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## Developing University Students' Transferable Skills Through Object-Based and Collaborative Learning: An Exploration into the Role of Art Galleries and Museums

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### Abstract

This empirical paper reports on the findings of a pilot study that aimed to explore student attitudes towards the innovative use of the arts to develop university students' transferable skills. Postgraduate business and management students were taken to a local museum and nearby art gallery to undertake a guided object-based learning activity. The art centre activities were designed to help students to learn, practice and develop key transferable skills through collaboration in an experiential learning setting. Methods: A questionnaire was dispersed to the students after the second trip had taken place, to ascertain student feedback on both their experience and skill development because of the object-based learning approach. Results: Of the 21 students who took part in the museum and art gallery trips, a total of 19 completed the questionnaire. The results show that the students found their visits to the museum and art gallery to be valuable, enjoyable, and social, while also gaining new skills. The quantitative and qualitative analysis supports that these experiences were especially effective in fostering discussions among students, promoting critical thinking through object-based learning, and allowing students to compare their perspectives with those of their peers. This study supports the use of informal learning environments like museums and galleries as they can be highly effective in complementing traditional classroom education by encouraging deeper engagement and support a shift toward more interactive, discussion-driven education. This deeper learning approach fosters critical thinking, cultural competence, and teamwork, thus simulates key skills employers seek in the workplace.

**Keywords/key phrases:** postgraduate skills, object-based learning, experiential learning, museum, art gallery

### 1. Introduction

Cultivating a diverse set of transferable skills during university is crucial for students' continuous learning and preparation for future career success (Scheuring & Thompson, 2024). Transferable skills, also known as soft skills, employability skills, personal skills, and generic skills (Scott & Willison, 2021), refer to a set of valuable competencies and attributes that can be applied to various environments and across different contexts (Olesen et al., 2021). Transferable skills encompass a range of competencies such as teamwork, leadership, problem-solving, critical thinking,

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communication and cultural competence. These skills are essential not only for academic success but for the workplace, significantly enhancing students' propensity to secure and succeed in employment, given growing employer demands (Wahab et al., 2025).

In terms of a skills hierarchy, Tight (2020), in their systematic review of the graduate skills literature, found that there is no uniform agreement on what the most critical graduate skills are. Whilst perspectives differed between stakeholder groups and countries, some skills are frequently cited in the literature, including: communication and interpersonal skills, critical thinking, cultural awareness, teamwork and collaboration skills (Tight, 2020; Silber-Varod et al., 2019; van Laar et al., 2017). Manpower Group (2024), however, from their research were able to list the top 5 transferable skills sought by employers globally. These are: 1. collaboration and teamwork; 2. accountability and reliability; 3. Reasoning and problem solving; 4. Active learning and curiosity; 5. Resilience and adaptability. The list of skills desired evolves over time, incorporating emerging competencies relevant to today's workplace. These include cultural competence for diverse work environments (Mahayosnand & Sabra, 2024) and adaptability to new technologies in the fourth industrial revolution (Sirayi et al., 2024).

However, the Manpower Group (2024) research also showed that 75% of organisations globally report that they struggle to recruit employees with the skills their businesses need. Tushar & Sooraksa (2023) highlight that the university plays a crucial role in developing students' transferable skills, however, these authors also explore outdated university programs which do not always meet labour market expectations. This university-industry misalignment can then contribute towards the global skills gap recently reported by Manpower Group (2024).

### **1.1. The Value of The Arts for Skill Development**

For universities to remain current in developing a variety of transferable skills that will benefit both the individual student and future business needs, academic programmes must look towards innovative ways to engender meaningful and contemporary skill-developing opportunities for their students. Carlucci & Schiuma (2018) surmise that the arts can be used to address the challenges of the modern business landscape, which require more creativity, person-centred approaches and emotional intelligence skills and capabilities. The authors explain that as the contemporary business environment demands new competencies and adaptability due to its complexity and constant change, the use of the arts offers great potential to both employees and students in developing key skills that align to current business needs.

Expanding further on how the arts can support learning, Chatterjee (2011) details how the collections in museums and art galleries can be used to enhance both subject-specific knowledge and develop key transferable skills, through the method of object-based learning (OBL). OBL in museum contexts utilises museum collections, which comprise of diverse artifacts and specimens, to offer unique opportunities for critical discussion, group work, and lateral thinking. As such, museum and art gallery collections can play a crucial role in inspiring and educating students, helping them to develop a broad range of transferable skills (Chatterjee, 2011; Das, 2015).

To summarise therefore, Chatterjee (2011) and Carlucci & Schiuma (2018), identified a set of skills which can be developed using the arts, that enable individuals to generate innovative ideas, understand and manage emotions, adjust to varying situations, engage in thoughtful dialogue, collaborate effectively, communicate information clearly, and approach problems

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from new perspectives. Collectively, these competencies are essential for both personal and professional growth, enhancing one's ability to navigate and succeed in diverse environments. However, whilst the integration of the arts to support learning in various disciplines is not a new phenomenon (Kaimal et al., 2016), the arts remain underutilised as a method to enhance learning specifically in business education (Molderez & Ceulemans, 2018). This is echoed by Decker-Lange (2018), who in their critique of business schools, stress that profit-driven private sector organisations are the dominant focus, and other contexts, such as the arts, can often be omitted from business and management curriculum, either as company case studies for students to analyse, or as places for student learning and skill development.

Where business and management programmes have drawn upon the arts to develop transferable skills in their students, there have been positive outcomes. In their study, Molderez & Ceulemans (2018) found that using paintings as part of a corporate social responsibility course for postgraduate management students, was a helpful way for the students to see different points of view on complex sustainability topics. These authors used a selection of artwork which they showed in class, to provoke reflection and stimulate discussion amongst students about sustainability concepts. The findings showed that this approach helped students to consider topics from different viewpoints and enhanced their grasp of complex sustainability concepts.

In their study involving executive learners, Kaimal et al. (2016) took managers to an art museum as part of their leadership development training, encouraging them to explore and discuss their perceptions of, and reactions to, various art. The researchers found that engagement with the artefacts through the museum experience helped to enhance self-awareness as well as awareness of others' too. This intrapersonal and interpersonal skill development enriched the participants' appreciation of themselves whilst stressing the importance of being 'open-minded' to the different perspectives. These are key skills within management roles (Kaimal et al., 2016).

In the context of economics education, Das (2015) reports on their study which required students to visit two museum exhibits as part of their economics classes. The two exhibits aligned to key economics concepts, including decision-making, wealth inequality, market dynamics, property rights, innovation and productivity. The exhibits provided a way to connect economics topics with societal themes in an experiential learning context. Student surveys revealed that incorporating museum visits into the economics curriculum greatly enhanced their learning. The visits allowed students to engage with rich and diverse exhibits, which provided a tangible context for exploring significant issues such as labour market discrimination and the history of patent institutions. Students commented that this connection between real-world social and institutional challenges and the theoretical and empirical frameworks of economics deepened their understanding of the subject. This paper focused mainly on subject-specific knowledge, but the findings did also report some skill development, aligning to communication skills by encouraging thoughtful interdisciplinary discussions about history, culture, and broader societal perspectives (Das, 2015).

These above research projects demonstrate how the arts can be instrumental in management education for developing transferable skills. For example, group discussions centred on individual art pieces can help students understand varying interpretations and viewpoints. Additionally, by listening to the rationale behind others' interpretations of specific artworks, students can refine their initial perspectives and expand their understanding. Communication and cultural awareness are crucial for diverse workforces, where individuals possess varied

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perspectives based on different cultural, professional, and lived experiences. Managers and leaders must be respectful and sensitive to differing viewpoints within their teams, and adept at navigating and appreciating these differences successfully. As such, the use of the arts (either through the inclusion of artwork pieces, or via trips to museums) is a valuable way to develop key skills in business and management students.

## 1.2. Learning Approach

The integration of the arts into university management education has drawn from three key learning approaches: object-based learning (Chatterjee, 2011), experiential learning (Das, 2015), and collaborative learning (Kaimal et al., 2016). Firstly, object-based learning (OBL) engages students by using physical objects or artifacts as a focus for exploration and understanding. By directly observing and interacting with materials such as museum exhibits, historical artifacts, or paintings, students develop new thinking through critical thinking and enhanced observational skills (Chatterjee & Hannan, 2016). This hands-on approach fosters multidimensional perspectives, enriches the educational experience, and makes learning more dynamic and impactful (Chatterjee & Hannan, 2016). Secondly, experiential learning focuses on acquiring knowledge through direct experience and reflection. Students engage in real-world activities such as fieldtrips, simulations, or hands-on experiments, bridging the gap between theory and practice. This approach deepens understanding, develops practical skills, and encourages a cycle of critical thinking through active participation and subsequent reflective practice (Kolb & Kolb, 2017). Finally, collaborative learning involves interaction and cooperation amongst students (Qureshi et al., 2021). By participating in group activities, discussions, and collaborative problem-solving tasks, students share ideas, debate perspectives, and build collective understanding. This approach fosters teamwork, enhances communication skills, and promotes a deeper grasp of concepts through shared effort and diverse viewpoints, as Chatterjee & Hannan, (2016; 3) explain: “*deeper cognitive engagement can be brought about when learning is more social*”. As such, learning collaboratively with others improves students' academic performance by fostering deeper understanding, engagement, and idea-sharing (Qureshi et al., 2021).

These three approaches, which all have areas of overlap with each other, demonstrate the transformative potential of the arts in creating engaging, multidimensional learning experiences through a combination of object-based learning, experiential learning and collaborative learning. As this study involved taking students to a museum and art gallery, this qualifies as experiential learning, using museum exhibits and artefacts qualifies for OBL and the real-time and post-activity group discussions incorporated into the student tasks, also permits this as a collaborative learning approach too. As such, this project incorporated elements from each of these learning styles to maximise the experience for the students and deepen the learning.

## 1.3. Research Aim

Only a few studies exist in the field of the use of museums and art galleries in business and management education for the development of transferable skills (Molderez & Ceulemans, 2018), as such, this project took an exploratory approach to build on the work of other researchers on this topic.

This paper reports on the findings from this quantitative pilot study, exploring postgraduate management students' skill development through tailored activities involving object-based and

collaborative learning via experiential learning set in a museum and art gallery visit. The project research question is: How do postgraduate students experience object-based and collaborative learning activities set in art gallery and museum environments and what impact does this have on their skill development?

## 2. Methods

This study adopted a quantitative research design, utilising a questionnaire approach with postgraduate management students who had attended either one or both available guided museum and art gallery trips over a 2-week period.

### 2.1. The Sample and Object-Based Learning Approach

The project involved 21 postgraduate students enrolled on one of the University's Master's in Management programmes. The students reside within in the Business School of a University based within the North-West of England. During the first two weeks of the Master's course, these 21 students attended either one or both of the two Object-Based Learning guided activities within local art centres. In week one, there was a trip to a local museum and in week 2 there was a trip to an art gallery. The two art centres were within walking distance to the University. These trips were part of the suite of activities planned for the MSc students during the 2-week induction period to their course, and as such, were not credit-bearing and not linked to any future assessment. A summary of the two art centre activities is provided in Table 1 below but for more details of what each art centre exercise involved, please see the supplementary information.

TABLE 1. STRUCTURED ACTIVITIES FOR EACH OF THE MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY VISITS

<b>Guided Museum Activity Week 1 of MSc course</b>	<b>Guided Art Gallery Activity Week 2 of MSc course</b>
Students spend 15 minutes silently observing an assigned artwork or object to enhance their observational skills. Individually, they consider different interpretations and develop critical thinking by asking questions like "What am I seeing that someone else might see differently?" and exploring the reasons behind their observations. Following the individual reflection, students then engage in group discussions to share their insights, explore different viewpoints, and discuss broader issues such as bias and inequality. This activity aims to refine their communication and critical thinking skills while fostering an appreciation for diverse perspectives.	Students worked in pairs or small groups, choosing specific paintings or artwork that sparked their interest. Students collectively observed the art piece and took notes on their observations, focusing on individual interpretations, details noticed, the artist's intended message, and questions they had about the artwork. Group discussions throughout the visit, allowed students to explore and compare reactions and perspectives, fostering collaborative learning and cementing transferable skills through diverse interpretations and shared experiences.

Source: own construction

As depicted in Table 1, the activities were designed to facilitate group work and group discussions by working through guided worksheet exercises. The guided worksheet activities aimed to develop specific skills, which included: observational skills for reviewing unfamiliar art pieces, communication skills in talking to others about what they see, encouraging debate



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around diverse viewpoints and practicing critical thinking skills by asking ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions about the objects.

Pairs and small groups were self-selecting, so students chose who to work with, however, as these museum and art gallery trips were in the induction period, i.e., the first two weeks of the course, most students did not know each other, so held discussions with peers they had only just met. Furthermore, the MSc student cohort is diverse, representing many different countries from around the world, each having differing cultural, work, and life experiences. This helped to provide further richness to the discussions and aid in sharing of diverse opinions and perspectives.

## **2.2. The Questionnaire**

As this was an exploratory project, the questionnaire was designed to garner participant attitudes towards the experience and insights on the skills developed. Section 1 of the questionnaire contained questions pertaining to demographic data, whilst maintaining participant anonymity. This study wanted to ascertain how the postgraduate Management students experienced the art centre trips and gain their perspective on this being a valuable learning experience. As such, section 2 of the questionnaire focused specifically on the respondents’ experience of this method of learning. The questions contained within section 2 derive from Chatterjee’s (2011) work exploring students’ engagement with art centres as a strategy for learning, as well as drawing from Kolb & Kolb (2017) asking students opinions of the experiential learning aspect, which is more practical and hands-on than traditional classroom experiences. This section 2 contained a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” for 8 statements relating to the overall museum and art gallery learning experience. One open-ended question was included here for participants to expand on their overall learning experience.

Section 3 of the questionnaire then focused on a list of specific skills that students felt they had the opportunity to develop through this initiative. The list of 10 skills used in section 3, were drawn from the findings of the previous studies in this area; critical thinking and observational skills (Tight, 2020; Chatterjee & Hannan, 2016); reflective practice (Kolb & Kolb, 2017); communication and collaboration (Qureshi et al., 2021; Tight, 2020); awareness and appreciation of different viewpoints (Molderez & Ceulemans, 2018; van Laar et al., 2017; Kaimal et al., 2016; Mahayosnand & Sabra, 2024).

In this final section of the questionnaire, again a 5-point Likert scale was included for these statements relating to any skill developments gained from the experience, and a final open-ended question for participants to comment on their specific skills developed from the art centre visits.

In summary, the statements included in sections 2 and 3 of the questionnaire were developed through the explored literature and based upon the key concepts of object-based learning, collaborative learning, and experiential learning theory, as well as drawing on the findings from the previous studies that exist in this field.

## **2.3. Ethical Approval**

At the start of this research project, the author submitted a proposal outlining the study's aims, methods, participant recruitment approach, data handling, and potential risks to the University’s Research Ethics Committee. This was considered a minimal risk project, and ethical approval was granted on 16.09.2024 with the Ethics Reference No: 24/LBS/032.

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## 2.4. The Analysis

For the quantitative data collected from the questionnaire, the data was entered into SPSS for analysis. As the number of participants was small, this limited the statistical tests that could be performed. As such, the quantitative data was analysed descriptively, i.e., producing means, percentages and standard deviations. Descriptive statistics can provide a useful summary of the data and allows for the reporting of trends and patterns in the data (Acosta & Brooks, 2021).

For the qualitative data obtained through the two open-ended questions within the questionnaire, this was analysed using Braun & Clarkes (2006) stepped approach to Thematic Analysis. Braun & Clark (2006) define two levels of thematic analysis: semantic and latent. Semantic thematic analysis involves identifying and analysing themes that are explicitly stated by participants or found directly in the literature. This level focuses on the surface meaning of the data, highlighting what is directly communicated. In contrast, latent thematic analysis goes beyond the explicit content to uncover underlying themes. Researchers look beyond what is directly said, inferring deeper patterns and meanings that are not immediately apparent. This level of analysis seeks to interpret and understand the underlying assumptions, ideas, and ideologies within the data. This analysis drew on both approaches (semantic and latent) to create a set of themes to summarise the qualitative data.

## 3. Results

The cohort of students was small; only 21 students attended the museum and art gallery trips. Of these 21 students, 19 completed the follow-up questionnaire. So, although the questionnaire response rate was high (90%) overall, the sample size is very small and this therefore limits the analysis that can be performed on the data. However, this is a pilot study and exploratory in nature, with an aim to gain insights and identify preliminary trends in the use of the arts for developing university students' transferable skills.

### 3.1. Demographic Data

The sample comprised of 19 postgraduate students with a mean age of 27.7 years. In terms of gender split, 53% reported as male and 47% reported as female. Most of the students (84%) were classed as international students and the remaining 16% classified as home students. Of the two trips available, 74% of the sample had attended both the museum and art gallery venues, with the remaining 26% only attending one trip (either the museum or the art gallery).

### 3.2. Quantitative Analysis

The questionnaire largely contained Likert scale statements which yielded quantitative data about two key areas; 1. the students' overall learning experience of the museum and art gallery visits and 2. Any specific skills developed through the experience. The responses are based on a 5-point Likert scale, with higher values (5) indicating stronger agreement and lower values (1) indicating stronger disagreement. The mean scores for each statement are presented in Table 1 and Table 2 below. Wanjohi & Syokau (2021) suggest the following mean score interpretations: 1.0-2.4 represent a negative attitude, 2.5-3.4 are considered neutral attitudes whilst mean scores in the bracket 3.5-5.0 represent positive attitudes. I.e., the higher the mean score, the higher the agreement expressed by the respondents. The standard deviation scores are also given in the tables below, which are a measure of how spread out the values are in a dataset.

Table 2 shows the mean scores and standard deviations for all the statements contained within section 2 of the questionnaire pertaining to the overall learning experience.

TABLE 2. STUDENTS' OVERALL VISIT EXPERIENCE

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
The experience was engaging	19	4.00	5.00	4.6842	.47757
I got to know students better on the trip	19	3.00	5.00	4.4737	.69669
I liked that the session was outside of the classroom	19	2.00	5.00	4.6316	.76089
Its more effective learning than inside classroom	19	2.00	5.00	4.4737	.96427
Enjoyed interacting with fellow students	19	3.00	5.00	4.5789	.60698
The trip generated innovative discussions	19	3.00	5.00	4.6316	.68399
Acquire skills through hands-on experience	19	3.00	5.00	4.2632	.73349
I have learnt something new	19	4.00	5.00	4.7368	.45241

Source: own calculations

All mean scores in Table 2 show very strong agreement to the statement with the highest mean score for the statement 'I have learnt something new'. The second highest mean was for the statements: 'The experience was engaging' and in joint third place were: 'I liked that the session was outside of the classroom' and 'The trip generated innovative discussions'. Additionally, the Standard Deviation scores all are under the value of 1. This means they all are low standard deviation scores, suggesting that the data points are closer to the mean, indicating a low variance and more consistency. Overall, the data in Table 2 suggests that student found the visits to the museum and art gallery beneficial, enjoyable and social, whilst primarily learning something new. However, the statement 'It's more effective learning than inside the classroom' yielded the highest Standard Deviation score (.96427) which indicates the responses had the highest variance from the mean and therefore more inconsistency in the student scores.

Table 3 below provides all the mean scores relating to the skills statement contained within section 3 of the questionnaire. These statements all yielded positive attitudes (all above 4.36) and they all exhibited low standard deviation scores, indicating low variance from the mean and more consistency between responses.



TABLE 3. SKILLS DEVELOPED THROUGH THE EXPERIENCE

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I gained insights on how my opinions compared to others	19	4.00	5.00	4.5789	.50726
Practiced using my observational skills	19	3.00	5.00	4.5263	.61178
I was able to discuss with others	19	3.00	5.00	4.6316	.59726
I was able to think critically about an object	19	3.00	5.00	4.7368	.56195
Was able to take my time and not jump to conclusions	19	3.00	5.00	4.5263	.69669
I collaborated with other students in a team	19	3.00	5.00	4.4211	.69248
Developed my thinking skills in a practical way	19	3.00	5.00	4.4737	.69669
My communication skills were enhanced	19	3.00	5.00	4.5263	.69669
I became more appreciative of diverse viewpoints	19	3.00	5.00	4.5263	.69669
I was able to reflect on my learning	19	2.00	5.00	4.3684	.83070
I would like more experiences like this on my PGT studies	19	2.00	5.00	4.5263	.84119

Source: own calculations

The three highest mean scores were for the statements: ‘I was able to think critically about an object’, ‘I was able to discuss with others’ and ‘I gained insights on how my opinions compared to others’. These scores support that the museum and art gallery experiences were particularly effective in encouraging discussions amongst the students, facilitated critical thinking through object-based learning and through these discussions, students had the opportunities to compare their own viewpoints with those of their teammates to explore how they aligned or differed from those of their peers. In comparison, the statement ‘I was able to reflect on my learning’ had the lowest mean and highest variability, however, this still yielded a positive mean of 4.36 and a low standard deviation score below 1.

### 3.3. Thematic Analysis of the Qualitative comments

The questionnaire contained two specific open-ended questions for participants to include qualitative comments. The first requested more detail on the students’ overall learning experience and reflections of the visits, whilst the second open-ended question sought examples from students regarding their skill development from undertaking the guided tasks. Thematic Analysis was performed in line with Braun & Clarkes (2006) six-step approach and from this analysis, five themes were derived from the student quotes.

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### 3.3.1. Theme 1: Self-Awareness Skills

The quotes from the students revealed that the discussion exercises surrounding the objects helped students to reflect on how their views differed to the views of others. Some students were able to articulate the interesting difference in perspectives between students within the same group reviewing the same object:

*“It was really interesting to me how I viewed the sculpture as bad with negative connotations as it was black and red, which are colours for danger, but my groupmate saw it as good. From our discussions I was able to understand their view and how based on culture, we can see things differently.”* (Male home student)

*“I learnt how I feel about religious artefacts, how that is shaped by my observational skills by looking at it as a whole and through the eyes of others.”* (Male international student)

*“I learnt that objects could reflect deeper meaning when we take a closer view and hear from different opinions and so I am not only limited to how I see things.”* (Female home student)

### 3.3.2. Theme 2: The Importance of Diversity to Leadership

Students reported that they learnt the importance of different cultural viewpoints being considered when working on a task. The quotes support that not only did students learn from different cultures whilst working in the groups on the tasks, but they learnt the appreciation of diverse voices being heard, as that yields a better outcome and supports different ways of thinking.

*“I have learnt how different cultural backgrounds and education influences how we perceive different things in life. This can enhance leadership by being sensitive to different viewpoints which fosters a better environment.”* (Female international student)

*“This activity has helped me to understand the different beliefs and perspectives of people towards cultures, religion and artwork. These kind of activities improve our understanding of each other, which helps us in our study and work with respecting other cultures.”* (Male international student)

*“The importance of diverse perspectives, especially in understanding culture and diversity, for leadership styles and decision-making, cannot be over-emphasised, because we all need each other to grow and no opinion is wrong.”* (Female international student)

### 3.3.3. Theme 3: Learning through Collaboration

Another key area which students commented on, involved the benefits of teamworking and learning through collaboration:

*“We listened to all individuals tell their own decisions on the painting, discussing with the group improved the decision of the whole group and we learnt new things from them.”* (Female international student)

*“This educational trip helped me to build bonds with others and get to know people on my course...got to hear different points of view and learn from each other.”* (Male home student)

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*“The visits helped me to practice teamwork skills in the form of discussions and interactions and experience of this outside of the classroom.” (Female international student)*

### 3.3.4. Theme 4: Engaged Learning Experience

Overall, the students welcomed the experience outside of the traditional classroom and enjoyed visiting the museum and art gallery as a student cohort. Student comments support that the experience was more than just enjoyable however, in that the enjoyment helped them to be more engaged and have a deeper learning experience as a result:

*“Having a task to do is good and resulted in better reflections, critical thinking and deeper observations. If I had come to the museum alone, I would just walk round and look, but not think too deeply.” (Male home student)*

*“It was a wonderful and valuable experience as this exercise was both fun and knowledgeable.” (Male international student)*

*“These outside classroom activities helped me to develop my skills more practically and more engaging than in the classroom.” (Male international student)*

### 3.3.5. Theme 5: Developed Key Skills

As was included in the quantitative analysis section, the students reported on a range of skills they developed. Some of the student quotes expand on the numerical data to offer further insights and reflections into the skills students practiced and developed during the museum and art gallery visits. These include: teamwork, observation, critical thinking, as well as self-confidence:

*“Both the museum and art gallery visits were so exciting and engaging. I totally enjoyed this experience and learnt a lot about teamwork.” (Male international student)*

*“We started observing a lot on the object and got so much details and ideas about it. This activity definitely helped me to enhance my observation skills and to understand clear observation and critical thinking as necessary skills.” (Male international student)*

*“I think critical thinking in particular was enhanced, especially when learning others’ views.” (Male international student)*

## 4. Discussion and Future Research

The results show that the feedback from the students about the museum and art gallery visits were overwhelmingly positive. The learning experience was enjoyable, provided opportunities to learn something new and allowed for innovative discussions within the groups. In terms of transferable skills, the students reported on a range of skills they developed from the object-based, collaborative learning that took place via the experiential experiences in the museum and art gallery. The quantitative and qualitative analysis both support the findings of previous researchers in the field on the potential of such art centres to help individuals practice and develop a number of skills through the use of the arts (Chatterjee, 2011; Das, 2015; Carlucci & Schiuma, 2018).

Many of the participant responses commented that they learnt the value of different perspectives through this exercise, which was a similar finding to Molderez & Ceulemans (2018). However, this research extends this prior work to argue that the students in this study were commenting on the development of a thorough appreciation of different opinions, ideas and diverse viewpoints. The

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quotes support that the students felt a high level of respect for diverse viewpoints and several students were able to link the value of learning about different opinions to effective leadership and responsible decision-making - which is a deep insight gained from this study.

In addition to diverse thinking skills, the students cite a range of other transferable skills developed from the museum and art gallery trips. For example, the students developed several of the highly sought after skills by global recruiters, as reported by Manpower Group (2024). Collaboration and teamwork, critical reasoning and problem solving, along with active learning and curiosity, were all reportedly developed by the students from this initiative.

Not only did students develop a range of transferable skills in an experiential learning format, but this learning had wider reach through inter-connected elements. For example, students hearing diverse perspectives through the collaborative exercises, also helped students to develop their critical thinking, self-reflection, and communication skills during those object-based collaborative discussions. Meaning that the collaborative exercises exposed students to different viewpoints, prompting them to navigate and reconcile multiple perspectives. This, in turn, enhanced their ability to critically assess information, engage in meaningful self-reflection, and communicate their thoughts effectively. The skills developed over the two venue visits were therefore intertwined and as can be seen in some of the quotes above, there is some overlap when attempting to compartmentalise the quotes neatly into the five main themes. This evidences how dynamic yet complex, the learning process is, as it does not occur in isolation. Taking students outside of the classroom to engage in collaborative, experiential and object-based learning really helped to deepen student learning and understanding and following the work of Kolb & Kolb (2017), encourage a cycle of active participation, reflection and subsequent cognitive skill development. As such, not only do the findings of this study support a breadth of learning, but results of this study support the conclusions of Chatterjee & Hannan (2016) that the social side to the experience helped students to learn more deeply too. In summary, breadth and depth of skill development was evident from the museum and art gallery experiences.

This exploratory study offers deeper insights into the benefits of experiential, arts-based learning for postgraduate management students, particularly in fostering an appreciation of diverse perspectives, enhancing skill development through collaborative working and critical thinking skills. While previous research has explored object-based and collaborative learning in business and management education (Das, 2015; Kaimal et al., 2016; Molderez & Ceulemans, 2018), the arts remain underutilised as a method to enhance learning in this discipline (Molderez & Ceulemans, 2018). By demonstrating the potential of arts-based learning in business education, this study joins a small collection of existing research that challenges the conventional focus of management curricula and supports broader integration of non-traditional learning environments. This practice of arts-based learning has received little attention in the field of business and management but has potentially significant real-world implications when this learning approach yields the development of key skills that are highly sought-after by global recruiters (Manpower Group, 2024).

As this was an exploratory pilot study, there are some suggestions to make for future research. One area for improvement is to encourage more structured and explicit reflection after the student activity. This would maximise the student learning from the activities and cement the learning further. Another suggestion for future research is to undertake a longitudinal approach through qualitative means (i.e., interviews or focus groups) to explore whether the museum and art gallery

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experiences, along with the skills gained through this initiative, have a lasting impact on students' academic and professional development. A final suggestion for future research is to explore the use of technology and how digital tools, virtual museum tours, or augmented reality can enhance object-based and collaborative learning and whether they yield similar benefits to in-person experiences?

## 5. Conclusion

This study highlights the value of object-based and collaborative learning in an experiential arts experience for developing transferable skills among postgraduate business and management students. The findings support that museums and galleries can provide an engaging and interactive environment that fosters critical thinking, self-awareness, observation, communication and collaboration skills, as well as reflective practice and an appreciation of diversity—all key skills which are essential for personal and professional success.

The results of this study also have wider implications. For example, universities could explore the integration of experiential learning into management education to enhance student engagement and skill development. These findings are also relevant to organisations seeking creative employee training through the use of arts-based learning, such as museum workshops, to enhance the appreciation of diverse perspectives, creative and critical thinking as well as teamwork. Leadership training programs specifically could apply these methods to develop these key transferrable skills which can make leaders more effective. Policymakers should also consider promoting partnerships between universities, museums, and businesses to create structured learning initiatives that connect academic knowledge with real-world application, ensuring graduates are equipped for today's complex professional landscape.

However, this study does also have some limitations. Firstly, the small sample size coupled with an exploratory research design with only one Business School, means that the findings are not generalisable, especially as this employed a non-random sample (Tipton et al., 2017). However, small scale and case study research findings can still provide valuable viewpoints, understandings and key insights into a phenomenon (Yin, 2018). Secondly, as the researcher, I acknowledge that my positionality, potential biases and assumptions have influenced the research. For example, my limited resources resulted in a preference for questionnaires, which meant that a certain richness of data through interviews or focus groups was not sought. Furthermore, while I aimed to approach the study objectively, my advocacy for innovative pedagogy may have shaped how I framed the conclusions. However, I took measures to mitigate this, employing structured data collection and analysis to enhance transparency and rigor.

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### Data Availability

Data supporting the conclusions of this study can be made available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author.

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