

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.18440855

EXAMINING THE EDUCATIONAL IMPACT OF SCHOOL VISITS ON CULTURAL LEARNING AND HERITAGE AWARENESS: CASE STUDY OF BAIT SHEIKH SAEED BIN HAMAD AL QASIMI MUSEUM

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Received: 28/09/2025
Accepted: 21/10/2025

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the educational impact of school visits to the Bait Sheikh Saeed Bin Hamad Al Qasimi Museum in Kalba, United Arab Emirates, with a focus on pupils' cultural learning and heritage awareness. Using a descriptive-analytical design, data were collected from pupils, teachers, and museum staff through questionnaires, interviews, and observations. Findings reveal that interactive activities, particularly pottery workshops and storytelling sessions, were the most effective in engaging pupils, aligning with constructivist and experiential learning theories. Pupils reported significant knowledge gains and heightened pride in Emirati culture, while teachers emphasized the visits' role in reinforcing curriculum content. Museum staff highlighted successes in outreach but noted challenges such as large group sizes, limited time, and resource constraints. The study confirms the vital role of heritage museums as educational partners, not only in knowledge transmission but also in identity formation. It calls for stronger school-museum collaboration, improved curricular integration, and balanced use of digital technologies to sustain meaningful cultural learning experiences.

KEYWORDS: Museum education, School visits, Cultural learning, Heritage awareness, Emirati identity, Bait Sheikh Saeed Bin Hamad Al Qasimi Museum.

1. INTRODUCTION

Museums have long been recognized as vital institutions for preserving cultural heritage, transmitting knowledge, and engaging communities in meaningful learning experiences. Beyond their traditional role as repositories of artifacts, museums are increasingly understood as dynamic educational spaces where formal and informal learning intersect (Hein, 1998; Hooper-Greenhill, 2007). For school-aged children in particular, museums offer opportunities for experiential engagement that extend classroom-based curricula, enabling pupils to connect with tangible heritage, explore diverse cultural narratives, and develop critical thinking skills.

School visits to museums represent one of the most effective strategies for introducing pupils to cultural heritage in ways that are interactive, memorable, and identity-forming. Unlike textbooks or classroom lectures, museum experiences allow children to encounter authentic artifacts and stories, thereby stimulating curiosity and a sense of ownership over their cultural past (Dewhurst, 2010; Falk & Dierking, 2000). Several studies have highlighted the benefits of such visits, noting improvements in pupils' observational skills, cognitive achievement, and appreciation of cultural diversity (Greene et al., 2014; Dierking, 2014). Importantly, in contexts such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where rapid modernization risks weakening intergenerational connections with tradition, school museum visits can act as critical bridges between the past and the present.

The case of the Bait Sheikh Saeed Bin Hamad Al Qasimi Museum in Kalba exemplifies the dual role of museums as custodians of heritage and as centers of educational innovation. Established in a historic coastal house dating back to 1898–1901, the museum not only conserves architectural and cultural traditions of the Emirati community but also actively engages school groups through interactive programs, workshops, and digital initiatives (Sharjah Museums Authority, n.d.). These initiatives resonate with broader efforts in the UAE to embed cultural awareness and national identity within educational frameworks, aligning with policy priorities that emphasize heritage as a pillar of social cohesion (Al-Kandari, 2015).

However, many museums in the region continue to rely on traditional, passive modes of interpretation, such as long text panels, guided tours heavy on factual narration, and limited use of participatory activities (al-Sawalha, 2020). Such approaches risk alienating pupils, who increasingly

learn through multisensory and technology-enhanced experiences (Hawkey, 2007; Al-Louati, 2021). Moreover, teachers often face constraints in integrating museum visits into their curricula, and museum staff may struggle to balance authenticity of heritage with the need for innovation. This tension underscores the need for research into how museum visits affect pupils' learning and awareness.

1.1. Research Aim And Questions

This study examines the educational impact of school visits to the Bait Sheikh Saeed Bin Hamad Al Qasimi Museum, focusing on how interactive activities and museum programs enhance cultural learning and heritage awareness among pupils aged 7–14. The research is guided by the following central question:

- How can museum-based activities during school visits promote awareness of cultural heritage among students?

Supporting sub-questions include:

- What aspects of museum visits are most attractive to pupils?
- How do specific activities (e.g., storytelling, pottery coloring, worksheets) influence pupils' knowledge and engagement?
- In what ways do teachers perceive museum visits as complementary to school curricula?
- How do museum staff conceptualize their role in promoting heritage awareness?
- What challenges and opportunities arise in integrating technology and interactivity into museum-based education?

1.2. Significance Of The Study

The significance of this research is twofold. First, it addresses an urgent educational and cultural priority in the UAE: strengthening pupils' national identity through heritage awareness. School visits to museums are positioned as an effective means to achieve this goal, yet empirical studies assessing their actual impact remain limited in the region. Second, the case study contributes to international debates on museum pedagogy by demonstrating how theories of constructivist, sociocultural, and experiential learning (Piaget & Cook, 1952; Kolb, 2014) can be applied in non-Western contexts.

By analyzing the perspectives of pupils, teachers, and museum staff, this article provides a holistic understanding of how school museum visits function as educational experiences. In doing so, it highlights best practices, identifies gaps, and proposes recommendations for enhancing museum-school partnerships in the UAE and beyond.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Museums occupy a unique position within educational landscapes, serving simultaneously as custodians of cultural heritage and as spaces of learning outside the formal school system. Their role in shaping cultural awareness and identity has been widely acknowledged across global contexts, particularly when museums engage directly with schools (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007; Hein, 1998). This review synthesizes the literature on the educational role of museums, the pedagogical theories underpinning museum learning, the significance of school visits, comparative global practices, and the challenges and opportunities of technology integration and cultural identity building.

2.1. The Educational Role Of Museums

The educational function of museums has undergone significant transformation. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, museums emphasized preservation and display, with exhibitions designed largely for elite audiences and minimal concern for educational interpretation (Macdonald, 2006). By the late twentieth century, however, the rise of “new museology” repositioned museums as spaces for public service and engagement, where learning became a central mission (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007). This transformation reframed museums not only as guardians of heritage but also as “parallel educational institutions” that complement schools by offering experiential, multisensory opportunities for discovery (Falk & Dierking, 2000).

Museum education, particularly for children, integrates entertainment and instruction. Scholars note that pupils benefit when activities encourage the use of multiple senses (e.g., touch, sight, and sound) alongside reflection and discussion (Bligh, 2003). The ability to connect tangible objects with lived experiences is what differentiates museums from classrooms. For instance, Dewhurst (2010) demonstrated that handling authentic artifacts resulted in stronger memory retention and emotional engagement compared to learning the same content through books.

In addition to individual cognitive benefits, museums serve broader cultural and civic purposes. They provide spaces where societies can negotiate identity, transmit values, and foster intercultural understanding. Al-Kandari (2015) emphasized that museums help modern generations connect with traditions, thereby reinforcing belonging. In the Gulf region, scholars highlight museums as crucial spaces for strengthening national identity among youth. Al-

Kandari (2015) argued that museums transmit values to younger generations, instilling pride in heritage. Yet, much of the global literature remains Western-centric, underscoring the need for more localized research in Arab and Gulf contexts.

2.2. School Visits As Informal Learning

School visits to museums exemplify informal learning, defined as learning outside formal curricula, often voluntary, social, and experiential (Falk & Dierking, 2000; Hein, 1998). Unlike classroom teaching, informal learning emphasizes curiosity-driven exploration, storytelling, and active participation. Such visits not only diversify pupils’ learning environments but also provide memorable experiences that blend education with enjoyment.

Table 1: Benefits of School Visits to Museums (Literature Synthesis).

Benefit	Description	Key References
Knowledge acquisition & memory retention	Pupils who interact directly with objects or participate in activities retain knowledge better than through books alone.	Dewhurst (2010); Greene et al. (2014)
Critical thinking & observation skills	Visits encourage questioning, interpretation, and attentive observation.	Dierking (2014)
Social learning & collaboration	Pupils engage in peer-to-peer dialogue, teamwork, and co-interpretation.	Johnson & Johnson (2009)
Cultural awareness	Encounters with diverse artifacts foster empathy and intercultural respect.	National Art Education Association (n.d.)

School visits also foster responsibility and autonomy, as pupils navigate new spaces, manage tasks, and interact with peers outside classroom structures (Dierking, 2014). The role of fun and entertainment is central: enjoyment enhances motivation, leading to deeper engagement and learning (Bitgood, 2013).

Challenges remain, however. Teachers often face constraints in aligning museum visits with curriculum goals, while logistical issues such as transportation and scheduling reduce frequency of visits (al-Sawalha, 2020). Museum staff also report difficulties in designing age-appropriate activities for diverse student groups. Despite these challenges, the consensus in the literature is clear: school visits are not “add-ons” but essential complements to formal education, particularly in cultivating heritage awareness.

2.3. Pedagogical Theories Applied In Museums

A growing body of literature links museum learning to established pedagogical theories. Three

frameworks dominate: constructivism, sociocultural theory, and experiential learning. These theories illuminate how children learn in museums and guide educators in designing effective programs.

Table 2: Pedagogical Theories and Their Applications in Museums.

Theory	Core Idea	Museum Application	References
Constructivism	Learners actively construct knowledge by linking new information to prior knowledge.	Inquiry-based exhibits, problem-solving activities, multiple interpretations of artifacts.	Piaget & Cook (1952); Hein (1998)
Sociocultural Theory	Learning occurs through social interaction and cultural context.	Group discussions, teacher-student-staff dialogues, culturally inclusive activities.	Vygotsky; Ash (2003); Banks (2015)
Experiential Learning	Learning is cyclical: experience followed by reflection then application.	Workshops, simulations, role-playing, hands-on heritage activities.	Kolb (2014); Dewey (1983)

2.3.1. Constructivism

Constructivism argues that knowledge is not transmitted but constructed by learners who integrate new information with prior knowledge (Piaget & Cook, 1952). In museums, this principle manifests in interactive exhibits that encourage questioning, experimentation, and multiple interpretations (Hein, 1998). For children, this means that museum objects become tools for constructing meaning rather than passive displays. Inquiry-based stations, for example, invite pupils to hypothesize about an artifact's function or symbolism, reinforcing learning through discovery.

2.3.2. Sociocultural Theory

Vygotskian sociocultural theory emphasizes learning as a social and cultural process, mediated by interaction, language, and shared activity (Banks, 2015). Museums provide contexts where pupils negotiate meaning collectively through conversations with peers, teachers, and museum educators. Ash (2003) observed that collaborative interpretation often produces deeper understanding than individual observation. For heritage museums, embedding cultural narratives familiar to children strengthens this effect, allowing pupils to see themselves reflected in exhibitions.

2.3.3. Experiential Learning

Kolb's (2014) experiential learning model identifies a cycle of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Museums naturally lend themselves to this cycle. A child may participate in a pottery workshop (experience), reflect on traditional craft skills (observation), connect it to cultural values (conceptualization), and attempt new creative outputs (experimentation). Dewey (1983) further stressed that authentic experiences are more effective when linked to real-world application.

Together, these theories emphasize that learning in museums is most impactful when interactive, social, and reflective. Yet gaps remain: much of the empirical literature applies these theories in Western museums, with fewer studies documenting how they manifest in Gulf contexts.

2.4. Informal Learning And Global Practices

Informal learning is central to museum pedagogy. It differs from formal education by being voluntary, less structured, and driven by curiosity (Robbins et al., 2021). Museums worldwide have pioneered diverse approaches to informal learning, from hands-on science experiments to immersive storytelling in heritage contexts.

Table 3: Global Practices in School-Museum Education.

Institution	Innovative Practice	Outcome
American Museum of Natural History (USA)	Inquiry-based "discovery rooms" for children.	Improved observational and inquiry skills.
Science Museum (UK)	Hands-on experiments and STEM challenges.	Increased enthusiasm for science subjects.
Skansen Open-Air Museum (Sweden)	Living history reenactments and craft workshops.	Pupils engaged emotionally with cultural traditions.
Taiwan National Museum	Storytelling-based heritage education.	Pupils connected emotionally to national history.
Louvre Abu Dhabi (UAE)	VR/AR immersive dome experiences.	Attracted younger audiences through technology.

These cases demonstrate that informal learning strategies differ depending on the type of museum. Science museums often prioritize experimentation and STEM alignment, while heritage museums focus on identity, tradition, and cultural transmission. Living history museums, such as Skansen in Sweden, add another dimension by reenacting past lifestyles and allowing pupils to participate in crafts or farming activities (Craig, 2012).

The Gulf context presents specific challenges. Conservation priorities often restrict physical

interaction with heritage objects, limiting opportunities for hands-on exploration (Macdonald, 2006). At the same time, pupils expect engaging, participatory activities. Addressing this tension requires innovative design, blending authenticity with interactivity.

2.5. Technology In Museum Learning

The integration of technology has transformed museum education over the past century, evolving from early audio guides and dioramas to multimedia kiosks in the 1990s, and more recently to immersive VR and AR platforms. Each stage reflects shifts in educational philosophy and visitor expectations. Research consistently shows that technology enhances accessibility, engagement, and multisensory learning (Hawkey, 2007; Al-Louati, 2021). In the UAE context, recent research has shown that tangible interaction, such as object-based workshops, can significantly enhance children's engagement with cultural heritage (Nofal and Alqaydi, 2025). Digital tools can provide contextual information, animate historical scenes, and offer multilingual interpretation. For pupils, these tools are particularly effective, as they align with their digital-native learning styles. Examples include:

- Virtual Reality (VR) reconstructions of ancient cities, allowing pupils to "walk" through historical environments.
- Augmented Reality (AR) overlays that animate static artifacts, showing how tools were used in daily life.
- Gamified apps that turn museum exploration into treasure hunts or puzzles.

Yet scholars caution against overreliance. Macdonald (2006) warned that excessive focus on technology risks overshadowing artifacts, reducing visits to "spectacle" rather than meaningful heritage encounters. Technology can also create issues of accessibility, as not all schools or pupils may have equal familiarity with advanced devices.

The consensus is clear: technology should complement, not replace, authentic engagement with cultural objects. Particularly in heritage museums, balance is essential; digital tools must enhance narrative interpretation without undermining the intrinsic value of physical artifacts. Despite these insights, studies focusing on the integration of technology in Arab and Gulf heritage museums remain limited, leaving a gap this article addresses.

2.6. Cultural Identity And Heritage Awareness

Museums are central to the preservation and transmission of cultural identity. In rapidly

modernizing societies, heritage museums anchor younger generations in traditions, values, and historical narratives. Ghobash (2017) described cultural identity as the "roots of a tree," warning that without these roots, social cohesion weakens.

Heritage museums contribute to identity formation by:

- Providing exposure to tangible heritage: objects, architecture, and crafts embody values and practices.
- Connecting with intangible heritage: oral traditions, poetry, music, and rituals often incorporated into programming.
- Creating spaces for intergenerational dialogue: children engage with traditions explained by elders or community representatives.

Al-Kandari (2015) found that pupils participating in heritage workshops reported stronger attachments to national identity. Similarly, Al-Faris (2016) argued that museums in the Gulf function as bridges between tradition and modernity, counteracting youth detachment from cultural practices. In the UAE, virtual reality initiatives have been found to reinforce young visitors' awareness of intangible cultural heritage, supporting identity-building goals in museum education (Alhindassi and Nofal, 2026).

UNESCO (2003) has also emphasized the importance of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage (e.g., practices, expressions, knowledge, and skills) as essential for cultural continuity. Museums that integrate intangible elements, such as traditional crafts or oral poetry, not only preserve heritage but also make it relevant for younger audiences.

Despite this, the literature highlights a gap: empirical research on how museum visits specifically shape heritage awareness among school pupils in the Gulf remains scarce. Most studies discuss the cultural role of museums broadly, without systematically measuring outcomes of school visits. This case study helps fill that gap by documenting pupils' perceptions and experiences in a heritage museum context.

3. CASE STUDY CONTEXT: BAIT SHEIKH SAEED BIN HAMAD AL QASIMI MUSEUM

The case study focuses on the Bait Sheikh Saeed Bin Hamad Al Qasimi Museum, located in Kalba on the eastern coast of the Emirate of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (UAE). This museum is both a preserved architectural landmark and an active cultural institution that bridges the nation's past with its educational aspirations for future generations.

3.1. Historical Background

Kalba has long been recognized as a strategic coastal settlement along the Gulf of Oman, historically important for fishing, trade, and maritime connections. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Kalba was ruled by members of the Al Qasimi family, one of the most influential ruling families in the Gulf region (Heard-Bey, 2004). Sheikh Saeed bin Hamad Al Qasimi, who governed Kalba during this period, built a residence that symbolized both authority and hospitality.

Constructed between 1898 and 1901, the house embodied the architectural traditions of the region: walls of coral stone and gypsum, reinforced by mangrove poles (chandal) imported through maritime trade, and ornamented wooden elements crafted by local artisans. Its location along the coast symbolized Kalba's connection to seafaring and trade networks that extended across the Arabian Peninsula, East Africa, and the Indian Ocean.

After the Sheikh's death, the house remained a landmark of local memory. Recognizing its heritage value, the Sharjah Museums Authority (SMA) restored the building, opening it as a museum in 1999. The conversion was part of Sharjah's broader policy of heritage conservation, led by H.H. Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, which sought to safeguard Emirati traditions while using museums as tools of cultural education.

3.2. Architectural Features

The building exemplifies traditional Emirati coastal architecture. It consists of two main wings, eastern and western, organized around a spacious central courtyard.



Figure 1: Courtyard of the Museum (Source: Sharjah Museums Authority (n.d.))

- Courtyard (ḥawsh): Served as the heart of social life, where family gatherings, storytelling, and communal activities took place (Figure 1).
- Majlis (council room): Functioned as a reception area for guests and a space for governance, symbolizing hospitality and authority.
- Private residential quarters: Demonstrated

gendered divisions of space, reflecting cultural norms of the time.

- Wind towers (barjeel): Provided natural ventilation, an early example of environmental adaptation in Gulf architecture.

The architecture itself constitutes an educational resource. For pupils, walking through these spaces provides first-hand exposure to how Emiratis lived, governed, and interacted with their environment more than a century ago. Such direct encounters resonate with constructivist learning principles, as children actively connect new knowledge with sensory experiences of space.

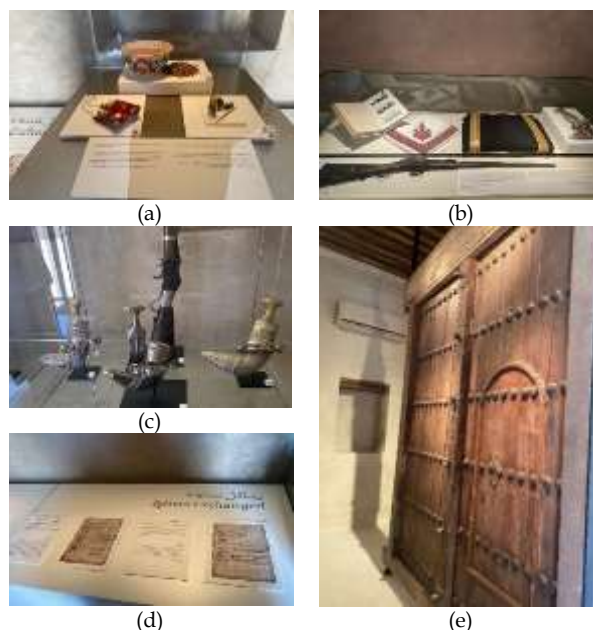


Figure 2: Collections of Bait Sheikh Saeed Museum; (a) display of Sheikh Saeed's poetry, (b) traditional dress of Sheikh Saeed bin Hamad Al Qasimi, (c) display of Traditional Weapons, (d) wooden Gate with inscriptions, and (e) historical letters exchanged by the Al Qasimi family (Source: Authors)

3.3. Collections And Displays

The museum's displays include objects of daily use, weaponry, clothing, poetry, letters, and architectural elements. These collections embody both tangible and intangible heritage.

3.3.1. Poetry And Intangible Heritage

Sheikh Saeed was celebrated for his al-'azi poetry (Figure 2.a), a form of oral tradition performed in call-and-response style to inspire courage and unity. The museum preserves his verses, contextualizing them as symbols of cultural resilience. In 2017, al-'azi was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage, affirming its significance for national identity.

3.3.2. Dress And Social Status

The Sheikh's attire is displayed, including the bisht (embroidered cloak), dagger (khanjar), and Kashmiri shawl. These garments (Figure 2.b) signal authority and social status, helping children understand how material culture expresses identity.

3.3.3. Weapons And Valor

Collections include Martini-Henry rifles, swords, and shields (Figure 2.c). Beyond their martial role, these items illustrate ceremonial uses in weddings and festivals. Weapons were often ornamented with silver, demonstrating aesthetic as well as functional value.

3.3.4. Architectural Elements

The wooden gate of the house (Figure 2.d), engraved with Quranic verses and poetry in Thuluth script, blends craftsmanship with spirituality. Pupils encounter heritage as both artistic and moral tradition.

3.3.5. Archival Letters

Personal correspondence preserved in the museum reveals social relationships and familial networks, offering insight into communication and daily life in early twentieth-century Kalba, such as what is shown in Figure 2.e.

3.4. Educational Role And Programming

As part of the Sharjah Museums Authority, the museum has developed a structured program for engaging schools and pupils. Its offerings combine tangible and intangible heritage, traditional storytelling, and modern technologies.

Table 4: Educational Programs at Bait Sheikh Saeed Bin Hamad Al Qasimi Museum.

Program	Description	Educational Value
School Visits	Guided tours designed for primary and secondary students, booked via SMA's online platform.	Provides structured exposure to heritage within formal curricula.
Workshops	Activities such as pottery coloring, calligraphy, and craft-making.	Hands-on experiential learning, aligned with Kolb's cycle.
Storytelling Sessions	Oral narratives, including poetry recitations and folklore.	Promotes cultural identity, language appreciation, and intergenerational learning.

Holiday Camps	"Happy Vacation Camp" integrates games and creative projects.	Blends entertainment and heritage, reinforcing informal learning.
Digital Activities	Touchscreens, interactive quizzes, and digital storytelling.	Appeals to digital-native pupils, complementing traditional heritage displays.

The integration of such programs demonstrates how museums operationalize educational theories:

- **Constructivism:** Pupils build understanding by connecting new knowledge with familiar contexts.
- **Sociocultural Learning:** Group activities encourage cooperation and shared meaning-making.
- **Experiential Learning:** Workshops provide cycles of doing, reflecting, and applying.

Beyond individual learning, the museum holds wider educational and cultural significance:

1. **Authenticity of setting:** As a restored historic house rather than a purpose-built institution, the museum allows pupils to encounter heritage in situ, enhancing emotional engagement and cultural pride.
2. **Integration of tangible and intangible heritage:** By combining material culture (weapons, dress, architecture) with oral traditions (poetry, storytelling, crafts), the museum embodies UNESCO's holistic approach to heritage education.
3. **Policy alignment:** Its programming reflects Sharjah's cultural policies that emphasize heritage as a foundation of national identity, aligning museum education with state objectives.
4. **Local and national relevance:** The museum simultaneously represents the specific traditions of Kalba and the broader Emirati identity, making findings relevant both locally and nationally.
5. **Filling research gaps:** While the literature highlights the educational value of museums globally, fewer studies explore heritage museums in the Gulf. This case study provides much-needed evidence on the educational role of school visits in an Emirati heritage setting.

In sum, the Bait Sheikh Saeed Bin Hamad Al Qasimi Museum functions as a living classroom, where architectural space, collections, and interactive programs converge to foster cultural learning and awareness. Its significance lies not only in its collections but also in its ability to translate heritage

into educational practice, providing a fertile ground for analyzing the educational impact of school visits.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive-analytical research design to examine the educational impact of school visits to the Bait Sheikh Saeed Bin Hamad Al Qasimi Museum on pupils' cultural learning and heritage awareness. The methodology integrates qualitative and quantitative approaches to capture multiple perspectives (i.e., pupils, teachers, and museum staff) while grounding the findings in observed experiences during school visits.

4.1. Research Design

The choice of a descriptive-analytical design reflects the study's dual aims:

1. Description of the nature of museum educational programs and pupils' experiences.
2. Analysis of how these experiences translate into cultural learning and heritage awareness.
3. This design is well suited for studies in museum education, where variables such as engagement, identity, and cultural awareness are complex and require both measurable indicators and interpretive insights (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007; Falk & Dierking, 2000).

4.2. Population And Sampling

The study population included pupils, teachers, and museum staff involved in school visits to the Bait Sheikh Saeed Bin Hamad Al Qasimi Museum.

- Pupils: Students aged 7–14 years from primary and lower secondary schools in Kalba and Sharjah. Pupils were selected using stratified sampling to ensure representation across age groups.
- Teachers: Schoolteachers accompanying the visits, selected through purposive sampling to capture diverse perspectives from different grade levels.
- Museum Staff: Educators and administrators responsible for designing and delivering school programs.

A total of 40 pupils, 4 teachers, and 4 museum staff members participated in the study.

Table 5: Summary of Research Participants.

Group	Sample Size	Demographic Details	Sampling Technique	Purpose
Pupils (7–14 yrs)	40	30 males (75 %), 10 females (25 %); 17 in Cycle 1 (7–10 yrs), 23 in Cycle 2 (11–14 yrs)	Stratified sampling	To capture diversity across age and gender groups

Teachers	4	Mixed genders; representing different grade levels	Purposive sampling	To provide curricular and pedagogical perspectives
Museum staff	4	Mixed genders; educators and administrators	Purposive sampling	To provide institutional perspectives

This composition ensured balanced representation of both male and female pupils and inclusion of students from two educational cycles, allowing meaningful comparison across developmental stages within primary education.

4.3. Data Collection Methods

To triangulate findings, the study employed three main instruments: questionnaires, interviews, and field observations.

4.3.1. Questionnaires

Structured questionnaires were distributed to pupils and teachers. These were designed to capture both quantitative and qualitative data. The instruments combined closed-ended Likert-scale questions measuring engagement, enjoyment, and cultural learning outcomes, alongside open-ended questions that invited participants to reflect on the most meaningful aspects of their visit. This dual structure ensured both statistical measurability and the ability to capture personal insights.

4.3.2. Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers and museum staff. Questions explored perceptions of the educational role of museums, alignment with school curricula, challenges of programming, and opportunities for innovation. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

4.3.3. Field Observations

The researcher conducted participant observations during multiple school visits. Observation focused on pupils' behaviors, levels of engagement during activities, and interactions with teachers and staff. Notes documented body language, group dynamics, and spontaneous comments.

4.4. Research Rigor, Ethics, And Limitations

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of findings, several measures were taken. The instruments (i.e., questionnaires, interview guides, and observation forms) underwent expert validation by two specialists in museum education and educational research to confirm content relevance

and clarity. Prior to full implementation, a pilot test was conducted with three pupils and one teacher from a nearby school not included in the final sample. Feedback from this pilot was used to refine item wording, sequencing, and comprehension. Validity and reliability were supported through triangulation across instruments and examination of internal consistency among Likert-scale items. Member checking with teachers reinforced the accuracy and credibility of qualitative data.

The study also adhered to strict ethical considerations. Informed consent was secured from school administrators and teachers, while parental permission was obtained for pupils' participation. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained, with pseudonyms used in reporting. Care was taken to respect cultural norms, ensuring that the research process aligned with Emirati values of hospitality and propriety. Participation was voluntary, and the research design ensured minimal disruption to the pupils' learning experience. Data collection took place in January 2025, coinciding with the spring academic term when school visits to the museum were most active. Acknowledging limitations, the research was confined to a single museum and a specific set of schools in Sharjah and Kalba, limiting the generalizability of results. Pupils' self-reports may have been influenced by social desirability, and observations captured only a fraction of activities.

5. RESULTS

This section presents the results of data collected from pupils, teachers, and museum staff regarding the educational impact of school visits to the Bait Sheikh Saeed Bin Hamad Al Qasimi Museum. The findings are organized thematically with quantitative and qualitative evidence to provide a comprehensive view of cultural learning and heritage awareness outcomes. Data were gathered during multiple school visits to the museum, involving 40 pupils (ages 7-14), 4 teachers, and 4 museum staff members.

- Pupils completed questionnaires following their visits, generating both quantitative ratings and qualitative reflections.
- Teachers contributed through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.
- Museum staff participated in interviews, while researcher observations supplemented self-reported data.

This multi-source approach ensured that results reflect both direct experiences of pupils and professional perspectives of teachers and museum staff.

5.1. Pupils' Perspectives

5.1.1. Engagement And Enjoyment

The majority of pupils expressed high levels of engagement and enjoyment during their visits. Table 6 summarizes responses to Likert-scale items. The results show that over 90% of pupils enjoyed the visit and participated actively. Pupils' willingness to revisit another museum suggests that the experience fostered long-term interest.

Table 6: Pupils' Reported Engagement During Museum Visit (n=40).

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I enjoyed the museum visit	65%	28%	5%	2%	0%
I participated actively in activities	58%	32%	7%	3%	0%
I would like to visit another museum in the future	70%	21%	6%	3%	0%

5.1.2. Learning Outcomes

Responses also indicated strong perceptions of learning. Pupils reported that the museum helped them gain knowledge about Emirati traditions, poetry, and crafts. The strongest outcome relates to heritage pride; over 90% of pupils felt more connected to their cultural identity after the visit.

Table 7: Pupils' Perceptions of Learning (n=40).

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I learned something new about Emirati heritage	72%	22%	5%	1%	0%
I now better understand traditional crafts and tools	61%	29%	7%	3%	0%
The visit made me feel proud of Emirati culture	68%	24%	6%	2%	0%

5.1.3. Favorite Activities

Open-ended responses highlighted the popularity of hands-on activities. Pupils most frequently cited:

- Worksheet activity (storytelling sessions): remembered for their emotional and cultural resonance.
- Pottery coloring workshops: described as fun and creative.
- Exploring traditional dress and weapons displays: linked to curiosity and excitement.

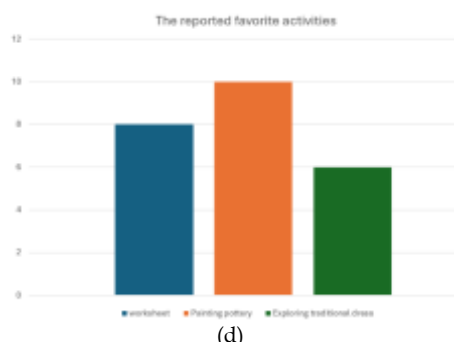
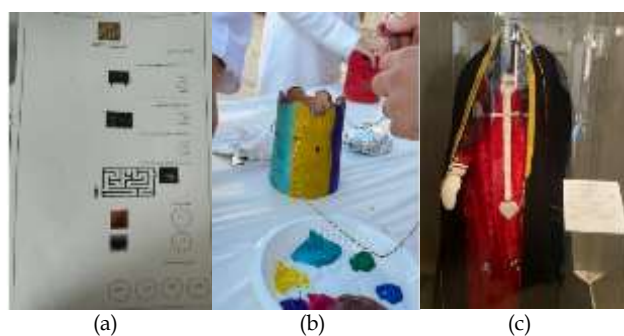


Figure 3: Pupils' Activities at the Museum; (a) worksheet activity (storytelling), (b) pottery coloring, (c) exploring traditional dress, and (d) the reported favorite activities.

5.2. Teachers' Perspectives

Teachers emphasized the educational value of museum visits as complementary to classroom instruction.

5.2.1. Alignment With Curriculum

Most teachers agreed that visits reinforced topics covered in social studies and heritage education modules. They highlighted that seeing artifacts in context made abstract concepts more concrete. One teacher noted: *"When pupils see the tools, clothes, and house architecture directly, they link the information from textbooks to real life"*.

5.2.2. Skills Development

Teachers also observed improvements in pupils' critical thinking, observational skills, and group collaboration. They reported that the museum setting encouraged more questioning than classroom environments. Teachers raised some challenges during their interviews (Table 8), such as:

- Limited time available for deep exploration of exhibits.
- Large group sizes that sometimes reduced individual participation.
- Need for stronger pre- and post-visit integration into lesson plans.

Table 8: Teachers' Perceptions of Benefits and Challenges.

Program	Description	Educational Value
Curriculum	Reinforces social studies and heritage lessons	Lack of preparatory materials
Skills	Promotes observation, questioning, collaboration	Time constraints for deeper inquiry
Engagement	Increases motivation and pride in culture	Large group sizes hinder individual participation

5.3. Museum Staff Perspectives

Museum staff highlighted their mission to balance heritage conservation with educational engagement. Staff emphasized that their primary goal is to promote heritage awareness among young generations. They described school visits as a cornerstone of the museum's strategy. They reported on both successes and challenges, such as the balance between the conservation of objects and the required hands-on activities for children. One staff member explained: *"we want children to touch and experience heritage, but we also must preserve fragile objects. Finding balance is a constant challenge"*.

1. Perceived successes

- High pupil participation in workshops.
- Strong demand from schools in Kalba and Sharjah.
- Positive teacher feedback encouraging repeat visits.

2. Challenges

- Need for more digital integration to appeal to "digital-native" pupils.
- Pressure of large groups vs. limited staff resources.
- Balancing object conservation with hands-on activities.

6. DISCUSSION

The discussion interprets the findings of this study in light of existing scholarship on museum education and cultural learning. The section is structured into five key discussion points, each highlighting the implications of school visits to Bait Sheikh Saeed Bin Hamad Al Qasimi Museum for educational theory, practice, and policy.

6.1. Hands-On And Interactive Activities Foster Deeper Learning

Interactive, hands-on activities in museums are the most effective in promoting cultural learning and engagement among pupils. Our results showed that workshops such as pottery coloring and storytelling

sessions were consistently cited by pupils as their favorite and most memorable activities. This aligns with constructivist and experiential learning theories (Hein, 1998; Kolb, 2014), which stress that learning occurs most effectively when learners actively engage with material. Comparable findings from international case studies, such as Skansen Open-Air Museum in Sweden and Taiwan's National Museum (Craig, 2012; Klook, n.d.), confirm that active participation leads to stronger cognitive and emotional outcomes. This is also consistent with findings from local research demonstrating that tangible, hands-on activities foster meaningful cultural learning in schoolchildren (Nofal and Alqaydi, 2025).

Accordingly, heritage museums should continue to prioritize interactive programming, ensuring that every school visit integrates at least one hands-on component. Investment in resources and staff training for interactive pedagogy is essential to maximize learning impact.

6.2. Museum Visits Strengthen Pupils' Cultural Identity and Pride

School visits to heritage museums significantly enhance pupils' sense of cultural identity and pride. Over 90% of surveyed pupils reported feeling more proud of Emirati culture after the visit, confirming that museum experiences play a role in identity formation. This resonates with the literature emphasizing the cultural role of museums as sites for transmitting values and traditions (Al-Kandari, 2015; Ghobash, 2017). This corresponds as well with recent evidence from UAE museums where VR applications successfully enhanced awareness of intangible traditions (Alhindassi and Nofal, 2025). UNESCO (2003) also highlights that integrating intangible cultural heritage—such as al-'azi poetry—into education fosters belonging and intergenerational continuity. Teachers corroborated this finding, noting that pupils connected classroom knowledge with lived heritage when exposed to tangible objects and traditional practices.

Therefore, policymakers and educators should further institutionalize museum visits as part of the national curriculum, framing them as essential for cultural continuity and identity-building, rather than optional extracurricular activities.

6.3. School Visits Complement But Do Not Fully Integrate With Curricula

While museum visits effectively reinforce curricular content, integration with school curricula remains limited. Teachers acknowledged that visits

made social studies and heritage topics more concrete but expressed concern about the lack of preparatory materials and follow-up activities. Literature on informal learning (Falk & Dierking, 2000; Hein, 1998) emphasizes the importance of pre-visit preparation and post-visit reflection for maximizing learning outcomes. Without this integration, museum learning risks remaining episodic rather than embedded within broader educational processes.

Accordingly, schools and museums should co-develop curricular toolkits, including pre-visit lesson plans and post-visit assignments, to ensure continuity between classroom and museum learning. Such collaboration would enhance both immediate engagement and long-term retention.

6.4. Logistical And Resource Constraints Limit Educational Potential

Practical challenges (e.g., large group sizes, limited time, and staff shortages) reduce the effectiveness of museum school visits. Teachers reported difficulties managing large groups, while museum staff noted the tension between accommodating demand and maintaining quality experiences. Literature similarly highlights logistical barriers, including transportation and scheduling, as common constraints in school-museum collaborations (al-Sawalha, 2020; Bitgood, 2013). Observational data also revealed that not all pupils could fully participate in activities when groups were too large.

To address these challenges, museums should adopt smaller group rotations during workshops and consider digital supplements for pupils who cannot participate directly. Increased institutional funding and staff recruitment would further help balance conservation responsibilities with educational demands.

6.5. Technology Offers Opportunities But Requires Careful Balance

Digital tools can enhance museum learning, but their integration must balance innovation with authenticity. Both teachers and staff emphasized the need for more digital engagement to appeal to digital-native pupils. The literature supports this view, showing that VR and AR technologies increase accessibility and engagement (Hawkey, 2007; Al-Louati, 2021). The Louvre Abu Dhabi's Quantum Dome project illustrates regional success with immersive technologies (Arts & Culture, 2025). However, scholars warn against overreliance on spectacle at the expense of authentic object-based

learning (Macdonald, 2006). Pupils in this study still valued direct interaction with tangible collections more than digital elements, highlighting the need for balance. These results align with broader evidence (including recent studies on virtual museum experiences) that such platforms can enhance children's critical thinking and cognitive development, though their integration must be balanced with authentic object encounters (Nofal et al., 2026).

We argue that heritage museums should integrate technology selectively, using it to complement—not replace—authentic encounters with objects and traditions. Investments should focus on tools that contextualize heritage (e.g., AR overlays, digital storytelling) rather than high-cost spectacle technologies that risk overshadowing the collection.

6. CONCLUSION

This study examined the educational impact of school visits to the Bait Sheikh Saeed Bin Hamad Al Qasimi Museum, focusing on how such experiences contribute to pupils' cultural learning and heritage awareness. The findings demonstrate that interactive and hands-on activities (such as pottery workshops and storytelling) were particularly effective in engaging pupils, aligning with constructivist and experiential learning theories. Pupils reported not only acquiring new knowledge about Emirati traditions but also developing a heightened sense of cultural pride and identity. Teachers confirmed that

museum visits reinforced curricular content, while museum staff highlighted their institutional commitment to heritage transmission despite logistical challenges. Taken together, the results affirm the central role of heritage museums as partners in education and cultural sustainability.

At the same time, the study underscores areas that require further development. Greater integration between museum programs and school curricula is essential to ensure that visits are not isolated experiences but part of a broader educational continuum. Logistical barriers (i.e., large group sizes and limited time) must be addressed to maximize the quality of engagement. Additionally, while digital technologies offer promising tools for enhancing accessibility and interactivity, they must be used in balance with authentic object-based learning to preserve the integrity of heritage encounters. The study contributes to filling a research gap in the Gulf region, offering insights for policymakers, educators, and museum professionals seeking to strengthen the role of museums in cultural learning. Ultimately, school visits to heritage museums such as Bait Sheikh Saeed Bin Hamad Al Qasimi are not merely educational excursions but essential platforms for cultivating identity, fostering intergenerational connections, and preparing young generations to value and sustain their cultural heritage. Future studies could extend this research to multiple museums across the UAE and Gulf region, allowing for cross-comparative analysis and greater generalizability of findings.

Acknowledgements: Authors would like to thank the Sharjah Museums Authority, and particularly the staff of the Bait Sheikh Saeed Bin Hamad Al Qasimi Museum, for granting access to the museum, facilitating fieldwork, and generously sharing their insights. The authors are also grateful to the school administrators, teachers, and pupils who participated in this study and contributed valuable perspectives that enriched the research findings.

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