

Exploring the Meaning of a Field Trip: Recreational Activity or Learning Activity?

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Abstract: Exploring the Meaning of a Field Trip: Recreational Activity or Learning Activity?.

Objective: The main objective of the research is to identify and understand the psychological meanings embedded in the field trip experience and how students interpret this activity in both educational and recreational contexts. **Methods:** This study employs a qualitative phenomenological analysis method to explore students' perceptions of field trips as a learning activity in a Senior High School in Yogyakarta City. **Findings:** Out of 24 respondents, only 4 students perceived the field trip as a formal learning activity. Fifty percent of respondents viewed it as a combination of learning and recreation, while the remaining third interpreted it solely as a recreational activity. The findings reveal that students' perceptions of field trips are influenced by personal experiences, the organization of the trip, and its integration into the curriculum. This research underscores the importance of carefully designing field trips to achieve educational goals while providing a recreational element. **Conclusion:** As such, the multifaceted interpretation of field trips can be utilized by educators to create holistic and enjoyable learning experiences that not only meet curriculum objectives but also enhance student engagement and motivation.

Keywords: fieldtrip, field visit, education, recreation.

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■ INTRODUCTION

Schools serve as institutions responsible for providing an adequate learning environment within the context of formal education (Haerullah & Elihami, 2020). Beyond classroom learning, extracurricular activities such as field trips are also considered an integral part of the educational process (Rugaiyah, 2022). Field trips are a learning method conducted by taking students to a specific location outside the school or learning site to observe, investigate, and study certain objects (Rosmayanti, 2022). Field trips can provide valuable learning experiences by allowing students to see real-world applications of classroom concepts while facilitating active and interactive learning (Lawalata, 2023).

Relevant studies on field trips have been extensively conducted. For example, Behrendt and Franklin (2014) implemented field trips as science excursions that connect students with their surrounding environment. Hindayati (2023) demonstrated that field trips could enhance the naturalistic intelligence of high school students through outdoor learning activities. Meanwhile, Hemby et al. (2024) investigated the accessibility of field trips in the United States, highlighting considerations such as transportation, visit costs, and curriculum alignment. Furthermore, Maria et al. (2023) introduced innovations such as virtual field trips during the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, in some cases, the true purpose of field trips is often misinterpreted as mere

recreational activities (Almeida et al., 2016). This misconception can have negative impacts on educational budgets and the allocation of national resources. Amin (2020) highlighted the growing phenomenon of misinterpreting field trips as recreational activities, leading to the misuse of public funds meant for structured educational activities outside the classroom. Additionally, the lack of supervision and accountability regarding the use of field trip funds has become a critical issue (Hemby et al., 2024). Hemby's research revealed that inefficient budget utilization and a lack of educational outcomes are among the negative consequences of this practice. Thus, a thorough analysis is needed to address the misinterpretation of field trips as recreational activities.

The implementation of field trips in Indonesia faces unique challenges. The country's geographical diversity and economic disparities significantly affect their accessibility and effectiveness. Schools in rural or remote areas often encounter logistical barriers such as limited transportation and high costs, while urban schools face overcrowded destinations, which diminish the educational value of field trips (Rahayu, 2023). Additionally, weak policy enforcement and the lack of clear guidelines reinforce the perception of field trips as mere recreational activities, despite their potential as an effective means to educate students about their environment through hands-on experiences (Hemby et al., 2024).

Budget misuse is a major concern in Indonesia, where funds allocated for educational purposes are often diverted to activities less relevant to learning objectives (Hemby et al., 2024). The lack of oversight exacerbates this issue, resulting in inefficient spending and missed educational opportunities. While field trips are a significant part of outdoor learning activities in Indonesian schools (Rahayu, 2023), research on their fund management and effectiveness remains limited. This study aims to address this gap by analyzing the misinterpretation of field trips as

recreational activities in Indonesian high schools. By addressing local challenges such as budgetary issues, geographical barriers, and policy gaps, this research seeks to provide insights on optimizing the educational impact of field trips.

This study is expected to offer deeper insights into the importance of efficient and effective field trip implementation while addressing the misconception of field trips as recreational activities in high schools. Policymakers and educators can leverage these findings to develop better guidelines and practices to maximize the learning potential of field trips, ensuring alignment with curricular goals and prudent budget management.

■ **METHOD**

This research employs a phenomenological qualitative analysis method. Phenomenology is the study of human experiences (Moustakas, 1994). According to Creswell (2007), phenomenology seeks the "essence" of the meaning of phenomena as experienced by individuals. A phenomenon is anything that appears in consciousness (Moustakas, 1994). The general focus of this approach is to examine the essence and meaning of human experiences and consciousness as they emerge (Moustakas, 1994; Priyoyuwono, 2008; Tuffour, 2017).

Participants

The data sources for this study were selected using a non-random sampling method with a purposeful sampling technique, which involves selecting participants based on specific criteria set by the researcher to ensure they align with the research needs and objectives (Sugiyono, 2014). The participants in this study consisted of 24 high school students in Yogyakarta City who had participated in a study tour or field trip.

Instrument

The primary qualitative data collection instrument was the researcher themselves (human

instrument). The researcher was responsible for determining the focus of the study, selecting sources of data, collecting data, assessing the quality of the data, analyzing and interpreting the data, and drawing conclusions from the findings (Sugiyono, 2015: 305-306).

Research Design and Procedures

In a phenomenological approach, the primary data collection technique is in-depth interviews, which involve first-person narratives obtained through informal and formal conversations (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher conducted interviews using voice recordings and Google Forms. The stages of the interview process included: (1) preparing the interview protocol and questions, (2) identifying students to be interviewed based on the criteria, (3) confirming the willingness of participants to be interviewed, (4) scheduling the interview upon participants' agreement, and (5) conducting the interview.

Data Analysis

To ensure the validity of the data, measures were taken to confirm that the findings accurately represented the observed realities in the field. Data validation was performed using triangulation, member checks, and external audits, as described by Creswell (2015). The researcher then carried out data analysis to give meaning to the collected data, transforming it into useful information to address the research problem and arrive at conclusions. According to Moustakas, as cited in Hasbiansyah (2005), the critical procedures in phenomenological data analysis include horizontalization, identifying clusters of meaning, and providing a description of the essence.

■ RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research is to identify and understand the psychological meanings embedded in the experiences of field trips and

how students perceive these activities in both educational and recreational contexts. Data were collected from 24 twelfth-grade students of SMA IT Abu Bakar Kulon Progo as informants. The informants were selected using a purposeful sampling method, in which the researcher intentionally chose individuals and locations rich in information relevant to the study (Creswell, 2015). The selected criteria included students who had participated in field trip activities during the semester. A sample of 24 informants is considered adequate for phenomenological research (Creswell, 2007).

The researcher, as the primary instrument (human instrument), played a key role in determining the focus, selecting tools, analyzing data, and drawing conclusions from the findings. To guide the process, an interview protocol was used, comprising a form designed by the researcher that included interview instructions, questions, and space for recording the informants' responses (Creswell, 2015). The interview protocol was validated by a supervising lecturer to ensure the questions could thoroughly explore students' field trip experiences. Additionally, a Google Form was provided to the students to analyze complementary findings from the interviews. To ensure data validity, this research utilized methodological triangulation, combining data from in-depth interviews, observations, and questionnaires. Interview results were validated through member checks, where informants were given the opportunity to review their interview transcripts. External validation was also conducted through an external audit by education experts who were not directly involved in the study.

The researcher analyzed the data from in-depth interviews using phenomenological data analysis procedures (Moustakas, 1994); (1) Horizontalization, the researcher identified all relevant statements from the raw data without deleting or ignoring any initial statements.; (2)

Clusters of Meaning, themes were classified through two steps: (a) Textural Description, the researcher described what the informants experienced regarding the field trip. (b) Structural Description, the researcher described how the phenomenon was experienced by the informants.; (3) Essence Description, the researcher integrated the textural and structural descriptions to produce

an essential understanding of students' experiences related to the field trip.

The researcher derived meanings from the analysis, with the main findings from in-depth interviews identifying three primary categories of meanings that field trips hold for students. These findings are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Respondents' views on the meaning of field trips

No.	Informant	Number of Informant	Description of Information	Categorization
1.	INF12. INF17. INF18. INF19	4 informant	Field trips are activities outside the classroom where students visit specific locations or tourist spots to learn directly about topics related to their curriculum.	Field trips are learning activities.
2.	INF1. INF2. INF3. INF5. INF6. INF10. INF14. INF15. INF20. INF21. INF22. INF24.	12 informant	Field trips are activities outside the classroom where students visit certain locations or tourist spots to learn and also as a moment for vacation and recreation.	Field trips are both learning and recreational.
3.	INF4. INF7. INF8. INF9. INF11. INF13. INF16. INF23	8 Respondents	Field trips are activities outside the classroom where students visit locations or tourist spots for recreation and vacation.	Field trips are purely recreational activities.

The research findings indicate that field trips are primarily learning activities without the inclusion of recreational or leisure components. Field trips are designed to broaden students' perspectives through direct, field-based experiences that align with lesson content. These activities aim to provide real-world context and strengthen the concepts taught in the classroom. Further findings reveal that field trips hold diverse meanings for students, ranging from curriculum-supportive learning activities to leisure opportunities for relaxation. This underscores the need for more strategic planning in organizing field trips to ensure

educational objectives are met while still incorporating recreational aspects appropriately.

The researcher also analyzed the results of a Google Form distributed to the informants, used as a method of written interviews without face-to-face interaction. These findings are elaborated in Table 2 below.

The study findings indicate that students are more inclined to view field trips as activities for enjoyment and relaxation after classroom learning. Although the majority of students described field trips as a combination of leisure and learning, more than half of the respondents admitted that

Table 2. Students' responses regarding field trips

No	Questionnaire Item	Agree/Yes	Disagree/No	Maybe/Both
1.	Do you agree that field trips are a time for having fun (healing)?	87.5 %	8.3 %	5.2%
2.	Do you agree that field trips/company visits/study tours are moments to unwind after daily classroom learning?	95.8 %	5.2 %	-
3.	Do you agree that field trips/company visits/study tours are vacation activities (healing)?	29.2 %	-	70.8 %
4.	Do you take notes for learning purposes during field trips/company visits/study tours?	29.2 %	-	70.8 %
5.	Does the teacher facilitate your learning during field trips/company visits/study tours?	62.5 %	5.2%	33.3 %
6.	Have you ever felt that you learn more during field trips?	41.7 %	20.8 %	37.5 %
7.	Do you take photos to post on social media during field trips/company visits/study tours?	66.7 %	33.3 %	-
8.	Do you take more photos than receive learning information during field trips/company visits/study tours?	45.8 %	54.2 %	-

they only occasionally take notes on educational information during these trips. This highlights the need for more intensive teacher guidance to ensure students remain focused on the learning objectives during field trips.

Another finding reveals that more than half of the students take more photos than notes on educational content. This suggests that students are more motivated to document their experiences than to concentrate on the learning materials.

Overall, this study illustrates that field trips hold significant potential as an enjoyable learning method. However, better management is essential to ensure that educational goals are achieved without overlooking the recreational aspects.

Field Trips as Learning Activities

Based on the research findings, out of 24 informants, 4 stated that field trips are learning

activities. This indicates that a small portion of students perceive field trips as part of the formal learning process. This perception may be influenced by various factors, including students' personal experiences, the way field trips are conducted, and how teachers integrate these experiences into the curriculum (Hevia et al., 2022). It suggests that many students view field trips more as enjoyable or recreational activities rather than serious learning opportunities.

According to Falk and Dierking (2018), students' perceptions of field trips can be shaped by personal motivation, interest in the subject matter, and the quality of the experiences at the destination. Furthermore, the theory of informal learning highlights the importance of context in out-of-classroom learning, where students gain knowledge through hands-on experiences without the pressure of formal academic structures

(Rogers, 2003). Teachers need to leverage the potential of informal learning to enrich students' experiences with more targeted strategies.

Field Trips as Both Learning and Recreational

The research findings reveal that 12 informants stated field trips are both learning and vacation activities. This data is supported by survey results indicating that 70.8% of students perceive field trips as a combination of these two activities. This suggests that students tend to view field trips as multifaceted experiences that blend educational elements with entertainment. The majority of students consider field trips as activities encompassing both learning and recreation (Staddon et al., 2023). This may reflect students' preference for learning in a more relaxed and interactive context compared to traditional classroom settings.

Parrello and Valentine (2022) highlight that informal experiences like field trips can enhance students' motivation to learn by combining elements of enjoyment and education. Students are often more engaged and motivated when learning takes place outside conventional classroom environments, where the learning process feels more relevant. However, it is essential for teachers to integrate field trip experiences into the curriculum to ensure educational objectives are achieved (Lillo, 2023). For instance, teachers can provide field study guides, assign post-field trip tasks, and conduct reflection sessions to deepen students' understanding.

Field Trips as Purely Recreational Activities

Field trips are often considered an integral part of the educational experience, offering students the opportunity to learn outside the usual classroom setting. However, how students perceive field trips can vary significantly. An interesting finding from this study is that one-third of the 24 respondents identified field trips as purely recreational activities. This is further

supported by survey data showing that only 29.2% of students recorded educational information during field trips. These findings suggest that most students may view field trips more as recreational opportunities than as educational experiences (Schuurman et al., 2023).

Students' perception of field trips as purely recreational activities may be influenced by how the trips are designed and organized. If the recreational elements dominate the educational components, students are more likely to perceive them as vacations. Stern and Powell (2020) argue that students' perceptions of field trips are strongly shaped by their experiences during the activity, particularly how the activities are connected to the classroom material they have studied. Choi et al. (2023) further note that if the connection between field trip activities and lesson content is unclear, students may fail to recognize the educational value of the experience. Therefore, teachers must balance the recreational and educational aspects of field trips to ensure students gain meaningful experiences.

This study has several limitations that should be considered. First, the use of purposive sampling may introduce potential bias, as participants were selected based on the criterion of having attended field trips. Second, the validity of data collected through interviews and observations may be influenced by researcher subjectivity. Third, the study has not fully explored the use of technology during field trips, such as mobile phones for documentation, which could affect students' focus on learning.

Practical Recommendations

Based on these findings, several recommendations for teachers and policymakers are as follows:

1. Design field trips with a balanced approach between educational and recreational aspects, such as involving students in pre- and post-trip preparations.

2. Provide field study guides, such as task lists or specific activities for students to complete during the trip.
3. Conduct post-trip reflection or discussion sessions to help students understand the educational value of the experience.
4. Utilize technology wisely during field trips, such as leveraging learning apps to support data collection and information gathering.

■ CONCLUSION

This study reveals that a minority of students perceive field trips as purely educational experiences. In contrast, half of the respondents view field trips as a combination of learning and recreation, indicating that students tend to see these activities as multifaceted experiences blending education with entertainment. These findings are supported by survey results showing that 70.8% of students consider field trips as activities encompassing both learning and recreation. However, a third of the respondents interpret field trips solely as recreational activities, suggesting that many students emphasize the entertainment aspect over the educational one. Factors such as the way field trips are organized, students' personal experiences, and their integration with the curriculum significantly influence these perceptions. To maximize the educational value of field trips, teachers must design activities thoughtfully, ensuring that educational objectives are achieved while still allowing space for enjoyment and relaxation. By doing so, the dual perception of field trips as a blend of learning and recreation can be leveraged to create holistic and enjoyable learning experiences, ultimately enhancing student engagement and motivation.

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