Chapter 8
Study Abroad Management Programs: Strategies for Enhancing Returns

Neeta Baporikar
Namibia University of Science and Technology, Namibia & University of Pune, India

ABSTRACT

Combination of study undertaken in the native settings, combined with abroad studies, creates better environment for acquiring holistic perspectives. This is truer for management programs due to globalized business environment. Consequently, thousands depart annually for education abroad experiences with the expectation that they will become better professionals and return home with significantly enhanced/advanced competencies and skills. However, learning in a foreign milieu may not always be superior to learning at home. Indeed, the extent to which the study abroad programs aid in becoming successful is dependent on a vast number of variables. Hence, the objective of this chapter is to have a clearer understanding of how study abroad programs function in the development of students’ professional competencies. Adopting a case-based approach, the focus is on Omani students’ experiences related to management programs. It also aims to provide strategies to enhance the returns from study abroad management programs in general and especially for students of Oman.

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INTRODUCTION

A person who has not travelled is like a person who has read only one page of the book called life! It has long been assumed that the study undertaken in the native settings, combined with abroad studies, creates the best environment for acquiring holistic and global perspectives. This is truer for management programs due to globalized business environment (Baporikar, 2016a). The power of this assumption is so great that there has evolved a popular belief that students who spend time abroad are those who will ultimately become the most proficient in the international business arena. Consequently, thousands of students depart annually for education abroad with the expectation that they will become better professionals and return home with greatly enhanced/advanced competencies and skills.

Travelling is an exceptional experience to help students convert theory into practice, and to use what they have learnt in real-life situations. Learning in a foreign context, however, may not always be superior to learning at home (Cassidy, 2004). Indeed, the extent to which the study abroad programs aid in becoming successful is dependent on a vast number of variables. Hence, the objective of this chapter is to have a clear(er) understanding of how study abroad programs function in the development of students’ professional competencies. Adopting a case-based approach, the research focus is on Oman students’ study abroad experiences related to management programs. It also aims to provide strategies to enhance the returns from study abroad management programs in general, and especially for students from Oman. Thus, this research was undertaken to explore how strategies can be designed to enhance the returns for Omani students who do management programs abroad. This chapter will delve into the reason(s) why they go abroad, their expectation on completion, and the perceived benefits by them.

BACKGROUND

Arab societies are currently in a state of confusion. Problems of underdevelopment, inequity, institutional deficiencies, and illiteracy are rampant (Arab Human Development Report, 2002). Arabs seem to be in a futile search for a new identity in a world that is transforming; power structures are shifting, societal expectations are changing, and male-female relations are developing. The Arabs seem to yearn for a new identity that does not displace them from their roots, and at the same time connects them to the future; the search seems incessantly fruitless. Even non-Arabs seem to be confused about the issue leading to inner culture conflict. Culture resides at multiple levels, from civilizations, nations, organizations to groups (Shein, 1985).
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