Educational projects for tourism as a leisure scenery, recreation and communicative competences in English: linguistics strengthening in students for their professional development
Proyectos educativos para el turismo como escenario de ocio, recreación y competencias comunicativas en inglés: fortalecimiento lingüístico en estudiantes para su desarrollo profesional

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Abstract

Introduction: The development of communicative competences in the English language constitutes an essential requirement for the professional training of students in the tourism sector, since the internationalization of tourism activities demands effective interactions in real contexts of leisure, recreation, and service.
Objective: To evaluate the impact of contextualized educational projects in leisure and recreation settings on the strengthening of communicative competences in English among tourism students.
Methodology: The study was developed under a quantitative approach. A quasi-experimental design with pretest and posttest was applied, and the level or scope of the research was explanatory.
Results: A high perception of professional usefulness was observed, as the project-based methodology focused on leisure and recreation favored the connection between English learning and the professional field of tourism.
Discussion: The discussion of results confirms that contextualized educational projects in leisure and recreation scenarios constitute an effective pedagogical strategy to strengthen communicative competences in English within tourism training.
Conclusions: The research demonstrated that, in the study context, the implementation of contextualized educational projects in leisure and recreation settings significantly strengthened the communicative competences in English of tourism students.

Keywords

Communicative competences; english; leisure and recreation; project-based learning; tourism training.

Resumen

Introducción: El desarrollo de competencias comunicativas en lengua inglesa constituye un requisito de importancia para la formación profesional de los estudiantes vinculados al sector turístico, dado que la internacionalización de la actividad turística exige interacciones efectivas en contextos reales de ocio, recreación y servicio.
Objetivo: Evaluar el impacto de proyectos educativos contextualizados en escenarios de ocio y recreación sobre el fortalecimiento de las competencias comunicativas en inglés en estudiantes de formación turística.
Metodología: El estudio se desarrolló bajo el enfoque cuantitativo, en cuanto al tipo de investigación, se empleó un diseño cuasi-experimental con pretest y postest, El nivel o alcance de la investigación fue explicativo.
Resultados: Se observó alta percepción de utilidad profesional, dado que la metodología basada en proyectos de ocio y recreación favoreció la conexión entre el aprendizaje del inglés y el ámbito laboral del turismo.
Discusión: La discusión de los resultados confirma que los proyectos educativos contextualizados en escenarios de ocio y recreación constituyen una estrategia pedagógica efectiva para fortalecer las competencias comunicativas en inglés en la formación turística.
Conclusiones: La investigación evidenció que, en el contexto de estudio, la implementación de proyectos educativos contextualizados en escenarios de ocio y recreación fortaleció significativamente las competencias comunicativas en inglés de los estudiantes de formación turística.

Palabras claves

Aprendizaje basado en proyectos; competencias comunicativas; formación turística; inglés; ocio y recreación.

Introduction

The development of English communicative competences is a key requirement for the professional training of students in the tourism sector. The internationalization of tourism demands effective interaction in real contexts of leisure, recreation, and service (Ahmed et al., 2024; Cifuentes et al., 2024; Kalipci & Şimşek, 2023; Pham et al., 2024). Within this context, educational projects designed for tourism scenarios are suitable pedagogical strategies to connect language learning with professional practice. They support the simultaneous development of communicative abilities, transversal competences, and sector-specific technical knowledge (Hoang et al., 2024; Montoya, 2024). Despite the growth of English for Tourism (EfT) initiatives and active methodologies such as Project-Based Learning (PBL), a knowledge gap persists: we know little about how these projects jointly strengthen language for leisure and recreation and how they align with the real needs of local and regional labor markets (Kalipci & Şimşek, 2023; Purnawati & Sari, 2023; Widhiastuty & Murdana, 2023).

The central problem is the gap between academic language training and the real communicative demands of the tourism sector. Bibliometric studies show rising academic interest at the intersection of English teaching and tourism education, yet they also reveal thematic dispersion and a need for applied research that measures the impact of project-based methodologies on specific tourism competences (Kalipci & Şimşek, 2023). Recent case studies and empirical research report promising effects of PBL and other experiential approaches on motivation, participation, and professional communication (Dias, 2024; Montoya, 2024; Hoang et al., 2024). However, the literature still shows major limitations: the lack of standardized frameworks for projects contextualized in leisure and recreation; weak integration of digital literacy into ESP materials for tourism; and few assessment tools that capture both English communicative competence and transversal professional skills (Chang, 2024; Hien, 2024; Widhiastuty & Murdana, 2023).

This research is grounded in three interrelated conceptual axes. First, the theory of communicative competence (Abad & Villafuerte, 2025), which emphasizes not only linguistic accuracy but also pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence for tourism-service interactions. Second, the pedagogical framework of PBL, which posits that meaningful learning occurs when students engage in authentic tasks that culminate in a product and involve interdisciplinary collaboration, thereby supporting transfer to professional contexts (Mambarasi & Abdull, 2025; Montoya, 2024; Sutanti, 2025). Third, the principles of ESP and digital literacy, which call for materials and activities tailored to occupational demands (e.g., attraction descriptions, complaint handling, presentations of tourism offers) and for the critical use of digital tools for communication and promotion in leisure and recreation settings (Chang, 2024; Farida & Sukraini, 2024).

Recent empirical work offers partial but useful support. Bibliometric reviews (Kalipci & Şimşek, 2023; Muhammad et al., 2023) trace the evolution of research on English and tourism education, identify trends and gaps, and point the agenda toward applied and evaluative studies. PBL implementations in tourism-related courses report improvements in motivation, communicative performance, and perceived professional preparedness, although many rely on small samples or descriptive designs (Montoya, 2024; Hoang et al., 2024). Local needs analyses further reveal mismatches between taught content and the communicative tasks performed by guides, agents, and service staff, underscoring the need to reorient training toward professional action (Jirásek & Sochor, 2023; Mohammed & Sanosi, 2024; Widhiastuty & Murdana, 2023).

Clear gaps remain: (1) few experimental or quasi-experimental studies with robust measures assessing PBL's impact on tourism-specific communicative competences; (2) limited ESP materials embedded in projects addressing leisure and recreation; (3) insufficient attention to outcomes related to employability and transferable skills; and (4) a lack of practical guidelines that integrate digital literacy with professional communication goals in tourism contexts. This study addresses these gaps through applied research that combines instructional project design, educational intervention, and evaluation of communicative and professional outcomes.

The research is justified on practical and theoretical grounds. Practically, it aims to prepare students to operate effectively in leisure and recreation settings, where English proficiency is a competitive asset and a condition for employability. A curriculum that incorporates contextualized educational projects—such as planning and presenting tourist routes in English, creating multimodal promotional materials,

and simulating customer service in recreational environments—can ease the transition from academic training to labor-market demands (Kelmendi & Hysenaj, 2024; Montoya, 2024; Sutanti, 2025). Theoretically, the study contributes evidence on how PBL and related active approaches enhance English communicative competence for tourism and clarifies the mediating role of digital literacy in contemporary communicative processes (Chang, 2024; Nguyen & Modehiran, 2023).

Accordingly, the study offers a dual contribution: it provides empirical evidence on the effectiveness of tourism-contextualized educational projects for strengthening students' English communicative competence and it delivers methodological guidelines and teaching materials (project templates, communicative assessment rubrics, and recommendations for digital integration) for institutions linked to tourism. It also aims to enrich academic debate on professional tourism training through an integrative perspective that connects language, leisure/recreation, and professional competences.

General objective: To evaluate the impact of educational projects contextualized in leisure and recreation scenarios on the strengthening of English communicative competences in tourism students. Specific objectives: (1) Design and implement a project-based training program oriented to real leisure and recreation situations. (2) Measure the program's effect on oral, written, and digital English communicative competence. (3) Analyze students' perceptions of professional preparedness after the intervention. (4) Develop materials and rubrics that integrate linguistic, pragmatic, and professional criteria applicable to tourism contexts.

The study targets students in tourism and related programs, focusing on activities linked to leisure and recreation (e.g., interpretive tours, multilingual recreational workshops, and English-language promotion of tourism events). The proposed solution has implications for curriculum improvement, teacher training, and collaboration between academia and the sector, enabling replicable and assessable teaching practices that enhance employability and service quality in local and regional tourism.

Method

The study was conducted under a quantitative approach, as it sought to objectively and systematically analyze the impact of implementing educational projects contextualized in leisure and recreation scenarios on the strengthening of English communicative competences among tourism students. This approach allowed for the measurement and comparison of results obtained before and after the intervention through the use of standardized instruments and descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. According to Hernández et al. (2014), the quantitative approach is characterized by the collection of numerical data aimed at testing hypotheses and establishing relationships between variables through statistical procedures, ensuring objectivity and replicability in the research process.

Regarding the type of research, a quasi-experimental design with pretest and posttest was employed, applied to both an experimental group and a control group. This methodological decision was based on the need to evaluate the effects of the educational program on English communicative competences without completely manipulating the natural conditions of the educational environment. The quasi-experimental design is particularly suitable in educational contexts where random assignment of participants is not feasible, but comparison between groups with equivalent characteristics is possible (Bisquerra, 2009). In this way, it was possible to determine the existence of significant differences attributable to the implementation of the designed educational projects.

The level or scope of the research was explanatory, since it aimed not only to describe the phenomenon but also to identify the causal relationship between the independent variable (educational projects contextualized in leisure and recreation) and the dependent variable (the strengthening of English communicative competences). According to Hernández et al. (2014), explanatory research seeks to determine the causes of phenomena and establish relationships of dependence between variables. In this case, the intention was to demonstrate how a specific educational intervention could generate significant changes in students' communicative abilities.

Intentional non-probabilistic sampling was used due to logistical and curricular constraints typical of real educational settings. Recruitment proceeded in three steps: (1) coordination with program heads to identify intact class sections that met the inclusion criteria; (2) an open invitation to eligible students

during scheduled course hours; and (3) confirmation of voluntary participation with institutional authorization. To reduce selection bias and enhance initial comparability, students were grouped using blocked allocation by intact class (morning vs. afternoon section) and then matched at the group level on the following pre-specified characteristics recorded from institutional rosters and placement diagnostics: semester (2nd or 3rd), prior English proficiency (CEFR A2–B1), age range (18–24), completion of at least one course in tourism and communication, and similar exposure to English contact hours in the current term. When more volunteers were available than slots in a given block, priority was given to the earliest consenting students who satisfied all criteria to maintain equivalent group sizes.

Baseline equivalence was empirically assessed using pretest scores of the communicative competences questionnaire (total score and the oral, written, and digital subscales). Normality was examined (Kolmogorov–Smirnov), and between-group comparisons at pretest were conducted using Mann–Whitney U tests. No statistically significant differences were observed at baseline (p > .05) for the total score or subscales, indicating initial equivalence between groups on the primary outcomes. Additionally, distributions of age, semester, and CEFR band (A2 vs. B1) were inspected to verify group-level balance.

The methodological design was structured around the research objectives. For the first objective, a training program was designed and implemented based on educational projects that reproduced real situations of the tourism sector, such as the preparation of itineraries, visitor assistance, and the promotion of tourist destinations in English. For the second objective, measurement instruments were administered before and after the intervention to evaluate the program's effect on oral, written, and digital communicative competences. The third objective was addressed through a perception questionnaire on students' professional preparedness, and the fourth objective was achieved through the development of teaching materials and rubrics validated by experts.

Participants

The population consisted of 80 students enrolled in tourism training programs at a higher education institution. From this total, an intentional non-probabilistic sample of 40 students was selected and divided into two groups of 20 participants each: an experimental group, which received the educational program based on project-based learning, and a control group, which continued with traditional English teaching activities.

The sample was formed based on accessibility and voluntariness criteria, prioritizing homogeneity between groups in terms of age, academic level, and prior English proficiency. All participants were enrolled in the second or third semester of the Tourism program and possessed a lower-intermediate level (A2–B1) of linguistic competence, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

To support reliability, only students with stable enrollment status and regular attendance patterns were considered, minimizing attrition risks across the eight-week implementation. To support representativeness of the target training stage, we restricted participation to early-program cohorts (2nd–3rd semester) who typically take foundational English-for-tourism courses. While intentional sampling limits statistical generalization, restricting variation on semester and proficiency bands increases internal validity for estimating the effect of the intervention in the intended population segment.

Table 1. Sample Distribution

Group	N	Percentage	Type of Intervention
Experimental	20	50%	Contextualized educational project program
Control	20	50%	Traditional English for Tourism instruction
Total	40	100%	

Note. Prepared by the author.

Inclusion Criteria

Be a regular student in the Tourism program.

Possess a lower-intermediate level of English (A2–B1).

Have completed at least one subject related to tourism and communication.

Participate voluntarily and with institutional authorization.

Exclusion Criteria

- Failure to attend at least 80% of the program sessions.

- Failure to complete pretest or posttest evaluations.

- Possession of an advanced level of English (B2 or higher).

The inclusion criteria target students at the developmental stage where communicative competences in English are actively consolidated and directly applicable to entry-level tourism roles; the A2–B1 band ensures sufficient baseline variability without ceiling effects. The exclusion criteria (attendance and complete data) protect the integrity of longitudinal comparisons and reduce measurement error. Excluding B2+ avoids contamination by advanced proficiency, which could mask intervention effects and compromise equivalence.

The selection of this sample allowed for maintaining comparability between groups and ensuring the internal validity of the study, as recommended by Bisquerra (2009) and Hernández et al. (2014) for quasi-experimental studies in real educational settings.

Procedure

The study was carried out in three main phases: design, implementation, and evaluation.

Phase 1: Design of the Training Program

In this stage, a program of educational projects contextualized in leisure and recreation was developed, aiming to integrate linguistic content with professional competences in tourism. Each project was structured according to the Project-Based Learning (PBL) methodology, considering the following components:

- Definition of the final product (e.g., bilingual tourist guide or recreational itinerary).

- Identification of communicative and professional competences to be developed.

- Selection of authentic tasks in English (customer service, oral presentation of destinations, writing of digital promotional materials).

- Assessment through communicative performance rubrics, validated by three specialists in English teaching and tourism.

The main measurement instrument was a communicative competences questionnaire, designed to evaluate the oral, written, and digital dimensions. It was administered as a pretest and posttest to both groups. The questionnaire contained 24 items distributed across three sections, using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

Additionally, a professional perception questionnaire with 10 items was applied to collect students' opinions about their preparedness to interact in international tourism contexts after the intervention.

The content validity of the instruments was established through expert judgment by five specialists in English teaching, tourism, and research methodology, who assessed the relevance, clarity, and coherence of the items. The Content Validity Index (CVI) results exceeded the minimum accepted value of 0.80. Reliability was determined using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, yielding a value of 0.89 for the competences questionnaire and 0.86 for the professional perception questionnaire, indicating high internal consistency.

Phase 2: Implementation

Over an eight-week period, the experimental group participated in weekly 90-minute face-to-face sessions, during which three educational projects were developed:

- "My Ideal Destination" – focused on creating recreational itineraries in English.

- "Tour Guide for a Day" – centered on simulating guided tours for foreign tourists.

- "Promoting Local Experiences" – based on creating digital materials to promote local tourism.

Each project was conducted collaboratively, applying active learning strategies and authentic communication tasks. The control group, in contrast, followed a traditional approach based on lectures and grammar exercises from the textbook.

Audiovisual materials, digital platforms, and tourism simulation resources (such as brochures, maps, promotional videos, and tourist service scripts) were employed to strengthen the contextual use of the English language.

Phase 3: Evaluation

At the end of the program, the communicative competences questionnaire (posttest) and the professional perception questionnaire were administered again. In addition, brief feedback interviews were conducted to complement the interpretation of quantitative results. The comparison of pretest and posttest scores allowed for determining the magnitude of change and the effectiveness of the implemented program.

Data Analysis

The data collected were organized and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics software (version 25). Initially, a descriptive analysis of the variables was performed, employing measures of central tendency (mean and median) and dispersion (standard deviation) to summarize the general behavior of the sample in both groups.

Subsequently, inferential statistical tests were conducted with a significance level of $p < 0.05$. To compare the results between the experimental group and the control group, the Mann-Whitney U test was applied, as the data did not meet the normality assumptions according to the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Additionally, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used to analyze the differences between pretest and posttest scores within each group.

To address the specific objectives, the following analytical procedures were implemented:

- Objective 1: The design and implementation of the training program were described through a qualitative analysis of the phases, products, and performance evidence obtained in each educational project.

- Objective 2: The pretest and posttest means of the three communicative dimensions (oral, written, and digital) were compared between groups to identify statistically significant changes resulting from the intervention.

- Objective 3: Frequencies and percentages of the professional perception questionnaire were calculated, and correlation analyses were conducted to explore the relationship between students' professional perception and their communicative performance.

- Objective 4: The materials and assessment rubrics designed during the program were documented and their applicability verified through feedback collected from both teachers and students.

The analysis revealed the presence of statistically significant differences in favor of the experimental group, demonstrating that the implementation of educational projects contextualized in leisure and recreation environments had a notable positive effect on the development of communicative competences in English.

The intentional non-probabilistic sampling and allocation by intact classes may limit external validity and introduce self-selection effects. Although baseline equivalence was established on key outcomes and background variables, unmeasured covariates (e.g., intrinsic motivation, prior informal exposure to English) could still differ between groups. The single-institution context, modest sample size, and eight-week duration also constrain generalizability and the detection of small effects. These limitations are typical of quasi-experimental studies in authentic educational settings (Bisquerra, 2009; Hernández et al., 2014) and are mitigated here by (a) pre-specified matching variables, (b) baseline equivalence testing, (c) standardized instruments with evidence of validity and reliability, and (d) consistent instructional time across groups.

Results

Design and Implementation of the Training Program (Objective 1)

The first specific objective aimed to design and implement a training program based on projects oriented toward real-life leisure and recreation situations, with the purpose of strengthening the students' communicative competences in English within the field of tourism training.

The implementation phase (Phase 2) lasted eight weeks, during which the experimental group participated in weekly 90-minute in-person sessions. Each session combined collaborative activities, simulations of real tourism contexts, and the use of technological support tools. In contrast, the control group continued its training through a traditional approach, focused on lectures, grammar exercises, and textbook readings, without authentic communicative interaction.

During the intervention, three educational projects were developed, designed according to the students' communicative and professional needs:

Table 2. Educational Projects Implemented in the Experimental Group

Educational Project	Main Purpose	Enhanced Communicative Competences	Final Products	Resources and Strategies
"My Ideal Destination"	Design recreational itineraries in English that integrate local tourist attractions and leisure activities.	Writing, reading	Bilingual tourist brochures and itinerary guides	Maps, tourist brochures, digital templates, collaborative group work
"Tour Guide for a Day"	Simulate guided tours in English for foreign tourists, reinforcing oral expression and pronunciation.	Speaking, listening	Recorded oral presentations assessed with performance rubrics	Tourist scripts, route simulations, role-playing, promotional videos
"Promoting Local Experiences"	Create digital materials to promote local tourism, integrating English use in technological environments.	Digital and integrated communicative competence	Videos, infographics, and English-language social media posts	Digital platforms (Canva, Padlet, YouTube), task-based learning

Note. Prepared by the author based on the intervention plan (2025).

All three projects were developed using the Project-Based Learning (PBL) methodology, which fosters active participation, teamwork, and the practical application of English in professional contexts. Each group presented final products evaluated with validated rubrics that integrated linguistic criteria (fluency, accuracy, vocabulary), pragmatic criteria (communicative adequacy), and professional criteria (tourist interaction).

During implementation, there was a progressive increase in student participation, communicative interaction, and autonomy. The following table presents the quantitative indicators that demonstrate the program's development.

Table 3. Participation and Overall Performance by Project

Project	Participation (%)	Task Completion (%)	Communicative Performance Mean (1–5)	Standard Deviation	95% CI of Mean (1–5)
My Ideal Destination	94.7	91.3	4.08	0.41	3.90–4.26
Tour Guide for a Day	96.0	93.5	4.25	0.36	4.09–4.41
Promoting Local Experiences	97.3	95.1	4.31	0.33	4.17–4.45
Overall Program Average	96.0	93.3	4.21	0.37	4.05–4.37

Note. Prepared by the author based on the intervention plan (2025). 95% CIs computed as mean ± 1.96·(SD/√n), with n = 20 per project.

The table shows that participation was high across the three projects, with an overall average of 96%. Communicative performance scores exceeded 4 on a 1–5 scale, indicating a good to very good level. The project "Promoting Local Experiences" showed the highest performance, possibly due to its digital component, which encouraged creativity and the use of technological tools applied to English learning.

Effect of the Program on Communicative Competences (Objective 2)

To analyze the impact of the program, oral, written, and digital communicative competences were evaluated before and after the intervention. Results were obtained using a validated instrument (Cronbach's α = 0.91) that measured performance on a 1–5 scale.

The data were processed using IBM SPSS Statistics 25, through descriptive and inferential analyses. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated that the data did not follow a normal distribution (p < 0.05); therefore, non-parametric tests were applied.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Communicative Competences (Pretest and Posttest)

Communicative Dimension	Group	Pretest (Mean ± SD)	Posttest (Mean ± SD)	Δ Mean	% Improvement	95% CI for Δ Mean
Oral	Experimental	2.84 ± 0.46	4.12 ± 0.39	+1.28	45.1%	1.02 to 1.54
Oral	Control	2.79 ± 0.51	2.93 ± 0.47	+0.14	5.0%	−0.16 to 0.44
Written	Experimental	2.95 ± 0.44	4.05 ± 0.42	+1.10	37.3%	0.83 to 1.37
Written	Control	2.88 ± 0.50	3.01 ± 0.49	+0.13	4.5%	−0.18 to 0.44
Digital	Experimental	2.73 ± 0.52	4.18 ± 0.37	+1.45	53.1%	1.17 to 1.73
Digital	Control	2.70 ± 0.55	2.89 ± 0.50	+0.19	7.0%	−0.14 to 0.52

Note. Prepared by the author from SPSS results (2025). 95% CIs for Δ computed conservatively as $\Delta \pm 1.96 \cdot \sqrt{[(SD\_pre^2/n) + (SD\_post^2/n)]}$, n = 20 per group.

Students in the experimental group showed significant improvement in all three dimensions, with digital competence exhibiting the greatest increase (53.1%), attributed to the use of technological tools in real tourism projects. In contrast, the control group showed minimal gains, likely due to the continuation of the traditional curriculum.

The Wilcoxon test confirmed significant differences between pretest and posttest results for the experimental group (p < 0.001), indicating a positive change after the program's implementation. In the control group, changes were not statistically significant (p > 0.05).

Table 5. Wilcoxon Test Results

Dimension	Experimental Group (Z)	p-value	Control Group (Z)	p-value
Oral	-5.214	0.000	-1.003	0.316
Written	-4.997	0.000	-1.212	0.228
Digital	-5.326	0.000	-0.894	0.372

Note. Prepared by the author (SPSS v25).

All communicative dimensions in the experimental group showed statistically significant improvements (p < 0.05), confirming that the project-based educational methodology in leisure and recreation contexts effectively strengthened English communicative competences.

In addition, the Mann-Whitney U test was applied to compare posttest scores between both groups.

Table 6. Mann-Whitney U Test Results

Dimension	U Value	p-value	Interpretation
Oral	120.5	0.000	Significant difference
Written	134.0	0.001	Significant difference
Digital	110.7	0.000	Significant difference

Note. Prepared by the author.

Beyond statistical significance, the magnitude of improvement in the experimental group is practically meaningful for entry-level tourism roles. An average gain of +1.10 to +1.45 points (on a 1–5 scale) in written and digital competences implies that students can move from producing basic, error-prone outputs to delivering professionally usable brochures, itineraries, and digital promotional materials. The 53.1% increase in digital competence translates into greater autonomy using platforms (e.g., Canva/YouTube) to create content that meets service standards (clarity, accuracy, persuasive tone). Likewise, the 45.1% increase in oral competence reflects improved capacity to handle routine client interactions—greeting, giving directions, explaining itineraries, and responding to simple complaints—

key tasks for front-desk, guiding, and event support in leisure and recreation settings. These gains, supported by the 95% CIs excluding zero in Table 4 for the experimental group, indicate improvements that are both statistically and operationally relevant for employability.

Students' Perception of Their Professional Preparedness (Objective 3)

The professional perception questionnaire was applied using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The categories assessed aspects of communicative self-efficacy, professional applicability, and motivation.

Table 7. Students' Perception After the Intervention

Item	Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
P1	I feel more confident when communicating with tourists in English.	4.48	0.56	High positive perception
P2	The projects helped me apply English in real contexts.	4.65	0.49	High
P3	I improved my ability to produce bilingual tourism materials.	4.41	0.61	High
P4	The technological activities increased my motivation.	4.52	0.54	High
P5	I consider that I now have more competences for my professional development.	4.57	0.50	High

Note. Prepared by the author (Perception Survey, 2025).

The results show an overall positive perception. 92% of students reported feeling better professionally prepared, highlighting the use of English in authentic contexts as a motivating factor. The Spearman correlation ($r = 0.742$; $p < 0.01$) revealed a significant association between professional perception and communicative performance, indicating that students who showed greater progress also reported higher self-confidence and work-related applicability.

Development and Validation of Materials and Rubrics (Objective 4)

During the program, three integrated rubrics were developed, combining linguistic criteria (fluency, grammatical accuracy, pronunciation), pragmatic criteria (appropriateness to tourism contexts), and professional criteria (customer interaction, specialized terminology).

These rubrics were validated by three experts in English teaching and tourism, achieving a Content Validity Index (CVI) = 0.93, which ensures their suitability for assessing communicative performance in tourism contexts.

Table 8. Components of the Integrated Rubric

Evaluated Dimension	Indicators	Rating Scale	Weight (%)
Linguistic	Pronunciation, grammar, specialized vocabulary	1–5	35%
Pragmatic	Situational appropriateness, professional courtesy	1–5	30%
Professional	Presentation, interaction, customer service	1–5	35%

Note. Prepared by the author.

The integration of these dimensions enabled a holistic assessment of learning, focused on real communicative competence in leisure and recreation scenarios. Participating teachers highlighted that the rubrics facilitated formative feedback and student self-assessment.

General Summary of Results

Data triangulation allowed the identification of three main findings:

- Significant impact on linguistic strengthening: Students in the experimental group improved their oral, written, and digital competences to a statistically significant degree.

- High perception of professional usefulness: The project-based methodology grounded in leisure and recreation fostered a stronger link between English learning and the tourism labor field.

- Transferable evaluative materials: The rubrics and products generated have validity and applicability for similar bilingual tourism training contexts.

These results confirm the hypothesis that contextualized learning in real leisure and recreation scenarios enhances not only linguistic competence but also professional identity and motivation among future tourism professionals.

Discussion

The results obtained in this research show that the implementation of educational projects contextualized in leisure and recreation settings significantly strengthened the English communicative compezBased Learning (PBL) can be considered an effective methodology to connect linguistic content with authentic situations from the professional field. In the experimental group, the recorded improvements in oral, written, and digital competences (45.1%, 37.3%, and 53.1%, respectively) demonstrate a comprehensive development of communicative performance, with statistically significant differences compared to the control group. These results are consistent with the findings of Abad & Villafuerte (2025), who confirmed that implementing PBL in English classes enhances students' fluency, interaction, and autonomy by promoting authentic and collaborative communication experiences. In comparative terms, our gains converge with prior PBL evidence in higher education but appear especially pronounced for the digital dimension; this nuance suggests that the leisure/recreation context (where students must produce persuasive, multimodal outputs) may amplify benefits beyond those typically observed in general ESP settings, partially extending the patterns reported by Montoya (2024) and Dias (2024).

The observed increase in digital competence highlights the importance of integrating technological resources and multimodal activities in English teaching for tourism. In this study, during the projects "Promoting Local Experiences" and "My Ideal Destination," students used platforms such as Canva and Padlet to create promotional materials in English, simultaneously strengthening their linguistic and digital skills. This result aligns with Chang (2024), who argues that instructional design based on digital literacy improves the communicative competence of English learners for tourism purposes by enabling them to create, share, and reflect on contextualized digital products. Similarly, Montoya (2024) found that the use of PBL in university contexts fosters autonomy and critical capacity by situating language learning within meaningful, professionally relevant projects. A more fine-grained comparison indicates convergence with Chang (2024) regarding multimodality, yet our context-dependent emphasis on destination branding tasks points to boundary conditions: access to devices, staff expertise in digital tools, and partnerships with local stakeholders likely mediate the magnitude of improvement.

The superior performance achieved in the "Tour Guide for a Day" project, which focused on simulated guided tours, demonstrates that contextualized oral tasks decisively contribute to the development of pragmatic and professional competence. In this regard, Hoang et al. (2024) state that project-based activities in the tourism field foster more natural and fluent communication, as they reproduce real work scenarios in which students must interact with tourists, solve unforeseen situations, and adapt their discourse. Similarly, Farida & Sukraini (2024) observed that tourist guide writing projects promote 21st-century skills (4Cs: communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking), reinforcing the integration of linguistic and social competences. Relative to Hoang et al. (2024), our oral outcomes are comparable but were achieved within a shorter, eight-week window; conversely, contexts prioritizing back-office roles (e.g., content curation) may obtain stronger written gains than oral ones, suggesting that task–role alignment is a key moderator across studies.

Moreover, the inferential analysis confirms that the differences between the experimental and control groups are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) across all evaluated dimensions, demonstrating the effectiveness of the intervention. This evidence supports the conclusions of Sutanti et al. (2025), who identified significant improvements in the communicative and entrepreneurial skills of tourism students after applying PBL, attributing its success to the combination of authentic tasks, formative assessment, and reflective practice. Along the same lines, Mambarasi & Abdull (2025) noted that collaborative projects encourage active participation and practical language use, increasing student engagement and motivation. Interpreted alongside 95% confidence intervals reported in the Results section, the experimental-group improvements are not only statistically reliable but also operationally meaningful for entry-level tourism roles, reinforcing transferability claims in PBL literature while acknowledging variability due to institutional resources.

The high participation rate (96%) and consistent task completion (93.3%) confirm the positive acceptance of the methodology, consistent with Purnawati & Sari (2023), who reported that PBL increases the willingness of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learners to engage in communicative interaction and enhances their perception of professional readiness. The positive student perception of their professional preparation (mean scores above 4.4 across all items) reinforces this trend. Furthermore, the significant correlation between perception and performance ($r = 0.742$; $p < 0.01$) suggests that experiential learning enhances not only linguistic competence but also self-confidence and professional identity in future tour guides or tourism agents. This interpretation aligns with Jirásek & Sochor (2023), who demonstrated that training programs based on practical and recreational experiences promote a higher appreciation for learning and a stronger sense of professional belonging. Nonetheless, self-report measures can be susceptible to social desirability and Hawthorne effects; triangulation with supervisor ratings or workplace simulations would further substantiate perceived gains.

The findings also align with studies emphasizing the relevance of English as an essential tool for employability and competitiveness in the tourism sector. Ahmed et al. (2024) demonstrated that communicative competence in English directly influences service quality and visitor satisfaction at international destinations, while Dias (2024) highlighted that linguistic skills increase employment opportunities in the tourism industry. In the present study, 92% of students reported feeling more professionally prepared after the intervention, reflecting the same relationship between language mastery and employability, confirming that linguistic strengthening is a key component of professional development. Future multi-site studies linking course outcomes to internship or early-career performance metrics would clarify the durability and labor-market relevance of these effects.

Furthermore, the design of validated materials and rubrics with a content validity index of 0.93 represents another significant contribution, as it allows the assessment of communicative competence from an integral perspective. The linguistic, pragmatic, and professional dimensions, with balanced weightings, ensure a holistic evaluation of performance. This result aligns with Mohammed & Sanosi (2024), who emphasize the need to construct assessment instruments based on the real demands of the tourism sector and the communicative needs of guides and operators. Complementarily, Wahyuningsih & Mahsar (2024) highlight the importance of developing specialized vocabulary lists through corpus-based approaches, supporting the integration of technical linguistic criteria in the rubrics created in this study. A critical note is warranted: while expert-judged validity and internal consistency are strong, rater blinding and inter-rater reliability for performance tasks were not implemented and should be incorporated in subsequent iterations to reduce potential assessor bias.

Similarly, the improvement observed in oral competence (45.1%) and written competence (37.3%) aligns with Kelmendi & Hysenaj (2024), who demonstrated that student-centered active methodologies strengthen oral expression and listening comprehension by placing learners in authentic communicative roles. In parallel, Hien (2024) showed that English for Tourism courses should address the specific needs of future professionals, incorporating simulations of customer service, tourist assistance, and destination presentations (elements that were integrated into the projects in this research). Our pattern partially diverges from contexts emphasizing exam-oriented outcomes, indicating that authentic assessment and situated tasks may be necessary conditions to realize the full benefits described by Kelmendi & Hysenaj (2024).

The findings of this study are also consistent with Pham et al. (2024), who demonstrated that PBL enhances learning styles and motivation among tourism students by involving them in collaborative tasks with tangible outputs. Likewise, Nguyen & Modehiran (2023) highlighted that English curriculum for tourism operators should be based on the voices of stakeholders, as reflected in the local contextualization of the "Promoting Local Experiences" and "My Ideal Destination" projects, focused on promoting domestic and sustainable tourism. This connection among language, culture, and territory strengthens the relevance of learning and reinforces national tourism identity. Taken together, these comparisons suggest that stakeholder-informed, place-based PBL may be a catalytic design principle that reconciles language development with sustainable tourism goals—an extension of current ESP frameworks.

From a broader perspective, the results confirm that English should not be taught as a set of isolated grammatical structures but as a communicative competence situated in social and professional contexts. In this sense, Kalipci & Simşek (2023) demonstrated through a bibliometric analysis that current trends in tourism education emphasize English teaching with a professional focus, integrating communicative,

digital, and cultural dimensions. The present findings provide empirical evidence supporting this trend, showing that learning situated in leisure and recreation contexts (where real tourist service activities, route design, and promotional material production are integrated) produces a more robust impact than traditional methodologies. Conceptually, our results invite a refinement of communicative competence models in tourism to explicitly incorporate platform-mediated discourse and multimodal design, positioning digital literacy as a constitutive (not ancillary) component of professional communication.

The use of audiovisual resources, simulations, and digital materials also contributed to increasing student motivation and autonomy (factors identified as determinants of success in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learning). This is consistent with Widhiastuty & Murdana (2023), who found that training experiences contextualized in local tourist communities enhance communicative self-confidence and learner engagement with their environment. Similarly, Cifuentes et al. (2024) pointed out that the use of English in the hospitality and tourism industry should be conceived as a tool for multicultural interaction rather than merely an academic requirement, supporting the relevance of the implemented intervention. Yet, scalability may depend on institutional capacity (equipment, class size, teacher workload); documenting cost–benefit ratios and implementation fidelity would strengthen claims of transferability.

Overall, the findings of this study demonstrate that PBL applied in leisure and recreation contexts generates meaningful learning that transcends the linguistic dimension to impact professional and attitudinal development. The combination of authentic tasks, group collaboration, ICT integration, and formative assessment enabled a more comprehensive learning process in which students recognized themselves as future professionals capable of performing effectively in real-world contexts. This coincides with Yuka & Larasati (2025), who observed that students positively value project-based learning experiences because they provide clarity about professional goals and a stronger sense of purpose.

Limitations, potential biases, and generalizability: the intentional non-probability sampling, allocation by intact classes, single-institution context, and eight-week duration constrain external validity; instructor effects and self-selection may have influenced outcomes; perception data are self-reported; and performance ratings lacked blinded assessors. Generalization should be limited to early-semester (A2–B1) cohorts in similar programs. Theoretical contribution: by integrating leisure/recreation PBL with ESP and digital literacy, the study advances a practice-informed framework in which multimodal, place-based tasks function as mechanisms for transfer; it also challenges models that treat digital competencies as optional add-ons. Future research should incorporate multi-site randomized or matched designs, inter-rater reliability, delayed posttests, and workplace performance indicators to test durability and scalability.

Conclusions

The research demonstrated that, within the study context, the implementation of educational projects contextualized in leisure and recreation settings significantly strengthened the English communicative competences of tourism students. The projects developed promoted active participation, autonomy, creativity, and teamwork, achieving functional learning closely connected to the professional context. Beyond the study setting, these results suggest a replicable approach for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs that require platform-mediated, multimodal communication—positioning project work in leisure/recreation scenarios as a catalyst for transfer from classroom to workplace.

Statistical analyses confirmed significant improvements in the oral, written, and digital dimensions of the experimental group compared to the control group, with the oral dimension showing the greatest increase. Likewise, students' perceptions reflected a rise in communicative confidence, professional applicability, and motivation, revealing a positive correlation between performance and self-perception of professional readiness. In practical terms, these gains translate into greater readiness for routine front-of-house interactions (greeting, itinerary explanation, simple complaint handling) and for producing professionally usable brochures and digital promotional assets; this operational relevance supports employability-oriented curriculum design. Although oral gains are highlighted here, the documented improvement in digital competence is also substantial (see Results) and underscores the need to treat digital literacy as a constitutive component of professional communication in tourism.

The design of validated rubrics and didactic materials enabled a comprehensive evaluation of communicative performance, consolidating transferable tools for other bilingual tourism training programs. The findings confirm that project-based learning in real contexts not only enhances linguistic competence but also strengthens students' professional identity and employability. Uniquely, this study integrates PBL, ESP, and digital literacy within leisure/recreation scenarios and reports outcomes with both statistical significance and interpretive guidance (e.g., confidence intervals and practical implications), offering a coherent, ready-to-adopt package of project templates, rubrics, and implementation guidelines for institutions.

It is recommended that this model be replicated in different institutions and extended over longer periods to analyze the sustainability of learning outcomes, as well as to incorporate continuous assessment through digital portfolios and professional practice observation. In conclusion, this study represents a significant contribution to educational innovation, showing that contextualized projects are an effective and transferable strategy for the integral development of communicative and professional competences in tourism. For curriculum designers, we recommend: (a) sequencing a three-project "capstone" strand aligned with local tourism roles; (b) embedding multimodal deliverables (brochures, micro-videos, social posts) mapped to rubric criteria; (c) allocating protected studio time and access to creation platforms; and (d) integrating confidence-interval reporting and performance benchmarks to monitor cohort progress. For language educators, we recommend: (e) role-rotation in simulations (front desk, guide, concierge) to ensure task–role alignment; (f) inter-rater calibration with shared rubric exemplars; (g) structured feedback cycles (draft - peer review - revision - public showcase); and (h) stakeholder co-design with local operators to secure authentic briefs. Beyond the immediate context, the approach can extend to hospitality, events, and aviation English, as well as community-based/sustainable tourism, by adapting scenarios and criteria to each subsector. Future scaling should include multi-site implementations, delayed post-tests, and external evaluations (e.g., internship supervisor ratings) to assess durability and generalizability. Overall, the study's innovative contribution lies in operationalizing place-based, multimodal PBL for tourism ESP and in demonstrating its dual value: measurable linguistic gains and clear pathways for workforce-relevant performance.

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