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EDUCATION INFLATION IN STUDY TOURS

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Abstract: With the in-depth promotion of the concept of quality education, study tours in my country have developed rapidly, but in practice, the phenomenon of "education inflation" has emerged: the cost of study tours has continued to rise, while the value of education has not increased accordingly, and even problems such as form outweighing content, overpackaging and exaggerated publicity have emerged. This paper first explains the concepts of study tours and education inflation and the relationship between the two, and analyzes its performance characteristics in terms of inflated costs, blind comparisons, uneven quality, and utilitarian evaluation; then analyzes the causes such as market supply and demand imbalance, institutional profit-seeking, and government performance-driven; then through current situation analysis and effect evaluation, it reveals the multiple impacts of education inflation on the quality of study tour education, students' knowledge and practical ability, and educational equity; finally, from the three levels of policy, school and society, comprehensive countermeasures such as building access standards, strengthening supervision, optimizing curriculum design, teacher training and home-school cooperation are proposed. Research shows that only through multi-party collaboration and systematic governance can the vicious cycle of "education inflation" and market expansion in study tours be broken, and study tours can be promoted to return to the essence of education and achieve healthy, balanced and sustainable development.
Keywords: Study tour; Education inflation; Cost-value imbalance; Curriculum design; Education equity; Comprehensive quality training

1 INTRODUCTION

With the continuous advancement of educational reform in China, the concept of quality education has gained widespread acceptance. Study travel, as an educational approach integrating learning, practice, and travel, has emerged accordingly. In 2016, the Ministry of Education and 10 other departments issued the "Implementation Opinions on Promoting Study Travel for Primary and Secondary School Students," explicitly stating that study travel should be incorporated into the teaching plans of primary and secondary schools to promote its healthy and rapid development. Since then, study travel has rapidly gained popularity nationwide, becoming an innovative form of education that bridges school-based and extracurricular learning, widely embraced by schools, parents, and students. From the school perspective, study travel enriches the curriculum system, providing students with opportunities to step outside the campus, connect with nature, and understand society, thereby fostering students' comprehensive qualities and innovative capabilities. Parents also hope that through study travel, children can learn through practice, broaden their horizons, and enhance their competitiveness. For students, study travel is full of novelty and appeal, stimulating their learning interest and desire for exploration. However, behind the vigorous development of study travel, several issues have gradually surfaced. Among them, the phenomenon of "educational inflation" deserves particular attention. In the economic field, inflation refers to an excessive issuance of currency beyond actual demand, leading to currency devaluation and persistent price increases. In the field of education, "educational inflation" can be understood as a situation where, despite continuous increases in educational resource inputs, educational outcomes fail to achieve corresponding and effective improvement, or even experience quality decline and a focus on form over substance. In study travel, this "educational inflation" manifests as continuously rising costs without matching educational value, raising widespread concerns across society. This study aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of the specific manifestations, causes, and impacts of "educational inflation" in study travel. Based on this analysis, targeted solutions will be proposed to promote the healthy and sustainable development of study travel. In terms of theoretical significance, current research on study travel mainly focuses on its educational value, curriculum design, and implementation models, with relatively little attention paid to the issue of "educational inflation." This study will fill this gap, enriching and refining the theoretical framework of study travel and providing new perspectives and insights for future research. In terms of practical significance, by examining the issue of "educational inflation" in study travel, this research can help schools, parents, and study travel institutions better recognize the existing shortcomings in current practices. It will guide them in rationally planning and organizing study activities to enhance the quality and effectiveness of study travel. Simultaneously, it will assist relevant government departments in strengthening market supervision, standardizing market order, safeguarding students' legitimate rights and interests, and steering the study travel industry toward a more professional, standardized, and healthy direction. Abroad, some developed countries (e.g., outdoor education in the United States, educational visits in the United Kingdom) have a long history of conducting study travel, with relatively in-depth research. Some scholars have noted the positive effects of study travel on promoting students' cognitive development and social skills. However, research on issues analogous to "educational inflation" remains scarce. Some studies indicate that with the commercialization of study travel, problems such as

misalignment between activity content and educational goals, and inflated prices may arise, though systematic theories and findings have yet to be established. Domestically, with the rise of study travel in recent years, related research has gradually increased. Many scholars have explored the connotations, characteristics, and educational functions of study travel, emphasizing its importance in cultivating students' core competencies. However, research on "educational inflation" in study travel is still nascent. Some educators and researchers have begun to recognize phenomena such as formalism, high costs with low quality, but most remain at the stage of describing phenomena and raising problems, lacking in-depth causal analysis and effective solution strategies. Overall, current research on "educational inflation" in study travel, both domestically and internationally, remains in its infancy. Further in-depth exploration is necessary to provide more scientific and effective theoretical support and practical guidance for addressing this issue.

2 MECHANISM ANALYSIS OF STUDY TOURS INDUCING EDUCATIONAL INFLATION

2.1 Core Elements of Study Tours

Study tours are an off-campus educational activity that combines research-based learning with travel experiences. Guided by the concept of quality-oriented education, they emphasize students' practice and exploration in authentic contexts. The "Opinions on Promoting Study Tours for Primary and Secondary School Students" point out that study tours are off-campus educational activities, organized and arranged in a planned manner by education departments and schools, conducted through collective travel and centralized accommodation, combining research-based learning with travel experiences. They represent an innovative form connecting in-school education and out-of-school education, are an important part of educational teaching, and serve as an effective means of comprehensive practical education. In essence, study tours are not simple tourism activities but a learning process with clear educational purposes. They break the spatial constraints of traditional classroom teaching, allowing students to leave the campus, enter nature, society, and historical and cultural sites, and carry out research-based learning during travel to acquire knowledge, cultivate abilities, and enhance quality[1].

Study tours can broaden students' knowledge across multiple fields such as natural sciences, human history, and social life. For example, during a study tour to a science museum, students can directly learn about advanced scientific technologies and principles, stimulating their interest in science and desire to explore; during a study tour to historical and cultural relics, students can personally experience the vicissitudes of history and gain a deep understanding of historical events and cultural traditions. At the same time, students can develop various practical skills during study tours, such as observation skills, research and investigation skills, teamwork skills, and communication and expression skills. Through study tours, students learn to apply scientific methods for research-based learning. They need to independently determine research topics, design research plans, collect and analyze data, and draw research conclusions. In this process, students gradually master the general methods and steps of scientific research and cultivate the ability to think independently and solve problems. For example, in an ecological environment study tour, students can be divided into groups to investigate the local ecological environment, use methods such as measurement, sampling, and data analysis to understand the current status and issues of the ecological environment, and propose corresponding protection recommendations. Study tours help cultivate students' sense of social responsibility, spirit of teamwork, and patriotic feelings. During collective travel, students need to cooperate and help each other to complete various tasks, thereby enhancing their sense of teamwork and collective honor. At the same time, as students learn about the magnificent mountains and rivers of their country, its long history, and splendid culture, they will be inspired with love for their country, enhancing national pride and confidence. Moreover, study tours allow students to get close to nature and understand society, cultivating respect for nature and care for society in their attitudes and values.

iiMedia Consulting data show that the market size of the study tour industry was 90.9 billion yuan in 2022, 146.9 billion yuan in 2023—a year-on-year increase of 61.6%—and reached 300 billion yuan in 2024 (see Figure 1). According to questionnaire surveys, over 90% of families participate in at least one study tour each year, and one-third of families arrange 2–3 study tour activities annually, including projects organized by schools and those organized by social institutions; among these families, nearly 70% spend more than 1,000 yuan per trip on study tours for their children, and one-quarter of families spend over 5,000 yuan per trip.

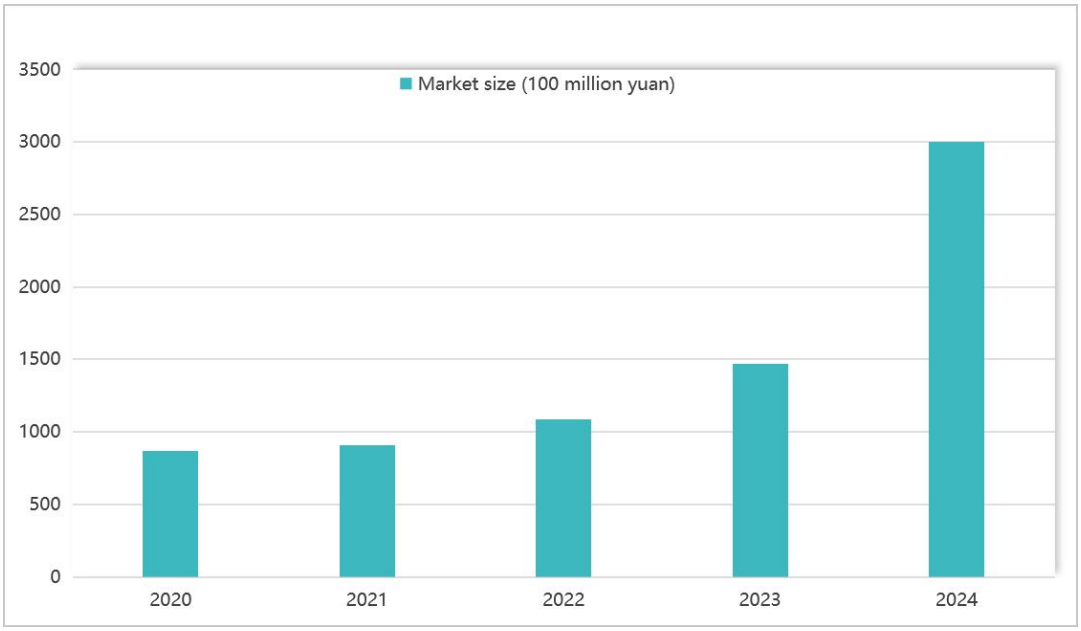

Figure 1 Changes in Market Size of Study Tours from 2020 to 2024

Study tours are typically organized and arranged uniformly by schools or educational institutions. Schools, based on the teaching plan and students' actual circumstances, formulate study tour schemes and select appropriate destinations and activities. In the organizational process, schools assign teachers to lead the group, ensuring both the safety of students and the effectiveness of learning. At the same time, schools also cooperate with travel agencies and study tour bases to jointly carry out study tour activities. In addition, some families independently organize parent–child study tours, allowing children to learn and experience under the accompaniment of their parents. The content of study tour activities is rich and diverse, covering multiple fields such as natural sciences, human history, and social life. Common types of study tour activities include natural ecology study, history and culture study, technological innovation study, and Red Education study. For example, natural ecology study activities can involve taking students to nature reserves, botanical gardens, or zoos to observe the growth habits of plants and animals and to understand the balance and protection of ecosystems; history and culture study activities can involve organizing students to visit museums, ancient architecture, and historical sites to experience the charm of history and culture; technological innovation study activities can lead students to science museums, research institutes, and high-tech enterprises to learn about the cutting-edge developments in technology and to experience the achievements of technological innovation; Red Education study activities can arrange for students to visit revolutionary memorial halls, martyrs' cemeteries, and revolutionary bases to commemorate the revolutionary martyrs and to inherit Red genes.

In study tours, the teaching methods employed mainly include experiential teaching, inquiry-based teaching, and project-based learning. Experiential teaching allows students to participate in various activities firsthand, acquiring knowledge and skills through personal experience. For example, in agricultural study activities, students can personally engage in farm work, experience the processes of planting and breeding, and understand the basic knowledge and skills of agricultural production. Inquiry-based teaching guides students to independently raise questions and solve problems, cultivating their inquiry abilities and innovative thinking. For instance, in geological study activities, teachers can guide students to observe the characteristics of rocks, raise questions about the formation and evolution of rocks, and then let students investigate and seek answers through literature review and fieldwork. Project-based learning allows students to use projects as a vehicle, completing project tasks through teamwork and thereby cultivating their collaborative abilities and comprehensive practical skills. For example, in urban planning study activities, students can be divided into groups to carry out urban planning projects, researching and designing aspects such as functional layout, transportation planning, and environmental protection, ultimately producing an urban planning proposal[2].

Quality-oriented education emphasizes the cultivation of students' holistic development, including moral character, scientific and cultural literacy, physical and mental health, and artistic aesthetic quality. As a comprehensive educational activity, study tours can organically integrate multiple educational elements, providing students with a platform for all-round development. Through study tours, students not only acquire knowledge and skills but also cultivate attitudes, values, and enhance overall quality. For example, during study tours, students must adhere to social ethics and protect the environment, which helps cultivate their moral character; as students learn knowledge in natural sciences and history and culture, they can improve their scientific and cultural literacy; students can also engage in outdoor activities to exercise their bodies and strengthen their physical fitness, contributing to the development of physical and mental health; meanwhile, in appreciating natural landscapes and works of art, students can cultivate their artistic aesthetic quality. School-based education is primarily classroom teaching, focusing on the transmission of knowledge and theoretical learning; off-campus education, on the other hand, places greater emphasis on practical experience and social participation. Following the logic of "what kind of person to cultivate,""how to cultivate people," and "how to guarantee the quality of cultivation," a talent cultivation framework for study tours has been

constructed(Figure 2). In general, this cultivation framework can be described as: to achieve the goal of training study tour professionals who understand education, are skilled in tourism, and are capable of practice, multiple certificate requirements—such as teacher qualification certificates and professional skill certificates—are set as graduation requirements; a "dual-track" cultivation path is constructed in which universities and enterprises jointly train talent; and a "four-in-one" guarantee mechanism is established, in which the government, universities, enterprises, and industry associations collaborate.

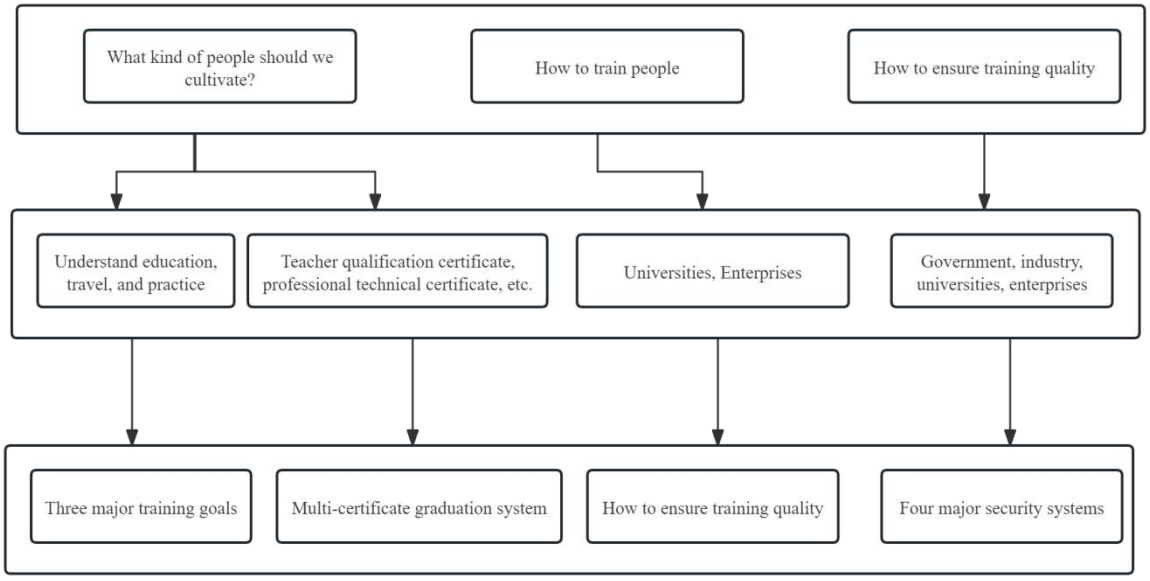

Figure 2 Framework of the Talent Training System for Study Tours

Study tours organically combine school-based education and out-of-school education, making up for the shortcomings of practical teaching in schools. Through study tours, students can apply the knowledge learned in the classroom to real life, deepening their understanding and mastery of that knowledge; at the same time, students in social practice can encounter different people and events, broaden their horizons, gain experience, and improve their social adaptability. For example, in history class, students learn about ancient civilizations, and by going to historical and cultural sites for a study tour, they can personally experience the charm of ancient civilizations and more intuitively understand the development and changes of history. Core competencies are the essential qualities and key abilities that students should possess to meet the needs of lifelong development and social progress. Study tours have unique advantages in cultivating students' core competencies. For instance, study tours can cultivate students' autonomous learning ability and independent thinking ability, allowing students to learn how to learn through independent inquiry and practical experience; they can cultivate students' innovative spirit and practical ability, enabling students to be brave in innovating and dare to practice when facing real problems; they can cultivate students' sense of social responsibility and teamwork spirit, allowing students in group activities to learn to care for others, serve society, and cooperate with others. In short, study tours are an important way to cultivate students' core competencies and have significant importance for students' future development.

2.2 Educational Inflation: Concept Analysis, Characteristic Manifestations, and Quality Concerns

2.2.1 Definition of educational inflation

Educational inflation is a concept widely discussed in the fields of educational economics and sociology, analogous to inflation in the economic domain. In economics, inflation refers to a situation where the money supply exceeds the actual demand in the economy, leading to currency devaluation and a sustained, general rise in prices. Similarly, educational inflation can be understood as a phenomenon in which the number and prevalence of educational certificates, credentials, or degrees continue to increase, yet the actual level of knowledge, skills, and abilities they represent does not improve correspondingly; in other words, the "value" of each unit of educational credential or certificate is devalued in both the market and social perception. Essentially, educational inflation reflects an imbalance between educational supply and labor market demand. As society increasingly emphasizes education and educational scale expands continuously, more and more individuals attain higher-level credentials and degrees. However, the labor market's capacity to absorb highly educated talent is limited; when the supply of highly educated individuals exceeds market demand, the advantages that once accompanied high credentials and degrees gradually diminish, much like purchasing power declines when currency is devalued, and the "gold content" of degrees and diplomas also weakens[3].

2.2.2 Characteristic manifestations of educational inflation in the educational field

Under the backdrop of educational inflation, the overall academic attainment level of society shows a clear upward trend. Taking higher education as an example, in the past, bachelor's degree holders may have been relatively scarce

talent resources, but now the number of master's and even doctoral graduates is continuously increasing. Many positions that originally required only a college diploma or bachelor's degree now begin to demand master's or higher degrees. This general elevation of academic requirements is not entirely based on actual job requirements for higher levels of knowledge and skills, but is to some extent influenced by educational expansion and the pressure of employment competition.

As the population of highly educated individuals grows, the value of credentials becomes diluted. On one hand, the returns and opportunities that the same credential can obtain in the job market are no longer as pronounced as before, for example in terms of salary levels and prospects for career advancement. On the other hand, in pursuit of higher credentials, some schools and institutions may lower admission standards and graduation requirements, leading to a phenomenon of degree "watered down." Some students, although they obtain the corresponding credentials and degrees, cannot actually master the knowledge and skills required by the market, further aggravating the degree of educational inflation.

Educational inflation triggers intense educational competition. In order to gain an advantage in the job market, students and parents must invest more time and effort into education. From kindergarten onwards, there is competition to enter high-quality elementary schools; in primary and secondary education, students face pressure to advance and must participate in various extracurricular tutoring and training; in higher education, competition for postgraduate and doctoral admissions grows increasingly fierce. Such excessive competition not only increases the burden on students and families but may also lead to psychological issues among students, affecting their mental and physical health as well as their holistic development.

Due to the general elevation of academic attainment and the labor market's overemphasis on highly educated talent, many highly credentialed individuals end up working in positions unrelated to their fields of study or in jobs that do not require high credentials, resulting in reduced occupational match. This not only wastes educational resources but also impacts individuals' career development and sense of achievement. For example, some master's or doctoral graduates work as ordinary clerks or sales staff, where the professional knowledge and skills they acquired cannot be fully utilized, and their personal value is difficult to realize.

2.2.3 Potential impacts of educational inflation on education quality

To meet the demands of educational expansion, some schools may face teacher shortages. In order to fill staffing gaps, schools may lower the standards for hiring teachers, leading to an overall decline in the quality of the teaching workforce. Moreover, due to an increase in student numbers, teachers' teaching loads become heavier, making it difficult for them to give each student sufficient attention and guidance, which in turn affects teaching quality. At the same time, in order to cope with educational competition and improve progression rates, some schools may adopt exam-oriented teaching methods, emphasizing the transmission of knowledge while neglecting the cultivation of students' innovation and practical abilities, which is also detrimental to improving education quality.

Educational inflation causes educational goals to gradually deviate from the original intent of cultivating well-rounded individuals. Under intense competition and employment pressure, schools, parents, and students focus more on credentials and grades while neglecting students' interests, individual development, and the cultivation of their comprehensive qualities. Education becomes a means of pursuing utilitarian gains rather than promoting students' holistic growth and societal progress. This deviation in educational goals not only affects individual students' development but also has adverse effects on society's long-term development.

In an environment of educational inflation, academic misconduct such as fraud and plagiarism occurs frequently. To obtain higher credentials and titles, some teachers and researchers may resort to improper methods to produce research outcomes. Such academic misconduct not only undermines academic integrity and the scholarly ecosystem but also affects improvements in education quality. Additionally, the academic evaluation system often overemphasizes metrics such as the quantity of publications and impact factors, while neglecting the actual value and innovativeness of research achievements, which is also not conducive to fostering a healthy academic atmosphere and promoting academic progress[4].

Educational inflation exacerbates the uneven distribution of educational resources. High-quality educational resources are often concentrated in a few regions and schools; to access these resources, students and parents must pay a higher price. In educational competition, students from wealthier families often gain more educational resources and opportunities, while those from less affluent families may face a scarcity of educational resources. This unequal distribution of educational resources not only leads to unequal educational opportunities but also further widens the gap between rich and poor and entrenches social stratification.

In summary, educational inflation is a complex social phenomenon that manifests multiple characteristics in the educational field and has numerous potential impacts on education quality. Addressing educational inflation requires joint efforts from government, schools, families, and society to adjust education policies, optimize resource allocation, improve education quality, and promote the coordinated development of education and the labor market.

2.3 Relationship between Study Tours and Educational Inflation

2.3.1 Mechanisms by which study tours may induce educational inflation

With the rapid development of the study tour market, parents' emphasis on their children's education and pursuit of quality-oriented education have led to a sharp increase in demand for study tours. However, the current supply in the study tour market is relatively insufficient, and high-quality study tour resources are particularly scarce. There are only

limited study tour institutions with professional qualifications, excellent curriculum design, and strong teaching resources, making it impossible to meet the enormous market demand. In this supply-demand imbalance, study tour institutions often raise prices to obtain greater profits. For example, some popular overseas study tour programs can cost tens of thousands of yuan or more, far exceeding their actual costs. This phenomenon of inflated prices significantly increases family expenditures on study tours, further exacerbating the educational burden and becoming an important manifestation of educational inflation.

In a societal environment of increasingly fierce educational competition, parents generally experience blind following and comparison psychology. When they see other children participating in various study tours, they worry that their own children will fall behind and therefore also sign them up. This blind emulation causes study tours to gradually evolve into an "educational standard," with parents no longer focusing on whether study tours truly suit their children but using them as a means of competing with others. For example, some parents spend large sums to enroll their children in various high-end, luxurious study tour programs simply to enrich their resumes, even though these programs may not significantly benefit the child's actual growth and development. This excessive competition and comparison psychology drive the popularity of the study tour market ever higher, further pushing up educational costs and intensifying educational inflation.

Currently, the study tour market lacks unified regulations and standards, leading to uneven quality of study tour products. To reduce costs, some study tour institutions often simplify curriculum design, reduce teacher investment, and shorten activity durations, causing study tour education quality to suffer a major setback. For example, some study tour programs merely organize students to visit certain attractions, lacking professional explanations and guidance, so students cannot gain substantive knowledge and skill improvements. However, when choosing study tour programs, parents often find it difficult to distinguish quality, relying only on price and promotional materials. In such circumstances, even if parents spend large sums, their children cannot obtain educational returns commensurate with their investment, resulting in a waste of educational resources and further aggravating educational inflation.

2.3.2 Intrinsic links between study tours and educational inflation

One important manifestation of educational inflation is the continuous rise in educational costs and excessive increases in educational investment. As a newly emerging form of education in recent years, study tours have gradually become an important part of family education expenditure. With the booming study tour market, parents' spending on their children's participation in study tour activities keeps rising, yet this investment does not necessarily yield corresponding educational returns. For example, some students participate in multiple study tours but do not show significant improvements in academic performance or comprehensive qualities. Therefore, study tours can to some extent be seen as an external manifestation of educational inflation, reflecting unreasonable resource allocation and low efficiency in the education sector.

The competitive pressure and anxiety generated by educational inflation, in turn, further drive the development of the study tour market. In the context of educational inflation, parents focus more on cultivating their children's comprehensive qualities and extracurricular practical experiences to help them stand out in fierce competition. As a form of education that integrates learning, practice, and experience, study tours precisely meet this demand. Hence, educational inflation continually increases parents' demand for study tours, stimulating the prosperity of the market. However, this prosperity may also lead to market overexpansion and a bubble, further intensifying educational inflation[5].The educational inflation induced by study tours and the impact of educational inflation on the study tour market interact, forming a vicious cycle. On one hand, problems in the study tour market such as inflated prices and uneven quality lead to higher educational costs and reduced educational effectiveness, exacerbating educational inflation. On the other hand, educational inflation drives parents to place greater emphasis on study tours, increasing investments in study tours, which further promotes the development of the study tour market and price increases. This vicious cycle not only increases families' educational burdens but is also detrimental to the reasonable allocation of educational resources and the improvement of education quality. Therefore, effective measures must be taken to break this vicious cycle, promote the healthy development of the study tour market, and ensure fairness and efficiency in education.

3 THE CURRENT SITUATION ANALYSIS OF STUDY TOURS

3.1 The Popularity of Study Tours

The coverage of study tours has gradually expanded from economically developed regions to all regions nationwide. In the eastern coastal areas, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong, and Zhejiang, study tours are relatively mature in development; both the richness of activities and the professionalism of organization are at the forefront. These regions possess abundant historical and cultural resources, advanced technology enterprises, and high-quality educational resources, providing a solid foundation for conducting study tours. In central regions, study tours are also developing rapidly. Taking Hunan, Hubei, and Henan provinces as examples, local governments and education departments actively promote the popularization of study tours by combining local red culture, historical sites, and natural scenery to develop a series of study courses with regional characteristics. For instance, Shaoshan and Jinggangshan in Hunan Province have become popular destinations for red-themed study tours. Although western regions lag behind in terms of economy and educational resources, they have also been increasing investment in study tours in recent years. Xinjiang, Tibet, and Qinghai, for example, fully utilize their unique natural landscapes and ethnic cultures to attract more and

more students to participate in study activities. At the same time, the central government promotes the development of study tours in western regions through policy support and funding, narrowing the gap with eastern regions. The resources covered by study tours are also becoming increasingly extensive, encompassing history and culture, natural sciences, technological innovation, labor practice, and other fields. In terms of history and culture, museums, memorial halls, and ancient architecture have become important study bases. For example, the Palace Museum receives a large number of study tour groups each year; through professional explanations and interactive experiences, it allows students to gain an in-depth understanding of ancient Chinese history and culture. In the field of natural sciences, study resources include nature reserves, botanical gardens, and zoos. Students can observe the ecological habits of plants and animals there, learn natural science knowledge, and cultivate respect for nature. In terms of technological innovation, science museums and high-tech enterprises have become windows through which students learn about cutting-edge technologies. Students can visit research laboratories, experience achievements in technological innovation, and be inspired to develop interest and love for science and technology. Labor-practice–oriented study activities are also receiving increasing attention. Rural farms, orchards, and livestock farms have become places where students can experience agricultural life and learn labor skills. By participating in labor practice, students not only acquire certain labor skills but also cultivate a spirit of hard work and awareness of teamwork. The state attaches great importance to the position of study tours within the education system and has issued a series of policy documents to promote their development. In 2016, the Ministry of Education and ten other departments issued the "Opinions on Promoting Study Tours for Primary and Secondary School Students," which explicitly proposed integrating study tours into primary and secondary school teaching plans, requiring localities to develop a batch of study-tour courses with outstanding educational effects, and establishing a study-tour working mechanism with standardized management, clear responsibilities, diversified funding, and safety guarantees. Subsequently, local governments have successively issued related implementation rules and supporting policies, providing policy guarantees for the conduct of study tours. Study tours have gradually merged with school curricula, becoming an important component of school education. In curriculum design, schools organically integrate study tours with subjects such as Chinese language, history, geography, and biology and design a series of targeted study-tour courses. For example, in Chinese language courses, students can visit the birthplaces of literary classics to gain a deeper understanding of the connotations and background of the works; in history courses, students can conduct on-site investigations of historical sites to experience the changes and development of history. At the same time, study tours also focus on cultivating students' comprehensive qualities, such as innovation ability, practical ability, and teamwork ability[6]. By participating in study activities, students can learn through practice, improve their problem-solving abilities and self-directed learning skills, and lay a solid foundation for future development. To ensure the quality and effectiveness of study tours, education departments have gradually established a comprehensive evaluation system. The evaluation content includes curriculum design, activity organization, safety assurance, student feedback, and other aspects of study tours. Schools use evaluation results to improve and optimize study-tour activities continuously, thus enhancing the educational quality of study tours. Moreover, evaluation results serve as important reference indicators for assessing the overall quality of school education and teaching, motivating schools to attach greater importance to organizing study tours. In summary, in recent years, study tours have made significant progress in participation scale, coverage, and their position within the education system. With social development and deepening educational reform, study tours are expected to play a greater role in the future, making a larger contribution to cultivating well-rounded, high-quality talent.

3.2 Implementation Models of Study Tours

Theme-based curriculum design is one of the more common models in current study tours. It constructs the entire curriculum system around a specific theme, with themes chosen broadly across fields such as natural sciences, history and culture, and technological innovation. Taking a history and culture theme as an example, the course can be designed as an "Ancient Civilization Exploration Journey." In terms of course content, students are first arranged to visit a local history museum, allowing them to intuitively understand the forms, uses, and stories behind ancient artifacts, thereby cultivating their powers of observation and interest in history and culture. Next, students are organized to conduct on-site investigations of historical relics, such as city walls and ancient architecture; through on-site explanations and hands-on experience, they can feel the charm of ancient architecture and the wisdom of ancient people. Additionally, students can be assigned to carry out history and culture research-based learning, such as having them work in groups to study the political, economic, and cultural characteristics of a certain historical period and to present their findings, thereby cultivating students' self-directed learning abilities and teamwork skills. Project-based curriculum design emphasizes that students learn and apply knowledge through real projects. Typically, a specific project goal is set for the course, and students complete the project through teamwork. For example, in a technological innovation–themed study tour, the course can be designed as an "Intelligent Robot Design and Production Project." At the beginning of the course, teachers introduce students to the basic principles and relevant technical knowledge of intelligent robots. Then, students, working in teams, design and produce intelligent robots according to given tasks and requirements. During project implementation, students must apply the knowledge they have learned to carry out scheme design, material selection, programming, debugging, and other tasks. Finally, each team demonstrates and tests their self-made intelligent robots and shares their experiences and gains from the project process. Through this project-based curriculum design, students not only can learn technological innovation knowledge in depth but also can improve their abilities to solve practical problems and innovate in their thinking. Experience-based curriculum design focuses on

students' personal experiences and feelings. Courses are arranged so that students participate in various practical activities and learn and grow through hands-on experience[7]. Taking a natural sciences theme as an example, the course can be designed as a "Field Ecology Investigation Experience Journey." In this course, students enter nature to carry out activities such as plant identification, animal observation, and ecological environment investigation. Students need to personally collect plant specimens, record animal habits and ecological environment data, and so on. Through these firsthand experiences, students can gain a deeper understanding of natural science knowledge and strengthen their love and sense of protection for nature. Meanwhile, during field investigations, students must face various challenges and difficulties, such as harsh weather conditions and complex terrain, which helps cultivate their perseverance and adaptability. School-led study tour activities are organized and implemented by schools. Schools formulate detailed study-tour plans based on teaching goals and students' actual situations. In the preparatory phase, schools conduct comprehensive preparations, including communicating and coordinating with study-tour bases, arranging transportation and accommodation, and formulating safety plans. Schools also provide safety education and pre-trip training for students, informing them of the purpose, content, and precautions of study tours. During the activities, schools arrange for teachers to accompany students throughout the trip, responsible for learning guidance, daily management, and safety assurance. Teachers guide students to actively participate in various activities and help them solve problems encountered along the way. After the activities, schools organize students to summarize and reflect on their experiences, evaluate the effectiveness of the activities, and integrate study-tour outcomes into students' comprehensive quality evaluation systems. Travel-agency–led study tour activities are organized and implemented by travel agencies. Travel agencies, possessing abundant tourism resources and organizational experience, can provide professional services for students. Upon receiving school commissions, travel agencies design personalized study-tour plans based on schools' needs and students' characteristics. Travel agencies are responsible for arranging transportation, accommodation, catering, attraction tickets, and so on, and for coordinating cooperation with study-tour bases. During the activities, travel agencies arrange tour guides to accompany students throughout the trip; tour guides provide explanations and services to ensure the smooth progress of activities. Meanwhile, travel agencies also establish comprehensive safety assurance mechanisms to safeguard students' personal and property safety. However, this model has shortcomings, such as travel agencies focusing more on tourism service quality while paying less attention to the educational functions of study tours. School–enterprise cooperative study tour activities are conducted through cooperation between schools and enterprises (including study-tour bases, training institutions, and so on). Schools and enterprises leverage their respective strengths to jointly organize and implement study-tour activities. Schools are responsible for organizing and managing students, setting teaching objectives, and reviewing course content. Enterprises provide support by offering venues, equipment, and teaching staff based on their own resources and professional advantages. For example, schools may collaborate with science museums to conduct technology innovation–themed study tours: schools organize students to visit the science museum, while the museum provides professional explanations and experimental equipment to allow students to conduct scientific experiments and inquiry activities. School–enterprise cooperative study tours can fully integrate the resources of both schools and enterprises, achieve complementary advantages, and improve the quality and effectiveness of study tours. Student evaluation is an important component of the study-tour evaluation mechanism. Through student evaluation, it is possible to understand students' satisfaction and gains from study tours. Multiple methods can be used for student evaluation, such as questionnaire surveys, interviews, and self-assessments. Questionnaire surveys can include questions about study-tour course content, activity organization, teacher guidance, and so on, allowing students to select and evaluate. Interviews can involve choosing some students for face-to-face dialogue to learn about their specific experiences and feelings during the study tour. Self-assessment lets students evaluate their own performance during the study tour, including learning attitudes, teamwork abilities, innovation abilities, and other aspects. Through student evaluation, problems and shortcomings in study tours can be identified and provide references for future improvements. Teacher evaluation mainly assesses students' learning performance and growth during study tours. Teachers can evaluate from aspects such as students' learning attitudes, knowledge mastery, practical abilities, and teamwork skills. Teacher evaluation can adopt a combination of formative and summative evaluations. Formative evaluation runs throughout the entire study-tour process; teachers observe students' performance during activities and provide timely feedback and guidance.Summative evaluation happens after the activity ends; teachers assess students' learning outcomes based on assignments, reports, presentations, and other outcomes.Table 1 presents the implementation models of study tours[8].

Table 1 Study Tour Implementation Model

Category	Model	Core Features	Core Value
Curriculum Design	Thematic	Course built around a single theme (history/tech/nature)	Systematic knowledge acquisition, fosters subject interest & inquiry skills
	Project-based	Goal-oriented practical projects (e.g., robot building)	Enhances practical application, problem-solving & innovation
	Experiential	Hands-on activities (field surveys/operations)	Deepens perception, cultivates resilience & adaptability
Organization Model	School-Led	Full-cycle management: planning → execution → evaluation	Precise educational goals, safety compliance, curriculum integration
	Travel Agency-Led	Integrated logistics & resource	Professional operational

		services by agencies	efficiency, reduces school burden
	School-Enterprise Collaboration	Resource synergy: schools + enterprises (bases/institutions)	Complementary advantages, provides professional venues/equipment/instructors
Evaluation Dimension	Student Feedback	Surveys/interviews/self-assessments on learning outcomes & experience	Optimizes course design, improves engagement satisfaction
	Teacher Assessment	Process observation + outcome evaluation of skill growth	Provides precise teaching feedback, refines educational objectives
	Parent Evaluation	Surveys on safety & educational effectiveness recognition	Promotes home-school collaboration, builds trust
	Social Evaluation	Expert/media/public assessments of educational value & social impact	Enhances credibility, guides sustainable development

Teacher evaluation not only provides learning feedback for students but also offers a basis for schools and teachers to improve teaching methods and curriculum design. Parent evaluation allows understanding of parents' views and opinions on study tours. As students' guardians, parents are very concerned about their children's growth and development. Parent evaluation can be conducted through questionnaires and parent meetings. In questionnaires, parents can be asked to evaluate aspects such as the organization, safety assurance, and educational effectiveness of study tours. At parent meetings, schools can introduce the details of study tours to parents and listen to their suggestions and opinions. Through parent evaluation, communication and cooperation between schools and parents can be strengthened, jointly promoting students' growth and development. Social evaluation mainly refers to the extent to which all sectors of society evaluate and recognize study tours. Social evaluation can assess the social influence, educational value, and social benefits of study tours. It can be carried out through media reports, expert assessments, and social feedback. Media reports can publicize the achievements and experiences of study tours, raising their social visibility and influence. Expert assessments can involve inviting education experts, tourism experts, and others to evaluate study tours and offer professional opinions and suggestions. Social feedback can be gathered by collecting opinions and suggestions from all sectors of society to understand societal needs and expectations for study tours. Through social evaluation, external support and supervision can be provided for the development of study tours, promoting their healthy growth.

3.3 Evaluation of Study Tours' Effectiveness

To comprehensively and scientifically assess the educational effects of study tours in practice, it is necessary to construct a reasonable evaluation indicator system, which primarily covers three dimensions: knowledge and skills, affective attitudes, and behavioral habits. By comparing students' scores on subject-related knowledge tests before and after the study tour, one can evaluate the improvement in their mastery of disciplines such as history, geography, and science. For example, after a history-and-culture–themed study tour, students can be tested on their knowledge of historical events and cultural sites, and score changes can be observed. One can examine the practical operational skills students have acquired during the study tour—such as handicraft creation, experimental procedures, and wilderness survival skills—and assess these through students' work displays or practical skill evaluations. Through questionnaires and student interviews, one can understand how students' interest in learning changes before and after the study tour, observing whether they exhibit a stronger desire to explore related subjects or fields. One can evaluate students' performance in team activities—such as communication and collaboration skills and sense of collective responsibility—by assessing the completion of group tasks or conducting peer evaluations within small teams. One can investigate students' awareness of and identification with local culture and traditions by reviewing their reflections or cultural-creative works to understand their cultural comprehension and feelings. One can observe students' self-discipline during the study tour—such as adherence to rules and punctuality—and evaluate this through teacher assessments or self-management records. One can assess students' attention to and actions for environmental protection during the study tour by observing whether they actively participate in environmental activities and develop habits of conserving resources. A detailed questionnaire should be designed and administered to students both before and after the study tour. The questionnaire content should encompass all the aforementioned evaluation indicators; by statistically analyzing the questionnaire results, one can understand the changes in students before and after the study tour. For example, one can include multiple-choice questions and open-ended questions concerning learning interest and teamwork awareness, allowing students to self-evaluate and provide feedback. For the knowledge-and-skills dimension, the testing method is adopted: administer a baseline test before the study tour to ascertain students' initial knowledge level; after the trip, administer an identical test and compare the two sets of scores to evaluate students' knowledge gains. For practical skills, one can use hands-on tests to assess students' level of mastery. During the study tour, teachers should conduct thorough observations of students, recording their performance in each activity segment. Observation content should include students' behavior, learning attitude, and teamwork; through continuous observation and documentation, one can evaluate improvements in students' overall qualities. One should collect students' creative works produced during the study tour—such as diaries, drawings, and handicraft pieces—and analyze their content to understand students' gains in affective attitudes and knowledge-and-skill domains. For example, by analyzing students' study-tour diaries,

one can learn about their feelings and reflections on the travel experience. Through analysis of test scores and practical-skill evaluation results, it is found that most students exhibit significant improvement in subject knowledge and practical skills after participating in study tours. For instance, after a natural-sciences–themed study tour, students typically demonstrate deeper mastery of biology and geography knowledge and enhanced practical operational skills. However, some students show less pronounced improvement, which may be related to factors such as their learning foundation and attitude. According to questionnaire surveys and student interviews, study tours have a positive impact on students' affective attitudes. Most students report increased interest in learning, and their awareness of teamwork and cultural identification is strengthened. For example, during a cultural study tour, students gain a deeper understanding of local history and culture, and their sense of identification with traditional culture noticeably increases. Nevertheless, a few students demonstrate little change in affective attitudes, indicating a need for further attention and guidance. Observational methods and analysis of students' work indicate that some students make progress in self-discipline and environmental awareness; for instance, during the trip, they can consciously follow rules and voluntarily participate in environmental protection activities. However, some students do not show obvious improvement in their behavioral habits, suggesting that future education and teaching should strengthen cultivation in these areas. Study tours integrate classroom knowledge with practical activities, allowing students to learn and apply knowledge in authentic contexts. Through firsthand experience and hands-on practice, students can better understand and master subject knowledge, achieving integrated comprehension. For example, during a history-and-culture study tour, students combine historical knowledge from textbooks with real-world scenes by visiting historical sites and listening to on-site explanations, deepening their understanding and memory of historical events. Study tours provide abundant practical opportunities, encouraging students to explore independently and innovate. In practical activities, students must apply learned knowledge to solve real problems, thereby cultivating innovative thinking and practical abilities. For instance, in a technology-themed study tour, students participate in technological experiments and invention-and-creation activities, which stimulate their innovation consciousness and enhance their hands-on abilities. During study tours, students must collaborate with team members to complete various tasks, learning to care for and respect others and thereby enhancing their sense of social responsibility and teamwork spirit. Through team activities, students can better leverage their own strengths while learning from others, improving communication and collaboration skills and team cohesion. Study tours also take students out of the classroom to get close to nature and relax both body and mind. During the trip, students can exercise to strengthen their physical fitness and relieve academic stress, maintaining positive psychological health. For example, in an outdoor-adventure study tour, students engage in activities such as hiking and mountain climbing, which enhance their physical fitness and cultivate perseverance. In summary, study tours play an important role in improving students' comprehensive qualities. However, in practice, some issues still exist that require further refinement and improvement to enhance the educational effectiveness of study tours and better promote students' holistic development.

4 PHENOMENA OF EDUCATIONAL INFLATION IN STUDY TOURS

4.1 Over-Packaging of Educational Content

4.1.1 Manifestations of over-packaging of educational content

In some study tours, course designs appear rich and diverse, aligning with educational objectives on the surface, but in reality, form outweighs substance. For example, some study tour organizations offer history-and-culture–themed courses, arranging for students to visit museums and attend expert lectures. Superficially, these activities cover both knowledge explanation and field investigation, seemingly allowing students to gain an in-depth understanding of history and culture. However, in practice, museum visits are merely cursory; students do not have enough time to carefully observe exhibits or deeply reflect on related historical knowledge. Expert lectures are superficial, lacking interactive communication with students and unable to address students' specific questions in detail. Such course designs pursue formal completeness while ignoring students' actual learning experience and knowledge absorption, resulting in over-packaged educational content whose actual educational value is greatly diminished.

Study tour organizations often exaggerate the effects and value of educational content in their promotions to attract more students and parents. They claim that their study courses can comprehensively enhance students' overall qualities—such as cultivating innovation ability, teamwork spirit, and practical skills—but find it difficult to fulfill these promises in practice. For example, some promotional materials state that study activities will allow students to participate in high-tech project practice, thereby cultivating their technological innovation ability. However, at the event itself, students only watch a few technology demonstrations and do not truly engage in hands-on project practice. Such exaggeration misleads parents and students into having excessively high expectations of the educational value of study tours, while the actual experience falls far short of promotional claims, resulting in over-packaged educational content[9].

4.1.2 Causes of over-packaging of educational content

As the study tour market continues to develop, competition has grown increasingly fierce. In order to stand out among numerous organizations and attract more participants, some organizations resort to over-packaging educational content. They believe that only by making promotional materials and course designs more flashy and appealing can they gain the attention of more students and parents. This market pressure leads organizations to focus more on packaging educational content than on improving educational quality.

Some study tour organizations have a distorted understanding of educational objectives, placing too much emphasis on form and superficial outcomes while neglecting students' actual learning needs and the essence of education. They assume that as long as they arrange many activities and courses, students will automatically receive a good educational experience during the study tour. However, this one-sided perception means that when designing educational content, they fail to fully consider students' interests and abilities, and do not pay attention to the depth and breadth of the content, thus producing over-packaged educational content.

4.1.3 Negative impacts of over-packaging educational content

Because educational content is over-packaged, its actual value shrinks and students cannot truly learn useful knowledge and skills during the study tour. They may participate in activities that are merely formal without gaining a deep understanding of the educational significance behind them, resulting in greatly diminished learning outcomes. For instance, in some natural-science–themed study activities, although students visit nature reserves and see various plants and animals, the lack of professional explanation and guidance means that they learn little about these organisms' ecological characteristics and scientific knowledge, failing to achieve the intended learning goals.

When parents choose a study tour for their children, they often rely on promotional materials and expectations about educational content. Once they discover that the actual educational effect differs significantly from what was advertised, they lose trust in the organization. This loss of trust not only damages the organization's reputation and word-of-mouth but may also lead parents to question the entire study tour market, hindering the healthy development of the industry.

Over-packaging educational content means that organizations invest large amounts of human, material, and financial resources in course design and promotion without achieving corresponding educational outcomes, resulting in wasted resources. These resources could have been used to improve educational quality, refine teaching methods, and provide students with better learning experiences. Instead, they are squandered on over-packaging, which impedes the reasonable use of educational resources and the sustainable development of education.

4.1.4 Strategies to address over-packaging educational content

Relevant government departments should strengthen regulation of the study tour market by establishing strict industry standards and norms, and by reviewing and supervising organizations' course designs and promotional materials. Institutions that over-package educational content or engage in false advertising should be punished in accordance with the law to standardize market order and protect the legitimate rights and interests of students and parents.

Study tour organizations should enhance their own professional competence, gain a deep understanding of educational objectives and students' learning needs, and focus on the quality and actual effect of educational content. Institutions can improve the professionalism of teachers and staff—ensuring that course design and implementation align with educational principles and students' developmental needs—by inviting educational experts to guide them and conducting internal training sessions.

Parents and students should improve their ability to discern the true value of study tours and not be misled solely by promotional materials. They can consult relevant information, ask other parents and students for opinions, and investigate an organization's reputation and track record in order to evaluate the actual value of educational content. Furthermore, parents and students can actively participate in the design and evaluation of study activities, offering their own suggestions to encourage organizations to continuously improve educational content and service quality.

4.2 Exaggerated Claims of Educational Effect

4.2.1 Forms of exaggerated claims

In the study tour market, exaggerated claims about educational outcomes are quite common. Some study tour organizations, seeking to attract more parents and students, excessively package their educational results in promotional materials and marketing campaigns. For example, certain organizations claim that their study projects can significantly boost students' academic performance. They assert that after just a few days of study activities, students will experience a "qualitative leap" in their mastery and application of major subjects like Chinese, mathematics, and English—even suggesting that test scores can increase by dozens of points. From an educational science perspective, however, improvements in academic performance result from a long-term, systematic process influenced by multiple factors; a short study tour cannot realistically produce such dramatic gains in a few days.

Other organizations emphasize that their programs can cultivate students' innovation and practical abilities. They use exaggerated language such as "making students future innovation leaders" or "comprehensively elevating students' hands-on skills." In reality, cultivating innovation and practical ability requires long-term accumulation and systematic training; a single study tour may only offer a brief experience, falling far short of these lofty claims. Additionally, some organizations advertise that study tours can help shape perfect character and morality, claiming that students will become more disciplined, confident, and responsible—perhaps even abandoning bad habits—during the trip. But character and moral development is a gradual process influenced by family, school, and social environments; while a study tour may have a promotive effect, it cannot achieve the advertised transformation in such a short period.

4.2.2 Reasons for misleading parents and students

When parents and students choose a study tour program, they often lack in-depth knowledge of the study tour market. They principally rely on promotional materials and information provided by organizations, which are typically polished by the institutions themselves. Due to a lack of professional judgment and comparison channels, parents and students find it difficult to verify the truthfulness and reliability of promotional claims and so are easily misled by exaggerations.

In the context of fierce educational competition, parents commonly experience educational anxiety. They hope their children will develop comprehensively and never fall behind. Therefore, when they see advertisements claiming that study tours can yield various remarkable educational results, they may quickly decide to sign up, overlooking rational consideration of those claims.

Currently, regulation of the study tour market still has certain loopholes. There is no effective review or oversight mechanism for organizations' promotional content, allowing some to make wild, exaggerated claims without restraint. Moreover, existing laws and regulations provide insufficient penalties for exaggerated advertising, failing to deter violators effectively.

4.2.3 Harms of exaggerated claims

Parents often pay high fees to enroll their children in so-called "high-quality" study tours. However, because exaggerated promotional claims lead to actual educational effects that do not match expectations, parents' financial investments do not yield the promised returns, and students do not gain the anticipated learning and growth experiences. This damages the economic interests of parents and students and infringes upon their learning rights.

Exaggerated claims disrupt a fair market environment. Study tour organizations that operate with integrity and focus on genuine educational outcomes may lose market share when competing against institutions that engage in sensationalized advertising. This can cause a "bad money drives out good" phenomenon. Over time, the healthy and orderly development of the entire study tour market will be undermined.

As a new educational format, study tours aim to foster students' comprehensive development. Yet exaggerated claims create a stark gap between the promoted benefits and actual outcomes, causing parents and students to question the value of study tours as an educational model. This skepticism can undermine the credibility of the broader educational sector.

4.2.4 Countermeasures

Relevant government departments should establish and improve a regulatory mechanism for the study tour market and intensify review of organizations' promotional content. They should clearly stipulate that promotional language must be truthful, accurate, and objective, and impose severe penalties on institutions that engage in exaggerated advertising to raise the cost of violations.

Schools and community organizations should strengthen educational outreach to parents and students, offering training and informational campaigns to enhance their understanding of study tours and their ability to evaluate promotional claims. Parents and students should learn about the essence and characteristics of study tours, develop a rational perspective on advertisements, and avoid impulsive sign-ups.

Study tour organizations should exercise self-discipline, adopt correct business philosophies, and prioritize genuine improvements in educational outcomes. In their promotional materials, they must adhere to the principle of seeking truth from facts, objectively and accurately describing the content, objectives, and expected effects of study tour programs, and avoid using inflated or false promotional language.

4.3 Economic Interests Driving Negative Impacts

4.3.1 Travel agencies and other organizations sacrificing educational value for profit

Travel agencies, as important organizers of study tour activities, prioritize economic gain as their primary objective. Driven by profit, some travel agencies deviate from educational principles when designing and conducting study tours. In order to reduce costs and increase profits, certain travel agencies compress research and development of course materials and investment in teaching staff. They may hire guides with low fees and without professional educational backgrounds to act as study tour instructors; such guides can only provide simple commentary on tourist attractions and cannot offer students in-depth knowledge expansion or practical guidance. Additionally, in course design, genuine educational segments and learning content are reduced while more commercially oriented visits—such as trips to shopping venues or entertainment facilities unrelated to educational themes—are added. For example, a study tour originally planned around history and culture might allocate large portions of its itinerary for students to shop at local specialty stores, while historical site visits become cursory[10]. This profit-driven arrangement strips study tours of their intended educational value; students cannot gain substantive learning experiences, resulting in wasted educational resources, severely diminished educational effects, and exacerbation of the phenomenon of educational inflation.

4.3.2 Influence of scenic areas and merchants' profit demands on study tour quality

Scenic areas and merchants also play important roles in the study tour market. In pursuit of economic benefit, they often take actions detrimental to study tour educational quality. Scenic areas, seeking increased revenue, may charge excessively high admission and service fees to study tour groups. This significantly raises the cost of study tours; to balance expenses, travel agencies or schools may reduce the number of activity days or the richness of course content. Furthermore, some scenic areas, eager to attract more study tour groups, overdevelop tourism facilities, damaging the original natural and cultural environments and degrading the educational experience.

Merchants, through partnerships with study tour organizations, market various so-called "study-tour souvenirs" or "learning supplies" to students. These products are often overpriced and of uneven quality, providing no real educational value when purchased. Such profit-driven behavior by merchants not only increases the financial burden on students and families but also distracts students from the educational focus of the study tour, undermining the educational effect.

4.3.3 Expansion and profit pressure on educational institutions

As the study tour market booms, many educational institutions have entered the field hoping to seize a share of the profits. To secure a foothold in the competitive market, these institutions continuously expand their scale and offer more study tour programs. To attract more students and parents, some educational institutions engage in excessive marketing, exaggerating the effects and benefits of study tours. The content they advertise often does not match the actual activities, setting parents and students up for unrealistic expectations.

Moreover, to meet the demand for rapid expansion, educational institutions may lower teacher requirements, hiring staff without professional educational backgrounds or study tour experience. They also face enormous profit pressure and may cut corners during study tours, reducing investment in necessary educational resources—for example, shortening course durations or decreasing the number of practical activities. Those actions, driven by economic interest, sacrifice educational quality, creating a marketplace where truly valuable educational resources are diluted and exacerbating the problem of educational inflation.

4.3.4 Local governments' performance and economic considerations

Some local governments, aiming for political achievements and local economic development, actively promote study tour projects. Although the initial intention is positive, problems can arise during implementation. Local governments, in order to attract more study tour groups, may offer policy incentives and financial subsidies to local enterprises and organizations. However, some enterprises and organizations take advantage of these incentives, focusing on quantity rather than quality of study tour products.

Additionally, local governments may require that study tour activities align more closely with local economic industries—for example, by arranging visits to local factories or enterprises—without considering whether these activities truly meet students' learning needs and educational objectives. This performance- and economy-driven promotion approach leads study tours to deviate from their educational essence, resulting in unreasonable allocation of educational resources and further aggravating the phenomenon of educational inflation.

Economic interests driving study tour activities produce multiple negative effects, continuously intensifying educational inflation. Solving these problems requires joint efforts by government, schools, enterprises, and society at large to strengthen regulation, standardize market order, and ensure that study tours return to their educational roots, providing students with genuinely valuable learning experiences.

5 Impact of Educational Inflation on Study Tours

5.1 Impact on Educational Quality

Against the backdrop of educational inflation, society generally associates education with utilitarian goals—such as pursuing higher credentials and obtaining better employment opportunities. This atmosphere has gradually permeated the field of study tours, causing their original educational objectives—focusing on cultivating students' comprehensive qualities, improving practical abilities, and broadening knowledge—to become distorted. When selecting study tour programs, schools and parents tend to pay more attention to whether a program can add weight to students' future college admissions or career development. Some schools choose study projects in collaboration with universities or well-known enterprises, hoping that students might receive recommendation letters or gain internship opportunities at prestigious companies. Parents, likewise, prefer study activities with competitive elements or that award certificates, believing these will give their children an advantage in the admissions race. For example, in certain study tours for high school students, organizers emphasize connections to specific colleges' independent enrollment channels, claiming that students' performance during the activity will be referenced by admissions departments. This situation turns students' primary motivation into seeking recognition from universities rather than focusing on learning and experiencing during the tour. They may deliberately cater to the evaluation criteria in order to obtain high marks, neglecting deep exploration of knowledge and cultivation of personal interests[11].

Educational inflation has driven rapid expansion of the study tour market, resulting in a surge of organizations entering this field. To attract more students and parents in a competitive environment, some organizations pursue short-term gains by offering perfunctory course designs, rendering study tour content overly formulaic. On one hand, many study tour curricula lack systematic structure and professional depth. They merely piece together popular educational concepts without truly considering students' cognitive levels or learning needs. For instance, some "technology study" programs simply arrange visits to a few technology exhibitions, offer a few popular-science lectures, and then let students perform a few simple experiments on their own. While these activities appear diverse, they actually lack depth and coherence, making it difficult for students to acquire valuable knowledge or skills. On the other hand, course content often disconnects from actual educational goals. Some study tour programs focus excessively on outward spectacle and superficial excitement, neglecting to cultivate students' core competencies. For example, in some cultural study tours, organizers arrange for students to participate in various traditional ceremonies—such as wearing Hanfu or tea ceremonies—but fail to provide in-depth explanations of the historical origins and spiritual essence behind these cultural practices. Students merely go through the motions of participating in ceremonies without truly understanding or inheriting the essence of traditional culture.

Educational inflation has caused demand for study tours to surge, while the development of professional instructor teams has lagged behind. This leads to uneven levels of teaching quality within study tours, seriously undermining educational outcomes. Because the market demand for study-tour instructors is high, individuals without professional knowledge or teaching experience have entered the industry. These individuals may have only received brief training

and lack deep understanding of the educational philosophy and methods of study tours, rendering them incapable of providing high-quality instruction. For example, in some natural-science study activities, instructors have limited understanding of the local ecosystem and biodiversity, so they merely recite basic information from texts and cannot answer students' in-depth questions or guide them through scientific inquiry. Additionally, to cut costs, some study-tour organizations hire part-time teachers. These part-time teachers may have other jobs and limited time to devote to study tours, resulting in insufficient attention and guidance for students. The high turnover of part-time teachers also makes it difficult to establish long-term, stable teacher–student relationships and to provide personalized education and training.

Under the influence of educational inflation, evaluation systems for study tours have become single-dimensional, primarily using student grades or certificates as evaluation criteria, while overlooking students' holistic development during the study process. Currently, many study tour programs adopt standardized evaluation methods—such as tests or competition rankings—that focus solely on learning outcomes, neglecting indicators such as students' attitudes, methodologies, and emotional experiences during the tour. For example, in some art-focused study activities, students are evaluated based on their artwork or performance scores, whereas their creative thinking during the process, teamwork spirit, and aesthetic appreciation receive insufficient attention. A single evaluation system can also lead students to adopt a utilitarian learning mindset. They will focus exclusively on content that can be reflected in evaluations to obtain good results, ignoring other aspects of development. This not only contradicts the original educational intent of study tours but also impedes the enhancement of students' comprehensive qualities and personal development. In summary, educational inflation delivers multiple blows to the educational quality of study tours, leading to a deviation from their intended goals and preventing study tours from realizing their true educational value. To improve the educational quality of study tours, all parties must work together to correct utilitarian tendencies, strengthen curriculum and instructor development, and perfect evaluation systems so that study tours can return to their essence of cultivating students' comprehensive qualities.

5.2 Negative Impacts on Student Development

In the context of educational inflation, study tours are gradually becoming utilitarian. Schools and parents often view them as tools to bolster students' résumés, focusing on whether study tours can produce tangible benefits for admissions or academic awards. This utilitarian orientation causes study tours to lose their original purpose of deep knowledge exploration. For example, in some study tours centered on visiting prestigious schools, students merely take cursory tours of campuses, hear brief introductions to school histories, and engage in brief conversations with current students. They do not genuinely explore those schools' academic environments, research achievements, or unique educational philosophies. Such superficial visits prevent students from acquiring systematic, in-depth knowledge; they merely gain a nominal "prestigious-school experience." Similarly, in certain natural-science study tours, students may follow a preset route to visit natural museums or geological parks and quickly view exhibits under the guidance of a teacher or guide, lacking time for independent exploration and deep reflection. They passively absorb information without opportunities to ask questions, conduct experiments, or engage in true exploration, making it difficult for them to genuinely master the relevant scientific knowledge.

Educational inflation leads society to adopt a one-dimensional standard for evaluating students, placing excessive emphasis on knowledge in certain popular subjects and fields. This trend also influences the design and selection of study tours. Schools and parents tend to choose programs related to entrance exams or in-demand majors, ignoring students' interests and holistic development. For example, in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education—because of its high employment prospects and social recognition—many study tour programs revolve around STEM disciplines. Students may participate in programming, robotics, or astronomy activities, while opportunities for humanistic, artistic, or social-science study remain relatively scarce. This narrow focus on certain types of knowledge leads to imbalanced knowledge structures and a lack of ability to understand and integrate different fields. Furthermore, some schools, aiming for guaranteed "results" from study tours, prefer mature, low-risk programs over innovative and challenging ones. As a result, students only encounter conventional and conservative knowledge, making it difficult for them to expand their horizons, cultivate innovative thinking, or develop interdisciplinary learning skills[12].

With intensifying educational inflation, competition within the study tour market grows fierce. Some organizations exaggerate the efficacy of experiential activities in their advertising, but in practice, these activities become mere formalities. For instance, in some agricultural study tours, promotional materials claim that students can participate in the entire process of planting and raising livestock. In reality, students only perform simple tasks—such as watering or fertilizing—on a farm, without truly understanding agricultural production principles and techniques. Such superficial activities fail to help students genuinely acquire practical skills or develop hands-on problem-solving abilities. Likewise, in certain industrial study tours, students might only tour a factory's production line and listen to a brief introduction to production processes without having the opportunity to participate in design or manufacturing. Such cursory visits do not provide students with real industrial production experience and thus do not substantively foster their engineering practice skills or innovative capacity.

Under educational inflation, schools and parents often arrange study tours for students in an overly meticulous and restrictive manner, neglecting to cultivate students' ability to practice independently. During study tours, students usually follow detailed schedules and safety rules devised by teachers or guides, lacking opportunities for independent choice and decision-making. For example, on a single outdoor-adventure study tour, teachers may create highly specific

itineraries and safety protocols, requiring students to follow the plan exactly and preventing them from exploring or discovering on their own. This excessive protection and intervention deprive students of opportunities to exercise independent thinking and problem-solving. Additionally, some schools and parents, worried about safety during experiential activities, limit the scope and intensity of students' practical engagement. For instance, in certain outdoor-ecology study tours, students can only partake in very simple and safe projects, preventing them from challenging their limits and cultivating resilience and a spirit of daring to try. Such restrictions on students' opportunities for independent practice hamper their comprehensive development of practical skills.

Educational inflation also causes a disconnect between practice and theory in study tours. In some programs, although practical activities are arranged, there is a lack of in-depth teaching and guidance on relevant theoretical knowledge, preventing students from combining experiential knowledge with theoretical understanding. For example, in a chemistry experiment–focused study tour, students perform simple chemistry experiments in a laboratory, but the teacher merely introduces procedural steps and safety precautions without delving into underlying chemical principles. Students mechanically complete the experiments without truly understanding their meaning and value. This separation of practice from theory precludes students from transforming practical experiences into broader knowledge and abilities and prevents cultivation of scientific thinking and innovation skills. Similarly, in some history-and-culture study tours, students visit historical sites and museums, but guides only offer brief introductions to events and figures without leading students to think or analyze problems from a historical perspective. Students merely remember historical facts without genuinely grasping historical development patterns or cultural connotations. Such practice lacking theoretical guidance cannot provide students with deep learning experiences or cultivate their humanistic literacy and comprehensive analytical abilities.

5.3 Challenges to Educational Equity

Educational equity is a fundamental pillar of social justice, with its core in providing every student with equal educational opportunities and resources so that they can fully realize their potential and achieve holistic development. However, educational inflation poses severe challenges to this goal, especially in the context of study tours, where it exacerbates unequal distribution of educational resources and significantly undermines the realization of educational equity. Study tours typically require students to bear various costs—including transportation, accommodation, and activity fees. As educational inflation intensifies, the cost of study tours continues to escalate. On one hand, fierce competition in the education market drives study-tour organizations to invest more in offering attractive programs and services—such as hiring professional instructors, developing specialized courses, and selecting high-end destinations—all of which contribute to rising prices. On the other hand, growing societal interest in and recognition of study tours—and surging demand—also push prices higher. Families with relatively strong financial means can afford costly study tours and choose high-quality, internationally oriented programs for their children, thereby broadening their knowledge and cultivating comprehensive qualities during travel. For example, some families send their children on study tours to prestigious schools abroad, allowing them to experience advanced educational philosophies and campus cultures firsthand and interact with international students—undoubtedly providing more opportunities and advantages for their future development.

However, economically disadvantaged families face study-tour fees as a barrier they simply cannot overcome. They may need to budget even basic living expenses carefully, making it impossible to afford study-tour costs. Consequently, these children lose opportunities to gain practical experience and broaden their horizons through study tours, causing the gap between them and children from better-off families to widen. This economic barrier, which creates unequal opportunities, is the most direct manifestation of educational inflation's negative impact on educational equity.

Under educational inflation, high-quality study-tour resources tend to concentrate in economically developed regions and key schools. Economically advantaged areas usually boast abundant educational resources and stronger financial capabilities, making them attractive to study-tour organizations that offer high-quality programs. Schools in these areas also have more funds and channels to partner with reputable study-tour organizations, providing students with a diverse range of study-tour options. For instance, in first-tier cities, schools can organize study tours to local research institutes, enterprise parks, and cultural venues, exposing students to cutting-edge scientific achievements and cultural and artistic resources. These areas also frequently host international study-tour exchange events, giving students the chance to learn alongside peers from around the world.

In contrast, economically underdeveloped regions suffer from a shortage of educational resources, leaving study-tour development severely constrained. Schools in these areas may lack the funds and connections to offer rich study-tour programs; even if some activities exist, their quality and scale cannot compare to those in developed regions. This concentration of high-quality resources creates increasing disparities in study-tour opportunities between different regions, further exacerbating unequal distribution of educational resources and undermining educational equity.

Current educational evaluation systems, to some extent, reinforce advantages gained through study tours. In an environment of increasingly intense competition for admissions, some schools and admissions institutions begin incorporating students' study-tour experiences into evaluation criteria as a key reference factor. Students from affluent families—who have more opportunities to participate in high-quality study tours—accumulate rich experiences, certificates, and honors during these tours, giving them an edge in evaluations. These students have an easier time gaining recognition and opportunities in admissions and awards, further enhancing their competitiveness. Conversely, students from low-income families, lacking such study-tour experiences, are at a disadvantage in the evaluation system.

They may lose out on opportunities in admissions competition simply because they do not hold related experiences or certificates. This orientation of the evaluation system amplifies disparities caused by educational inflation, working against the realization of educational equity.

Educational inflation presents multiple challenges to educational equity in the realm of study tours. To promote educational fairness, government, schools, and society must work together to adopt effective measures that lower study-tour costs, balance resource distribution, and perfect evaluation systems—so that every student can enjoy fair and high-quality educational opportunities.

6 RESPONSE STRATEGIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Policy-Level Regulation

The government should coordinate education, tourism, and market supervision departments to develop unified and scientifically based admission standards for study tour providers. For study tour organizations, these standards should specify requirements in areas such as instructor qualifications, curriculum design capacity, safety measures, and financial stability. For example, require that study tour instructors hold relevant educational credentials and professional expertise, and establish a clear instructor-to-student ratio. Curricula must match students' cognitive levels and learning objectives at each grade, with explicit educational themes and practical components. For venues hosting study tours, authorities should inspect environmental safety, the richness of educational resources, and the adequacy of facilities. Only organizations and venues that meet these admission standards may operate, raising overall market quality from the outset and preventing low-quality, nominally "study tour" projects that lack real educational content. This will reduce parents' blind investment in supposedly "high-end" study tours and help curb educational inflation.

Price-regulating agencies should enhance oversight of study tour fees. First, require all study tour providers to post itemized pricing that clearly lists included services—transportation, lodging, meals, instruction, admission fees, and so forth—to prevent hidden charges and misleading offers. Second, establish a price-monitoring system that regularly collects and analyzes the cost of various study tour offerings. When a program's price is clearly excessive and not matched by service quality, investigate and intervene. The government can publish recommended price ranges to guide providers toward reasonable pricing. At the same time, encourage healthy competition so that providers naturally offer fair prices, ensuring parents and students can access quality programs without being overcharged, which in turn helps prevent educational inflation driven by inflated costs.

The government should lead in creating a multi-dimensional quality-assurance system for study tours, encompassing educational outcomes, safety protocols, and service quality. The education bureau can assemble expert panels to periodically evaluate curricula, teaching methods, and student feedback to determine whether programs achieve their intended learning goals. Tourism and market-supervision agencies should inspect providers' safety safeguards—vehicle safety, lodging and dining hygiene, emergency procedures—and verify service standards. Providers or programs that fail to meet these evaluations must be ordered to correct deficiencies within a set timeframe; if violations are severe, revoke their operating licenses. By enforcing rigorous quality assessments and supervision, the government elevates overall standards, ensuring parents and students truly benefit, avoiding wasted resources on programs of uneven quality, and preventing educational inflation.

Government publicity offices, in cooperation with the education department, should use multiple channels—official websites, social media, school bulletins—to promote an accurate understanding of study tours. Explain to parents and students that the purpose of study tours is to broaden horizons, build practical skills, and enhance well-rounded competencies—not merely to keep up with peers or impress others. Publicize regulatory policies and oversight measures so families can have confidence in the market. Additionally, share model examples and success stories of high-quality study tours to demonstrate best practices, guiding parents and students toward rational decisions and reducing the tendency to chase expensive, "high-status" programs. This coordinated messaging helps create a social climate that values substance over show, effectively curbing educational inflation.

The government should strengthen planning and support for study tour resources across regions and program types. In economically underdeveloped areas or places with fewer education resources, increase funding to build more bases and facilities—science centers, museums, historical sites—that can host study activities, and improve ancillary infrastructure and services. At the same time, encourage reputable study tour providers to expand into these regions through partnerships, joint programs, or resource sharing. This will raise the quality and variety of offerings in underserved areas. By striving for a balanced distribution of study tour resources, students nationwide will enjoy fair access to quality programs, reducing the pressure on families to spend excessively to secure "elite" experiences and helping to alleviate the effects of educational inflation.

6.2 School-Level Optimization

6.2.1 Thoughtful curriculum design

Schools should design study tour courses that tie directly into their existing subject curricula and respect students' developmental levels. For instance, in history classes, arrange visits to historically significant cities or landmarks so that as students tour ancient sites and museums, they gain deeper insight into historical events and cultural developments, reinforcing their understanding and memory. In science subjects, schedule trips to science centers or research facilities where students can participate in experiments and experience technological innovations firsthand, cultivating their

scientific thinking and hands-on skills. Curricula should go beyond simple lectures and include interactive, experiential elements. For example, organize wilderness survival training, hands-on crafts, and cultural performances, so students learn by doing and reflect on each experience.

Instructional methods should be varied—group work, inquiry-based learning, and project-based tasks can foster collaboration and critical thinking. For example, in an ecological study tour, divide students into teams to observe local ecosystems, collect data, and analyze findings through group discussion. This approach develops teamwork and problem-solving abilities. Study tour courses should build in progression: start with foundational knowledge, then move to deeper inquiry, guiding students to progressively develop skills and understanding. At the same time, ensure continuity from start to finish so students can construct a cohesive framework of knowledge. For example, in a unit on traditional culture, begin with a museum visit to introduce basic concepts and historical context; next, involve students in learning a traditional craft to experience culture firsthand; finally, have students create a cultural project that applies their new knowledge in an innovative way.

6.2.2 Strengthening management systems

Schools should form a dedicated study tour management team that includes administrators, teachers, and counselors, each with explicitly defined responsibilities. School leaders oversee overall planning and decision-making. Teachers handle curriculum delivery and instructional guidance. Counselors manage student welfare, logistics, and safety. The school should conduct regular training sessions for the management team to improve their leadership skills and professional expertise.

When engaging external providers, select organizations with solid reputations and proven experience. Sign detailed partnership agreements that spell out each party's rights, responsibilities, and quality expectations. Throughout the collaboration, school staff should actively participate in curriculum planning and logistical arrangements, ensuring activities align with the school's educational goals and meet students' needs. Implement an ongoing evaluation system for partner providers: regularly assess their service quality, highlight areas for improvement, and require prompt corrective actions if problems arise.

Establish a comprehensive student-management policy covering attendance, behavioral expectations, and a clear system of rewards and consequences. Before any trip, provide extensive safety and behavioral orientation so students understand rules and expectations. During the tour, maintain vigilant supervision of student conduct, promptly address conflicts or issues, and ensure a safe, orderly environment for the entire program.

6.2.3 Enhancing teacher training

Schools should organize regular professional-development workshops on study tour pedagogy—covering curriculum design, teaching strategies, and safety protocols. Invite subject-matter experts and experienced instructors to lead sessions that blend theory, case studies, and hands-on practice, thereby raising teachers' skill levels. Encourage teachers to take an active role in planning and executing study tour activities, fostering a culture of continuous innovation. The school might create a small fund to reward teachers who excel in study tour instruction, motivating them to invest extra effort. Additionally, establish peer-learning forums—workshops, roundtables, or informal meetings—where teachers can share best practices and lessons learned, promoting collective growth in teaching quality.

6.2.4 Ensuring student safety

Develop detailed emergency-response plans that address potential risks—traffic accidents, natural disasters, medical emergencies—and outline clear procedures and responsibilities so that staff can act quickly and effectively when unforeseen events occur. Provide each participant—student and teacher—with adequate insurance coverage, including accident and medical policies. When selecting insurers, carefully compare coverage terms and premium costs to secure appropriate protection. Before departure, conduct thorough safety inspections of all transportation vehicles and activity venues to verify the integrity of equipment and facilities. During the study tour, maintain strict oversight: assign sufficient adult chaperones, equip them with first-aid supplies, and enforce protocols for monitoring student locations and well-being. These measures safeguard students' lives and health at every stage of the experience.

6.2.5 Fostering home–school collaboration

Before the study tour, hold parent information sessions—both in person and via online parent groups—to explain the tour's purpose, itinerary, and learning objectives. Answer questions promptly to alleviate any concerns. Invite parents to contribute to planning and logistical support, for example by volunteering to help with chaperoning or sharing relevant expertise. Engaging parents not only provides extra resources but also strengthens the partnership between families and the school in nurturing student growth.

After the tour concludes, provide families with detailed feedback on student performance and learning gains. Solicit parents' perspectives and suggestions via surveys, informal conversations, or follow-up meetings. Incorporating parental feedback enables the school to refine future curriculum design and management practices, continually improving educational quality.

By implementing these school-level optimizations—careful curriculum design, robust management structures, enhanced teacher training, stringent safety measures, and strong home–school partnerships—schools can significantly elevate the learning value and overall effectiveness of study tours, ensuring students benefit fully from comprehensive developmental experiences.

7. CONCLUSION

This study confirms the existence of a significant phenomenon of "educational inflation" in the field of study travel, primarily manifested in the substitution of superficial sightseeing for in-depth educational practices, the weakening of diverse learning value due to curriculum homogenization, and the deviation of utilitarian evaluation from the original purpose of cultivating core competencies. This phenomenon has exerted profound negative impacts on the educational system: First, the inclination of commercial capital toward popular projects has led to an imbalance in resource allocation, exacerbating the crisis in educational equity; second, passive learning models hinder the development of students' innovative abilities, causing a substantive deviation from the goals of study travel; third, market chaos has triggered a crisis of public trust, undermining the health of the educational ecosystem. Future reforms should focus on three major directions: achieving immersive learning experiences through the integration of AR/VR technologies and AI-powered personalized customization; reconstructing the curriculum system via STEAM interdisciplinary integration; and expanding global perspectives through international collaboration. The fundamental solution lies in establishing a multi-stakeholder collaborative mechanism—at the policy level, national standards and a quality supervision system must be established; educational institutions should deepen curriculum reform and teacher training; and social forces must open resources to participate in ecosystem co-construction. Only by returning to the essence of education can the core value of study travel as a practical education carrier be restored, thereby advancing high-quality educational development.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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