

## Long-Distance Romantic Relationships among International Students: “My First Qualitative Research”

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to seek depth information how international students maintain their relationship to stay feeling close with their romantic partners although separated by distance or live in a different country, the difficulties and the reasons they choose to remain in the long-distance relationship. Semi-structured interviewed were conducted to four international students. Five themes emerged, they are “keep in touch”, “this is my look”, “trustworthiness as foundation”, “family’s support”, and “relationship’s goal is get married”. The participants utilize many ways of communication to keep in touch well because it also becomes a difficulty for the relationship if it is not done seriously. Since many of the participants have got support from their family, it makes them more believed that this relationship would be no matter even in a long-distance relationship. Admittedly, the distance has both beneficial and negative aspects, but how the couples handle it through the communication, always trust each other and share the relationship’s goal, determined the maintenance and help to feel close in the long-distance relationship.

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### INTRODUCTION

Taiwan is one of the countries that have an outstanding higher education system and provides opportunities for international students to study a wide variety of subjects, ranging from education, oceanography, Chinese language, history to tropical agriculture and forestry, engineering, business, semi-conductors and more (Pasaribu & Suprpto, 2020; Suprpto, Saragih, & Al Ardha, 2019). The government and the universities in Taiwan also provide many types of scholarship available for students from outside Taiwan. There are still many reasons to make international students pursue their education in this country. It makes the number of international students that come to Taiwan increasing every year (Suprpto et al., 2019). For instance, according to the data of Taiwan Ministry of Education (2014), there are 3.455 international students from Indonesia in Taiwan, and according to the data of Office International Affairs of NDHU (2015), there are about 53 international students from Indonesia studying in this university.

Pursuing a degree in Taiwan means that international students have to move for a certain time from their home country to Taiwan (Pasaribu & Suprpto, 2020). It means that the international students also have to leave their family, their jobs and also their special friends. There are so many studies now about international students but only focused on the experiences when studying, cultural shock and life adjustment. There were a few studies that conduct to know how international students deal with their romantic feeling.

According to Roscoe (1987), college students have high importance of the role of romantic relationships in their lives. Because of the educational opportunities, the students



choose to live in long-distance separation location with their close friend or romantic partner. However, many students have to “go away” to college outside their home country such from Indonesia to Taiwan, the relationships may assume in many forms. According to Skinner (2005), research on the dating behaviours of college students has been distinguished into the non-long distance and long-distance relationship.

In recent years long distance-relationships have become increasingly prevalent. Stafford, Daly, and Reske (1987) stated that approximately one-third of premarital relationships in university settings might be long-distance in nature. Dainton and Aylor (2001) also said that among college students, the numbers involved in distance romantic relationships range from 25 to 40%. This phenomenon also occurs to international students in Taiwan.

The precise definition of what constitutes a long-distance relationship has significantly varied among previous studies. The majority of studies use a “miles separated” criteria; however, the exact number of miles has varied. Schwebel et al. (1992) used 50 miles or more in their study, whereas Lydon, Pierce, and O’Regan (1997) and Knox et al. (2002) used 200 miles or more to define a long-distance relationship. This study only focused on the long-distance relationship between two countries, to see the experiences when the relationship is conducted in a different environment.

Many studies of long-distance relationships tend to focus on quantified topics that only bring us to the basic ideas of the long-distance relationships such as the perceptions (Skinner, 2005), commitment (Lydon, Pierce, & O’Regan, 1997), idealization (Stafford & Reske, 1990), and personal career development (Gerstel & Gross, 1984). These issues are important to understand the couples in a long-distance relationship, but it is still little research that gives in-depth information to describe the experiences of the couples in maintaining their relationship and feeling close each other although geographically separated, especially for international students in Taiwan—conducting a study on the daily maintenance strategies of long-distance couples provided essential insights into relational intimacy.

Because in National Dong Hwa University, most of the international students are still unmarried and doesn’t bring their romantic relationship’s partner to the university, this study wants to seek depth information how international students when conducting studying maintain their relationship with their romantic partners although separated by distance or live in a different country. Three research questions guided this study: How do the participants stay feeling close?; what challenges are found by the participants?; and why do the participants choose to keep maintaining the long-distance relationship?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many definitions of the long-distance relationship. Other studies have used less concrete definitions. For example, Guldner (1996) used the statements “my partner lives far enough away from me that it would be very difficult or impossible to see him or her every day” and “my partner lives close enough to me that I could see him or her every day if I chose to”. These differing definitions suggest that many factors may play a role in determining if a relationship is long-distance or non-long distance and that there may be more than one type of long-distance relationship. While the definition of a long-distance relationship in this study is the relationship that conducted between the international students with their partner that live in a different country with them because different country means different environment, different time setting, different social environment and etc. so it will be effect their way in maintaining the relationship. So this study wants to limit the meaning of the distance to the country.

However, due to the variations in the definitions of long-distance, the estimations of the prevalence of these types of relationships are not exact, yet studies have established approximate ranges. In the United States, long-distance relationships have gained increasing prevalence among couples. Bergen, Kirby, and McBride (2007) estimate that nearly three million married Americans live away from their spouse. Nowadays, this phenomenon is not only for married couples, but also apparent in the lives of young adults as they separate from family, friends, and dating partners during the transition from high school to college (Arnett, 2000). It can be seen that many college students experience some form of long-distance dating today.

In the largest study about a long-distance relationship, Guldner (2003) compared couples in a long-distance relationship with those in the close-distance relationship resulted on four different measures: satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, and trust. The results showed no significant difference between the two groups and, in fact, the author suggested that the probability of success within a long-distance relationship is just as great as in other relationships. Not surprisingly, other researchers concurred with these findings (Dainton & Aylor, 2001; Stafford & Reske, 1990). On the other hand, research shows that when it comes to difficulties within a long-distance relationship, women are more likely to blame the relationship, while men tend to focus on external factors (Guldner, 1996). When it comes to a long-distance relationship, laying blame on the distance for the breakdown of the relationship more often than not facilitates an amicable break-up (Guldner), but it also leads many people to believe that long-distance relationship simply does not work (Guldner; The Center for the Study of Long Distance Relationships, 2004). As a result, one of the best ways to prevent this specific concern is to keep the lines of communication open (Aylor, 2003; Guldner). Dansie (2012) state that as many as 75% of college students are or will eventually be in a long-distance relationship relying on various communication technologies to connect with their partner.

Past investigations also have focused on defining the meaning of “long-distance” (Dellman-Jenkins, Bernard-Paolucci, & Rushing, 1994) and find the predictors of long-distance relationship stability (Schwebel, Dunn, Moss, & Renner, 1992). Although the long-distance looks very hard to be conducted, Stafford & Merolla (2007) studied that college students in a long-distance relationship are more stable than whom in the geographically close-distance relationship. Therefore, the long-distance relationship can be maintained, but it is little known about how they are saved.

## RESEARCH METHOD

### Design of the Study and Data Collection

This study was designed for a qualitative finding. It was dedicated for beginner qualitative researchers to enhance the philosophy of education (Suprpto, Ku, Cheng, & Prahani, 2020). Some demographic information was gathered to the purpose of describing the sample. The main source of data collection was interviewed. An interview is an excellent means of grasping at the meanings attached to intimacy (Pasaribu & Suprpto, 2020; Snyder, 1992). The interview sessions were conducted in semi-structured question format. The researcher provided the types of questions, but when taking interviews, it still gives space to some additions. It also used some closed-ended questions regarding age, religion, length of the relationship, and etc. It took time for an interview about 20-30 minutes. It was done using Indonesia language because all participants come from Indonesia. The majority of the interview used a set of open-ended questions and designed to explore the experiences of the participants and evaluating the strengths of their relationships. The maintenance and commitment of the relationship also were examined.

### Participants



This study was based on interviews data with four international students who were currently conducting long-distance relationships while furthering their academic education at National Dong Hwa University. A purposive sampling technique was used to get the participants. This study seeks the participants by asking the researcher's friend from the same country about their relationship status. Only participants are coming from Indonesia. They are also still unmarried. All the names used in this study are coded. This study solely focused on the experiences of one partner. No effort to collaborate the information was made at this study, although getting data from the couple is a better finding for this kind of research, it will be logically done for further analysis. This study was emphasized on subjective experience, so it was consistent with interviewing one person in the romantic relationship.

Demographic information of the participants is summarized in Table 1, and the relationship history of the participants is summarized in Table 2. There are two males and two females, and they are all graduate students.

**Table 1.** Participant's Demographics

Name	Age	Ethnics	Department	Year
A (M)	25	Javanese	English	2
B (F)	27	Batakese	Environmental studies	2
C (F)	26	Javanese	Education	2
D (M)	23	Karonese	Education	1

Note: All names and academic department are changed to protect the participants' anonymity

**Table 2.** History of participant's relationship

Name	Total Length	Separation Time	Remainder of Separation
A (M)	6 yrs	1 yrs 4 months	6 months
B (F)	8 yrs	1 yrs 10 months	2 months
C (F)	2 yrs 1 month	1 yrs 4 month	6 months
D (M)	5 months	3 months	2 years

### Data Analysis

Each interview was recorded by using audio-recorder and directly transcribed. The interviews were done in a face-to-face interview. The transcription process was very helpful in solidifying the data and clarifying coding strategies. As the transcriber, the researcher had the opportunity once again to hear the tapes after completion, then read through the transcriptions several times. After reading the transcriptions twice, the researcher began to do the content analysis by highlighting quotes that reflected similarities answer from the participants. According to Weber (1990) in Loh (2013), content analysis is the technique to break down the written text into meaningful units using design rules carefully. In this study, all the descriptions were captured from the interviews. The content analysis was done to get some codes and categories which answer the preliminary research questions of this research.

Firstly, the researcher code for phrases that describe the way of participants to stay feeling close with the partner. Then, code for phrases that describe some challenges that the participants get during the long-distance relationship. And then, code for phrases that describe the reasons for participants to keep maintaining the long-distance relationship. After that, the phrases were extracted to determine the core meaning of the participant's answer and then grouping similar categories. There are some categories in every part that found in this research. There are eight coding categories identified: the feeling close techniques, the communication processes, the using of technology, the straightness/weakness of the partner, the sense of trust, the commitment processes, the goal of the relationships, and the influence of motivation. With these eight essential areas in

mind, the researcher tried to cut the highlighted quotes and sorted them into piles that made some coded areas. The last step in the content analysis was to divide the quotes into themes that were common to most of the participants. The thematic areas that emerged were: keep in touch, this is my look, trustworthiness as a foundation, family's support, and relationship's goal "get married".

## FINDINGS

The results of this study made sense with the qualitative approach to present the goal of this research. This result revealed the participant's way to stay feeling close with their partner when they could not physically be together, the difficulties that they face and the reasons why the participants still keep maintaining their long distance relationship.

### Keep in Touch

Communication is a way to share and change information between two people or more, it also to make connection with everyone in everywhere. For the couples in the long-distance relationship that can not be always meeting each other by face to face, communication process appeared to be an important thing that helps the couples to stay feeling close each other. All participants reported that having good communication makes they can feel close with their partner although they are separated in different country. The participants also feel that communication is the reinforcing factor for their long-distance relationship, for example:

*B: "The strength of my relationship is always communication. We always have communication each other using technology, you know this time we even can see each other in video call."*

*C: "Our relationship is stronger every day because we always keep in touch. There are so many things that we do to communicate each other, sometimes I also call her mother via mobile phone."*

*D: "I think the communication is the most important thing in our relationship. We do the communication every day, but the duration is short time, maybe only 5-10 times of chatting in a day, but if we have video call, it will be in hours because it is not done every day."*

The other participant also explained how he used the communication as his way to feel close with his partner as he said:

*A: "I try to always be there for her in many ways. When she's cranky, I always try to get closer, seduce and persuade. Although she says, "don't send me message, don't call me anymore", but I was always persuaded. I will call her."*

The findings above showed that all participants really concerned about their communication process to stay feeling close by doing keep in touch with their long-distance relationship's partners. The participants also explained how the communications give big effect in their relationship.

Because all participants are international students, it means that they have similar activity in the university, such as to study and do the research. It will be very different if compared to the activity of their partners, especially the using of time. Sometimes, it makes problems among the participants with their partners. For example, participant A said even the small thing can be big thing because of the long-distance relationship, as reported below:

*A: "Even the small things can be bigger if we are in long distance. For example, my girl asks me to always give her news in whole days, morning, day, afternoon, evening. In fact, I am here not a victim of crime that will always be in news, sometimes I am sleeping because of very tired and forget to say something to her, it will be a very big problem and she will be very angry with me"*





*and tell "if you want to sleep, actually you can say something or give me news, send message or call, not like this, always forget to give me news". (with female intonation). The fact is I was really tired at that time. Even for sleeping, it could become big problem. (Feeling upset because of the girlfriend's demands)*

It can be seen that the partner of the participant A maybe doesn't realize the activity of her partner because the participant also didn't communicate his activity clearly. It also explains that the partner of the participant hope that the participant always try to keep in touch eventhough it is only one message at the end of his activity. Although, they have been together in long time, it doesn't guarantee the understanding of the partner when they are separated geographically. It is also shown by participant C that older than the participant A, she reported that:

*B: "There is only little problem in my relationship, sometimes the communication, because our activities are different, then when he is busy on his works, he will forget his mobile phone and me. Sometimes I send message from morning but unread until evening. How come he doesn't look his mobile phone in a whole day. It makes me get angry with him."*

But in other side, the participant D make a dealing with his partner about their way of communication related to his activity. Because when first time being in Taiwan, he had miscommunication with his partner in many times. They didn't have very intense communication so his girl feeling angry with him and even he ever tried to end this relationship. But then, he tried to explain his partner about his study process in the university and he is lucky to get her, as he reported:

*D: "She said "if the problem of communication disturbs your study, it is your right to communicate with me whenever you can, I will not impose you to always give me news, the time is flexible for you, I will always wait and it doesn't matter for me, but you have to maintain the trust that I give on you".*

When the participant D was interviewed, he looked very proud and excited to tell that story. It seems that the relationship between him and his partner works better although they are in long-distance relationship because he has communicated his activity to his partner. It is also happened to the participant B since she and her partner tried to understand their different job and time, their relationship goes smoothly.

It is important to realize that keep in touch is one of the main ways to this participants feeling close with their partners and could be big problem if it is only coming from one side, because the distance can produce negative thinking easily among the couples when the communication doesn't work well. It is good for further research to discuss how the long-distance couple's way of communication if studied based on their age, whether the maturity has impact or not to the long-distance relationship.

### **This is My Look!**

Nowadays, the using of technology has been developed increasingly and it helps the international students to get better communication process with their partner. All participants relied on the technology to be the link between them and their partner as a way to feel close to them, even though they could not be there in person. As they said that communication is the most important thing to make them stay close, they utilize many ways in communicating, such as using technology and also using old way sending letters. It is a good tools for the international students to make real their communication and know their

partner physically. They reported that they always try to show their partners how they look in the day they have communication. They reported as below:

*C: "I always send my photos to him. I think, it almost everyday. Before I am going to somewhere, I will tell him and take my picture and send it to him, I hope he knows how my look at that time. And I also hope he sends me back, but it is seldom, he will send his photos when he really wants to send, not because I have sent mine. We also do video call; it is to make our communication looks real"*

*D: "Our communication usually done by calling via phone, having video call, chatting using BBM, and sending videos and letter. When we are in video calling, we usually make our crazy expression in camera so it makes so funny, it is limited activity but we enjoy it because we feels like we are in the same place, not as far as the reality. She also often sends video about her activity, tells me what she has done in a day."*

Other participants also used the same technology to communicate to their partner but they only said the kinds of the technology and reported about the process less than the two participants above.

From the finding aboves, it can be seen because of the participants realize their separation position makes them can not meet each other physically, they keep trying to know and to show their physical condition each other to make the communication more real and felling close each other.

But sometimes, the other participants also feel that the technology has limitation. Sometimes they have difficulties when they want to share something but in fact they only can see their partner through technology. It is reported by participant A, that he ever tried to think about looking for another partner from the university, because sometimes he feels he needs a real one to be shared with, like he reported:

*A: "You know how a man, sometimes I want to make close friend but only a friend to share, for reassurance, so I looked for the closest friend to play with, to share feelings here when I feel bored that can make my heart grow calm. Because she is far from me, when I want to share my happiness, my sadness, sometimes I am confused how the way is, so I find a close friend to be asked with me as my sharing friend here, to play with and to have meal with so it feels more real".*

It is out of the expectation of this study, that although the participants know their status is in a relationship but sometimes they also miss to have someone to be shared in real. It also be the difficulties for participant D when looking at someone else more beautiful that his partner nearby him, sometimes he feels want to get close with someone else besides his partner, as he reported:

*D: "Sometimes I think why I can miss her so much, it means I love her so much, but sometimes I also think why the other girl is more beautiful than my girl. Sometimes I feel our chemistry is built but sometimes it is also unstable when I see a beautiful girl. It is really a temptation for me because my partner is far from me. But to avoid this feeling, sometimes I try to make video calling with my partner directly when I am in my room, so I can look her and realize that I have a very beautiful girl also."*

It seems like physical performance still become difficulties for the participants in longdistance relationship. When they see someone else, they can be attracted easily because they think that their real partners are far from them. But conversely, it only happens to the male participants in this study, because for the female participants, they directly ignored to



think someone else nearby them, maybe for the future research it is better if the study focus on the long-distance relationship experiences based on the genders whether sex have different influence for a long-distance relationship process.

It can be seen that the look of the partner physically in long-distance romantic relationship also has important role to make the couples stay close each other, because if it doesn't work well, it will be the difficulties to the participant to avoid the temptation of someone else.

### **Trustworthiness as Foundation**

A major issue that also came in the interviews was the topic of trustworthiness. While trustworthiness is an issue in all romantic relationships, it seemed to have particular significance for long-distance romantic relationship due to the constraints posed by the geographic separation. All the participants reported that without a complete sense of trust, a long-distance relationship would never work. Trust is an attribute when the individuals progressed from one romantic relationship to the next level. Ruble (1996) said that the individuals' attitudes about trust come from their romantic past and from observing their parent's relationships when they are young. The participants knew from past experiences that trust was a nonnegotiable trait that must be totally stable for the maintenance of a strong and healthy relationship, especially given the geographic constraints imposed by the distance. The participants also related this attribute to their communication process in this relationship. The trustworthiness really becomes a big effect for their relationship to handle the miscommunication among them, as reported of participant:

*D: "I think my relationship is strong because the trustworthiness, without trustworthiness, a relationship will be no meaning. If we trust each other, although we do not have very intense communication, it won't be a problem. I have ever been in a relationship, it was not a long-distance relationship, but at that time, we didn't have trustworthiness with my ex so the relationship didn't work. But now, my girl trust me so much eventhough I am far from her, and I am busy in my study so sometimes we only have few chatting, it is not a matter for us, because we stated before that we trust each other."*

*C: "There is some factors that make my relationship stronger, the trustworthiness and the relationship goal. I have known that he is a kind of a stable person, so I will always try to share with him every friend that I have here, and he also does the same thing. So we try our best to trust each other, it will be very good influence when I got angry with him when he was busy and forget his mobile phone, I directly think that I trust him, and I know he was in busy time now. So this trustworthiness really helps our long-distance relationship. If you don't trust your partner, it will be very hard to be in long-distance relationship because it will be easier to get negative thinking about unavailability of our partner."*

All participants seems realizing their long-distance relationship is stronger when they have trustworthiness among them. They utilize this as foundation for their relationship to minimize the problems that easier come caused by the geographic separation. Although in fact the temptation of infidelity will always come to this relationship, with the absolute trust in their relationship, the long-distance relationship will work well.

### **Family's Support**

Family is also potentially helpful in providing encouragement to maintain a longdistance relationship. Similar to processes in other types of intimate relationships, social networks seemed to influence participants' opinions of their long-distance relationship (Campbell, Connidis, & Davies, 1999). For some participants, the support from family even becomes the





basic reason why they choose to maintain this long-distance relationship, as reported by participant:

*A: "Because of the motivation from our family, and our personal feeling that we have got in many years so every problem that come in our relationship during geographic separation are ignored, and because our relationship has involved our families so our long-distance relationship is not only about our feelings but also what our families feel, it will be our priority".*

The participant A also told that his family and his partner's family have known each other even often involved in the same family event. When his family has family event in Indonesia, they always invited his girl to join although he is still in Taiwan, so it really maintains their relationship although they are in geographic separation. Family is also as big consideration for them when they are feeling tired with their relationship, they will keep trying to maintain this relationship. It means that the role of family is very influential in their relationship.

While participant C reported that family is the main reason why she is feeling confident with her long-distance relationship, since her father really like her partner and although she is in Taiwan, she often calls her partner's family via mobile phone, she does it to make her relationship with her partner's family stay close. Her partner also often comes to her parent's house to visit her family.

*C: "My parents support us, when there was also a man came to my house want to know me closer, my father seems not care about the man, so I also feel no interest with the man. But when my current partner first time came to my house and then invited me to his house, my father gave me permission, and when he visited my house, my father seems to welcome him, so I ask my family about their suggestion and told them about his background, but then you know, my family thinks he is good man and they like him. It makes me more spirit to be closer with him because my family has accepted him".*

It means that the influence of family support has important role to maintain their longdistance relationship and also to build their trustworthiness. It also happens to the participant B, when firstly her family didn't support her relationship because of different level of education with her partner, she only think that this relationship will like teenager relationship, no goal, no direction just as usual romantic relationship. But then, after some time, they try to know more each other and persuade their family by discussing about their relationship's goal, it makes the participant's family give support on the participant's relationship. It also change the way of participant B in maintaining her relationship, it makes her start to commit to the relationship and the relationship is stronger although they are still in geographic separation. The relationship's goal also then seemed to be the reason in maintaining the long distance relationship.

### **Relationship's Goal "Get Married"**

Another reason why the participants maintain the long-distance relationship is the relationship's goal. Almost all the participants reported that they have already discussed with their partner about their relationship's goal. It also relates to their commitment in conducting this relationship. Commitment in relationship's goal then seemed to be a reflection of one's investment in the relationship as evidence by staying in touch each other. It can be seen from this report:

*B: "Actually, the most important thing also that makes us feeling close is about the topics that we always share each other when we communicate. We share about our relationship's goal, and*



*then we pray together, it changed my mind about this relationship. First time, I only thought that I have a boyfriend, that's enough, but then after being in some years relationship, he tried to share his goal in this relationship to me is getting married, it makes my mind changed and realize that I have found one for my future. So the distance in our relationship means little thing if compared to our goal."*

Even for participant C, the relationship's goal has become one of the trending topics in her relationship communication process.

*C: "Now we are preparing ourselves for our future, we save money, we do our best to prepare the best future for us, even our daily sharing topic is about our marriage preparation."*

It also explains that the participant doesn't think negatively about their long-distance relationship because they have something to reach for their future with their current partner. They think that the separation is the investment for their better future. Because although they are separated in miles, but they are doing preparation to have better quality for their togetherness in the future.

Another participant also reported that the feeling of having found the fixed criteria for future partner also as one of the factors that he is so committed to his current partner, although first time he said that he needs someone else to be his sharing friend in the university, but he still commit to his current long-distance relationship because he thinks that he has found the girl to be his wife in the future, although now they are separated by country. He is quite confident that he had found the best partner for himself as he told:

*A: "I hope the best for us, to get married, and this will be happy ending. I hope she will be my wife because she has fix criteria to be my wife; she is beautiful, kind, and loved by my family. Although I like to see another beautiful girl here, but it won't change my relationship with her, because she has everything I need to be my future wife. So I will maintain this longdistance relationship."*

These perceptions seemed to be connected with the commitment processes and a desire to fully invest in a relationship with their current partner. But it seems like the age and maturity also affect their way when committed to their current partner. It can be shown by the report from participant A, B, and C that has been in 25-27 years old if compared with the younger participant D that still 23 years old. Participant D contrastly doesn't think too much about getting married with his current partner because he thinks that he still have long time to think about it. He only said that if his current partner is his soulmate, they can pass their relationship process during this long-distance relationship. Overall, the participants were articulate about their strong commitments to their partners and the relationship, despite in the geographic separation.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study shed light on our understanding about the international students in National Dong Hwa University experience in conducting their long-distance romantic relationships. According to the participants, there are five themes that have influential in their long-distance relationship, including: (1) keep in touch, (2) this is my look, (3) trustworthiness as foundation, (4) family's support, and (5) relationship's goal "get married".

Keep in touch in this study related to the way of the participants to stay feeling close with their partners. The non-physical nature of communicating for these couples was cited as a major benefit, instead of a negative consequence of the geographic separation. They

utilize many ways of communication to keep in touch well because it also becomes a difficulty for the relationship if it is not done seriously. Because of the distance, keep in touch make the participants and partner know each other about their conditions and help the relationship works more smooth. The communication processes also used by the participants to reaffirm their commitment and interdependence to the relationship that help explain why the distance did little to interfere their long-distance relationship. However, extra effort must be made to keep in touch with the partner since the distance can inhibit communication. Furthermore, creative techniques had to be implemented by the participants in order to maintain the closeness with the partner, when they could not be together. Technology is used by the participants to feel closer to their partner. Maintaining communication through phone and video calling help them through the rough spots. Because the distance makes the participants cannot see their partner physically, they usually try to send their photos or videos to handle this problem. It also helps the couple to feel close and real because they can see each other by using the technology.

Additionally, many participants mentioned that they felt they had found “the one” or their “soul-mates”. Since many of the participants have got support from their family, it makes them more believed that this relationship will no matter even in a long-distance relationship. They also always try to have contact with their partner’s family. Although admitting that the long-distance relationship would be difficult, the participants believed that there simply was not a substitute for their current partner and focus on the future. Focusing on the future also help the participants to stay in their long-distance relationship. The goal of the relationship becomes the important reason for the participants to maintain and to reject all difficulties in their relationship. They believed that now they are preparing themselves in order to have better future with their current partner. It could be also affected by their age and maturity so for further research, it is better if study the relationship based on different age of participants. Overall, the respondents seemed satisfied and accepted their situation.

### **Limitations of this Study**

Due to the economic and geographic consideration on the part of the researcher, only one partner from each long-distance romantic couple was interviewed. Different issues may have emerged if both partners from the international students’ couples had been interviewed. Then the issue that also should be noted was the fact that these participants were all highly educated in master program. Even their partners had at least completed a high school’s degree. It would be interesting to sample more educationally diverse populations and explore how educational background might connect to the long-distance relationship process. It is also as delimitation of this study when the international students are in one university due to the methodological consideration for the researcher. Another issue is also about the participants that coming only from one country, it will be very different experiences that may be got if the participants from diverse country. However, this “my first qualitative research” is useful to give an understanding to international students who experience long-distance relationship.

### **CONCLUSION**

Relationship strengths as they are articulated by the participants’ themselves give insight regarding the meanings attached to the distance effect. It seems that longdistance relationships are not used as a means to a teenager relationship, but rather as a means to an end (called, marriage) while getting through a period time of separation which is created by further academic needs of the participants. Even the participants who had the option of dating others people that they had no need to because they are already with the best person



life had to offer them. The main fact that long-distance relationship requires extra effort in itself like to keep in touch and have full trustworthiness, which may contribute to the commitment and confidence about their relationship.

Participants in this study described much strength of their relationships and seemed dedicated to making them work. Admittedly, the distance has both beneficial and negative aspects, but how the couple handle it through the communication, trust each other and have relationship's goal, determined the success of the long-distance couples. Interview data suggested that committed participants who have complete trust with their partner could conduct successful long-distance relationships. The participants identified no major problems with their partners, which signified that these participants felt their relationships were quite solid in themselves. The only thing wrong with these relationships as expressed by the respondents was "the distance" itself.

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