

Article

The Study Tour in China: An Emerging Mode for Practical Education

Fu-Rong Sun ^{1,2} and Tian-Zi Xu ^{2,*} 

¹ Department of Public Instruction, Wenzhou University of Technology, Wenzhou 325000, China; sunfr@wzu.edu.cn

² Faculty of Education, Wenzhou University, Wenzhou 325000, China

* Correspondence: 20200200@wzu.edu.cn

Abstract: The study tour is an effective mode for students to learn in an effective way. For decades, it gradually has become an emerging mode for practical education in China, underpinned by policies, funds, technology, and human resources. This study aims to showcase how the curriculum of the study tour can currently be operated, including goals, content, teachers, and evaluation, as well as what the potential barriers are. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in the study through organizing site investigation and distributing questionnaires. The data were from 122 institutes of study tour in Zhejiang Province as the outstanding example. According to the results, we find that even though there are numerous study tour courses, the syllabi are not rigorous and the professional literacy of the teaching staff is low. Additionally, most study tour activities are carried out with lecturing or sightseeing, yet without practice, inquiry, or operation. Therefore, with the study tour being increasingly emphasized, more professional collaboration with schools and universities should be put on the agenda to enhance the prevailing curriculum.

Keywords: study tour; practical education; curriculum; qualitative; quantitative



Citation: Sun, F.-R.; Xu, T.-Z. The Study Tour in China: An Emerging Mode for Practical Education. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 11969. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su132111969>

Academic Editor: Eila Jeronen

Received: 13 September 2021

Accepted: 25 October 2021

Published: 29 October 2021

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Correction Statement: This article has been republished with a minor change. The change does not affect the scientific content of the article and further details are available within the back-matter of the website version of this article.



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1. Introduction

Since China's basic education curriculum reform in 2001, practical education has gradually gained widespread attention, especially for its important role in promoting students' deep learning, thinking training, innovation, and problem-solving abilities. In the past two decades, some practical modes such as comprehensive practical courses, project-based learning, inquiry-based learning, and STEM education, have been developed one after another. However, practical education seldom got involved with outdoor activities that are close to nature and society. Furthermore, many practical courses have been weakened, formalized, or even suspended due to the high relation of test scores to students' development, which diminished the effectiveness of practical education in China.

1.1. The Background of Study Tour in China

In 2016, the Ministry of Education of China issued a policy required bringing study tours into line with the basic education plans. The policy demands that all the stakeholders should work together to design the curriculum, draw up the semester schedule, establish the management and security system, and raise multi-pronged funds. Study tours for primary and secondary school students are planned and organized by education departments and schools, combining research studies and travel experiences with group travel and centralized accommodation. This term brings some characteristics, which could be termed as a 'Chinese experience' for practical education.

First, the study tour is combined with travel, so that the activities are always organized at scenic spots, historical sites, science and technology museums, and other tourist places. This combination aims to encourage students to learn with venturing out into nature and society, experiencing deep-learning, extending school-based knowledge, understanding real society, realizing the spirit of culture, getting close to the landscape, and improving

physical strength. Besides, travel also brings students more fun and practical experience for their learning progress. Second, this study tour can't be separated from the school courses. It is essentially a complement to school education, together with the other modes of practical activities. Furthermore, the most important thing during study tours is education, rather than recreation, play, or adventure. Therefore, this kind of study tour course should have a connection with school subjects and emphasize the aspects of inquiry and exploration. Third, the study tour has multi-dimensional benefits, as it not only increases the modes of practical education, broadening the venues of practical activities outside of school, enriching students' learning content, but also fuels the travel economy, and revitalizes the rural economy through the rural study tour activities.

To better report the latest situation of the study tour in China, this research selected Zhejiang Province as the target for data collection and analysis. The study tour in Zhejiang Province ranks among the first in the country. By now, the related policies have been issued by the Provincial Department of Education, 22 national institutions and 122 provincial institutions have been certified, and a provincial study tour research center has been established by the government, relying on Wenzhou University. Besides, the study tour in this province has been initially constructed as a three-level guiding and supervising mode at the provincial, municipal and county levels. As an emerging event, there also a large number of exemplary teaching staff training program to improve the pedagogies for teachers, instructing them to understand the characters, process, and methods of study tour. Furthermore, the practice in Zhejiang Province also keeps in step with the times, building an online platform to enhance the data management and information service for the study tour.

Hence, to understand more practice in China, this research showcases how the curriculum of the study tour is currently operated, including the purpose, activities, themes, teachers, and evaluation. Meanwhile, through our study, the outstanding experience in Zhejiang Province will be summarized, some potential problems or weaknesses could be exposed, and we will put forward certain strategies to promote the practice of the study tour in China, attempting to bring more possibilities for the development of practical education around the world.

1.2. Review of Literature

The literature review of this study is divided into two parts. In the first part, we give the research status of the study tour in China. In the second part, we give the research status of two analogous education activities in the world, in order to help us comprehensively understand the global research and development of practical, informal, and experiential education.

1.2.1. The Literature Review of the Study Tour in China

As an emerging practical education mode in China, the study tour has attracted extensive domestic attention. From now on, the research tends to be theoretical, generally focusing on the connotation, value, curriculum design, and promotion strategies from a macro perspective. Besides, the study tour is supported by the government with policy publishing, which brings some indigenous characteristics in the direction of research.

The connotation of the study tour in China is "learning in practice". Su et al., (2020) pointed out that although the study tour is closely related to tourism and the economy, it is still a special trip with a research process and learning purpose. The 'tour' is the carrier, of secondary importance [1]. However, there are also certain researchers that admit the dominant status for tourism and classified it into travel-focused study tours and education-focused study tours [2]. Some researchers, based on the essential elements of the modern tourism industry, pointed out that the study tour products are the core element of the study tour [3]. An integrated view is also popular, which emphasizes a deeper integration of education and travel. It appeals to combine the learning aspect of the trip, without losing the pleasure of touring [4,5]. This viewpoint sets high standards for both curriculum and teachers.

Compared to the connotation of study tour, the value of it has already arrived at a common understanding [6]. First, study tour in China is a kind of intelligence education, owing to experiencing different natural and humanistic environments which could enhance students' humanity and scientific literacy, learning interest, and critical and innovative capabilities. Second, study tour is a kind of self-education. Through effective self-management, self-planning, and self-restraining outside of their comfort zones, students could develop a better understanding of themselves, tap into their potential, promote self-management skills, and highlight personality. Third, the study tour is a kind of civil education. Through participating in social activities, managing the relationship between self and society, and following social moral and behavioral norms, students could strengthen their sense of social responsibility, confidence, and courage to cope with various challenges, and abilities in problem solving.

Curriculum construction is another vital part of research for study tour in China. Yin and Cheng (2018) first put forwards that it was necessary to ensure the scientific and standard implementation of study tour in basic education [7]. They stressed the importance of setting the related curriculum policy, developing resources for the study tour courses, and constructing the curriculum system. Yang and Wang (2019) revealed that current study tour courses were deficient in systematic design and pointed out that we should rethink the value of them, effectively integrate and resolve the goals, provide various content for students to choose, and flexibly adjust the steps and methods [8]. From the curriculum resources, Yuan (2021) suggested that there were two directions to select the content [9]. One was vertical, basing on the teaching syllabus and combined with regional culture and nature resources. The other was horizontal, such as the regional development in history, agriculture, industry, service industry and transport. Deng et al. (2020) thought there was a clear separation between study tour and school courses, attributing to the lack of guidance for course practice [10]. They believed the next step should be to join the types of course, the link of process, and the practical subjects together. Ma (2021) introduced the practical experience of a primary school in Zhejiang Province [11]. The school figured out a mode for connecting the study tour with the school subjects. They meticulously designed the instruction plan and students' handbook in order to guide teachers and students to deeply understand what the activity targets were, what they needed to prepare, how they took action, and what they would obtain.

However, for most research fellows paying attention to the study tour practices, there was seldom research about the theory of study tour. There were only three research teams using space theory, seamless learning, and sociological theory to explore the development of the it [12–14].

1.2.2. The Literature Review of two analogous education activities

Although study tour is a new model of practical education in China, there are some analogous education activities with a long history, have been widely carried out all over the world. The outdoor education and educational travel are the two typical examples. The outdoor education is the kind of education 'in', 'about', and 'for' the out-of-doors. This definition means that the location can be the campus playground or the forest in the suburbs; the themes focus on the nature, environment and resources; and the purpose is to guide students to understand nature, appreciate the environment, make rational use of resources, and protect the ecosystem [15]. The educational travel is another popular way of practical education, encouraging people to travel to other regions or around the world, in order to applies the knowledge and skills to a fully diversified environment, and expand their experience.

The three terms, study tour, outdoor education, and educational travel, have many common grounds such as that they are all experiential and informal education, with first-hand experiences, direct connection with the knowledge, and participation of interaction and socialization. However, there are also significant differences among them. For example, study tour takes primary and secondary school students as the objects, while the audience

of educational travel is wider, including adults. Besides, each of them has its own emphasis, as the outdoor education focusing on the nature and environment issues, the educational travel focusing on the tourism, yet, the focus of the study tour being vague, which seems to be the learning mode committed to “going out of the campus and into the society and nature”. Moreover, the outdoor education mainly takes place in the natural environment, the educational travel mainly happens in non-residential areas, and the study tour always organizes in the local place with one-day activities, or going to the other regions with multi-days’ tour, such as summer camp. Therefore, this study reviews the literature on these three terms to comprehensively understand the development of the similar education activities all over the world, and attempt to figure out certain inspiration and strategies across different cultures and society.

There is a long history of study in the outdoors. It can be dated more than 300 years to the ideas of the English educator John Locke’s “education of gentleman”, and supported by the modern theories such as Dewey’s ‘learning by doing’, Piaget’s ‘constructivism’, and Kolb’s experiential learning cycle. Since the last century, as an important form of education, outdoor education has gained fruitful research in western countries. The research themes usually focus on environment, outdoor sports, outdoor adventure, and environment-related values, history, culture, energy and nature [16–25]. In terms of objective, outdoor education is always settled on transmitting environmental consciousness and values, exploring the landscape and the wild, and understanding natural resources and sustainability [16,17,21,23]. What’s more, there are hosts of research focusing on the approaches for outdoor education. The researcher Mikaelis indicated that a place-responsive pedagogy could enable teachers to work within school-based outdoor education in new and innovative ways, which could facilitate cross-curricular teaching and learning initiatives more locally [26]. Some researchers conducted a comparison research between two approaches for outdoor sports education. By analyzing the performance and outcomes, they found that the blended approaches with the school-based outdoor education approach and Moodle (learning management system) performed better than the traditional learning environment. It is because of the outdoor activities engaging students in the nature environment outside the school walls that allows them to possess sports knowledge and skills [19]. Additionally, in terms of research methodology, it is common to carry out the empirical study with qualitative and quantitative methods, and case study with one or several outdoor education programs, in which the data come from questionnaires and interviews with the stakeholders, such as the program leaders, students, and teachers [27–29].

For educational travel, the international researchers recently focus on the following areas: the sustainability of educational tourism, the effectiveness of experiential learning, the cultivation of global citizens, the influence towards students’ values, and the satisfaction of education tourism. Firstly, the sustainability of educational tourism is an important trend of international research. Many studies voice concerns that educational travel plays a negative role in the sustainable development for local society and the environment, and call for the incorporation of sustainability into educational travel program mission statements, training of program leaders in dimensions of economy, environment and social culture, and implementation of sustainability-related assessment measures [30–32]. Second, the analysis of the effect of experiential learning in educational tourism has also attracted much attention. Research has investigated the influence of immersion experience, learning satisfaction, and other factors on learning effect in educational travel, and pointed out that physical involvement, matching degree, and immersion perception should be paid attention to in the process of curriculum design [33]. This is echoed by another study, which discusses the impact of perceived value and travel experience on education tourism satisfaction. It is pointed out that the higher the degree of participation, the more conducive to the individual’s understanding of knowledge and society [34]. Moreover, negotiating the details of how to travel, gaining information about different cultures, seeing places for the first time, and interacting with other travelers are also proved to be significant elements of promoting experiential learning through the process of educational travel [35]. In addition,

cultural distance has a negative correlation with the effect of educational travel, especially in asymmetric culture, where the interaction between students and locals is difficult [36]. Third, the function of cultivation of students' values is also emphasized by researchers. Through quasi experimental research, one study pointed out that educational tourism could improve participants' positive emotions, alleviate anxiety, and promote the development of participants' self-cognitive ability and social identity [37]. Another quasi experiment explored that educational travel could strengthen students' beliefs about climate change by changing students' environmental world outlook and emotional connection to nature [38]. Additionally, as the international tourism projects are the important part of the educational travel, it especially emphasizes the role of cultivating students to become global citizen with social awareness and sense of responsibility [39,40]. Last, the term of satisfaction also appears frequently in research about educational travel. Some studies have exposed that the transportation, convenience, accommodation facilities, projects, operation plans, novelty and educational effects have an important impact on students' and teachers' satisfaction to education tourism, especially the operation plan and education effect, which are the key influencing factors of revisit and recommendation intention [41,42].

To sum up, from the trends at home and abroad, the research on curriculum is more concentrated in Asian countries, especially in China. Curriculum construction is the guarantee of standardized implementation for study tour, the key step to cultivate students required by the country, and the lifeline for the sustainable development of study tour centers. However, presently, rare studies based on practical data have been conducted in China, while most of international researches about outdoor education and educational travel are more inclined to explore methods and functions through the process of activities with empirical research method, which provides an important reference for China's follow-up research at the methodology and breakthrough points.

Therefore, our research focus on the curriculum construction of study tour in China, using quantitative and qualitative methods to collect and analyze the data from the state-level and provincial-level study tour centers in Zhejiang Province. And the implication of this study mainly lies in, on the one hand, understanding the reality and finding out the obstruction of the study tour curriculum in China, and on the other hand, introducing more practical models and experiences with Chinese characteristics, bringing more data and cases to enrich the database, sharing more perspectives and inquiry, and providing more academic support for the development of the whole domain of the study tour and those analogous education activities. The research questions are as follows:

1. Generally, what is the current situation of study tour curriculum?
2. What are the course goals? How to fulfill them?
3. What are the course contents? How to choose them?
4. How about the teaching staff? Can they be able to conduct this kind of practical education?
5. How to evaluate students' performance? Is there a comprehensive system? How does it work?

2. Methodology

2.1. Terminology

First of all, several terminologies of study tour in China should be interpreted to clarify the investigation objects. One is the 'study tour camp and base'. It is the places that the study tour is organized, where they are always equipped with diverse functional classrooms or natural resources, such as traditional handicraft classrooms, farmland, forests, and culture and history inheritance, to meet the learning demands. The outstanding difference between the camp and base is that the former can simultaneously accommodate up to thousands of students and conducts outdoor activities, while the latter only take single-day activities without accommodation. Another terminology is the 'national-level and provincial-level', which indicate the different certification departments. For example, a national-level camp means this camp is certified by the national education department, and a provincial-level base means it is confirmed by the provincial education department.

2.2. Participants

Since 2018, Zhejiang Province issued several policies to promote the development of study tour and certified a number of study tour camps or bases. In this research, 122 study tour institutes were reached, and an online communication group has been established. Among them, there include all the categories, national-level camps ($n = 2$), national-level bases ($n = 13$), provincial-level camps ($n = 50$), and provincial-level bases ($n = 39$). A questionnaire was distributed to all of the leaders of the 122 institutes, and 104 valid questionnaires were collected. Besides, a series of field research interviews have been conducted in 8 camps and bases, which was almost distributed across all levels. A total of 24 people participated in the interviews, including leaders, teachers, curriculum developers, and managers. Considering some institution asked for anonymity for the program name, the study replaced the institution name with letter codes, and their details about location, level, themes, and number of participants can be seen at Table 1.

Table 1. Interviewees' information.

Code	Level	Location	Core Courses	Number of Participants in the Interview
DQ	national-level base and provincial-level camps	Hangzhou City	farming activities	4
CL	provincial-level camps	Hangzhou City	traditional handicraft, forestry activities	3
SS	provincial-level camps	Jinhua City	traditional handicraft, farming activities	3
OH	provincial-level camps	Wenzhou City	traditional handicraft, farming activities, revolutionary history inheritance	2
GJ	provincial-level bases	Taizhou City	citrus picking and handicraft, citrus museum	1
YY	provincial-level bases	Lishui City	brewing craft of soy sauce, vinegar, and wine	5
ZT	provincial-level bases	Ningbo City	career experiencing	4
CC	provincial-level bases	Wenzhou City	traditional handicraft, farming activities	2

Source: own work based on government documents.

2.3. Data Collection

This study used a mixed method research paradigm. The views of the participants on the study tour curriculum were explored by collecting both qualitative and quantitative data. On the one hand, questionnaires were distributed to 122 study tour centers with the provincial level and the above in Zhejiang Province, among which, 104 centers responded with validity, and the return rate was 85.2%. The questionnaire contained three sections: cognition, practice, hindrance and plans, consisting of a variety of yes/no, single-choice, and multiple-choice. To ensure the validity of the research, the questionnaire was tested by two experts, and necessary modifications were made to it on the basis of the experts' consultations. At the same time, in order to obtain more details, uncover more implicit perceptions, and collect more realistic problems and suggestions, this study selected nine study tour centers with different levels, locations and curriculum themes, to conduct field research and interviews. A series of semi-structured questions were implemented to the leaders, teachers, course designers and so on, allowing for the flexibility in adapting the questions relying on the interviewees' responses, so that we may probe more information. Those questions were also reviewed by experts and modified. Besides, during the field investigation, we acquired lots of the internal documents of these study tour institutions, such as course program, activity handbooks, syllabus, and evaluation forms, which provided us more details about the courses. The multiple data sources strengthen the validity of the research.

2.4. Data Analysis

In this research, we built a framework for curriculum analysis, which includes two dimensions and 18 indexes, so that we could comprehensively and deeply understand the

current situation of the curriculum for the study tour in China. The first dimension takes Tyler's mode of curriculum construction as the theoretical foundation. The rationale for curriculum planning that he designed includes four famous questions, which are still has strength for stakeholders to refer to when they desire to develop a course [43]. Tyler's four questions could be simplified into four aspects for operating, which are "recognizing and determining the curriculum objectives", "selecting curriculum content", "arranging and adjusting tutoring", and "designing evaluation frame and criteria". Even some researchers criticized that Tyler's mode was a linear system, deprived of the course flexibility, and obstructing adjustment for unpredictable practical circumstance, it still provides us an easy method of operation for curriculum design. Therefore, based on Tyler's four main parts of one course, we developed the first analyzing dimension with curriculum objectives, curriculum content, curriculum teaching staff, and curriculum evaluation, in order to thoroughly understand the development of the study tour courses.

At the same time, to further analyze the data, we also have developed a second dimension, so as to have an in-depth understanding of the implementation of the primary dimensions of the study tour's courses.

First, for curriculum objectives, we referred to the Chinese KAPO mode, which represent the Chinese basic education goals [44]. This mode consists of four parts, the knowledge and skills, the process and steps, the emotional attitude and values, and the learning occurrence, and we took the first three as the second dimension to formulate questionnaire survey and curriculum text analysis. Second, the policy of Zhejiang Province suggests that the study tour can be divided into four categories, the revolutionary journey, the ecological journey, the cultural journey, and the innovative journey, and advocates that all localities and regions should base on their own resources to develop a rich variety of courses for students. Hence, we divided the secondary analysis dimension of the course content into four themes and analyzed the themes of the main courses in 122 study tour bases and camps in order to understand the distribution of the main contents of the current courses. Third, we investigated the current situation of the teaching staff for the course of the study tour. As we all know, whether teachers have professional quality is the key to whether they can correctly choose teaching methods, properly use teaching skills, and reasonably achieve teaching objectives. Therefore, based on the research of the teacher professionalism [45–48], we design the secondary analysis dimension of the teaching staff as "whether they have professional knowledge", "whether they have received professional training", and "whether they have a stable employment rate and occupation retention rate", so that we could explore whether the current teaching team could be competent for the practical education function that the study tour should play. Last is about the curriculum evaluation. As the emerging mode of practical education in China, the score-test cannot reflect the students' development for their problem-solving capability, collaboration ability, innovation, and their transformation of behaviors or value. Hence, we design the second analysis dimension of the course evaluation with the following indexes: "Whether multiple evaluation schemes have been developed and implemented", "whether multiple subjects participate in the evaluation", "whether the evaluation contents correspond to the needs of practical education", and "whether the evaluation results have been effectively used". More details about the course analysis framework can be seen in Table 2.

Based on the course analysis framework, we conducted the quantitative and qualitative analysis on the collected data with screening, classifying, cross-tabulating, integrating, and synthesizing. The questionnaires were distributed through an online platform, and an original report was generated backstage, while each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed. The quantitative analysis reflects the distribution and general trend of the different options in each dimension, while the qualitative analysis indicates the deeper perceptions, views, and opinions behind the phenomenon. Therefore, both kinds of analysis support each other and portray a more comprehensive, in-depth, and realistic outlook of the curriculum of the study tour in China.

Table 2. The Curriculum analysis framework.

First Dimension	Second Dimension	Description
1. Curriculum Objectives	(1) the knowledge and skills; (2) the process and steps; (3) the emotional attitude and values	What is about the leaders' understanding of the significance of the curriculum objectives? Does the syllabus include all the education goals? Is it professional and accurate for the expression of course objectives?
2. Curriculum Content	(4) the revolutionary journey; (5) the ecological journey; (6) the cultural journey; (7) the innovative journey	The revolutionary trip mainly focusses on the modern revolutionary resources; The ecological trip mainly focusses on the natural resources and environment; The cultural trip mainly focusses on the traditional culture; The innovative trip mainly focusses on the modern science, industry and business.
3. Teaching Staff	(8) professional knowledge; (9) professional training; (10) professional organization	whether they have professional knowledge? whether they have received professional training? whether they have a stable employment rate and occupation retention rate?
4. Curriculum Evaluation	(11) evaluation schemes; (12) evaluation subjects; (13) evaluation contents; (14) evaluation results	Whether multiple evaluation schemes have been developed and implemented? whether multiple subjects participate in the evaluation? whether the evaluation contents correspond to the needs of practical education? whether the evaluation results have been effectively used?

Source: own work based on the government documents and education theories.

3. Results

3.1. Curriculum Objectives of Study Tour

The course objectives usually contain knowledge, behaviors, skills, and actions, which students should master through the course. Those objectives are also the foundation and value of a course, surrounded by all the other elements. That is to say, everything in the course should work together to ensure students master those objectives. Additionally, the course objectives are the basis for selecting the learning content, teaching methods, and evaluation criteria.

The questionnaire results indicate that 84% of respondents believe the study tour course should bring students with an authentic experience to deep learning, 76% of respondents think the course should enrich learning activities to avoid the lecturing and indoctrination, and 78% of respondents reckon that the course should tap a bunch of social resources for learning (there is the multiple-choice questions, the sum of the percentages will be greater than 100%. The same goes for below.). Furthermore, from the interview transcribed manuscript, some study tour center leaders expounded their views about course objectives.

The leader of the DQ study tour center said, "It is not enough to rely on books alone, but to let students sow the seeds or pick the fruits themselves and experience the joy of harvesting through their own work".

The leader of the YY study tour center said, "Our course is all about getting students to delve into the production line to understand how the soy sauce and vinegar they eat every day is produced. They get to stir and turn it themselves. The fermentation process contains lots of knowledge of many subjects, such as chemistry and climate. I believe that a term in such a setting will give students a deeper understanding to the knowledge".

Despite the leaders expressing pluralistic viewpoints about curriculum goals, we find that, based on the second dimension of analysis indexes, the documents, such as course schemes and syllabus, rarely demonstrate a clear and systematic target structure. For ex-

ample, from the document named “Mascot Design and Production at the Citrus Museum”, which we collected from the GJ study tour center, we drew the course objectives below:

- (a) to learn about the mascot, and enrich students’ knowledge;
- (b) to visit the Citrus Museum, and gain an insight into the culture of the museum;
- (c) to design and collaborate in the production of the mascot for the museum;
- (d) and to enhance students’ capabilities for artistic aesthetics and literacy.

It is clear to see the set of curriculum objectives appears to contain three dimensions, knowledge, skills, and culture. However, in fact, the skill dimension describes specific activities rather than learning goals. It should be amended “to develop students’ handicraft skills, innovative design skills, and improve students’ collaboration, communication, even their leadership” or something else.

Another example comes from the YY study tour institute. The education purposes of the course “A Pleasant Journey of the Soya Bean” are as follows:

- (a) to learn about the origins of soy sauce, wine, and vinegar;
- (b) to understand the production process of soy sauce, increasing the knowledge of healthy lifestyle;
- (c) to visit the industry, experience the spirit of artisanship, and understand traditional culture;
- (d) to improve the hands-on ability, understand the innovation of science and technology, and appreciate the charm of old brands.

This set of course objectives appears to be comprehensive, especially at the “emotional attitude and values” aspect. Nevertheless, it doesn’t reflect the unique elements corresponding to the activities, so that it is difficult to find the key target of the course. It gives the audience impression that everything seems to be said, but in fact, nothing is said.

3.2. Curriculum Content of Study Tour

The categories of study tour in China are numerous. As a kind of practical education, the themes are quite different from school subjects. The national policy suggests that the design of content could rely on the natural and cultural heritage resources, proletarian revolutionary spirits resources, great public facilities, industrial and mining enterprises, and other places. Meanwhile, based on the regional and local resources, the targeted content could range from nature, history, and humanities, to the geography, science, and technology, which should highlight several elements, such as the great scenery of the motherland, the long history of the nation, the fine revolutionary traditions, and the modernization achievements. Likewise, the policy of study tour in Zhejiang Province recommends that the content could be selected around the four main themes, the revolutionary journey, the ecological journey, the cultural journey, and the innovative journey.

According to the core course conducted in the 122 study tour centers certificated by the Zhejiang Government, the statistics had been made and the results show that the number of cultural trips was the highest, accounting for 62.0%. The specific contents of cultural trips include, but are not limited to traditional handicraft, intangible cultural heritage, literature, local characteristics and culture, and museums. The second-highest number of outdoor course content was set with ecological themes, accounting for 29.9%. The contents of the ecological dimension mainly rely on natural landscapes, characteristic villages, and ecological reserves. Third is the innovative journey, with learning about new technologies in science, industry, and business, which is accounted for 22.6%. Lastly, the revolutionary journey accounts for only 10.9%. This type of course content relies on specific resources, such as war sites, and sites of important revolutionary meetings. The revolutionary journey is mainly set up to transmit excellent revolutionary spirit, moral character, and values to learners, through reviewing, learning, feeling, and experiencing the revolutionary historical events.

Concretely, each level of study tour center has its own characteristics in the terms of activity theme. For example, there is a lack of course content related to proletarian

revolutionary education in national level camps, but more ecological courses than cultural courses, while the other three levels of study tour centers establish more cultural activities than the ecological one. Besides, there are few innovative activities at national-level bases, accounting for only 15.4%. Then, compared with the number of 60, there are only 9 provincial-level bases that operate activities connected with the proletarian revolutionary education. It can be recognized as a shortage. More details could be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. The numbers of different course themes conducted by different levels of the study tour centers (the total is 122, as the 15 national level centers is first provincial level before).

Items	National-Level Camps (N = 2)	National-Level Bases (N = 13)	Provincial-Level Camps (N = 25)	Provincial-Level Bases (N = 97)
The Revolutionary Journey	0	2	4	9
The Ecological Journey	2	4	7	28
The Cultural Journey	1	9	15	60
The Innovative Journey	1	2	8	20

Source: own work based on the government documents.

Generally, there is a bunch of course content of study tour in Zhejiang Province that ranges from traditional culture to modern society value, from local resources to international popular activities, from history events to modern science technology. Likewise, the various course content adequately develops the resident resources and reflects the indigenous characteristics.

3.3. Teaching Staff of Study Tour

As one of the important modes of practical education, a study tour should be organized by project-based learning, problem-based learning, performing, experiencing, handwork, hiking, and so on, through which the learners could attempt to solve real problems, obtain experience not available in school, grasp the culture, history, spirits, and value with embodiment experience.

However, the data indicates that most outdoor activities are carried out with lecturing or sightseeing, rarely involved with practice or inquiry. Without learning and exploring, the study tour is reduced to traveling, which is the most urgent issue of the study tour in China. Moreover, it is also against the original intention of the education department.

As Parker J. Palme said, “we teach who we are (. . .) knowing my students and my subject depends heavily on self-knowledge” [49]. It is inspired that teachers’ self-knowledge that comes from their education and life experience play a significant role in teaching. However, taking the current teaching staff’s background into consideration, the majority have no related education experience or are unequipped with expertise of teaching. It is hard for them to guide students in inquiry-based learning.

According to the data, the current teaching staff consists of tour guides, veterans, and someone with relevant expertise, such as farmers, inheritors of intangible cultural heritage, forest rangers, and others. However, teaching is a complex human activity, involving multiple elements, such as pedagogy, content knowledge, students’ knowledge, management, evaluation, and so on. Shulman’s concept of pedagogy content knowledge could be used to get a glimpse of nature [50]. However, 96.8% of the respondents indicated that the current practitioners are not professionally aligned. In particular, the lack of expert teachers is the main problem (77.8%). In addition, the low employment and retention rates (44.4%) are the crises that cannot be ignored.

According to the interview, the qualitative data show more details of teacher resources in different study tour centers. For example, the leader of the DQ national-level base said:

The teachers who undertake hiking, cooking, and farming in our base are the local farmers. They have a strong knowledge of agriculture, but lack knowledge of teaching expertise, probably resulting in them not having a good understanding

of the curriculum objectives or being able to organize students for inquiry-based learning activities. Yet the full-time teachers in our base, who have the pedagogical skills, do not know the relevant specialized knowledge. Hence, to bridge this gap, we now regularly organize cross-learning and teaching research for both types of teachers at our base.

As a result, the respondents' satisfaction with the current teaching staff was also low. 51.1% of them believed that their professionalism was not good enough to achieve the objectives of the study tour, and 40.0% believed that the employed were only basically able to complete their teaching tasks. Thus, nearly 90% of the respondents said that professional teacher training was urgently needed, of which, establishing the inner mechanism of teaching research activities was considered the most effective way of improving teacher training (see Figure 1).

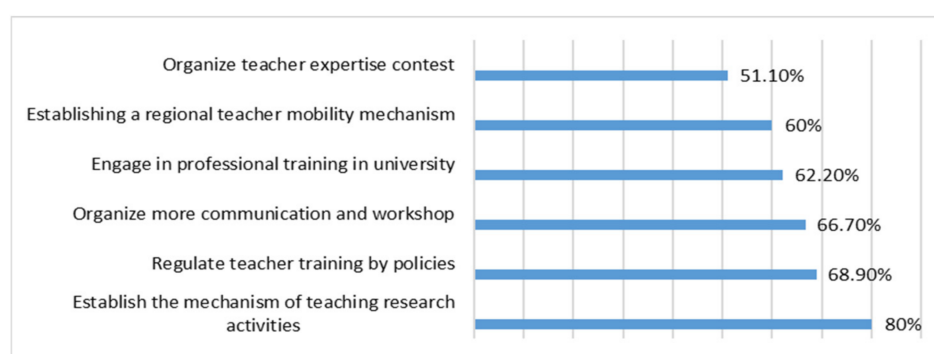


Figure 1. The main strategies for teacher improvement.

3.4. Evaluation of Study Tour

Assessment is an essential part of a course. It is a systematic tool used to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of every part of one course, such as the rationale of objectives, the teaching method for accomplishment, and the learning performance. Moreover, curriculum evaluation will provide feedback and suggestions for course improvement. Therefore, as a reflective tool, the curriculum evaluation is indispensable for course construction and development. For practical education, the learning outcomes are always tacit, so that the evaluation is more important and complicated, in order to comprehensively monitor the learning process and probe students' progress.

To varying degrees, all the levels of study tour centers have set up comprehensive and mutual evaluation schemes for their courses. In terms of evaluation methods, it mainly exploits oral evaluation (74.8%), written evaluation (73.8%), process evaluation (66.7%), outcome evaluation (53.3%), quantitative evaluation (63.6%), and qualitative evaluation (53.3%). In terms of evaluation subjects, most of the institutions adopt a multi-subject mutual evaluation model, in which students, school teachers, teachers in institutions, partner organizations, parents, school leaders, and other stakeholders engage the assessment. Of these, the three categories of people mostly involved are the teachers in institutions (83.2%), school teachers (67.3%), and students (67.3%). Accordingly, the evaluation not only directs at the students, but also at the teachers in institutions, the institutions, the curriculum, and the partners. In terms of evaluation content, there is an outstanding limitation that 89.7% of the evaluation scale focus on mastering measurable skills, followed by the acquisition of explicit knowledge (85.1%), yet there is less space allocated to the implicit learning outcomes, such as the emotional experience, the development of habits, the change of attitudes, and the upgrading of value about the environment and the society.

Moreover, the statistics data show that these study tour institutions are not satisfied with the current course evaluation, which could be attributed to "the evaluation system not professional" (62.2%), "the relative not attaching importance to course evaluation" (56.6%), "the large number of students making the assessment difficult" (51.1%), "the low assessing

literacy of teachers" (40.0%), and "the flowing of students making the sustainability of assessment difficult" (46.7%).

4. Discussion

A great deal of qualitative and quantitative data above could explicitly answer the research questions of the outline of study tour curriculum in China. It is clear that there are numerous study tour courses and activities, which reflects the emerging practical education mode starting to get on the right track. Correspondingly, the data also reveals a bunch of problems. First, it is general that the syllabuses in these study tour centers are not comprehensive and rigorous, which is inconsistent with what the centers' leaders said about the cultivation. And based on the three dimensions of the national education goals, the structure of the curriculum in these centers often mixed the targets with the activities. It is suggested that there is a lack of scientific and operable instruction for these courses. Second, when selecting the curriculum content, it was clear to find that the designers generally refer to the policies, the indigenous resources, students' interests, school subjects, and other elements. By categorizing them into four main themes, we find there is an unbalance, which is the courses about the revolutionary journey presenting an obvious shortage. Hence, in this dimension, more resources about revolutionary history and culture should be explored and developed for study tour curriculum. Third, we find that most outdoor activities are carried out with lecturing or sightseeing, yet exclusive of practice, inquiry, or operation. It is obviously difficult to cultivate students' critical thinking, problem-solving, social skills, environmental responsibility, and emotional health. According to the data, we also find that the most vital attribution is the low professional literacy of the teaching staff, who could not afford a practical education. As an emerging industry, it has not yet developed its own professional training chain. That means the employed are not in the right profession. Meanwhile, the low professional identity leads to low career retention rates, which make the situation worse. Last, in the term of course evaluation, the situation is more complicated. The data show that almost all of the institutions in our investigation have developed a comprehensive and mutual evaluation system, yet, in general, the practice is terrible. The interview data provide us with more details about the course evaluation situation. The interviewees indicated that the evaluation in the study tour centers had not being integrated with the schools'. The separation led to the lack of high stakes for the study tour assessment. Additionally, the teachers in these study tour centers complained that the current evaluation system was not operational, which increased the burdens on teachers. Besides, the lack of a platform to save, share, count, and track the evaluation data, has led to the waste of resources and the absence of reflection. Moreover, the leaders think that the teachers' evaluation literacy is not sufficient for data analysis and synthesis. In summary, although each study tour center has developed a comprehensive and mutual course assessment program, the implementation is not as good as it could be.

5. Conclusions

Recently, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China offered guidance for the revolutionary study tour in one of its replies. It encouraged the local governments to fully take advantage of the plentiful cultural centers, memorials, and museums at all levels to conduct patriotic education, and sublimate students' patriotic consciousness through practical experience. In that context, with practical education being increasingly emphasized, some strategies should be conducted to improve the status of the study tour. On the one hand, the curriculum is the core competency of the study tour that also is the most remarkable character between the study tour and the outdoor travel or adventure. The curriculum, as a guide to teaching and learning activities, largely determines the effectiveness of students' abilities cultivation, environmental awareness and consciousness, and value and attitude sublimating. Therefore, professional collaboration is one of the most important initiatives to enhance the prevailing curriculum. These study tour institutions should seize more opportunities to collaborate with researchers in curriculum development

at universities, making necessary modification leaning on their ideas and suggestions, or inviting them to develop unique curriculum.

On the other hand, establishing closer links with school education is another important strategy for improving the current state for study tour curriculum development. In China, the study tour, as a supplement to the formal school education, has the important responsibility of nurturing students through guiding them to have direct and close contact with nature, environment, and society, and acquire knowledge in an experiential way. However, in the exam-driven situation, the study tour should also be properly aligned with the school education, especially in terms of the curriculum objectives and evaluation. The learning goals of study tour can be appropriately integrated with the content of school subjects. And to avoid becoming a formality merely, the evaluation system should be linked to the school academic assessment, functioning as an important reference factor for students' comprehensive literacy.

The limitation of this study lies in that the data is from only one province in China. Although it includes both qualitative documents and quantitative statistics, its representativeness could be further enhanced. As study tour is becoming increasingly important in China, more provinces have enacted more local policies to support and pilot its development. Therefore, our study could reflect a more diverse picture, and further expand the scope and volume of the data collection.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, F.-R.S. and T.-Z.X.; methodology, T.-Z.X.; formal analysis, F.-R.S. and T.-Z.X.; investigation, T.-Z.X.; literature review, T.-Z.X.; writing—original draft preparation, T.-Z.X.; writing—review and editing, T.-Z.X.; supervision, F.-R.S.; funding acquisition, F.-R.S. and T.-Z.X. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research was funded by The National Social Science Fund of China grant number BHA190127. The APC was funded by the Faculty of Education, Wenzhou University.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to they below to the Zhejiang provincial study tour research center. In order to avoid improper use after disclosure, the data is not publicly available at the request of the center.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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