

# FIELD Excursions As Pedagogical Tools In Tourism And Hospitality Higher Education: Comprehensive Study

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## Abstract

*This in-depth research study investigates the use of field excursions as a pedagogical tool for learning in higher education and examines their value in promoting experiential learning. It specifically explores how students' cultural backgrounds influence their learning and social experiences before, during, and after these field excursions. The theoretical framework used for this research is based on Kolb's (2020) four-cycle model and offers a holistic perspective by addressing the social and educational aspects of field excursions. The study acknowledges that students' perspectives on the benefits and challenges of field excursions may differ depending on their cultural backgrounds. This qualitative research used a non-probability sampling strategy, enrolling only tourism and hospitality students from the International College of Management, Sydney (ICMS) and have previously participated in a field excursion to the Hunter Valley wine region in New South Wales, Sydney. The sample included undergraduate (UG) students aged 19-30, and has been divided into three groups: local, European, and Asian students. The triple-coding process was used to analyse comments in English. Themes openly coded the substantive comments, then axial coded them into three main categories. In addition, selective coding reveals the interconnectivity among the identified themes and categories. This study contributes to the ongoing discourse on the pedagogical efficacy of field excursions and offers insights into the nuanced experiences of students from diverse cultural backgrounds.*

**Keywords:** experiential learning, field excursion, student experience, cultural background, employability skills

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## INTRODUCTION

Field excursions enhance students' experiential learning in terms of environmental literacy, and positive youth development (Lee et al., 2020). Bartle (2015, p.4) for example refers to experiential learning as "a holistic philosophy of education based on the notion that an individual's life experiences, education and work play a significant role in their learning and understanding of new knowledge". He perceived experiential learning as a continuous process that enhances students' understanding. In fact, his research showed that experiential learning motivated students to complete their subjects and pursue postgraduate studies. Yet there is a gap in literature when it comes to research that aims to understand the impacts of field excursions on students' learning processes and engagement in the classroom (Naomi, F., & Brent., W, 2020; Shynkarov, S. Demianenko, 2023). Hoban & Barnes (2019) also added that the psychological impacts field excursions have on students' experiences are complex and require more in-depth research to understand their nature. In addition, most of the previous studies (e.g. Cooper et al., 2010; Lee et al, 2020; Naomi, F., & Brent., W, 2020; Shynkarov, S. Demianenko, 2023) focused on the impacts of field excursions on students' learning processes with very little or no emphasis on understanding the impacts of participants' cultural backgrounds on their social and educational experience before, during and after the field excursion. This study aims to explore the multifaceted impacts of field excursions as a learning tool in higher education, with the aim of elevating students' understanding of studied subjects, encouraging classroom engagement, and consolidating relationships with both peers and educators. The aim is to study field excursions as shared experiences that allow students to apply theoretical knowledge into real-world settings, helping to develop students' critical employability skills. Central to the study is viewing field excursions as more than just an academic exercise, but as transformative experiences that enhance students' practical understanding of their chosen subjects (Seifan et al., 2020). The study investigates the dynamic relationship between field excursions and the development of employability skills, highlighting the role of field excursions in preparing students for real-world challenges. The research also aims to explore how students from diverse cultural backgrounds engage with and contribute to the collective learning environment during and after field excursions by focusing on the shared nature of these experiences, and whether cultural differences affect experiential learning, social engagement, and potential to acquire and enhance employability skills during and after the field excursion. Field excursions are valuable educational tools in higher education as they encourage experiential learning, narrow the gap between theory and practice, engage multiple senses, and help students develop critical thinking skills (Seifan et al., 2019). When

utilised thoughtfully into the curriculum, field excursions can promote the overall educational experience and help students tackle the real world challenges (Behrendt, M., & Franklin, T. 2014).

The following section will provide critical analyses of existing literature concerning field excursions and experiential learning, followed by the results and discussion sections, and finally the conclusion section.

## Literature Review

### Field Excursions as Collaborative Firsthand Experience

Experiential learning received interest amongst early researchers (e.g., Dewey, 1910, 1938; Lewin 1946) who aimed to address the use of experiential learning at the subject level. Research shows that experiential learning can take different forms in higher education contexts. These include but are not limited to work-integrated learning, work-based learning, school excursions, laboratory teaching, simulations, and service-learning experiences. In this regard, Olusegun, (2015), argue that field excursions are constructive learning processes where people learn by “fitting” new knowledge with what they already know. Field excursions can be seen as direct experiences allowing participants to later reflect, draw conclusions, and apply their newly acquired knowledge to various situations. To enhance the on-site learning experience, these experiences should be preceded by a phase of active experimentation involving thorough planning, setting expectations, and forming hypotheses (Shynkarov, S. Demianenko, 2023). Previous research (e.g. Behrendt and Franklin 2014; Cherchenko & Demianenko, 2023), highlighted the importance of pre-visit preparation and post-visit follow-up activities in enhancing the learning outcomes for students participating in excursions to museums, zoos, aquariums, nature centres, and parks. In addition, field excursions serve as a platform where students learn about a studied matter outside the formal classroom settings (Steenkamp et al. 2018). In this regard, Steenkamp et al. (2018) postulate that school excursions are valuable tools in offering an alternate learning platform that enables students to engage both existentially and physically, leading to rewarding new learning experiences.

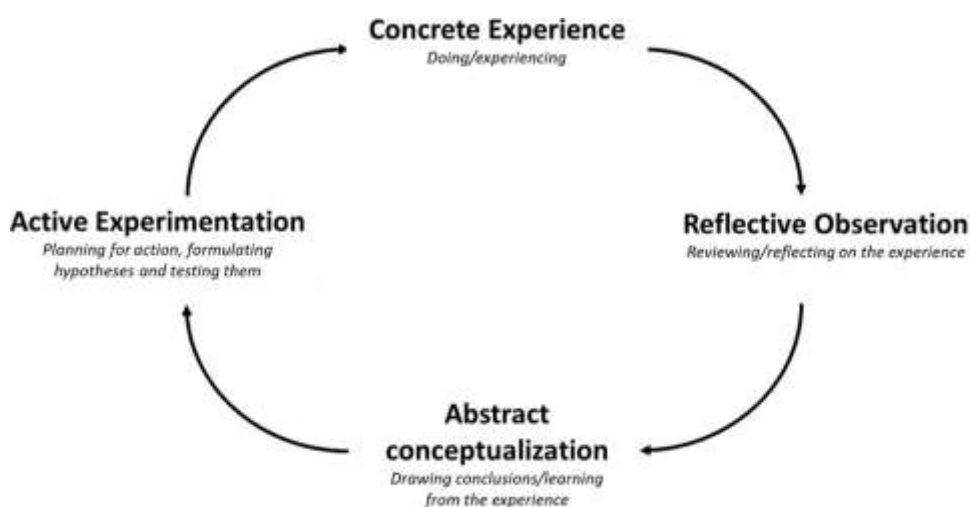


Figure 1 (Kolb, 2020, four cycle model)

The current research emphasises the importance of experience-based learning in higher education. Drawing from Kolb's (2020) perception that learning is inherently experiential, this study points out that experiential learning can be reliably assessed, and students are not merely recipient but active participants in the learning process.

The practicality of field excursions helps to stimulate students' critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and decision-making skills. According to Lee et al (2020), students will be able to understand sophisticated subjects by engaging in practical activities during field excursions. They suggest that activities, including meeting with experts, and hands-on experiences allow students to engage in diverse environments, cultures, and perspectives different from their own, which can broaden their understanding of the world (Falk et al., 2000; Cooper et al., 2010; Skinner et al., 2012; Pashkova, S. Demianenko, 2023). In this regard, Paris et al., (2001) believe that field excursions encourage students to think critically and to analyse information from different perspectives, which in turn promote their problem-solving skills. Additionally, excursions usually incorporate group activities that require collaboration, negotiation and different perspectives. This in turn encourages tolerance and the acceptance of different viewpoints

amongst students and educators (Stahl, 2006). Similarly, Marc et al., (2014), argue that excursions enhance academic comprehension, foster social skills and cultural appreciation, and encourage personal growth and self-reliance. They argue that during the excursions, students make memories that impact their educational journeys. For example, students' interaction with tour guides, experts, or locals during excursions, introduces them to different opinions and ways of thinking. During the excursion, students are encouraged to participate in discussions, ask questions and challenge preconceived notions, which will make them better understand the topic from different perspectives. Therefore, field excursions should be included as part of the higher education curriculum as they provide students with opportunities to learn outside the classroom and to experience new things. As suggested by Orpett et al., (2010), exposing students to real-life situations and challenges, excursions offer a context for learning that goes beyond textbook knowledge. This contextual learning can help students better understand how to apply their problem-solving skills in practical scenarios. Engaging in problem-solving activities during excursions encourages students to think critically and analytically.

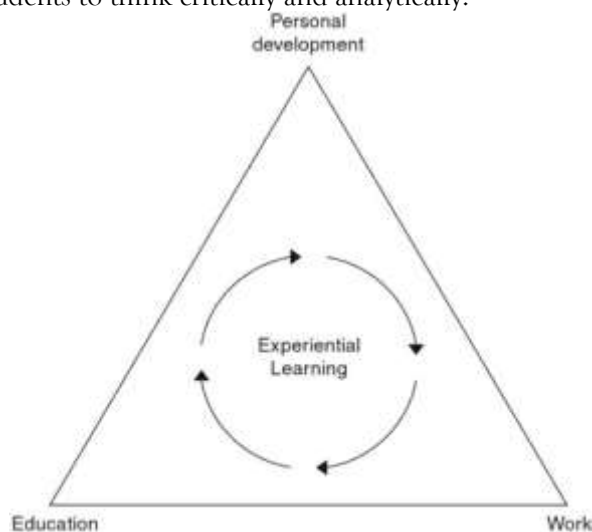


Figure 2 Experiential learning as the process that links education, work, and personal development (Kolb, 2015). In another study, according to Hoban & Barnes (2019), the primary benefit of excursions lies in the increased involvement of students. Witnessing real-life situations and learning from experts generates excitement and instils enthusiasm in these students. However, although engagement alone does not equate to learning, it serves as a fundamental prerequisite for effective learning. Therefore, excursions often act as a catalyst, sparking profound learning experiences in the classroom. According to research conducted in the University of New South Wales (UNSW, 2019), school excursions in higher education can be used as a shared experience to build better relationships between students and teachers which is reflected in the classroom. Hence, enjoyable learning is often the most effective. When teachers are enthusiastic and engaged during excursions, their students tend to mirror this behaviour.

### **Influence of cultural background**

Different factors tied to students' cultural backgrounds may impact their experiences during and after the field excursion (Behrendt et al., 2014). For example, students are keen to showcase their cultural identity during the field trip (Watson 2023). In this context, Pace and Tesi (2004) suggest that field excursions allow students to understand their cultural identity since school excursions are immersive experiences that allow students to gain a deeper understanding of their customs Watson (2023), traditions and historical vents. They added that school excursions are transformative and encourage students to appreciate their cultures and make them proud of who they are. Additionally, these outings serve as settings for communal celebration and exchange of cultural experiences, which develop a sense of belonging (Watson, 2023). In this context, field excursions that promote cultural identity recognition go beyond the classroom and are essential to students' personal and social development, creating a more welcoming and culturally rich learning environment (Behrendt et al., 2014). A person's interests, motivation, needs, life circumstances, past experiences and knowledge all influence the overall experience of students during the field trip. Students from diverse cultural backgrounds may view field excursions in a different way due to differences in their motivations, interests and experiences (Behrendt et al, 2014). For example, many East Asian societies are culturally influenced by the Confucian tradition, which has a comprehensive

value system emphasising social roles, effort-making, self-cultivation and academic achievements (Ames, 2011; Hwang, 2012; Li, 2012). Students who came from Confucian culture tend to be quiet and motivated by their parents and teachers to take part in school activities. Therefore, they may believe that it is obligatory to participate in school excursions just to meet the expectations of their parents and teachers (Chen et al., 2016, 2019; Wang and Chen, 2020). In this regard, Hodkinson & Arthur (2014, p 430) argue that “while many Western university teachers are aware of the ‘silent Chinese student’ phenomenon, few understand its underlying reasons, especially the kiasu mindset and its relationship to other cultural elements”. Kiasu, or feeling of missing out, may restrict the interaction of international Chinese students with their teachers and impedes collaboration with classmates, which may impact their educational experience negatively. Therefore, the researchers assert the need to have a more culturally sensitive understanding of the impact of cultural differences on teaching effectiveness. Guided by the expectancy-value theory of motivation in learning, Lo et al (2022) endeavoured to understand the impact of motivation on students’ cognitive learning. Their empirical research involved a sample of 2,056 college students from a university in Hong Kong. Their findings show that there is a causal relationship between students’ learning experiences, motivation and cognitive learning outcome. They also confirm that motivation is a key factor determining cognitive learning outcome, affording a better understanding of student learning behaviour and the impact in service-learning. In comparative cross-cultural research that investigated the interpersonal and organisational negotiation subject’s understanding between Australian and Chinese students, the results show clear differences between the two groups of students (Basset, 2004). The comparison between the two groups was based on Hofstede’s (1980) four value dimensions of individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, and masculinity-femininity and the Chinese cultural traits of relationship building, face, gift giving and banquets. The researcher found that the Chinese students believe the supervisor has the “absolute right to decide everything”, whereas Australian students express an opposing view. The Chinese students emphasise the value of relationships in contrast to the Australian students who do not mention this at all. Similarly, Lesjak et al (2015) investigated the motivation of 1,400 European students and found that the vast majority of European students are motivated by better job opportunities, and they hoped that participating in school activities such as school excursions would increase their chances of employment and self-development. In this study, both European and Local students were encouraged to participate in the field excursion to build professional networks and to get better job opportunities. During the excursion they took fewer notes compared to Asian students but engaged by asking more questions. Lo et al (2020), Lesjak (2015), and Basset’s (2004) research are very crucial for our research since they delved into the impacts of cultures and motivation on students’ learning experiences, willingness to participate in school activities, and cognitive learning. Therefore, their research will be compared with our results in order to either support or refute their findings.

Studies carried out at the University of New South Wales (UNSW, 2019) suggest that school field excursions can serve as a means of fostering stronger bonds between students and teachers that carry over into the classroom. As a result, learning that is enjoyable is frequently the most effective, and students tend to imitate teachers who are enthusiastic and involved during field excursions. However, De Beer (2023) argues that the diverse cultural backgrounds of students may affect their interactions with educators. For example, if students feel that they are appreciated and understood by teachers, they will perceive the trip positively and will be more likely to recommend it to other students. Yet, students with limited language skills, or those who speak a different language, may be challenged to understand the educational purpose of the trip which will impact their understanding of the subject and its materials (Pace and Tesi, 2004; Watson, 2023). In conclusion, students’ perceptions of field excursions can be significantly influenced by their cultural background. Students’ perceptions and values of field excursions can be influenced by a variety of factors, including recognition of cultural identity, language barriers, prior experiences and knowledge, and teacher-student relationships.

#### **Field excursions as Camaraderie Experience**

Shared experiences promote interaction, teamwork and collaboration among students. In this regard, Fredricks et al., (2004) and Lee, (2019) emphasised the importance of school excursions. They argue that group activities during field trips help students to explore new areas of learning, improve their relationship with their educators, learn the importance of collaboration, and forge stronger bonds with their classmates. These benefits have a positive effect not only because they enhance students’ comprehension, but also because it creates emotional bonds with the learning content. To effectively apply these connections alongside prior knowledge and classroom concepts, the students need to participate in discussion. One effective approach to linking concepts with

experiences is through the students' immediate social network (Kadushin, 2012). This involves students engaging in peer teaching, explaining how to complete tasks or on what to focus their attention, reading placards and signs to one another, and discussing their understandings of the experiences (Sukhraj, 2018). According to Adams et al., (2018), the role of school excursions in developing students' perspective-taking skills is an area of interest within educational psychology. Perspective taking emphasises the ability to understand and consider other people's thoughts, feelings, and points of view. Their research shows that students can develop empathy and understanding by seeing and engaging with individuals from diverse backgrounds or circumstances. This first-hand experience enhances their ability to consider alternative perspectives, leading to greater tolerance and respect for others. Hover, et al., (1997), state that a major part of the success is developed through building relationships, not only with the students, but within the institution hierarchy and by engaging with departments to get a buy in as it enhances and builds credibility for the institution. Steenkamp et al., (2018), also explain that excursion and the activities related to it allowed a sense of community and solidarity through the communal sharing of work-integrated learning experiences, through finding commonality with the student cohort, during group activities. This is explained by Emdin, C., (2016), who believes that excursions provide a break from the traditional classroom setting, making learning more interactive and engaging for students. When students are actively involved in solving real-world problems during excursions, their motivation and interest in the subject matter tend to increase (Shynkarov, S. Demianenko, 2023). As demonstrated in the literature review, most researchers tend to be more focused on the benefits that field excursions have as a form of collaborative learning, or their social impacts as a shared experience, with little emphasis on the understanding whether students' cultural background have an impact on their experiences. Therefore, the aim of this research is to contribute to filling the gap in literature to better understand the multidimensional impacts of field excursions, and it aims to understand whether students' cultural backgrounds have an impact on their experiences during and after the field excursion. In doing so, and since this research is exploratory and aims to understand the influence of students' cultural backgrounds on their experiences, the researchers adopted the Blooms taxonomy theory in formulating exploratory questions (Bloom, 1956), and therefore the research's primary question is: How do field excursions, as a pedagogical tool in higher education, influence experiential learning, cultural engagement, and perceptions of benefits and challenges among students from diverse cultural backgrounds, applying Kolb's (2020) four-cycle model as a theoretical framework?

## METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLING

This study uses a qualitative method to understand students' perceptions about the benefits and challenges experienced before, during and after the field excursion. In qualitative research, information is gathered to gain an in-depth understanding of the investigated topic (Saunders et al., 2011). Qualitative research approaches have been used to obtain a more naturalistic, contextual and holistic understanding of human beings in society (Todd et al., 2004). Moreover, qualitative analysis emphasises the experiences of the participants, such as how they express themselves, other people, and their environment. In this study, semi-structured interviews were the primary method of data collection. The interview format facilitated open-ended discussions, enabling participants to articulate their thoughts, experiences, and perceptions in their own words. This approach allowed for flexibility in exploring emergent themes while ensuring coverage of key topics predetermined by the research objectives. Thematic analysis was employed to systematically analyse the collected data. The iterative process involved coding the data to identify recurring patterns, themes, and categories. Data coding was both deductive, aligning with predetermined research questions, and inductive, allowing for the emergence of unanticipated themes. A non-probability sampling strategy is used, consistent with the research objectives, focusing specifically on participants who study hospitality and tourism at the International College of Management, Sydney (ICMS) and have previously attended field excursions. This criterion ensures that participants have pertinent knowledge about the topic, adding to the study's depth and applicability. Prior to the excursion to the Hunter Valley wine region, all students underwent an induction and were briefed about the excursion's learning outcomes and main topics.

Undergraduate (UG) students, both international and domestic, were included, highlighting the significance of cultural diversity. By capturing a wide range of perspectives and experiences, this inclusive sampling strategy seeks to strengthen the study's conclusions. The interview questions were tested on a small sample of respondents before conducting the actual interviews. This allowed us to revise the questions based on the feedback and results. In addition, ethical approval will be obtained from the International College of Management Sydney's Ethics Committee prior to commencing data collection. Informed consent will also be obtained from all participants,

ensuring confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw from the study at any point. In addition, pseudonyms are used to protect the identities of participants. The interview process will conclude when data saturation is reached.

## DISCUSSION

This discussion delves into the impacts of school excursions on shaping students' experiences. Based on interviews, two main elements emerged revealing how cultural dynamics and hands-on learning influence students' engagement, learning outcomes, and overall enjoyment of these field excursions:

1. Cross cultural elements involving peer interactions and school excursion as a shared experience.
2. Learning through immersive excursions which encompasses sensory learning, hands on experiences, and student's preparation before the school excursion.

### Cross-Cultural Connections and Understanding through Shared Experiences

Shared experiences and educational activities during the Hunter Valley school excursion demonstrated cross-cultural interactions and fostered bonds between Asian, European and Australian students. Visiting wineries, distilleries, and breweries, and participating in beer, gin and wine tastings, not only provided an educational experience but also fostered cross-cultural connections and understanding. This is evidenced by Rose, a European student, who said, "It was a very good day trip. Meet some new people, meet the producer of the wine, the wine fields, got to know the Australian wine culture. Perfect experience for me." Edward, an Australian student, also added, "I got to know my classmates better especially after the wine testing. For example, some international students did not talk much in class but during the trip I got to know something about them and their culture." Additionally, a student of Finnish and Australian heritage, who had lived and worked in Germany, explained how European alcohol drinking customs is significantly different from the Australian customs. He said, "I really liked the excursion. What was interesting is how the bartender showed us the wine making process. It's different from that in Europe. In Australia it was more enjoyable and engaging." These findings collaborate previous literature (e.g. Fredricks et al, 2004; Philips, et al 2007; Sukhraj, 2018; Watson, 2023), that school excursions promote cultural understanding and encourage students to make new friends and expand their social networks. Consistent with Basset's (2004) research, the results of the current study support the idea that Asian students emphasise the value of building relationships with classmates and educators. Sarah, a Chinese student, said, "The trip was great. I knew my teacher better than before the trip. I also made new friends because of this excursion." Matthew, a Vietnamese student, also said, "This trip allowed me to meet new people and to make friendship with some Australian and European students'. The results of this study contradict the findings of Chen et al., (2016, 2019); and Wang and Chen, (2020), who suggested that students from Confucian culture tend to be quiet and motivated by their parents and teachers to participate in school activities. On the contrary, all Asian students in this study showed enthusiasm to participate in the school excursion. They wanted to leave the classroom setting, meet new people, and try something different. This is exemplified by Sarah, a Chinese student, who explained her reason for signing up. "I signed up for this excursion because it sounds fun to go out with classmates and have an experience outside the classroom." The results highlight the significance of school excursions as platforms for fostering cultural connections. During the excursion, students from diverse cultural backgrounds, including Asian, European, and Australian students, interacted with each other in meaningful ways. The shared experience of wine and other beverage tasting encouraged a rich cultural exchange and developed sense of camaraderie among students, allowing them to develop new friendships and broaden their cultural horizon. Therefore, educators should promote group dynamic activities that encourage students to showcase their culture, making the school excursion a memorable experience.

### Enhancing Understanding and Retention through Practical Learning Experiences

Students' experiences in the Hunter Valley excursion corroborate previous studies (e.g. Dewey, 1910, 1938; Lewin 1946; Steenkamp et al, 2018; Shynkarov, S. Demianenko, 2023) who highlighted the significant role of practical learning in enhancing understanding and retention of theoretical knowledge. By listening to professionals and participating in the wine, gin and beer-making process, students were able to gain a deeper understanding of how each ingredient and production process affects the flavour, which was not as effectively learned in a classroom setting. This is evident from Sarah, who said, "To go and see how the wine is made makes it easier for me to understand my baraminology class." In addition, the results of this study support Shynkarov, S. Demianenko (2023) belief that school excursions serve as a platform for students to retain information about the studied subject. In this study, six

out of 11 students interviewed shared the wine-making process in their country of origin with their classmates. The practical learning combined with the cultural diversity facilitates better retention of information and a deeper understanding of the subject matter. This is evident from Zoe, an Italian student, who said, “To know the Australian way of making wine was very interesting... Also, my Australian friends explained to me the wine-making process in their regions, some from South Australia and others from Tasmania. I think I will remember the wine-making process after the excursion.” Mark, an Australian student also added, “That was much fun to know the different cultures of winemaking in different countries.” Students in the Hunter Valley excursion appreciated having a farmer involved, as it provided a different perspective compared to their educators. Out of the 11 students interviewed, nine mentioned that getting an insider view from a farmer was valuable. Jack commented, “It was a great opportunity to hear the farmer talk about the wine-making process and their sustainability practices.” During the excursion, students were able to engage multiple senses. They visited the factory, participated in steering the wine containers, and learned directly from farmers. This multi-sensory experience enhanced students’ understanding of the wine, beer, and gin production, making the school excursion a memorable experience. In addition, through the real-world exposure, students were able to appreciate sustainability practices implemented by the makers of these beverages. Previous preparation (e.g. researching wineries and learning about wine and beer making in class) helped students to appreciate the diverse experiences at the Hunter Valley. This supports Brent and Duane (2004) argument that previous preparation helps students to have a better experience during the excursion.

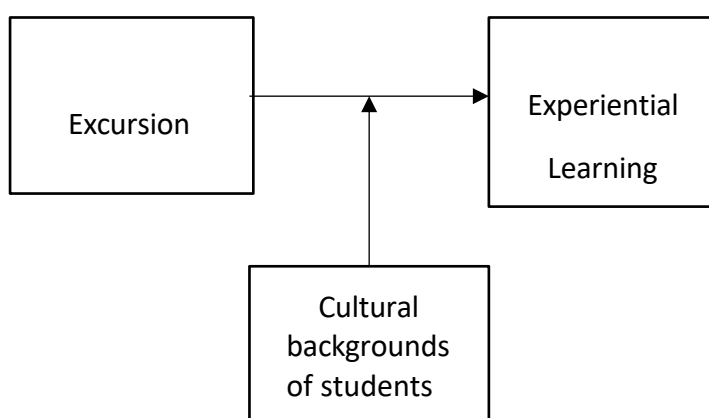


Figure 3: Conceptualising school excursions as pedagogical tool

The findings of this study support Kolb’s (2020) notion that experience-based learning approach is a powerful educational tool that enables students to actively participate in the learning process. And just like Kolb’s research (2020) the results of this study support that excursions provide immersive, hands-on learning experiences. However, the current research also shows that students’ backgrounds influence their experiences. School excursions encourage cross-cultural interactions that reassure information retention and the overall satisfaction of the excursion. The excursion served as a platform for social interactions where students spoke about their cultures, shared their knowledge, made new friends, and enjoyed diverse experiences. Accordingly, and while considering Kolb’s (2020) work on school excursions and experiential learning, the model above has been created in order to showcase the influence of students’ cultural backgrounds on shaping their experiences before, during and after the field excursion.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The current research investigated the impact of school excursions as a pedagogical tool in higher education, incorporating 11 interviews with Tourism and Hospitality undergraduate students from ICMS. The results highlight the importance of school excursions as an effective means of experiential learning and fostering cross-cultural connections among participants. The research corroborates Kolb’s (2020) theoretical model for understanding the students’ experience during and after the school excursion. However, the results indicate that students’ cultures have an influence on their understanding, information retention, and cross-cultural interaction. Additionally, school excursions helped students to broaden their networks, learn from different perspectives, academic and not academic, like farmers, which provided them with an insider perspective about the industry and its sustainable practices. Although the results of this study show the importance of students’ cultures in shaping their

experiences, no preparatory or cross-cultural group dynamic activities were proposed by educators nor industry experts. Therefore, the study recommends that educators understand the cultural backgrounds of their groups before the excursion and tap into their cultures to provide students with a memorable experience.

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