ADJES (Ahmad Dahlan Journal of English Studies)
VOL 13, No. 2, 127-144
https://doi.org/10.26555/adjes.v13i2.2388

Integrating Language and Research: Students' Experiences in an English for Religious Tourism Course at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin

[1]Nani Hizriani, [2]Khairatunnisa

Email : [1]nanihizriani@uin-antasari.ac.id, [2] khairatunnisaicha@gmail.com
[1]Universitas Islam Negeri Antasari Banjarmasin
[2]Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Rasyidiyah Khalidiyah (Rakha) Amuntai

*Corresponding author

ARTICLE INFO

Article history
Received
Revised
Accepted

Keywords
English for Religious Tourism
English for Specific Purposes (ESP)
Experiential Learning
Intercultural Competence
Research-Based Learning

ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study explored students' experiences in integrating language learning and undergraduate research within an English for Religious Tourism (ERT) course at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin. Data gathered from semi-structured interviews, reflective journals, classroom observations, and student projects were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework. Findings reveal six primary outcomes: students engaged in authentic experiential learning through site visits to local heritage destinations like the Jami' and Sultan Suriansyah Mosques; enhanced their English communication confidence and specialized vocabulary; acquired practical qualitative research skills; developed broader intercultural awareness and respect for religious diversity by exploring multicultural sites like the Po An Kiong Temple; improved digital literacy through producing promotional videos, infographics, and brochures; and experienced personal growth by fostering cultural pride and independence. Despite initial challenges regarding academic writing and technical vocabulary, the integration of research-based and field-based experiential activities into English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction proved to be an effective model for holistic student development.

This is an open access article under the CC–BY-SA license.

Introduction

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has evolved from a language-centered approach into a more contextual and learner-oriented field that seeks to connect language instruction with learners' academic, professional, and social needs (Abrar-ul-Hassan & Fazel, 2018). Within this framework, English for Religious Tourism (ERT) represents a unique intersection between language learning, cultural heritage, religious values, and tourism communication.

As religious tourism continues to develop worldwide, the demand for English proficiency combined with intercultural competence and heritage awareness has become increasingly important. In Indonesia, particularly in South Kalimantan, religious tourism has grown significantly through destinations and events such as Jami' Mosque, Sultan Suriansyah Mosque, the annual Haul Guru Sekumpul pilgrimage, and interfaith heritage sites including Po An Kiong Temple. These sites provide authentic contexts for language learning and create opportunities for integrating local wisdom into English education.

Recent developments in higher education emphasize that language learning should not only focus on linguistic competence but also foster critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and research skills. Consequently, universities are encouraged to adopt experiential and project-based learning approaches that engage students in authentic tasks and community contexts. Experiential learning enables students to connect theoretical knowledge with practical experiences, while research-based learning encourages inquiry, reflection, and knowledge construction (Kolb, 1984; Ryan, 2025). Such approaches are particularly relevant in ESP classrooms, where learning outcomes are expected to prepare students for real-world communication and professional practices.

ESP also emphasizes task-based learning, which focuses on meaningful communication through tasks that resemble real-life situations. Task-based learning allows students to apply language skills while solving problems, conducting projects, or performing professional roles. Ellis, (2021) explains that tasks facilitate communicative competence because learners use language as a tool to achieve specific outcomes rather than merely practicing grammatical forms.

A number of studies have explored English for Specific Purposes, project-based learning, experiential learning, and tourism education. Previous studies have shown that authentic tasks and collaborative learning contribute positively to students' language proficiency, motivation, and intercultural competence (Paltridge & Starfield, 2013; Kristiana, 2026). Other studies have examined religious tourism from sociocultural and economic perspectives (Timothy & Olsen, 2006; Raj & Morpeth, 2007). However, limited attention has been given to the integration of language learning and undergraduate research within the context of English for Religious Tourism. In particular, there is still a lack of studies focusing on students' experiences in conducting field-based projects and research activities as part of ESP instruction in Islamic higher education institutions.

At Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Antasari Banjarmasin, English for Religious Tourism (ERT) is offered as a two credits course for sixth-semester students of the English Language Education Study Program. The course is designed to support the university's vision of

https://doi.org/10.26555/adjes.v13i2.2388

"Excellence and Morality" by integrating Islamic values, local identity, religious moderation, and global perspectives. Through various learning activities including field visits, interviews, collaborative projects, brochure development, documentary videos, and article writing students are encouraged to explore religious tourism sites and communicate their findings in English. More importantly, the course integrates undergraduate research into classroom activities, enabling students to investigate diverse topics such as mosque architecture, pilgrimage traditions, moral values in religious sermons, interfaith tourism, and the role of social media in promoting religious destinations.

The necessity for English language skills particular to specific religious and regional tourist contexts has increased due to the growing popularity of global halal tourism and cultural heritage travel in Indonesia. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses, especially English for Tourism, are essential in Indonesian higher education for giving students the communication skills which need to succeed in the profession. According to Walker & Harding, (2006), English for Tourism integrates language skills with tourism knowledge and professional communication practices. In Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKIN/PTKIS), where halal hospitality, pilgrimage sites, and local Islamic cultural assets are essential to the local identity, preparing students to express these subtleties in English necessitates pedagogical models that connect academic research with practical professional practice.

While task-based frameworks and Project-Based Learning (PBL) have been increasingly popular in ESP literature beyond the world, the majority of current research focuses on professional English writing, general workplace communication, or generic tourism tasks. Recent research on ESP in Indonesian higher education and vocational settings shows how effective project-based learning strategies are at increasing students' vocabulary and speaking confidence. However, rather of using real, empirical field research, these implementations frequently rely on static, hypothetical work settings (such as mock tour guiding or itinerary planning). Furthermore, there is still a gap of empirical research examining how research-integrated project-based models work when embedded in specialized English for Tourism courses, in particular within Islamic university environments where cultural-religious literacy and localized community needs despite the fact that study on research-integrated learning in English Language Teaching (ELT) clearly suggests benefits for critical thinking and domain knowledge.

Religious tourism represents a meaningful form of travel driven by spiritual, cultural, and educational motivations, setting it apart from purely recreational travel. It encompasses traditional practices such as pilgrimages to sacred destinations, spiritual tourism centered

on personal well-being, and visits to both tangible structures and intangible traditions that form a region's religious heritage. Using sacred spaces as active learning environments fosters place-based and contextual education, allowing learners to connect theoretical knowledge with local wisdom. Furthermore, because these sites attract diverse visitors, religious tourism serves as a platform for intercultural communication, promoting cultural awareness, interfaith understanding, and global citizenship.

Indonesia serves as an exemplar of rich religious diversity, where traditions like Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and indigenous faiths coexist and yield significant heritage destinations. Major sites like Borobudur, Prambanan, and historic Islamic destinations demonstrate how heritage sites contribute to economic development, identity preservation, and interfaith dialogue. South Kalimantan specifically highlights this dynamic through key Islamic heritage sites such as the Sultan Suriansyah Mosque, the tomb of Sheikh Muhammad Arsyad Al-Banjari, and the annual Haul Guru Sekumpul alongside multicultural landmarks like the Po An Kiong Temple, providing unique localized resources for educational exploration.

This study examined the integration of a research-based Project-Based Learning (PBL) model into an English for Tourism course at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin in order to cover this empirical gap. Specifically, the research first examined how the research-integrated project-based ESP model is designed and implemented within the course framework. It subsequently evaluated the students' learning outcomes and qualitative experiences regarding both their specialized language proficiency and research competencies. Finally, the study explored the practical challenges and broader pedagogical opportunities that emerge from implementing this integrated approach in an Islamic higher education context.

Method

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore students' experiences in integrating language learning and research activities in the English for Religious Tourism (ERT) course at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it allows researchers to understand participants' perceptions, experiences, and meanings in a natural setting (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Specifically, the study adopted a case study approach, which enables an in-depth investigation of a bounded system in this case, the implementation of the ERT course and students' experiences within it (Yin, 2018).

This qualitative case study is bounded within a 16-week undergraduate English for Tourism course implemented during the (6th semester) academic term at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin. The course comprised 14 instructional meetings (100 minutes/week) and

https://doi.org/10.26555/adjes.v13i2.2388

two dedicated field research cycles as middle and final examination.

Students worked in small collaborative research groups (4–5 students per group) to conduct mini-empirical investigations into local religious and cultural tourism sites. Supervision involved weekly formative feedback on both research instruments and language accuracy during dedicated consultation sessions. Assessment was divided into process-based components (formative peer/instructor feedback, reflective journals, field data notes) and product-based deliverables (a written research-based tourism profile report and an oral English presentation).

Table 1. Overview of Course Components, Schedule, and Integrated Outputs

Week / Phase	Focus & Allocation	Instructional & Language Input	Research Activities & Fieldwork	Outputs & Deliverables
Weeks 1–3 *(Preparation)*	70% Language 30% Research	Specialized tourism vocabulary Genre analysis of tourism profiles nterviewing técnicas & question formation	Formulating mini-research questions Developing semi-structured interview guides & observation checklists	Approved research proposal & validated data collection instruments
Weeks 4–7 *(Field Research Cycle 1)*	40% Language 60% Research	Note-taking strategies Transcribing & translating field data Descriptive academic writing	Site Visit 1: Field observations & semi-structured interviews with site managers/tourists	Field observation notes, interview audio/transcripts, & initial site dossier
Weeks 8–11 *(Field Research Cycle 2)*	50% Language 50% Research	Cross-cultural communication Drafting thematic report sections Integrating visual/audio assets	Site Visit 2: Supplementary interviews with community members/religious leaders	Draft research-integrated English tourism profile
Weeks 12–16 *(Synthesis & Dissemination)*	60% Language 40% Research	Academic oral presentation skills Public speaking & defense Q&A Peer-editing & revision strategies	Data triangulation & thematic synthesis Preparing final digital/print reports	Final Written Tourism Research Profile Oral Research Presentation

The study focused on sixth-semester students of the English Language Education Study

Program who enrolled in the ERT course. Through authentic learning activities, such as field visits, interviews, article writing, and multimedia projects, students experienced the integration of language learning and undergraduate research. Therefore, the case study design provided a suitable framework for capturing the complexity of these learning experiences.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected students who had completed the English for Religious Tourism course. The interviews aimed to explore students' perceptions, learning experiences, competencies developed, and challenges encountered during the course. The flexible nature of semi-structured interviews enabled participants to express their views and experiences in depth. Students' reflective writings were used to understand how they perceived and interpreted their learning experiences. These reflections provided valuable insights into their language development, intercultural awareness, research skills, and personal growth throughout the course. Then, classroom activities and field-based learning experiences were observed to document students' participation, interactions, collaboration, and engagement during the implementation of project-based and research-oriented tasks. Observation notes were used to complement the interview and document data. The last part is documentation that various student-produced documents were analyzed, including research articles, brochures, infographics, videos, field reports, and presentation slides. These documents served as evidence of students' learning processes and outcomes and provided information regarding their ability to integrate language skills with research and cultural knowledge.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis proposed by (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis involved three stages.

1. Semi-Structured Interviews: Individual interviews

   All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim in Indonesian, and subsequently translated into English by the researchers. To preserve semantic fidelity, back-translation was conducted on 20% of the randomly selected transcripts by an independent English-Indonesian bilingual classroom.
2. Reflective Journals: Students submitted entry journals

   Following a structured prompt protocol focusing on: (a) linguistic development, (b) research challenges, and (c) socio-cultural reflections during site visits.
3. Documentary Artifacts & Field Observations

   Methodology for observation that focuses on how students participate in research-language integration assignments. Additionally, presentation slides, final written reports, and student research reports were gathered as supplemental documents.

https://doi.org/10.26555/adjes.v13i2.2388

A blended inductive-deductive thematic analysis approach was used to analyze the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). While inductive codes developed directly from unprocessed transcripts and diaries, deductive codes were influenced by ESP and research-integrated learning frameworks.

Trustworthiness and Rigor were established through Lincoln and Guba's criteria for qualitative research.

1. Credibility is attained by triangulating data from observation logs, reflective journals, and interviews. In order to verify accuracy, complete interview transcripts and English translations were sent back to participants.
2. Transferability is addressed by giving a thorough explanation of the course structure, instructional context, and bounded case.
3. Dependability and Confirmability: Maintained by a peer debriefing with two senior ELT/ESP researchers who independently verified 20% of the coded transcripts. Using Miles and Huberman's reliability index, an inter-coder agreement rate of 88% was verified.

Finding and Discussion

A. Findings

The participants in this study were six sixth-semester students enrolled in the English for Religious Tourism (ERT) course. They were selected based on their participation in the course activities and collaborative research projects. To provide an overview of the participants' backgrounds, assigned roles, and research topics, their profiles are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Participant Profile Summary

Participant Code	Gender		Project Topic
P1	Female	Student Researcher / Content Writer	History and Architecture of Jami' Mosque
P2	Female	Student Researcher / Interviewer	Moral Values in Religious Sermons
P3	Female	Student Researcher / Data Analyst	Gen Z Perceptions of Religious Tourism
P4	Female	Student Researcher / Media Creator	Pilgrims' Motivations at Guru Sekumpul's Tomb
P5	Female	Student Researcher / Interviewer	Chinese Cultural Heritage at *Po An Kiong* Temple

Participant Code	Gender		Project Topic
P6	Female	Student Researcher / Visual Designer	History and Identity of Sabilal Muhtadin Grand Mosque

As presented in Table 2, all six participants were female students who assumed different responsibilities within their collaborative research projects. Their roles included student researcher/content writer (P1), interviewer (P2 and P5), data analyst (P3), media creator (P4), and visual designer (P6). The research topics covered various aspects of religious tourism and cultural heritage in South Kalimantan, including the history and architecture of Jami' Mosque, moral values in religious sermons, Generation Z's perceptions of religious tourism, pilgrims' motivations at Guru Sekumpul's Tomb, Chinese cultural heritage at Po An Kiong Temple, and the history and identity of Sabilal Muhtadin Grand Mosque. The diversity of these topics and assigned responsibilities reflects the range of research activities undertaken by the students and provides the context for examining their experiences of integrating English language learning with undergraduate research.

1. Students' Experiences of Integrating Language Learning and Research Activities in the English for Religious Tourism Course

Analysis of interview transcripts, students' reflective journals, classroom observations, and students' final projects revealed that the integration of language learning and research activities in the English for Religious Tourism (ERT) course provided meaningful and authentic learning experiences. Students perceived the course not merely as an English class but as an opportunity to explore local religious heritage, conduct small-scale research, and apply their English skills in real-life contexts. Six major themes emerged from the analysis.

https://doi.org/10.26555/adjes.v13i2.2388

2. Experiencing Authentic Learning through Fieldwork and Religious Tourism Sites

One of the most prominent themes concerned students' experiences of learning outside the classroom. Students emphasized that field visits to religious destinations such as Jami' Mosque, Sultan Suriansyah Mosque, and pilgrimage sites enabled them to connect theoretical knowledge with real-world experiences. According to several participants, observing architectural features, interviewing local communities, and documenting cultural practices allowed them to understand religious tourism more deeply than classroom lectures alone.



Fig.1. Students Conducting Site Visits to Religious Tourism Destinations

One participant stated:"Visiting the sites helped me understand the history and significance of those places. I also learned many new English words related to architecture and religion. It was different from learning only from textbooks." Observation data indicated that students actively engaged in discussions, took photographs, recorded videos, and interacted with local residents during site visits. These experiences correspond to Kolb, (1984) concept of concrete experience, where knowledge is acquired through direct engagement with authentic environments.

3. Developing Communication Skills through Research Activities

Students consistently reported that conducting interviews and preparing research reports improved their communication skills. Interviewing religious leaders, caretakers, visitors, and local communities required students to formulate questions, listen attentively, and present information effectively. Many students indicated that they became more confident in speaking and describing religious destinations. One participant explained: "When we interviewed local people and presented our findings, I became more confident speaking. I also learned how to explain cultural and religious topics clearly."

Document analysis of students' articles and presentations showed improvements in

vocabulary related to tourism, history, architecture, and religious traditions. Students also demonstrated better organization of ideas and more effective use of academic language. These findings indicate that research activities provided authentic opportunities for language use, which enhanced students' communicative competence.

4. Learning Research Skills through Undergraduate Research

Another significant theme was students' development of research competencies. Most participants admitted that they had limited experience conducting research before taking the course. Through group projects, they learned how to formulate research topics, collect data, conduct interviews, organize information, and write academic reports. A participant reflected: "Before this course, I thought research was difficult. After conducting observations and interviews, I realized that research starts from simple questions and curiosity."

Students' final projects demonstrated their ability to apply basic qualitative research techniques. Several projects explored topics such as:The history and architecture of Jami' Mosque; Moral values in religious sermons; Gen Z perceptions of religious tourism; and Pilgrims' motivations at Guru Sekumpul's tomb. These findings illustrate the implementation of research-based learning, where students actively construct knowledge through inquiry and investigation (Healey & Jenkins, 2009).

5. Strengthening Intercultural Awareness and Appreciation of Religious Diversity

Students also reported increased awareness of cultural and religious diversity. Visiting different religious sites and interacting with people from diverse backgrounds broadened their perspectives and encouraged greater appreciation of pluralism. One participant commented: "I learned that religious tourism is not only about Islam. Visiting Po An Kiong Temple taught me about Chinese culture and the importance of respecting different beliefs."

Reflective journals revealed that students developed empathy and understanding toward cultural differences. These experiences correspond to Byram, (1997) concept of intercultural communicative competence, particularly the dimensions of attitudes, knowledge, and critical cultural awareness.

https://doi.org/10.26555/adjes.v13i2.2388

6. Enhancing Digital Literacy and Creativity

Students highlighted the role of digital media in supporting their learning experiences. They created videos, brochures, infographics, and social media content to promote religious tourism destinations. One participant noted:"Making videos and editing content for Instagram made the project more interesting. We learned not only English but also digital communication."



Fig.2. Students' Infographics on Religious Tourism and Cultural Heritage

Analysis of students' products indicated that they successfully integrated textual, visual, and multimedia elements to communicate tourism information effectively. These activities fostered creativity and digital literacy while preparing students for contemporary tourism communication.

7. Experiencing Personal Growth and Transformative Learning

Perhaps the most profound theme emerging from the data was personal transformation. Students described becoming more confident, independent, and appreciative of local heritage. They also developed stronger interpersonal skills and a greater sense of responsibility toward preserving cultural and religious traditions.

One student reflected: "This course changed my perspective. I realized that our local heritage is valuable and should be introduced to international visitors. I became more proud of my culture." Another participant stated: "I learned that language is not only grammar. Language can be used to tell stories, preserve traditions, and connect people."

These findings suggest that students experienced transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000), where reflection and authentic experiences contributed to changes in attitudes and perspectives. Overall, students experienced the integration of language learning and research activities in the English for Religious Tourism course as meaningful, authentic, and transformative. These findings demonstrate that the ERT course goes beyond language instruction by integrating experiential learning, research-based learning, intercultural competence, and digital literacy, thereby providing students with holistic learning experiences that prepare them for academic, professional, and social contexts.

8. Development of English Communication Competence

One of the most frequently mentioned outcomes was the improvement of English communication skills. Students reported increased confidence in speaking, writing, and presenting information in English. The activities of conducting interviews, preparing reports, producing videos, and presenting findings enabled them to use English in authentic situations.

Several students explained that they acquired new vocabulary related to religion, architecture, tourism, and local culture. They also became more aware of how to communicate cultural and religious information appropriately to different audiences. One participant remarked:"I learned many new expressions related to tourism and history. I also became more confident when explaining our local heritage in English."

Analysis of students' articles and presentations further indicated improvements in organization, vocabulary usage, and academic writing skills. These findings suggest that authentic tasks provided meaningful opportunities for language development.

9. Enhancement of Research Competencies

Students consistently emphasized that the course strengthened their research abilities. Through observations, interviews, documentation, and report writing, they learned fundamental research procedures and became familiar with qualitative inquiry. A participant explained: "Before taking this course, I did not know how to conduct interviews or organize findings. The project helped me understand research step by step. "Students reported improvements in several aspects: identifying research topics; collecting and organizing data; conducting interviews and observations; analysing information; writing research reports and articles.

These findings indicate that the ERT course successfully integrated undergraduate research into language learning, allowing students to become active knowledge producers rather than passive recipients.

https://doi.org/10.26555/adjes.v13i2.2388

10. Development of Intercultural and Religious Awareness

Another important outcome concerned students' increased appreciation of cultural diversity and religious pluralism. Visiting different religious sites and interacting with communities enabled students to understand the importance of tolerance and mutual respect.

One participant stated: "Through this course, I learned that every religion has valuable traditions and histories. We need to respect differences and learn from each other. Reflective journals revealed that students became more aware of cultural differences and recognized the importance of preserving local traditions. Exposure to multicultural settings also encouraged them to appreciate Indonesia's diversity and develop broader perspectives.

These experiences correspond to Byram, (1997) concept of intercultural communicative competence, particularly attitudes, knowledge, and critical cultural awareness.

11. Improvement of Digital Literacy and Creative Skills

Students also perceived that the course enhanced their digital competence and creativity. The preparation of brochures, infographics, videos, and social media content required them to use various digital applications and multimedia tools. One student commented: "Making tourism videos was challenging, but I learned video editing and content design. It made the learning process more interesting." Students became familiar with Canva and graphic design applications; video editing software; social media platforms; online information searching; and digital storytelling techniques.



Fig.3. Students' Video Production Projects for Religious Tourism Promotion

Document analysis of students' projects demonstrated creativity in presenting tourism information through visual and multimedia formats. These activities contributed to students' readiness for digital communication in tourism and education.

12. Strengthening Personal Values and Sense of Cultural Identity

Beyond academic and professional competencies, students highlighted the development of personal values. They reported becoming more appreciative of local heritage and more aware of their responsibility to preserve cultural traditions. One participant reflected: "I became more proud of South Kalimantan's heritage. Before joining this course, I did not realize how rich our culture and religious history are." Another student stated: "This course taught me not only English but also respect, responsibility, and appreciation for diversity."

Students' reflections revealed several values developed during the course, including: respect for cultural and religious diversity; empathy and tolerance; teamwork and collaboration; responsibility toward cultural preservation; self-confidence and independence. These findings indicate that the ERT course facilitated transformative learning experiences that influenced students' perspectives and identities.

Analysis of the data revealed that participation in the English for Religious Tourism course enabled students to develop a variety of competencies and values. These findings demonstrate that the ERT course contributes to holistic student development by integrating language learning, research activities, intercultural understanding, and character formation. The competencies and values acquired through the course prepare students not only for academic and professional contexts but also for active participation in multicultural and increasingly interconnected societies.

B. Discussion

The findings indicated that the English for Religious Tourism (ERT) course provides students with authentic and meaningful learning experiences by integrating language learning with research activities and community engagement. Through fieldwork, site visits, interviews, article writing, and project-based activities, students were able to connect classroom knowledge with real-world contexts. These experiences support Kolb, (1984) Experiential Learning Theory, which emphasizes that learning occurs through the transformation of experience. The learning process also reflects idea that meaningful education should be grounded in authentic experiences that actively engage learners.

The integration of language learning and undergraduate research enabled students to develop not only English proficiency but also research competencies, academic literacy, and critical thinking skills. Consistent with the principles of Research-Based Learning proposed

https://doi.org/10.26555/adjes.v13i2.2388

by Healey & Jenkins, (2009), students became active producers of knowledge rather than passive recipients of information. Through interviews, observations, collaborative inquiry, and article writing, they experienced the process of knowledge construction and developed greater confidence in conducting research. These findings are in line with Brew, (2006), Levy & Petrulis, (2012) and Walkington et al., (2011), who highlighted the importance of integrating research into undergraduate learning.

The study also revealed that students developed intercultural awareness and appreciation of religious diversity through interactions with local communities and visits to religious heritage sites. Such experiences contributed to the development of intercultural communicative competence as proposed by Byram, (1997). Students demonstrated openness toward different cultures and beliefs, developed greater cultural understanding, and learned to appreciate diversity and interfaith harmony. These findings support Deardorff, (2006) view that intercultural competence involves attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary for effective communication across cultures.

Another important finding concerns the enhancement of digital literacy and creativity. Through the production of videos, brochures, infographics, and social media content, students learned to combine language skills with digital communication. This finding is consistent with Pegrum et al., (2014) concept of digital literacy and Mayer's, (2009) Multimedia Learning Theory, which emphasize the importance of multimodal learning and creative content production. In addition, the use of digital media reflects contemporary tourism communication practices that increasingly rely on visual storytelling and online platforms (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

Furthermore, students experienced personal growth and transformation throughout the course. They reported increased self-confidence, stronger appreciation of local heritage, and greater awareness of cultural diversity. These changes reflect Mezirow, (2000) Transformative Learning Theory, which explains how meaningful experiences accompanied by critical reflection can lead to changes in perspectives and values. Similar views were expressed by Cranton, (2006) and Dirkx, (2002), who argued that transformative learning influences not only cognitive development but also identity formation and personal growth.

Although students encountered challenges related to language proficiency, field research, academic writing, and time management, these difficulties became opportunities for learning and development. Collaborative projects and peer interactions helped students overcome obstacles and strengthen problem-solving skills, which is consistent with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and the principles of Project-Based Learning proposed by

Thomas, (2000). Overall, the findings demonstrate that the integration of experiential learning, research-based learning, project-based learning, intercultural communication, and digital literacy creates holistic learning experiences that contribute to students' linguistic competence, research skills, intercultural awareness, creativity, and personal transformation. Consequently, the English for Religious Tourism course serves not only as a language course but also as a platform for preparing students to become globally minded, culturally sensitive, and professionally competent graduates.

For undergraduate students, the English for Religious Tourism (ERT) course's blended approach of language study and research activities offered a comprehensive, practical, and life-changing educational experience. The study, which used a qualitative methodology supported by reflective journals, interview transcripts, classroom observations, and student project materials (such as infographics, video promotions, and research reports), found significant improvements in five key areas: digital literacy, intercultural and religious awareness, foundational research skills, English communicative competence, and personal development.

Conclusion

This study examined students' experiences of integrating language learning and undergraduate research in an English for Religious Tourism course at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin. Data from semi-structured interviews, reflective journals, classroom observations, and student-produced documents were analyzed through thematic analysis. Six outcomes emerged. Students described fieldwork at local religious heritage sites as an authentic learning context. They reported greater confidence in speaking, writing, and presenting in English, along with expanded tourism-related vocabulary. They described acquiring basic qualitative research skills, namely formulating research questions, collecting data through interviews and observation, and writing research reports. They reported increased awareness of cultural and religious diversity after visiting multicultural sites such as the Po An Kiong Temple. They developed digital literacy through producing videos, brochures, and infographics. They also reported changes in self-confidence, independence, and appreciation of local heritage. Participants also reported challenges with academic writing, technical vocabulary, field research, and time management.

Several limitations bound these findings. The study was a single-case design, conducted in one course at one institution during one semester, and the six participants profiled were all female sixth-semester students. The findings rest on participants' self-reports, reflective journals, and the researchers' reading of student products. The study did not include pre- and post-course measures of language proficiency or research competence, so reported

https://doi.org/10.26555/adjes.v13i2.2388

gains in these areas reflect perceived rather than measured change. Future research could use comparative or longitudinal designs across multiple institutions or cohorts, include participants of varied gender and academic background, and combine qualitative accounts with measures of linguistic and research outcomes. Further studies could also examine how the challenges students reported develop and are resolved over the course of a project cycle.

References

Abrar-ul-Hassan, S., & Fazel, I. (2018). English for specific purposes. *In The TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching (1st ed.).* John Wiley & Sons. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118784235.EELT0661

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2). https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). One size fits all ? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis ? *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *18*(3), 328–352. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1769238

Brew, A. (2006). *Research and teaching: Beyond the divide*. *Palgrave macmillan.*

Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Multilingual Matters.

Cranton, P. (2006). *Understanding and promoting transformative learning (2nd ed.)*. Jossey-Bass.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2017). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches.* SAGE Publications.

Deardorff, D. K. (2006). Identification and Assessment of Intercultural Competence as a Student Outcome of Internationalization. Journal of Studies in International Education, 10(3). https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315306287002

Dirkx, J. M. (2002). The Power of Feelings: Emotion, Imagination, and the Construction of Meaning in Adult Learning. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 63–72. https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.9

Ellis, R. (2021). *Task-based language teaching*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-79143-8_25

Healey, M., & Jenkins, A. (2009). Developing Undergraduate Research and Inquiry. Higher Education Academy.

Kolb, D. A. (1984). Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development. Prentice Hall.

Kristiana, V. (2026). English Communication Skills in Tourism Improved with the Cooperative Project-Based STEAM Learning Model. *PROJECT (Professional Journal of English Education),* *9*(3), 698–704. https://journal.ikipsiliwangi.ac.id/project/article/view/30875

Levy, P., & Petrulis, R. (2012). How do first-year university students experience inquiry and research, and what are the implications for the practice of inquiry-based learning?

Studies in Higher Education, 37(1). https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2010.499166

Mayer, R. E. (2009). Multimedia learning (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Mezirow, J. (2000). Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress. Jossey-Bass.

Paltridge, B., & Starfield, S. (2013). *Handbook of English for Specific Purposes*. John Wiley & Sons. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118339855

Pegrum, M., Hockly, N., & Dudeney, G. (2014). *Digital literacies (1st ed.).* Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315832913

Raj, R., & Morpeth, N. D. (2007). Religious tourism and pilgrimage festivals management. *Religious tourism and pilgrimage festivals management*. https://doi.org/10.1079/9781845932251.0000

Ryan, T. (2025). Experiential learning as education. *International Journal of Learning and Instruction (IJLI), 7*(1), 21–32. https://jurnal.untan.ac.id/index.php/IJLI/article/view/72857/75676605618

Thomas, J. W. (2000). A review of research on project-based learning. Autodesk Foundation. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203001073

Timothy, D., & Olsen, D. (2006). Tourism, Religion and Spiritual Journeys. Routledge.

Walker, R., & Harding, K. (2006). Tourism 1. Oxford University Press.

Walkington, H., Griffin, A., Keys-Mathews, L. D., & Metoyer, S. (2011). Embedding Research-Based Learning Early in the Undergraduate Geography Curriculum. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education, 35*(3), 315–330. https://doi.org/10.1080/03098265.2011.563377

Xiang, Z., & Gretzel, U. (2010). Role of social media in online travel information search. *Tourism Management, 31*(2), 179–188. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2009.02.016

Yin, R. K. (2018). Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods (6th ed.). SAGE.