Changing mental models and developing global mind-sets of business students through international study modules

Cailin Human, University of Cape Town, South Africa

Marius Ungerer, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa

ABSTRACT

The fast-changing interdependent global context and the accompanying need to teach capabilities required in the global marketplace led to the implementation of international global modules for business management students. The study explored students' perceptions about their learning experiences on international modules to BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) countries abroad. The findings suggest that a module abroad encouraged a broader vision outside of their own mental representations and contributed to the development of students' mental models and global mind-sets. The module exposed them to foreign ways of thinking and behaving in diverse contexts and in so-doing disturbed current thinking. The global educational experience enhanced experiential learning, stimulated reflection, and contributed to the development and transfer of deep knowledge. This article provides insight into the experienced value of international global modules, and it proposes a reflection framework on improving the learning outcomes of such modules abroad.

Keywords: Cultural sensitivity, emerging markets, experiential learning, global mind-sets, International Study Module, mental models, reflective learning, study abroad, worldviews

INTRODUCTION

Globalisation has transformed the market place, not only for countries and industries, but also for higher educational institutions (Dowling, 2014). The complexity, scale and interconnectedness of the challenges in our rapidly changing global community, in national and international contexts, cannot be met through conventional education. Business school graduates are expected to contribute and assume roles and responsibilities as citizens of a global community. Cogan and Derricott (2012) call for an approach to citizen education which includes personal development and a commitment to thinking and acting in ways that consider local, national and global community concerns. Yet, graduates possess limited awareness of global issues (Rynes & Bartunek, 2013). McMillan and Overall (2016) found that, in general, MBA curricula do not address the needs of employers and the evolving needs of organisations.

Given criticisms from various stakeholders about the relevance of the Master's degree in Business Administration (MBA) programmes, business schools are challenged to ensure their programmes are in touch with the realities of an interconnected world and relevant to the needs of practising managers (Rubin & Dierdorff, 2009). The management skills required include: global business acumen, cultural sensitivity, multi-cultural teamwork and reflection (Randolph, 2008). Employers today want graduates who are globally aware, can communicate across cultures, and can develop leadership competencies (Carlile, Davidson, Freeman, Thomas & Venkatraman, 2016).

A critical challenge for business schools is addressing the leadership skills deficit by giving significant attention to values-based leadership development (Carlile et al., 2016). Business schools are responsible to contribute to the development not only of managers, but of high-calibre global leaders: 'We need leaders who can see past culture and politics to engage people who are wholly unlike themselves' (Javidan, Teagarden & Bowen, 2010: 113). One has to recognise the key role and impact of leadership in terms of addressing imbalances in rule-making, unequal distribution of benefits, driving economic recovery and sustainability and making global markets more sustainable (Bergsteiner & Avery, 2008; McIntosh, Thomas, Leipzier & Coleman, 2003).

The decade leading up to the year 2010 saw the emergence of new global economic growth centres away from the G7 (United States, Japan, Germany, France, United Kingdom, Italy, and Canada) to the G20. The G20 includes Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS), and Korea, Indonesia, Mexico, Argentina, Turkey and Saudi Arabia (Klein & Salvatore, 2013; Ghauri, 2014). From 1993 to 2007 the combined share of China and India's global output more than doubled to nearly 16%, which was more than twice the United States'

average growth (The Economist, 2013). Given the broad-based growth experienced by the BRICS economies, they were significant contributors to global recovery after the 2008 financial crisis, Jayan (2012) argued that expanding the scope of cooperation among the BRICS countries has immense relevance in this century. Since economic growth increasingly depended on meaningful engagement with emerging markets, business schools responded in their research and curriculums with increased attention to these markets (Dhanaraj & Khanna, 2011). Although South Africa is a small player in the BRICS association, the African continent is inextricably linked to BRICS. Of relevance to students is the impact of emerging markets such as the BRICS countries on the world economy and evolution within the global economic environment.

Also relevant in business education today is preparing future managers through developing global business competencies. The skills challenge with graduating students entering into business is a continuous discourse among business education stakeholders (Carlile et al., 2016). Research done by Dhanaraj and Khanna (2011) found that, although the strategic implications of the emerging markets are clear, executives are often ill equipped to deal with the harsh realities and complexities regarding doing business in these high-growth emerging markets. Business schools in developing African countries, including South Africa, are responsible to grow managers who can apply global business knowledge to improve the domestic performance (Kaynak & Kucukemiroglu, 1997).

International study modules abroad are a popular way for business schools to internationalise MBA curricula. Due to the responsibilities around offering relevant MBA programme content and developing global leaders, the University of Stellenbosch Business School (USB) made a strategic decision to offer a compulsory one-week international study module on its MBA programme from 2011 onwards. Yet, empirical confirmation of how the international module contributes to MBA students' professional skills, competencies and leadership development, is limited. Also, while the costs associated with modules abroad are considerable, it is necessary to assess rigorously the relevance and significance of experiences abroad from the students' perspectives.

The aim of the study was to explore student perceptions about their experiences during their international MBA modules in BRICs (BRIC countries). At the USB, 126 out of 331 USB students (38%) chose to travel to BRICS on the MBA International Study Modules during the years 2012 and 2013. The module consists of lectures and engagement with faculty at the host business schools, visits to local and global companies in the host country, and some cultural activities. After completion of this module, all students submitted assignments in the

form of reflective essays. These essays allowed students the freedom to share their honest, subjective and personal views on their experiences abroad, in addition to more theoretical and academic perspectives covered in standardised course evaluations.

Extracting the reflective learnings from the reflective essays, the study explored three research questions:

1. In what ways does the international study module contribute to MBA students' understanding and insights about doing business in BRIC countries?
2. In what ways does the international study module broaden, develop and/or change MBA students' personal mental models, perspectives and worldviews?
3. What are MBA students' perceptions about the experience (learning and other) during the international study module?

The insights into students' experiences on international study modules contribute to knowledge about best practices and learning outcome opportunities in an increasingly globalised and differentiated world. The author argues that an international module abroad is a beneficial mode for experiential learning for the development of MBA students' global mind-sets. Key learning outcomes are proposed that could contribute to developing future managers and leaders with mental models and perspectives that are relevant to national and international challenges.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this study the theoretical perspectives on students' experiences on their international study module focuses on the development of mental models through experiential learning and the practice of reflection, with the aim to develop global (worldly) mind-sets.

As the product of concepts and contexts with which one grew up and have developed over one's life, mind- set can be seen as a person's philosophy of life (Taylor & Gollwitzer, 1995). Worldviews, seen as a synonym for perspectives in the context of this study, refer to how individuals structure their different perceptions into a coherent system of ideas, according to Leo Apostel and Jan van der Veken (cited by Vidal, 2008: 3). For managers to be open to challenging their worldviews, they need to realise their worldviews are sets of assumptions and not necessarily true facts (Senge, 1990). Perspective transformation is a process of personal emancipation whereby students are freed from previously-held constrictive beliefs, attitudes, values and feelings, and whereby learners develop more reliable beliefs, exploring and validating their authenticity, to make more informed decisions (Taylor, 2008; Yang, 2004).

The practice of transformation learning in higher education is 'where educators challenge learners to critically question and assess the integrity of their deeply held assumptions about how they relate to the world around them' (Mezirow & Taylor, 2011). Mezirow (1991: 167) defined transformation learning as

The process of becoming critically aware of how and who our assumptions constrain the way we perceive, understand and feel about our world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative perspective; and finally, making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings.

Through reflection on experience, learners can revise their assumptions and expectations, leading to paradigm shifts and behavioural change (Taylor, 2008).

According to Gregersen, Morrison and Black (1998: 28) the 'basic mental process for development [of global leaders] is to understand the world, not just one country ... that requires both some rearranging and stretching of our mind-sets'. Dhanaraj and Khanna (2011) recommend that instead of only expanding information about doing business in emerging markets, it would have greater impact to attempt transformation of the managerial mind-set. Cohen (2010: 5) argued that developing a new perspective called a 'global mind-set', was a more important attribute required for effective global leadership than a new set of skills or experience.

A global mind-set summarises what is believed to make a global leader and an effective manager in a cross-cultural environment (Javidan et al., 2010: 111). The authors propose that a global mind-set has three major components, namely, Intellectual, Psychological, and Social capital. Intellectual capital refers to knowledge of international business and the capacity to learn, and it is the easiest of the three types of capital to develop. What is important is the student's capacity to understand how his or her business works on a global level. In another article, Alon and McAllaster (2008: 1) argued that 'Leadership abilities in the 21st century are partly a function of intelligence about our global environment'.

Psychological capital refers to openness to different cultures and the capacity to change. The premise is that you cannot effectively influence people different from yourself without a good understanding of what those differences are. One of the goals of an MBA programme is to help foster critical thinking and analytic skills beyond students' own 'inherent biases' (White & Griffith, 1998: 108). International best practice compels business schools to offer their students opportunities to develop competencies to deal with people from different cultural backgrounds,

and how to operate in different business contexts and environments (Javidan et al., 2010; Jones, 2012; Mintzberg & Gosling, 2002; Randolph, 2008). To increase the more difficult and personal component of a global mind-set, psychological capital, students should travel and be exposed to new experiences and ideas (Javidan et al., 2010).

And thirdly, *Social capital* refers to the ability to bring people together, make connections and to influence stakeholders. Social capital is largely relationship based and acquired through experience. The ideal is to widen the circle of social interaction and to make an emotional connection with people who are different from oneself. Globalisation has created opportunities for collaboration among different countries, but this also created challenges relating to the effective management of partnerships between different cultures. Fan and Zigang (2004) reported that cultural differences ranked first as the biggest barrier in doing business in the world market. First-hand experiences in other cultures develop the ability in students to be more appreciative of different viewpoints and the benefits of cultural differences in the business environment (Randolph, 2011). Ultimately, business educators must help students understand how cultural differences work in order to turn cultural competence into a competitive advantage.

The role of business schools, therefore, is to influence students' thinking towards such a global mind-set. While perspectives and mind-sets ultimately control behaviour, educators have to identify compelling motivations and relevant tools for creating shifts in students' mental models. Senge (1990) argued that new ways of thinking are only possible if one has the skills to inquire into one's own and others' ways of thinking. Donald Schön said the following: 'I have come to feel that [the] only learning which significantly influences behaviours is self-discovered self-appropriated learning' (as cited by Ungerer, Herholdt & Le Roux, 2013: 28). Mental models determine how people make sense of the world and how they take action, but unless students make a conscious effort to identify them and talk about them openly, they cannot think of their impact and develop new mental models that serve them better (Senge, 1990).

Mental model development can take place through the experiential learning model proposed by Kolb, Rubin and Osland (1991). Their holistic learning cycle comprises the following: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation, which again leads to concrete experience (Kolb, Rubin & Osland, 1991). In this way, experiential learning can address the criticism of business education as being unable to prepare students for practical challenges in a globalised and differentiated world. In fact, to meet the demands of MBA education, the design of curricula has followed a trend of using more experiential learning methods (Bevan & Kipka, 2012; Caza, Brower & Wayne, 2015).

Mental model shifts also occur through disturbed thinking in new contexts. Being immersed in other cultures not only as tourists, but with a practical business focus, provides students the opportunity to develop their global mind-set (Javidan et al., 2010). Study abroad trips increase levels of 'world-mindedness', while it offers students unfamiliar and uncomfortable environments, territories and spaces where they gain maximum learning in the stretch zone of learning. Such stretched mind-sets can lead to better understanding and appreciation of business and cultural diversity (Taras et al., 2013).

However, experiential learning without the necessary interpersonal skills, remains fundamentally adaptive, not generative (Senge, 1990). Managers require reflection and inquiry skills in order to challenge their mental models. Reflective learning can be enhanced when students are exposed to diverse cultures and are required to reflect on what they have learnt (Randolph, 2011). Students should be motivated to challenge the status quo, search for alternatives, and provide concepts and context for new cognitive structures. They should be encouraged to clarify their assumptions, discover internal contradictions in those assumptions, and think through new strategies based on new assumptions (Senge, 1990).

Further to the issue of cultural diversity, Randolph (2011) believes that diversity and potential conflict are keys to better cultural understanding and can lead to synergy of ideas. He reported that his students learnt how to analyse cultural differences and demonstrated knowledge of how to work with people from different cultures. This is what ultimately improves performance on tasks that require cross-cultural competencies. An essential part of developing students' global business capabilities is by reducing the gap between theory and practice (Randolph, 2011). This requires more interaction between academic theory and exposure to first-hand experiences to help students develop the skills to work in a global business context. Therefore, a key element in providing mental model development stimuli through experiential learning is in-market experience and engagement in different contexts, including interaction with executives, managers, students and local people (Dhanaraj & Khanna, 2011). It is necessary to create opportunities for students to have personal experiences through which to learn cultural sensitivity and a way to see stereotypes and personal biases for what they are (Taras et al., 2013).

The reflective learning process is based on a clear link between action, reflection and change. The deeper one reflects, the more insight increases, which leads to greater depth in learning and internalisation. This causes more deconstruction (understanding more fully) and finally, leads to the reconstruction of one's worldview (or thinking principles). Through redirecting

students' natural inclinations towards new conversations, one can produce new learning (Senge, 1990). The ability to hold more than one viewpoint or perspective at the same time becomes possible after reflection, and the individual is in a better position to influence and change his or her behaviour (Dostal, Cloete & Jaros, 2004; Johnson-Laird, 2013; Ungerer et al., 2013).

Senge (1990) argued that all managers know that many of the best ideas or strategies never get translated into practice or action. Further to exposing and engaging people, there remains a gap between what people know and what they do (Ungerer et al., 2013). It is believed that this gap stems from new insights conflicting with deeply-held internal worldviews limiting people to familiar ways of thinking and acting. Ultimately, the question one should ask following a mental model development approach, is whether students showed differences in interpreting contexts, and whether this influenced their behaviour. The goal is to transform the mental models of students to the level where they are not only understanding on an intellectual level, but also capable of relevant action (Dhanaraj & Khanna, 2011). Considering changed behaviour and the development of action mind-sets, Bergsteiner and Avery (2008) found that students made an active effort to relate what they experienced on study tours abroad to other parts of their lives.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research employed qualitative research through theme-based content analysis using ATLAS.ti (a software application) to explore student perceptions extracted from their submitted reflective essays upon completion of their MBA International Study Module (ISM). The research purpose was to look at whether the ISM contributes to students' understanding and insights about doing business in BRICS, at the ways in which the ISM broadens, develops and/or changes students' worldviews and personal mental models, and to explore students' perceptions about the experience (learning and other) during the ISM at the USB.

Data collection and sampling method

The main unit of analysis for this research were the compulsory reflective essays (ISM assignments) submitted on the School's learning hub via Turnitin, by the 126 students who travelled to BRIC countries in 2012 and 2013 on their ISM.

The outline of the ISM assignment brief given to students by the accompanying faculty members was to reflect on the main learnings they have gained and the implications thereof on their current and future thinking as leaders in their organisations; and to discuss the implications these insights have for them personally.

Given the assignment brief, the essays contained students' personal views, perceptions and reflections about their experiences on their ISM.

Ethics

The ethical guidelines and requirements imposed by the host institution were met. The benefit of the content-analysis research approach was that it was unobtrusive – available data was used that had been already submitted by students as compulsory assignments, and students were informed about the purpose and nature of the research. Students were not affected by the usage of this data, and their identities remained protected.

Analysis

The sequence of analysis employed in the study was first to complete a literature review to identify preliminary categories and themes around doing business in BRIC countries, international study modules, internationalised curricula and changing mental models, perspectives and worldviews. During this initial deductive process, codes were suggested by the pre-data analysis literature review. This allowed the researcher to identify the main themes through which to explore student perceptions on international study modules. The main themes that emerged from the theory were the following:

- Bridging the theory and practice gap
- Cultural competencies
- Experiential learning
- Global mind-set
- Global leadership
- Mental model development.

The research then followed an inductive process, whereby the further analysis was grounded in the reflections, perceptions and perspectives of students. In this way the researcher remained open to explore the research questions from the perspectives of the internal paradigms of the sample subjects (Babbie, 2010). Atlas.ti enabled the researcher to analyse systematically the student submissions, assign meaning to selected text, and manage the identified codes. It further enabled carrying out data mining and extracting knowledge and insights that point to theoretical understandings relevant to this study (Babbie, 2010).

One of the biggest advantages of using Atlas.ti was that it allowed the researcher to code, analyse and integrate simultaneously. Throughout the data analysis process, the researcher

linked student observations with the literature review, related these to the research questions, as well as recorded own reflections and insights. At the end of the analysis, reports were generated for selected groups of codes, namely code families. These reports presented quantitative and qualitative evidence of typical observations, reflections and comments made by students about their experiences. In the integration phase of the research process these reports enabled the researcher to compare results to the literature review's main themes in relation to the research questions.

Quality

Qualitative research is measured against the criteria of internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). A carefully conducted computer-assisted qualitative data analysis increases the validity of research results, and remains easily accessible throughout the research process (Friese, 2012). For qualitative research, Guba and Lincoln (op cit.) proposed an alternative to reliability and validity, namely trustworthiness. Trustworthiness can be described through four sub criteria, namely dependability, objectivity, credibility, transferability (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In order to ensure the trustworthiness of the coding process, the researcher maintained a reflective journal by way of analytic memos, as proposed by Saldana (2010). These memos also increased the credibility, transparency and dependability of the analysis, while they served as the building blocks for the findings for this research report, as recommended by Friese (2012). An unintended benefit of the sequence of this study, using a preliminary list of codes and categories linked closely to the research questions, was that personal measurements from the researcher's perspective were minimised. This increased measurement dependability.

Researcher bias was managed through a deliberate awareness of own preferences, adherence to established data collection and analysis techniques, as well as an open-minded approach to the interpretation of the data (Babbie, 2010). The researcher's purpose was exploration and discovery and with the intention to report honestly the findings for the benefit of all stakeholders. The researcher allowed the data to speak for itself, which contributed to objectivity. The findings reported provided a rich description of the social world, thereby increasing transferability (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Experiential learning and the practice of reflection enable transformation of assumptions and generation of new meaning. MBA programmes offering first-hand experiences abroad, coupled with the students' thoughtful deliberate considerations of their experiences through the practice of reflective learning, provide the possibility of them looking at their experiences

from different perspectives. In this light, this study explored the impact of cultural immersions in BRIC countries on the development of students' mental models and worldviews. One of the most powerful ways of changing perceptions, worldviews, beliefs, values and attitudes is self-reflection. It is through such increased depth of reflective learning that people obtain the freedom to reconstruct, change and broaden their worldviews.

The key International Study Module (ISM) learning outcomes emerged from the reflections of the MBA students directly and are discussed.

Global mind-set developed: Intellectual capital

For South Africa to tap into the opportunities offered by the BRICS association, the country's business leaders and managers need deeper knowledge and insights into doing business in the other four BRICS countries. By travelling to different global marketplaces, students experienced first-hand the BRIC countries' potential for growth economically, politically and socially. The findings contain evidence of student insights gained about doing business in the BRICS, the observed cultural differences, and the business challenges and opportunities.

In addition to developing intellectual capital, it was evident from the recorded findings that the MBA students expected to have their mental models challenged and that they were open to new perspectives and worldviews. Students also reflected on their need to grow continually and develop to become better leaders, for example:

> I realised through this India trip, that I am in a state of impermanence and life is moulding me to become the leader that I am meant to be. I have to realise that I am in the process of 'prototyping' myself and that through each stage of development, I should reflect, engage and learn how to improve myself and never be complacent that the 'current model' is the answer (India, 2012).

> *And*

> A key insight for me as an aspirant leader in the African region is, how do I start shaping my thinking and developing leadership capabilities in order to be part of an eco-system that formulates innovative ideas? (India, 2012).

Shifting mental models through experiential learning

The study found that, as proposed by Dhanaraj and Khanna (2011), shifts in mental models occurred through the experiential learning students experienced on the ISM, as expressed by a student from the India 2012 group:

Being exposed to other cultures and ideas has challenged my paradigms and has forced me to think differently about myself, my work, my family, my goals and my ambitions.

The ISM experience provided students with a window to the world and themselves that did not otherwise exist, and new ways of thinking became possible (Senge, 1990). Student reflections also revealed how the experience abroad encouraged them to change their mind-sets in order to become better leaders, for example:

My mind-set has shifted from being money focused to making a difference in others' lives…I want my leadership to add value and not only be focused on how much wealth I can accumulate for myself (India, 2012).

The findings support Randolph's (2011) argument that reflective learning can be enhanced when students are exposed to diverse cultures and reflect on what they have learnt.

Changed mind-sets, perspectives and worldviews

Perspective transformation leads to students being freed from previously-held views (Yang, 2004). The study found evidence of students' challenged perspectives and worldviews, as seen from the Russia 2013 students' reflections:

The experience has really widened my own perspective on my view of the world. I find myself energised to test my own paradigms more regularly and create further learning from the experience.

The lecturers encouraged us to think differently, to have a worldview and mentality that stretches you to think in new ways, outside the box, and this allows you to see new opportunities.

A student from the Brazil 2013 group said:

It was a great learning experience for me – understanding how different people from different backgrounds think about and approach the same scenarios so differently. And even more noteworthy was how not only one approach is successful in a given situation. What is vital to the success of the different approaches is taking yourself out of your own context and understanding the context of the problem being solved as well as the different role-players. I have been able to apply this in my leadership and I find that being aware of the context from which others view a situation allows you to view problems from a different perspective and therefore also find more creative solutions.

The findings also conform to Senge's (1990) theory that the exposure of students to diverse contexts and different scenarios can unfreeze mental models and lead to the creation of a new worldview.

Also, corresponding with Senge's (1990) view that study abroad experiences help students realise that their worldviews are sets of assumptions and not necessarily true facts, student reflections included the following:

> As leader, my visit to Russia taught me the danger in predefined thinking about another country. I learned again to be very careful of the false images the media and popular political ideology can imprint on one's own thinking. The truth is often very different' (Russia, 2013).

Also, in the words of another student from this group to Russia:

> The lesson I learnt is that there is context in every society's difference in worldview and both may be the correct perspective at the same time.

This ability to hold more than one viewpoint or perspective at the same time puts students in a better position to influence and change their behaviour (Ungerer et al., 2013). Students' realisations about the existence of truth outside of their comfort zones support the development of social capital.

Global mind-set: Social capital gained

On the ISM students recognised the prevalent influence of culture on business practices and behaviour. They experienced how values in the workplace are influenced by culture, and importantly, the effect of culture on a country's economic growth, as per the following:

> When reflecting on the insights gained on doing business in Brazil, it is imperative to remember where the country came from, what the people have been through, and the day-to-day challenges they still face and experience. Their culture derived from history is more important that the history itself or the actual events (Brazil, 2013).

In addition, on the ISM, students were stretched out of their normal surroundings, and when they reflected about the new context and scenarios it helped them to see things in a broader context. According to student perceptions, the ISM in India presented a refreshing perspective and their current thinking was disturbed in terms of how Indian people challenge the norm and prevalent thinking when it comes to social innovation and finding solutions to socio-economic challenges, for example:

The exposure was an eye opener, academically, economically and socially. Travelling the world takes us out of our comfort zone and somehow we become empowered (India, 2012).

Students started to consider other associations and relationships beyond their known connections, as noted in this quote:

We should approach our environment and look beyond the generally-accepted or associated businesses. We need to encourage people to look beyond their realm of association – not simply in terms of growing a business or for looking for new business opportunities, but also for developing your own personal truths (Russia, 2013).

Furthermore, the findings concur with the research by Dhanaraj and Khanna (2011). They found that students' experiences serve to break down stereotypes by them understanding diverse outcomes, multiple stakeholder commitments and the complex interactions that drive strategy in emerging markets. For example, students commented that:

The visit to India has broken some of the stereotypes I had before the trip.

A key learning for me was that by experiencing a situation first-hand, provides you with much better insight and it removes many of the preconceived assumptions that you might have had (India, 2012).

In this way the cross-cultural interactions and students' experiences on the ISM reduced perceived differences and prejudice towards different cultural groups, and fostered interest in future international collaboration, as recommended by Taras et al. (2013). Student reflections recorded include the following:

The world is changing. The old rules will soon not apply anymore. The growing disparity between the haves and the have nots are at levels that are simply not stable. The world can simply not go on in the same manner as it has for the past few decades. ... Change has to happen. Communication between different countries, cultures and economic blocks will have to improve. People will have to trust each other. They need to understand what the needs of the other party are (Russia, 2013).

A student who went to India in 2012 said:

We can accomplish much more as humans if we would share all the knowledge we have to ensure we share the wealth and prosperity.

Furthermore, a student who went to Russia in 2013 noted:

I believe now more than ever that cooperation is driven, not by compromise, which contains elements of all positions of opinion, but rather a new position, which improves on each and all as a whole.

Global mind-set: Psychological capital gained

The study found that students welcomed the opportunity offered on the ISM to analyse cultural differences and to deepen their knowledge about how to work with people from different cultures, which concurs with Randolph's (2011) recommendations. Reflections showed that students had gained a cultural sensitivity to the norms, values and social representations of others, for example:

People are different, think different, do different, have different inherent cultures, beliefs and ways of working. Unless we as individual leaders choose to capitalise on the uniqueness of countries and regions and people, we will continue to invest negative energy trying to understand why we are different or who are smarter, as opposed to measure, internalise and innovate from our current way of thinking (Brazil, 2013).

It has exposed me to the sensitivity required to work with different people and has given me some key first steps in learning how to create a successful team through diversity (India, 2012).

One of the ways in which Randolph (2011) measured his students' action mind-sets was to see whether students demonstrated the ability to build synergy out of differences. This study showed that for the students from the India 2012 group, such ability was indeed developed. The ISM to India included a workshop that required USB students to work with students from the host school in India on a local low-income housing project. Reflections recorded in the data analysis of the India 2012 group, confirmed that these students had learned how to capitalise on the synergy that stems from appreciating and utilising diversity through collaboration, for example:

I believe that the trip to India has given me wonderful exposure, especially the design workshop that required us to work with the students from the Indian business school. Being dependent on others for cultural context, language interpretation and the feasibility of business ideas was a wonderfully frustrating experience ... After this session I saw that by managing diversity well, one can truly create a better end solution. Sure, managing diversity well isn't easy, but it has become a prerequisite for success, especially if one wants to take your business global – something which I one day would like to do.

> This trip has made a lot of theory more real to me. I can see how diversity leads to learning and tolerance...We learn from each other if we are tolerant.

The findings provided evidence that the module abroad lead to better cultural understanding and students learnt how to leverage diversity to find better solutions to problems and challenges, which confirms Randolph's (2011) findings. Another key learning that emerged from the student reflections was the realisation by some students about the advantage South Africans have over many other countries given our familiarity in dealing with diversity issues. This provides a valuable platform for practising better cultural sensitivity at home.

Bridging the theory and practice gap

An essential part of developing students' global business capabilities is by reducing *the gap between theory and practice* (Randolph, 2011). Student reflections indicated that the theory and practice gap was bridged through concrete experience which helped broaden or change their mental models and worldviews. Again, students from the India 2012 group commented on their unique and concrete experience with local people and local problems, which offered them the opportunity to find relevant radical solutions to the problems within a cross-cultural team.

Ultimately the question that needs to be asked following a mental model development approach is whether students showed differences in interpreting contexts, and whether this influenced behaviour. The study found evidence of students indicating that they wish to make an active effort to relate what they experience on international modules abroad to other parts of their lives. Examples of reflections recorded in this regard, include the following:

> It was evident that engaging MBA students in hands-on projects, like the Design-thinking workshop in India, helped them to develop skills to work in a global business context. This is in line with the findings of Bergsteiner and Avery (2008), and it further contributed to bridging the gap between theory and practice in the learning experience.

Finally, the study found that the module abroad enhanced students' ability to think globally and act locally, as advocated by Kaynak and Kucukemiroglu (1997). In addition to broadened perspectives globally, the ISM experience also broadened students' perspectives of their own countries, organisations and businesses. There was also evidence of students gaining an understanding of the required competencies to be successful in their South African businesses within the future globalised world.

CONCLUSION

Globalisation has created tremendous opportunities for collaboration among different countries, but this also created challenges relating to the effective management of partnerships between different cultures. There is a need for collaboration with local and international actors in the current global context where economic, political and social challenges and opportunities affect all stakeholders as never before. In addition to specific knowledge about new markets, students need particular cognitive capacities to enable them to broaden their worldviews, develop cultural intelligence, make novel connections and recognise potential opportunities. The study showed how the ISM developed these crucial cognitive capacities in students.

In addition to the responsibility for relevant education, business schools have a fertile opportunity to transform student perspectives and to grow global leaders geared towards collaboration and action. From the recorded and analysed student perceptions, a number of key learning outcomes related to transformed mind-sets and perspectives on MBA global modules abroad were identified.

Exposure to other cultures and perspectives on the ISM was found to have disturbed students' thinking and increased their critical thinking skills. Students became more open to other contexts and truths, which resulted in them undergoing mind-shifts, reaching new awareness about themselves, and changing their perspectives through experiential learning and the practice of reflective learning. Following Kolb's learning cycle students were enabled to reduce the theory-practice gap and further enhanced their reflective competencies.

The development of students' psychological and social global mind-sets enabled them to learn about the advantages of better cultural understanding and more synergy in the light of diversity and cultural differences. It showed how students came to appreciate the necessity of bridging cultural barriers, finding commonality and nurturing long-term partnerships. Their experiences encouraged them to adapt to other cultures, which in turn helped them learn more about themselves. Through the processes of experiential and reflective learning on the ISM, students gained cultural sensitivity, and were able to start seeing new business and collaboration opportunities, both locally and globally.

The article highlighted the value proposition entailed in the compulsory ISM offered to MBA students. Moving forward, the focus should be on how to improve the design of such a module in order to ensure the MBA programme remains relevant in terms of learning outcomes and management competencies required by student customers, local and global businesses, and international accreditation bodies.

To meet these desiderata, the following reflection framework is proposed:

WHAT?	
The international study module contributes significantly towards developing MBA students' global mind-sets	
SO WHAT?	**NOW WHAT?**
➢ MBA students' recorded experiences of their international MBA study module confirm the fertile opportunity business schools have to transform student perspectives and develop global mind-sets. ➢ The development of global mind-set is a relevant and ➢ measurable outcome of international study modules.	➢ Integrate the ISM with the rest of the MBA curriculum. ➢ Increase attention in curriculum and research to emerging markets – BRICS and African countries in particular. ➢ Critically consider the primary learning objectives ➢ related to the international module and ensure relevance of learning outcomes and management competencies developed. ➢ Include cross-cultural projects on all ISM's (like the ➢ Design-thinking workshop in India) ➢ Commit to continuous improvement of the module design.

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