

# An Examination of Participants' Perceptions of The Management University of Africa's Japan Study Tour

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## 要 旨

本研究は、2024年にアフリカマネジメント大学によって行われた日本研修ツアー参加者による研修成果の公表を目的としている。現在、あらゆる場においてグローバル化が進み、高等教育においても異文化理解や専門教育の開発が促進されている。それらは、日ごとに重要性を増しているといえよう。この日本研修ツアーでは、ケニアの参加者に日本の経営システム、起業家、文化的価値観など多くの実践的な学習機会を提供している。質的研究と量的研究からなる、混合研究法を採用しつつ、特に質的側面に重点を置いている。参加者の省察を通して幅広い経験や行動、考え方を振り返り、文化的な背景や理解にまで深く深化させた分析を試みた。

また、より柔軟な自由回答を引き出すため半構造化質問票を用いている。このことによって、日本の文化的価値観の影響、異文化適応の課題、体験学習の今後の可能性など、参加者の課題とテーマを明らかにすることができた。さらに、この研修ツアーでは、グローバルな意識、リーダーシップスキル、文化的共感の育成など多面的な利点を明らかにし、実践的で効果的なプログラムの設計を提案している。アフリカと日本の教育機関間の国際交流に関する既存の専攻研究を考察するとともに、それらの発展に大きく寄与しつつ、今後の国際交流プログラムのモデルケースになることを期待したい。

**キーワード：**文化交流、教育観光、海外学習交流、学術交流、能力の形

## Introduction

In a globalized and interconnected world, the role of higher education in fostering cross-cultural understanding and professional development has gained significant traction. Study

tours, as part of experiential learning initiatives, provide a unique platform for students and professionals to engage with diverse cultures, industries, and academic practices. These programs bridge theoretical knowledge with real-world applications, enabling participants to develop global competencies, adaptability, and a broader worldview (Kolb, 1984; Tarrant, Rubin, & Stoner, 2014).

The Management University of Africa Japan Study Tour exemplifies the transformative potential of such international collaborations. Initiated in 2022, the program offers Kenyan participants an immersive experience in Japanese management systems, entrepreneurial practices, and cultural values. By engaging with Japanese institutions, industries, and communities, participants gain insights into innovative practices such as *kaizen* principles, sustainable entrepreneurship, and the intricate balance between modernity and tradition. These experiences not only enrich participants' understanding of global best practices but also inspire them to reflect on their own cultural and professional contexts.

To evaluate the impact of the 2024 study tour, this research adopts a mixed-methods approach, emphasizing the qualitative side. While quantitative data offers measurable insights into participants' experiences and outcomes, qualitative analysis delves deeper into their personal narratives, cultural observations, and professional reflections. Using a semi-structured questionnaire, the study aims to capture the nuances of participants' experiences, uncover any recurring themes related to their experience, such as the influence of Japanese cultural values, the challenges of cross-cultural adaptation, and the transformative potential of experiential learning.

By focusing on the perceptions and evaluations of the participants, this study aims to contribute to the growing body of literature on international educational exchanges, particularly between African and Asian institutions. It explores the multifaceted benefits of study tours, including the development of global awareness, leadership skills, and cultural empathy. Furthermore, the research highlights the importance of structured planning, participant engagement, and cultural immersion in designing practical and impactful programs.

The objectives of this research were to better understand the lived experiences of the participants, to improve future iterations of the study tour, and to document and describe the extent to which it achieved its implicit goals of enhancing professional competency, fostering personal growth, and increasing intercultural understanding.

## **Literature Review**

### **Globalization and Higher Education**

Globalization has become a transformative force in higher education, fostering international collaboration, cultural exchange, and knowledge sharing (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Study tours and international educational programs have emerged as key strategies for universities to cultivate global competencies and expose students to diverse cultural and professional contexts (Jones, 2013). Such initiatives align with the increasing demand for graduates who are equipped to navigate a globalized workforce (Knight, 2004).

Long, Akande, Purdy, and Nakano (2010) examine the integration of academic rigor and experiential learning in short-term study tours. Focusing on a program to Japan, the authors employ an emic, host-country-based approach inspired by Japanese school excursions. This method enhances students' cultural immersion, personal development, and academic understanding through active student involvement in itinerary planning, research, and on-site interactions. The authors highlight significant outcomes, including increased cultural sensitivity and academic engagement, though they note challenges in post-tour reflections due to program structure and duration.

### **Study Tours as Learning Tools**

Study tours provide students with experiential learning opportunities that combine theoretical knowledge with real-world applications (Kolb, 1984). These programs encourage critical thinking, adaptability, and cross-cultural communication skills (Ritchie & Crouch, 2000). Moreover, study tours can enhance participants' global awareness and foster personal growth by immersing them in new cultural settings (Soman, Praharaj & Sharma, 2023). Woldegiyorgis, Luchilo, and Pham (2020) explore the role of diasporas in fostering academic collaboration across the Global South, highlighting the historical and contemporary migration patterns shaping diasporic networks and their potential to bridge gaps in knowledge exchange. Despite limited collaboration due to structural inequalities, linguistic barriers, and geopolitical imbalances, the authors underscore the growing significance of academic mobility and diaspora engagement in addressing these challenges. They also envision future scenarios where strengthened ties among academic institutions in these regions could enhance global knowledge production and equitable partnerships.

### **Cultural Immersion and Perceptions**

The impact of cultural immersion on participant perceptions has been extensively

documented. Studies reveal that exposure to new cultural environments can challenge pre-existing stereotypes, promote cultural empathy, and broaden participants' worldviews (Tarrant, Rubin, & Stoner, 2014). However, the success of these outcomes depends on well-designed programs that balance academic, cultural, and logistical elements (Paige, Cohen, & Shively, 2004).

## **International Partnerships in Education**

Collaborations between institutions from different countries have proven to be mutually beneficial, offering unique learning opportunities and fostering institutional growth (Marginson, 2006). For example, partnerships between African and Asian universities are gaining traction, emphasizing the exchange of ideas and practices in governance, leadership, and sustainable development (Teferra & Knight, 2008). Several universities in the Kanto area such as Josai University and Tokyo University of Foreign Studies have active exchange programs or study tours to Africa (Boakye-Tetteh, 2024; Ritchie, 2020).

## **The Role of Participant Evaluation**

Participant feedback is critical in assessing the effectiveness of study tours and identifying areas for improvement (Anthony, 2022). Evaluation frameworks often focus on participants' satisfaction, learning outcomes, and the program's overall impact on their personal and professional development (Deardorff, 2006). Such assessments provide valuable insights for refining future programs.

The existing body of literature highlights the multifaceted benefits of study tours in higher education, particularly in promoting cultural understanding, personal growth, and professional development. By integrating these insights, the study on participant perceptions and evaluations of The Management University of Africa Japan Study Tour contributes to this growing field, offering a unique perspective on cross-continental educational collaboration.

## **Overview and History of The Management University of Africa Japan Exchange and Tour**

The Management University of Africa Japan Exchange and Tour first began as an informal programme in 2018 with an initial cohort of four students and a faculty advisor from MUA. There were many lessons learned from the initial study tour in terms of logistics and the need for a clearly articulated and coordinated curriculum to maximize student satisfaction and learning, to move from a more touristic approach to an educational and training one. The study tour, in its current configuration, was initiated in 2022. It aims to provide participants

with an immersive opportunity to explore the management systems, entrepreneurship practices, and cultural values of Japan. The tour was originally initiated as a reciprocal effort to foster learning and collaboration between Kenya and Japan, providing Kenyan participants the opportunity to gain insights into Japanese business practices and cultural traits that can inspire innovations and improvements in their own contexts. The authors are involved with a group of other academics in conducting and administering the study tour on the Japanese side. The Management University of Africa participants are fully self-funded with the group mostly consisting of graduate students at either the master's or doctorate level who are also employed in a range of industries such as transportation and logistics, banking and commerce, health care management, and other industries. They are accompanied by several members of staff and the Vice Chancellor of the University. The trip is centred in Tokyo and the neighbouring Saitama area, but in past years participants have also travelled to Osaka for various activities.

On the tour, participants learn from the working environment in Japan, and it is hoped that upon their return to Kenya, they will consider applying any of the takeaways from the trip to their own organizations and personal lives. The members consist of current and upcoming entrepreneurs and managers who are eager to learn from Japan's emphasis on time management, communication skills, logistics, and the concept of *kaizen*—a philosophy of continuous improvement. Participants also delve into Japan's celebrated aesthetics and attention to detail, which hold valuable lessons for improving the quality of Kenyan products and services.

A key highlight of the study tour is a focus on a diverse array of industries. Students visit both large corporations, like Nissan IEC, where they tour manufacturing facilities and learn about logistics, as well as smaller, community-driven enterprises. For instance, they visit a local business in Saitama Prefecture town of Ogawa, Yoshida Accessories, a family-run business that successfully adapted to the digital age under the leadership of the younger generation. Such experiences offer practical examples of how entrepreneurial knowledge and traditional skills can combine to thrive in modern markets.

The tour also emphasizes sustainable practices through visits to local organic farms and related businesses. In Ogawa, the birthplace of Japan's organic farming movement in the 1970s, students engage with innovative approaches to food security. Highlights include participating in tea-making activities at Miyanoen Tea Plantation in Sayama and touring Ogawa Winery to learn about the intersection of entrepreneurship and sustainability. In addition to the core business and academic activities, the program includes enriching cultural exchanges. Students engage with their Japanese counterparts at institutions like Toyo University and Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, fostering mutual understanding and

international friendship. This year, some participants also took part in lectures on Kenyan culture at a Japanese high school, contributing to cross-cultural education.

Non-academic activities add an additional layer to the experience, including visits to iconic locations such as the Tokyo Sky Tree and Akihabara electronics district. These excursions allow participants to appreciate the modernity of Japan alongside its traditional values, creating a holistic view of the country. Through this multifaceted approach, the Japan Exchange Tour not only equips Kenyan students with tools to implement innovative ideas back home but also builds enduring relationships that bridge cultural and professional gaps between the two countries.

The tour organizers also incorporated plenty of opportunities for participants to discover Tokyo and the surrounding area for themselves over the course of the tour by encouraging them to walk around the city, make use of the various public transport options available, to take risks and to interact with members of the public to discover their own way and not to be afraid of taking missteps or making errors during their stay. At first, many of the participants were reluctant to move about outside of the group, but, after a few days, they had settled in and got used to the vastness of Tokyo. They gradually conquered their surroundings and began to make efforts to mix and interact with the Japanese locals and to try some of the local cuisine or to do their own activities.

Table 1: The Japan Study Tour itinerary for 2024

Date	Activities and notes
7th Nov (Thurs)	<b>Arrival in Tokyo</b> Participants transferred to their accommodation at a hotel in Kawaguchi, Saitama.
8th Nov (Fri)	<b>Toyo (Hakusan Campus) University visit</b> Participants attended classes, participated in a campus tour, and met with students at the "English Community Zone," where they engaged in cultural exchange with Japanese students.
9th Nov (Sat)	<b>Peace as a Global Language Conference, Toyo University (Akabane Campus)</b> The conference theme was "Artificial Intelligence: Implications for Peace in Communities at the Local and Global Level." This year featured a total of 20 presentations.
10th Nov (Sun)	<b>Walking Tour of Tokyo and Tokyo Skytree Town Visit</b> Participants explored the Asakusa area, walked along the city's canals and parks, and gained an understanding of the vast scope of Tokyo as a metropolis. They also toured Tokyo Skytree Tower.
11th Nov (Mon)	<b>Visit to Sayama Miyanoen (Tea Plantation), Saitama</b> Participants engaged in activities such as picking and making tea, eating tea leaf tempura, touring the facilities, and visiting the onsite tea souvenir shop.

12th Nov (Tues)	<p><b>High School lecture</b> One participant delivered a lecture to high school students in Saitama on the topic of the Kenyan economy and opportunities for future development.</p> <p><b>Tour and shopping of Akihabara electronics district.</b> Participants explored the renowned electronics district, engaging with small retailers offering a wide variety of electronics at bargain prices.</p>
13th Nov (Wed)	<p><b>Tokyo University of Foreign Studies Visit</b> Participants attended classes with Japanese students, took part in exchange activities, assisted with school festival preparations, and engaged with the African Studies Department to strengthen ties between the Management University of Africa and Tokyo University of Foreign Studies.</p>
14th Nov (Thurs)	<p><b>Car Manufacturer Parts Tour (Atsugi Plant), Yokohama</b> Participants visited Tokyo IEC, attended a lecture by the CEO, participated in a discussion, and toured the manufacturing plant.</p> <p><b>Nissan Gallery Visit and Tour</b> Participants learned about the history, current operations, and future direction of one of Japan's leading car manufacturers.</p>
15th Nov (Fri)	<p><b>Josai University Visit and Exchange</b> One participant delivered a guest lecture on "Kenya and the International Community," followed by an opportunity for participants to engage with students in the Josai University student hub.</p>
16th Nov (Sat)	<p><b>Organic Farm Tour to Shimozato Organic Farm, Saitama</b> Participants visited one of Japan's first farms to adopt fully organic practices in the 1970 s. They learned about the organic farming process, its benefits for the local community, business opportunities, environmental connections, and the importance of food security.</p> <p><b>Visit to Local Artisan Ishida Accessory Maker, Saitama</b> Participants learned about the challenges of finding successors for small businesses in Japan, especially in rural areas facing population decline and a shortage of young workers.</p> <p><b>Organic Winery Tour and Wine Tasting</b> Participants learned about an initiative to produce wine in a region previously considered unsuitable for grape cultivation. They toured the facilities and vineyards and participated in a wine tasting session.</p>
17th Nov (Sun)	Free time.
18th Nov (Mon)	<b>Kenyan Embassy Visit</b> Departure.

## The Japan Study Tour Questionnaire

Following this year's tour, we decided to conduct a survey of participants' perceptions and opinions of their time in Japan and to measure the benefits derived from various activities. This survey also aimed to assess the program's effectiveness in meeting its goals and to identify areas for improvement in future iterations.

The survey was administered using Google Forms and distributed to all 15 participants, who consisted of four faculty members, three administrative staff, and seven students (six graduate students and one undergraduate). The questions covered a range of topics, including

participants' experiences with cultural exchange, their insights into Japanese business practices, and their views on the program's academic and non-academic activities.

A self-reporting questionnaire in a structured questionnaire format, combining several closed-ended questions for quantitative feedback and open-ended questions to capture qualitative insights was employed. This mixed-methods approach allowed for both the systematic comparison of responses and the exploration of deeper participant perspectives. The rationale for choosing this format was to balance efficiency in gathering broad feedback with the flexibility needed to understand individual experiences and nuanced observations.

Semi-structured questionnaires also allow respondents to answer more freely and, on their terms, with no restrictions on their responses. They allow for unusual or surprising responses and are useful to explore and discover a range of answers to determine common themes (Ranganathan & Caduff, 2023). The data was analysed through thematic analysis, with responses categorized into key themes such as educational highlights, cultural observations, and challenges faced. This approach facilitated the identification of patterns and commonalities across participant feedback, ensuring that both the trends and unique perspectives were represented in the findings.

The survey had a response rate of 50%. Participants highlighted the significant value of immersive activities such as visits to local businesses and organic farms, as well as the cultural exchanges with Japanese students and faculty. Additionally, responses revealed which aspects of the program resonated most deeply, such as the emphasis on *kaizen* principles and sustainable entrepreneurship. The findings will guide future iterations of the Japan Exchange Tour, and by incorporating participant feedback, we aim to enhance the program's structure, expand its scope, and ensure it continues to offer meaningful and impactful experiences for all involved. The survey also reiterates our commitment to continuous improvement.

## Key themes and insights

### I Reception

The study tour was universally well-received, with participants describing it as “excellent,” “very impressive,” and “well organized.” Faculty members particularly appreciated the comprehensive nature of the visit, which successfully fulfilled its planned itinerary and objectives. As one participant noted, “The programme was meticulously planned and executed, leaving no room for confusion or delays.” Another stated, “I felt that every activity was purposeful and added to my understanding of Japan.”



## **II Educational Environment Integration**

The university visits revealed significant insights into Japanese higher education practices. One faculty member noted the “very warm welcome in all the universities visited” and observed that “students [were] eager to learn about our culture abroad.” Another participant highlighted the “world class” facilities and infrastructure, emphasizing how “the level and standards are high” based on student interactions and presentations.

The learning environment was particularly noteworthy, with participants observing:

- a. Student-centred learning approaches
- b. Well-designed social spaces (“chilling zones”)
- c. Integration of local language in teaching
- d. High standards of student discipline

## **III Technical and Industrial Exposure**

Industrial visits provided practical insights into Japanese technological advancement and management practices. A faculty member described the Nissan Gallery visit as “very exciting,” highlighting the “advancement in technology” observed.

The study tour also included diverse industrial experiences:

- a. Automotive industry exposure at Nissan
- b. Organic farming initiatives at Ogawa Town
- c. electronic retail districts (Akihabara)
- d. Innovation centre

One staff member particularly noted the value of seeing “used goods in near excellent condition being sold along the junk street... at throwaway prices,” highlighting the contrast with Kenyan approaches to second-hand goods.

## **IV Cultural and Infrastructural Impact**

Participants consistently noted the profound impact of experiencing Japanese social infrastructure and cultural practices. A student remarked that “movement and transportation if you're really planned is quite efficient,” while others noted initial challenges with the railway system during rush hours. Cultural observations were particularly insightful:

“Honesty and integrity - this is a must if Kenya has to move from where we are”

“Hardwork - Japanese appeared to be more hardworking and focused”

“Cleanliness is a great culture in every aspect and place”

“Orderliness - people even line up at train stations, in restaurants and literally everywhere”

## V Development and Leadership Insights

A significant theme emerged regarding governance and development. As one faculty member observed: “It was apparent to most participants that what Kenya lacks is visionary leadership devoid of corruption. A realisation that Japan was almost in the same situation as Kenya some 60 years ago, yet there is no comparison to make now is enough proof that it is possible to build a country where ‘things work.’” The historical context was particularly impactful, with one participant noting how the Sumida city area “was rebuilt to a modern status in just about five years following its bombing during the second World War,” demonstrating “Japanese hard work and determination.”

## VI Recommendations for Future tours

In response to the question regarding future study tours and improvements, several key recommendations emerged:

- a. Extended Duration: “Include more than 15 days”
- b. Additional Industrial Visits: “Visit to Toyota production plant”
- c. Natural Experiences: “A day’s hike on Mt. Fuji”
- d. Academic Components: “Paper presentations should not be optional in order to build the confidence of the students”
- e. Cost Considerations: “Explore the possibility of accommodation in some campuses which could be a lot cheaper”

The participants comments indicate that the tour successfully achieved its educational objectives while providing participants with valuable insights into Japanese society, technology, and management practices. The experience seems to have particularly impacted participants’ views on development and governance, inspiring them to consider how Japanese practices and values might be adapted to the Kenyan context. Finally, the feedback was effective in reiterating the original themes and goals of the study tour.

## Conclusion

The Japan Study Tour had a profound impact on participants’ perspectives on development, education, and cultural practices. As one student remarked: “Everything I saw gave me a different perspective on implementing what I learn in school. Everyone in Japan appreciates their country’s achievements.” The programme’s success underscores the value of international exchanges in enhancing cross-cultural understanding and providing insights into successful development models, particularly for developing nations. It also demonstrates how such initiatives promote cultural exchange, knowledge sharing, and professional growth, with participants reporting significant gains in global awareness, leadership skills, and personal development. Their experiences reveal how study tours not only strengthen academic and

professional competencies but also encourage personal growth and intercultural appreciation.

Finally, the findings highlight the importance of qualitative feedback in capturing participants' experiences and provide guidance for improving future programs. By addressing challenges such as cultural differences and logistical hurdles through structured planning and active engagement, study tours can maximize their educational and cultural impact. Ultimately, these programs serve as transformative opportunities to inspire and empower participants while bridging cultural and professional divides.

## Implications

The findings suggest that such programs can serve as valuable tools for international knowledge transfer and cultural exchange. Future research might explore the long-term impact of such programs on participants' professional practices and institutional development initiatives.

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### Appendix

The questionnaire was carried out using Google Forms.

1. What were your overall impressions of the trip? How did it align with your expectations?
2. Describe an activity that stood out to you the most.
3. What did you find most challenging during the programme?
4. What did you find the easiest?
5. During the study tour, visits were made to Toyo University, Josai University and Tokyo. University of Foreign studies. What did you find most interesting about the learning environment and student exchanges?
6. You visited several tourist sites such as Tokyo Skytree Town and Akihabara. How do you see these complementing the educational goals of the trip?
7. How do you think this trip has shaped your perspectives on challenges in Kenya?
8. What do you hope you will take away from this experience in the long term?
9. For future study tours, is there anything you would recommend that should be carried out differently? What new elements would you want included/excluded?
10. Please feel free to write freely if you have any other opinions.