

## PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN'S VIEWS ON TOURISM

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**Annotation:** This article explores the psychological and pedagogical aspects of preschool children's perceptions of tourism and its role in early childhood development. It examines how tourism-related experiences—such as excursions, nature walks, cultural visits, and role-playing activities—can influence children's cognitive, emotional, and social growth. From a psychological perspective, tourism fosters curiosity, sensory engagement, imagination, and adaptability, while strengthening communication and problem-solving skills. From a pedagogical standpoint, it serves as a valuable tool for experiential learning, integrating geography, history, cultural studies, and environmental awareness into age-appropriate educational activities. The article also addresses the challenges of organizing tourism for preschool children, including safety considerations, attention span limitations, and the need for active parental and educator involvement. The findings highlight that well-planned tourism activities, aligned with children's developmental needs, can enrich their worldview and contribute to holistic education.

**Keywords.** Preschool education; tourism in early childhood; psychological development; pedagogical methods; experiential learning; cultural awareness; environmental education; child development; social skills; preschool tourism activities

**Introduction.** In the modern world, tourism is increasingly recognized not only as an economic activity but also as an important cultural and educational phenomenon. While traditionally associated with adults, tourism is now gaining relevance in the context of early childhood development. Introducing preschool children to tourism—whether through short trips, excursions, or interactive learning—can foster curiosity, broaden their worldview, and promote social, emotional, and cognitive growth.

From a psychological perspective, the preschool years (ages 3–6) represent a critical period for shaping perceptions and attitudes. At this stage, children are naturally curious, eager to explore their surroundings, and highly responsive to sensory experiences. Exposure to new environments, cultures, and natural landscapes can stimulate imagination, enhance communication skills, and build early forms of cultural awareness. Such experiences can also help develop adaptability, resilience, and problem-solving abilities.

From a pedagogical standpoint, tourism-related activities can be integrated into educational programs as part of experiential learning. Through guided excursions, role-playing, storytelling, and interactive games, educators can help children acquire basic knowledge about geography, history, and cultural traditions in an age-appropriate way. These activities not only support intellectual development but also contribute to moral and aesthetic education by fostering respect for nature, heritage, and diversity.

In this context, understanding the psychological and pedagogical characteristics of preschool children's views on tourism is essential. By identifying their needs, interests, and developmental capabilities, educators and parents can design tourism-based activities that are engaging, safe, and educationally meaningful. This article explores these characteristics, drawing on research in

developmental psychology, pedagogy, and tourism studies, and offers practical recommendations for incorporating tourism elements into preschool education.

**Literature analysis.** Research on preschool education emphasizes the importance of experiential learning, where children gain knowledge through direct interaction with their environment. According to Piaget's cognitive development theory, preschool-aged children (ages 3–6) are in the preoperational stage, characterized by symbolic thinking, imagination, and limited logical reasoning (Piaget, 1962). Tourism activities—such as guided excursions, nature exploration, and cultural visits—provide rich sensory input and concrete experiences that align with these developmental characteristics.

From a psychological standpoint, Vygotsky (1978) highlights the role of social interaction and the “zone of proximal development” in learning. Tourism-based activities encourage cooperative learning, language development, and cultural awareness, as children share experiences with peers and adults. Furthermore, research by Falk and Dierking (2016) shows that informal learning environments, such as museums, parks, and heritage sites, enhance memory retention and foster curiosity.

Pedagogically, tourism serves as a platform for integrating interdisciplinary learning. According to Bruner (1996), educational content should be presented in ways that are meaningful and relevant to children's lives. Tourism activities achieve this by connecting classroom knowledge—such as geography, history, and environmental science—to real-world contexts. Studies by Stone and Petrick (2013) also point out that tourism for young children promotes empathy, environmental responsibility, and intercultural understanding when designed with age-appropriate methods.

However, several authors (Brooks, 2011; Carr, 2011) stress that preschool tourism must consider children's limited attention spans, need for physical safety, and developmental differences. Activities should be short, interactive, and supported by familiar adults to ensure engagement and emotional security. In addition, structured reflection after tourism experiences—such as storytelling, drawing, or role-playing—can help children consolidate their learning.

Overall, the literature confirms that tourism, when adapted to the cognitive, emotional, and social needs of preschoolers, is a powerful educational tool. It not only enhances academic readiness but also nurtures life skills, cultural sensitivity, and environmental awareness.

**Materials and Methods.** This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design combined with elements of case study methodology to explore the psychological and pedagogical characteristics of preschool children's perceptions of tourism. The approach was chosen to capture rich, detailed insights into children's views and to understand how these views relate to their developmental characteristics.

**Participants** The study involved 30 preschool children aged 4–6 years from two urban kindergartens and one rural kindergarten. The sample was selected using purposive sampling to ensure diversity in socio-cultural backgrounds. Participation was voluntary, and written consent was obtained from parents or legal guardians.

Designed with age-appropriate, open-ended questions to elicit children's ideas about tourism, favorite places, and expectations from trips. Researchers observed children during simulated tourism activities (e.g., guided nature walk, museum visit) to note emotional responses, social interaction, and engagement. Children were provided with pictures of various tourist destinations

and activities to prompt discussion and facilitate expression of ideas. Participants were asked to draw a “trip” they would like to take and explain their drawing, allowing for assessment of imaginative and cognitive aspects.

The study followed ethical guidelines for research with minors. Parental consent and child assent were obtained. The activities were designed to be safe, enjoyable, and aligned with preschool curricula. Children’s identities were anonymized in all reporting.

**Discussion.** The findings of this study provide important insights into how preschool children perceive tourism and how these perceptions are shaped by their psychological development and pedagogical environment. The results indicate that children aged 4–6 demonstrate an emerging understanding of tourism as both a recreational and educational activity. Many children associated tourism with enjoyable experiences such as visiting parks, zoos, and museums, yet they also recognized its role in learning about new places, animals, and cultures.

From a psychological perspective, the children’s responses reflect the characteristics of the *preoperational stage* as defined by Piaget (1964), where thinking is dominated by imagination, vivid imagery, and egocentric viewpoints. Their drawings and verbal descriptions often included fantastical elements—such as flying to destinations in balloons or visiting imaginary animals—indicating the centrality of creative thinking at this developmental stage. However, some children demonstrated early forms of logical reasoning, particularly when explaining why certain trips were enjoyable or educational.

From a pedagogical perspective, the study confirms the role of guided learning and experiential activities in shaping children’s tourism-related understanding. Consistent with Vygotsky’s (1978) *sociocultural theory*, children’s knowledge expanded through social interaction with peers, teachers, and tour guides. Structured pre-trip activities and post-trip reflections appeared to strengthen retention of new information and broaden conceptual understanding of tourism.

Interestingly, the urban–rural difference emerged as a factor. Urban children tended to associate tourism with cultural and technological experiences (museums, aquariums, city landmarks), whereas rural children emphasized nature-based tourism (forests, rivers, farms). This aligns with the findings of Glover and Prideaux (2009), who noted that children’s tourism preferences are often influenced by their immediate living environment.

The results also underscore the emotional dimension of children’s tourism perceptions. Positive emotions such as excitement, curiosity, and happiness were dominant in both observational data and self-reports, supporting earlier research by Carr (2011) on the role of affect in children’s travel experiences. Emotional engagement appeared to enhance not only enjoyment but also learning outcomes.

From an educational policy standpoint, these findings suggest that integrating tourism-related activities into preschool curricula can enhance both cognitive and socio-emotional development. Activities such as short field trips, virtual tours, and themed classroom projects can foster curiosity, creativity, and social skills. Furthermore, exposure to diverse forms of tourism may help bridge the gap between urban and rural experiences, promoting more balanced learning opportunities.

Overall, this study adds to the growing literature on child-focused tourism education, highlighting the importance of early childhood experiences in forming positive and informed attitudes toward travel and cultural exploration. Future research could examine longitudinal

effects, tracking how early tourism exposure influences later travel behavior, environmental awareness, and cultural sensitivity.

**Conclusion.** This study explored the psychological and pedagogical aspects of preschool children's perceptions of tourism, revealing that even at an early age, children form meaningful—though often imaginative—understandings of travel and exploration. The findings confirm that their views are shaped by developmental characteristics, social interactions, and environmental context.

Psychologically, children in the preoperational stage demonstrate curiosity, creativity, and emotional engagement when discussing tourism. Their descriptions often combine real-life experiences with imaginative elements, reflecting the cognitive traits typical of early childhood. Pedagogically, guided activities, storytelling, and direct experiences significantly enrich children's understanding of tourism, helping them connect recreational activities with learning opportunities.

Differences between urban and rural children highlight the influence of lived environments on tourism perceptions: urban children gravitate toward cultural and technological attractions, while rural children focus on nature-based experiences. This suggests the need for diverse and inclusive tourism education strategies in preschool programs.

The research emphasizes that tourism-related activities, whether through actual trips or classroom simulations, can foster cognitive growth, cultural awareness, and socio-emotional development in young learners. By integrating such experiences into early childhood education, educators and policymakers can nurture not only future travelers but also globally minded citizens.

Future research should examine the long-term impact of early tourism experiences, as well as develop pedagogical models that balance entertainment, education, and cultural sensitivity. Ultimately, fostering positive and informed views of tourism in preschool years can contribute to a lifelong appreciation for exploration, learning, and cultural exchange.

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