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The barriers in organizing fieldwork-based learning trips in China: The tourism academics' perspective

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ABSTRACT

Fieldwork has been widely acknowledged as a useful educational practice. However, many academics are still reluctant to take their students to fieldwork. This study aims at identifying the barriers to conducting student fieldwork as perceived by tourism academics working in tertiary education in China. Data were collected using semi-structured in-depth interviews with 21 academics from twelve different tourism colleges. Using NVivo as an analytical tool, barriers were identified in seven areas: institutional system, academics, organization, accident, site, students, and social environment. The findings indicate that academics are aware of these barriers that prevent them from taking students to fieldwork. The study underlines the educational value attached to fieldwork by academics, informing institutes to formulate policies and strategies to increase academics' motivation, and teacher educators to design education programs for academics to be able to organize and manage fieldwork-based learning trips.

1. Introduction

Fieldwork, as a form of pedagogy, has attracted attention from researchers since the beginning of the 1980s (Fido & Gayford, 1982; Mason & Director, 1980; McCaw, 1980; McKenzie, 1986). Fieldwork enhances learning by providing insights different from those acquired in the classroom (Arcodia & Dickson, 2013; Ettenger, 2009), and opportunities to blend theory with practice (Gretzel, Jamal, Stronza, & Nepal, 2009). Fieldwork is also significant for students' acquisition of specialized knowledge, practical technology, useful skills, and the ability to work with peers and academics (Fuller, Gaskin, & Scott, 2003). Although academics agree that fieldwork is a useful educational practice (e.g., Dillon & Dickie, 2012; Dillon et al., 2006; Rickinson et al., 2004), they tend to overlook it in tourism higher education. This paper focuses on the barriers that tourism academics perceive as obstacles in practicing fieldwork as a teaching method.

Previous studies suggested that several factors could lead to an unwillingness to organize fieldworks (Scott, Boyd & Colquhoun, 2015). Some scholars stated that the cost of fieldwork is the pivotal factor (Waite, 2009), while others focused on inadequate academic training (Kendall, Murfield, Dillon, & Wilkin, 2008) and the lack of confidence, ability, and experience (Magntorn & Helldén, 2012; Moseley, Reinke, & Bookout, 2002; Nundy, Dillon, & Dowd, 2009; Tal & Morag, 2009). Researchers have investigated potential factors in the fields of geography, biology, and sociology. However, the relevant literature in the tourism field is relatively limited.

On the other hand, most studies on tourism higher education have been conducted in western, English speaking contexts, while research on this topic in China is deficient. The development of tourism education in China, including the history, reforms, challenges, and opportunities of the subject (Zhao, 1991; Xiao, 1999; Lam & Xiao, 2000; Du, 2003; Zhang & Fan, 2006) has been the focus. Empirical and exploratory studies on the topic are very few and include Gu, Kavanaugh, and Cong (2007) and Zhang, Lu, Hu,

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and Adler (2009).

Fieldwork in primary and secondary schools in China has been promoted by domestic policies for years, such as the "Opinions on promoting the study tour of primary and secondary school students," jointly released by the Department of Education, the National Tourism Administration, and other nine government departments at the end of 2016 (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2016), and the "Curriculum guidelines for comprehensive, practical activities in primary and secondary schools," issued by the Ministry of Education in November 2017 (CME, 2017).

As for tertiary education, according to the China National Tourism Administration (2018), there are 608 universities and 1086 colleges offering tourism undergraduate programs as of 2017. They generally attach more importance to internships, whereas fieldwork, as an important form of experiential learning, is not sufficiently emphasized (Hou, 2004). This paper highlights the significance of fieldwork and explores the barriers to its use in tourism higher education in China.

2. Literature review

2.1. Fieldwork learning as a pedagogy

The notion of "fieldwork" is related to other constructs, such as industry trip, field trip, or field education. These notions trace back to experiential learning, which was proposed based on Dewey's theory of experience (1938). The vision is to integrate classroom and workplace learning to foster complete self-realization (Saltmarsh, 1992). Kolb (1984) defined experience learning as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (p.41). Knowledge is constructed, and learning is achieved through concrete experience and reflection (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Experiential learning is a participatory method of learning involving a variety of capabilities, carried out when a learner processes information in an active and immersive learning environment (Hale Feinstein, Mann, & Corsun, 2002). Experiential learning has been advocated as a powerful tool in education (Daly, 2001; Kennedy, Lawton, & Walker, 2001), and it has been used in a variety of disciplines, including medicine, social studies, and business management.

There are several forms of experiential learning in higher education, including internship, fieldwork, practicum, study tour, and so on. In this study, we focus on fieldwork which is defined by Lonergan and Andresen (1988) as "any arena or zone within a subject where, outside the constraints of the four-walls classroom setting, supervised learning can take place via the first-hand experience" (p.64).

Both fieldwork and internships are conducted outside classrooms, and they provide learning opportunities through first-hand experience. However, they differ in terms of purpose, time duration, and supervision. While an internship aims to provide students with a general experiential perception of the industry and prepare them for future employment (Brown, Willett, Goldfine, & Goldfine, 2018), fieldwork can be considered as a practical section of a course, aimed at offering students a better understanding of classroom knowledge. Internships normally last more than two months, while fieldwork can be carried out on a day trip or last less than a week. Internships require students to work in the industry as trainees, whereas fieldwork is managed and supervised by the teacher as it is a part of the course.

The differences between the study tour and fieldwork are reflected in their duration and purpose. Fieldwork involves course-based short field trips, while a study tour often lasts for more than a week, can take place abroad, and has multiple purposes such as education, travel experience, and providing a competitive advantage for employment (Williams & Best, 2014).

Fieldwork in higher education is often confused with internship or study tour in China, especially in the hospitality and tourism fields. To avoid confusion, in this study, we use the term "fieldwork-based learning trips" (hereafter, FBLTs), which refers to the short trips (normally, lasting less than a week) organized by tourism academics as a practical section of a course. For example, tourism academics of the course *Visitor Attraction Management* take students to a specific tourists site to improve their understanding of relevant knowledge such as the interpretation, planning, financial management, and marketing of visitor attractions.

2.2. The benefits and challenges of fieldwork

The benefits of fieldwork for the students have been well identified, including direct pedagogic benefits, learning in context and a sense of reality, transferable skills, and social aspects (Scott, Fuller, & Gaskin, 2006). According to Livingstone (1999), fieldworks not only facilitate the development of deep learning and transferable skills, but can also be valuable to future studies and employment. As a form of experiential learning, fieldwork can close the gap between the knowledge gained in an academic setting and its practical application. Similarly, FBLTs provide an excellent opportunity for students to work as a team, which is in itself an essential part of personal and social education (Huang, 2011). Fieldworks also assist students in discovering how to purposefully learn outdoors in varying weather conditions, and link theory with observation (Barker, Slingsby, & Tilling, 2002).

Dunphy and Spellman (2009) reported that most students consider fieldwork an effective pedagogic tool, which provides subject-specific and transferable knowledge. The educational benefits of fieldwork include the development of creative and critical thinking skills, practical experience for career development, integration of various course elements, and improved interpersonal skills and self-confidence (Papamarcos, 2002). It can also enhance learners' capacity to evoke higher-order cognitive abilities in terms of problem-solving skills and judgment (Feinstein & Bynner, 2004). Moreover, fieldworks give students the opportunities to develop social networks (Ding & Li, 2012) by forming new friendships (Harris & Lagos, 2015), and interacting with industry employees and local communities. Similar to study tours, fieldwork is beneficial for teachers as it encourages open-mindedness, improvement of professional skills, and construction of strong teacher-student relationships (Lagos, Dolphin, & Kerlin, 2019). The organization of

fieldwork requires the teachers to get in contact with the industry, which is beneficial for their research and career development, and it allows them to improve their capabilities of dealing with all kinds of students' problems apart from knowledge transfer.

Although the benefits of fieldwork in education have been commonly recognized, there are also some disadvantages or challenges (Lagos et al., 2019). The costs of fieldwork are the most obvious disadvantages, not only for higher education institutes (Fuller et al., 2003) but also for students (Dunphy & Spellman, 2009). Another disadvantage is that preparing and managing fieldwork is time-consuming (Fuller et al., 2003). Furthermore, the health and safety risks associated with fieldworks demotivate teachers to incorporate them into their teaching plan (Nash, 2000). It is a big challenge for teachers to take care of a big group of students during fieldwork trips, which involve traveling, accommodation, dining, and multiple activities on sites.

Another issue concerns the learning outcomes of fieldworks due to different learning styles among students (Osland & Rubin, 2001). The success of fieldworks depends also on the teachers' capabilities, including intercultural competence, which is defined as "a way of being that enables both individuals and organizations to respond effectively to people who differ from them" (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2003, p. 5). Moule (2010) confirmed that students are more likely to achieve their full potential with culturally competent teachers. Intercultural competence does not only refer to an international context but also heterogeneous contexts within the same culture (Lindsey et al., 2003). Therefore, even though there are no international students in the class, intercultural competence is still important for teachers to have a better interaction with students from different backgrounds, especially in the fieldwork setting.

2.3. FBLTs in tourism education

FBLTs play an extremely relevant role in tourism education. Tourism scholars have pointed out many advantages of FBLTs (Bauer, 2003; Ritchie, Carr, & Cooper, 2003; Weiler & Kalinowski, 1990). Arcodia and Dickson (2013) noted that FBLTs could strengthen students' theoretical knowledge acquired in classrooms and the understanding of the tourism industry. Ruhanen (2006) stated that FBLTs are valuable as they allow students to experience real-life experiential situations, in which they can apply theory to the real world. Therefore, FBLT, as a form of experiential learning, is a useful educational tool within the tourism and hospitality field (Goodenough & Page, 1993).

Some scholars believe that it is possible to use computer technology to create a 'virtual reality' field course as an alternative and an answer to leaving the relative comfort of the academic hall and laboratory (Kent, Gilbertson, & Hunt, 1997). However, Wong and Wong (2009) argued that it is difficult to simulate an environmental setting or carry out a useful experiment in a laboratory in tourism education. FBLTs can provide students authentic learning experiences in different tourism settings, and technology might not be able to replace real trips. According to Franck and Harhay (2012), FBLTs benefit tourism and hospitality students regarding enhanced learning, interest, and enthusiasm for the subject. Students confirmed that FBLTs could assist them in developing a more thorough understanding of the topic with a more exciting learning approach (Kern & Carpenter, 1984).

Another benefit of FBLTs for tourism students is their contribution to personal and intellectual development (Penington & Wildermuth, 2005; Roberts, 1999). It is argued that students will be more confident in handling issues when they are outside the learning environment, as they have already "practiced" in a non-threatening environment (Armstrong, 2003). Furthermore, FBLTs stress the practical application of knowledge to real-world situations, which improves tourism students' problem-solving skills. With personal and intellectual development, tourism students can master the skills that may be required for their work placements and employment. Thus, FBLTs are also beneficial for the tourism industry sectors, which will employ these students who have worked in "real-life" situations in a simulated environment and have tested their knowledge and skills (Franck & Harhay, 2012).

The connections between academics or institutes and the tourism industry developed on FBLTs are beneficial to both sides. Academics can gain some insights from the tourism practices for their research, knowledge generation, extension, and application, or funding from the industry (Cantor, 1995). On the other hand, tourism practitioners have the opportunity to learn more about the theoretical knowledge applied to their business, or receive valuable advice for their business from the students and academics, or identify and preserve potential qualified employees.

Compared to the studies on the benefits of fieldwork, those on its barriers or challenges are limited, especially in the tourism field. The challenges represented by the financial costs, time, risks, and required capacities and skills for fieldworks have been discussed in section 2.2. As for the perception of the potential barriers related to fieldwork, a questionnaire with secondary-school teachers reported that class size, time, transport, and cost were the most important factors (Fido & Gayford, 1982). Kinchin (1993) added the factor low interest of the academics to the list. Fisher (2001) summarized the barriers as the availability of suitable sites, lack of curriculum specification, complicated requirements of the National Curriculum for practical work, risk of accidents, low perception of the value of fieldworks by students, and no contribution to academic career promotion. Scott, Boyd, Scott, and Colquhoun (2015) classified the barriers into lack of suitable equipment, lack of academic knowledge about the outdoor setting, lack of academic confidence of teaching in an outdoor setting, and university institutional culture.

The potential barriers to fieldwork identified in previous studies are listed in Table 1. However, the question is whether this list is exhaustive and a single barrier or the combination of barriers is relevant in different contexts. As for the tourism field, no studies have addressed the issue of whether there are some different or specific barriers to organize fieldworks in tourism higher education or FBLTs as we defined in section 2.1. Moreover, as mentioned in the introduction section, most studies on fieldwork have been conducted in western contexts. The different political and administration systems and culture in China may lead to different answers to the same question. Comparing China with the United States, Liu, Sun, and Anderson (2013) claimed that the lack of faculty supervisors, inadequate field agencies for placement, and few qualified social workers at field agencies are the top challenges in conducting fieldwork in China. Zhang (1999) argued that fieldwork would not be generalized in geographical education in Chinese secondary schools due to the time cost and lack of qualified teachers. Previous studies on tourism education in a Chinese context have

Table 1
Academics' perception of the relative importance of potential barriers to FBLTs.

Potential barrier	Fido and Gayford (1982)	Kinchin (1993)	Fisher (2001)	Scott et al. (2015)
Large Class Sizes	✓	✓		✓
Time/Timetable	✓	✓	✓	✓
Transport	✓	✓		
Enjoyment/Interest of academic		✓	✓	
Cost	✓		✓	✓
Availability of suitable sites			✓	✓
Lack of curriculum specification			✓	
Complicated requirements of the National Curriculum for Fieldworks			✓	✓
Risk of accidents			✓	✓
Low perception of the value of fieldworks by students			✓	✓
No contribution to academic's career promotion			✓	✓
Lack of suitable equipment				✓
Lack of academic knowledge about the outdoor setting				✓
Lack of academics' confidence of teaching in an outdoor setting				✓
Institutional culture				✓

explored the role of experiential learning in hospitality students engagement (Yan & Cheung, 2012) and the measurement of experiential learning activities in hospitality education (Yang & Cheung, 2014).

3. Methods

3.1. Qualitative research design

The data have been collected through qualitative interviews with tourism academics in higher education institutes (Deery, Jago, & Fredline, 2012) to understand their perspective with flexibility, depth, and realism. Probing questions were asked to acquire more details and achieve complete explanations for the primary questions (Minichiello, Aroni & Alexander, 1990). An example of the used questions is the following: Would you please recall and describe your own experiences, if any, of directly taking students on an FBLT? Please indicate your overall feeling towards FBLTs and explain the reasons. Have you encountered barriers when taking students on an FBLT? If any, please describe these barriers. What are the largest barriers, and what is their origin? What do you think are the reasons for these barriers? Do you know how to remove these barriers?

3.2. Data collection

The sampling process was oriented to collect a demographically representative sample with different levels and backgrounds of institutes and tourism academics. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were both adopted to recruit respondents. The recruitment of the interviewees was ended when information saturation was reached (Jennings, 2005). A total of 21 qualified respondents were interviewed in 2018. Table 2 presents the demographic profiles of the participants.

Among these 21 interviewees, the proportion of females and males was almost equal. With respect to age, twelve of the interviewees were aged between 31 and 40 years, and seven were in the 41–50 years group; the remaining two were 52 and 53 years old. The academic seniority was understood in terms of the following levels: professor, associate professor, and the junior was defined as the lecturer. More than two-thirds of the interviewees (16) had academic seniority, and the remaining five were academic juniors. Almost half of them (10) had more than ten years of teaching experience. The interviewees were from various academic backgrounds, including tourism economics, tourism geography, tourism management, and tourism culture. Their location covered a relatively broad range, with nine from western China, seven from southern China, three from northern China, and two from eastern China.

Nine universities in this sample were ranked as first-class universities (top 39 universities in China, which were certificated as world-class in May 1985), six were second-class (top 116 universities in China which were categorized in 1995 by the project of "build about one hundred outstanding universities towards the 21st century"), four were third-class, and two were fourth-class, that is, public universities and profit colleges.

The data were collected from June to August 2018. The interviews lasted between 40 and 80 minutes. We used face-to-face interviews to ensure that our respondents were free to think deeply and analyze complex issues during the interview. All of the interviews were voice-recorded with the interviewees' permission and then transcribed verbatim in Chinese and translated into English thereafter. The transcripts in English were back-translated into Chinese to ensure accuracy (Chen, Hsu, & Li, 2018). Tools such as NVivo were employed so that researchers were able to better and more imaginatively analyze complex data using deep and prolonged contemplation aided methods.

3.3. Data analysis

According to the requirements of content analysis, coders should first classify the samples to formulate the coding manual

Table 2
Demographic profiles of the interviewees.

No.	Gender	Age	Title	Teaching years	University ranking
1	Male	31	Associate professor	5	first class
2	Female	38	Lecturer	13	first class
3	Female	52	Professor	18	first class
4	Female	47	Associate professor	26	first class
5	Male	33	Lecturer	5	first class
6	Male	33	Associate professor	5	first class
7	Male	44	Deputy Dean	21	first class
8	Male	41	Associate professor	10	third class
9	Male	31	Lecturer	1	second class
10	Male	31	Associate professor	1	first class
11	Male	31	Associate professor	1	first class
12	Male	40	Associate professor	11	second class
13	Male	48	Professor Deputy Dean	16	second class
14	Female	39	Lecturer	6	second class
15	Male	34	Associate professor	7	forth class
16	Female	40	Associate professor	16	second class
17	Female	41	Associate professor	16	third class
18	Female	35	Lecturer	5	third class
19	Male	37	Associate professor	7	second class
20	Female	33	Lecturer	6	forth class
21	Male	53	Professor	28	third class

(Neuendorf, 2016). Hence, we analyzed the sampling information and randomly selected 10% of the texts to form textual categories. Content analysis works as a relatively objective approach to recording and revealing the features of information (Neuendorf, 2016). The key to content analysis is intercoder reliability (Singletary, 1994). The analysis and findings will be unpersuasive if the encoding is unreliable. A reliable encoding requires different coders to produce identical coding results with the same approaches (Wester, 2005). To enhance the reliability of encoding, two researchers encoded the texts in this study. Before encoding, the two coders discussed the specific categories and their definitions in the manual, basic procedures of encoding, and other noteworthy details. Subsequently, two raters selected the samples, encoded them independently, and then discussed the inconsistencies between their coding results, according to which researchers would revise questions, add encoding instructions, rearrange the sequence of the questions, and finally form a coding manual.

We take the site barrier as an example to explain the procedure of encoding and how the final themes from the categories were reached. The coding was based on the semantics of the interviewees. One respondent reported: “It is difficult to get access to the site because it is far away from the university.” The authors coded it as C1 (Difficulty in reaching the site) as open coding. Another respondent stated: “It is a challenge to find appropriate sites for FBLTs.“ It was coded as C2 (Difficulty in finding appropriate sites). Since C1 and C2 are both barriers referring to the site, the authors then integrated them into B1 (site barriers) in axial coding. It was then directly used as A (site) in selective coding due to the presence of one item only in B.

After encoding, the consistency of the two coders needs to be evaluated, and calculating the intercoder reliability of each variable is indispensable to ensure high reliability (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002). The reading order may influence the coding process, which could cause a certain habit or mindset towards the evaluation criteria in coders when they are reading and encoding the text, and a habit would further disturb the consistency and objectivity in the process of coders assessing information (Bryman, 2016). Hence, to avoid the analytical errors caused by the influence of the reading order, in this research, coders disrupted the information order and conducted a random reading. Two researchers in this study independently encoded the texts; subsequently, statistics coding and reliability were recalculated using the entire sample, verifying the reliability between coders, and calculating the mutual discriminant reliability of coders. The test of coder's interactive discriminant reliability revealed that the overall simple percentage agreement had reached a relatively high level, and the coding proved to be acceptable.

4. Results

4.1. Academics’ overall perception of FBLTs

When asked about their perception of FBLT, nearly all interviewees who had the experience mentioned the word “arduous.” It indicates that the image of an FBLT as “a toilsome experience” has been deeply rooted in the minds of academics. However, when asked about why they did not give it up, participants mentioned compulsory school rules. It seems that most participants deemed FBLTs as an enforceable task for annual assessment and frankly admitted that they were unwilling to do that. Most academics perceived FBLTs as discouraging even though they clearly knew that it is meaningful and beneficial for students. Thus, academics tend to use other pedagogies to replace FBLTs despite the requirements of its inclusion in some curricula, such as tourism geography. Some interviewees who had never been on an FBLT also showed similar attitudes. When asked how to spread authentic and vivid knowledge, they responded that they prefer to adopt other easy solutions. The 21 responses generated 15 behavior inhibitor

Table 3
Barrier items generated by the interviews.

Category	Barrier items
Institutional system	1 insufficient funds
	2 red tape
	3 institutional dysfunction
Academics	1 personal characteristics
	2 social capital
	3 pressure
Organization	1 cost
	2 timetable
	3 class size
Accident	1 accident
Site	1 inadequate sites
Students	1 negative behavior and attitude
Social environment	1 inadequate safety education
	2 the negative impact of the Internet
	3 pressure from public opinion

categories (Table 3).

4.2. Institutional system

We defined a series of sub-items under the label of the institutional system, including insufficient funds, red tape, and institutional dysfunction. The foremost barrier to FBLTs is funding shortage. The interviews support the study by Waite (2009), in which funding issues were the most commonly mentioned barrier to outdoor learning. Also, Lock (2010) stated that funding influenced FBLTs provision in his review of over 40 years of FBLTs for students in Britain. Actually, in China, according to the dean and some administrators (within the 21 interviewees), the school does have special fieldwork funding for students, which is not common knowledge among academics. In addition, although some universities have sufficient funds, they have limited time to use such funds. There is a phenomenon named “fund shock,“ which refers to the fact that significant funds need to be spent in a short time. As for FBLTs, it often leads to poor activity organization and, thus, a negative experience for both academics and students.

The red tape of FBLTs, which refers to tedious paperwork, was also perceived as an inhibiting factor. Academics are reluctant to design and organize FBLTs due to the burden of the paperwork (e.g., applications). Furthermore, Chinese universities have a very complicated and strict procedure for reimbursement. Every expenditure must correspond to an invoice, bank transaction record, and statement for it. Any minor mistake associated with the documents or procedure will cause the failure of the reimbursement procedure and extra effort to correct it. This is a big difference compared to the findings of previous studies in western contexts. Reimbursement is becoming the most troublesome issue for academics in China due to the complex system.

Institutional dysfunction refers to the lack of a formal system to support FBLTs. As indicated by the interviewees, there are no clear rules and regulations on FBLTs in terms of application, organization, implementation, evaluation, and rewards. It results in the confusion and demotivation of academics. Moreover, some deans or administrators show a negative attitude toward FBLTs, especially for those institutes that do not have a tradition of experiential learning. Tourism education in China has not formed a custom of FBLTs as geography and botany.

4.3. Academics

Academics’ characteristics have been identified as another vital factor that hinders academics from carrying out FBLTs. It can be roughly divided into three aspects: personal characteristics, social capital, and pressure.

Personal characteristics refer to the educational background, personality, and health situation of the academics. The academics who had FBLTs experience when they were students tend to be positive in organizing FBLTs for their students, especially those who had an overseas educational background in a western country. The benefits they gained in FBLTs or the perception of fieldwork as an effective teaching method encouraged them to apply it in their teaching. This is consistent with the research by Gold et al. (1991) on the benefits of field experience. The personality of academics is also believed to have an influence on their attitude toward FBLTs. For the academics who are outgoing and optimistic, FBLTs is a good opportunity to build up strong teacher-student relationships. On the contrary, the introverted and passive academics consider it as a big challenge that they are reluctant to face. They are afraid of getting into troubles during FBLTs. The health condition of the academics may also be a barrier since the organization and implementation of FBLTs require efforts and energies.

Social capital here mainly stands for the academics’ social connections with the industry. Most institutes do not provide such resources or potential cooperation partners for academics to support the FBLTs. Thus, academics need to search, contact, communicate and negotiate with the administrators of the potential sites directly. This often involves the use of personal social capital, considering the significant role that “guanxi” (“social networks“) plays in China (Gold, Gold, Guthrie, & Wank, 2002). This may turn out to be a barrier to organizing FBLTs, especially for young academics who lack such social capital. Even though some academics

have social capital, they are reluctant to use it too often. As one interviewee stated: “Given that there is no obvious benefit for the sites, I am embarrassed to bother the manager every year. He needs to receive and guide us and present a guest lecture for the students every time.“ Most academics bring a gift or treat the receiver for a meal to repay the favor. Unfortunately, these costs cannot be reimbursed from the institutes. It leads to the unwillingness of academics in organizing FBLTs, especially given that they do not contribute to their career advancement or obtain any rewards.

It is not surprising that pressure was highlighted as an inhibitor to develop and deliver FBLTs, consistently with the study of Lock (2010). Academics in Chinese universities are often under great pressure to produce research outcomes and academic projects. Apart from teaching, research achievements (normally publications) and academic projects with funds are directly related to the job title and career-advancement, and even salary. Therefore, academics do not have enough time to undertake FBLTs.

4.4. Organization

Organizational barriers to FBLTs include costs, timetable, and class size. The costs of FBLTs include the costs of transport, accommodation, and sometimes entrance fees and guide speaker fees, or even communication costs. It relates to the funding issues of the institutes discussed above. The inhibiting power of costs is different for academics from different universities. Those from first and second-class universities with relative abundant funds did not perceive costs as an important inhibitor; the issue for them was rather the reimbursement. However, academics from third and fourth-class universities perceived financial costs as a strong inhibitor of FBLTs due to the poor budget situation of their institutes. What is worse, sometimes the academics just assume the costs are too high for the institutes to afford since they are not aware of the special funding assigned to FBLTs every year by the university.

Concerning timetables, FBLTs often conflict with other activities in the curriculum, especially when the destination is far from the campus or the FBLT lasts longer. As one academic claimed: “It takes a long time, so it requires lots of communication and coordination work. Since you cannot go on an FBLT in the 2 h of the normal class time, even for the one-day trip, you have to consult other teachers who have class on that day to switch to other days.” The finding supports previous studies that the longer the fieldwork is, the less likely it is to be held (Fido & Gayford, 1982). Respondents also indicated the problems of organizing FBLTs on weekends or holidays for the students and the academics, who are reluctant to work on non-working days because of the extra responsibilities in case of accidents. Furthermore, some academics stated that the time schedule for the course is too limited to arrange an FBLT. They consider theoretical knowledge prior to FBLTs.

As for the class size, this is expected to be a barrier, as indicated by several previous studies (Fido & Gayford, 1982; Kinchin, 1993; Scott et al., 2015). A higher number of students leads to higher costs and a more complicated organization. A class size of 60–120 students is very common in Chinese universities. Although teaching in the classroom might not be a problem, the number of students becomes an issue when planning FBLTs. Some academics felt that it is easy to become a monodrama of the FBLTs when the group is too large to gather around them. Moreover, academics cannot take care of too many students outdoor, especially in the open natural sites, with falling stones and slippery roads.

4.5. Accident

Another frequently mentioned perceived inhibitor was the possibility of accidents, regardless of the level of universities and academics. Safety is a vital concern in FBLTs, which confirms the results of previous research (Fisher, 2001). Since the students are exposed to many environmental variables during FBLTs, such as bad weather, traffic, natural conditions, and so on, the possibility of accidents is much higher than staying in classrooms. The accidents include physical, mental, and property-related damages. Most respondents indicated that they could not stand the idea of what would happen in case of accidents, considering the reaction of students’ parents, the university, and the public. Once a severe accident occurs, such as the death of a student, the leading academics need to take responsibility for it, which may cause damages to their career. Therefore, academics would rather choose other ways of teaching to replace FBLTs. This might also be attributed to the risk-avoidance tendency of the Chinese culture that limits FBLTs in China.

4.6. Site

Most respondents agreed that the lack of adequate sites was a barrier. This confirms the results of Magntorn and Helldén (2012), which reported that the scarcity of high-quality sites was the second most general barrier to taking students on FBLTs. A suitable site is necessary for students to have a valuable and interesting experience, and thus, good learning outcomes. However, it is not always an easy job to find appropriate sites for FBLTs. First, since the institutes do not provide potential sites, academics have to search and build up connections by themselves. While this might not be the foremost barrier for senior academics, it tends to be a big challenge for junior academics, who typically cannot rely on an extended social network. Second, suitable sites are not always at a short distance from the campus, and the transport and accommodation expenses increase, leading the academics to give up the site and, in turn, FBLT. Third, different sites are required for different courses and learning objectives. It means that identifying one suitable site is not enough since almost all tourism academics in China are in charge of two or more courses. Even if one site was enough, the academics are reluctant to repeat the same experience every year, as mentioned in relation to the social capital issue. This leads to another site barrier mentioned by academics, that is, the limited benefits that FBLTs convey for the sites. While FBLTs are beneficial to students, obviously, the sites gain little from it. Although the connection with universities may provide potential human resources, the sites have no benefit in the short term. On the contrary, they have to receive the academics and students, showing them around,

providing guest lectures, and so on. Consequently, the site managers tend to be against this kind of cooperation.

4.7. Students

Another inhibiting factor was represented by students' negative behavior and attitudes, although this was not a challenge for all academics. Some behaviors, such as destroying local facilities, leaving and acting alone, not following the rules and recommendations of academics, may result in damage to academics' enthusiasm and, then, become a barrier. Interviewees noted that there is nothing they can do about it except for loudly and repeatedly disciplining the students. Several academics attribute the bad behaviors to students' negative attitudes towards FBLTs. However, previous studies have confirmed students' positive perception of FBLTs (Arcodia, Cavlek, & Abreu-Novais, 2014; Hawkins & Weiss, 2005). Therefore, the improper behaviors might not reflect a negative attitude towards FBLTs, but the failure to understand the real thoughts of students. As for the context of this study, China is a geographically vast country with multiple subcultures; therefore, the students may be quite different in terms of learning. Academics should develop intercultural competences and master communication strategies to deal with this issue.

4.8. The social environment

This barrier includes inadequate safety education, the negative impact of the Internet, and pressure from public opinion. Safety education seems to be an overlooked issue by both schools and parents in China. The single evaluation method of students by exams forces schools to attach much importance to the curriculum, while devalues other kinds of education like safety education. Specific programs to instruct students about how to escape from an earthquake, fire, and other accidents are rare in Chinese schools. This factor turned out to have a negative impact on the implementation of FBLTs since students have little knowledge of how to avoid risks and protect themselves. On the other hand, the one-child policy, according to which a couple could have only one child, made the situation even worse. The only children receive excessive care and are even spoiled and overprotected, which leads to a serious lack of safety sense and education.

An interesting and noteworthy finding was the negative influence of the Internet, thanks to which the news of an accident spreads much more easily than before. However, very often, the truth is distorted or exaggerated, and some people with an ulterior motive mislead the public on purpose. Unfortunately, most people are not capable of critical thinking and tend to believe that, if an accident occurs, the schools and academics should be blamed for that, especially when the parents spread the news from their perspective. The academic who organized the FBLT will suffer from a great pressure from the public opinion, since sometimes they are even misunderstood by their colleagues, relatives, and friends, and the universities and institutes are likely to punish the academics for satisfying the public. All these aspects will negatively affect the enthusiasm of academics to carry out FBLTs. Therefore, it is not surprising that many respondents expressed their thoughts about the immaturity of the social environment to take FBLTs.

5. Conclusions

This study revealed that academics are afraid of a series of potential barriers in organizing FBLTs in China, which are related to the institutional system, the academics themselves, organization, accident, site, students, and social environment. These barriers indeed prevent tourism academics from organizing FBLTs. This study confirmed the findings of previous studies, which pointed out the barriers represented by the cost, class size, risk of accidents, lack of suitable sites, and so on. Meanwhile, it identified some barriers that are specific to the Chinese context, that is, red tape, institutional dysfunction, social capital, and social environment.

The following suggestions are made to overcome the barriers and increase the number of FBLTs in tourism higher education in China. The first suggestion concerns the institutional system, as it seems to be the source of some barriers. The precondition of FBLTs is the availability of sufficient funds. Institutes should not only allocate a special fund for FBLTs but also manage it reasonably, rather than producing a "fund shock" as mentioned above. Moreover, the information about the availability of these funds (e.g., the amount, application process, and possible use) should circulate among the academics. This administrative measure will weaken the barriers represented by the costs of the organization and the red tape. The paperwork for the reimbursement should be also optimized. The use of a network platform similar to an online self-service reimbursement can be developed to improve efficiency. FBLTs assistants, who can support the academics in preparing the paperwork, should be provided by the institutes.

With regard to the institutional dysfunction, the deans and administrators should be aware of the significance of FBLTs and show a supportive attitude. The institutes need to develop clear rules and regulations regarding FBLTs, including the application, implementation, evaluation prohibition, and curriculum specification, which should incorporate FBLTs. Having a better design and organization of FBLTs would greatly help academics. Also, it is very important that the response and responsibility for possible accidents are declared. This can alleviate the academics' worries of having to take responsibility if accidents occur. Without the risk of too much pressure from students' parents, the university, and the public, academics will be more positive in implementing FBLTs. This is extremely important under the circumstance of the immatureness of the social environment to support FBLTs. In case of accidents, the institute or university should post a declaration, which explains the event and responsibilities allocation to the public, rather than wait until the news of the event spreads and try to calm down the public by punishing the academics involved.

A clear statement of the curriculum incorporating FBLTs is useful to avoid that academics replace them with other teaching activities. Meanwhile, the institutes should guarantee the benefits of academics in implementing FBLTs. The extra workload involved in organizing and implementing FBLTs should be accounted for compared to teaching in the classroom. Academics who make achievements on FBLTs need to be awarded, and the evaluation for career-advancements should incorporate this component beyond

publications and research projects. This would make the practice of FBLTs more feasible for academics.

The institutes should develop a system to support academics in implementing FBLTs. The role of FBLTs assistants should not be limited to helping the academics to deal with the paperwork, but also to organize and manage the group, especially when the class size is large. More assistance is required for older academics or the ones with health issues. Also, the institutes should coordinate the timetable to ensure that sufficient time is available for FBLTs. Academics who are in charge of different courses can cooperate in organizing FBLTs. Combined FBLTs are recommended as they can cover different learning objectives for more than one course.

As for the sites for FBLTs, the institutes should provide some fixed long-term partners for different learning objectives. Therefore, academics would not need to use their personal social capital to negotiate with potential sites. This is particularly relevant for the junior academics, who have typically a limited social capital. The partnership between institutes and sites can be a win-win relationship. Sites can gain benefits in terms of reputation (being the fieldwork base of universities), potential human resource (graduated students of partner universities), professional suggestions for the site management and development (research projects on specific issues). This would also offer the academics the connections with the industry and opportunities for applied research, and thus increase their motivation to organize FBLTs.

The suggestions concern also the teacher educators regarding FBLTs. As Lagos et al. (2019) claimed, we cannot take it for granted that teachers are experts on fieldwork since the implementation of an FBLT is not an easy job. A series of training workshops on FBLT including the design, application, organization, risk management, and so on, is necessary to provide the academics, especially the young ones who lack relevant experience, with sufficient knowledge. In fact, the care and development of younger tourism academics are vital to the success of the education of tourism students (Pearce, 2007). Academics can learn how to be more open-minded and build strong teacher-student relationships (Lagos et al., 2019) from the workshops on FBLT. Teacher educators can also offer study abroad programs for Chinese tourism academics, which will enhance their intercultural competence (He, Lundgren, & Pynes, 2017; Paik et al., 2015). Consequently, academics will be capable of better interacting with different students from variable Chinese subcultures during FBLTs. This would be an effective way to relieve the academics' from the perceived barrier of students' attitude during FBLTs.

Similar to most empirical studies with a limited research scope, this study also has some limitations that deserve future research attention. In this study, some academics considered students' improper behaviors as the consequence of a negative attitude toward FBLTs, and this influenced their enthusiasm in the organization. However, this contradicts previous studies, which confirm students' positive feelings toward fieldwork (Arcodia et al., 2014; Hawkins & Weiss, 2005). Since these studies were based on a western context, future research on FBLTs from the Chinese students' perspective is required to investigate whether there is any difference. Another future research direction concerns the exploration of the opinions of people from the industry, specifically the managers of the sites, in terms of their concerns, perceived benefits, and suggestions on FBLTs.

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