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## CHILDREN'S INTEREST IN DINOSAUR MUSEUMS AND DINOSAURS IN THAILAND

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### ABSTRACT

Museums, exhibits, and displays regarding dinosaurs are a key influence in children's development, creating understanding, knowledge, and awareness of the natural world, and even influencing their future career choices. Unfortunately, upon preliminary literature reviews, there is little information and studies concerning this subject in Thailand, leading to the formation of this research. Accordingly, this research aims to explore opinions and attitudes regarding dinosaurs and dinosaur museum exhibits in kindergarten, primary, and secondary school students, and the pursuit of future career choices, through a quantitative research, acquiring data from 518 Thai students in kindergarten (n=40), primary (n=262), and secondary (n=216), covering all regions of Thailand. Results showed that a little over half of the children surveyed had never visited any dinosaur museums, resulting in the X museum visited per person of only 0.64. This is mainly due to the distances between the museums and the children's respective residences. As for children who'd visited dinosaur museums, the most liked exhibits for kindergarten and primary students are animatronic exhibits, whilst, for secondary students, it is the dinosaur fossil/bone exhibits. On the contrary, the most disliked exhibits by kindergarten, primary, and secondary students are dinosaur fossil/bone exhibits, animatronic exhibits, and dinosaur model exhibits respectively. Alternatively, children who like dinosaurs outnumbered those who don't (79.54% and 20.46% respectively), with the preference for dinosaurs largely being due to movies/cartoons (49.76%). Among these children, most want to become Paleontologists and Paleo-artists (25.00% and 22.09% respectively). Unfortunately, data also reveals that 75.73% of the children who want to become Paleontologists have obstacles, mainly a lack of knowledge about institutions with a Paleontological program.

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**Keywords:** Dinosaur, Dinosaur Museum, Survey, Children, Preference, Paleontology

## INTRODUCTION

Many studies use dinosaurs as a medium to help children learn and study, with many research using dinosaur-related topics and tools to access children in experiments (Hutchings *et al.*, 2007; Tan, 2019; Young *et al.*, 2021). On top of this, dinosaur exhibits were also used to conduct experiments on children's knowledge and opinions (Palmquist & Crowley, 2003; Palmquist & Crowley, 2007; Fouad & Elsaid, 2019). This all led to an assumption that children are interested in and attracted to dinosaurs as have been previously reported that young children (aged four to five years old) are more interested in dinosaurs than other subjects (Leibham *et al.*, 2005) and that children tend to learn better using dinosaur-related sources (Pila *et al.*, 2019). Nevertheless, the attendees of dinosaur-related extracurricular activities, such as museums, cartoons, and movies are not only limited to children aged four to five years old but rather children of all age groups (Kindergarten, Primary, and Secondary) and often even include adults.

In Thailand, since the first appearance of dinosaurs in the Thai media in 1965, the first discovery of identified dinosaur fossils in 1976 (Ouilapan & Thongcharoenchaikit, 2024), and the discoveries of 13 new species of dinosaurs (Manitkoon *et al.*, 2022; Manitkoon *et al.*, 2023), there has been an increasing trend in dinosaur-related youth contents and programs, which isn't limited to Paleontology but often includes Paleo-art, games, graphic designs, and video production, led by leading governmental and private institutions, such as the Department of Mineral Resources, the Maharakham University, Mahidol University, Chulalongkorn University, and the Sirindhorn Museum. Resultantly, this diverse selection of dinosaur-related youth programs had opened a question regarding the future careers of these children, and presents the idea that dinosaurs are progressively becoming the topic of interest among Thai and other youth (Cesiri, 2020). Therefore, it is necessary to explore the interest in dinosaurs among children of different age groups and their future career choices and goals. In which the results would be beneficial to educational centers, museums, or governmental institutes related to child development, allowing them to prepare the resources suitable to the preferences of children in all age groups and to aid and guide children to their future goals.

Other than this, access to extracurricular learning institutes, such as museums is important to support this group of children, especially as some museum exhibits play a vital role in fostering children's learning experiences (Weisberg, Dunlap & Sobel, 2023). Additionally, as dinosaur content in museums has become

an attraction for visitors (Souza *et al.*, 2023), many museums are now introducing dinosaur exhibits such as animatronics, models, and real fossils, with the intention of attracting children and visitors. Furthermore, since the 1980s, dinosaur exhibits, especially the more modern animatronic exhibitions, have increasingly become the focus of many museums, exclusively becoming one of the most popular, evocative exhibits, and gaining the museum an increase in the number of visitors (Carpenter, 1997; Tunnicliffe, 2000; Salmi, Thuneberg & Vainikainen, 2016; Cruz, Hite & Velasco, 2022). Accordingly, it is important for museum management and development to know the needs and interests of its target group to be able to provide its full potential, especially to children of different age groups with varying interests.

## **METHODS**

### **Research Questions**

This research aimed to explore dinosaur and museum exhibit preferences and attitudes among children in different age groups, with the following being the research questions for this research:

Q1: What are children's attitudes and comments when visiting dinosaur museums/exhibits?

Q2: Which exhibitions do children prefer in dinosaur museums?

Q3: Do children have a preference for dinosaurs? And why?

Q4: What career in the paleontological fields would children like to pursue? And are there any obstacles?

### **Survey Design**

This research is a quantitative research conducted through an online questionnaire with 3 main target groups being kindergarten, primary, and secondary children. The questionnaires used are developed in order to obtain the information needed for analysis through refining question structures of various related research studying children's interpretation and attitudes toward dinosaurs and museum exhibits, such as: "What is your favourite dinosaur?", "How Large Were the Largest and Smallest Dinosaurs?", "Where can fossils be found?", "What do you remember from your visits