

REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: IJAR-59455

Title: Learning Beyond the Classroom: A Multi-Cohort Study of Rural Immersion Outcomes, Intercultural Competence, and International Student Mobility in India.

Recommendation: Major revision required.

Rating	Excel.	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality		Yes		
Techn. Quality				Yes
Clarity		Yes		
Significance		Yes		

Reviewer's ID: JPR-212

Detailed Reviewer's Report

This is a substantial and timely manuscript that addresses an under-researched intersection of experiential learning, international student mobility and Indian education policy. The multi-cohort design and the three proposed frameworks give the paper genuine originality. However, several methodological, reporting and presentation problems require attention before publication.

Strengths

The research topic is highly relevant to current policy debates around NEP 2020, the New Colombo Plan and India's position as an inbound study destination.

The multi-cohort design, drawing on Australian, Indian, Indigenous community and educator perspectives, is ambitious and provides unusually rich triangulation.

The qualitative material is a genuine strength. Participant reflections such as the Toto wedding experience and the walking reflection are vivid and analytically useful.

The three proposed frameworks, the Rural Immersion Learning Cycle, the Perception Reality Gap Index and the Community Integrated Curriculum Model, are clearly presented and have practical value for program designers and policymakers.

The positioning of rural communities as co-educators rather than passive learning sites is an ethically important contribution and is consistently maintained.

International Journal of Advanced Research

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Major Weaknesses

Serious sampling inconsistency in the central cohort. The NCP Cohort is described as fifteen students, yet key findings are reported on $n=5$, and Table 1 is labelled " $n=5$, projected $n=14$." The paper acknowledges that nine additional surveys were in progress at the time of writing. This means the flagship quantitative findings, including the cultural competency mean of 4.46, the safety mean of 4.56, the career mean of 4.42 and the Net Promoter Score of +80, rest on only five responses and cannot support the strength of the claims made. Phrases such as "every participant" and "not a single negative term" are technically true of $n=5$ but rhetorically misleading. The paper should either wait for the full dataset or substantially soften all claims tied to this cohort.

Projection of findings to a larger sample. The decision to project findings to $n=14$ based on surveys still in progress is not methodologically defensible. Projections of this kind have no place in a results section. All projected figures should be removed and replaced with the actual completed responses, or the analysis should be clearly labelled as preliminary.

Practitioner-researcher bias. The authors are the designers and operators of the programs under study. The manuscript acknowledges this limitation but does not sufficiently mitigate it. All favourable outcomes are reported without any disconfirming or critical data. No participant criticism, no negative program component ratings below 2.61, and no counter-narratives appear anywhere. A more credible study would report what did not work as thoroughly as what did.

Safety data appear internally inconsistent. The manuscript states that zero participants reported significant health or safety issues, yet the physical wellbeing item scored 3.8 out of 5, described as the lowest item. If no participant experienced significant issues, this lower score needs clearer explanation than the brief reference to "the realities of 30-day travel."

Selective reporting of program components. Table 2 reports the top ranked components but the lowest ranked items, including the Australian Consulate visit at 2.61 and the Christ University sessions at 3.68, receive only passing comment. The interpretation that lower rated components are "more conventionally structured" is plausible but speculative and is presented as a firm conclusion.

Structural and formatting problems. Several tables and framework boxes are presented as raw text with embedded placeholders such as "ILLUSTRATION PLACEHOLDER: Circular five-stage diagram" and "ILLUSTRATION PLACEHOLDER: Pentagon diagram with five conditions at vertices." These are not publication ready. The reference list contains duplicates, including British Council 2022 and British Council India 2023 appearing twice, and a typographical error, "Cratbre" for Crabtree.

Citation and formatting inconsistencies. Some in text citations use "and" while others use the ampersand, and the reference list is inconsistently styled. The manuscript

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also mixes "hundred percent" and "one hundred percent" in the career section and uses numerals inconsistently, for example "hundred percent" instead of "100 percent."

Minor issues. The acronym LN is used without definition at first use. The phrase "Japan-India education" appears as a keyword although Japan appears only as a comparative case. Section 4.4 is duplicated in the manuscript. The Appendix summary table is compressed and difficult to read.

Recommendation

Major revision required. The paper addresses an important topic and contains genuinely valuable qualitative material, but the quantitative claims are currently not defensible given the sample sizes and the projected data. The authors should first remove all projected figures and base claims only on completed responses, clearly stating the actual n for each cohort throughout. Second, they should substantially temper all conclusions drawn from the NCP Cohort, given that these rest on five responses. Third, they should report negative or critical findings alongside positive ones to reduce the appearance of advocacy. Fourth, they should resolve the inconsistent safety and wellbeing reporting. Fifth, they should replace all illustration placeholders with actual figures or remove them. Sixth, they should correct the duplicated references, the "Cratbre" error and the citation formatting inconsistencies. With these revisions, the paper has the potential to make a meaningful contribution to the literature on experiential learning and international student mobility.