

## **Bridging Cultures, Building Competence: A Decade of Transformative Study Tours in the Philippines**

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### **【Abstract】**

This study explores the outcomes of a Philippines Study Tour for Japanese university students participating in a management program, focusing on the integration of service learning with international fieldwork. Through reflexive thematic analysis of student reports, the research identifies three salient themes that encapsulate the tour's impact: Cultural Exchange and Insight, Socio-Economic Observations, and Personal and Professional Growth. Students' exposure to Filipino culture was found to significantly influence their levels and types of engagement, with direct interaction with local communities enhancing their cultural understanding. Observations of socio-economic disparities provided real-world context to their academic studies, as students grappled with the visible contrasts in wealth, infrastructure, and healthcare. The tour also catalyzed profound personal and professional development, prompting introspection about cultural identities, values, and future career paths. Interactions with locals and experiences within educational settings contributed to a broader worldview and a deeper appreciation for global citizenship. This study underscores the value of study tours as powerful pedagogical tools for cultivating intercultural competence and social responsibility in future professionals.

### **【Keywords】**

Service Learning, Cultural Exchange, Socio-Economic Insights, Personal Growth, Educational Fieldwork

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## 1 Introduction

In an increasingly globalized world, the demand for educational programs that not only impart academic knowledge but also foster intercultural understanding and sensitivity is on the rise. The study tours organized for Japanese university students from a management program to the Philippines represent a pioneering approach to meeting these demands. This research, initiated in 2010 and continuing through to 2024, is based on longitudinal qualitative data and adds to the literature by providing a specific case study of the evolution of educational programs to adapt to both learner needs and societal changes. By focusing on service learning within a specific contextual setting, this research contributes a nuanced, layered understanding of the mechanisms, impacts, and processes of service learning.

The primary objectives of these study tours have evolved over time, maintaining a core focus on enhancing English language confidence and competence, while increasingly emphasizing the development of intercultural understanding and sensitivity. This shift reflects a broader educational goal: to prepare students for a world where cross-cultural communication and understanding are paramount. The recent emphasis on learning about the society, culture, history, economics, politics, and education of another island nation in Asia underscores the program's commitment to providing a holistic educational experience.

One of the most notable outcomes observed from these tours is the transformation in students' attitudes towards their education. Although the tendency among Japanese university students is toward passive approaches to learning, participating students have demonstrated a shift towards active engagement and a realization of the importance of applying classroom knowledge to real-world situations. This outcome is significant, highlighting the tours' impact on students' academic and personal development.

The selection process for both the Japanese students and the local stakeholders in the Philippines is designed to ensure that participants are fully prepared and genuinely interested in the objectives of the study tours. The activities and methodologies employed during the tours are diverse and aimed at achieving the set objectives, including company visits, cross-cultural activities, and engagement with underprivileged communities.

The theoretical underpinnings of the tours draw from significant learning experiences and self-determination theory, emphasizing the basic psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness. These frameworks, along with the principles of project-based learning and service learning, inform the structure and expected outcomes of the tours, ensuring that they are both educational and transformative.

The research methodology, based on reflexive thematic analysis of students' reflective writings and final reports, provides a rigorous and reliable analysis of the qualitative data collected. This methodology allows for a deep exploration of the students' experiences and the impact of the study tours on their development.

Preliminary findings from previous tours (Jones, 2013, Jones & Leacock, 2019) have exceeded expectations, particularly regarding students' engagement and the depth of their

learning experiences. These insights have informed adjustments to the program, although challenges such as smartphone addiction continue to be addressed.

In conclusion, these study tours offer significant contributions to students' development within the management program, particularly in terms of project-based learning and English as a Foreign Language competence. They foster intercultural understanding and cross-cultural communication, key components in preparing students for a globalized world. This manuscript will explore the design, implementation, and outcomes of these study tours, providing valuable insights into the role of international educational experiences in student development. In the next section, we offer some background information on the program.

## **2 Background**

In 2010, the Commission on Higher Education, the regulatory agency in the Philippines tasked with the delivery of higher education in the country, started supporting internationalization efforts through various programs for the higher education institutions in the country. However, one limitation of their support was that only those higher education institutions who were considered as centers of development or centers of excellence in certain fields of study could be eligible for mobility programs including international student exchanges.

This policy effectively limited participation to students and could not include students who did not have the financial means to participate or were part of the marginalized sectors, which already had intrinsic limitations to begin with.

Thus, came the motivation to initiate international student exchanges that would be sustainable through the support of private partners in the Philippines and with the support of the Hirao School of Management at Konan University in Japan. The objective of the international student exchange was to provide opportunities for students to develop cross-cultural competency skills through active engagement between Japanese and Filipino students and youth.

The program had the following distinctive features:

1. The exchange program was initiated with a partner higher education institution in the Philippines which entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with the Hirao School of Management at Konan University. From 2010 to 2020, the partner university was University of Pasig City, Metro Manila, a local university located in one of the cities of Metropolitan Manila with a huge population of urban poor, mainly consisting of migrant work families seeking employment and opportunity in the environs of the capital city of the Philippines. The demographic profile of the students from the institution consisted of youth coming from the urban poor sector of Pasig City and usually are first generation learners in their family, who would not otherwise have access to higher education, were it not for the existence of an institution proximate to their residence.

2. A distinctive feature of the program was its collaboration with private or non-governmental organizations involved in addressing the needs of the marginalized sector of the Filipino society.

- Bukid Foundation and Educational Enrichment and Enhancement Foundation had a Scholarship program in the extension school of San Lorenzo Ruiz of Calapan, located in Oriental Mindoro for the indigenous community of the Mangyans. Through this collaboration, there were exposure and immersive trips for the students to engage with and be exposed to the challenges faced by the indigenous communities in the Philippines.
- The House of Refuge is a non-governmental organization supported by Christian groups to provide transition support for orphan beneficiaries through the inter-country adoption system.
- Virlian Foundation is an entity supported by the Prince of Monaco Trust which provides support for independent living for urban poor street children. These included food, shelter, education and social support services, to those who were otherwise living in the streets.
- The Education Channel is a digital media platform that delivers through technology-assisted modalities the delivery of education programs to those who would not have access such as out-of-school-youth, children in conflict with the law and persons deprived of liberty.

3. The over-arching principle for initiating the program is the advocacy of human transformation through the development of the participant's cross-cultural competencies given the opportunity to relate to those from other countries. It introduces elements of development to its participants through active engagement and advocacy for the development of those who would not otherwise have the opportunity to do so.

4. The program is designed to support the enforceability of the right to access, equity and quality of education, as stated in the United Nations Convention and the Sustainability Development Goals. The participants who are otherwise marginalized in Filipino society are provided these opportunities to address their developmental needs.

5. The expanded innovation introduced during the COVID pandemic was the use of technology-assisted learning through the conduct of a one-day Philippine Study tour online. The learning objectives were slightly tailored fitted in the context of physical interaction and thus, provided the opportunity to explore other learning methodologies besides the 10 to 14 day field exposure trip of the Japanese students.

6. The students of Pasig City were able to develop cross-cultural competencies that provided them with the motivation to exert utmost effort in their chosen field of study, especially since majority of the participants were studying Hospitality Management. The

exposure also motivated many participants to seek work opportunities abroad such as working in a cruise ship with its multinational employees. The experience boosted their confidence and self-esteem to seek out more challenging opportunities for themselves.

7. Since the program has been engaged with Urdaneta City University for only one year, the students who are coming from the rural urban poor in a mostly agricultural area, were highly motivated to seek out opportunities for either work or study abroad.

### **3 Literature Review**

Service learning, a pedagogical approach with roots in the educational philosophies of John Dewey and Jean Piaget, emphasizes active learner engagement with a purposeful curriculum. This concept, having gained traction within K-12 schools in the United States post-1993, is grounded in research which suggests that the quality of service-learning implementation significantly influences student impact (Billig, 2000).

Research indicates that service-learning programs, when well-conceived and executed, yield positive student outcomes including increased social responsibility, improved attitudes towards adults, moral and ego development, and enhanced self-esteem (Thomsen, 2006). However, the effectiveness of these programs is contingent upon teacher training in service-learning pedagogy. The literature cites several barriers to successful implementation, including limited resources, ill-defined program sequencing, lack of awareness, and inadequate support systems (Billig, 2002). Despite available training opportunities, there remains a gap in the research regarding how teachers adopt and sustain service-learning initiatives (Wade, 1997; Thomsen, 2006).

The potential benefits of service-learning are manifold, extending from authentic community engagement to various dimensions of student development. According to Kaye (2010), service-learning fosters social-emotional growth, interpersonal skills, leadership, and intercultural competence (see Appendix for the Kaye's 5 Stages of Service Learning). It engenders respect and collaboration between community, parents, and students, and deepens curriculum comprehension, motivation, and retention. Additionally, it offers avenues for career exploration and college preparedness.

Scholars like Thomsen (2006) and organizations such as the Safe and Responsive Schools Project underscore the developmental benefits of service learning, observing that students engaged in service exhibit less risky behavior and greater interpersonal and intercultural understanding. Furthermore, service learning enhances student-teacher relationships and community perceptions of youth, contributing to a strengthened sense of societal connectedness.

Central to the service-learning discourse is the impact on academic engagement and performance. Billig (2006) synthesizes research evidence suggesting that high-quality service learning correlates with improved attendance, test scores, problem-solving skills, and mastery of content across various academic disciplines. Five factors are identified as critical to maximizing the educational impact of service learning: the correlation between

service activities and academic standards, direct service to the community, reflective practices, student autonomy in project management, and sustained duration of service activities.

In summary, service learning represents a multifaceted educational strategy that promises to cultivate students who are not only academically proficient but also civically engaged and socially responsible. As such, it is imperative to continue investigating the educational structures and teacher training necessary to uphold the integrity and efficacy of service-learning programs.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Edwar L. Deci and Richard Ryan, is a robust framework for understanding human motivation and psychological health. It posits that the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are essential for fostering an individual's intrinsic motivation and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). SDT operates on the principle that individuals are inherently inclined toward growth, achievement, and the integration of experiences, which are facilitated through satisfaction of these basic needs.

Motivation, according to SDT, exists on a continuum ranging from amotivation, or lack of intentionality, to intrinsic motivation, where actions are aligned with one's sense of self (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The progression from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation (Fig. 1) involves several stages, starting from external regulation, where behavior is influenced by external rewards or demands, to intrinsic regulation, where actions are inherently satisfying and engaged in for personal gratification (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Vallerand, 2007).

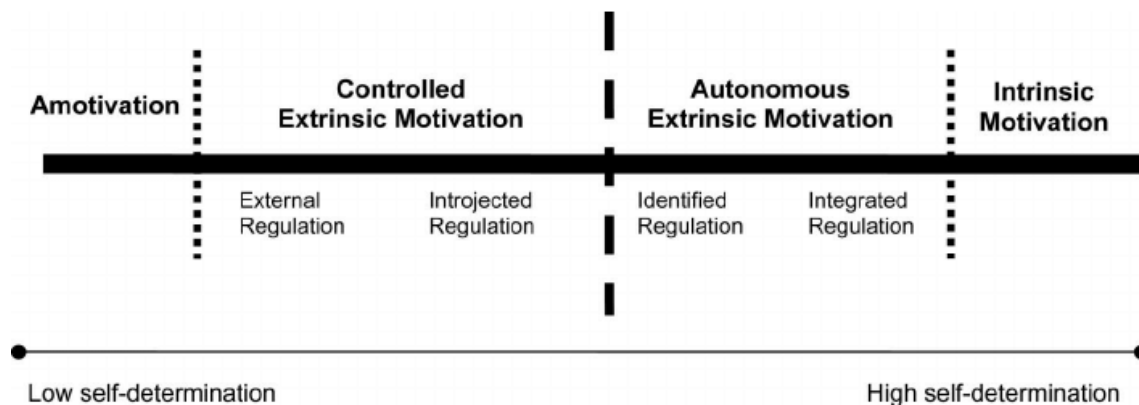


Fig. 1 Amotivation to intrinsic motivation continuum.

The theory emphasizes the concept of locus of causality, which describes the degree to which individuals perceive themselves as the origin of their own actions (deCharms, 1968). A sense of autonomy is crucial for fostering intrinsic motivation, which is best supported when individuals initiate and regulate their own actions. Competence, another basic need, refers to the confidence in one's abilities and the drive for mastery, while relatedness pertains to the desire to connect with others in meaningful ways (Ryan & Deci, 2008).

Vallerand's hierarchical model of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation further elaborates on SDT by introducing levels of generality in motivation—global, contextual, and situational—that interact with social factors and the satisfaction of basic psychological needs to influence behavior (Vallerand, 2000; Vallerand, 2007). This multidimensional perspective underscores the complexity of motivation as both an intrapersonal and social phenomenon.

The integration of SDT into educational and training programs, such as those involving service learning, is foundational for promoting autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The theory provides a comprehensive understanding of why individuals engage in certain behaviors and how they can be guided towards more self-determined forms of motivation.

Intrinsic motivation is inherently associated with curiosity, exploration, and the engagement of activities for their own sake (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Loewenstein, 1994). The transition from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation is crucial for cognitive, social, and physical development, as it is through engagement with inherent interests that individuals acquire knowledge and skills (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

SDT also distinguishes between autonomous and controlled motivation, where the former stems from internal sources or well-identified values, and the latter is driven by external rewards or the avoidance of punishment (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Understanding these types of motivation is imperative for creating environments that nurture an individual's inherent propensity for growth and learning.

In summary, Self-Determination Theory offers a nuanced view of motivation that is vital for designing interventions that cultivate intrinsic motivation through the satisfaction of basic psychological needs. The theory's application to service learning and other educational settings is pivotal for developing self-directed, motivated, and psychologically healthy individuals.

## **4 Methods**

### *Participants*

The participants of this study were Japanese university students enrolled in a management program that emphasizes economics and business administration. These students participated in annual study tours to the Philippines from 2010 through the latest tour in 2023. A prospective group set to travel in February 2024 was also included in the pre-departure phase of the study. Selection criteria for student participation included attendance at an orientation session, submission of an application, and a reflective essay detailing their motivation for joining the study tour.

### *Procedure*

The study tours were structured to include a blend of educational and cultural exchange activities. These included company visits, collaborations with local universities, and service work with underprivileged children in various urban and rural settings. Students

prepared for the tours through pre-departure sessions, focusing on cultural sensitization, project objectives, and English language proficiency.

During the tours, students engaged in daily reflective writing exercises and participated in debriefing sessions. These reflective practices were designed to encourage self-exploration and enhance the learning experience. Upon return, students compiled their reflections into final reports, which served as the primary data for this study.

#### *Data Collection*

The qualitative data encompassed the reflective journals and final reports authored by the students, capturing their personal insights, experiences, and developmental progress throughout the study tours. The reflective journals were maintained on a daily basis, while the final reports were comprehensive narratives produced post-tour.

#### *Data Analysis*

The research employed reflexive thematic analysis as outlined by Braun & Clarke, facilitated by the use of NVivo software. This approach allowed for a nuanced coding process, enabling the identification of recurrent themes across the data set. To ensure reliability, the researchers' analysis was cross-validated with results produced by AI-assisted qualitative data analysis tools, enhancing the methodological rigor of the study.

#### *Ethical Considerations*

Participants were informed of the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured by de-identifying all personal information from the reflective journals and final reports.

### **5 Findings**

Through the Reflexive Thematic Analysis of the student reports from the Philippines Study Tour, three key themes were identified across all reports: Cultural Exchange and Insight, Socio-Economic Observations, and Personal and Professional Growth. Here are the themes with three examples (excerpts) from a range of reports for each theme:

#### ***Cultural Exchange and Insight***

- The significance of prior exposure to the Philippines in sparking interest and enhancing the learning experience. This reflects how students' previous experiences or lack thereof influenced their perception and engagement during the study tour.
- The impact of direct engagement with local communities on students' understanding of Filipino society. Students highlighted how immersive experiences with local communities deepened their understanding of cultural and societal norms in the Philippines.



- Reflections on the importance of cross-cultural communication. Reports included insights on how navigating language barriers and engaging in cross-cultural dialogues enriched students' experiences and learning.

### ***Socio-Economic Observations***

- Observations on the socio-economic disparities within the Philippines. Students noted the stark differences in living conditions and the visible gap between wealth and poverty in various regions.
- The stark contrast between wealth and poverty observed across different aspects of Filipino life. These observations extended to infrastructure, healthcare, and daily life, offering students firsthand insights into the socio-economic challenges faced by Filipinos.
- Experiences with both private and public healthcare systems revealed stark contrasts. Reports contrasted the experiences and facilities between private and public healthcare systems, reflecting on the implications for access to care and quality of service.

### ***Personal and Professional Growth***

- The tour served as a catalyst for personal reflection and growth. Students reflected on how the tour prompted them to consider their own cultures, values, and future professional paths.
- Visits to educational institutions offered valuable perspectives on the Philippine education system. Insights into the educational system, including interactions with local students and faculty, contributed to students' professional and academic growth.
- Personal growth facilitated through interactions with locals. Engaging with Filipinos from various walks of life expanded students' perspectives, fostering empathy, curiosity, and a deeper understanding of global citizenship.

These themes illustrate the multifaceted impact of the Philippines Study Tour on participants, highlighting significant learning and growth through cultural exchange, socio-economic insights, and personal reflection.

## **6 Conclusion**

The Philippines Study Tour has emerged as an innovative and impactful educational model, demonstrating the profound influence international fieldwork can have on Japanese university students. This study has illuminated three key themes derived from students' experiences: Cultural Exchange and Insight, Socio-Economic Observations, and Personal and Professional Growth, each contributing to a holistic learning experience that transcends traditional classroom education.

Cultural exchange and insights have revealed the essential role of immersive, direct engagement in fostering a deeper understanding of the host country's culture and societal norms. The importance of cross-cultural communication skills was underscored, proving to be a cornerstone in students' learning journeys, enabling them to navigate new environments and engage effectively with diverse populations.

Socio-economic observations have provided students with a real-world context to their academic pursuits, uncovering the stark disparities that define many aspects of life in the Philippines. These firsthand experiences have catalyzed a broader understanding of global economic and social issues, challenging students to apply their classroom knowledge to analyze complex real-world scenarios.

Finally, the tours have been instrumental in facilitating personal and professional growth among participants. Students have engaged in profound self-reflection, considering their own cultural identities and values within the global context. The exposure to the Philippine education system and interactions with local communities have enriched their academic and professional outlooks, fostering a spirit of empathy and global citizenship.

In essence, the study tours have proven to be a powerful pedagogical tool, contributing significantly to the development of intercultural competence and social responsibility among future professionals. This research provides compelling evidence of the benefits of integrating service learning with international fieldwork, underscoring its value in the formation of engaged, knowledgeable, and compassionate global citizens. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, such educational experiences are indispensable in preparing students to navigate and contribute positively to the global community.

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### **Biographical Statements**

**Brent A. Jones** has taught English for Specific Purposes in Hawaii, Japan and other parts of Asia since 1987. He was the coordinator of the Business English program in the Economics Department at Kobe Gakuin University from 2005 - 2009. He is currently the Director of Language Programs at Konan University, Hirao School of Management, where since 2009 he has helped develop a content and language integrated (CLIL) program. From April 1, 2018 to March 31, 2019 he was a Visiting Professor at the Peter Gustavson School of Business at the University of Victoria. The shortlist of his research interests includes L2 learning motivation and engagement, instructional technology, instructional design, CLIL, curriculum and materials development, genre approaches to second language reading and writing, and extensive reading.

**Amihan April M. Alcazar** is currently the University President of Urdaneta City University, Pangasinan. She was previously the University President of the Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Pasig from 2012-2021 for two terms of office. Presently, she is the Co-Chair of the Internationalization National Review Committee of the Commission on

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### **Appendix - The Five Stages of Service Learning (Source: Kaye, 2010)**

#### *Inventory and Investigation*

Using interviewing and other means of social analysis, students:

- catalog the interests, skills, and talents of their peers and partners
- identify a need
- analyze the underlying problem
- establish a baseline of the need
- begin to accumulate partners

#### *Preparation and Planning*

With guidance from their teacher, students:

- draw upon previously acquired skills and knowledge
- acquire new information through varied, engaging means and methods
- collaborate with community partners
- develop a plan that encourages responsibility
- recognize the integration of service and learning
- become ready to provide meaningful service
- articulate roles and responsibilities of all involved
- define realistic parameters for implementation

#### *Action*

Through direct service, indirect service, research, advocacy, or a combination of these approaches, students take action that:

- has value, purpose, and meaning
- uses previously learned and newly acquired academic skills and knowledge
- offers unique learning experiences
- has real consequences
- offers a safe environment to learn, to make mistakes, and to succeed

#### *Reflection*

During systematic reflection, the teacher or students guide the process using various modalities, such as role play, discussion, and journal writing. Participating students:

- describe what happened
- examine the difference made
- discuss thoughts and feelings
- place experience in a larger context
- consider project improvements
- generate ideas
- identify questions
- encourage comments from partners and recipients
- receive feedback

#### *Demonstration*

Students showcase what and how they have learned, along with demonstrating skills, insights, and outcomes of service provided to an outside group. Students may:

- report to peers, faculty, parents, and/or community members
- write articles or letters to local newspapers regarding issues of public concern
- create a publication or Web site that helps others learn from students' experiences
- make presentations and performances
- create displays of public art with murals or photography