EDUCATIONAL VALUE ANALYSIS OF STUDY TOURS: A MERE FORMALITY OR A MEANINGFUL LEARNING EXPERIENCE?

INTRODUCTION

Study tours are widely recognized as a key component of experiential learning, allowing students to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. During winter or the New Year, many schools organize study tours for children, offering them a break from traditional classroom learning. However, these tours often lack clear educational objectives, raising concerns about their effectiveness in enhancing students' knowledge and skills.

However, in Bangladesh, study tours often lack a structured approach, reducing their effectiveness as an educational tool. Instead of being purposeful learning experiences, many study tours have become routine formalities with unclear objectives. Research suggests that when properly designed, experiential learning activities, such as study tours, significantly enhance student engagement and understanding (Kolb, 2015). However, poor planning and a lack of academic integration often undermine their potential.

STUDY TOUR ACTIVITIES IN BANGLADESH

Study tours are common across different levels of education in Bangladesh, with varying levels of effectiveness. Some of the most frequent types of study tours include historical and cultural tours, industrial and corporate visits, science and environmental tours, and, international study trips.

Historical and Cultural Tours: Visits to historical sites like the National Museum, Lalbagh Fort, and the Liberation War Museum aim to connect students with their heritage. However, these tours often lack structured guidance, reducing their educational impact (Rahman & Akter, 2021).

Industrial and Corporate Visits: Universities frequently arrange visits to factories, banks, and multinational companies to expose students to industry operations. While these visits have potential, they often involve passive observation rather than hands-on engagement (Hossain, 2020).

Science and Environmental Tours: Tours to research centers, agricultural farms, and environmental projects can offer practical exposure, but without follow-up discussions, their long-term impact remains minimal (Chowdhury & Alam, 2019).

International Study Trips: Private universities occasionally organize foreign study tours, providing students with global perspectives. However, these are limited to privileged groups, making them inaccessible for most students (Hasan, 2022).

THE PROBLEM: STUDY TOURS AS A MERE FORMALITY

Despite their potential, many study tours in Bangladesh almost fail to meet educational objectives due to several reasons. Firstly, unclear learning goals i.e. without predefined academic objectives, study tours often turn into sightseeing trips rather than structured learning experiences (Kolb, 2015). Secondly, poor planning and execution, i.e. many study tours are organized haphazardly, with little coordination between academic institutions and host organizations (Rahman & Akter, 2021). Thirdly, minimal student engagement, i.e. tours often involve passive observation, with limited opportunities for students to engage in meaningful discussions or critical thinking exercises

(Hossain, 2020). Fourthly, lack of assessment and reflection i.e. research indicates that the effectiveness of experiential learning increases when students engage in post-tour reflections, assignments, or group discussions, which are often missing in study tours in Bangladesh (Chowdhury & Alam, 2019). Fifthly, weak industry-academia collaboration i.e. many industrial visits lack structured learning sessions from professionals, reducing their impact on students' knowledge and career readiness (Hasan, 2022).

Enhancing the Educational Value of Study Tours

To maximize the educational value of study tours, institutions should adopt a structured approach that begins with defining clear learning objectives aligned with course content (Kolb, 2015). A well-planned itinerary, developed in collaboration with industry professionals and academic mentors, should include interactive sessions and guided tours to ensure relevance and depth (Hossain, 2020). Encouraging active participation through pre-tour research tasks and post-tour reflective essays can significantly enhance student engagement (Rahman & Akter, 2021). Additionally, fostering strong industry-academia collaboration can provide students with meaningful interactions with professionals, making industrial visits more insightful and career-oriented (Hasan, 2022). Finally, integrating evaluation mechanisms such as post-tour assessments, presentations, or reports is essential to measure and reinforce learning outcomes (Chowdhury & Alam, 2019).

LEARNING SCOPE IN LARGE STUDY TOURS VS. SMALL STUDY TOURS

Study tours are essential for experiential learning, bridging theoretical knowledge with real-world applications. However, the effectiveness of a study tour often depends on its size. While large study tours involve many participants, small study tours are more intimate, allowing for focused learning. This article explores the learning scope in both formats, weighing their advantages and limitations.

Large Study Tours: Broad Exposure but Limited Engagement

Large study tours, often organized by universities or large institutions, involve a significant number of participants (e.g., 30-100 students). These tours typically cover multiple locations or large-scale industries, offering broad exposure.

Learning Benefits of Large Study Tour

Large tours can visit multiple sites, exposing students to various industries, institutions, or historical places in one trip (Kolb, 2015). With a large group, students interact with peers from different academic backgrounds, fostering interdisciplinary learning (Hasan, 2022). Large-scale visits to corporate offices, factories, or research centers may provide students with certification or formal acknowledgments that add value to their academic profile (Rahman & Akter, 2021).

Limitations of Large Study Tour

Due to the sheer number of students, direct interaction with industry experts or guides is often restricted (Hossain, 2020). Managing transportation, accommodations, and schedules for a large group can lead to organizational inefficiencies, reducing the focus on learning (Chowdhury & Alam, 2019). In large groups, students may feel hesitant to ask questions or actively engage in discussions (Rahman & Akter, 2021).

Small Study Tours: Deep Learning with Focused Interaction

Small study tours usually involve fewer than 20 participants and are often designed for specialized learning. These tours focus on in-depth exploration rather than covering multiple sites.

Learning Benefits of Small Study Tour

With fewer students, there are greater opportunities for direct engagement with industry professionals, researchers, or tour guides (Kolb, 2015). Small tours often allow students to participate in practical activities, such as laboratory experiments, factory operations, or cultural immersion programs (Hasan, 2022). Students in small groups have more opportunities to ask questions, participate in discussions, and receive feedback, enhancing their critical thinking skills (Hossain, 2020). Small tours are easier to organize and manage, ensuring better time utilization and learning experiences (Chowdhury & Alam, 2019)

Limitations of Small Study Tour

Unlike large tours, small groups may not have access to multiple locations or industries in one trip due to resource constraints (Rahman & Akter, 2021). With fewer participants, the cost of travel, accommodation, and expert sessions

may be higher per student compared to larger tours (Hossain, 2020). A smaller group means fewer chances for students to interact with a diverse set of peers, which can limit knowledge exchange (Hasan, 2022).

CONCLUSION

The choice between large and small study tours depends on the learning objectives. For broad exposure and institutional recognition, large study tours are preferable. For hands-on learning and deep engagement, small study tours offer a more effective approach. Both large and small study tours have unique learning scopes. Large study tours provide broader exposure, networking, and institutional access but suffer from logistical difficulties and limited engagement. Small study tours enable hands-on learning, deeper discussions, and personalized experiences but may have higher costs and limited exposure. Institutions should design study tours based on their academic goals, ensuring that students gain maximum educational value from their experiences.

Study tours have the potential to enrich students' academic experiences, but in Bangladesh, they often fall short due to inadequate planning and weak academic integration. To transform study tours into effective educational tools, institutions must adopt a structured approach that includes clear learning objectives, active student participation, and strong collaborations with industry and academia. With these improvements, study tours can shift from being mere formalities to powerful learning experiences that equip students with real-world knowledge and skills.

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