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Emmanuel Querrec & Ana María Pacheco Arenas

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TUAS – IB Degree Programme case study



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ABSTRACT

Turku University of Applied Sciences (TUAS) has strengthened entrepreneurship education in its various educational programmes as from 2010. The shift in the strategy was aiming at creating opportunities for the blooming of new talents among its students. This article studies the outcomes from developments in the learning environment specific to the Bachelor level International Business Degree Programme (IBDP) at TUAS. The aim of the article is threefold: determining the importance of the cross-cultural dimension, finding if entrepreneurial culture actually developed, and investigating the student perception on the pedagogical methodology used in the IBDP.

The study compiles findings from a survey conducted on fourteen students and some figures calculated on the overall student population. The study shows that the IBDP is a strongly cross-cultural learning environment. Students support each other when team working and learning. They develop their entrepreneurial spirit and managerial skills through project work and field action. They specifically value project work and field action as two critical pedagogical tools. Many IBDP students have bloomed further into entrepreneurial and managerial talents, capable of winning high level business idea competitions and turning their business concepts into reality. This is representative of the strong entrepreneurial culture actually developed at DP level.

Keywords:

education, entrepreneurship, cross-cultural, pedagogy, Business idea competition, project, students

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GOAL OF THE STUDY

Turku University of Applied Sciences (TUAS) is a major educational institution located in South-West Finland. TUAS is strengthening entrepreneurship education in its various faculties and educational programmes in line with its key strategic objectives (J. Kontio, 2010). This effort intended to achieve a higher number of startups initiated by students. Five years later it felt important to examine the situation. This research is executed at the Degree Programme (DP) level. The aim of the article is threefold: determining the importance of the cross-cultural dimension, finding if entrepreneurial culture actually developed, and investigating student perception on the pedagogical methodology used in the International Business Degree Programme (IBDP). The study compiles findings from a survey conducted on fourteen students and some figures calculated on the overall student population.

STUDY POPULATION AND METRICS

The target of the study is the Bachelor in International Business from the IBDP at TUAS, in the Faculty of Business, ICT and Chemical Engineering. However, the IBDP may not be representative of TUAS DP's in general. This is especially true with regard to findings presented later on the cross-cultural dimension. Therefore a conclusion based on the IBDP student population may not be possible to generalise to other DP's. The study does not take into consideration the metrics already at hand at TUAS such as the number of commissioned theses or practical training. The metrics used or developed for the purpose of this study are:

- The relative importance of the international student community involved in the DP (U. Brandenburg and G. Federkeil, 2007),
- DP student-based evaluation on the learning environment and implemented pedagogical approach (through a survey led on 14 students),
- DP students' successful participation in external events (under the form of awards or relevant stage completion as for scholarship years 2013–2014 and 2014–2015 throughout the total IBDP student population, i.e. 149 students), and
- The number of DP students involved in a newly founded organisation during their studies (same as above).

The two latest metrics are critical, as they evaluate the accomplishment of TUAS' strategic objectives at DP level. It reflects if there is realisation of the goal of strengthening interactions between TUAS and the regional economy (J. Kontio, 2010). The student based evaluation metric provides complementary qualitative inputs in the analysis. In reference to IPMA principles (IPMA, 2006), all responding students have had a foot in the real world, confronting their knowledge, skills, attitudes, competences and performance capabilities (S. Goff, 2011) while working with team mates or confronting a jury during an external event (e.g. in a Business Idea Competition).



PICTURE 1. *“I got big supports from teachers...I had new ideas about business environment from them” (Vu Hai Ninh, 2015).*

GENERAL AND CROSS-CULTURAL CONTEXT

The higher education landscape moves fast in Finland (Ahola et al., 2014). There are multiple forces shaping Universities of Applied Sciences' (UAS) strategies, among which the EU policy, Ministry of Education initiated regulations, global market trends as well as regional, municipal and industrial requirements and influences. The mission of teaching, research and service to the society is constantly under scrutiny to provide talented graduated students in the coming decades for an innovative and growing Europe. Acculturation, defined as the change of cultural context (V. Korhonen, 2010), is a key characteristic of Finnish UAS' learning environment.

Cross-cultural aspects are given emphasis at both EU, Finnish and regional levels (EU, 2015). The cross-cultural dimension in a learning environment, more than just a characteristic, can be exploited as an asset in education (Black and Mendenhall, 1990). Some TUAS students have expressed clear comments after experiencing acculturation at TUAS:

I learned that coming together with people from different cultures and backgrounds can really open your eyes to new possibilities and I wouldn't have learned all of that if I hadn't come to study in Turku. (Blog, 2015)

Nevertheless, learning in a cross-cultural environment is complicated and multifaceted, requiring adaptability skills from learners (V. Korhonen, 2010; R.A. DeVillar, 1994). As a matter of fact, International Degree students face daily obstacles during their education in Finnish Universities (D. Njeri Chege, 2013). In the IBDP, skills and competences for overcoming those obstacles have been developed and shared since 1997. A Higher Education course in English is a necessity (M. Shattock, 2008) in which the IBDP has eighteen years of experience. Attachment to the IB Values, namely Create – Share – Respect (Picture 1), is important in view of developing the community spirit

through shared value for all IBDP students and staff. We will discuss this issue in the sections titled Entrepreneurial and Managerial talents and Cross-cultural dimension in the IBDP. We also present illustrative pictures and quotes from students all along the article.



PICTURE 2. *The IBDP Values.*

INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY AND PARTNERSHIPS

TUAS' strategy is strongly inspired by educational policy at the Finnish Ministry and EU levels, as well as through the CDIO principles (CDIO, 2011). TUAS puts emphasis on learning actions taking place in cooperation with the research and the business communities for regional development. This is in line with the knowledge triangle strategy, at the core of EU educational policy (EU, 2011). At TUAS, the knowledge triangle works in practice while using:

- Strengthened internal and external communication
- Focused international cooperation

International partners are important at DP level. For example, student mobility is a strengthening factor of the cross-cultural dimension in DP. Good communication with those partners and their incoming students is essential in order to ensure good student adaptation to the learning environment. In terms of communication TUAS uses a combination of intranet, extranet, web-based learning platforms, an advanced Customer Relationship Management (CRM) application as well as open tools for the purpose of one-off class activities. The CRM assists staff in stakeholders' information processing on key, sporadic and potential partnerships and customers during cooperation activities.

TUAS has a worldwide network of partner universities (TUAS a, 2015). There are field-specific and regional-specific co-operation partners. Segmentation in the cooperation is necessary given the complexity of the various supporting programmes, for example to access funding. External funding is a key resource to project based learning activities undertaken by the students. Funding programmes typically have partner profile based eligibility criteria.

The IBDP is central to developing International Cooperation expertise within TUAS. As an example, the IBDP efforts have contributed to developing the latest strategic double-degree agreements with Russian Universities (TUAS d, 2015).

CROSS-CULTURAL DIMENSION IN THE IBDP

Student population is in total about 149 Degree Students per academic year in the IBDP, spread between the three and a half study years (SoleOPS, 2015). Cross-cultural interaction is a constant in the IBDP, with a minimum of about 25 nationalities among the DP students. In addition to that, a group of about 75 exchange students participates in the classes and project-based activities yearly. In comparison to the other five DPs in the same faculty, the IBDP represents up to 88% of the total number of incoming exchange students. The teaching staff is also international, and students have a chance to be coached by mentors from the five continents during their studies. The internationality of the lecturers and their commitment to and in the process of internationalisation are of fundamental significance (Brandenburg, 2014).

When looking at the ratio exchange student per degree student the IBDP scores 2 degree student per exchange student. This figure, it expresses the strong weight of the group of international students in the structure of the student population, which is an important factor of acculturation. Other DPs in the same faculty score 35.8 (DP in Biotechnology and Food Technology) and 62.6 (DP in Business) degree students per exchange student. The degree of acculturation is considerably lower there. Taking in consideration the nationalities of DP students (as well as those of exchange students) would considerably widen the gap in the degree of acculturation between the DPs in this faculty. The IBDP performs outstandingly in developing a cross-cultural dimension based on those figures.



PICTURE 3. *Cross-cultural setting for a negotiation role-play in the IBDP (Querrec, 2013).*

THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND THE PEDAGOGICAL DIMENSION

A followed objective of TUAS' IBDP is to offer students the possibility to be experts in their field of interest as well as guiding them towards their working life integration. The IBDP favours an innovative learning environment that promotes entrepreneurship among business students. Students and teaching staff's team working is very intensive. This is especially true with regards to coaching activities executed by the teaching staff, for example in project based studies. Top management of TUAS states that: "Research and development projects involve students and teachers from various fields as well as representatives of business and industry". This pedagogical approach is in line with TUAS' Innovation Pedagogy based principles (Lehto and Penttilä, 2013). It is different from traditional, knowledge centred lecturing, such as "learning the book by heart". In the IBDP, attention is equally given to developing knowledge as to developing skills, attitudes, competences and performance in reference to the five steps of the learning scale from IPMA (2015).



PICTURE 4. *An IBDP team in field action (OIS / IB-HUB, 2014).*

HANDS-ON APPROACH

Students in the IBDP are at the core of the learning environment as expressed through TUAS' objectives (TUAS b, 2015). Most courses offer the possibility to accumulate knowledge, but as well to gradually climb the IPMA scale of learning (IPMA, 2015) through various activities. For example, the students are engaged in providing external organisations with the following deliverables:

- Market research reports,
- Strategic internationalisation plans, and
- Media contents (brochures, audio advertising recordings)

This comes in addition to traditional student contribution to Regional Economic Development as through commissioned thesis work and practical training opportunities. Student projects are often carried in cooperation with other DPs at TUAS, other Universities, including abroad, for example through the CARPE network (CARPE, 2015), public organisations, and with profit as well as non-profit organisations.



PICTURE 5. *“IB is what I like and I have passion on that...I am grateful to the changes that I got after I studied IB” (Le Jiang, 2015).*

THE SURVEY

Industry actors and students are essential stakeholders for TUAS. The roles and interactions between those two are essential at DP level. This study gave students the possibility to concretely and critically assess the learning value achieved while studying in the IBDP. Students are empowered to judge. Is the IBDP creating learning value, and is it opening doors for a successful career? Some student statements have been encouraging in the past (The Sun Ship, 2014), but we wish to have a more formal, neutral and deeper investigation on the matter. The survey presented in this study contains questions focusing on student's opinion about:

- The IBDP learning environment
- Network development aspects
- Learnt competences and aptitude to be competitive on the labour market
- Particular successful achievements during study period
- Pedagogical tools



PICTURE 6. *“IB gives the opportunity to get the best out of each member of a team, despite his/her nationality, habits and life standards”.* (Rihards Novikov, 2015).

MATURING AS A MANAGERIAL TALENT IN IBDP

Students answered in a homogenous manner in the survey open question on particular successful achievements (Question 7b). Some words were recurrent, such as “practical”, “projects”, “success” and “team”. The tone in the answers is very positive and supportive towards the current learning environment, full of “opportunities” for the students. The cross-cultural dimension is naturally challenging and we already gave a word on that. However, the IBDP proves excellence in action, for taking advantage of the many different countries, cultures and backgrounds among its students. Students are given “responsibilities” to “engage” in line with the IBDP values, which are Share-Create-Respect. Students have a “passion” and mature while enhancing knowledge, skills, attitude, competence and performance. One of the students interestingly mentioned that he could reflect and perceive its own “changes”.



PICTURE 7. *“Thanks to the cross-cultural environment in the IBDP...I can step up and work equally with academic students from prestigious universities” (Thi Kim Nguyen, 2015).*

EMPOWERED ENTREPRENEURS

In addition to the survey and to student population figures, we decided to track-record the most successful participation to external events, under the form of awards or relevant stage completion in well-established business idea competitions. The results are presented in Table 1. This gives a concrete ground for assessing the realisation of Entrepreneurial and Managerial talents during students' study time within the IBDP:

Efforts put in entrepreneurial education have yielded clear results in the IBDP. Students are given the opportunity to get engaged in serious entrepreneurial projects. In November 2014 the Masar student project was initiated, as part of the so called Internationalization Practice Projects (IPP) project-based learning activity. The project turned into a capitalised company, created in Finland, winning the Rockstart competition in the Netherlands. It is capitalised at EUR 100 000 and valued to EUR 1,000,000 as to 27th April 2015. Masar activities are global, with operations in Egypt and Asia, while maintaining leadership and strategic decision-making in Europe (Netherlands and Finland). Masar is a living example of IBDP expertise in empowering students to learn International Business in a very practical way.

TABLE I. *Successful IBDP student's participation to external events.*

Student ID	Event	Event scale	Top achievement	Founded Startup
1	PREGAME 2014 <i>www.pregame.fi Perustayritys.fi</i>	Regional	Winner	No
2	Geebiz 2014 <i>www.geebiz.org</i>	Global	Top 3 listed	No
	Challenge Turku 2015 <i>www.facebook.com/challengeturku</i>	Regional	Winner	No
3	Hong Kong Polytechnic University Challenge 2014	Global	Participant	No
4				Yes*
5	Challenge Turku 2014 <i>www.facebook.com/challengeturku</i>	Regional	Winner	No
6		Regional	Participant	No
7	Ahjo Program – MikkeliES 2014 <i>ahjoaccelerator.fi/</i> and <i>mikkelies.fi/en/</i>	National	Winner	Yes
8	Rockstart 2015 <i>www.rockstart.com/</i>	Global	Winner	Yes
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				

**incubated under Boost Turku Startup Projects as HippoTori*

THE IBDP LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Note that all data analysis figures can be found in the appendix. With regard to the learning environment, the students who responded all agreed that the IBDP learning environment is very strongly cross-cultural (Question 1 of the survey, see appendix). This is in line with our findings based on the ratio of exchange student per degree student (see above).

While agreeing to a majority with the statement, students however don't agree as strongly with the fact that this would lead to improving student capability to be successful on the working marketplace (Question 2, see Figure 1). This is surprising when considering research in the field. We may assume that students underestimate the impact in terms of learning value, and usefulness to the professional career, of a strong cross-cultural learning environment.

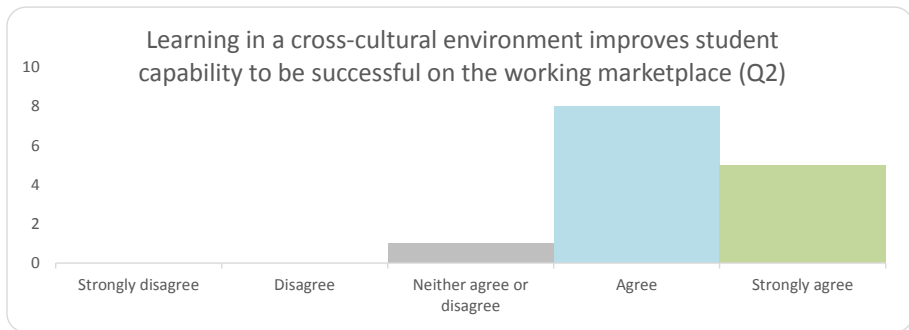


FIGURE 1. *Data analysis for question 2.*

Interestingly, a large majority of students agreed that studying in IB offers opportunities for successful achievements as a student (Question 7a) and expanding the professional network (Question 5).

Respondents dominantly agree that the learning provided in the IBDP is highly valuable (Question 3) but half the study group is unsure whether they are competitive on the working marketplace (Question 4, see Figure 2). This

emphasises the issue spotted in Question 2. It is unclear if the reason behind this is due to lack of knowledge, biased perception, pessimism, anxiety of the future or a sincere and supported opinion.

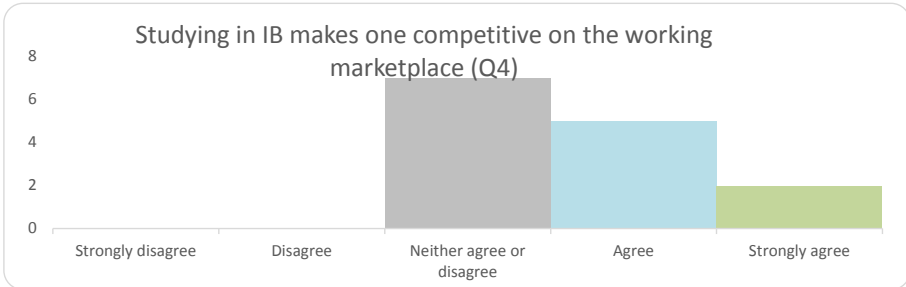


FIGURE 2. *Data analysis for question 4.*

More positively, nearly two thirds of the responding students agree (and none disagree) that after studying in IB, they are more competitive candidates on the global market place than a person who would have studied by their home country’s higher education learning environment standards (Question 16, see Figure 3). This is very supportive to TUAS’ strategy and its realisation at DP level, from a student’s perspective.

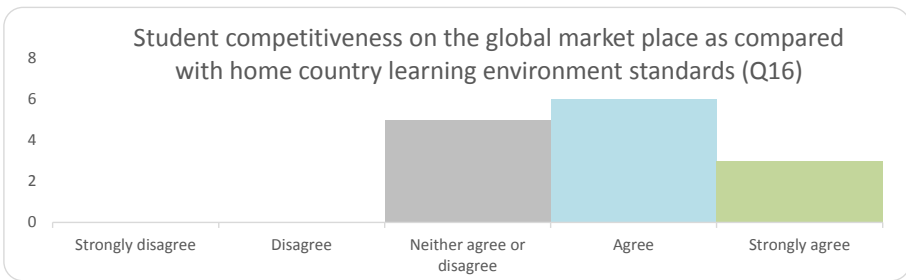


FIGURE 3. *Data analysis for question 16.*

Two thirds of the group agreed on recommending newly applying students to apply for studying in IBDP (Question 6). It is understandable that some students don’t take a clear position, due to the inherent difficulties of studying in a strongly cross-cultural and project based learning environment. This is in line with our comments on the general and cross-cultural context.

With regards to pedagogical aspects, students consider that all forms of learning activities are critical, whether by reading books and web contents (Question 8), listening to a lecturer’s speech and taking notes (Question 10), Project work (Question 12), or being involved in organising field action is a critical activity for learning (Question 14). Project work and field action are however more strongly agreed upon. Those two are also considered to provide more durable learning than reading and listening (Questions 9, 11, 13, 15). Figure 4 shows the student opinion on learning durability as through project work.

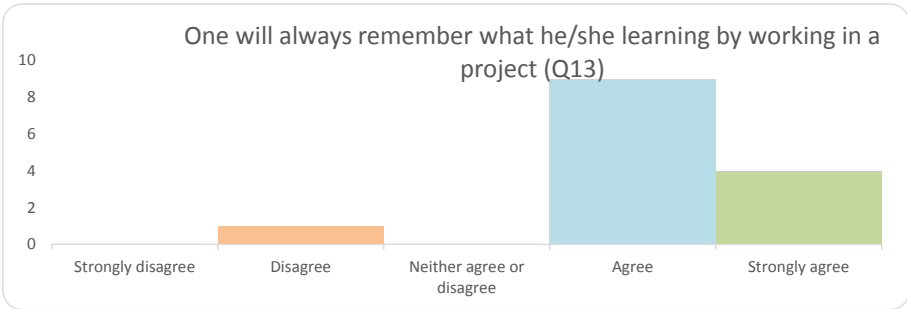


FIGURE 4. *Data analysis for question 13.*

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND LIMITATIONS

The following points underline the scope of the study and possible orientation for future research. First, curriculum building is considered an essential task for turning TUAS' strategy into concrete outcomes, in terms of student competence. Also, some pedagogical tools, spread throughout students' curricula are essential towards students' integration in working life. Those could be given attention for further research, such as:

- Company visits,
- Company guest presentations,
- Services to companies,
- Public event organisation, and
- Research and publication work.

Secondly, not all IBDP students become entrepreneurs or managers after their studies. There are many other fruitful pathways such as deepening in their knowledge through Master studies or continuing with a different professional option such as financial consultancy. The DP needs a reliable system for continuous networking of its former students, for example by using an alumni community through a social media platform. It is made all the more challenging by the fact that distance and variety in the cultural contexts could still be considered as barriers to it. Nevertheless, IBDP students "still keep in touch as good friends" (Hoa Le Duc, 2015) and social media tools have definitely and considerably reduced barriers for establishing a robust alumni.

Thirdly, note should be taken that the selection process for entrance candidates benefits from the work done upstream by UAS with FINNIPS. The IBDP receives candidates from all over the world with a guarantee of quality from the selected applicant. Performance and quality in the IBDP marketing, but more especially in the candidate application and selection process would be a very interesting topic for further research.

Fourthly, is the IBDP capable enough of turning to-be entrepreneurs into actual ones? Indeed, the proportion of Startup founders may be considered as relatively small, and is that in line with other DPs, or other UAS? In class, students play the game, and take part in activities in and outside the classroom, but they also clearly express their fear of the risks entailed with becoming an entrepreneur. Is there an additional challenge in progressing from idea generation to becoming an entrepreneur for real? This could also be a valuable direction for further research.

Last, there is much to learn from other UAS in Finland, not only in terms of developing an entrepreneurial mindset but also in improving the cross-cultural learning environment. For example, Arcada has more than 50% of non-Finnish International Business students (Arcada a, 2015) and 300 international students, coming from 50 different countries (Arcada b, 2015). Metropolia has 900 international degree students who represent more than 90 different nationalities, spread within the 67 DPs, including the 15 DPs in English. (Metropolia, 2015). Those figures are very interesting and could lead to a valuable comparative analysis.

CONCLUSION

Independently of their country of origin, students from the IBDP share similar values. This creates the ground and perfect context for the development of strongly cross-cultural teams. Students support each other while learning and developing an entrepreneurial spirit and managerial skills. Project work, as well as field action, are valued as critical pedagogical tools. The teaching staff, acting as coaches in project work, supports the students. They establish the learning goals and adapt the students' learning path towards excellence in entrepreneurial and managerial knowledge, skills, attitude, competence and performance. Many IBDP students have bloomed further into entrepreneurial and managerial talents, capable of winning high level business idea competitions and turning their business concepts into reality. This is representative of the strong entrepreneurial culture actually developed at DP level.



PICTURE 8. *“Studying in IBDP, I had many opportunities to take part in several projects in and outside school as well as some business-related competitions...I gained valuable experience” (Thi K. Huynh, 2015).*

It takes a lot of time and effort to build one's network, corporate identity, as well as a supportive and contributive alumni network for a young DP such as the IBDP. There are also lots of obstacles in the sphere of International Business. The IBDP is ambitious. Performance indicators in terms of learning, cross-cultural dimension, an entrepreneurial mindset and regional development will be challenging to keep at current levels. However, the future is full of promises for the IBDP given:

- The new IBDP values (Create-Share-Respect), strengthening its identity,
- The inspiring leadership (Vesa Taatila, Juhani Soini, Juha Kontio, Jaana Kallio-Gerlander) which ensures clarity of the strategic vision and purposefulness of the curriculum developments,
- The dedicated and value-adding teaching staff, and most importantly
- The talented, open minded, creative and responsible students.

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APPENDIX I: SURVEY QUESTIONS

All survey questions, except open question 7b, were closed questions using the following scale:

- 1 = Strongly disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neither agree or disagree
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly agree

IB Degree Programme evaluation questions

- 1) The IB degree programme learning environment is very strongly cross-cultural
- 2) Learning in a cross-cultural environment improves student capability to be successful on the working marketplace
- 3) Studying in IB is highly valuable from a learning perspective
- 4) Studying in IB makes one competitive on the working marketplace
- 5) Studying in IB offered me opportunities to expand my professional network
- 6) I would recommend any newly applying students looking for a degree programme in Business Administration to go for studying in IB
- 7a) Studying in IB offers opportunities for successful achievements as a student
- 7b) Would you have a successful specific achievement in mind which took ground while and thanks to studying in IB?

Pedagogy evaluation questions

- 8) Reading books and other materials (e.g. web contents) is a critical activity for learning
- 9) One will always remember what he/she learns by reading in books or on the web
- 10) Listening to a lecturer speech and taking notes is a critical activity for learning
- 11) One will always remember what he/she learns through listening to a lecturer speech and taking notes
- 12) Project work is a critical activity for learning
- 13) One will always remember what he/she learning by working in a project
- 14) Preparing and organizing an event (e.g. seminar, conference) is a critical activity for learning
- 15) One will always remember what he/she learns through preparing and organizing an event

Educational excellence

- 16) After studying in IB, I am a more competitive candidate on the global market place than a person who would have studied by my home country higher education's learning environment standards

APPENDIX 2: DATA ANALYSIS

