Tạp chí Khoa học và Công nghệ Trường Đại học Công nghệ Đông Á

Students' Perceptions Of Experiential Learning Through Field Trips: A Case Study Of Tourism Majors, East Asia University Of Technology

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ABSTRACT

Experiential learning is widely recognized as an effective pedagogical approach for bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and professional practice in tourism education. However, empirical evidence regarding tourism students' perceptions of experiential learning through field trips remains limited, particularly in the Vietnamese higher education context. This study aims to examine students' perceptions of experiential learning through student designed field trips in the Travel and Tourism Service Management program at East Asia University of Technology.

A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining a questionnaire survey of 74 third-year tourism students with thematic analysis of reflective journals, course reports, and in-depth interviews. The field trips were incorporated into the Destinations, Travel Routes, and Internship course and involved visits to several tourism destinations in Northern Vietnam. Students actively participated in planning, organizing, and implementing the field trips under lecturer supervision, thereby creating a learner-centered experiential learning environment.

The findings indicate highly positive student perceptions of experiential learning. The highest rated dimensions were the importance of experiential learning ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 0.76$), perceived benefits ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 0.77$), and the importance of pre-trip preparation ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 0.76$). Qualitative evidence further revealed that field trips enhanced students' practical skills, destination knowledge, teamwork, and understanding of tourism operations. Although students expressed positive views regarding program design, activity diversity, and assessment methods, the cost of field trips received comparatively lower evaluations ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 1.07$). The study contributes empirical evidence from Vietnam and highlights the value of student centered field trips in strengthening competency based tourism education.

Keywords: Experiential learning, Field trips, Students' perceptions, Tourism Education, Vietnam

1. INTRODUCTION

Experiential education is fundamentally defined as learning activities that engage learners directly with the practical phenomena under examination (Cantor, 1997). Given the interdisciplinary nature of tourism, students are required not only to acquire theoretical knowledge but also to actively reflect on their experiences, engage with real-world situations, and develop critical thinking and problem-solving capacities applicable to professional contexts (Graburn, 1980; Schmelzkopf, 2002). However, despite these educational demands, tourism instruction remains largely influenced by traditional teacher-centered approaches in which knowledge is primarily transmitted through abstract and symbolic frameworks designed to develop conceptual understanding (Miles, 1991). While such approaches provide essential theoretical foundations, they often offer limited opportunities for students to observe, experience, and critically evaluate tourism phenomena within authentic operational environments.

To address these limitations, experiential learning has emerged as an increasingly important pedagogical approach in tourism and hospitality education. By engaging students directly with destinations, tourism operations, and industry stakeholders, experiential learning enables learners to connect classroom knowledge with professional practice and develop competencies that are difficult to cultivate through conventional instruction alone. A growing body of literature has demonstrated the educational value of field trips as a key form of experiential learning. Existing studies consistently suggest that field trips enhance students' understanding of theoretical concepts, professional practices, and industry realities by providing opportunities for direct engagement with real-world environments (Arcodia et al., 2021; Xie, 2004).

Previous research has generally reported positive student perceptions of experiential learning. Arcodia et al. (2021) found that students viewed educational tourism field trips favorably, with perceptions evolving as they gained greater exposure to destination environments and practical activities. Similarly, Wong et al. (2009) demonstrated that students' learning outcomes and satisfaction were significantly influenced by factors such as trip organization, activity relevance, and opportunities for active participation, suggesting that the effectiveness of experiential learning depends not only on the field experience itself but also on the quality of instructional design and student engagement. Beyond immediate learning outcomes, field trips have been shown to contribute substantially to students' professional and personal development. Lyu et al. (2016) reported that hospitality students perceived experiential learning activities as highly effective for developing industry-specific knowledge, practical skills, and professional competencies, while Xie (2004) found that tourism

students particularly valued the hands-on nature of field experiences for enhancing their understanding of tourism management and destination operations. Other studies have emphasized broader educational benefits, including the development of critical thinking, reflective learning, problem-solving abilities, and sustainability awareness (Yoon et al., 2016).

Recent scholarship has further expanded experiential learning beyond traditional physical environments. Hirsch et al. (2005) highlighted the potential of integrating field-based activities with digital simulations, whereas Patiar et al. (2017) demonstrated that virtual field trips can effectively support students' understanding of hospitality operations and theoretical concepts. Nevertheless, students continue to recognize the distinctive value of physical field experiences because they provide opportunities for direct observation, authentic interactions, sensory immersion, and engagement with the complexities of tourism destinations and stakeholder networks.

Despite the growing recognition of experiential learning and the expanding body of empirical evidence documenting its educational benefits, several important gaps remain. First, most previous studies have concentrated on learning outcomes, student satisfaction, or the overall effectiveness of field trips. Comparatively less attention has been devoted to understanding students' holistic perceptions of experiential learning programs, including pre-trip preparation, student participation in program design, implementation processes, assessment mechanisms, and perceived educational benefits. Second, empirical evidence remains concentrated in Western educational contexts, while studies conducted in developing countries are comparatively limited. Third, within tourism education, existing research has largely examined internships, educational tourism, or work-integrated learning, whereas student-designed field trips as a learner-centered experiential learning model remain underexplored.

The Vietnamese context presents a particularly notable research gap. Although tourism education research in Vietnam has primarily focused on workforce development, curriculum reform, industry and university collaboration, and graduate employability, relatively few studies have investigated how tourism students perceive and evaluate experiential learning activities. While Truong et al. (2025) demonstrated the value of field trips for experiential learning among Vietnamese architecture students, empirical evidence focusing specifically on tourism students remains scarce. Consequently, limited knowledge exists regarding how Vietnamese tourism students evaluate the importance, benefits, implementation processes, and assessment practices associated with experiential learning programs.

Addressing these gaps is particularly important given the growing emphasis on competency-based education and industry-oriented training in Vietnam's tourism sector. Understanding students' perceptions of experiential learning can provide valuable insights for improving curriculum design, strengthening field-trip organization, enhancing assessment practices, and ultimately contributing to the development of a more competent tourism workforce. Therefore, this study investigates tourism students' perceptions of experiential learning through student-designed field trips within the Travel and Tourism Service Management program, contributing empirical evidence from the Vietnamese higher education context and extending the existing literature on experiential learning in tourism education.

This article explores third-year students' tourism perspectives on field trips to Hoan Kiem lake - Hoa Lo Prison Relic Museum - Bat Trang and Hoa Lu Ancient Capital - Cuc Phuong National Park in destinations, travel routes, and internships course. For undergraduate students studying in tourism and travel services management at East Asia University of Technology, the trip served as a unique practical. The third-year students have already completed the necessary training and basic tourism courses. During the four weeks of instruction in this course, students were exposed to readings, conversations, and presentations for a total of thirty hours. The students did extensive study on the background in 7 tourism regions in Vietnam, including definitions of destinations and tourism routes, conditions for recognizing destinations and tourism routes, group presentations, and sharing information with fellow classmates. Especially, students were assigned to design the tour by themselves with instructions from the lecturer in order to maximize students' practical learning. The experiential component was executed through single-day field trip, which systematically combined onsite lectures delivered by experts and academic instructors at the respective destinations with structured educational tours.

The primary objective of the field trip was to facilitate a comprehensive, practical understanding of tourism planning. To document their experiential process, students were mandated to maintain systematic daily reflective journals and gather empirical visual documentation through photography and videography, capturing key destinations, localized socio-cultural phenomena, industry activities, and stakeholder interactions. Following the conclusion of the fieldwork, students completed a formal course evaluation assignment. Additionally, a post-trip survey was administered to quantitatively and qualitatively capture student perspectives regarding the pedagogical efficacy of the field trip. To situate these empirical materials within a rigorous academic context, the ensuing section provides an theoretical discussion of experiential

learning. A conceptual framework is subsequently formulated to illustrate the multi-faceted dimensions of experiential learning as realized through student fieldwork. Ultimately, the empirical findings of this study draw upon a triangulated dataset consisting of student reflections from daily journals, final summary reports, online survey responses, and in-depth interviews. The pedagogical and institutional implications of these findings are detailed discussed in the conclusion section of this paper.

The study addresses two following research questions:

- How do tourism students perceive the importance and benefits of experiential learning through field trips?

- How do students evaluate the preparation, implementation, and assessment components of field-trip-based experiential learning programs?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

As conceptualized by Gillis (1992), experiential learning operates as an interactive pedagogical paradigm centered on the principle of "learning by doing" Within this framework, students acquire cognitive knowledge through direct, hands-on engagement with real-world phenomena, subsequently developing the capacity to transfer and apply these acquired competencies to novel and diverse situational contexts. Kolb (1984) offered one of the most well-known models of experiential learning, arguing that experience is transformed to build a person's learning process for information. Learning requires these hands-on experiences and thoughtful observations (Kolb, 1984; Dewey, 1897). The process of gaining knowledge through cyclical experience is commonly referred to as Kolb's (1984) four-stage model of experiential learning. This process operates through four systematic stages: concrete experience, where the learner actively engages in an activity; reflective observation, involving critical contemplation of the experience; abstract conceptualization, where these reflections are synthesized into formal theories or models; and active experimentation, during which the learner applies these frameworks to plan and test hypotheses in future scenarios. Field trips and school excursions are one method of learning by doing, and they are seen as an essential component of the educational experience (Cooper & Latham, 1989). Field trips are an excellent way for theoretical courses to incorporate experiential learning into the curriculum. This allows students to reflect on the experience and connect it to the course's theoretical components and broader readings (Jenkins, 2000).

According to Hoover and Whitehead (1975), experiential learning exists when a participant 'cognitively, affectively & behaviorally processes knowledge, skills, or attitudes in a learning situation characterized by a high level of active involvement'. It has been documented that such learning approaches are well suited to the preferences and competences of tourism students. Various researchers in different discipline areas have documented how an experiential approach can contribute to deep learning. In his widely cited study of learning styles, Kolb (1984) proposed the notion, 'Tell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I will understand'. This perspective supports the view that experiential learning should be prominent in the curriculum because it stimulates deep learning. A report by the National Training Laboratories Institute for Applied Behavioral Sciences (NTLIABS) noted that the medium of instruction influences student retention of their learning. The study observed that the poorest performing methods are lectures (5 percent retained) and reading (10 percent retained). At the other end of the spectrum 75 percent is retained through 'practice by doing' and 90 percent through 'teaching others' (Dale 1954). The concept of 'practice by doing' aligns closely with experiential learning. Another impetus for extending the reach of experiential learning is the need for tourism and hospitality staff to demonstrate well-developed 'soft skills' in handling complex intercultural service settings.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study was developed based on experiential learning theory and previous research on tourism field trips and student perceptions of experiential learning (Cantor, 1997; Arcodia et al., 2021; Lyu et al., 2016; Wong et al., 2009; Xie, 2004). Experiential learning is generally understood as a cyclical process in which learners actively engage in concrete experiences, reflect upon those experiences, conceptualize new knowledge, and subsequently apply their learning to future situations. Within tourism education, field trips represent a practical manifestation of this learning cycle because they enable students to connect theoretical knowledge with authentic tourism environments.

Drawing upon the literature, this study conceptualizes experiential learning through field trips as a multidimensional process consisting of three interrelated components: pre-trip preparation, on-trip implementation, and post-trip. Pre-trip preparation includes activities such as information gathering, destination research, itinerary planning, and student participation in designing the learning experience. On-trip implementation refers to the experiential activities conducted during the trip, including destination observation, stakeholder interaction, guided interpretation,

experiential activities, teamwork, and active participation in tourism operations. Post-trip encompasses reflective reports, course assignments, feedback mechanisms, and evaluation procedures designed to facilitate reflection and knowledge consolidation following the field experience.

These dimensions collectively shape students' perceptions of experiential learning, which are reflected through their evaluations of the importance, benefits, satisfaction, and overall effectiveness of On-trip experiences. Positive perceptions are expected to contribute to the development of professional competencies, including tourism knowledge, communication skills, teamwork abilities, problem-solving skills, and a deeper understanding of tourism destinations and operations.

Accordingly, the conceptual framework proposes that students' perceptions are not determined solely by participation in field trips but are influenced by the quality of preparation, the design and implementation of learning activities, and the effectiveness of assessment practices. By examining these interconnected dimensions, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how experiential learning contributes to tourism education and professional competency development within the Vietnamese higher education context.

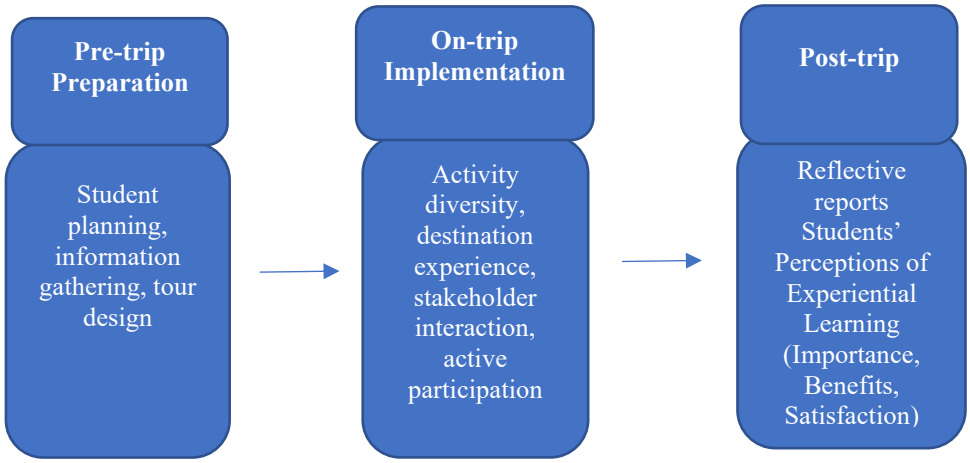


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study (Xie, 2004 ; Wong and Wong, 2009)

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed-methods case study approach to investigate tourism students' perceptions of experiential learning through field trips. A mixed-methods design was considered appropriate because it enabled the integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence, providing a more comprehensive understanding of students' learning experiences. Quantitative data were collected through a structured survey questionnaire, while qualitative data were obtained

from students' reflective journals, course reports, and semi-structured interviews. The case study focused on third-year students enrolled in the Travel and Tourism Service Management program at East Asia University of Technology who participated in experiential field trips as part of the Destinations, Tourism Routes, and Internship course.

The study involved 74 third-year undergraduate students majoring in Travel and Tourism Service Management. All participants had completed fundamental tourism courses before joining the experiential learning program. As part of the course requirements, students were assigned to design and implement field trips under the supervision of lecturers. The field trips included visits to Hoan Kiem Lake, Hoa Lo Prison Relic Museum, Bat Trang Pottery Village, Hoa Lu Ancient Capital, and Cuc Phuong National Park.

Data were collected from four sources to ensure methodological triangulation. First, a structured questionnaire was administered after the completion of the field trips. The questionnaire consisted of Likert-scale items measuring students' perceptions regarding the importance, benefits, organization, implementation, and assessment of experiential learning activities. Second, students were required to maintain reflective journals throughout the experiential learning process. These journals documented observations, reflections, learning experiences, and professional insights gained during the field trips. Third, students submitted final course reports that evaluated the effectiveness of the experiential learning activities and reflected on their learning outcomes. Finally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 8 random selected students to gain deeper insights into their perceptions, experiences, and recommendations for improving future experiential learning programs.

Quantitative data obtained from the survey were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means (M), and standard deviations (SD). These statistics were used to examine students' overall perceptions and levels of agreement regarding different dimensions of experiential learning. Qualitative data collected from reflective journals, final reports, and interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-step procedure proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis involved familiarization with the data, initial coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition, and report writing. This approach enabled the identification of recurring patterns and themes related to students' learning experiences, perceived benefits and perceived valuable.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive analysis

The demographic profile and behavioral characteristics of the sample are summarized in Table 1. The post-trip survey obtained 74 valid responses from third-year students majoring in Tourism and Travel Services Management. Within this respondent, 58.1% (n = 43) identified as female, and 41.9% (n = 31) identified as male. 37 out of 39 students in class 1 and 37 students in class 2 who participated in the field trips joined this survey, accounting for 97.4%. It is clearly seen that most of the students (20.3%) were born and grew up in Hanoi, with 79.9% of them from other cities and provinces in Vietnam. This result shows that 91.9% of third-year tourism students have participated in three field trips during their three years of studying at the university, which is considered the highest proportion. While 2.7% and 5.4% of students have taken part in 2 and 4 field trips, respectively.

Table 1. Features of population (n = 74).

Features	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Sex		
Male	43	58.1
Female	31	41.9
Class		
DCDLLH 12.10.1	37	50.0
DCDLLH 12.10.2	37	50.0
Hometown		
Hanoi	15	20.3
Other cities/provinces	59	79.7
Number of field trips you participated in after 3 years studying tourism		
2	2	2.7
3	68	91.9
4	4	5.4

(Source: Results from author's data analysis)

In terms of organizing the field trips, the university cooperating with travel agents has been the most popular way to organize the study tour for students, which accounted for 83.8% of the total. The results of the online survey indicate that 67.6% of students were given the opportunity to design and organize the field trip by themselves. However, the in-depth interviews reveal that this was the first time that they were given

a chance to design and implement a tour program during their three years studying tourism at the university.

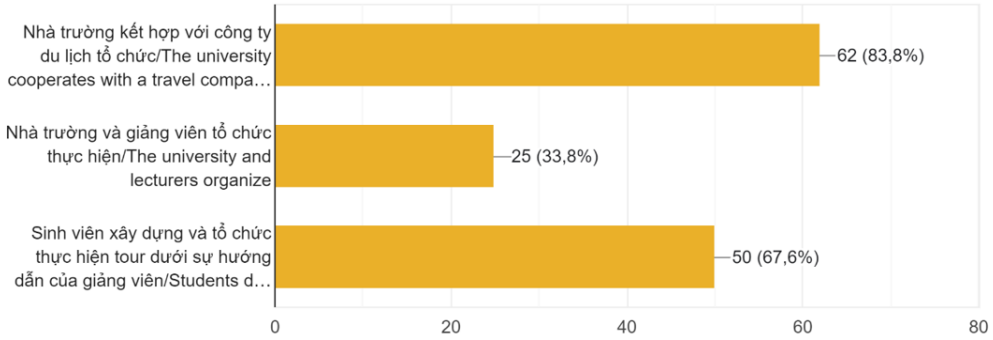


Figure 2. Methods of organizing the field trips

(Source: Results from author's data analysis)

The importance of experiential learning through field trips

Students demonstrated a highly positive perception of practical experiential learning programs in Travel and Tourism Service Management, with a mean rating of 4.47 (SD = 0.76). A substantial majority of respondents (63.5%) considered such programs to be extremely important, while 20.3% rated them as very important and 16.2% as important. No respondents reported lower levels of importance. This strong consensus highlights the perceived value of experiential learning as an integral component of tourism education and suggests a need to further strengthen practice-oriented learning opportunities to better support students' professional development and career readiness.

Table 2. Students' perceptions of the importance of practical experiential learning programs in Travel and Tourism Service Management (N = 74)

Level of importance	N	Percentage
Important	12	16.2%
Very Important	15	20.3%
Extremely Important	47	63.5%
Total	**74**	**100.0%**
Mean (SD)	**4.47 (0.76)**	

(Source: Results from author's data analysis)

Table 3. Students' perceptions of the benefits of practical experiential learning programs in Travel and Tourism Service Management (N = 74)

Perceived benefit	N	Percentage
Beneficial	12	16.2%
Very beneficial	16	21.6%
Extremely beneficial	46	62.2%
Total	**74**	**100.0%**
Mean (SD)	**4.46 (0.77)**	

(Source: Results from author's data analysis)

Table 2 indicates that students perceive practical experiential learning programs as highly beneficial for Travel and Tourism Service Management education. The mean score was 4.46 (SD = 0.77), suggesting a high level of agreement regarding the benefits of these programs. Among the 74 respondents, 62.2% rated practical experiential learning activities as “Extremely Beneficial” 21.6% as “Very Beneficial” and 16.2% as “Beneficial” Notably, no respondents selected lower levels of benefit. These results demonstrate a strong consensus among students regarding the positive contributions of experiential learning to their academic development and professional preparation. The findings further suggest that practical learning experiences play an important role in enhancing students’ industry knowledge, practical skills, and career readiness in the tourism sector. Taken together, the findings indicate that students not only regard experiential learning programs as highly important (M = 4.47, SD = 0.76) but also perceive them as highly beneficial (M = 4.46, SD = 0.77), highlighting the substantial value of practice-oriented learning in tourism and hospitality education.

Evaluation of experiential learning through students’ designing and organizing field trips

Table 4 shows that students were generally satisfied with the opportunity to design and implement their own experiential learning programs. The mean satisfaction score was 4.08 (SD = 0.93), suggesting a relatively high level of satisfaction among respondents. Of the 74 students surveyed, 44.6% reported being extremely satisfied, 23.0% were very satisfied, and 28.4% were satisfied with this aspect of the program. Only 4.1% indicated that they were somewhat satisfied, while no respondents reported lower levels of satisfaction. These findings suggest that allowing students to take an

active role in planning and implementing experiential learning activities is generally well received and may contribute to greater learner engagement, autonomy, and ownership of the learning process.

Table 4. Students' satisfaction with opportunities to design and implement their own experiential learning programs (N = 74)

Satisfaction level	N	Percentage
Somewhat satisfied	3	4.1%
Satisfied	21	28.4%
Very satisfied	17	23.0%
Extremely satisfied	33	44.6%
Total	**74**	**100.0%**
Mean (SD)	**4.08 (0.93)**	

(Source: Results from author's data analysis)

Surprisingly, figure 3 points out most of the students have been at destinations in the field trips (accounted for 78.4%). However, 64.9% of students visited destinations just for simple sightseeing, and 13.5% came there a long time ago, mostly before the COVID-19 pandemic. It can be implied that students will have a lot to learn and discover at destinations during the field trips.

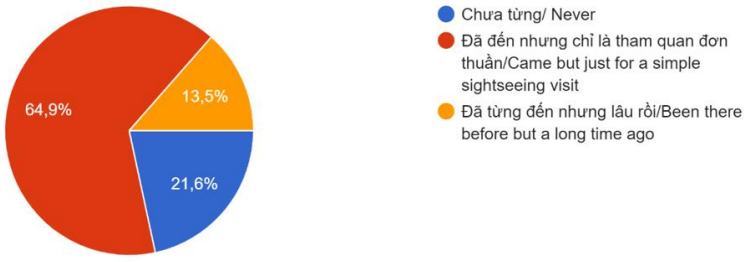


Figure 3. Students having been to destinations before the field trips

(Source: Results from author's data analysis)

While students strongly acknowledged the importance and benefits of experiential learning, satisfaction with program costs was considerably lower. This discrepancy suggests that although students value experiential learning opportunities, financial affordability remains a significant concern that may influence participation and accessibility. Such findings underscore the need for universities and program

organizers to consider financial support schemes, cost-sharing mechanisms, or more affordable program designs to ensure equitable access to experiential learning opportunities.

Table 5. Students' satisfaction with the cost of experiential learning programs (N = 74)

Satisfaction level	N	Percentage
Not at all satisfied	1	1.4%
Somewhat satisfied	15	20.3%
Satisfied	33	44.6%
Very satisfied	9	12.2%
Extremely satisfied	16	21.6%
Total	**74**	**100.0%**
Mean (SD)	**3.32 (1.07)**	

(Source: Results from author's data analysis)

Table 6 points out that students generally perceived experiential learning programs as offering a diverse range of activities. The mean agreement score was 4.16 (SD = 0.84), reflecting a relatively high level of agreement among respondents. More than half of the students (52.7%) totally agreed that the programs incorporated a variety of activities, including guiding, games, destination-based experiential activities, and shopping experiences. An additional 12.2% strongly agreed**,** while 33.8% agreed with this statement. Only one respondent (1.4%) expressed disagreement. These results suggest that experiential learning programs provide students with exposure to multiple forms of tourism-related activities, thereby supporting a more comprehensive and engaging learning experience.

Table 6. Students' perceptions of the diversity of activities in experiential learning programs (N = 74)

The diversity of activities	N	Percentage
Disagree	1	1.4%
Agree	25	33.8%
Strongly agree	9	12.2%
Totally agree	39	52.7%
Total	**74**	**100.0%**
Mean (SD)	**4.16 (0.84)**	

(Source: Results from author's data analysis)

Table 7 demonstrates that students considered pre-trip preparation activities to be highly important in experiential learning programs. The mean score was 4.46 (SD = 0.76), reflecting a strong consensus regarding the significance of preparation before field-based learning experiences. Among the 74 respondents, 62.2% rated pre-trip preparation activities as "Extremely Important" while 21.6% considered them "Very Important" and 16.2% viewed them as "Important" No respondents selected lower levels of importance. These findings suggest that students recognize the critical role of preparation activities, such as planning itineraries, assigning responsibilities, collecting destination information, and organizing logistics, in ensuring the effectiveness of experiential learning trips.

Table 7. Students' perceptions of the importance of preparation activities before experiential learning trips (N = 74)

Importance level	**N**	**Percentage**
Important	12	16.2%
Very Important	16	21.6%
Extremely Important	46	62.2%
Total	**74**	**100.0%**
Mean (SD)	**4.46 (0.76)**	

(Source: Results from author's data analysis)

Table 8 shows that students generally supported the use of course completion reports as a means of evaluating experiential learning outcomes. The mean agreement score was 4.09 (SD = 0.84), reflecting a relatively high level of agreement among respondents. Half of the students (50.0%) totally agreed that experiential learning outcomes should be assessed through course completion reports, while 10.8% strongly agreed and 37.8% agreed with this evaluation method. Only one respondent (1.4%) expressed disagreement. These results suggest that students perceive report-based assessment as an appropriate mechanism for documenting learning experiences, reflecting on acquired knowledge and skills, and demonstrating learning outcomes following experiential learning activities.

Table 8. Students' perceptions of evaluating experiential learning outcomes through course completion reports (N = 74)

Agreement level	N	Percentage
Disagree	1	1.4%
Agree	28	37.8%
Strongly agree	8	10.8%
Totally agree	37	50.0%
Total	**74**	**100.0%**
Mean (SD)	**4.09 (0.84)**	

(Source: Results from author's data analysis)

Table 9 illustrates that students perceived the report questions as being closely aligned with the content and activities of their experiential learning programs. The mean agreement score was 4.24 (SD = 0.79), reflecting a high level of agreement among respondents. More than half of the students **(**56.8%**)** totally agreed that the report questions closely followed the experiential learning program, while 10.8% strongly agreed and 32.4% agreed with this statement. No respondents expressed disagreement. These findings suggest that the assessment instrument was perceived as relevant and appropriately connected to students' experiential learning experiences, thereby supporting the validity of the reporting and evaluation process.

Table 9. Students' perceptions of the alignment between report questions and experiential learning activities (N = 74)

Agreement level	N	Percentage
Agree	24	32.4%
Strongly agree	8	10.8%
Totally agree	42	56.8%
Total	**74**	**100.0%**
Mean (SD)	**4.24 (0.79)**	

(Source: Results from author's data analysis)

Table 10. Students' perceptions of the alignment between report questions and experiential learning activities (N = 74)

Criterion	Mean	SD
Importance of experiential learning	4.47	0.76
Benefits of experiential learning	4.46	0.77
Importance of pre-trip preparation	4.46	0.76
Alignment of report questions with experiential learning activities	4.24	0.79
Diversity of activities	4.16	0.84
Evaluation through course completion reports	4.09	0.84
Ability to design and implement programs	4.08	0.93
Cost of experiential learning programs	3.32	1.07

(Source: Results from author's data analysis)

The findings indicate that students hold highly positive perceptions of experiential learning in Travel and Tourism Service Management. The highest mean scores were recorded for the perceived importance of experiential learning (M = 4.47), its benefits (M = 4.46), and the importance of pre-trip preparation activities (M = 4.46). These results suggest that students recognize experiential learning as an essential component of tourism education, enabling them to connect theoretical knowledge with real-world tourism practices and develop professional competencies.

Students also reported positive perceptions regarding the diversity of experiential learning activities (M = 4.16) and opportunities to design and implement their own learning programs (M = 4.08). These findings highlight the value of student-centered learning approaches that promote active participation, autonomy, teamwork, and practical skill development. However, the relatively higher standard deviation for student-led implementation suggests that some learners may require additional guidance and support when undertaking independent learning tasks.

Assessment-related dimensions also received favorable evaluations. Students agreed that learning outcomes could be effectively assessed through course completion reports (M = 4.09) and that the report questions were closely aligned with experiential learning activities (M = 4.24). This finding indicates a strong degree of alignment

between learning activities and assessment practices, supporting the effectiveness of the program design.

In contrast, satisfaction with program costs was the lowest rated criterion (M = 3.32; SD = 1.07). Although students strongly acknowledged the value of experiential learning, financial considerations appear to be a significant concern. This result suggests that affordability remains a key challenge and highlights the need for universities to explore financial support mechanisms and cost-effective program models to ensure equitable access to experiential learning opportunities.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that experiential learning is perceived as a highly valuable educational approach in tourism education. While students appreciate its importance, benefits, activity design, and assessment methods, improving financial accessibility remains essential for maximizing participation and learning outcomes.

These results were further supported by evidence from eight semi-structured interviews conducted with purposively selected students.

Most interviewees emphasized that experiential learning provided opportunities to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Student 2 explained that “many tourism concepts seemed abstract in the classroom, but after visiting destinations and observing tourism operations directly, I could understand how tourism systems actually function in reality.” Similarly, Student 5 noted that “field trips transformed theoretical knowledge into practical experience and helped me see how destination management, visitor services, and tourism resources are interconnected.” These reflections support the high mean score regarding the importance of experiential learning.

Regarding perceived benefits, interview participants consistently highlighted the development of professional competencies. Student 1 reported that “the field trip improved my communication and teamwork skills because we had to coordinate activities, interact with local stakeholders, and solve unexpected situations together.” Likewise, Student 7 stated that “designing and operating the tour ourselves increased my confidence and gave me practical skills that are difficult to gain through classroom learning alone.” These findings reinforce previous studies suggesting that experiential learning contributes to both professional and personal development.

The importance of pre-trip preparation was also strongly emphasized. Student 3 commented that “researching destinations, preparing itineraries, and assigning responsibilities before departure helped us understand the learning objectives and work more effectively during the trip.” Similarly, Student 8 observed that “without the preparation stage, students would simply behave like tourists; preparation encouraged

us to think and act like tourism professionals." These comments suggest that preparation activities play a critical role in maximizing learning outcomes.

Students also expressed favorable views regarding the alignment between report questions and experiential learning activities. Student 4 explained that "the report questions reflected what we actually observed and experienced during the trip, allowing us to connect theory with practice in a structured way." Student 6 further noted that "the report encouraged critical reflection rather than merely describing destinations, which helped deepen my understanding of tourism management issues."

The diversity of activities received a similarly positive evaluation. Interviewees appreciated the combination of destination interpretation, observation, tour guiding practice, group discussions, and cultural experiences. According to Student 5, "the variety of activities kept us engaged throughout the trip and provided opportunities to learn from different perspectives." Student 2 added that "each activity contributed differently to our learning experience, making the program more dynamic and meaningful."

Students generally agreed that course completion reports represented an appropriate assessment mechanism. Student 7 explained that "writing the final report helped me synthesize observations and transform field experiences into academic knowledge." Likewise, Student 1 indicated that "the report required us to analyze tourism issues critically instead of simply summarizing what happened during the trip."

The ability to design and implement experiential learning programs independently also received positive evaluations. Several students viewed this component as one of the most valuable aspects of the course. Student 8 stated that "planning the tour ourselves helped us understand the complexity of itinerary design, budgeting, scheduling, and risk management." Student 3 similarly noted that "student led planning increased our sense of responsibility and encouraged active participation throughout the learning process."

In contrast, the cost of experiential learning programs received the lowest mean score, indicating more diverse opinions among participants. While some students considered the cost reasonable relative to the educational value obtained, others expressed financial concerns. Student 4 remarked that "the knowledge and skills gained justified the expenses," whereas Student 6 pointed out that "the cost may be challenging for students with limited financial resources, particularly when multiple field trips are required during the academic year." This finding suggests that although

students strongly recognize the educational value of experiential learning, financial considerations remain an important factor influencing participation and satisfaction.

5. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on experiential learning in tourism education by examining tourism students' perceptions of student-designed field trips within the Vietnamese higher education context. The findings indicate that students perceived experiential learning as highly important and beneficial, particularly in enhancing their understanding of tourism concepts, connecting theory with practice, and developing practical competencies required in the tourism industry. Students also expressed positive evaluations regarding pre-trip preparation, the alignment between learning activities and assessment tasks, the diversity of field trip activities, and opportunities to participate directly in the design and implementation of experiential learning programs.

The findings provide further empirical support for the pedagogical value of field trips in tourism education. Consistent with Xie (2004), students highly valued the hands-on nature of experiential learning and perceived direct engagement with destinations, tourism operations, and stakeholders as essential for understanding the realities of tourism management. Similarly, the results support the argument of Lyu et al. (2016) that experiential learning contributes not only to knowledge acquisition but also to the development of professional competencies and workplace readiness. The high levels of student satisfaction observed in this study appear to be associated with the learner centered design of the field trips, particularly students' active involvement in itinerary planning, destination research, team coordination, and onsite implementation. Such participation may have enhanced students' sense of ownership, autonomy, and engagement throughout the learning process.

At the same time, the findings partially extend those reported by Wong and Wong (2009), who emphasized the importance of trip organization, activity relevance, and student participation in shaping learning satisfaction. While the present study confirms the significance of these factors, it additionally suggests that allowing students to design and manage their own field trips may further strengthen experiential learning outcomes by fostering responsibility, decision making abilities, and professional confidence. This learner centered dimension has received comparatively limited attention in previous tourism education research and represents a potentially valuable contribution to the experiential learning literature.

Nevertheless, the overwhelmingly positive responses reported in this study should be interpreted with caution. As discussed earlier, several forms of response bias may have influenced the findings. First, sample bias may have occurred because participants were drawn from a single university and voluntarily participated in the evaluation process. Second, social desirability bias may have encouraged students to provide favorable evaluations of educational activities organized by their lecturers and institution. Third, post-trip evaluation bias may have resulted from the emotional enthusiasm and immediate positive impressions experienced shortly after completing the field trips. Furthermore, because the field trips adopted a student-centered approach in which students were actively involved in designing and implementing the programs, positive perceptions may partly reflect students' strong sense of ownership and engagement rather than solely the educational effectiveness of experiential learning itself.

Several limitations should therefore be acknowledged. Most importantly, the study was conducted with a relatively small sample of 74 students from a single higher education institution. Consequently, the findings cannot be generalized to all tourism students in Vietnam. Variations in institutional contexts, curriculum structures, student backgrounds, and field trip designs may produce different outcomes. While the present study provides useful exploratory insights, broader empirical evidence is needed before firm conclusions can be drawn regarding the effectiveness of experiential learning across Vietnamese tourism education.

Future research should address these limitations through larger scale, multi-institutional studies involving students from different universities, tourism programs, and geographical regions. Longitudinal research designs would also be valuable for examining whether positive perceptions are sustained over time and whether experiential learning contributes to long term professional development and career readiness. Furthermore, future studies should incorporate more sophisticated measurement models by developing and validating constructs such as perceived usefulness, student satisfaction, learning outcomes, practical skills development, and career readiness. Statistical techniques including exploratory factor analysis (EFA), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), structural equation modeling (SEM), and regression analysis may provide deeper insights into the causal relationships among these variables. Such approaches would allow future researchers not only to describe students' perceptions but also to explain how experiential learning influences educational outcomes and professional competency development within tourism education.

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