Students as Global Citizens: Lessons from the International Study Tour

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Abstract—Study and work operations are being transformed with the uses of technologies and are consequently becoming global. This paper outlines lessons learned based on the international study tour that Australian Bachelor of Information Systems students undertook. This research identifies that for the study tour to be successful, students need to gain skills that global citizens require. For example, students will need to gain an understanding of local cultures, local customs and habits. Furthermore, students would also need to gain an understanding of how a field of their future career expertise operates in the host country, how study and business are conducted internationally, which tools and technologies are currently being utilized on a global scale, what trends drive future developments world-wide and how business negotiations and collaborations are being undertaken across borders. Furthermore, this research provides a guide to educators who are planning, guiding and running study tours as it outlines the requirements of having a pre-tour preparatory session, carefully planned and executed tour itineraries and post-tour sessions during which students can reflect on their experiences and lessons learned so that they can apply them to future international business visits and ventures.

Keywords—Global education, international experiences, international study tours, students as global citizens, student centered education.

I. INTRODUCTION

DURING the past decade, Australian universities have been taking their students abroad on organized study tours. Based on the data collected by the Australian Department of Education, it can be noted that from 2011 to 2014, the number of participants in short study tour programs has almost doubled. Furthermore, it can be seen that out of all the mobility programs study tours seems to attract about 43 % of students and that schools of Science, Technology and Engineering (STEM) are amongst most proactively engaging [1]. This reflective study is based on the undertaken international study tour journey that enabled final year, Bachelor of Information Systems students from Western Sydney University, Australia to engage in their first innovative study tour learning experience. This paper aims to identify strategies that are to be implemented when international short duration study tours are being planned and organized. Furthermore, this paper pinpoints lessons learned from this international study tour experience that provided students with alternative channels through which to learn and engage. In addition, this paper highlights and identifies skills and knowledge students undertaking international study tours will have the opportunities to gain, so that by deeply engaging in such learning experiences they can obtain knowledge required to become future global citizens.

II. STUDY TOUR OBJECTIVES

This tour was designed for final year Australian Bachelor of Information Systems degree students, who are about a semester away from completing their studies. At this stage it was identified that students in their final year are academically mature and ready to take more challenging international experiences and become career ready globally. Consequently, high performing third year students, undertaking Emerging Trends, a core Information Systems subject were invited to take a part in a 10-day India Study Tour, one of the growing technology hubs in Asia [2]. Participants were selected based on their past grades, written submissions and detailed interviews. Based on the assessments and students performance results, out of 22 students who applied for the study tour, a group of six well-performing students was chosen to take part.

The study tour preparations helped identify a number of factors. First it was essential to identify the main outcomes students undertaking the tour will be able to meet. To do this, a detailed review of the unit was conducted and learning outcomes of the unit mapped to activities undertaken as a part of the tour. Secondly, a review of the unit delivery was conducted. As it can be seen from Fig. 1, this subject is commenced in 2010. Each year subjects are being reviewed and new changes and requirements identified, so that they can be implemented the following semester. In its early days, the Emerging Trends subject operated in a standard two-hour lecture and two-hour tutorial mode. Often in lectures new concepts and theories would be discussed, while during tutorials students would do a case study analysis, engage in discussions, would complete reviews and would compare and contrast new cutting edge technologies.

In 2013, there was a major re-development undertaken with this unit as it was identified that frontal teaching is not always the most effective. Therefore, this subject's delivery was restructured to incorporate lectures and tutorials into seminar sessions. During seminars, the facilitators guide discussions and also provide sufficient time for students to interact and work on collaborative projects. Furthermore, in seminars, the facilitators can easier attend to specific requirements of students and address particular areas in which students may be struggling [3]. In seminar environments students get the opportunity to focus on group activities, discussions and

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collaborative projects while applying the theoretical knowledge learned. Moreover, seminars are also attended by industry speakers and experts where students are provided with real life examples and experiences.

Fig. 1 Teaching Staff and student engagements over the years

Fig. 2 Teaching modes and delivery

From Fig. 2 it can be seen that over the years the number of assessments has stayed the same, however the nature of the subject delivery has changed. The same principles were applied to the study tour cohort. During the study tour experience, it was noted that when planning a study tour it is important to carefully plan all sessions [4]. Consequently, the pre-departure session consisted of two major components. Initially, the primary theory concepts were reviewed and discussed. Following this, the basic building blocks identifying some of the new emerging trends in Information Systems were reviewed and some known international business cases analyzed. Next, the tour plan was discussed and reviewed with all group members. In addition, all participants

were informed about the accommodation and their responsibilities in terms of travel. A practical list that included health precautions, what to wear, as well as important phone numbers was given to the study tour participants.

Study tour participants were also advised that during the tour there will be some time to see the major attractions, however that the primary focus is education and business interaction. It was also noted that to gain full cultural immersion it is important to engage in local business exchanges, learn from peers who are undertaking similar studies overseas and gain new knowledge from the cultural experiences.

Therefore, the study tour had the following objectives:
A) Give students the opportunity to learn about life, work and study in India;
B) Give student the opportunity to interact with peers overseas and make long lasting connections;
C) Give students the opportunity to engage in business discussions and hear from some of the world's top business leaders;
D) Give students knowledge and skills about what it means to be a global citizen; and,
E) Teach students about different cultures and habits, and allow them to experience India's hospitality.

III. STUDY TOUR EXPERIENCES

International study tour students' experiences were guided by the academic tour organizers. Students were however seen as responsible travelers and were expected to follow the given schedules and requirements.

The 10-day study tour was filled with a range of cultural, business and educational visits. Each visit gave students the opportunity to learn more of what it meant to be a global citizen and also take into the account what they would need to know later in life when embarking on overseas travel for study or work.

During the study tour, the students visited three universities, one training center and five businesses. At the education institutions they had the opportunity to network with local students, learn about their local experiences and also discuss similarities and differences of study patterns, materials learned and modes of studies in both India and Australia. Students also learned that modes of study vary, where for example in Australia students often have about four hours a week allocated to a subject, while in India in addition to lecture and tutorial time, students often also have practice classes for units three times a week. On the other hand, it was also noted that the content studied in both India and Australia is quite similar and that both Australian and Indian universities highly value industry collaborations and engagements.

To ensure the study tour students gain a holistic emersion experience, content of the study tour was closely mapped to the Information Systems degree the students are undertaking.

Consequently, students were given opportunities not only to mingle with their peers and meet the academic staff and engage actively in exchanges, but were also given opportunities to visit some cutting edge businesses.

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To supplement the study experience students were given opportunities to visit businesses whose operations and objectives closely align with Information Systems majors and/or sub majors. As it can be seen from Fig. 3, the study tour participants were taken to visit and engage with businesses in the telecommunications industry, which provided students with knowledge in mobile computing and networking. The technology-based implementation company provided students with knowledge about project management, web development, new systems implementations, as well as new projects for young innovators. The automotive organization allowed students to learn about supply chain operations, tracking, business processes re-engineering and just-in-time delivery. The medical goods supply organization allowed students to see and monitor system operations, identify critical defects and closely observe production operations. And finally, the large food chain organization allowed students to learn about automated production, critical production times and monitoring systems used to oversee all activities.
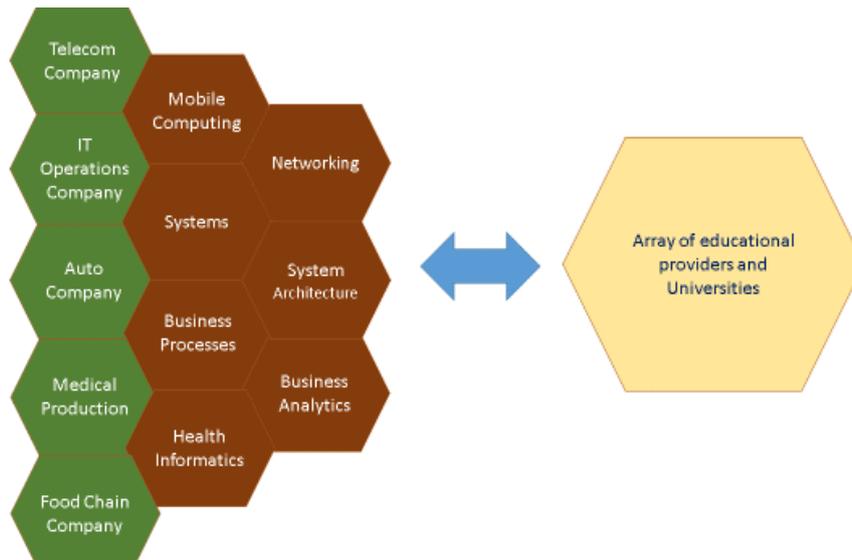

Fig. 3 Lessons learned: visited companies and educational institutions

When visiting different organizations, the students were welcomed in a traditional style, greeted, taken on the site tours and given opportunities to interact with world class experts. By understanding cultural principles and engaging internationally, students can now adjust with more ease to foreign and global environments. This was also noted during the tour, as day by day students were becoming more at ease. Furthermore, during the study tour students were given the unique opportunity to learn about cutting edge operations, business ventures and company structures. Students also had the chance to hear from some of the top departmental managers and learn about current edge business operations, business ventures and future predictions. Students also had the opportunity to visit some manufacturing plants, see the production lines and observe how system embedded sensors and cameras closely monitor production lines and are able to alert staff of any discrepancies and defects if and when noted. The visits to the companies gave students the ability to move away from purely theoretical and case-based concepts and understandings, to experience of just-in-time operations and productions in real companies.

IV. VALUE OF THE STUDY TOUR LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Detailed analysis of the study tour could be mapped to the notions of Blooms Taxonomy [5] and Kolb's Cycle of Learning [6]. The tour was planned based on the already existing knowledge and understanding that all students have already undertaken a significant portion of study prior to the tour and have an understanding of the principles of Information Systems. The study tour was seen as a vehicle that was giving students the opportunity to gain a wider array of experiences and undertake experiential learning [7]. Deeper learning was expected to be made based on the mix of prior knowledge gained before the tour and the knowledge gained as a result of the tour [8]. While on the tour, it was noted that students would be exposed to and gain knowledge about cultures, customs and habits of locals. Once students were comfortable in the local settings, they could then focus on understanding new fields of knowledge and fully comprehending what they have learned. To fully comprehend, it was seen essential to reflect on past experiences, review what was learned recently and make mental maps between the two. Study tour students needed to make associations between their experiences in Australia when working, learning and studying and their peers' experiences in India. Once this was done, the students were able to do more a comprehensive analysis and conceptualize what the differences meant when studying, when running business, when collaborating with international organizations, when visiting international partners, as well as how reciprocal relationships would need to function when for example international visitors come to visit the organization in Australia. Furthermore, this experience

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equipped students with knowledge and skills required when needing to gain understandings of global study and work operations. Students can not only now clearly point out similarities and differences in the ways in which the two countries conduct business or follow study patterns, but they can now also successfully interact in the new environment. For example, initially students may not have been accustomed to ritual welcomes; however, after learning more about the local customs and cultures, they were able to become familiar and relaxed. Moreover, students have learned some of the business practices and procedures that strictly regulate how junior staff is expected to address senior staff in India, but also learned that in India, the same as in Australia, young employees are nurtured and encouraged to communicate with mentors and show their interest and express their goals and what they would like to achieve in their careers. It is important to note that even though there are certain procedural and cultural differences, in business very similar relationships are present and young employees are highly encouraged to seek high-performing well-respected mentors in their fields.
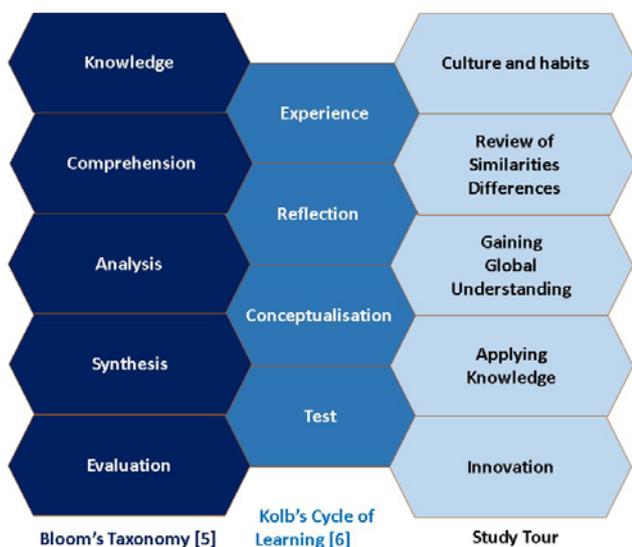

Fig. 4 Learning theories and findings

Students in India are taught even at university that it is absolutely paramount to practice certain skills in order to achieve. One example is how programming is taught at universities and how students, in addition to regular class activities, are also required to attend practice sessions. It is well known that in mathematics, as well as programing, persistence and dedication to task are essential to excel. In Australia students often have two hours of lectures and two hours of practical after which it is their responsibility to gain extra skills, practice and learned knowledge.

After a detailed review, it can be seen that exposing students to a different country and giving them the opportunity to experience life in that country, is crucial for the successful development of future global citizens. If the students were to visit countries as tourists they would have the chance to visit tourist attractions, however they would not have as much

chance to be fully immersed into the society. It can be seen that a global citizen would need to have knowledge of various global scenarios. Firstly, they would need to read about the business and study scenarios of countries, as well as the governmental regulations, habits, customs and traditions. However, even though knowledge of these is paramount, it is never fully enough. Visiting and residing in a country and fully experiencing it is crucial to successful future interactions.

Considering that study tour students were initially provided with cases, they were encouraged to read and learn based on the available material. However, once study tour students arrived to India they were given the opportunity to fully immerse themselves into the local culture.

They were given the opportunity to experience crossing roads in crowded streets, taking public transport and tackling busy traffic to arrive on time to a meeting. Students also had the opportunity to experience local cooking and delicacies, local customs and traditions. Furthermore, the students fully engaged with local students, academics and business leaders and their staff.

One quite important fact is that students who undertook the tour were not undertaking a self-planned or even a group planned holiday, but were taking part in activities that were carefully planned and embedded in the day to day operations of local business and/or study routines. Consequently, there were days where the study tour students were just students in India, being met by local students who showed them their campuses, introduced them to their colleagues, which allow them to time to talk and compare their studies and their usual day to day activities. Furthermore, the students were given opportunities to work on common projects and identify some of the current trends in the field of information systems. It was interesting that the mixed student groups had very similar views on emerging technologies and their applications.

At other times, the students were either seen as visitors coming to see how their partner organizations work and operate, or employees who are learning crucial components of the system implementations. Therefore, when visiting organizations students were treated as guests with the full respect that showed the visiting Australian students what international collaborations and engagements often entail. The students also learned about companies' operations and they also had the unique experience of speaking to top managers.

It can be noted that during this study tour company visits, the students also learned about some of the ventures of the large multinational organizations had in both India and Australia. Some have close business partners in Australia, some service and distribute goods to Australian companies, and some have offices in Australia and even offer internships in both India and Australia.

Allowing the students to hear from the organizations themselves about their close links and collaborative partnerships within technology sectors and with Australian businesses was a valuable experience for the students, as this helped them learn about future opportunities and likely scenarios to occur once they graduate and enter the workforce.

By undertaking a study tour students can gain cutting edge

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experiences. They can learn how to adjust in a new country, how to find the way around, who to approach and ask for help and support if needed. The study tours can also give students the unique opportunity to establish contacts overseas, with student peers and also some well reputed businesses. It is noted that in the future the world will become even more globalized then it is today. It is widely seen that geographical locations have stopped playing any determining factors in whether business is to be conducted with a company or not. Jobs are being outsourced daily, new business ventures with international partners are being formed and even customers buying simple perishable goods are no longer looking to purchase goods locally, but consider purchasing goods from organizations offering cheaper alternatives, regardless of the location. Therefore, students need to be proactive. They need to gain required skills and they also need to show and demonstrate their willingness to learn and excel. They need to graduate while knowing that future business and work interactions will require global citizens. They also need to take into the account that they may live in one country but run a business in another or have business partners from all over the world. Collaborators are also essential for good ventures, and therefore, it is also important that students are given opportunities to meet their peers overseas. Technology is available today that can allow students to gain and maintain business contacts and grow their networks locally and internationally. Students also need to learn the importance of maintaining such relationships. For example, one day a student they met at the university overseas while undertaking the study tour could become their business partner or collaborator.

Upon returning home, it is important to give students the opportunity to reflect on their journey, complete their journal, ponder their experiences, discuss them and learn from them. It is also important to identify what worked well, what could have been done better and how in the future certain experiences may be improved. It is also important to give students the opportunity to review how they would have dealt with certain encountered situations if they were on a business visit. This gives students an early to building on their international engagements and experiences, which in the future will most likely give them the cutting edge advantage over their peers who have not undertaken similar activities as students. It is expected that students who undertake study tour experiences will be able to better deal with and be more prepared when undertaking and participating in international business ventures.

V. Conclusion and Further Studies

In conclusion, this research identifies that running international study tours requires careful planning, tour execution and follow up of the tour activities. When planning tour activities it is essential to take into the account current global business and educational perspectives. Consequently, the aim of the tour should be to equip current students with the skills required to be future global citizen. Therefore, it is also essential to closely align the aims of the tour with the students'

areas of study, as well as potential internship and employment trends. To plan a study tour successfully it is also essential to take into the account students' present experiences, as well as current research trends, new opportunities and cutting edge innovations.

The tour plan needs to be concise. It needs to allocate sufficient time to cultural interactions, business visits, university visits and projects. Once the tour is in progress, it is essential to be attentive and to allow students to gain a holistic understanding of global interactions, international exchanges and project engagements. While on the tour the students will gain knowledge about similarities and differences between cultures, business exchanges, as well as the environments in which study and work are conducted. Furthermore, students will learn about global perspectives within their field, as well as current research initiatives. In addition, students will learn about how to apply knowledge in multicultural teams, work on collaborative projects and future business initiatives.

Post tour it is important to allow the student participants to further evaluate their experiences, write journals, present and identify how to apply the skills and knowledge gained to future international experiences.

It is expected that study tours will in the future become a part of students' study curriculum. It will be important for future studies to investigate study tour experiences and perceptions of the students, both before and after.

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