

**DESIGNING IMPACTFUL INTERNATIONAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES: LESSONS FROM A STUDY TOUR FOR EXECUTIVE MBA STUDENTS**

Priscila Pesce Lopes De Oliveira

Afonso Carneiro Lima - UNIFOR

**Resumo**

This applied research assesses students' perceptions of a short-term international learning experience offered as part of a Brazilian EMBA program. The study tour, held in partnership with a prestigious university in the United States, included lectures by renowned faculty, visits to world-class organizations, and cultural exposure. Through a focus group with participants comprised of both students and alumni, this qualitative research identifies key themes associated with participants' perceptions, including the relevance of content to professional practice, the value of integrating academic and corporate visits, and suggestions for improvement. Findings reveal that even brief, well-structured immersion programs can generate transformative learning outcomes when aligned with participants' professional context and challenges. The study contributes to the literature on experiential and executive education and offers practical implications for the design of impactful international study tours in executive master's and doctoral programs.

**Palavras-chave:** International management education, Executive program design, Experiential learning in higher education

**Abstract**

This applied research assesses students' perceptions of a short-term international learning experience offered as part of a Brazilian EMBA program. The study tour, held in partnership with a prestigious university in the United States, included lectures by renowned faculty, visits to world-class organizations, and cultural exposure. Through a focus group with participants comprised of both students and alumni, this qualitative research identifies key themes associated with participants' perceptions, including the relevance of content to professional practice, the value of integrating academic and corporate visits, and suggestions for improvement. Findings reveal that even brief, well-structured immersion programs can generate transformative learning outcomes when aligned with participants' professional context and challenges. The study contributes to the literature on experiential and executive education and offers practical implications for the design of impactful international study tours in executive master's and doctoral programs.

**Keywords:** International management education, Executive program design, Experiential learning in higher education

# **Designing Impactful International Learning Experiences: Lessons from a Study Tour for Executive MBA Students**

## **Abstract**

This applied research assesses students' perceptions of a short-term international learning experience offered as part of a Brazilian EMBA program. The study tour, held in partnership with a prestigious university in the United States, included lectures by renowned faculty, visits to world-class organizations, and cultural exposure. Through a focus group with participants comprised of both students and alumni, this qualitative research identifies key themes associated with participants' perceptions, including the relevance of content to professional practice, the value of integrating academic and corporate visits, and suggestions for improvement. Findings reveal that even brief, well-structured immersion programs can generate transformative learning outcomes when aligned with participants' professional context and challenges. The study contributes to the literature on experiential and executive education and offers practical implications for the design of impactful international study tours in executive master's and doctoral programs.

**Keywords:** International management education, Executive program design, Experiential learning in higher education

## **1 Introduction**

In an era of globalized economies and interconnected industries, international experiences have become a hallmark of quality higher education, particularly in business and management education. According to the Institute of International Education (IIE, 2023), international mobility, especially at the graduate level, fosters essential competencies such as global leadership, intercultural communication, and adaptability, all of which are widely regarded as crucial to prepare current and future managers for the complexities of transnational and multicultural environments (Ryan, Silvano, & Brown, 2013).

In the same vein, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB International, 2025b) underscores the strategic role of internationalization, noting that accredited institutions increasingly support a range of global engagement initiatives. However, student participation rates remain low: fewer than 5% of business school students engage in any form of international learning experiences, whether short-term or semester-long (AACSB International, 2025a).

Even though internationalization has been increasingly valued by higher education institutions (HEI), the literature has yet to sufficiently examine the design and educational impact of short-term international experiences. Existing research has predominantly centered on undergraduate student mobility and lengthier academic exchange programs (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Teichler, 2004; Wächter, 2003), paying limited attention to the rising prevalence and strategic importance of brief, immersive learning experiences. Furthermore, few studies have explored how these experiences are pedagogically structured, aligned with the needs of adult learners, or translate into sustained professional development.

Where existing studies do touch on learning in international settings, they frequently remain conceptual or limited to outcomes, without exploring the interplay between program design, participant engagement, and applied learning. For example, while Mintzberg and Gosling (2002) advocate for "educating managers beyond borders," empirical research on how to effectively design these border-crossing experiences is scarce. Similarly, while theories of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), constructive alignment (Biggs, 1996), and adult learning (Merriam & Bierema, 2013; Illeris, 2003) offer important conceptual tools, their application in the specific context of short-term, graduate-level international learning experiences has

received limited empirical attention. Leask (2009) and Altbach and Knight (2007) also call for a better understanding of how structured and informal dimensions of international learning interact, but evidence on how this unfolds in EMBA or EDBA programs remains fragmented.

This study addresses these gaps by examining the design and perceived impact of a one-week international study tour embedded within a Business Administration graduate program at a Brazilian university. Held in collaboration with a leading U.S. business school, this study tour took place at a major American city and featured academic lectures and corporate visits. Using a qualitative, participant-centered approach, the research draws on insights from a post-experience focus group with students and alumni to evaluate what worked, what could be improved, and how the program's structure contributed to learning outcomes.

The research is guided by the following question: how do graduate students and alumni perceive the academic, professional, and structural dimensions of a short-term international study tour, and what design improvements can enhance its learning impact? Accordingly, the goal of this study is to assess participant perceptions of a short-term international study tour within an EMBA program, with the aim of identifying key design elements that support applied learning, relevance, and student engagement.

The relevance of this investigation is twofold. From a theoretical standpoint, it contributes to closing a notable gap in the literature at the intersection of internationalization, program design, and adult learning in graduate education. By grounding the analysis in theories of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), constructive alignment (Biggs, 1996), and adult development (Merriam & Bierema, 2013), the study advances a more integrated understanding of how global experiences can be structured for transformative learning. From a practical perspective, the study offers actionable insights for HEIs seeking to internationalize their graduate programs in meaningful and pedagogically sound ways, especially in contexts where long-term student mobility is not feasible. It also responds to the growing demand for evidence-based program design in executive and professional education.

## **2 Theoretical Background**

### **2.1 Internationalization of higher education**

Globalized business environments increasingly drive universities to embed international experiences into their curricula. Despite this shift, the literature remains heavily weighted toward undergraduate and semester-long student mobility, with less attention paid to short-term graduate-level experiences (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Wächter, 2003; Teichler, 2004). Recent studies, however, have begun to highlight the value of such opportunities. For instance, a 2021 review noted that while short-term global programs are increasing in popularity, their learning outcomes vary significantly depending on pre- and post-immersion scaffolding and expert engagement (Jansa & Anderson, 2021; Abhayawansa, Donovan, Masli, & Topple, 2024). There remains a clear gap in empirical knowledge about structural design and learner experiences within these intensive learning opportunities.

### **2.2 Experiential and adult learning theories**

Our approach is anchored in Kolb's experiential learning cycle, which encompasses hands-on experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). Short-term immersive experiences that combine faculty-led instruction and real-world corporate engagements are particularly likely to activate this cycle more fully than traditional coursework, thus effectively complementing it. Scholars like Illeris (2003) and Merriam & Bierema (2013) emphasize the importance of addressing adult learners' cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions, all of which are activated in cultural immersion contexts. Additionally, recent studies suggest that transformative impact is strongest when such components are fully aligned and sequenced; for instance, through pre-trip orientation and post-trip integrative reflection (Chong, Gan, & Menkhoff, 2022).

### **2.3 Program design and constructive alignment in executive education**

Constructive alignment (Biggs, 1996) is a crucial notion for structuring short-term international learning experiences. Coherent design ensures that learning outcomes, activities, and assessment are intentionally aligned. Mintzberg & Gosling (2002) advocated for “educating managers beyond borders,” emphasizing that depth, more than mere international exposure, is essential to avoid superficial or touristic experiences. Recent institutional frameworks (Bisoux, 2025) suggest that high-impact short learning experiences include structured pre-tour briefings, experiential visits, faculty reflection sessions, and structured post-tour integration. Case exemplars, such as short-term global modules at Wake Forest University School of Business and Thunderbird School of Global Management, demonstrate that when designed purposefully, such experiences can lead to high levels of cross-cultural competence and strategic capability development, even within tight timeframes.

### **3 Method**

Through a qualitative, exploratory approach, this study analyzes student and alumni perceptions and expectations regarding international academic experiences. The objective was to gather in-depth insights from participants of a short-term international study tour, focusing on their reflections and recommendations for future program enhancements. The data for this study come from a focus group, which enabled dynamic interaction among participants and facilitated the emergence of shared meanings and divergent viewpoints.

#### **3.1 The international study tour**

The international study tour discussed in this study results from a collaborative initiative between researchers from a Brazilian university and a prestigious American university on the East Coast in the early 2010s. Conceived as a strategic differentiator for a research-oriented Brazilian executive master’s program in business administration, the tour was designed to provide participants with direct exposure to innovative business ecosystems within mature and dynamic markets, with the core purpose of immersing students in international contexts where global businesses are structured, offering valuable benchmarks, advanced technological tools, and the opportunity to significantly expand their professional network. Although not all expected outcomes were explicitly defined, the overarching goal has been to generate practical impact on business within the participants’ local contexts.

A key academic component of the program includes classes taught by renowned faculty members from the American host university. The topics of these sessions vary based on the profile and interests of the participating cohort. Prior to the study tour, participants’ academic and professional backgrounds are mapped and discussed among faculty organizing the tour, thereby ensuring relevance and applicability.

Acknowledging that many participants do not speak English fluently, the program consistently includes the support of a professional interpreter, who is briefed in advance on the course content to ensure seamless translation and participant engagement.

Company visits are curated to reflect both the diversity of student interests and the opportunity for cross-sector learning. These visits include organizations based in or with offices in the city, and have spanned a wide range of industries such as startup incubators, investment banks, media companies, sports management agencies, retail firms, and technology enterprises. As for the academic component, its core themes include governance (with an emphasis on family businesses), operations management, brand strategy, and leadership. These themes have been highly appraised by different cohorts throughout the years. Collectively, these experiences aim to foster critical insights, comparative perspectives, and tangible professional growth.

#### **3.2 Data collection**

The focus group was conducted in December 2023, approximately three months after the international study tour had taken place. This timing was chosen to allow for reflection and possible repercussions of the learning experience in students’ professional routines and projects, while ensuring that recollection remained vivid in participants’ memories. The focus group

happened through a video conferencing platform, allowing for broad participation of both current students and alumni of the executive master's in business administration program. This format ensured convenience and inclusiveness, especially given the geographic dispersion of participants across different states.

The session was moderated by one of the authors, who had prior experience in qualitative methods. Participants were informed of the research purpose and provided informed consent. The session lasted approximately 90 minutes and was recorded (with permission) for transcription and analysis purposes.

### **3.3 Subjects**

The focus group involved a purposive sample of seven participants, including both students and alumni who had taken part in the 2023 study tour. The group was diverse in terms of age, professional background, and stage in the program (current students vs. graduates), enriching the discussion through various interpretations of the shared experience.

### **3.4 Units of analysis**

To guide the discussion and subsequent analysis, three analytical categories were predefined based on the objectives of the study:

1. General impressions – capturing participants' overall evaluations of the international learning experience, including perceived value and alignment with professional development goals.
2. Academic experience and visits – exploring preferences regarding content, teaching styles, and academic engagement during the 3-hour lectures held at the international partner university and visits to companies.
3. Suggestions for improvement – collecting constructive feedback for the refinement of future editions of the international study tour, including logistical, academic, and experiential components.

### **3.5 Data analysis**

The focus group transcript was analyzed using thematic analysis, following the procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Codes were developed inductively from the data and subsequently grouped into broader categories corresponding to the three analytical categories. Patterns, contrasts, and illustrative quotes were identified to support the discussion of findings in the next section.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

The following subsections detail the emerging themes identified through the focus group analysis, grouped by the predefined analytical categories: general impressions (seven themes), academic experience (six themes), and suggestions for improvement (three themes).

### **4.1 General impressions**

Participants' general impressions of the international study tour were overwhelmingly positive and revealed seven interconnected themes: perceived value, integration of academic and corporate learning, practical application, teaching quality, emotional engagement, program customization, and desire for continuity. Together, these insights illustrate how the program succeeded in delivering not only educational relevance but also a personally and professionally transformative experience.

A recurring observation was that of exceeded expectations. Although participants anticipated a high-quality experience, many were surprised by the actual impact of the program. Male Respondent 2 reflected, "*Numa hipótese boa, eu já esperava uma boa impressão, mas foi bem melhor,*" ['I had good expectations, I expected a good experience, but it was much better'] capturing a sentiment of pleasant surprise that echoed throughout the group. This perception of exceptional value is consistent with prior studies on short-term international experiences, which have demonstrated that even brief exposure can significantly influence professional perspectives (Teichler, 2004; Andrade, 2006).

A notable strength of the study tour was the integration between academic sessions and corporate visits. Participants consistently emphasized the value of connecting classroom concepts with on-site observations in globally recognized organizations. As Female Respondent 2 noted, “*A combinação com aulas e visitas é importante,*” [‘The combination of classes and visits is important’] while Female Respondent 1 added, “*Vivenciamos boa parte dos assuntos discutidos em aula.*” [‘We experienced many of the topics discussed in class.’] This blended format reinforced the applied nature of the study tour and reflects best practices in executive education, where experiential learning is considered a core element of managerial development (Mintzberg & Gosling, 2002).

Several participants discussed the practical application of knowledge gained during the immersion. For example, Female Respondent 1 shared that she had already “*compartilhado conhecimento com o diretor no trabalho,*” [‘shared knowledge with her director at work’] and Female Respondent 3 reported compiling a summary of the classes to apply and disseminate within her organization. These examples highlight how the program facilitated knowledge transfer, a critical outcome in executive master’s education (Knight, 2004).

Feedback on teaching quality was uniformly positive. Participants described instructors as dynamic, well-prepared, and capable of tailoring content to their specific professional realities. Female Respondent 1 described the sessions as “*aulas ricas, professores didáticos,*” [‘quality classes, with professors who knew how to teach’] and Female Respondent 4 noted that “*todas as aulas abordaram assuntos relevantes.*” [‘all classes were on relevant topics’] This alignment between teaching and student background demonstrates the application of adult learning principles, particularly in professional and executive education contexts (Merriam & Bierema, 2013).

Beyond academic content, participants underscored the emotional and social engagement fostered by the immersion. For some, it was their first international experience, bringing a sense of excitement and personal accomplishment. Male Respondent 3 shared, “*Foi a minha primeira viagem internacional... estava empolgado,*” [‘it was my first international trip... I was excited’] while Male Respondent 1 described the immersion as a “*semana valiosíssima.*” [‘highly valuable week’] These responses suggest that emotional investment contributed to the intensity and memorability of the learning, consistent with literature on the affective benefits of international exposure (Leask, 2009).

Another frequently mentioned element was tour customization and peer quality. Participants appreciated that the week was designed around their cohort’s profile, allowing for greater relevance and participation. Male Respondent 2 remarked, “*O programa ser customizado ajudou muito,*” [‘customization helps a lot’] and Male Respondent 3 emphasized the group’s high level of engagement: “*A equipe tinha um nível muito alto.*” [‘it was a high-level group’] Such peer-based dynamics are central to effective adult learning environments, where social learning and shared context enhance meaning-making (Illeris, 2003).

Finally, many participants expressed a desire for continuity and expansion. The short duration of the program left them eager for more in-depth engagement. Male Respondent 1 summarized this sentiment by stating, “*As aulas breves dão um gostinho de quero mais.*” [‘the short classes leave you wanting more’] This feedback suggests the potential for designing follow-up activities, such as alumni learning communities, post-tour projects, or virtual extensions that sustain and deepen the learning initiated during the tour.

#### **4.2 Academic experience**

Participants’ reflections on the academic experience of the study tour revealed a consistently high level of satisfaction with both the content and delivery of the sessions. Across the group, there was strong consensus regarding the quality of faculty and the structure of the learning environment. Professors were widely described as knowledgeable, engaging, and well-prepared. Male Respondent 2 called them “*professores excelentes,*” [‘excellent professors’]

Female Respondent 4 referred to one instructor as “*professora maravilhosa*,” [‘wonderful teacher’] and Male Respondent 1 affirmed the “*qualidade dos professores é indiscutível*.” [‘professor quality is indisputable’] Participants particularly appreciated the use of real-world cases, the inclusion of cultural perspectives, and the applied focus of each lecture. The content topics ranged from governance and organizational culture to operations and were seen as not only intellectually rich but deeply relevant to participants’ professional contexts, especially those working in or advising family-owned firms.

This relevance was further reinforced by the program’s applicability to real work environments. Several participants described instances in which they had already applied or disseminated insights gained during the immersion. As Female Respondent 1 put it, “*passsei isso adiante, discutindo na empresa*,” [‘I shared it, discussed it at the company’] while Female Respondent 4 summarized the sessions as “*tudo aplicável*.” [‘all of it was applicable’] Female Respondent 3 emphasized that the content “*validou e foi além do que eu faço profissionalmente*,” [‘it validated and went beyond what I do, professionally’] reflecting a broader trend in the group: the ability to draw immediate connections between academic concepts and ongoing organizational challenges, particularly in governance, succession, and strategic alignment.

Despite the positive feedback, there were divergent views on the duration and depth of the lectures. Several participants expressed a strong desire for more time, articulating a clear sense of “*gostinho de quero mais*.” [‘leaves you wanting more’] For instance, Female Respondent 4 suggested that “*4 aulas seriam muito proveitosas*,” [‘having 4 classes would be very useful’] and Male Respondent 1 noted that “*aulas curtas não têm como tratar de várias questões*.” [‘it’s impossible to discuss many topics in short lessons’] This sentiment was echoed by Marcelle. On the other hand, some defended the brevity and intensity of the sessions, arguing that such traits promoted focus and minimized fatigue. Female Respondent 1 observed that “*o tempo foi essencial. Se fosse mais tempo, talvez não fosse tão proveitoso*,” [‘duration was essential. If they were longer, perhaps they wouldn’t be so useful’] while Female Respondent 3 pointed out that, given the context, “*às vezes [foi] melhor do que um dia inteiro de aula*.” [‘sometimes, it was better than having classes for a full day’] These contrasting perspectives highlight the challenge of balancing depth and accessibility in short-term international learning experiences.

Another recurring topic was the connection between lectures and corporate visits. Participants noted that the program could be strengthened by establishing a more explicit connection between the classroom sessions and the organizations visited. Marcelle proposed “*começar as aulas com observações das visitas*,” [‘having classes start with observations from the visits’] while Female Respondent 1 recommended “*avaliar um pouco antes as empresas para fazer o link com as aulas*.” [‘assessing companies first, so that it’s possible to make connections to classes’] This reflects a broader desire to increase coherence between theoretical content and experiential learning, a key feature in effective executive education design.

Participants also emphasized the importance of the classroom environment and group composition. The fact that the group consisted exclusively of Brazilian students created a familiar and psychologically safe space that encouraged open dialogue. Female Respondent 1 described the group as “*muito coeso e produtivo*,” [‘very cohesive and productive’] and Male Respondent 2 highlighted the value of having “*um grupo exclusivo*.” [‘an exclusive group’] The role of the interpreter was also acknowledged as essential, particularly for those with limited English proficiency. Female Respondent 4 praised the interpreter as “*um capítulo à parte – excelente profissional*,” [‘something else – an excellent professional’] underscoring how this support enhanced informational accessibility and engagement for the entire cohort.

Finally, participants engaged in critical self-reflection and offered thoughtful suggestions for improvement. Male Respondent 2 admitted, “*deveria ter lido e me preparado mais*,” [‘I

should've read more and prepared better'] and Female Respondent 1 noted that the "*textos poderiam ter sido mais apropriados.*" ['readings could've been more fitting'] Female Respondent 3 suggested exploring additional themes in future sessions, while others proposed expanding opportunities for informal interaction with faculty beyond the classroom setting. Male Respondent 1, for instance, suggested it would be valuable to "*estender o contato com os professores,*" ['have more contact with the professors'] either before or after the immersion. These reflections demonstrate not only an investment in the learning process but also an awareness of the shared responsibility in collaboratively constructing a meaningful educational experience.

#### **4.3 Final reflections and suggestions for improvement**

The final reflections shared by participants offer valuable input for enhancing the future design of the international study tour. These suggestions, while grounded in individual experiences, point to broader patterns in how participants perceive the tour's structure, depth, and integration.

A recurring recommendation was the inclusion of additional academic content, particularly through the addition of one more lecture. Several participants felt that expanding the academic portion, especially with a focus on new management topics, would further enrich the learning experience. This reinforces the earlier theme of "leaves you wanting more," suggesting not only satisfaction with the existing content but also a clear demand for broader and deeper academic engagement. The desire for continued intellectual stimulation indicates the potential for modular expansion, allowing future iterations of the program to offer thematic variation according to cohort profiles.

Regarding the corporate visits, participants emphasized that the value of these engagements depended largely on the level of openness and interaction provided by the hosting organizations. Visits that featured candid conversations and practical insights, such as real project experiences and direct Q&A, were praised as highlights of the immersion. Female Respondent 2 described such moments as "*riquíssimos*" ['extraordinarily rich'] and emphasized the importance of "*fazer uma pergunta sem filtro.*" ['asking unfiltered questions'] In contrast, visits perceived as overly formal or lacking in dialogue, such as the one to a global banking institution, were considered less impactful. These reflections point to the importance of curating visits not only based on institutional prestige, but also on the potential for two-way engagement, relevance to participants' interests, and alignment with program learning objectives.

Another noteworthy suggestion involved advance information and preparation. Participants proposed receiving background details on the guest speakers and corporate representatives prior to each session. As Male Respondent 1 suggested, it would be helpful to "*enviar o contato antes de quem vai falar para estudar o contato com antecedência.*" ['have prior knowledge of who we'll be talking to, so that we can study in advance'] Providing such information could enable participants to prepare more thoughtful questions, enhance contextual understanding, and establish connections more effectively. This recommendation mirrors earlier observations about the value of pre-class materials and structured preparation, reinforcing the idea that the learning experience begins well before arrival and extends beyond the classroom setting.

Table 1 shows a synthesis of emerging themes in all thematic units of analysis and respective key insights.

**Table 1***Emerging themes from the focus group*

<b>Thematic Unit of Analysis</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Key Insights</b>
General Impressions	High quality of academic content	Professors were praised for clarity, expertise, and the use of real-world cases. Content was considered relevant and thought-provoking.
	Strong relevance to professional practice	Participants reported close alignment between the content and their daily work, especially in governance, leadership, and process management.
	Positive emotional and social engagement	The experience fostered motivation, a sense of privilege, and personal growth. Team bonding and peer learning were also key aspects.
	Supportive group dynamics and learning environment	The Brazilian cohort and exclusive format contributed to an open, comfortable environment. Interpreter support ensured accessibility and full engagement.
Academic Experience	Desire to expand academic content	Participants suggested including a fourth lecture, ideally on a new management-related topic, to broaden the academic portion.
	Mixed perceptions of time allocation	Some participants found the short and intense sessions highly productive, while others felt constrained by limited time and wished for deeper engagement.
	Varied quality of company visits	Visits with interactive, project-based dialogue (e.g., Company 3, Company 2) were valued. Less interactive visits (e.g., Company 1) were seen as lacking.
	Need for integration between lectures and visits	Participants emphasized aligning lecture themes with company visits and suggested using site experiences to enrich academic discussions.
	Strong teaching engagement and relevance	Faculty were commended for dynamic delivery and contextualized content. Lectures encouraged open

		participation and connected well with participants' realities.
Suggestions for Improvement	Better preparation and access to materials	Participants recommended earlier distribution of readings and speaker bios to allow for better preparation and deeper engagement with content.
	Participant self-reflection on engagement	Some participants recognized their limited preparation and advocated for more structured pre-class resources and clearer expectations.
	Opportunities for informal interaction with faculty	Participants suggested creating spaces for informal engagement with professors, such as pre- or post-session meetups or virtual follow-ups.

The findings from this study offer valuable insights into the academic and professional value of a short-term international study tour within the curriculum of an executive master's program. Three key analytical dimensions (general impressions, academic experience, and suggestions for improvement) reveal the depth of participant engagement and provide important implications for program refinement and institutional learning.

Participants consistently expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the program, emphasizing the academic quality of lectures and the expertise of faculty. These perceptions were supported by the strong alignment between classroom content and participants' real-world professional challenges, particularly in specialties such as family governance, leadership, and organizational processes. Additionally, the emotional and social dimensions of the experience, such as group bonding, motivation, and a sense of privilege, demonstrate the program's capacity to generate not only cognitive but affective learning outcomes. These findings are aligned with literature on executive education that highlights the transformational potential of immersive experiences when participants are engaged both intellectually and emotionally (Mintzberg & Gosling, 2002; Leask, 2009).

The academic experience was regarded as highly valuable, though participants articulated both praise and critique regarding the structure and integration of the content. On one hand, the teaching quality, use of real cases, and openness to interaction were praised as core strengths. On the other, several participants indicated a desire for an additional lecture, suggesting that the current format leaves them with a "taste for more." Similarly, company visits were perceived as uneven: visits that enabled open dialogue and project-based discussion stood out as exemplary, while others were viewed as passive and less engaging. The lack of structured integration between academic themes and company visits was also highlighted as an area for development. These reflections underscore the importance of curricular coherence, where theoretical and experiential components mutually reinforce one another (Kolb, 1984).

Several pragmatic suggestions emerged that can inform future iterations of the immersion. First, participants requested earlier access to pre-class materials and speaker bios, enabling better preparation and deeper engagement. Second, participants recommended creating opportunities for informal interaction with faculty, either through extended sessions, social meetups, or virtual follow-ups. Finally, there was notable self-awareness among participants, who acknowledged their own role in preparing for and maximizing the learning experience, indicating a mature and reflective learner profile. These points align with adult

learning theories emphasizing the learner's agency, context, and preparedness in shaping outcomes (Merriam & Bierema, 2013; Illeris, 2003).

This study contributes to the literature on international education in professional graduate programs by highlighting how short-term immersion experiences can serve as catalysts for transformative learning, especially when embedded within structured executive education. While much of the internationalization literature focuses on full-degree mobility or long-term exchanges (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Wächter, 2003), our findings indicate that even brief, high-quality immersion modules, when well-designed, can produce meaningful intellectual and behavioral outcomes, including knowledge transfer, managerial reflection, and contextual learning.

The analysis also reinforces theories of experiential and adult learning (Kolb, 1984; Merriam & Bierema, 2013), emphasizing the central role of learner context, motivation, and engagement. Participants' ability to connect classroom discussions with workplace realities supports the notion that learning is most effective when it bridges lived experience with new conceptual frameworks. Furthermore, the emerging theme of "taste for more" may relate to concepts of situated learning and constructive dissatisfaction, suggesting that programs like this can serve as a gateway to ongoing self-directed development.

Additionally, the findings extend the discourse on cross-cultural management education, indicating that perceived cultural distance between teaching methods and participant realities is mitigated when there is intentional customization, support mechanisms (like interpreters), and cohort homogeneity – adding nuance to existing theories on acculturation and pedagogical adaptation in global programs.

## 5 Final Considerations

Taken together, the results confirm that short-term international immersion programs, when thoughtfully designed, can generate high-impact learning experiences for professional master's students. The insights from this study suggest that the value of such programs lies not only in exposure to prestigious institutions and global companies but also in their capacity to foster self-reflection, professional alignment, and peer-based learning. Moving forward, program designers should prioritize content integration, flexibility in delivery, and learner preparation as key levers to enhance both academic rigor and practical relevance.

## References

- AACSB International. (2025, January). *Why so few students participate in global programs – and how business schools can change that*. AACSB Insights. <https://www.aacsb.edu/insights>
- AACSB International. (2025, February 28). *2020 AACSB business accreditation standards: An interpretation guide* (Updated ed.). <https://www.aacsb.edu/-/media/documents/accreditation/2020-aacsb-business-accreditation-standards-feb-28-2025.pdf>
- Abhayawansa, S., Donovan, J., Le, V., Masli, E., & Topple, C. (2024). Beyond borders: Evaluating the real impact of an Asia-based short-term study-abroad program for a business capstone unit. *The International Journal of Management Education*, 22(2), 100965. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijme.2024.100965>
- Altbach, P. G., & Knight, J. (2007). The internationalization of higher education: Motivations and realities. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 11(3–4), 290–305. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315307303542>
- Biggs, J. (1996). Enhancing teaching through constructive alignment. *Higher Education*, 32(3), 347–364. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00138871>
- Chong, M., Gan, B. K. S., Menkhoff, T. (2022). Enhancing students' global competence through international business study missions. *Journal of International Education in Business*, 15(2), 165-183. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JIEB-06-2020-0054>

- Gil, M. & Reyes, M. (2020). International short-term trips and the development of a global mindset in business students. *Journal of Teaching in International Business*, 31(4), 358-379. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08975930.2020.1851623>
- Illeris, K. (2003). Towards a contemporary and comprehensive theory of learning. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 22(4), 396–406. <https://doi.org/10.1080/026013703004837>
- Institute of International Education. (2024). *Open Doors 2023 report on international educational exchange*. <https://opendoorsdata.org/>
- Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Prentice Hall.
- Jansa, T., & Anderson, D. L. (2021). Socially responsive leadership for post-pandemic international higher education: Theoretical considerations and practical implications. Institute of International Education.
- Leask, B. (2009). Using formal and informal curricula to improve interactions between home and international students. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 13(2), 205–221. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315308329786>
- Merriam, S. B., & Bierema, L. L. (2013). *Adult learning: Linking theory and practice*. Jossey-Bass.
- Mintzberg, H., & Gosling, J. (2002). Educating managers beyond borders. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 1(1), 64-76. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2002.7373654>
- Ryan, J., Silvano, S., & Brown, H. T. (2013). The impact of experience-based MBA education programs on international career mobility. *Journal of Global Mobility*, 1(1), 28-45. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17574320910942187>
- Teichler, U. (2004). The changing debate on internationalisation of higher education. *Higher Education*, 48(1), 5–26. <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:HIGH.0000033771.69078.41>
- Wächter, B. (2003). An introduction: Internationalisation at home in context. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 7(1), 5–11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315302250176>