

# ***Study Experience Report***

## ***Tan Zheng Yang - Mechanical Engineering***

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### ***Before leaving***

Leaving Malaysia was a huge thing for me because living and studying in a foreign country was never a part of my plan when I entered UKM. I first heard about the Double Degree Engineering Program which is a collaboration program between UKM in Malaysia and UDE in Germany from Prof Tuti.

After discussing with my parents, I decided to send in my application for the Double Degree Program. Before going to Germany, we had to complete level A1 and A2 of German language courses during our semester breaks. An Intercultural course was also provided by the university just before we went to Germany.

Beside of the application for the university, we also had to apply for student visa, blocked accounts, student hostel, funds from UKM and also DAAD scholarship. Thank to the help of UKM Mercator Office, we could not have done it much easier.

### ***Studying and Learning in UDE***

In our program, we were basically studying subjects in their 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> semester. Studying in Germany was really different from the time we studied in Malaysia. For most of the subjects, the exam grades are fully dependent on the final exams. Thus, there are no marks allocated for attendance, tutorials, assignments, projects or tests. One can register for any subject in any semester but attending the lectures and tutorials are not compulsory, which means you go to class at your own will to learn. A lot of students have part time or student jobs while doing their studies. Hence, one's discipline is very important when studying in Germany.



Since our program is part of the International Studies in Engineering, we studied some subjects in English and some subjects in German. Usually, students there can select whether they want to study in full German program or International program. Most of our lectures and tutorials were conducted in German. Thus, it was a disaster for us during the first semester with our amateur level of German language. It took us a while to really understand and catch up on what they were teaching.

In Germany, their studies in engineering are very specialized. For example, in our university in Duisburg, Mechanical Engineering course is actually a combination of various departments. For examples, there are Programming, Design Software, Manufacturing, Mechanics, Logistics and Engines. Students can choose to finish their projects and bachelor thesis in the departments, depending on the fields that they are interested in. I personally think that this actually helps students to understand what they want to pursue in their future career.

Unlike in Malaysia, failing subjects are very normal to the students in Germany. For instances, a lot of students failed in a few 'killer' subjects such as Mechatronics and WKA (Engines). Those subjects were conducted in fully German. One is only possible to retake the exams for another 3 times if he failed the first time. Thus, it is comparably much stressful to study in Germany.

## ***Living in Germany***

### *Language and Culture*

Before I went to Germany, I thought that having fluency English would be more than enough to survive there. I was terribly wrong. Most people in Germany prefer to speak in German, and of course, it is because it's their mother tongue. Professors, lecturers and students in University can usually speak good, or at least, understandable English. However, there is a need to speak German when dealing with people outside of the university. For examples, when you are buying groceries, ordering food, asking for directions, dealing with university, government officers and so on, you have to speak German!

There is a saying that if you can speak a language another can understand, you can communicate with them. However, if you can speak in their mother tongue, you can speak through their hearts. Thus, it is important to at least learn how to speak normal conversations with the people there. Me for instances, I improved a lot by talking to my housemates in German every day. I also joined a lot of International events organized by the university.

It takes time for us Malaysian people to adapt the German culture – not only tradition culture, but also their working and living culture. Those 'cultures' are like 'unwritten rules' that we foreign people have to obey and respect. For example, punctuality is very important for them. Germans usually make appointments even when doing simple meet ups. They will very much appreciate it if you can reach earlier. Good thing is that the public transport also reached on time - most of the time.

## *Daily and Monthly Expenses*

As a nut shell, the daily expenses in Germany are relatively much higher than in Malaysia. A normal meal costs around 6-10 Euro in Duisburg. Eating in the University *Mensa* cost around 2-3 Euro for students. Due to the high living expenses, we usually cooked ourselves in hostel.

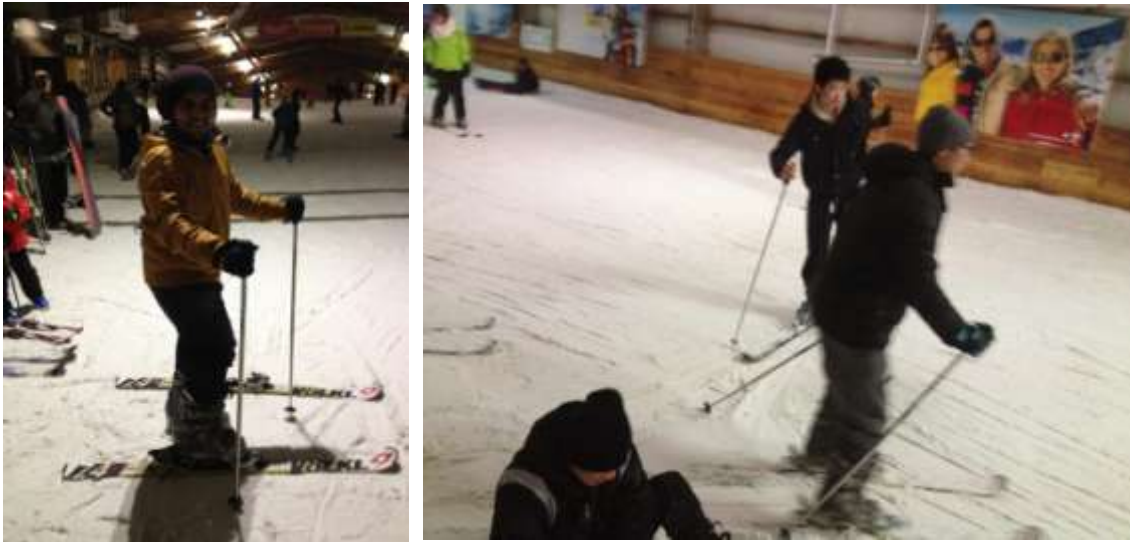


Most students who are studying in Germany are not required to pay high semester and tuition fees. In our university, we are only required to pay a fee of around 250 Euro per semester. After paying, we are provided with a student card each. Our student cards can be used travel pass to use the public transports such as street trains, buses and intercity trains in the state of North Rhine Westphalia.

Deutsche Bank limits the students to withdraw only 670 Euro per month, but that amount is more than enough for basic living. Our hostel cost us around 250 Euro per month while our student insurances cost us around 80 Euro per month. I allocated around 150-200 Euros for groceries and food every month. Hence, most of us can still save some money to buy things and travel.

## *Leisure Time*

During the winter, there are less outdoor activities. I registered for indoor sport activities in the university such as basketball and indoor football. We also once went on a university trip to an indoor skiing park at Bottrop. It was fun! Unfortunately, there was no snow in Duisburg during the year we went. Thus, we couldn't find any outdoor skiing near our city.



## *Indoor Skiing!*

During the spring and summer, there were a lot of activities going on at the outdoors. We Malaysians always organized potluck style picnic and barbeque parties together. We held it like almost every two weeks during that time and sometimes we invited international neighbours and friends. There was once we rented bicycles and cycled along the riverside of Duisburg.

I myself participated in a Marathon in Bonn during the early spring, a time when the flowers start to bloom. It was an amazing experience. During the summer, I also joined some international friends and participated in a dragon boat rowing competition which is an annual event at the river of Duisburg.





*Running Marathon and Rowing Dragon boat in Germany*



*Bbq with Dr Fais and UKM gang!*



*Hari Raya Celebrations with all Malaysian*

*Roller coaster with the UKM gang at the Bottrop Movie Park*

## *Special Events and Occasions*

The Europeans take Christmas as important as Hari Raya or Chinese New Year in Malaysia. It's a day of gathering and reunion with family, relatives and friends. They love it so much that they celebrate it for the whole December. Particularly in Germany, there are huge Christmas night markets in every town and city. The streets are decorated with lights and Christmas trees, and there are stalls selling candies, chocolates, sausages, and *Gluhwein* (a tradition Christmas wine in Germany)

There are also a lot of events like Halloween and city festivals such as *Rosenmontag* in Cologne. The people love those events and they are willing spent time and money to dress up in funny costumes, fooling around with friends and strangers on the street.



## ***Future benefit of staying abroad***

The best thing about studying abroad is to have the chance to experience and observe the difference between our country and their countries, especially in world leading country like Germany. Their successes in various fields were developed through decades as results of their attitudes, their cultures and their rich history backgrounds. As the younger generations of a developing country, we have a lot to learn from them.

As said earlier, living in Germany 'forced' us to speak German, and having basic communication skills in German language would also be a great addition in our resume. It might be handy in our future career especially for engineering students like us.

There are many travel benefits as students in Europe. For examples, we can purchase German Youth Pass and Interrail Youth Pass which is much cheaper so that we can take trains around Germany and Europe. My friends and I spent some of our semester breaks to travel around countries in Europe such as France, Netherland, England and Austria I also went on a solo backpacking trip for 2 weeks after I finished my bachelor thesis. I got the chances to meet a lot of friends and learn more about their countries and cultures during my travels.



*Trips to London and Paris*

### ***Advices to future juniors***

Self disciplines, time management, budget planning, independent and be hardworking. It is a once in a life time opportunity to study abroad, so don't just spend all your time only on studying hard in Germany. Go out, make some friends, travel around, experience the difference and enjoy the adventure.