

The Use of Field Trip on Eighth Grade Bhutanese Students on Geography Learning Experiences

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Abstract

This study investigated the effects of a field trip on the learning experiences and opinions of eighth grade Bhutanese students on learning geography. Qualitative research was carried out in one of the lower secondary schools in Western Bhutan. A purposive selection of 1 section out of 4 sections with 26 students were used. The data collected via behavior observation, students' reflective journal and focus group discussion were analyzed using content analysis and triangulated to answer the 2 research questions. The findings showed that a field trip was effective in enhancing content knowledge and environmental awareness and social, collaboration and communication skills. The participants enjoyed the lessons which increased their engagement and interest. The study indicated that field trip was highly beneficial for learning geography and was recommended to incorporate in other subjects such as history, science and social studies.

Keywords: Field trip, Geography, Students, Learning Experiences, Opinion

Introduction

Geography is one of the oldest earth sciences and dates back to early Greek scholars. Geography literally means "writing about the Earth." Nevertheless, in this 21st century world, an era of overwhelming technological advances, globalization and non-sustainable consumption of the resources, geography means much more

than writing about the earth. Geography is one of the most effective vehicles for the teaching impact of human-environment interaction and how to address and promote understanding of the causes and management of environmental issues. Furthermore, the teaching of geography can enhance students' conceptual understanding, foster critical thinking

skills and instill values and attitudes such as care, compassion, love and respect (Saini, 2009).

Today's alarming environmental problems include global warming, pollution and natural resource depletion inevitably threatening life on the planet earth (Pereira, 2015). The study of geography presents an opportunity to understand about environmental problems. Most importantly, geography assures that they comprehend the complexity of attitudes and values which shape the way we use and misuse the environment (Yangdon, 2015). Thus, the 21st century students need to study the problems and be responsible citizens to help solve the environmental problems the world is facing at present.

This can be made possible through shifting classroom pedagogy from the teacher-centered to learner-centered (Rabgay, 2014). A field trip is an effective way to provide learner-centered learning. Field trips are kind of an experiential learning that takes students away from the conventional classroom setting to a unique learning environment (Nabors, Edwards & Murray 2015). A well-planned field trip that follows Kolb's experiential theory empowers learners to internalize critical geographic theory and concepts

that enhance knowledge (Krakowka, 2012). Field trips not only enhances students' learning by providing real word experiences but also expands students' knowledge and understanding of a place in which they live. Kolb's learning cycle was chosen to guide the development of hands-on activity that focuses on learning through outdoor field trip experiences and reflection. Kolb's model promotes students' understanding through experience, reflection, conceptualization and experimentation (Randolph, 2013).

Thinley (2016) states that field trips provide hands-on learning experience that cannot be easily recreated in the normal classroom. Students' apply and learn a wide range of information, reasoning, collaboration and leadership skills through both physical and cognitive interaction while taking them away from the normal classroom. Zhang & Anderson (2003) found that more than 90% of the teachers' opinioned field trips as valuable educational experiences that enhanced students' learning achievement. "Field trips are lived learning. Students actively learn through the interaction between teachers and students" (Coughlin, 2010). An educational field trip is a progressive method of learning which prioritizes first-hand experiences where the teacher

facilitates the students in every learning process (Shakil, Faizi, & Hafeez, 2011). Educational experiences away from their regular class environment enables greater student achievement (Kulas, 2017). A Field trip allows students to interact, explore, expose and connect with the local community and events that is not possible through normal instructional days which develops a positive attitude toward related classroom activities. When students are offered with practical exposure and experiences the rate of learning is highly maximized (Olukayode & Tina 2013).

Despite its immense need for a shift from traditional classroom approach to students driven and active learning instruction such as field trip, teacher-centered instruction tends to dominate the class. According to Giri et al., (2016) teaching was very much syllabus oriented and teacher-centered in Bhutan. Similarly, Rabgay (2014) found that 75.71% of instructional time was used for lecturing where teacher's talk was 85.23% and students' talk time was only 11.38 % which indicated a strong prevalence of teacher driven instruction in Bhutanese classrooms.

Being confronted with a problem of poor students' performance including

geography over a subsequent period of time, the Royal Education Council of Bhutan began the timely intervention with the introduction of 21st century pedagogy in 10 Beacon Schools in 2009 (Royal Education Council, 2012). The program later expanded across the nation in 2016. Today it is an important feature of curriculum delivery in all schools in Bhutan (Policy and Planning Division, 2017). However, the effort in the teacher practices to improve students' performance is not very impactful on the general academic front especially in geography. According to the pupils' performance report on Bhutan Certificate of Secondary Examination only 4.74% of students scored marks in the ranges of 80 to 100 in history and geography (Bhutan Council for School Examinations & Assessment, 2017). This clearly indicated the genuine need for improvement in geography education.

Thus, in the light of a current pressing problem of declining learning standard in geography, the researcher was interested in conducting a study using field trip as an intervention.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the effects of field trip on the learning experiences of eighth grade students in geography.

2. To find out eighth grade students' opinions on learning geography through field trip.

Conceptual Frame work

There were two variables in this study. Field trip was an independent variable whereas students learning experiences

and their opinions in learning geography through field trip were dependent variables. This study explored and identified the lived experiences of the students in learning geography through field trip, qualitative study in the form of phenomenology was employed (Creswell , 2007).

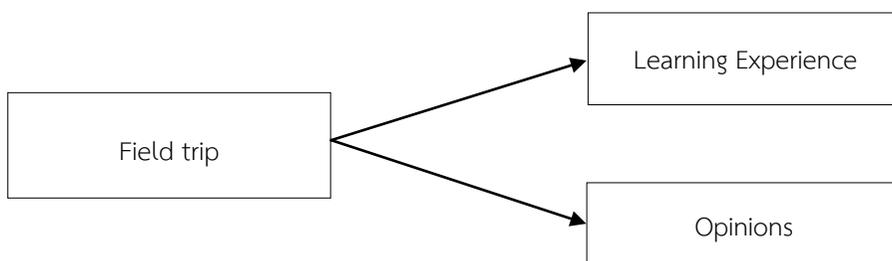


Figure 1 Conceptual framework

Population

The population of the study included 104 students from 4 sections of eighth grade. Each section was comprised of 26 students consisting of mixed gender and abilities with ages ranging from 11-18 years. Purposive selection was done to select 1 section from the 4 sections as the sample group for the study.

Instruments

The study employed lesson plans, the teacher's reflective journal on students' learning behavior, students' reflective

journal and focus group discussion which were validated by an expert from Thailand and Bhutan. The Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC) developed by Rovinelli & Hamblet (1977) was adopted to validate the items. The items with IOC between 0.67 to 1 were administered during the study.

Research Methodology

Data collection procedure

According to Suter (2012) while conducting educational study, researchers must comply with legal codes and ethical

guidelines. Consequently, the researcher obtained approval from Ministry of Education in Bhutan, Chief Dzongkhag Education Officer, principal of the research school, subject teachers, the participants and parents of the participants before carrying out the study. Further, Anonymity of the research participants and confidentiality of their views were protected through the use of pseudonyms such as: Std1, Std2, Std3.....Std26,TJ for teacher journals for students journal and FG for focus group discussion.

The study was conducted in the first semester from May to June, 2018. The researcher used 4 lesson plans of 2 hours on the topic “Using the Forests Resources” in Bhutan from eighth grade Bhutan geography. Researcher taught 1 lesson per week where learners learnt the content through field trip. During the course of the study students attended 2 field trips. The first trip involved a bus ride to a temperate forest which was 2 hours by bus that happened on weekend and the second trip happened after a week during the school hours which was a walking trip to an industrial area. Both the trips were focused on the uses of forest resources.

The peer teacher and the students maintained 2 reflective journals each based on the learning behavior observation and

about using field trip in the 2nd and 3rd week of the study respectively. In the fourth week participants were divided into 4 groups with 2 groups consisting of 6 members and 2 groups 7 members each. Focus group discussion was conducted to find out their opinion on using field trip in studying geography

Results and findings

Content analysis technique was employed to analyze the data collected via aforementioned instruments. The data collected from all the three instruments were merged using the concept of triangulation and categorized into students learning experiences and opinions on field trip.

Students Learning Experiences

Themes have been derived after having read all the written transcripts several times. A total of seven themes were categorized under students learning experiences.

Theme 1: Learning engagement

Students were found active, well engaged and attentive during the field trip. A significant event of active participation occurred during the interview and presentation. There was an increase in

students' engagement in carrying out their tasks during the field trip. *"Students were totally focused on task and paid full attention to the resources explanation. The engagement was more during the second field trip"* (TJ2). *"I was well engaged in carrying out the activities. I got the opportunity to share my views and took part in asking questions to the resource people at the site"* (FGStd15&Std 25).

Theme 2: Unity and Cooperation

Students worked as a team to frame questions and present findings. They had to share their opinions in the team to come up with a successful result which helped students to unite and cooperate with each other. The field trip gave them the opportunity to realize the benefits in working as a team in times to come. *"Sharing personal views, getting a chance to have one's own responsibility over things and distribution of work had made us stick together. We were a well-prepared team and always considerate when it came to some situations"* (FGStd23). *"Team spirit is important while going for a trip. We must cooperate and help each other to make the trip adventurous and enjoyable. Henceforth, working as team will be my hobby"* (SJ1Std16).

Theme 3: Experiential learning

Students perceived the field trip as experiential learning where they were involved individually as well as collaboratively in the real world that provided hands-on experiences. Students got an opportunity to explore and acquired more information on the concept taught and learnt. Further, the interaction with experiential resource provided authentic information that boosted their curiosity and spurred them to make further inquiry and gained direct experiences. *"I liked field trip as I could see things and got an opportunity to frame and ask questions as well. Now I am confident to make and ask questions"* (SJ1Std14).

Further, students expressed their preference of a field trip over ICT learning. Students pointed out that, information acquired through field trip was more effective and authentic than learning from the internet. *"We used to google and see the pictures which were not clear but going to the field trip I saw real things which was more understandable and accurate than googling"* (SJ1Std18). *"I gathered first-hand data and information. The conversation we had with the people who had their real first-hand experience were not like the ones we usually see on TV"* (SJ2 Std23).

Theme 4: Positive relationships

The field trip developed positive students- teacher relations as they were free from pressure of being asked to present or answer a question. All the students mentioned that they felt close to their teacher and knew more about them and felt free to ask questions and clear their doubts. *“Before participating in the field trip I was scared to ask questions but now I can ask questions and share my doubt to my teachers”* (FGStd6)

“We never think of teachers but after the field trip, I have realized that teachers always try to make us learn more today than yesterday” (FGStd16).

The interaction with the people living in their community not only answered their questions but also developed and strengthened positive relations and sense of belongingness. *“Through the field trip we could make a relation with the local community. In the class, we can communicate with only our classmates and don’t get a chance to make new friends”* (FGStd3).

Students stated that field trips helped them to build friendship with their classmates. They mentioned that the bond between them would not have been possible without the bonding activities like team work. Their circle of

friends increased and established a comfort level, that encouraged learning from each other. *“There are a few students in my class with whom I don’t actually communicate much but during the field trip I interacted with them as we were in the same group. Through the field trip I made many friends and had a good interaction”* (FGStd18&Std21).

Theme 5: Self-confidence

Prior to the field trip students were hesitant to ask questions among themselves and to their teachers owing to their low self-confidence. After the field trip, their self-confidence was boosted. *“Even some shy students were asking questions to resource people at the site”* (TJ1). *“During our class lesson, we learn through books and we do not talk much whereas during the field trip, we exchanged ideas and information and helped each other. So, we feel confident and talk easily”* (FGStd25).

Theme 6: Acquisition of Skills

The study showed that field trips helped students in acquiring skills such as communication, socialization, leadership, presentation, and questioning which elevated students’ interest in learning geography. *“The skills gained from the*

field trip are leadership, socialization, speaking, listening, presentation, writing and reasoning that I can use in my life” (FG2Std3&Std23).

Theme7: Gaining extra information

The participants were able to acquire extra information and knowledge from the field site which are not in the text that helped them better understand the concept. It was learned that the field trip had enhanced geography related technical terms. *“I have gained lots of knowledge from the field trips, such as the study of tree ring which is called ‘dendrochronology’ and animal migration that happens because of biological ‘GPS’. I saw new plants and learnt their names which I have never seen and heard before” (SJ1Std12)*

Students Opinion on field trip

The student’s reflective journals and focus group discussion were adapted to find out students’ opinion on the field trip.

Theme 1: Traditional versus field trip learning

Students stated that field trip learning is different from classroom learning. Most students did not enjoy geography lessons when taught using traditional methods, since the lessons

were mostly teacher- centered that is confined within the four walls of the classroom. *“I did not enjoy geography lessons because it was boring as we had to sit and listen to what our teacher taught us without any examples from real life situations” (FGStd1&Std14).*

On the other hand, students considered the field trip as fun and an interesting strategy. They preferred learning geography through a field trip as it excited them to learn meaningfully and acquire information that could be related to real life situations. Moreover, the field trips catered to the needs of different learning styles better than the other pedagogies.

This enhanced students’ learning interest and attitude towards the subject. Most of the students showed excitement to continue in future to take part in field trips which indicated that students’ attitudes towards learning geography had changed as they began to recognize that geography is not limited to books and the teacher’s lecture. *“My interest towards the geography lesson had changed after participating in the field trips. I was not feeling lazy as we had to walk around the places, unlike in the class where we had to sit and focus on the teacher’s lecture.” (FGStd13)*

Students expressed their passion and energy in learning geography through a field trip as variety of activities were incorporated to teach a topic that offered a platform to involve all learners irrespective of gender, age or learning style. Moreover, students discovered that geography is far from being a boring subject.

They mentioned that learning geography through a field trip was fun and interesting which peaked their curiosity. *“In the usual geography lesson, my level of interest was low due to the boredom and inability to understand the concept taught but the field trip explored the fun of learning geography”* (FG Std5).

Theme 2: Enjoyment in Learning

The field trip promoted enjoyment in learning through hands-on experiences. Most students mentioned that they enjoyed geography lessons taught through a field trip as their senses were actively involved in different activities rather than sitting and listening to their teacher’s lecture like in the normal classroom. *“Learning through field trip was enjoyable as we moved from place to place and see and touch things in real and learn from different people which was a new experience”* (FGStd21).

Theme 3: Career options

Students’ reflective journals showed that they were exposed to various career options they have for their future. Field trips to workplaces had provided students with a numerous opportunity such interaction with experts and professionals, created an awareness on career options integrated with understanding of application of their skills and interest. This ultimately affected students career options and intensified the students’ interest and attitudes toward the profession associated with the workplace. *“I got an opportunity to explore different plants and flowers. I think learning about different plants and flowers are very important as it can be helpful if we become a botanist”* (SJ1 Std11)

Theme 4: Environmental values

Students commented about their awareness and attitude towards the environment. The acquired environmental information had changed their way of thinking and feeling toward the environment. Students were motivated to take part in activities associated with environmental conservation. Students felt their genuine responsibility toward influencing their community, setting an example and leading the community to a better environment as they become future

leaders. *“The forest can be used for many purpose. We are the future leaders, so it is our responsibility to protect our forest”* (FGStd8&Std12).

Theme5: Geographical Location

The participants mentioned the applicability of a field trip in our country because of the geographical location and the availability of the resources. They further suggested topics from geography and other subjects that they wish to learn through a field trip. *“Topics from geography and science such as forest, industry and agriculture can be learnt through a field trip. These things are available Bhutan”* (FGStd1&Std5).

Theme6: Time constraint

The focus group discussion and students’ reflective journals showed that the field trip did not allow students to get detailed information from the resource people due to time constraints. The majority felt that as one of the greatest challenges during the field trip. *“Time was not sufficient while asking questions as the interviewers outnumbered interviewees. I was not happy as I didn’t get the opportunity to ask all the questions”* (FGStd2&Std11).

Theme 7: Monitoring students

The findings revealed that monitoring students’ progress is crucial for a successful field trip. During the field trip, the teachers should assume the role of a guide by monitoring, probing, giving feedback and supporting where and when needed. The majority felt the need to increase the number of escort as one or two teachers could not provide proper guidance to every student. *“During the question answer session, some students were not listening they were taking photos and focusing on plants”* (FG Std18& Std12).

Discussion and Conclusion

The study had two major findings. The first was positive learning experiences and the second was positive opinions towards a field trip in learning geography.

1. Positive learning experiences

The findings from all the three instruments showed that students participated actively and more frequently during the field trip when compared with the classroom behavior. This was supported by Abbatiello (2014) who stated that students could interact and participate more due to availability of larger space, freedom and more comfortable movement at the site. Similarly, Sigmon(2014) stated

that experiential learning kindled curiosity and independent learning that developed strength and engaged students in real life situation that is limited in the normal classroom. The finding also aligns with the experiential learning theory of Kolb (1984). Theory focuses on learning by doing where students actively participate in the learning process and that experience results in learning concretely, abstractly, reflectively and actively.

As demonstrated in previous studies (Shakil, Faizi & Hafeez ,2011) findings of this study also revealed that field trip developed numerous skills that are useful in students' lives. The findings exhibited gains in students' knowledge beyond classroom learning, improving their social, communication, leadership and presentation skills that motivated learning. There was a direct correlation between field trips and experiential learning. Experiential learning provided opportunities to improve communication skills, self-assurance, acquire and strengthen decision making skills to solve and respond to challenges the world is facing and processes that are important in their lives.

In addition to, the acquisition of numerous skills, the field trip also facilitated in creating bonds and developing

closer relationships with each other which enhanced students' knowledge both locally and globally. This finding corroborates the findings of Pyke (2015) that field trips provide a wide range of activities that acclimated each student's learning style, difficulties and played to their individual strengths. Educational field trips provide hands-on experiences that build understanding, develop skills and enrich positive learning relationship with peer, teachers and community. The socially oriented activities accompanied by ample time to interact with teachers, classmates, local community and natural environment developed positive relationships (Abbatiello, 2014). Further Lanier (2017) stated that experiential learning not only improved learner's academic performance and learning atmosphere, but also enhanced cultural knowledge and increased students' personal world views.

Furthermore, findings from all of the instruments showed that students exhibited high self-confidence during the field trip. The possible reasons to account for the high self-confidence were the freedom to interact, share ideas, opinions and support provided to each other without having to answer the questions directed to individuals. Students learned more and could approach a challenging

question or problem with less effort in an outdoor learning environment (Abbatiello, 2014). Similarly, Pyke (2015) stated that field trips provide opportunities to learn from peers, teachers and community by engaging students in new ways of learning and thinking outside their normal classroom which improved self - confidence and wellbeing.

The findings also showed that students were overwhelmed with the field trip. They had the opportunity to inquire, explore and learn in the real-life situation which helped them to gain extra knowledge and information. The experiential learning theory supported this finding. Kolb (1984) described learning as process and not an outcome and learning comes from one's experience. In addition, Nabor, Eward and Murray (2015) pointed out fieldtrips are a type of experiential learning that get students into a new mode of learning away from the normal classroom.

Field trip not only expand students' learning and experiences by providing them with hands on experiences but also increased students' knowledge and understanding of the world in which they live. This finding is also in line with Hoisington, Savleski and DeCosta (2010) who claimed that the field

trip increased children's vocabulary and learning interest.

2. Positive opinions on field trip

Findings from the students' reflective journals and focus group discussion showed that students did not learn much when taught through traditional method. This finding is similar to the findings of Thinley (2016) who found traditional teaching methods involved the direct flow of information from teacher to students where students are not given opportunity to connect the text with the real world rather they learn by simply reading or hearing which bored students who hardly learned anything.

On the other hand, a field trip created enjoyment in learning. According to Mundilarto & Pamulasari (2017) field trip provided new learning experience in a relaxed atmosphere and engaged in enjoyable outdoor activities that avoided saturation. Likewise, Sweet (2014) stated that students show high level of enjoyment during the field trip where students had fun and gained new knowledge. Further, a field trip promoted enthusiasm for students to learn and develop a positive attitude towards the subject. The finding is parallel to the studies conducted by Boxerman (2013) who carried out study

on echoes from the field: an ethnographic investigation of outdoor science field trip; Dhanapal & Lim (2013) conducted an action research on a comparative study of the impact and students' perceptions of indoor and outdoor learning in the science classroom; Thinley (2016) investigated using a field trip strategy to enhance the learning achievement and interest of seventh grade Bhutanese students towards history.

All the findings showed that a field trip sparks interest and develops a positive attitude in learning. Further the finding is also supported by Orion & Hofstein (2015) who found that concrete interaction with their surroundings involved students' in solving the learning task with team members which helped in developing a positive attitude toward the subject. Sigmon (2014) investigated the effectiveness of a farm field trip in fourth grade science.

The students' pre-test mean score was 20.53 and the post-test score mean was 25.64. The result revealed that a field trip strategy has improved students' science learning achievement.

The study also discovered that geography can be taught effectively a through a field trip where students are able to learn more and understand better.

Estawul, Sababa & Filgona (2016) also agreed that students learn better through field trip which improves geography academic achievement. Similarly, Kenna & Russell III (2015) stated that there is a broad spectrum of field trips available in teaching geography that supports students to examine and discover the geographical features and history of their surrounding environments. Stoddart and Adams (as cited in Leydon & Turner, 2013) commented that field trips offer opportunities for students to investigate and comprehend complex geographic problems which cannot be replicated in a classroom.

In addition, the findings from the students' reflective journals revealed that students' exposure to different careers and the skills required for each job created an awareness on career options. According to Partyka (2016) exposure to different career options and workplace will help determine students' future. Further, Kulas (2017) in his article "What are the benefits of field trip?" had precisely stated, Children learn about different profession, ideas and opportunities when they travel outside their own neighborhoods. A field trip can awaken the desire in a child to try new things and pursue previously unconsidered dreams. Field trips can introduce children

to job opportunities and can spark new interest and passions (p.4).

Majority of the students' revealed that field trips created awareness on environment. This finding is in accordance with Ferderbar (2013) who found out that in-nature and virtual-nature field trip experiences developed positive and greater pro environmental attitudes and behavioral change. It was also consistent with Cappadocia (2010) who believed that a field trip improves students' environmental awareness, attitude and actions. Further, the finding supports Stromholt (2015) who stated that to find the solution to the problems students must be involved and experience real world problems personally. Further, Finchum (2013) argued that to motivate students to conserve the environment, they must first appreciate and that is possible through physical experience. Students expressed their passion for environmental issues and desire to understand more and to share more about the importance and the results of using their environment. This finding accord with the conclusion made by Gilbertson (2012).

The most effective ways to encourage individuals to form a connection with the environment is to give them the opportunity to explore and learn from

nature first hand. Environmental programs provide experiences, often in the form of fieldtrips, that allow children to learn through their senses and hands-on activities, which provide the opportunity for a deeper connection with the environment (p.14). Additionally, findings also revealed the importance of considering the geographical location in implementing field trip. This finding aligns with Brower (2016) who believed that a field trip can happen only in a feasible geographic location, for example schools near a beach can surf. Similarly, Abbatiello (2014) claimed that a field trip in education must consider the specific geographical location.

Despite considerable potential, a field trip is not without problems. The findings depicted a very significant meaning in relation to the amount of time it takes to implement a field trip and students number in the class can interfere with the proper functioning of a field trip. To maximize the connection between the prior knowledge and the classroom concept students need adequate time, support and guidance from friends and teachers (Lynch, 2015).

The findings suggested that while the learning of geography through a field trip is perceived as a method that has the potential to help students, it is also

viewed as challenging for students during the implementation. Nevertheless, the study indicated a field trip as highly beneficial instructional method and reported that such method should also be incorporated in other subjects like Social Studies, Geography, History and Science can be taught and learned effectively through field trip.

Suggestions

1. Suggestions for Practice

1.1 Implementation of a field trip needs strong support from the ministry of education and the district education office should provide sufficient funds and resources like transportation assistance to the schools which would enable teachers to carry out effective field trip programs.

1.2 A field trip needs enough time for preparation and needs to be well planned and designed.

1.3 A field trip can be used as an alternative teaching-learning method compared to conventional method. Teachers in Bhutan should use field trips as an alternative method for teaching geography and other subjects like science, social studies and history.

2. Suggestion for future research

2.1 Further research should be conducted to study the effectiveness of field trips in other subjects like science, history and social studies and other levels of education with more samples and over a longer period to make the research findings more reliable and significant.

2.2 Further study should be carried out to compare the learning achievement of geography before and after the intervention of the field trip.

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