

DUMMY BOOK

**INTEGRATING LANGUAGE AND RESEARCH: STUDENTS'
EXPERIENCES IN AN ENGLISH FOR RELIGIOUS TOURISM
COURSE AT UIN ANTASARI BANJARMASIN**



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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND OF STUDY

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 (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). 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). Such approaches are particularly relevant in ESP classrooms, where learning outcomes are expected to prepare students for real-world communication and professional practices.

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

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 (Richards, 2007; Paltridge & Starfield, 2013). Other studies have examined religious tourism from sociocultural and economic perspectives (Olsen & Timothy, 2006; Raj & Griffin, 2015). 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.

From preliminary observations conducted by the researcher during the implementation of the ERT course, it was found that students experienced various forms of learning beyond conventional classroom activities. They actively engaged in fieldwork, interacted with religious leaders and local communities, produced multimedia tourism content, and developed research articles based on their observations. These experiences appeared to enhance not only their English communication skills but also their intercultural awareness, digital literacy, critical thinking, and appreciation of local religious heritage. Nevertheless, students also encountered several challenges related to academic writing, vocabulary mastery, research skills, and translating cultural concepts into English.

Based on the previous studies and preliminary observations, it is necessary to conduct research on students' experiences in the English for Religious Tourism course at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin. This study specifically focuses on how the integration of language learning and research activities influences students' perceptions, learning experiences, and the development of linguistic, intercultural, and academic competencies. The findings are expected to contribute to the growing literature on context-based ESP instruction and provide practical implications for designing innovative language courses that integrate local wisdom, research, and community engagement.

B. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study seeks to explore students' experiences in the English for Religious Tourism (ERT) course at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin. Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do students experience the integration of language learning and research activities in the English for Religious Tourism course at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin?
2. What competencies do students perceive they have developed through participation in the English for Religious Tourism course?
3. What challenges do students encounter during the implementation of language- and research-based activities in the English for Religious Tourism course?

C. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To explore students' experiences in integrating language learning and research activities in the English for Religious Tourism course at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin.
2. To identify the linguistic, intercultural, academic, and digital competencies developed by students through participation in the English for Religious Tourism course.
3. To investigate the challenges encountered by students during the implementation of language- and research-based learning activities in the English for Religious Tourism course.

D. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), particularly in the integration of language learning and undergraduate research within the context of religious tourism.

1. Theoretical Significance

Theoretically, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on context-based ESP by demonstrating how language instruction can be integrated with experiential learning and research-based learning. It extends the perspectives proposed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), emphasizing that ESP should not merely focus on linguistic competence but also foster critical thinking, intercultural awareness, and professional skills. Furthermore, the study enriches the discourse on religious tourism education by highlighting the role of authentic local contexts in promoting meaningful and transformative language learning experiences.

2. Practical Significance

Practically, the findings of this study are expected to provide useful insights for several stakeholders.

a. For lecturers and curriculum developers

The findings may serve as a reference for designing innovative ESP courses that integrate language learning, fieldwork, and undergraduate research. The study may also support the implementation of project-based and experiential learning approaches that promote authentic and meaningful learning experiences.

b. For students

The study may encourage students to develop not only English language proficiency but also research skills, intercultural competence, digital literacy, and awareness of cultural and religious heritage. These competencies are essential for preparing graduates to meet academic and professional demands in tourism and related fields.

c. For higher education institutions

The findings may support universities in strengthening the implementation of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) and the integration of teaching, research, and community engagement. The study also demonstrates how local wisdom and institutional values can be incorporated into language education to produce graduates with global competencies and strong moral foundations.

d. For the tourism sector and local communities

By promoting authentic representations of religious and cultural heritage, the study may contribute to sustainable tourism development and encourage greater community participation in preserving local traditions and religious sites. It also highlights the importance of ethical and intercultural communication in promoting religious tourism destinations.

e. For future researchers

This study may provide empirical evidence and methodological references for future studies on ESP, research-based learning, experiential learning, and religious tourism education. It may also open opportunities for comparative and longitudinal studies examining the impact of similar courses in different educational and cultural contexts.

E. PREVIOUS STUDIES

Research on English for Specific Purposes (ESP), tourism education, and experiential learning has expanded considerably in recent years. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of integrating authentic tasks, project-based learning, intercultural competence, and professional communication skills into tourism-related English courses.

One relevant study was conducted by Purnawati and Sari (2023), who investigated the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in an English for Tourism course. The study found that project-based activities enhanced students' communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking skills while increasing their readiness for employment in the tourism industry. Students perceived authentic projects as valuable opportunities to connect classroom learning with real-world professional demands.

Similarly, Kultsum, Defianty, and Nadrah (2022) examined the application of Project-Based Learning in ESP courses within an Islamic higher education context. Using a qualitative approach, the researchers reported that PBL promoted learner autonomy, active participation, problem-solving skills, and meaningful engagement with course content. The study concluded that project-based activities enable students to develop both language competence and professional skills relevant to their future careers.

Research on tourism education has also emphasized the importance of intercultural competence. Trang and Phuong (2023) conducted a needs analysis involving undergraduate tourism students in Vietnam and found that intercultural communicative competence was considered an essential component of tourism-related English education. Their findings suggested that language instruction should extend beyond grammar and vocabulary to include cultural awareness, intercultural communication, and professional interaction skills.

In a similar vein, Luka (2012) explored the development of intercultural language competence among tourism students in an ESP course. The study demonstrated that tourism students require not only linguistic proficiency but also intercultural understanding to function effectively in multicultural environments. The findings highlighted the role of authentic learning experiences and cultural engagement in strengthening students' communicative competence.

Further evidence comes from Saengtham and Larasati (2024), who investigated students' perceptions of Project-Based Learning in an ESP course for Ecotourism and Hospitality Management students. The study revealed that students viewed project-based activities positively because they increased motivation, fostered teamwork, and provided clearer connections between academic learning and professional goals. Students reported that authentic projects allowed them to develop practical communication skills and greater confidence in using English.

More recently, Maneethai (2025) examined experiential learning activities in hospitality education and found that authentic intercultural experiences enhanced students' cultural awareness, empathy, and global competence. The study argued that experiential learning provides valuable opportunities for students to engage with real-world situations and develop skills required in tourism and hospitality professions.

Although these studies provide important insights into ESP, tourism education, project-based learning, and intercultural competence, several gaps remain. First, most previous studies focus primarily on English for Tourism, Hospitality, or Tour Guiding, while limited attention has been given to English for Religious Tourism. Second, existing studies tend to examine learning outcomes, needs analysis, or curriculum design, rather than students' lived experiences of integrating language learning with undergraduate research activities. Third, research conducted within Islamic higher education institutions remains relatively limited, particularly in contexts where local religious heritage serves as the primary learning resource.

Therefore, this study seeks to address these gaps by exploring students' experiences in an English for Religious Tourism course at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin. Unlike previous studies, this research focuses on the integration of language learning, field-based research, and local religious tourism contexts. It specifically investigates how students experience research-oriented learning activities and how these experiences contribute to the development of language proficiency, intercultural awareness, research skills, and appreciation of local religious heritage.

F. RESEARCH DESIGN, TECHNIQUES OF DATA COLLECTION, AND DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

1. Research Design

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, 2018). 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).

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.

2. Techniques of Data Collection

Data were collected through multiple sources to ensure credibility and triangulation.

a. Semi-Structured Interviews

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.

b. Reflective Journals

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.

c. Observation

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.

d. Document Analysis

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.

3. Data Analysis Procedures

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis involved six stages.

a. Familiarizing with the Data

The researchers repeatedly read interview transcripts, reflective journals, field notes, and student documents to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the data.

b. Generating Initial Codes

Important statements, ideas, and recurring patterns related to students' experiences were identified and coded systematically.

c. Searching for Themes

The initial codes were grouped into broader categories to identify emerging themes. Similar codes were clustered together to represent meaningful patterns across participants' experiences.

d. Reviewing Themes

The identified themes were reviewed and refined to ensure consistency and coherence with the research questions and the overall dataset.

e. Defining and Naming Themes

Each theme was clearly defined and named to represent the essence of students' experiences. Possible themes included authentic learning experiences, language development, intercultural awareness, research skills, digital literacy, and challenges encountered during field-based learning.

f. Producing the Report

Finally, the researchers interpreted the findings and presented them narratively by integrating participants' quotations, observational data, and document analysis. The findings were discussed in relation to previous studies and theoretical perspectives on English for Specific Purposes, experiential learning, and research-based learning.

4. Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the study employed triangulation of data sources, member checking, and peer debriefing. Data obtained from interviews, observations, reflective journals, and students' projects were compared to enhance credibility. Participants were also invited to verify the accuracy of interview transcripts and interpretations. In addition, peer discussions with colleagues were conducted to improve the dependability and confirmability of the findings.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL REVIEW

A. English For Specific Purposes (ESP)

1 Definition of English for Specific Purposes

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) emerged as a distinctive branch of English language teaching in response to the growing demand for specialized communication in academic, scientific, and professional contexts. Unlike General English, which focuses on broad language competence, ESP aims to develop learners' language skills based on their specific needs and purposes. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), ESP is not a product but an approach to language teaching in which all decisions regarding content and methods are determined by learners' reasons for learning. Thus, ESP emphasizes relevance and practicality, ensuring that language instruction corresponds to learners' academic disciplines or professional requirements.

The development of ESP can be traced back to the 1960s when globalization, technological advancement, and international communication created a demand for English tailored to specific fields such as medicine, engineering, business, tourism, and science. Initially, ESP focused on register analysis, which examined the grammatical and lexical features of specialized texts. Subsequently, discourse analysis and genre analysis became prominent, emphasizing the communicative functions and rhetorical structures of language used in professional contexts. More recent developments have adopted learner-centered approaches that emphasize needs analysis, authentic communication, and task-based learning (Paltridge & Starfield, 2013).

ESP possesses several distinguishing characteristics. First, it is designed to meet specific learner needs. Second, it employs methodologies and activities appropriate to the discipline or profession concerned. Third, it focuses on the language, skills, discourse, and genres relevant to particular contexts (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Therefore, ESP is not merely teaching specialized vocabulary but facilitating learners' ability to communicate effectively in real-life situations.

Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) further classify ESP characteristics into absolute and variable characteristics. The absolute characteristics include: (1) meeting specific learner needs, (2) utilizing methodologies and activities related to specific disciplines, and (3) focusing on appropriate language, discourse, and genres. Meanwhile, the variable characteristics indicate that ESP may be designed for specific disciplines, may employ different methodologies from General English, and is generally intended for adult or intermediate-level learners. These characteristics demonstrate the flexibility of ESP in responding to diverse educational and occupational demands.

2. Principles of ESP

The implementation of ESP is guided by several fundamental principles that distinguish it from general language instruction. One of the most essential principles is needs-based instruction. Needs analysis serves as the foundation for determining learning objectives, materials, methodologies, and assessment procedures. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) argue

that learners' target needs and learning needs should become the basis for course design, ensuring that instruction remains relevant and meaningful.

Another important principle is learner-centeredness. In ESP, learners actively participate in the learning process, and their interests, goals, and prior knowledge influence instructional decisions. Rather than merely transmitting linguistic knowledge, teachers facilitate students' ability to use English in authentic contexts. Learner-centered approaches encourage autonomy, critical thinking, and active participation, making learning more effective and meaningful.

Authentic materials constitute another essential component of ESP. Authentic materials refer to texts and resources originally produced for real-life communication rather than for pedagogical purposes. These materials may include brochures, websites, advertisements, videos, social media posts, and professional documents. According to Gilmore (2007), authentic materials expose learners to genuine language use and increase their motivation by connecting classroom learning with real-world contexts.

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 (2003) explains that tasks facilitate communicative competence because learners use language as a tool to achieve specific outcomes rather than merely practicing grammatical forms.

Finally, ESP possesses a strong professional orientation. The primary goal of ESP is to prepare learners for academic and professional communication. Consequently, course content and activities are closely linked to workplace requirements and discipline-specific contexts. In tourism education, for example, learners may practice tour guiding, customer service interactions, promotional writing, and intercultural communication.

3. English for Tourism

English for Tourism represents one of the most rapidly developing branches of ESP. It focuses on equipping learners with linguistic and communicative competencies necessary for various sectors of the tourism industry, including hospitality, travel agencies, tour operations, and cultural heritage management. According to Walker and Harding (2006), English for Tourism integrates language skills with tourism knowledge and professional communication practices.

The scope of English for Tourism extends beyond grammar and vocabulary. It encompasses speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills required in authentic tourism contexts. Learners are expected to interact with tourists, provide information, respond to inquiries, and promote destinations effectively. Thus, communication skills, cultural sensitivity, and interpersonal competence become essential components of tourism education.

English communication in tourism involves diverse situations such as welcoming visitors, giving directions, describing attractions, handling complaints, and providing customer services. These communicative functions require not only linguistic accuracy but also politeness, empathy, and intercultural awareness. Effective communication contributes significantly to tourists' satisfaction and experiences.

One important area within English for Tourism is English for tour guiding and hospitality. Tour guides act as cultural mediators who interpret historical, cultural, and religious meanings to visitors. According to Pond (1993), successful tour guides require extensive knowledge, communication skills, and intercultural competence to facilitate meaningful interactions between tourists and destinations. Similarly, hospitality professionals need effective communication skills to provide quality services and maintain positive relationships with guests.

Intercultural communication is another central aspect of tourism English. Tourism involves interactions among people from different cultural, linguistic, and religious backgrounds. Therefore, tourism professionals must develop cultural awareness, tolerance, and sensitivity to avoid misunderstandings and foster mutual respect. Byram (1997) emphasizes that intercultural communicative competence enables individuals to understand and interact effectively with people from diverse cultural communities.

4. English for Religious Tourism

English for Religious Tourism can be viewed as a specialized branch of English for Tourism that focuses on communication related to sacred sites, religious traditions, pilgrimage activities, and spiritual heritage. Religious tourism combines cultural, historical, and spiritual dimensions, requiring language users to communicate respectfully and accurately about religious beliefs and practices. Consequently, English for Religious Tourism demands not only linguistic competence but also cultural sensitivity and ethical awareness.

Religious tourism as a branch of ESP emphasizes context-specific communication associated with pilgrimage destinations, religious events, and sacred heritage sites. Learners are expected to describe historical backgrounds, explain religious values, and facilitate intercultural interactions among visitors from diverse backgrounds. Such communication requires a balance between information delivery and respect for spiritual meanings.

Language and cultural interpretation constitute important aspects of English for Religious Tourism. According to Timothy and Olsen (2006), religious destinations are not merely physical spaces but repositories of cultural memories, identities, and spiritual meanings. Tour guides and tourism practitioners serve as interpreters who bridge local traditions and visitors' understandings. Therefore, language functions not only as a communication tool but also as a medium for preserving and transmitting cultural heritage.

Religious narratives and sacred heritage also occupy a central position in religious tourism communication. Narratives concerning historical figures, pilgrimage traditions, rituals, and architectural symbolism contribute to visitors' understanding and appreciation of sacred places. Through storytelling and interpretation, tourism practitioners help construct meaningful experiences for pilgrims and visitors while preserving local identities and traditions.

Furthermore, ethical communication is indispensable in religious tourism. Sacred places often embody profound spiritual significance for communities, requiring visitors and tourism professionals to demonstrate respect, sensitivity, and responsibility. Ethical communication involves presenting information accurately, avoiding stereotypes, respecting religious diversity, and promoting interfaith understanding. Such practices contribute to sustainable and inclusive tourism that values both cultural heritage and social harmony.

In the context of English for Religious Tourism, ethical and intercultural communication becomes particularly relevant because tourism activities frequently involve encounters among individuals from different religious and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, language education in this field should cultivate not only communicative competence but also empathy, tolerance, and appreciation of religious diversity.

B. Religious Tourism and Heritage Education

1 Definition of Religious Tourism

Religious tourism refers to travel motivated wholly or partly by religious, spiritual, or cultural reasons. It encompasses journeys to sacred sites, participation in religious festivals, pilgrimages, and visits to places associated with religious heritage and traditions. According to Timothy and Olsen (2006), religious tourism lies at the intersection of religion, culture, history, and tourism, making it one of the oldest forms of human mobility. Unlike conventional tourism, religious tourism is often characterized by spiritual meanings, emotional attachment, and symbolic experiences that transcend recreational purposes.

a. Pilgrimage and Religious Tourism

Pilgrimage is generally considered the oldest and most prominent form of religious tourism. Traditionally, pilgrimages involve journeys undertaken by believers to sacred places to fulfill religious obligations, seek blessings, express devotion, or strengthen spiritual identity. Examples include the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca, Christian pilgrimages to Jerusalem, and Buddhist pilgrimages to Bodh Gaya.

Although pilgrimage and religious tourism are closely related, scholars distinguish them based on travelers' motivations. Pilgrims are primarily motivated by spiritual or religious devotion, whereas religious tourists may combine religious interests with cultural, historical, educational, or recreational purposes (Collins-Kreiner, 2010). In practice, however, the distinction between pilgrims and tourists is often blurred because many visitors simultaneously pursue spiritual experiences and cultural exploration.

b. Spiritual Tourism

Spiritual tourism extends beyond formal religious practices and focuses on personal growth, self-discovery, and inner well-being. According to Norman (2011), spiritual tourism involves journeys aimed at seeking meaning, peace, and transformative experiences. Such activities may include meditation retreats, visits to sacred landscapes, participation in spiritual ceremonies, and encounters with religious communities.

The growing popularity of spiritual tourism reflects contemporary travelers' desire for authentic and meaningful experiences. Consequently, tourism destinations increasingly integrate spiritual dimensions into heritage interpretation and visitor experiences, emphasizing reflection, values, and cultural understanding.

c. Sacred Places and Religious Heritage

Sacred places constitute the core attractions of religious tourism. These sites may include mosques, temples, churches, shrines, monasteries, cemeteries, and other locations possessing historical and spiritual significance. According to Shackley (2001), sacred places

are not merely physical structures but repositories of collective memory, cultural identity, and spiritual values.

Religious heritage encompasses tangible and intangible elements inherited from previous generations. Tangible heritage includes architecture, manuscripts, monuments, and artifacts, while intangible heritage comprises rituals, traditions, oral histories, beliefs, and religious practices. UNESCO (2003) emphasizes that safeguarding both tangible and intangible heritage contributes to cultural continuity and sustainable development.

2. Religious Tourism in Indonesia

Indonesia possesses rich religious and cultural diversity, making it one of the most significant destinations for religious tourism in Southeast Asia. The coexistence of Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and indigenous beliefs has produced diverse sacred landscapes and heritage sites that attract pilgrims, tourists, and researchers alike.

a. Islamic Heritage Tourism

As the world's largest Muslim-majority country, Indonesia has numerous destinations associated with Islamic history and culture. Islamic heritage tourism includes visits to ancient mosques, Islamic boarding schools, royal tombs, and pilgrimage sites connected to religious scholars and saints. Destinations such as the graves of Wali Songo in Java, Baiturrahman Grand Mosque in Aceh, and Demak Great Mosque have become important centers of religious and cultural tourism.

According to Raj and Griffin (2015), Islamic heritage tourism not only strengthens religious identity but also contributes to local economic development and heritage preservation. Through interpretation and storytelling, these destinations provide opportunities for visitors to understand Islamic civilization and local traditions.

b. Multicultural and Interfaith Tourism

Indonesia's cultural diversity has also fostered multicultural and interfaith tourism. Visitors can experience religious heritage from different traditions, including Borobudur Temple, Prambanan Temple, churches, Chinese temples, and sacred landscapes shared by various communities. Such destinations promote dialogue, tolerance, and appreciation of diversity.

Timothy (2021) argues that heritage tourism can function as a bridge among different cultures by encouraging understanding and reducing prejudice. Through encounters with diverse religious traditions, visitors develop broader perspectives and intercultural sensitivity, contributing to social harmony and peaceful coexistence.

c. Religious Tourism in South Kalimantan

South Kalimantan possesses a rich Islamic heritage and vibrant religious traditions that make the region an important destination for religious tourism. Historical sites such as Sultan Suriansyah Mosque and Jami' Mosque in Banjarmasin reflect the spread of Islam and the development of Banjar civilization. In addition, pilgrimage sites associated with prominent ulama, including the tomb of Sheikh Muhammad Arsyad Al-Banjari and the annual Haul Guru Sekumpul in Martapura, attract millions of pilgrims and visitors from across Indonesia and neighboring countries.

Besides Islamic sites, South Kalimantan also demonstrates multicultural heritage through destinations such as Po An Kiong Temple in Banjarmasin, which symbolizes interfaith coexistence and cultural diversity. These destinations provide valuable opportunities for learning about religion, history, architecture, and local wisdom, making them important educational resources as well as tourism assets.

3. Religious Heritage as Learning Resources

Religious heritage sites offer authentic environments for experiential and contextual learning. They enable learners to connect theoretical knowledge with real-world experiences and foster deeper understanding of culture, history, and identity.

a. Place-Based Learning

Place-based learning refers to an educational approach that utilizes local environments and communities as contexts for learning. According to Sobel (2004), place-based education encourages students to engage directly with their surroundings and develop meaningful connections with their communities. In the context of religious tourism, sacred places provide opportunities for students to observe architectural features, interact with local communities, document oral traditions, and conduct field research. Such experiences facilitate active learning and strengthen students' appreciation of local heritage.

b. Heritage Education

Heritage education aims to promote awareness, understanding, and preservation of cultural and historical resources. According to UNESCO (2014), heritage education encourages learners to appreciate cultural diversity and develop responsibility for safeguarding heritage for future generations. Through visits to religious sites, interviews with religious leaders, and interpretation of historical narratives, students acquire knowledge not only about history and religion but also about values, identities, and cultural continuity. Heritage education thus contributes to holistic and transformative learning experiences.

c. Local Wisdom and Contextual Learning

Local wisdom represents the values, traditions, and knowledge developed within communities over generations. Contextual learning emphasizes connecting academic concepts with learners' real-life experiences. Johnson (2002) explains that contextual teaching and learning help students understand the relevance of knowledge and encourage meaningful learning. Religious heritage sites in South Kalimantan provide contextual resources for learning English, tourism, history, and intercultural communication. Through authentic tasks and field experiences, students can integrate linguistic competence with local knowledge and cultural understanding.

4. Intercultural Communication in Religious Tourism

Religious tourism involves interactions among people from different cultural, linguistic, and religious backgrounds. Therefore, intercultural communication becomes essential for fostering mutual understanding, respect, and peaceful coexistence.

a. Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness refers to individuals' ability to recognize and appreciate cultural differences and similarities. According to Byram (1997), cultural awareness enables people to interpret meanings, avoid stereotypes, and communicate effectively across cultures. In religious tourism, cultural awareness helps visitors and tourism practitioners understand customs, rituals, dress codes, and social norms associated with sacred places. Such awareness contributes to respectful and meaningful interactions.

b. Interfaith Understanding

Interfaith understanding involves recognizing and respecting diverse religious beliefs and traditions. In multicultural societies, religious tourism can function as a platform for dialogue and tolerance. Abu-Nimer (2001) argues that interfaith encounters encourage empathy, reduce prejudice, and strengthen social cohesion. Destinations characterized by religious diversity provide opportunities for visitors to appreciate common values shared across traditions, including peace, compassion, and mutual respect. Consequently, religious tourism can contribute to promoting harmony and intercultural dialogue.

c. Global Citizenship

Global citizenship refers to individuals' awareness of their interconnectedness with humanity and their responsibility toward global communities. UNESCO (2015) emphasizes that global citizenship education promotes tolerance, respect for diversity, social justice, and sustainable development. Religious tourism experiences expose learners to diverse cultures and worldviews, helping them develop empathy, openness, and intercultural competence. Through meaningful interactions with local communities and visitors from different backgrounds, students can cultivate global perspectives while maintaining appreciation for their own cultural identities.

C. Experiential Learning Theory

1. Definition of Experiential Learning

Experiential learning refers to the process through which individuals acquire knowledge, skills, and values through direct experiences and subsequent reflection. Unlike traditional approaches that emphasize passive reception of information, experiential learning focuses on active participation and meaning-making. According to Kolb (1984), learning is “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience.” This perspective views learners as active participants who continuously construct and reconstruct knowledge based on interactions with their environment.

a. Learning through Experience

Learning through experience is grounded in the idea that meaningful learning occurs when learners actively engage in authentic situations. Dewey (1938) argued that education should be connected to real-life experiences and that reflection upon those experiences is essential for intellectual growth. Experiential learning promotes active inquiry, critical reflection, and the application of knowledge to practical situations. Consequently, students are encouraged to connect theory with practice and develop deeper understanding through firsthand experiences.

b. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory

Kolb (1984) proposed Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), which explains learning as a cyclic process involving experience, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation. ELT integrates cognitive, behavioral, and affective dimensions of learning and emphasizes that effective learning requires both action and reflection. The theory has been widely applied in higher education, particularly in language learning, tourism education, and professional training, because it facilitates authentic and transformative learning experiences.

2. Kolb's Learning Cycle

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984) proposes that learning is a continuous process consisting of four interconnected stages that form a cyclical pattern. The process begins with concrete experience, in which learners engage directly in authentic activities such as field visits, observations, interactions with communities, or participation in practical tasks that expose them to real-world phenomena. These experiences are followed by reflective observation, during which learners examine and analyze their experiences from different perspectives, allowing them to identify significant aspects, recognize challenges, and gain personal insights. Through reflection, experiences are transformed into meaningful learning.

The third stage, abstract conceptualization, involves the development of concepts, theories, and generalizations based on reflection, enabling learners to integrate new experiences with existing knowledge and achieve deeper understanding. Finally, learners enter the stage of active experimentation, where they apply newly acquired knowledge and ideas to new situations, test solutions, and engage in further experiences. Through this continuous cycle of experience, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation, learning becomes dynamic, meaningful, and lifelong.

3. Experiential Learning in Language Education

Experiential learning has gained considerable attention in language education because it provides authentic contexts for communication and promotes learner autonomy. Through experiential activities, students develop linguistic competence while engaging with real-world situations (Kolb, 1984; Roberts, 2012). Fieldwork enables learners to collect data, observe social phenomena, and interact with communities, thereby exposing them to authentic language use while fostering critical thinking and intercultural awareness (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984).

Similarly, site visits to museums, heritage sites, religious destinations, and community centers provide opportunities for students to explore historical, cultural, and social contexts beyond the classroom, enhancing contextual understanding and communicative competence (Roberts, 2012). Interviews with community members, religious leaders, tourists, or practitioners serve as valuable learning experiences that help students practice questioning techniques, listening skills, and interpersonal communication while simultaneously developing research skills and cultural sensitivity (Nunan, 2004).

Furthermore, experiential learning encourages authentic communication, in which language is used for meaningful purposes rather than artificial classroom exercises. Through authentic interactions, learners negotiate meanings, express ideas, and communicate naturally in diverse contexts, ultimately enhancing their communicative competence, confidence, and ability to use language effectively in real-life situations (Ellis, 2003; Roberts, 2012).

4. Experiential Learning in Tourism Education

Experiential learning is particularly relevant to tourism education because the tourism industry requires practical knowledge, interpersonal skills, and intercultural competence. It encompasses community engagement, real-world learning, and reflection as interconnected components that support student development. Community engagement allows students to collaborate with local communities and participate in cultural and social activities.

Wearing and McGehee (2013) note that such community-based experiences enhance students' understanding of local cultures, foster social responsibility, and promote sustainable tourism practices through mutual learning. In addition, real-world learning through internships, field studies, and project-based activities enables students to understand industry practices and develop professional competencies, thereby bridging the gap between theory and practice.

Furthermore, experiential learning is strengthened through reflection and transformation, as Mezirow (2000) emphasizes that reflective processes enable learners to reconsider assumptions, broaden perspectives, and develop new understandings. Through this process, tourism students not only gain knowledge and skills but also cultivate empathy, intercultural awareness, and professional identity.

D. Research-Based Learning

1. Definition of Research-Based Learning

Research-Based Learning (RBL) is an educational approach that integrates research activities into teaching and learning processes, emphasizing inquiry, investigation, and knowledge construction so that students become active producers rather than passive recipients of knowledge. It is grounded in inquiry-based learning, which forms its core foundation by encouraging students to formulate questions, gather information, analyze evidence, and construct knowledge independently.

As Levy and Petrulis (2012) explain, this inquiry process fosters curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking skills. In addition, RBL is closely linked to undergraduate research, which refers to systematic investigations conducted by undergraduate students under academic supervision. Healey and Jenkins (2009) argue that such engagement provides students with opportunities to participate in scholarly activities and experience the process of knowledge creation directly, thereby enhancing their intellectual development, communication skills, and academic engagement.

2. Characteristics of Research-Based Learning

Research-based learning possesses several distinctive characteristics that emphasize active and meaningful knowledge construction. First, it promotes student-centered learning, in which students actively participate in identifying problems, collecting data, and interpreting findings, making learning an interactive and collaborative process rather than one dominated by teacher-centered instruction (Healey & Jenkins, 2009).

Second, research activities foster critical thinking by encouraging learners to analyze information, evaluate evidence, and make informed judgments, thereby enabling them to approach problems systematically and develop reasoned arguments (Brew, 2006). Third,

research-based learning enhances problem-solving skills by engaging students in the investigation of real-world issues and the formulation of possible solutions, which strengthens their analytical and decision-making abilities (Levy & Petrulis, 2012).

Finally, it facilitates knowledge construction, as students do not merely memorize information but actively construct understanding through inquiry, reflection, and experience, leading to deeper comprehension and the development of lifelong learning habits (Healey & Jenkins, 2009)³. Undergraduate Research in Higher Education

E. Project-Based Learning (PBL)

1. Definition of Project-Based Learning

Project-Based Learning (PBL) is an instructional approach that engages students in investigating authentic problems and producing meaningful products through collaborative and inquiry-oriented activities. According to Thomas (2000), PBL emphasizes learner autonomy, problem-solving, and the application of knowledge to real-world contexts. Through projects, students actively construct knowledge rather than merely receiving information.

2. Characteristics of PBL

Project-Based Learning (PBL) is characterized by several essential features that promote meaningful and active learning. One of its primary characteristics is the use of authentic tasks, which reflect real-world situations and enable learners to understand the practical relevance of knowledge while increasing their motivation to learn. Another important characteristic is collaboration, whereby students work in groups, share responsibilities, and negotiate ideas, thereby developing communication skills and teamwork.

PBL also fosters creativity and innovation, as students are required to design products, solve problems, and present ideas in meaningful and original ways. Furthermore, PBL promotes problem-solving skills by engaging learners in identifying issues, analyzing information, and generating solutions, processes that enhance critical thinking, independent learning, and the application of knowledge to practical contexts (Thomas, 2000; Bell, 2010; Larmer, Mergendoller, & Boss, 2015).

3. PBL in ESP Classrooms

Project-Based Learning has been widely implemented in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classrooms because it provides authentic and profession-oriented learning experiences. Through projects such as brochures, presentations, videos, and research reports, students practice language skills in meaningful contexts. PBL also facilitates learner autonomy and bridges classroom learning with workplace demands.

4. PBL and Tourism Education

In tourism education, PBL supports experiential and contextual learning. Students may engage in designing tourism packages, producing promotional videos, conducting field studies, and creating digital content. Such projects enable learners to develop language proficiency, intercultural competence, digital literacy, and professional skills. Consequently, PBL prepares students for future careers in tourism and hospitality industries by integrating theory with practice.

F. Intercultural Communicative Competence

1. Definition of Intercultural Communicative Competence

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) refers to the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. It goes beyond linguistic competence by incorporating attitudes, knowledge, skills, and critical awareness necessary for successful intercultural interactions. According to Byram (1997), intercultural communicative competence enables individuals to understand their own culture and those of others, interpret cultural meanings, and establish relationships based on mutual respect and understanding.

In the context of globalization and international mobility, intercultural communicative competence has become an essential component of language education. Language learners are expected not only to master grammatical and communicative aspects of language but also to develop sensitivity toward cultural differences and diversity. Therefore, intercultural competence contributes to promoting tolerance, empathy, and peaceful coexistence among people from different social, cultural, and religious backgrounds.

2. Byram's Model of ICC

Byram (1997) proposed a comprehensive model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) consisting of five interrelated dimensions that enable individuals to communicate effectively across cultures. The first dimension, attitudes, refers to curiosity, openness, and the willingness to suspend judgments about other cultures and beliefs, fostering appreciation of diversity and respectful interaction with people from different backgrounds.

The second dimension, knowledge, encompasses understanding social groups, cultural practices, traditions, and values within one's own culture and those of others, as well as awareness of the historical, social, and cultural contexts that shape behaviors and perspectives. The third dimension, skills of interpreting and relating, involves the ability to interpret cultural phenomena, compare cultures, and establish meaningful relationships between one's own culture and other cultures, thereby promoting mutual understanding and reducing misunderstandings.

The fourth dimension, skills of discovery and interaction, refers to the capacity to acquire new cultural knowledge and interact effectively with people from different cultural communities through observation, inquiry, and communication, enabling individuals to adapt successfully to unfamiliar contexts. Finally, critical cultural awareness represents the ability to evaluate cultural practices, beliefs, and values critically and ethically, encouraging learners to recognize stereotypes, inequalities, and cultural biases while promoting respect, social responsibility, and intercultural understanding (Byram, 1997).

3. Intercultural Competence in Tourism Education

Intercultural competence occupies a central position in tourism education because tourism involves interactions among people from diverse linguistic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. Tourism professionals, including tour guides and hospitality personnel, are expected to communicate effectively with international visitors and demonstrate sensitivity toward different customs and values.

According to Deardorff (2006), intercultural competence contributes to effective communication, empathy, and adaptability in multicultural environments. In tourism education, intercultural learning enables students to understand cultural diversity, avoid ethnocentric attitudes, and facilitate positive experiences for visitors.

Experiential activities such as fieldwork, cultural immersion, interviews, and interaction with local communities provide opportunities for students to develop intercultural competence. Through authentic encounters, learners acquire practical experiences that strengthen their communication skills and broaden their perspectives. Consequently, tourism education should integrate intercultural dimensions to prepare students for increasingly global and multicultural societies.

4. Interfaith Understanding and Religious Diversity

Religious tourism frequently involves encounters with sacred traditions, beliefs, and communities belonging to different faiths. Therefore, interfaith understanding becomes an important dimension of intercultural competence. Interfaith understanding refers to the ability to appreciate and respect religious diversity while recognizing common values shared among different traditions. According to Abu-Nimer (2001), interfaith dialogue promotes tolerance, empathy, and peaceful coexistence among diverse religious communities. Religious tourism can function as a medium for fostering intercultural and interreligious understanding because it exposes visitors to different beliefs, rituals, and cultural expressions.

In multicultural societies such as Indonesia, interfaith understanding contributes to social harmony and national unity. Through encounters with various religious heritages and traditions, learners develop appreciation for diversity and become more responsible global citizens. Therefore, language education in religious tourism should cultivate intercultural sensitivity and ethical awareness to promote peaceful interactions among individuals from diverse religious backgrounds.

G. Digital Literacy in Language Learning

1. Definition of Digital Literacy

Digital literacy refers to the ability to access, evaluate, create, and communicate information effectively using digital technologies. According to Gilster (1997), digital literacy encompasses not only technical skills but also critical thinking and the capacity to interpret information in digital environments.

As technology increasingly influences education and communication, digital literacy has become an essential competency for twenty-first-century learners. Belshaw (2014) argues that digital literacy includes cultural, cognitive, communicative, and creative dimensions that enable individuals to participate actively in digital societies. Thus, digital literacy extends beyond the ability to operate devices and includes the capacity to engage critically and ethically with digital information.

2. Digital Literacy in ESP

Digital literacy plays an important role in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) because professional communication increasingly relies on digital platforms and multimedia resources. Students are expected to access authentic materials, conduct online research, collaborate

virtually, and create digital products relevant to their disciplines. According to Dudeney, Hockly, and Pegrum (2013), digital literacy supports language learning by promoting collaboration, information management, and critical evaluation of online resources. In ESP contexts, digital tools facilitate learner autonomy and provide access to authentic materials such as websites, videos, podcasts, and social media content.

Furthermore, digital literacy enhances students' academic and professional readiness by enabling them to participate in digital communication and produce meaningful content in specialized contexts.

3. Social Media and Tourism Promotion

Social media has transformed tourism promotion and destination marketing. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and blogs enable tourism organizations and individuals to communicate with global audiences and promote cultural attractions. According to Xiang and Gretzel (2010), social media significantly influences tourists' decision-making processes because user-generated content provides authentic information and experiences. Tourism promotion increasingly relies on storytelling, visual communication, and interactive engagement.

For students in tourism-related programs, social media provides opportunities to develop digital communication skills and creativity. Activities such as producing tourism videos, writing blogs, designing brochures, and creating promotional campaigns enable learners to integrate language proficiency with digital literacy and professional competencies.

4. Multimedia Learning and Student Creativity

Multimedia learning involves the use of texts, images, audio, videos, and interactive technologies to facilitate learning. Mayer (2009) argues that multimedia enhances understanding because learners process information through both verbal and visual channels.

The integration of multimedia technologies encourages students to become active creators rather than passive consumers of information. Through digital storytelling, videos, podcasts, infographics, and presentations, students can express ideas creatively and communicate effectively. Multimedia learning also promotes collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Consequently, it supports meaningful and engaging learning experiences that are aligned with the needs of contemporary education and professional communication.

H. Students' Learning Experiences

1. Concept of Learning Experience

Learning experience refers to the interactions, activities, and reflections through which individuals acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values. According to Kolb (1984), learning experiences involve the transformation of experiences into knowledge through reflection and action. Learning is therefore viewed as a dynamic and continuous process rather than the mere acquisition of information.

In higher education, learning experiences are shaped by classroom activities, social interactions, field experiences, and engagement with communities. Positive learning experiences enhance motivation, deepen understanding, and contribute to students' personal and professional development.

2. Students' Perceptions and Reflection

Students' perceptions represent their interpretations and evaluations of learning experiences. Understanding students' perspectives is essential because perceptions influence motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes.

Reflection plays a central role in experiential learning. Schön (1983) argues that reflective practice enables learners to analyze experiences, recognize strengths and weaknesses, and improve future actions. Through reflection, students construct meanings and connect experiences with theoretical concepts. Reflective activities such as journals, portfolios, and discussions facilitate deeper learning and encourage learners to become more self-aware and independent.

3. Meaningful Learning

Meaningful learning occurs when new knowledge is connected with learners' previous experiences and cognitive structures. According to Ausubel (1968), meaningful learning enables students to understand concepts more deeply and apply knowledge in different contexts. Meaningful learning is characterized by active participation, relevance, and contextualization. Authentic experiences and problem-solving activities facilitate meaningful learning because students perceive the practical significance of what they learn.

In tourism and language education, meaningful learning is promoted through fieldwork, project-based activities, and interactions with communities, allowing students to connect theoretical concepts with real-life experiences.

4. Transformative Learning Theory

Transformative Learning Theory, proposed by Mezirow (2000), explains how individuals revise their assumptions and perspectives through critical reflection and experience. Transformative learning involves changes in beliefs, attitudes, and worldviews, leading to more inclusive and reflective perspectives. According to Mezirow, transformative learning often begins with experiences that challenge existing assumptions. Through reflection and dialogue, learners reinterpret their experiences and develop new understandings.

In higher education, transformative learning contributes to intellectual growth, self-awareness, and social responsibility. Experiential activities, intercultural encounters, and research experiences provide opportunities for students to develop empathy, critical thinking, and broader perspectives. Within the context of English for Religious Tourism, transformative learning occurs when students engage with local communities, explore religious heritage, and interact with diverse cultural traditions. These experiences enable learners to appreciate cultural diversity, strengthen intercultural competence, and develop meaningful connections between language learning and real-world contexts.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH FINDINGS

A. 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.

1. 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.



Figure 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's (1984) concept of concrete experience, where knowledge is acquired through direct engagement with authentic environments.

2. 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.

3. 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).

4. 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's (1997) concept of intercultural communicative competence, particularly the dimensions of attitudes, knowledge, and critical cultural awareness.

5. 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."



Figure 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.

6. 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.

B. Competencies and Values Developed through the English for Religious Tourism Course

The analysis of interview transcripts, reflective journals, classroom observations, and students' projects revealed that participation in the English for Religious Tourism (ERT) course contributed not only to students' linguistic development but also to the enhancement of research

competence, intercultural awareness, digital literacy, and personal values. Five themes emerged from the data.

1, 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.

2. 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.

3. 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's (1997) concept of intercultural communicative competence, particularly attitudes, knowledge, and critical cultural awareness.

4. 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.

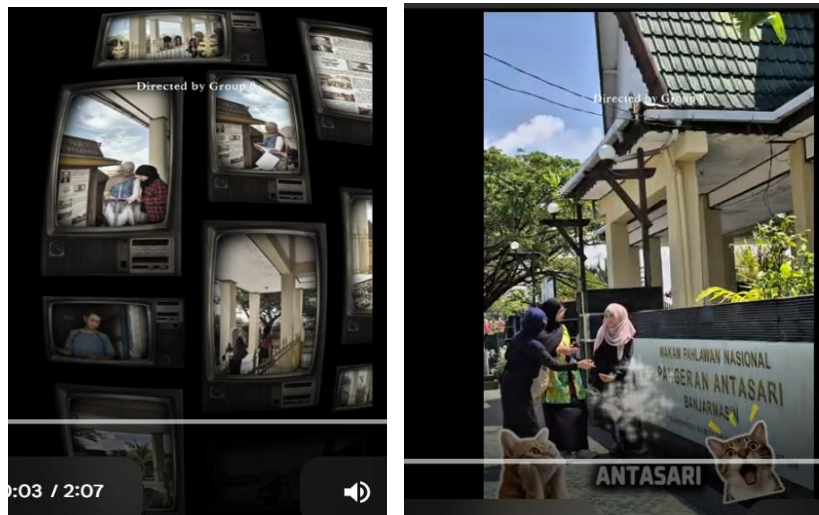


Figure 3. Students' Video Production Projects for Religious Tourism Promotion

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.

5. 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.

C. Challenges and Opportunities in Integrating Language Learning and Research Activities

Analysis of interview transcripts, reflective journals, classroom observations, and students' projects revealed that although students generally perceived the English for Religious Tourism (ERT) course positively, they also encountered several challenges throughout the learning process. At the same time, the course provided valuable opportunities for academic, personal, and professional development. Six themes emerged from the data.

1. Linguistic Challenges in Communicating Tourism and Religious Concepts

One of the most common difficulties experienced by students concerned language proficiency, particularly in speaking and academic writing. Many students reported that they lacked vocabulary related to tourism, architecture, religion, and local culture, which made it difficult to explain religious sites and historical narratives in English.

One participant explained: "Sometimes I knew the information in Indonesian, but I did not know how to express it in English. There were many terms related to history and religion that I had never learned before."

Students also indicated that organizing ideas and maintaining grammatical accuracy in writing research reports and articles posed challenges. Nevertheless, they acknowledged that repeated practice and feedback from lecturers and peers gradually improved their confidence and language proficiency.

2. Difficulties in Conducting Field Research

Another challenge concerned the research process itself. Several students stated that conducting interviews, arranging schedules, and collecting reliable information required considerable effort. One participant commented: "Finding resource persons and arranging interview schedules were not easy. Sometimes people were busy, and we had to come back several times." Students also encountered difficulties in transcribing interviews, organizing field notes, and analyzing qualitative data. Some participants admitted that this was their first experience conducting research outside the classroom.

Observation data showed that students occasionally faced technical and logistical constraints during field visits. However, these challenges also enabled them to develop problem-solving skills and adaptability.

3. Managing Time and Group Collaboration

Students identified time management as another challenge. Since the course involved fieldwork, project preparation, presentations, and article writing, balancing academic responsibilities with other coursework became demanding.

One student noted: "We had many tasks from different courses. Sometimes it was difficult to arrange meetings with group members and complete the project on time." Group collaboration also presented challenges. Differences in commitment, schedules, and working styles occasionally caused misunderstandings and unequal distribution of responsibilities.

Despite these issues, students recognized that collaborative projects helped them develop teamwork and communication skills.

4. Limitations in Digital and Academic Literacy

Although students frequently used digital technologies, several participants admitted that they initially lacked skills in academic writing, citation, video editing, and digital content production. One participant stated: "I had never written an article before, and I was not familiar with citation styles. Learning to edit videos and create infographics was also challenging."

Document analysis indicated that students experienced difficulties in synthesizing information, organizing references, and maintaining academic conventions. However, they gradually acquired new skills through practice and peer support. These findings suggest that digital literacy and academic literacy remain areas requiring continuous development among undergraduate students.

5. Opportunities for Authentic and Meaningful Learning

Despite the challenges, students unanimously emphasized that the course offered unique and meaningful learning experiences. Unlike conventional classroom instruction, the ERT course enabled them to engage directly with local communities and religious heritage. One participant reflected: "This course was different because we learned from real places and real people. It made learning more interesting and meaningful." Students perceived field visits, interviews, and project-based activities as opportunities to apply language skills in authentic contexts.

These experiences enhanced their understanding of local culture and increased their motivation to learn English. Reflective journals further revealed that students considered the course enjoyable because it combined language learning, tourism, and research in an integrated manner.

6. Opportunities for Professional and Future Career Development

Students also recognized the potential of the course to support their future careers. Many participants believed that the competencies acquired through the course would be useful for teaching, tourism, translation, research, and digital content creation.

One participant explained: "I realized that English can be used in many fields. After taking this course, I became interested in tourism promotion and educational content creation." Others indicated that the experience of conducting research and writing articles had increased their confidence in undertaking future academic projects, including undergraduate theses and conference presentations. Students also viewed the course as an opportunity to introduce South Kalimantan's religious heritage to international audiences and contribute to sustainable tourism development.

The findings revealed that students encountered several challenges while integrating language learning and research activities in the English for Religious Tourism course, including linguistic difficulties in communicating tourism and religious concepts, challenges in conducting field research, issues related to time management and group collaboration, as well as limitations in digital literacy and academic writing skills.

Despite these obstacles, the course provided numerous opportunities that contributed to students' academic, professional, and personal development. Students experienced authentic and meaningful learning through field-based inquiry and project-oriented activities, which enabled them to develop professional competencies, enhance their confidence in conducting research and academic writing, increase their awareness of future career opportunities and employability, and cultivate a greater appreciation of local heritage and sustainable tourism. Overall, students perceived that the benefits and opportunities offered by the English for Religious Tourism course outweighed the challenges they encountered, demonstrating that the integration of language learning, research, and experiential activities created transformative and meaningful learning experiences.

D. Discussion

The findings indicate 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's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory, which emphasizes that learning occurs through the transformation of experience. The learning process also reflects Dewey's (1938) 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 by Healey and 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 and 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's (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 Dudeney, Hockly, and Pegrum's (2013) 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's (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 (2001), 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.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

A. Conclusion

This study explored students' experiences in integrating language learning and research activities in the English for Religious Tourism (ERT) course at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin. Based on the findings and discussion, several conclusions can be drawn.

First, students experienced the integration of language learning and research activities as authentic, meaningful, and transformative. Through fieldwork, site visits, interviews, project-based activities, and article writing, students connected classroom learning with real-world contexts. These experiences enabled them to develop English communication skills while simultaneously engaging in research processes and interacting with local communities. The learning process reflected the principles of experiential learning and research-based learning, where knowledge was constructed through direct experience, reflection, and inquiry.

Second, participation in the ERT course contributed to the development of various competencies and values. In addition to improving English communication skills, students acquired research competencies, intercultural awareness, digital literacy, and creative skills. They also developed positive values such as respect for religious diversity, appreciation of local heritage, teamwork, responsibility, and self-confidence. These findings demonstrate that the course promotes holistic learning by integrating linguistic, academic, cultural, and personal dimensions.

Third, although students encountered challenges related to language proficiency, field research, academic writing, time management, and digital literacy, these difficulties became opportunities for growth and professional development. Students perceived the course as providing authentic learning experiences that enhanced their preparedness for future careers in education, tourism, research, and digital communication. Overall, the benefits of integrating language learning and research activities outweighed the challenges experienced by students.

From a broader perspective, this study demonstrates that English for Religious Tourism is more than a language course. It serves as a platform for experiential learning, undergraduate research, intercultural understanding, and transformative education. By connecting language learning with local religious heritage and authentic community engagement, the course contributes to the development of globally minded graduates who appreciate cultural diversity and local wisdom.

B. Suggestions

Based on the findings of this study, several suggestions are proposed.

1. For Lecturers

Lecturers are encouraged to continue implementing experiential and research-based learning approaches in English for Religious Tourism courses. More opportunities for fieldwork, collaborative projects, digital content creation, and undergraduate research should be provided to strengthen students' academic and professional competencies. Lecturers may also provide additional support in academic writing, research methodology, and digital literacy to help students overcome challenges encountered during the learning process.

2. For Higher Education Institutions

Universities should support innovative and contextualized learning by providing adequate facilities, funding, and institutional support for field-based and project-based activities. Collaboration with local communities, tourism stakeholders, cultural institutions, and government agencies should be strengthened to enrich students' learning experiences. Furthermore, institutions are encouraged to promote undergraduate research and publication opportunities to foster academic excellence.

3. For Students

Students are encouraged to actively engage in experiential learning activities and take advantage of opportunities to conduct research and interact with communities. They should continuously improve their English proficiency, academic writing abilities, digital literacy, and intercultural communication skills. Active participation in research and community-based projects can enhance both academic development and career readiness.

4. For Tourism Stakeholders and Local Communities

Tourism stakeholders and local communities are encouraged to collaborate with universities in preserving and promoting religious and cultural heritage. Such collaboration can provide authentic learning environments for students while contributing to sustainable tourism development and community empowerment. In addition, involving students in tourism promotion and cultural interpretation can help introduce local heritage to broader national and international audiences.

5. For Future Researchers

Future studies may explore the implementation of English for Religious Tourism in different institutional contexts or employ mixed-method or longitudinal approaches to investigate its long-term impacts on students' academic development and career trajectories. Further research may also examine the integration of digital technologies, artificial intelligence, virtual tourism, and international collaborative learning in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction. Comparative studies involving different tourism destinations and cultural settings would provide broader insights into the role of language education in promoting sustainable and intercultural tourism.

In conclusion, the English for Religious Tourism course represents an innovative model of English for Specific Purposes that integrates language learning, undergraduate research, intercultural competence, and local wisdom. Such an approach not only prepares students for professional and academic challenges but also contributes to the preservation and promotion of cultural and religious heritage in an increasingly interconnected world.

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