

Let's go on a field trip: Exploring the reflection of field trip on Gen Zs' cognitive and affective engagement

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ABSTRACT:

This study investigates the reflection of a field trip to one of main broadcasting stations in Malaysia, Radio Television Malaysia (RTM) on Gen Zs' cognitive and affective engagement. With a growing emphasis on experiential learning, the role of field trips in enhancing educational outcomes has garnered significant attention. The research questions of the study are as follows: RQ1: What does the field trip bring to cognitive (attentional focus, imagination and sense of insight) of the Gen Zs before and after the trip? And RQ2: What does the field trip bring to affective engagement (awe and reverence, conflict information and being moved) of the Gen Zs before and after the trip? The study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing interviews as the primary method of data collection. The participants of the study were 15 university students across different grade levels and academic backgrounds who have experienced field trips. They were given questions pre and post field trips and answers were analyzed by using thematic analysis. By capturing the voices and perspectives of the participants, the study aims to provide valuable qualitative data that shed light on the cognitive and affective engagement of university students related to field trip. Cognitively, students showed improved attentional focus, heightened imagination, and a deeper sense of insight into broadcasting processes. Affectively, the trip evoked awe and reverence, increased awareness of the complexities in broadcasting, and emotionally moved the students, boosting their enthusiasm and motivation for the field. These findings highlight the critical role of experiential learning in bridging theoretical knowledge with practical application, enriching educational experiences, and inspiring career motivation.

KEYWORDS:

Affective engagement, cognitive engagement, field trip, Gen Z, reflection

Introduction:

Field trips have long been a cornerstone of experiential learning, providing students with opportunities to engage with the world beyond the classroom. For Generation Z, who are digital natives often immersed in virtual environments, the tangible experiences offered by field trips are particularly impactful. These excursions play a crucial role in enhancing both cognitive and affective engagement, allowing students to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world contexts. Field trips can ignite curiosity, foster a deeper understanding of subject matter, and cultivate a sense of connection to their community and environment. Moreover, the hands-on, interactive nature of field trips can stimulate emotional responses and personal reflections, making learning more meaningful and memorable. As educators strive to equip students with the skills and knowledge needed for the 21st century, incorporating field trips into the curriculum remains a vital strategy for holistic educational development.

The level of focus, interest, curiosity, and involvement in the learning environment is referred to as student engagement in the context of education (1). In general, three dimensions make up the meta-construct of student engagement (2).

Engagement in behavior is the first. It emphasizes engagement and participation in extracurricular, social, and academic activities. Affective or emotional involvement is the second, and it refers to the degree of both good and negative responses to instructors, peers, coursework, and the institution, including a feeling of connection or belonging. The third is cognitive engagement, which is based on the notion of learning investment. The current study focuses on students' cognitive and affective engagement throughout the field trip.

The intricate experience of visiting locations and speaking with eyewitnesses involves cognitive involvement (3). Additionally, cognitive engagement is defined as the "cognitive rush" that results from an artwork that prompts critical engagement with the situation's specifics (4). Affective engagement is also a major component of students' interactions with sources (5), which can elicit an emotional response and have the capacity to touch students' hearts as well as their heads.

Operating out of its headquarters in Angkasapuri, Kuala Lumpur, Radio Television Malaysia (RTM) is a government-owned television network. RTM manages a number of television and radio stations. Currently, it operates two television channels, TV 1 and TV 2, 6 national, 2 international, 17 states, and 11 district radio stations (6). RTM provides a unique environment for this form of research with its extensive history and cutting-edge technology, which makes it the perfect place to examine the results of experiential learning.

Exploring the impact of field trips on Generation Z's cognitive and affective engagement reveals a promising avenue for enriching educational experiences. By integrating these excursions into the curriculum, educators can leverage the power of experiential learning to deepen understanding, enhance motivation, and create lasting emotional connections to academic content. Navigating the complexities of modern education, field trips continue to play a crucial role in shaping the minds and hearts of young learners.

Despite the long-standing use of field trips in education, their specific impact on students' cognitive and affective engagement, especially in settings like Radio Television Malaysia (RTM), is not well understood. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the impact of field trips to RTM on students' academic achievement, focusing on cognitive understanding and affective engagement. This research seeks to provide evidence on the effectiveness of field trips as a teaching tool for improving educational outcomes.

Thus, the present study sought to answer the following questions:

RQ1: What does the field trip bring to cognitive engagement (attentional focus, imagination and sense of insight) of the Gen Zs before and after the trip?

RQ2: What does the field trip bring to affective engagement (awe and reverence and being moved) of the Gen Zs before and after the trip?

2)Literature Review

This section is a review of previous studies on educational field trips, cognitive engagement and affective engagement.

Educational Field trip

Field trips have long been used for educational purposes and are used globally in the education world (7). It creates vivid memories among students and is an opportunity to apply concepts learned in a classroom as well as enhances the learning in both cognitive and affective domains (8). It has been shown to be beneficial emotionally and socially to school children (9). As an educational tool for higher education, fields trips have been widely used to supplement the learning of university students, from the tourism industry in Thailand (10), business students in Malaysia (11) to geology students in the United States (12). Field trips have been defined as a trip for educational purposes, where the students can interact with their learning environment, and gain experiential learning of the relevant ideas, concepts and subject matter (13).

Moreover, field trips have long been recognized as a valuable educational tool, providing students with concrete experiences that enhance their understanding of abstract concepts. Field trips offer significant benefits that extend beyond cognitive learning, fostering emotional and social development as well (9). These experiences are particularly impactful in promoting environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviors among students. The study found that the emotional benefits of field trips, such as enjoyment and positive memories, often outweigh the direct cognitive gains. These positive emotions are crucial as they stimulate interest and motivation to learn more, ultimately contributing to a more meaningful and lasting educational experience.

Cognitive engagement

A study found that incorporating high impact teaching practices and integrating cognitive learning theories into the curriculum positively influenced students' cognitive engagement (12). These practices included retrieval practice, elaboration, spaced practice, and dual coding, which collectively enhanced students' memory, comprehension, and application of knowledge. The findings suggest that such structured and theoretically grounded approaches to teaching

not only improve academic performance but also foster deeper cognitive engagement among students, promoting long-term retention and understanding of the material.

Affective engagement

Previous literature found the importance of affective engagement in environmental education and how it can vary based on different factors (14). It presents findings from an ethnographic case study focusing on two students during an ecology field trip, highlighting the complex relationship between interest in nature, motivation to learn, environmental consciousness and action towards nature. The results emphasized the importance of understanding why students feel a certain way and how they achieve affective learning outcomes during both planned educational activities and spontaneous encounters in natural outdoor settings. This suggests that affective environmental education programs should consider these multifaceted aspects to enhance students' engagement and promote pro- environmental behaviors in the long term. Another study investigates undergraduate student perceptions of fieldwork, focusing on the affective domain, revealing significant positive shifts in emotions post-fieldwork (15). Fieldwork, a key component of geoscience education, provides hands-on experience that complements classroom learning. The findings show a notable reduction in negative feelings and an increase in positive responses, fostering greater class cohesion and improved student relationships. This immersive learning environment not only enhances academic learning but also contributes to emotional and social development, indicating that fieldwork positively impacts students' affective engagement and overall educational experience.

3)Methodology

The qualitative methodology was conducted to examine the research problems and objectives whereby semi- structured interviews, and open-ended questions were used to answer the research questions. In this research, Gen Zs who were also university students were the informants. 15 informants, ages 19 to 24, were chosen using purposive sample approaches and participated in semi-structured interviews to gather details on their field visits and the cognitive and affective involvement they experienced. The selection of informants was predicated on the need that they be in the Gen Z age range and participate in the field trip to RTM.

Interview questions were adapted from previous literature (3). Interview sessions were conducted twice: once before the visit and once after the visit. For the pre-visit interviews, students were interviewed one week prior to the field trip on their knowledge about RTM. For the post-visit interviews, students were interviewed two days after the field trip on their experience to ensure their memories of the trip were still fresh. The data were captured and transcribed from the in-person interview sessions. Thematic analysis was used to find themes and codes in the data that addressed the research questions (16). Drawing conclusions or drawing inferences is based on the analysis that followed.

4) Findings

The findings of this study are divided into sections encompassing the demographics of informants and the themes and sub-themes that answered the research questions.

Demographics of Informants

The demographic characteristics of the informants are presented in Table 1. 15 informants participated in this study, 10 females and five males, and consisted of Gen Z age category from 19 to 22 years old. Out of 15 students, 10 were Malaysians and the other five were international students (four from Japan and one from Kyrgyzstan). All informants were university students who had participated in the field trip to RTM.

Table 1: Demographic of Informants

	r		Nationality
	e		Japanese
	e		Japanese
	e		Malaysian
	e		Kyrgyzstan

	e		Malaysian
			Japanese
			Malaysian
	e		Japanese
	e		Malaysian
			Malaysian
			Malaysian
	e		Malaysian
	e		Malaysian
			Malaysian
	e		Malaysian

Cognitive Engagement

Research question	Themes	Sub- themes
RQ1: What does the field trip bring to cognitive engagement (attentional focus, imagination and sense of insight) of the Gen Zs before and after the trip?	Pre - visit Attentional focus Imagination	Broadcasting station Proactive, Innovative
	Post- visit Attentional focus Imagination Sense of insight	Highly focus Impressed Work environment, Fascinated

Pre- visit Reflections

Analysis revealed that students had positive perceptions of RTM before the visit. A total of two sub-themes emerged under pre- visit reflections: attentional focus and imagination.

Attentional focus

Attentional focus is defined as learners' deep concentration on the encounter with the source (3). There were two questions asked to the students related to attentional focus: describing RTM and have they watched or listened to RTM before. As for the first question, most of the students are aware that RTM is a broadcasting station even though they are international students.

RTM is the Malaysian department of broadcasting. (P1, April 2024)

RTM is providing television and radio services to the Malaysians (P4, April 2024)

As for the second question, out of 15 students, only five students stated that they have watched or listened to RTM.

Yes, I have. I have watched TV1 and TV2 (P3, April 2024)

Yes, I have listened to and watched RTM programs before. One example is a drama television series called “Korban Kasih” that aired in 2020 (P5, April 2024)

Imagination

Imagination involves learners creating a mental image or envisioning a specific version of the information presented by the source (3). Before the visit, students were asked two questions: how they imagined RTM and how innovative they thought RTM was in its use of technology. The answers to the first question varied widely.

I imagined RTM as just a radio station for various stations (P3, April 2024)

Since RTM is a broadcasting company, I imagine that it will be filled with reliable sources of information and entertainment (P5, April 2024).

I imagine that RTM will have big satellites to transmit the signal of their shows across all Malaysia and will have many different departments in which they all have their respective channels and what they manage over (P10, April 2024).

As for the second question, most of the students mentioned that RTM is proactive and a center of innovation.

I think RTM is proactive in adopting technology, using artificial intelligence (AI) and digital platforms to enhance its broadcasting services in Malaysia (P4, April 2024).

During its inception, RTM was the main broadcaster and the first one to do it in Malaysia. But since the rise of the Internet, platforms supported by RTM have grown to be a form of legacy media (P11, April 2024).

In my opinion, they are quite innovative because they have used various platforms like radios, social media and televisions. For people who do not have access to live radio, they can easily find it in their website or any live broadcasting radio websites (P15, April 2024)

Post - visit Reflections

In general, post- visit reflections on the field trip were positive and reflected favorable associations between cognitive engagement of students. A total of three sub-themes emerged: attentional focus, imagination and sense of insight.

Attentional focus

Students were asked about their attentional focus to RTM representatives briefing during the field trip. They were given a scale from 1-10 (1 represents the lowest and 10 is the highest). Out of 15 students, two students rated 10/10, three students rated 8/10, 9 students rated 7/10 and only one student rated 5/10. This shows the students attentional focus towards the briefing is high.

Imagination

Under this sub-theme, students were asked whether their preconceptions about RTM matched their experience during the field trip. Out of 15 students, 7 said yes. Additionally, one student mentioned having visited RTM during high school.

Yes, because I have been to RTM on previous excursions with my high school, but it was insightful to see new stations and see new buildings (P7, April 2024).

Yes, as I had thought, it was a space for radio shows as well as television buildings (P9, April 2024).

Eight other students answered no to this question, as they were quite impressed with the broadcasting station

The buildings and TV studio are bigger than I expected (P1, April 2024).

It has changed my whole perspective (P9, April 2024).

The RTM was quite different from what I had imagined before the trip. I was particularly impressed with the TV broadcasting station. There were many lights on the ceiling and about 5 or 6 cameras to shoot from different angles. I was surprised that it was quite spacious, as I thought they were filming with much less equipment and in a smaller room (P13, April 2024).

Sense of insight

Under this sub-theme, two questions were posed. The first question asked what the students learned from the trip, as for many of them, it was their first visit to RTM. Most responses focused on the work environment at RTM.

I learnt that RTM has several radio stations in various regions and types. I was also surprised to learn that there are ethnic minorities who speak a variety of languages (P1, April 2024).

Through the class trip, I learnt many things about the workings of a broadcast station that I have never known before. I was surprised to learn that there are 34 radio channels. Moreover, time management is especially important in radio broadcasting (P2, April 2024).

I learnt about the process of how a show is broadcasted and filmed and also how radio stations work, which is quite interesting (P12, April 2024).

The second question delved into whether the students' reflections and thoughts had changed since their visit, compared to their initial impressions during the visit. The students thought this varies as most are more interested in working in the broadcasting field and some felt that broadcasting is a stressful place to work in.

I see RTM as a fun place to work at (P3, April 2024).

I am even more interested in the role of mass media than I was before the trip (P6, April 2024).

I thought if I were to work at a radio station, I would be full of tension and stress every day. Seeing radio personalities not memorize scripts but rather organize them into key points made me realize that it would be difficult for me to do the same thing even in Japan (P8, April 2024).

Affective engagement

Research question	Themes	Sub- themes
RQ2: What does the field trip bring to affective engagement (awe and reverence and being moved) of the Gen Zs before and after the trip?	Pre - visit Awe and reverence	Agent of information
	Post- visit Awe and reverence Being moved	Grateful Delighted, Excited

Pre visit

As for affective engagement, students do have emotional responses to the field trip. A sub-theme emerged under pre- visit reflections: awe and reverence.

Awe and reverence

Awe and reverence are when learners feel a deep appreciation for the organization (3). A question was asked to the students on the importance of RTM to society. All students agreed that RTM is important to society as it is an agent of information.

I think RTM is important to the society because they often showcase Malaysians customs and culture. I would say that it preserves and strengthens national identity by airing local content such as dramas, news and music shows (P5, April 2024).

RTM is important as it is responsible for broadcasting, not just media for entertainment for a whole country, but also emergency broadcasts for the nation (P11, April 2024).

RTM helps bring news to the public and they provide many sources of entertainment regardless of whether it is through the radio or television (P15, April 2024).

Post visit

Post-visit reflections on the field trip were positive and demonstrated strong affective engagement among the students. A total of two sub-themes emerged: awe and reverence and being moved.

Awe and reverence

There were two questions asked under this sub-theme: the students' appreciation towards RTM after the visit. For the first question, most of the students felt grateful for the field trip.

It is not often that I could visit Malaysian TV and radio stations, so I appreciate this opportunity. Through this visit, I was able to see and experience with my own eyes the history of radio and television in Malaysia (P2, April 2024).

Meeting and conversation with the radio hosts enriched our trip by providing both entertainment and valuable information about the work of radio and television (P4, April 2024).

I am genuinely grateful for this trip as I was given the opportunity to experience live podcasts and be able to witness the beautiful studio and huge cameras in real life (P9, April 2024).

Being moved

Being moved happens when learners are emotionally touched by the information the source conveys (3). For this sub-theme, the students stated that they felt delighted and excited with the field trip experience.

I enjoy new experiences, and this was a good one (P11, April 2024).

I had fun, it is nice to step out of the classroom with my classmates and be in another environment to learn. This visit also provides us with additional knowledge on the media industry besides just organizational knowledge (P12, April 2024).

I felt very excited and curious about what I was about to learn. After the trip, I felt very satisfied and happy to gain new information from the trip (P15, April 2024).

5) Discussion And Conclusion

This study investigates the impact of field trips on the cognitive and affective engagement of Generation Z students. Two research questions were examined: the first investigates how field trips affect cognitive engagement, and the second explores how field trips influence affective engagement. Using pre- and post-field trip interviews, the study examines how field trips influence students' learning experiences, emotional responses, and overall engagement. The findings demonstrate that field trips improve students' emotional health by encouraging a sense of community and teamwork, while also greatly enhancing their cognitive abilities, such as critical thinking and problem-solving. This research underscores the importance of experiential learning in higher education and highlights the need for more immersive and interactive educational experiences to engage modern students effectively. Furthermore, the study found no difference in cognitive and affective engagement between international and local students. From our sample, we conclude that Generation Z students, regardless of their country or background, exhibit similar thinking and emotional responses.

6) Recommendation

To build on the findings of the current study and explore new dimensions of student engagement through field trips, future research should consider several areas. First, expanding the sample size and including diverse educational contexts, such as varying cultural backgrounds and academic disciplines, would help in generalizing the findings. Additionally, conducting longitudinal studies could provide insights into the long-term impact of field trips on student engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes. Exploring the role of technology in enhancing the field trip experience and its effect on cognitive and affective engagement is another promising avenue. Finally, investigating the specific elements of field trips that contribute most to student engagement, such as peer interactions, hands-on activities, and reflective exercises, could help educators design more effective experiential learning opportunities.

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