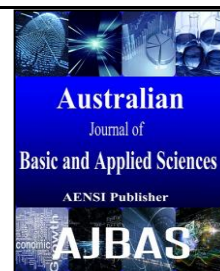




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Hermeneutical Phenomenology Approach Using Student's Field Trip Experiences for Learning about Tourist Experience Phenomenon

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ABSTRACT

Background: By the use of hermeneutical phenomenology, rich students' field trip reports are studied in order to understand the context and the dynamics of the interplay of tourist experience with their private preference spaces and the externally experienced context or environment. **Objective:** The overall aim of the study is to explore what is typically embedded to mean a tourist experience, its characteristics or nature, how a great experience could be narrated or depicted and the student-as-tourist's attitude towards the study tour trip. **Results:** The findings reflect sound validity and reliability as per the generally acknowledged quality criteria of a realism-based qualitative research approach. Construct validity is evidenced also by the alignment between the propositions posited and the significant sets of the students-as-tourists' experience statements, coupled with hermeneutical cycling of data analysis, member checking and similarity of phenomena shared in other proven theories such as attribution theory, motivational theory of consumer behavior, and value co-creation concept in strategic management discipline. **Conclusion:** A model is proposed that reaches into the interpretative domains of the study field trip experience by examining how the students make sense of their trip experience and the implications they draw.

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INTRODUCTION

Economy has started to shift from service-based to experience-based (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) states of development, and thus research should extend from service-oriented phenomena to perceptions in the domains of experiences. If such a shift is really happening, then research should show how and why consumers make preference choices over the experiential value on top of the functional and hedonic values of the products and services. From the theory of motivation it is not difficult to justify how consumers (i.e. tourists) could shift their attention from the basic physiological needs to a more experience-enabled motivation including self-realization through the consumption of experiences (Sundbo and Sorensen, 2013). For tourism, in the study of experience of a tourist, according to Sorensen and Jensen (2015), it is necessary to integrate the perceptions of tourist experience by situating within the environment that surrounds the experience encountered. To be specific, in this

article, the student experiences of their study trip would be positioned or interpreted toward the experience environment that is encountered, which could be the products and services, destination attraction and activities, accessibility, amenity, accommodation, attitude of the salespersons or tour guides, and the administration of the tour program. Ultimately the interplay between the wide variety of the environment and the tourist experiences could provide the strategic insights to help the tour organization and the study trip organizer (i.e. the university) to create robust and integrated experience environments by reckoning that environment is dynamic in nature, and as a resource that can be exploited for co-creation, co-transformation and co-production. Resources could be categorized as either transformed or transforming type, in which the former could be exhibited by the destination or given resources of the tour destination (i.e. the factory visited, the attraction site, the restaurants dined in) and the latter is the transforming participants whose roles are to co-create and to co-participate in making

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the experience. The acknowledgement of the themes of co-creating tourist experience can be found in Ek *et al.* (2008).

Objective:

Specifically, this article describes an interpretive or hermeneutic phenomenological approach of the study trip experience by the students, totaled 16, and who are currently pursuing the MBA in either entrepreneurial or tourism management at Mae Fah Luang University, Chiang Rai, Thailand. The overall aim of the study is to explore what is typically embedded to mean a tourist experience, its characteristics or nature, how a great experience could be narrated or depicted and the student-as-tourist's attitude towards the study tour trip. In addition, by having established the students in sharing their experiences in full attention, a hermeneutic cycle is applied to qualitative data analysis in order to examine the meaning, structure and essence of the trip experience phenomenon. The research effort is culminated at suggesting a conceptual framework, as theory building, which also provides some implications relating to tourism marketing strategies or theory involving tourist experience as driving force for differentiating advantages in the tourism industry. Implications about how the research findings can be contributed to the learning potential of the students would also be discussed.

Literature Review:

Although this research intends to build theory through an interpretive or hermeneutic phenomenological approach, nevertheless a minimum fore-knowledge or a-priori context of the available knowledge sources pertaining to tourist experience would still be useful.

According to Pine and Gilmore (1999), experience is a dynamic interplay between the personal space and the environmental space. To this, Kim (2009, p. 11) suggests that studying experience would provide the implications to the business to help them design programs and services to "encourage customer participation and to create environments that can support a theme to which programs or services pertain." Specifically, the research of Kim (2009) identified the simultaneous interplay of affective, cognitive and behavioral characteristics of a so-called memorable tourist experience, and by memorable tourist experience it signifies an experience which has the positive significance on future behaviors i.e. recollection, vividness in the memory, and the loyalty and positive word-of-mouth aspects of the behavioral intention (Kim, 2009, p. 23).

From a research measurement perspective, experience-based and its extended meanings-based approaches, according to Borrie and Bitzell (2001), are relatively recent addition to the subjects of

interest in analyzing how visitor experiences, which plays the role to complement the other two conventional approaches namely satisfaction approaches and benefits-based approaches. While having satisfaction means visitor had a good experience (Borrie and Bitzell, 2001) and that knowing benefits could shed light on the dimensions or types of the results of a trip experience (i.e. relaxation), nevertheless both approaches are not able to instrumentally help to dig deep into the nature and motives of tourist experiences. In addition, the conventional approaches are, by nature, confirmation of what is generally known to the industry or the competitors of the industry and thus, knowing the phenomenon, even in reliable and valid manner, would probably not able to bring about any particular nature of competitive advantage to the tourism organization. Rather, by putting a focus on discovery, i.e. in discovering the dynamic nature of the interactive experiences of the tourists, rather than on confirming whether they are satisfied or not and in what perspectives of their satisfaction, the experience- and its meaning-based research approaches could enable the strategic scenarios of the tourism organization to be innovatively challenged. Such an entrepreneurial and discovery-oriented innovation approach is the theme of the research work by Le Masson *et al.* (2010) with an attempt to holistically integrate research, development and innovation functions.

In considering for the fore-knowledge or a-priori knowledge needed for the hermeneutic phenomenological approach, the cognitive, affective and behavioral components of tourist experience recommended by Kim (2009) in his doctorate dissertation at Indiana University would be minimally acknowledged as possible contextual themes to help identifying and describing the nature of tourist experiences. The students' perception of their attributable causes to account for how they feel and thus to interpret their feelings in terms of the experience environment encountered is also subjected to the proven attribution theory (Schachter and Singer, 1962). For affective component, Mumford *et al.* (2012) acknowledge a need for careful observation on the possible long-term temperament, as seen in such stable personality characteristics, moods that are temporary, and emotions that are relatively brief, intense, and focused. Also, Valins (1970) suggests that the perception of physiological change (i.e. tense-relaxed) is a sufficient condition to judge or observe for the existence of the phenomenon of experienced affection, whether or not the perception is accurate. On the cognitive perspective, Kim (2009) discovers that cognitive evaluation of the trip would influence the tourists' perceptions toward the nature of the experiences. On the behavioral side, it was already acknowledged in Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) that co-participating in value creation and value

production would shape not only the personal value preference space of the participants, but also personal experience space as well as the network experience space. Thus, the mechanisms of cognitive, affective and behavioral components of the student experiences would provide the minimalist guide to the hermeneutical phenomenological method of this research study in examining the nature of the event as experienced or interpreted by the students in this study trip.

Research Methodology:

Inspired by the experience oriented co-creation concept needed to survive and thrive in the future of competition as advocated by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004), this research thus aims to study tourist perspective in the value of a tour not seen as merely stemming from the physical product like a tour package but predominantly by the resultant co-creation experience collectively made possible by the participating members involved in a tour. In Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004), three experiential spaces are considered as the main domains in the co-creation and co-production of values, namely the personal preference space in the center, personal experience space and the overall experience network. To study the interaction of these three spaces without being locked up by the extant theoretical repertoire of the literature, qualitative research method of phenomenological or hermeneutical phenomenology is recommended. Nevertheless, the central focus would be on the personal experience space in that the participant in a real-world setting is reflective and is thus capable of interpreting the features and meaning of experiences in his or her own terms. Thus, it necessarily puts the research in a realism ontological position that justifies the use of self-reflective report and observations of the students-as-tourists while the researchers play a conscious role to analyze and infer the findings in value-aware manner as caution as possible. Such an ontological-epistemological-methodological alignment is described in Healy and Perry (2000). As experience is individually centered, as also dictated by the philosophy of phenomenology, this research thus strikes to study and observe the general variation and patterns of 1) feeling, sensation or cognition of the tourist 2) experiences of the different individuals. In doing so it would allow the research to shed light towards the strategy development implication on mass customization approach of a typical packaged tour such as a study field trip.

In short, the phenomenological approach of this research underpins to explore and study the students' perceptions and their interpretations of tourist experience, and by this instrumental means the phenomenon of tourist experiences would be studied. Healy and Perry (2000) argue that this instrumental mechanism is a skillful means which enacts as a window to understand the external or extrinsic reality

out there. In other words, through the students' recalling the perceptions of their experiences associated with the study trip, an effort is made to study the meaning, structure and essence of the lived tourist experience in the study trip. Christensen *et al.* (2011) acknowledge this phenomenology-based qualitative approach as a way to gain access to each participant's inner world of subjective experience, which is a private preference space as described in Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004)'s terminology in co-creation strategic context. Nevertheless, in this research, an attempt is made to reach into the interpretative domains of the study trip experience by examining how the students make sense of their trip experience and the implications that they could draw. In this way, such a phenomenological approach is accomplished through hermeneutics rationality (Eatough and Smith, 2008). The use of hermeneutic cycles or rationality is sensible because, by nature, the phenomenological method was intrinsically interpretive (Giorgi and Giorgi, 2008), and could thus be called interpretive or hermeneutic phenomenological method (Packer and Addison, 1989) that aims to make a structural sense to a complex phenomenon. Packer and Addison (1989) argue that a "fore-knowledge" of the phenomenon to be researched upon should be made possible, even though it could be difficult for a phenomenon that is relatively unexamined in the past. To implement the hermeneutic cycle, Packer and Addison (1989) recommend researchers to cycle back and forth between the fore-knowledge of the extant literature in search of possible angles or dimensions of themes and the subjective lived experience of the participants, as such an approach is instrumental in clarifying and articulating the meanings in the way the total experience is meant for, together with a structure of interpretation that organizes the nature and context of the phenomenon.

In particular, during the data script analysis, an effort is made to determine experience statements that are significant, and to enable this, a generic phenomenological analysis procedural guide recommended by Christensen *et al.* (2011) was approached, namely:

- Is the statement descriptive of the experience?
- Does the statement appear to be something that is meaningful to the participant in expressing his or her experience?

Once the significant experience statements are established, they would be organized into clusters or themes that could essentially be forming the structures of meanings or essence of the tourist experience by the students in this study trip. In this way, it makes an attempt to establish analytic generalization in theory building rather than statistical generalization as in theory-testing (Healy and Perry, 2000, p. 122). On the validity perspective, validity is established through construct validity that shares similar concept to positivism by the use of

prior theory and triangulation of the reports from different student participants in the study trip. Prior theory as fore-knowledge is made known to be vital in Packer and Addison (1989) for a hermeneutic phenomenology study.

To prevent a possible incorrect identification of the source of arousal of the student experiences, students are requested to recall their trip experiences and submit their self-reflecting experience report within one week. This is in tune with the so-called excitation-transfer theory (Zillman, 1978) in that when arousal occurs, it takes some period of time for the arousal to decay, and when arousal is still decaying, a person may incorrectly identify the source of arousal.

Specifically the following illustrates the key procedural sequence of the hermeneutic cycle:

- Many rounds of data and sense-making analysis for each student participant.
- Sequentially move from the first student participant, to explore for confirmation or disconfirmation, or some other unique variations that are different from the previous thematic and selective coding analysis, and continue until concept saturation is achieved.

Results:

A hermeneutic phenomenological analysis is conducted according to the protocols delineated in the methodological section, which is based on the report scripts of the sixteen MBA students in the school of management at Mae Fah Luang University, in regarding a recent study trip to Korea. The data analysis discovers that the model shown in Figure 1 could be used to describe a tourist experience. At the

macro-level, this model highlights that tourist experience is a resultant of the interplay between personal experience space and the external experience context space and the inner personal preference space. At the micro-level, the model illustrates the detailed dimensions of the factors and processes involved in creating and influencing the values and dynamics of tourist experience characterized in each of the three spaces. Both pull (i.e. attractions and activities, landscape viewing and scenery, weather, social) and support and customer service (i.e. accommodations and food service, public facilities or areas, high way or road condition, tourism information, and service deliver) factors (Jennings and Nickerson, 2006) make up the experience context space. By “means” it relates to the sensory and intellectual mechanisms used to contact, form perceptions and images of all sensory varieties as sightseeing or visual objects and sounds (Dann and Dann, 2011), textures, smells (Dann and Jacobsen, 2003), or even abstract objects like pleasures. Images and perceptions of experiences then become the bases from which tourists make further decisions, including observable consumer behaviors such as positive word-of-mouth and attitude towards the destination.

From the model depicted in Figure 1, within the background of the students’ self-reflective reports on their study trip experience, numerous propositions become obvious as stated below. The propositions posit a set of research directions that will enable scholars to advance the knowledge and understanding about tourist experience and its implications and impact on tourist behaviors.

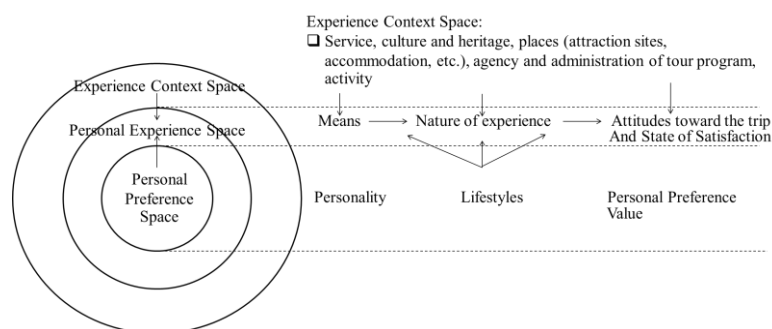


Fig. 1: Tourist Experience Model (Source: Developed for this Research).

Proposition 1 (P1):

Uniqueness of the experience context (environment) space leads to positive tourist experience and quality of experience. The latter two describe the nature of tourist experience. This proposition reinstates the early conceptualizations of the tourist experience as emphasizing on the distinctiveness from every life (Uriely, 2005) to connote a temporary reversal of everyday activities

(Cohen, 1979) in search of experiencing change (Smith, 1978). Uniqueness and differentiation in the form of products, services and experiences created by the encounter with the context should take the synergistic advantage of attributes and benefits of the products and services, attitude and behavior of the service staffs or people encountered, and experiential network efforts, essentially a marketplace resource based advantage (Srivasta *et al.*, 2001).

Proposition 2 (P2):

Positive educating experience that leads to insight gained as a part that describes the quality of tourist experience will establish positive attitudes toward the trip. The basis of understanding also is similar to proposition 1, but it further signifies that tourists could suspend their norms and values that govern their daily lives (Turner and Ash, 1975) through a positively educating tourist experience so that new understanding towards a phenomenon could be gained. Transcending by stepping from the normative habitual life into a tourist experiential world thus allows the tourist to step into the postmodern world (Denzin, 1991), so that tourists can base the experiences to re-differentiate their everyday life and renew their views towards tourism (Uriely, 2005) and thus allows the tourists to de-construct their previous assumptions and gain the insight to improve their lives.

Proposition 3 (P3):

While positive tourist experience leads to positive attitudes toward the trip, the negative tourist experience turns away from actively participating in the tourism context which results in negative attitudes toward the trip. This further stresses the importance of establishing a positive tourist experience.

Proposition 4 (P4):

Personal preference space has a moderating effort on the interplay between the experience context space and the personal experience space. In the resource-based view of argument, different customer segments differently perceive and experience value along the dimensions of, for instance, attributes, benefits, attitudes and network effects (Srivastava *et al.*, 2001), which can imply a mass-customization for tourism in that “a comparatively rare set of market-based assets and capabilities can be transformed into multiple forms of customer-based advantages” (ibid, p. 791).

Proposition 5 (P5):

The nature of tourist experience describes the dynamics of the cognitive, affective, and behavioral (i.e. participating, involving) domains of the tourist experience. Cognitive domains of tourist experience involve, for instance, perceived meaningfulness, perceived opportunities for encounter local experiences, perceived significance, perceived novelty, perceived opportunities for social interactions, local hospitality, serendipity and surprises, and perceived professionalism of local guides (Chandralal and Valenzuela, 2013).

Proposition 6 (P6):

The means to engage in a tourist experience is through the sensory channels available to a being including the intellectual capability.

Proposition 7 (P7):

The operations management performance indicators like capacity, variety of choices, flexibility, adaptability and quality of the experience context has positive correlational impact on tourist experience directly, and thus should be monitored, managed and designed creatively. To best deliver the capacity of the trip process, a network and government policy-synergy must be exploited.

Proposition 8 (P8):

Over time, based in part upon the tourist's continuous experiences, tourists develop attitudes toward the trip.

Proposition 9 (P9):

Experience is associated with mere reflection and impression about what they encountered, i.e. physical landscape, servicescape or the sensory objects such as the food tasted, the aroma and music of the environment.

Proposition 10 (P10):

The quality or judgment of the experience is also reflected by the state of the satisfaction, the state of refreshing feeling, and novelty experiences.

The above ten propositions are in fact not the exclusive lists, and to help understand each of the proposition Table 1 is given which shows some of the significant experience statements in the student trip reports. Both the lists of the propositions and the table of rich materials of understanding are aligned in the meaning through member checking with the students and colleagues, and thus fulfill the methodological trustworthiness (audited), analytical generalization (theory building) and construct validity in which the use of prior theory to support the propositions are also stated. These methodological reliability and validity also are aligned with the reflective nature of reality reported by the students (ontological appropriateness), together with some contextual variances that could cause propositional directions to alter, as in proposition 3 (as contingent validity), and value-aware epistemological validity. These quality criteria of realism-based hermeneutical phenomenological approach follow those of Healy and Perry (2000).

Conclusion:

In conclusion, by considering the dynamic interplay of the relationship between personal preference space, personal experience space and experience context space, it is possible to capture a parsimonious but rich picture of the tourist experience phenomenon. Tourist experience, as the data showed, is a result of the contact made with the contextual environment or events such as products and services, destination attraction and activities, accessibility facilities, amenity provision, accommodation choices and quality, operations

management capacity of the experience context, and attitude of the staff and the culture. In addition, significant tourist experience is shown to have positive impact on tourist's cognitive and affective state of satisfaction and attitude towards the destinations and services. What is particularly striking is that it is not the environment encountered that has weighty impact on the positive state of experience and attitude, but most importantly the

quality and uniqueness of the environment or events encountered. It is also noted that for an experience to become a conclusive impression and attitude, time is needed which implies to tour service providers to actively monitor and make adjustments along the trip. Also personal preferences do moderate the relationship between the tourist experience and the environment or events encountered.

Table 1: Some Significant Experience Statements in Support of the Propositions.

Some Significant Experience Statements in Student Trip Report	Proposition	Variables
I was really impressed to see the landscape of Naminara Island made possible by a combination of artificial creation and the nature systematically and methodically to give fascination to me, and coupled with the snow filling sceneries it really lures me to intend to come back. I strolled on that beautiful landscape with friends and took picture as memory, such as the memorial attraction of a small river and snow-capped mountain range presenting in memorial attraction, and really a good relaxation.	P1	People environment Unique landscape
The visit to the HITE Beer factory allows me to see how a world class beer production process is laid out and the gift of a beer can that is actually a pair of plastic cup and bottle opener inside which is innovative and presents me a satisfying feeling of their service oriented commitment.	P1,P10	Educating
We visited the strawberry farm, where we tasted big-size and really sweet strawberries but what I saw in the farm ground was small in sizes. The shop owners were busy with the sales and no explanation of how strawberries were planted, the soil conditions, the suitability of weather and internal temperature control were explained to us.	P3	Negative Environment
One reason that prevents me from participating in the skiing is that I felt the non-transparency of the tour guide in pricing of the skiing equipment and accessories needed, and also it does not fit my lifestyle. Nevertheless, I would prefer to ski only with my kids around.	P3,P4	Negative Environment
The majority of the products we stopped by along the trip such as strawberries and medical products, although are innovative, good packaging and free delivery, duty-free services to the airport, but the prices are expensive from my view.	P4	Personal Preference
I love the Kim Chi School concept, as it was selling of various choices of Kim Chi through personal involvement in the Kim Chi-making process. I was satisfied by what I learned from making Kim Chi and also bought a lot of Kim Chi and other related products from the shop. The shop also equips with many traditional Korean costumes to allow us to pick those we like, wear on it and take pictures as memory with my friends, and this allows me to feel the Korean culture by wearing Korean tradition costumes, and really made me feel satisfied and invited me to come back again.	P3,P5,P10	Co-Participating
The visit to the KIA motor factory was beneficial for my knowledge about how a world class production organization controls the quality and delivers the efficiency and productivity needed to be sustainable.	P2	Educating
I actually started to understand and feel the meaning of the trip on the third day. My impression about too much shopping along the ways was suddenly shifted to positive understanding. I realized a new experience by the different assortment of promotional styles, selling tactics and innovative concepts involved in different products and by different shops. As a result I actually anticipate to visit again to another cosmetic shops.	P8	Dynamic, Experiential Learning Process
The negative service attitude of the salesperson, an obvious one is the ginseng shop, manifested by her impatience in the explanation, did turn me off.	P3	Negative Environment
Mere experiencing the unique features or attributes of the destination is joyful to me such as enjoying the night view of N Seoul Tower, excited by the hanging padlock to symbolize eternal love by the tour guide, the innovative LED displays in N Seoul Tower, and the views of Seoul seeing from the tower compound are refreshing and joyful.	P1,P2,P9	Joyful, Enjoying, Excited.
The visit to Gyeongbokgung palace and folk museum was made fun by the tour guide capable to explain what was exhibited about the Korean traditional lifestyles, and I got the chance to learn about their culture, costumes, customs, and the community, and it was really a memorable and admirable experience to me.	P7,P10	Operations Management
As I am a government staff of my country, I was not only interested in how KTO (Korean Tourism Organization) organize and integrate the tourism information and services and present them in friendly accessible and communication manner, but I was attracted and be impressed by how it manages the center that has a clear goal to upgrade the nation's tourism and related industries in holistic manner. That itself is a definite worth or value of this trip to me. The layout and arrangement of the tourism information center, in terms of decoration, the creativity, supporting information, and the services rendered all made me felt comfortable as a welcomed tourist.	P2,P7,P10	Educating Worth
Visiting Samsung D'Light Center does influence my knowledge about Samsung and its product, especially towards the innovation capability of the company and about how technology can be embedded into daily life activities to deliver gratification.	P2	Educating
I truly enjoyed the Korean food, made special to me by the unique aromas and taste, as well as the highly nutrition and low calories. Each meal is enjoyable by a variety of side dish choices consisted of garlic and chili paste, soy bean paste, ginger and Kim Chi.	P7	Variety of Choices Enjoyable
The fundamental foundation for tourism involvement through, for instance, transportation modes and the wide varieties of accommodation choices really is satisfying to me.	P7,P10	Variety Satisfying
Study trip to me is very meaningful as it allows me to understand the social, memorial, and cultural benefits of the many aspects of the trip, which is vivid and more enlightening than the classroom format. Study trip allows me to search and explore through real-world activities that we can see, feel, and touch.	P2,P6	Meaningful See, Feel, Touch, Search, Explore

The weakness is that this article is based on students' study field trip in which the students are considered as tourists by nature. General tourists may behave or perceive rather differently from the students, as students have the obligation towards the goal of the trip and the study program. Thus, further research efforts should exploit the advantage of survey-based quantitative research method as it is more able to generalize the theory into wider population. Nevertheless, the rich explication of the tourist phenomenon in this article, as indicated in Table 1, would provide a strong base for operationalization effort of the survey-based approach. Theoretically, the proposed conceptual

model can be structured into a general business model configuration and thus it would lead to broader implication to practitioners and the general business industry to innovate and exploit the values of tourist experiences in establishing sustainable and renewable competitive advantage. In addition, student field trips should be promoted as they provide the necessary cognitive and other sensory oriented spaces for the students to explore for novelty and other possible variations of the theories covered in the texts and to reflect upon them in order to gain structured knowledge about the phenomena discussed in the theories. In short, experiential

learning approach in the MBA study should also be actively promoted and supervised (Tan *et al.*, 2014).

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