly and achieved the highest score! Despite the challenges, we communicated effectively.



Picture 13. TESOL 2023 Conference



Picture 14. Exhibition as Final Project

I had an amazing time as a receptionist at the TESOL 2023 Conference, a truly memorable experience. I was excited to wear my black blazer while greeting professors from various universities. My learning continued outside of class, participating in the Da-Yeh dance club's K-pop dance competition and placing third.



Picture 15. Halloween Event

Before Christmas, the campus held a Halloween event where they built a horror labyrinth. We had to solve puzzles to move from one challenge to the next until we could finally escape the maze. It was both scary and fun, and made me feel like I was part of a big celebration. What made it more exciting was the row of street food vendors—usually only found at night markets—lined up at the campus yard that day.



Picture 16. Sports Day



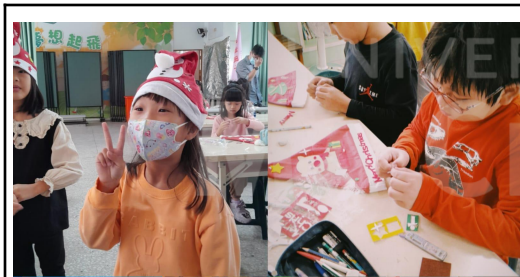
Picture 17. Christmas Singing Competition

Christmas in Taiwan is celebrated wholeheartedly, with decorations starting a week prior. We also won second place in the Christmas singing competition. Later, we attended a Winter concert with students from other faculties.



Picture 18. Winter Concert

A few days later, we joined Sports Day, where students from all faculties competed in inter-faculty events like tug-of-war, relay races, and basketball. The field was surrounded by food, accessory vendors, and even massage services. It was a lively event, showcasing strong campus spirit and how students blended fun with tradition.



Picture 19. Service-learning at Wender Elementary School



Picture 20. Service-learning at Minghu Elementary School

I also volunteered at Wender and Minghu Elementary Schools, teaching them about my culture before guiding the children in decorating Christmas hats. A child proudly showed off their work and exclaimed, "This is Santa's red!" I didn't correct them, instead, I

smiled and replied, "Yes, that's right." Sometimes, it's the experience that matters, not the words.



Picture 21. A Pack of Snacks Before Final Exams

Other than that, every semester, when final exams were approaching, the campus administration staff would give international students a pack of food and snacks as a token of encouragement. This simple gesture meant a lot to me and definitely increased my motivation to do my best.

I absolutely loved Taiwan! It's such a beautiful place, and I had some really special moments of silence and solitude there. They're things I'll always cherish, and they're still with me today. I remember a very difficult time during my final exams when I had a really high fever and experienced heartbreak at the same time. I was all on my own in my dorm room, and it felt so lonely. I stood on the balcony, feeling the cool air on my face, and I couldn't help but cry, feeling distant from the bustling city below and questioning whether I could endure all of this.

Then there was the day I almost ruined my clothes in the dryer, thinking it was the washing machine. I was so excited to get my clothes washed, but unfortunately, the smell in the dorm hallway was a bit too strong.

There was also one night when I skipped dinner, lying on my bed, feeling sad over something silly, like not being able to join a family gathering back home except through a video call, or feeling annoyed because I always got nauseous every time I took the bus home from Yuanlin.

I know it sounds silly, but when you're abroad, even the smallest things can feel like a real burden. Every little mistake feels magnified, as if they're little reminders of how far I am from home and the familiar comforts that I miss so much.

I sometimes stayed alone in the dorm while friends explored the city. But you know what? I've come to really appreciate those little moments of peace and quiet. I treated myself to some delicious pasta I bought at the convenience store, and the delicious aroma filled the air, making me feel all warm and cozy inside.

I watched some really great movies that took me to another world, and I tidied my room, finding so much peace in that simple act. My quiet days taught me to appreciate my own presence and find happiness in little things, and to see every challenge, good or bad, as part of the adventure. I learned resilience and strength.

Before this trip, I thought education was only about exams, grades, and deadlines. My routine involved studying a lot of material, and I found class boring. However, my time in Taiwan opened my eyes to a different perspective.

In the "Fun English Grammar" class, we played board games that seemed like they were just for fun at first. As I played them with my classmates, I realised these games were more than just fun; they were "realia." These games brought the classroom to life, making the learning experience feel real and relevant. I saw the joy on my classmates' faces as we laughed and learned together despite our different cultural backgrounds.

Short breaks between lessons were important for learning, following Mayer's Segmentation Principle. Each break helped us process what we had learned. I found the breaks useful for connecting with classmates. Multimedia learning came to life when mythology was presented through animation. I remember sitting in class, totally captivated by the fascinating stories that sparked my imagination, connecting me to a new culture.

We made bilingualism a natural part of our lessons, which went really well. The professors were good at switching between Mandarin and English, making everyone comfortable. Learning Mandarin phrases and new words made me proud and helped me connect with classmates on a deeper level. This experience showed me that education is about more than just knowing; it's also about deeper connections.



Picture 22. Left: Farewell's Dumplings; Middle: Farewell's Hot Pot; Right: Mr. KJ's Guitar Performance

Our farewell was perfect in its simplicity. We gathered around the table, hands busy eating dumplings. As we heated up the broth, I could feel the warmth of friendship surrounding us. It was more than just food; it was a celebration of the moments we had spent together. I also listened to Mrs. Sharon's explanation about the significance of Lunar New Year, the traditions that brought families together, and the hopes that each dumpling symbolized.

After the dumplings, we moved inside and ate the hot pot, the bubbling broth a comforting backdrop to our laughter. We dipped fresh vegetables and tender slices of meat, each bite bursting with flavor. The steam rose around us, mingling with our chatter, creating a cozy atmosphere that felt like home.

Then, Mr. KJ took center stage, giving us a guitar performance with a song we barely knew, but it still managed to make us happy. It was a reminder of how small things can connect us across cultures, creating our stories together in a beautiful memory.



Picture 23. Farewell Party's Photo Session

As the evening drew to a close, I felt a wave of emotions wash over me. I didn't cry. Not then. Instead, I felt full of gratitude for the friendships I had formed, full of love for the experiences we shared, and full of the bittersweet taste of something coming to an end.

At that moment, I realized that goodbyes don't always have to be sad. Sometimes, they can be wrapped in dumplings, filled with memories and laughter, leaving us with a warmth that lingers long after the last bite.

I arrived in Taiwan believing it would be just a short chapter in my student life. Little did I know, it would turn into a whole new book filled with unexpected adventures. I

became more independent. I learned how to manage my time, my finances, and even my feelings. I discovered what it truly means to be a guest in someone else's country. I learned to listen, observe, and adapt to new surroundings. I grew not just as a student, but as a friend and a new version of myself.

I also learned that education happens in the most unexpected moments. It's in the laughter shared while trying to explain a game to a confused child. It's in the happiness of learning new words in other languages from our friend in class. It's in those simple moments spent with someone who doesn't speak my language, yet we laugh at the same jokes. Those experiences taught me more than any classroom ever could.

After everything I've been through, I feel like writing a letter to my past self, especially the version of me who cried after failing IISMA.

To that version of me: You didn't fail. You are led down a different path, but one filled with new opportunities. To the version of me who wasn't sure you could survive abroad: You didn't just survive. You did more than you ever imagined.

And to anyone out there dreaming about going abroad: Go for it. Try. You might find more than what you were looking for. I went to Taiwan to get credits, but I came home with confidence, stories I'll never forget, and a better understanding of myself.

Next time I see a menu in Mandarin, I won't panic. I'll smile and order with confidence, because I've grown through the journey.

This memoir not only chronicles my personal growth but also underscores the vital role of emotional, social, and intellectual engagement in student learning. This is achieved through multimedia, realia-based, and personalized teaching methods. My experience revealed that cultural understanding extends beyond academics, demonstrating that shared

ideals can exist despite diverse lifestyles, learning approaches, and interactions.

Through service learning, cultural festivities, and daily activities, I developed a deep appreciation for Taiwanese culture's complexity, its people's kindness, and cross-cultural communication's impact. My theoretical understanding of school, society, and self was transformed into true comprehension through these personal experiences. Taiwan offered lessons beyond education and culture, teaching me how to navigate and learn from differences

