



Field trip instructional strategy: An approach for effective teaching for learners' easy comprehension of subject contents in the primary schools in a sustainable society

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Abstract

This paper focused on field trip as an effective instructional strategy for teaching/learning that enhances easy comprehension of subject contents among primary school pupils in a sustainable society. The paper discussed the concept of field trip as an instructional strategy; as learners or pupils-centred learning approach; as well as the types of field trips namely, formal field trips, informal field trips and non-formal field trips. Steps to follow in taking field trips were discussed; what makes a field trip good was discussed; how to plan a primary school field trip and why field trip is important were outlined and discussed; the shortcomings and limitations of field trips were also showcased. Based on the above discussions, conclusion was drawn and suggestions were proffered, among which was that field trips share some importance in teaching/learning, hence, should be carried out from time to time by primary school teachers; aided and encouraged by head teachers as administrators through the Universal Basic Education Board and parents.

Keywords: An approach for effective teaching/learning, field trip instructional strategy, learners' easy comprehension of subject content, primary school, sustainable society

Introduction

Field trip has been a staple of education for centuries. From school trips to museums, historical sites, and outdoor activities, field trips offer learners an opportunity to learn in a unique and engaging environment outside of the traditional classroom. Field trips can provide pupils with invaluable experiences that promote learning, encourage exploration, and inspire creativity. In this article, we will explore why field trips are important and how they can help solve the problem of pupils' engagement.

A field trip or excursion is a journey by a group of people to a place away from their normal environments. The purpose of the trip is usually observation for education, non-experimental research or to provide learners with experiences outside their everyday activities, such as going camping with teachers and their classmates. It has some advantages on children. Field trips provide a common ground with more-advantaged and less-advantaged children to have some of the same cultural experiences in the arts (Nwangwuma, 2023).

A field trip is an experiential learning opportunity in which learners leave the traditional classroom setting to learn within and outside their community. During field trips, pupils can participate in a wide variety of experiences to expand upon their current knowledge and to apply what they learn in school. Behrendt and Franklin (2014) ^[3] pointed out that field trips cannot be replicated within the confines of a classroom; rather, they are experiences that occur within a natural and relevant context. By participating in these trips, teachers enable their pupils to use their knowledge in real-life settings. There are many different kinds of field trips that vary based on the subject matter being taught. They range from art museums to nature reserves and include both virtual trips and in-person excursions. No matter the location, learners are invited to connect with the class content in a personal way (Behrendt & Franklin, 2014) ^[3].

Overall, field trips are a learners-centered approach in which learners put their learning into action outside the classroom.

Field trip: A learner/pupils-centered approach

A pupils-centred approach is just as it says: it is centred around the learners or pupils rather than centred on the teacher giving instruction (Beherent, 2018) ^[2]. Field trips embody being child-centred by giving children more autonomy in their learning. Beherent (2018) ^[2] maintains that a child-centred learning and teaching approach implies greater involvement of learners. They are given many opportunities to voice their opinions and share their experiences. Throughout the process, the pupils are adopting different roles..." In contrast to the traditional teaching style of lecturing in the classroom, field trips provide a plethora of opportunities for pupils that they otherwise could not have. Beherent (2018) ^[2] stated that field trips "allow learners to discover different learning environments, provide enrichment opportunities, and respite from the daily school routine" (Field Trips section). By implementing this learners-centred approach, field trips provide countless positive outcomes for pupils that go beyond just academic success (Lor, Hatten & Hunt, 2023) ^[11].

Types of field trips

Formal field trips: This type of trips consist of planned, well-orchestrated experiences where pupils follow a documented format. Government agencies, museums, and businesses offer excellent formal experiential learning activities and programs, which are usually run by the venue's staff. One pupil's experience is essentially the same as any other pupil's experience. Teachers find such programs comfortable because the pupils are bound to a choreographed agenda. However, there are minimal opportunities for pupils to personally interact and connect to the experience (Rennie & Michie, 2007) ^[16].

Informal field trips: These are less structured and offer learners some control and choice concerning their activities or environment. When observing pupils interacting in an informal education setting such as a science centre or field station, teachers are often amazed by how much children know and which children possess the most knowledge (Rennie, 2007) ^[16]. Informal education is a legitimate cognitive learning model. “Informal science experiences – in school-based field trips, student projects, community based science youth programs, casual visits to informal learning settings, and press and electronic media can be effectively be used to advance science learning” (Hofstein & Rosenfeld, 1996) ^[6].

Children feel at ease in an informal learning environment. The focus may be individualized, activities are not competitive or assessed, interaction is voluntary and unforced, and social interaction is encouraged. Together, these qualities create an intrinsically motivated learner as informed by (Rennie and Michie, 2007) ^[16] which encourages them to examine their connection to the local and national communities, as well as their connection to the local and global ecosystems (Krepel & Durrall, 1981) ^[9].

Non-school related informal field trips such as family activities, also contribute significantly to children’s science knowledge (Rennie & McClafferty, 1995) ^[15]. Although science knowledge and interest acquired at home may be compromised if the majority of experience occurs through the media such as television and the internet, in which the children may have difficulty determining reality from entertainment.

Steps to follow in field trip

As postulated by Nwangwuma (2023), the following are steps to follow in field trip. Field trips are most often done in 3 steps, they are as follows

1. Preparation
2. Activities
3. Follow-up activities

▪ Preparation

Preparation applies to both the learners and the teacher. Teacher should often take time to learn about the destination and the subject before the trip, while the learners should also be pre-informed about the field trip in the areas of the location of the trip, the items to carry along during the field trip and the duration of the field trip.

▪ Activities

Activities that take place at the field trips often include: visitation to sites such as zoo, airports, train stations, post offices, rail ways, among others. Both the teacher and pupils have to get acquainted with these before the take off for the field trip.

▪ Follow-up

Follow-up activities are generally discussions that occur in the classroom once the field trip is completed. In Western culture people first come across this method during school years when classes are taken on school trips to visit a geological or geographical feature of the landscape, for example. Much of the early research into the natural sciences was of this form. Charles Darwin as cited in Nwangwuma (2023) is an important example of someone who has contributed to science through the use of field trips.

Popular field trip sites include zoos, nature centers, Airports, industries, community agencies such as fire stations and hospitals, government agencies, local businesses, amusement parks, sciences museums, and factories. Field trips provide alternative educational opportunities for children and can benefit the community if they include some type of community service. Field trips also provide learners the opportunity take a break from their normal routine and experience more hands on learning. Places like zoos and nature centers often have an interactive display that allows children to touch plants or animals.

Today, culturally enriching field trips are in decline. Museums across the United States report a steep drop in school tours. For example, the Field Museum in Chicago at one time welcomed more than 300,000 learners every year. Recently the number is below 200,000. Between 2002 and 2007, Cincinnati arts organization saw a 30 percent decrease in learners attendance. A survey by the American Association of School Administrators found that more than half of schools eliminated planned field trips in 2010 (site school).

A variation on the field trip is the “site-based program” or “site-school” model, where a class temporarily relocates to a non-school location for an entire week to take advantage of the resources on the site. The approach was first developed at the Calgary Zoo in Alberta, Canada in 1993, and “Zoo School” was inaugurated in 1994. The Calgary Board of Education then approached the Glenbow Museum and Archives to create a “Museum School” in 1995 followed by the Calgary Science Centre in 1996 (Beverly, 2019) ^[4].

What make a field trip good

- Think of the excursion as a field study, not a field trip
- It is learning experience of experiential learning.
- A focus on art integration and project-based learning teaches children to explore real-world problems and challenges.
- Active and engaged learning inspires learners to obtain a deeper knowledge of the subject they are studying and allow them to see how ideas are connected.
- Teaching in such a contextual manner promotes collaboration, critical thinking and knowledge retention.
- Often, teachers look to the arts and cultural organizations of their community for field trips ideas; museums, zoos, science centres, and natural areas.
- Performing arts bring the page to the stage and can also offer a lesson in theater etiquette.
- In addition to the tradition venues, teacher may choose site for real world experiences to encourage pupils to apply what they have learned to something relevant in their life. For example, children visiting a construction site can return to the classroom and design their own homes, businesses, and other architectural structures.
- Visiting a college or university campus introduces the dream of higher education; big children can act as the tour guides, show dorm rooms, cafeterias, and study halls, while providing mentorship to the younger learners.
- The best field trips can bring two seemingly unrelated worlds together. Children from large cities may not understand a math equation about livestock, crops, and the other staples of the rural experience because the learners focus on the vocabulary, get confused, and skip the question.

- Learners in a rural community are often ignorant of urban and sub urban terminology. Like subway stops, fares, escalators, and so on are used. Placed in a math test question can block the main idea and prevent a child from answering.
- Sometimes state examinations include questions that do not bridge the gap between rural and urban children but designed field trip can bright it all together: combine two or more subjects while offering a variety of learning styles and intelligences, integrate the arts, encourage low-income and English Language learner pupil to make connections between community resources and opportunities and their family and culture. These experiences allow all participating learners to achieve a higher academic performance in all subject areas – not just the arts.
- Children need this vital component of school instruction, not only to improve test score, but to feel, see, touch and even taste the real world around them. These can be achieved through a field tri.

How to plan a primary school field trip

Whether you are going to the zoo or just the playground across the street, here is how to plan for a safe and fun field trip adventure:

1. Pre-visit the site to check suitability
2. Have each parent sign a permission slip
3. Recruit parents as volunteer chairpersons
4. Assign each adult a small group, but make sure all groups stick together.
5. Pair the children and remind them to tell an adult when they don't have a partner
6. Pin a name tag on the child's back that only includes the centre/program name and phone number
7. Bring along a first aid kit
8. Bring along a cell phone.
9. Bring along family emergency contact information
10. Do a head count each time you change location (Nwangwuma, 2023).

Why field trip is important?

It has been observed that field trips are not given recognition in primary schools in recent time, may be because of the prevailing insecurity. Teachers are also restricted by the pressures from parents and administrators to show curricular results and to cover subject contents in classrooms, leaving little time for out-of school activities. The logistics of test schedules, finding a substitute teacher, bus and fuel costs, and balancing curriculum needs with hand-on activities often leave teachers overwhelmed. Field trips are often viewed as extra-curricular activities and, therefore, are easy line items to cut. Field trips share the following importance on the learners as asserted by Pappas cited in Nwangwuma (2023):

1. Field trip is key component of school instruction; it broadens the educational experience and makes a subject more relevant.
2. Pupils might be good at reciting and remembering things but they often don't make the connection unless they experience it firsthand.
3. Field trips connect the dots for learners by providing real experiences related to all content areas.
4. Field trips enrich and expand the curriculum, strengthen observation skills by immersing children into sensory

activities, increase children's knowledge in a particular subject area and expand their awareness of their own community.

5. Another benefit of field trips is that they allow learners to be exposed to new ideas and perspectives. By visiting different locations, children can observe the world around them in a way that is not possible in the classroom. This exposure to new environments and cultures can help learners better understand the topics they are studying and gain a broader perspective of the world.
6. Field trips provide learners with an opportunity to explore and discover new information. By engaging in activities such as scavenger hunts and interactive exhibits, learners can engage in active learning and gain a deeper understanding of the material. This type of exploration encourages critical thinking and creative problem-solving, which can help children become more successful learners.
7. In addition to providing educational benefits, field trips can also help improve pupils' engagement. By participating in field trips, pupils can develop motivation, enthusiasm, and a sense of confidence and self-esteem.
8. Field trips can help improve learners' motivation and enthusiasm by providing an engaging and stimulating learning environment. By participating in activities that are both fun and educational, pupils can become more engaged in their learning and be more likely to take an active role in the classroom.
9. Field trips can also help pupils develop social skills. By interacting with their peers in a new environment, pupils can learn how to communicate and collaborate more effectively. This type of interaction can help pupils build relationships with their classmates, which can lead to increased engagement in the classroom.
10. Finally, field trips can help increase pupils' confidence and self-esteem. By participating in activities outside of the classroom, pupils can learn new skills, explore new ideas, and be exposed to new experiences. This type of learning can help pupils feel more confident in their abilities and be more willing to take risks in the classroom.
11. Field trips can also provide pupils with the opportunity to experience history firsthand. By visiting historical sites and monuments, pupils can connect classroom lessons to real-world applications and gain a better understanding of historical events.
12. By visiting historical sites, museums, and monuments, pupils can learn about the past in a more meaningful way. By seeing the artifacts and hearing firsthand accounts from experts, pupils can gain a better understanding of the events that shaped the world. This type of learning can help children make connections between what they are learning in the classroom and the real world.
13. Field trips can also encourage pupils to be curious and ask questions. By exploring new environments and interacting with experts, pupils can gain a better understanding of the topics they are studying and be more likely to ask questions and seek out additional information. This type of curiosity can help pupils become more engaged in their learning and be more likely to take an active role in the classroom.

Shortcomings of field trip

Field trip venues such as museums and zoos present problems that need be recognized.

- Flashy exhibits and fancy displays often obscure the real science within the exhibit. Displays may have sloppy or poorly worded explanations that yield no learning potential. Ethical dimensions of the subject matter are sometimes ignored or glossed over.
- Science might be portrayed as easy and unproblematic, omitting any reference to failures and issues experienced by the scientists during research and discovery, thereby failing to communicate the scientific process or communication of scientific thought, and focusing on conclusions rather than the journey or process involved to make the discoveries.

Limitations of field trip

Rennie (2007) ^[16] and Michie (1998) ^[13] identified five limitations to successful field trips:

- Cost of transportation;
- Teacher training and experience;
- Time issues such as school schedule and teacher's ability to prepare;
- Lack of school administrator support for field trips;
- Lack of venue options.

Finding time for the trip and making arrangements for pupils who cannot make the trip add tasks to an already busy teacher schedule (Scarce, 1997) ^[17]. Teachers need to determine the logistics to transport pupils. Large introductory classes present unique challenges due to the need of larger transportation facilities, safety issues, more pupils logistical planning, and time lost trying to organize the large group (Hudak, 2003) ^[7]. It is therefore imperative that the teacher prepares the children for the field trip in order to maintain a level of control that will allow for learning to occur when the class arrives at the venue (Ayodele & Adegbile, 2017) ^[1].

Kalvaitis (2007) ^[8] suggested that often, a teacher's fear is losing control of the children once at the field trip location. Upon arrival at a field trip venue, children are often disoriented resulting in excited, explorative, and unrestrained behaviour. The teacher should be prepared to focus on the pupils' mental and physical energy towards participation at the venue (Lei, 2010) ^[10].

Conclusion

As educators continue to actively involve field trips in their teaching, pupils will experience a higher quality education and better subject content comprehension. Beyond the classroom, pupils (learners) also experience social and emotional benefits when they have the opportunity to participate in field trips. While teachers do not have complete control over making a field trip happen, they can submit requests and proposals to the powers that do decide. It is also important that the significant benefits of field trips are clearly communicated to the people who do make the decisions (administrators and school boards). Overall, child-centred learning through field trips has many positive outcomes for learners that far outweigh any challenges they provide and can be implemented in the classroom in a variety of ways. Nature-based, arts-based, or even virtual field trips will all provide the positive outcomes that teachers are looking for as they work to provide a quality education for their pupils.

Suggestions

Based on the benefits of field trips outlined and discussed, the following suggestions were proffered:

1. Primary school teachers should not remain static to a particular instructional strategy. It has been observed that no one instructional strategy stands as the best; hence there should always be an interchange of instructional strategy.
2. Primary school teachers should from time to time organize a field trip for the pupils. This will enable them have little freedom from classroom stress; as well as make the pupils see things in real-life situation which will make them understand easily.
3. Head teachers who happen to be the administrators of primary schools should often encourage their teachers to take the children on field trips by providing all it takes in a field trip through the Universal Basic Education Board.
4. Parents also should from time to time support, provide for, and encourage field trips for the teachers and their children.
5. Field trip of all kinds must be planned in such a way that the teacher is not over worked and the children's life not put in danger.

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