



## **Project-Based Learning in Higher Education for Developing Transversal Competences in English for Tourism and Tourism Intermediation**

Ángel Rodríguez-Pallas 

Universidad de A Coruña, Spain, [angel.rodriguez.pallas@udc.es](mailto:angel.rodriguez.pallas@udc.es)

Ana Montoya-Reyes 

Universidad de A Coruña, Spain, [ana.montoya@udc.es](mailto:ana.montoya@udc.es)

This study examines how Project-Based Learning (PBL) promotes transversal competences by integrating two core subjects, English for Tourism, First Modern Language English, with Tourism Intermediation and Transport I in the bilingual Tourism Degree program at the University of A Coruña. Over a period of twelve weeks, 12 students in their second year of the degree designed a comprehensive travel package in English, which included destination analysis, itinerary planning, supplier negotiation, cost calculation, and promotional materials. Using a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods approach, data were collected through a six-item student questionnaire (Google Forms, which included open-ended and Likert-scale responses), project artefacts assessment (reports, itineraries, spreadsheets, and promotional materials), and systematic observations during group meetings and presentations. Notes on teamwork, participation, problem-solving, and English use provided additional material to monitor the progress of student engagement. Data analysis combined thematic analysis for qualitative evidence and descriptive statistics for quantitative responses. The findings obtained show that students perceived the project as highly relevant for applying linguistic and professional knowledge to authentic industry tasks. The reported benefits included greater use of specialised vocabulary, improved public speaking in English, enhanced collaboration, and a clearer understanding of tourism-sector practices. Challenges were mainly associated with spreadsheet-based cost calculations and varying spoken language proficiency. At the end of this project, students expressed high satisfaction, suggesting that interdisciplinary PBL strengthens both employability skills and language competence in tourism education.

**Keywords:** project-based learning, transversal competences, tourism education, English for tourism, tourism intermediation, interdisciplinary learning, higher education

### **INTRODUCTION**

The contemporary tourism industry is rapidly evolving, demanding highly skilled professionals with specialised knowledge and a diverse set of transversal competences.

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Effective communication, cultural sensitivity, and linguistic adaptability are crucial in this interconnected global marketplace. Within this context, Project-Based Learning (PBL) has gained prominence as a relevant pedagogical approach that emphasises learner engagement and the application of knowledge in meaningful tasks in higher education. In tourism programs, PBL is particularly significant due to its potential to integrate and engage students in authentic, interdisciplinary tasks that represent real-world professional challenges (Kokotsaki, Menzies, & Wiggins, 2016; Eswaran, 2024; Nayak, Satpathy, & Jain, 2024; Song, Rosli, & Zheng, 2025; Suhirman, Prayogi, & Asy'ari, 2021). With this approach, learners integrate theoretical knowledge effectively, together with linguistic, professional, and interpersonal dimensions within a single learning experience, a feature that is especially valuable in interdisciplinary settings, connecting academic instruction and professional practice (Markula & Aksela, 2022). In the tourism sector, proficiency in English constitutes a decisive factor in employability as it plays a key role in facilitating communication and negotiations with international partners, enhancing service quality, and ultimately increasing customer satisfaction (Munusamy & Kaliappen, 2024).

Despite the widespread adoption of this approach, there is a growing need for empirical research to systematically evaluate how PBL promotes and assesses transversal competences, specifically in higher education, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration in diverse higher education contexts, particularly in interdisciplinary settings (Granado-Alcón et al., 2020). Current literature often remarks on the potential of PBL but lacks detailed investigations into the long-term development and transferability of these skills across different disciplines (Sánchez & Reyes, 2025). While previous research has explored aspects of PBL in language learning and professional training (Alcalde, 2019; Feeney & Murphy, 2016; Kuntariati & Paramita, 2023; Montoya-Reyes, 2024), there is a lack of detailed investigations into how such interdisciplinary approaches, particularly those spanning multiple subjects, measurably improve both English language proficiency and job-related transversal skills in tourism students over an extended period.

Several studies stress the need for more robust frameworks and empirical evidence to systematically assess the development of transversal competences through PBL, especially in interdisciplinary contexts, including its impact on academic achievement, critical thinking, motivation (López & Palacios, 2024; Pangestu & Hidayah, 2024; Sánchez & Reyes, 2025; Torres, 2025), and 21st-century skills (Rocha, Mendes & Wardhani, 2025). The research conducted by Tan & Shen (2023) tackles the challenge of designing PBL activities that effectively integrate multiple transversal skills while ensuring measurable outcomes, particularly in complex, real-world scenarios. Another study (Chien & Chien, 2025) focuses on the scarcity of longitudinal studies that trace the development of these competences beyond the immediate duration of the project, which limits our knowledge of the sustained impact of PBL on employability. Moreover, the analysis of the long-term impact that project-based learning on employability and professional adaptability in specific fields, such as tourism, requires further exploration (Aznar & Pizarro-Barceló, 2021; Feeney & Murphy, 2016).

In language education for tourism, PBL facilitates experiential and autonomous learning by immersing students in meaningful tasks that require the practical use of the target language in context. Previous research highlights that authentic problem-solving fosters language acquisition, critical thinking, and learner autonomy (Ruiz & Ortega-Sánchez, 2022; Cusen, 2022; Kurniadi & Cahyaningrum, 2023). Similarly, in professional modules such as Tourism Intermediation and Transport I, PBL allows learners to apply theoretical knowledge to realistic scenarios, thus bridging the persistent gap between academic instruction and professional practice (Lin et al., 2017; Vieira, Melo, & Melo, 2023). When implemented across subjects, PBL can promote the integration of linguistic and sector-specific competences. In the tourism domain, mastery of English is a decisive factor for employability, facilitating negotiations with international partners, enhancing service quality, and improving customer satisfaction (Coelho, Ramos, & Sousa, 2024; Farida, 2024).

Building upon recent literature on PBL in higher education (Abilova, Kaldybayeva, & Zhansugurova, 2023; Nurbavliyev & Sydykhov, 2023; Upadhye, Madhe, & Joshi, 2022), scholars have pointed to persistent gaps in the assessment of transversal competence development (Osipovskaya, Coelho & Tasi, 2024) and long-term professional impact (Aznar & Pizarro-Barceló, 2021; Feeney & Murphy, 2016). In response to these limitations, the present study aims to fill this empirical gap by providing a specific case study of an integrated PBL experience in tourism higher education. It seeks to demonstrate that integrating language learning with professional training through PBL can produce measurable improvements in both linguistic proficiency and job-related skills.

Against this backdrop, the integration of two core subjects from the Tourism degree, *First Modern Language: English* and *Tourism Intermediation and Transport I*, through a PBL approach emerges as a useful pedagogical strategy for students to develop linguistic competence and professional skills such as teamwork, problem-solving, creativity, and cultural awareness.

The significance of this study lies in its detailed examination of a small-scale, interdisciplinary PBL experience situated within a bilingual degree programme. Rather than addressing PBL in general terms, it presents the critical need for effective pedagogical strategies, with a context-sensitive case, that prepares tourism students for the demands of a highly globalised industry. By focusing on an interdisciplinary PBL approach, this methodology contributes to, on the one hand, enhancing linguistic proficiency in English and, on the other hand, cultivating essential transversal competences that increase student employability. The findings obtained with this study contribute to the ongoing discourse on curriculum design and the alignment of university training with industry expectations, offering practical evidence for educators and policymakers in tourism education.

By documenting the design and implementation of a 12-week interdisciplinary PBL project involving 12 second-year students enrolled in the bilingual Tourism Degree at the University of A Coruña during the 2024–2025 academic year, and by analysing student perceptions and learning outcomes in depth, this study presents a solid case

study that advances knowledge of effective pedagogical practices in the field of tourism higher education. Within this project, students collaborated on the design of travel packages, using English as the vehicular language throughout all stages of the task, with the dual aim of (1) enhancing communicative competence in professional contexts and (2) developing transversal competences essential to the tourism industry, including collaborative work, project management, and critical thinking. The study further demonstrates how integrated, project-based approaches can effectively connect academic learning with professional demands, supporting the development of both language competence and employability, while contributing to ongoing debates on interdisciplinary curriculum design and the alignment of university programmes with the evolving needs of the tourism labour market. It demonstrates how integrated, project-based approaches can combine academic learning and professional demands, supporting the development of both employability and language competence. The findings also contribute to ongoing debates on interdisciplinary curriculum design and on the alignment of university programmes with the evolving needs of the tourism labour market.

### **Research Questions**

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1:** How does an interdisciplinary Project-Based Learning (PBL) experience, integrating English for Tourism and Tourism Intermediation and Transport I, impact students' perceived application of linguistic and professional knowledge to authentic industry scenarios?
- RQ2:** What specific linguistic and transversal competences do students perceive as enhanced through participation in this interdisciplinary PBL project?
- RQ3:** What are the main challenges encountered by students during the implementation of an interdisciplinary PBL project in tourism education, and how do these challenges relate to linguistic proficiency and technical skills?

### **METHOD**

This section describes the project's design and implementation, detailing the research approach, participants, and the sequence of activities that shaped the learning process. The aim is to provide a clear account of the pedagogical design so that the interdisciplinary nature of the PBL experience and its integration of English for Tourism with Tourism Intermediation and Transport I are fully understood. Information on data collection and analysis is also included to show how student learning and perceptions were examined throughout the project.

### **Research design**

As previously mentioned, this study presents a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods approach to examine the effectiveness of PBL in improving linguistic and professional competencies in tourism higher education. The qualitative component primarily involved collecting data through open-ended questions in student questionnaires and

systematic observations of group interactions and presentations. The project was conducted during the first semester of the 2024-2025 academic year with second-year students enrolled in the bilingual Tourism Degree at the University of A Coruña. It involved the joint implementation of PBL across two course subjects: *First Modern Language: English* and *Tourism Intermediation and Transport I*.

Following the model proposed by Montoya-Reyes (2024), the PBL design was adapted to the specific learning objectives of both courses. Students worked collaboratively to create a fully developed package tour, integrating research, itinerary design, supplier contact, cost estimation, price calculation, and promotional material production, with English as the primary working language.

### **Sampling method**

Participants for this study were selected using a convenience sampling method. The sample comprised all 12 second-year students enrolled in the bilingual Tourism Degree at the University of A Coruña during the 2024-2025 academic year. This cohort was chosen because the interdisciplinary PBL project was integrated directly into their mandatory curriculum for the courses *First Modern Language: English* and *Tourism Intermediation and Transport I*. The inclusion criteria required students to be officially enrolled in both subjects, thereby ensuring their participation in the full 12-week PBL experience. There were no exclusion criteria beyond non-enrolment in these specific courses. This approach enabled work with an intact group in its natural educational setting, providing a clear view of how PBL is applied in practice within a real-world academic context.

### **Participants**

The activity lasted 12 weeks and included all 12 students registered in the bilingual program's second year, divided into three project groups. Admission to the bilingual program requires a minimum B1 level of English, as defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). However, participants' language proficiency varied notably. While they had previously completed the English for Tourism course during their first year, their prior exposure to Tourism Intermediation and Transport I was limited to basic concepts covered in Introduction to Tourism.

The instructional team comprised one lecturer from each course. In alignment with PBL principles (De Grave, Moust, & Hommes, 2014), lecturers adopted a facilitative rather than directive role, guiding and supporting student-led inquiry, ensuring equitable task distribution, and promoting autonomous decision-making.

### **Procedure**

The project developed gradually over twelve weeks, following six main stages that combined preparation, development, and reflection.

#### *Stage 1 – Orientation and content review (weeks 1-2)*

- Review of key English language content from the previous year.
- Introduction to core concepts in tourism intermediation and package tour creation.

–Explanation of the PBL process, assessment rubric, and expected deliverables.

In this first stage, students were introduced to the project, and they had to revise key content from their previous English for Tourism course, while also being presented with key concepts of tourism intermediation and package tour creation. At this point, the teaching team explained the logic of the PBL approach, clarified the assessment criteria, and specified the expected deliverables, ensuring that all students had a clear understanding of the project's objectives and direction.

*Stage 2–Project planning and initial research (weeks 2–4)*

- Students formed groups and selected a tourism destination.
- Preliminary research on destinations and suppliers.
- Submission of a first written report in English, including a draft itinerary.

The second stage centred on planning and preliminary research. Students worked in groups to select their travel destinations and began collecting background information on suppliers and attractions. This stage concluded with an initial written report in English, which included a draft itinerary that served as the basis for further development.

*Stage 3–Development phase (weeks 5–8)*

- Collection of primary and secondary data (e.g., supplier quotations, market research).
- Calculation of costs and public sale prices using spreadsheets.
- Drafting of promotional materials using tools such as Canva, Genially, or PowerPoint.

During the third stage, groups engaged in the core development of their projects. They collected quotations from suppliers, estimated costs, and calculated public prices using spreadsheets. At the same time, they began drafting promotional materials, using digital tools such as Canva, Genially, or PowerPoint, to give their packages a professional finish.

*Stage 4–Interim presentation and feedback (week 9)*

- Each group delivered an oral presentation in English.
- Peer and instructor feedback was provided, with mandatory incorporation of revisions.
- Drafting of promotional materials using tools such as Canva, Genially, or PowerPoint.

In the fourth stage, students gave an interim oral presentation in English. This session provided a key opportunity for formative feedback from both peers and instructors, enabling groups to present their progress and identify areas requiring further refinement.

*Stage 5–Revision and finalisation (weeks 9–11)*

- Problem-solving related to presentation skills, cost calculations, and team coordination.
- Refinement of content and materials based on feedback.

The fifth stage was dedicated to the revision and completion of the project. During this stage, students worked on solving issues that had arisen, such as clarifying cost

calculations or improving the clarity of their presentations. They also refined their promotional materials and incorporated feedback from the interim presentation.

*Stage 6—Final presentation and reflection (week 12)*

- Formal presentation of the package tour in English.
- Group interviews with instructors to reflect on learning outcomes, challenges, and future improvements.

Finally, in the sixth stage, each group gave a formal presentation of their package tour in English. This closing session not only presented the outcomes of their work but also served as a reflective exercise, as students discussed with instructors the learning process, the challenges they had faced, and the competencies they felt they had strengthened.

### **Data collection and analysis**

To understand how students experienced the project and what they learned from it, several complementary data sources were used. Throughout the twelve weeks, group meetings and presentations were carefully observed, with notes taken on participation, teamwork, and the use of English. This provided a first-hand view of how the students approached the tasks and interacted with one another.

### **Research Instruments**

Data was collected using three primary instruments: questionnaires, project documents, and systematic observations. Each instrument was designed to capture different facets of the students' learning experience and project outcomes.

–*Questionnaires:* A six-question questionnaire (Q1 to Q6) was administered at the end of the project, created using Google Forms. This instrument included both open-ended questions, allowing students to describe their impressions in their own words, and Likert-scale items to capture their level of satisfaction and self-assessment of skill development. The questionnaire was specifically designed for this study to align with the project's learning objectives and was not adapted from a pre-existing validated instrument. To ensure content validity, the questionnaire items were reviewed by two experienced educators in tourism and language education for clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness. Pilot testing with a small group of similar students (which was not part of the final sample) was conducted to refine wording and ensure ease of understanding. Reliability was assessed through internal consistency checks during the pilot phase, focusing on the clarity of Likert-scale items.

–*Project documents:* The final source of evidence consisted of project documentation, which included written reports, itineraries, spreadsheets, and promotional materials created by each group. These materials were evaluated using a rubric that considered the accuracy of professional content, calculations and the correct and effective use of English. The teaching team designed the rubric based on the course learning objectives and industry best practices.

–*Observations*: Systematic observations were conducted throughout the twelve weeks of the project during group meetings and presentations. Detailed notes were taken on student participation, teamwork dynamics, and the use of the English language. A structured observation protocol was developed to guide the observers, focusing on predefined indicators related to collaborative work, problem-solving, and linguistic application in context. Two instructors independently observed and took notes, which were later cross-referenced to enhance inter-rater reliability.

### **Data Analysis**

The collected data were analysed using a mixed-methods approach, combining thematic analysis for qualitative data and descriptive statistics for quantitative data.

–*Qualitative Data Analysis*: The open-ended responses from the questionnaires and the observation notes were subjected to thematic analysis. The process involved several steps: (1) Familiarisation: Researchers read through all qualitative data to gain a general understanding. (2) Initial Coding: Relevant phrases and sentences were highlighted and assigned initial codes reflecting key concepts related to student perceptions, challenges, and learning outcomes. To ensure the dependability of the qualitative data, a multi-stage approach was employed. Beyond the independent observation and cross-referencing by two instructors for inter-rater reliability, the thematic analysis process included peer debriefing sessions where initial codes and emerging themes were discussed among the research team to minimise individual bias and achieve consensus. Additionally, a detailed audit trail of coding decisions and theme development was maintained to enhance transparency and replicability of the findings. (3) Generating Themes: Codes were grouped into broader potential themes. (4) Reviewing Themes: Themes were reviewed against the entire dataset to ensure they accurately represented the data and addressed the research questions. (5) Defining and Naming Themes: Final themes were refined and given clear names. This process contributed to the identification of the most recurrent patterns in student perceptions and challenges.

–*Quantitative Data Analysis*: The numerical data from the Likert-scale items in the questionnaires were summarised using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages. This provided quantitative indicators of student satisfaction and self-assessed skill development. The qualitative voices of the students and the quantitative indicators were then combined to present a more complete understanding of the project's impact.

Additionally, at the end of the project, the students completed a six-question (Q1 to Q6) questionnaire created in Google Forms, which is available in the Appendix section. This included open-ended questions, which encouraged them to describe their impressions in their own words, and Likert-scale items, which captured their level of satisfaction and self-assessment of skill development—the combination of these two formats allowed for a balance between detailed personal reflections and quantifiable feedback.

The final source of evidence came from the project documents themselves: written reports, itineraries, spreadsheets, and promotional materials created by each group. These materials were evaluated using a rubric that considered the accuracy of

professional content and calculations, as well as the effective and appropriate use of the English language.

Once collected, the open-ended responses were analysed thematically to identify the most recurrent patterns in student perceptions, while the numerical data from the questionnaires were summarised using descriptive statistics. In this way, both the qualitative voices of the students and the quantitative indicators of satisfaction were combined to provide a fuller understanding of the project's impact. Specifically, given the small sample size of 12 students (100% of the students enrolled in the subject), descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were calculated for all Likert-scale items to summarise student satisfaction and self-assessed skill development. These calculations were performed using Microsoft Excel's built-in statistical functions to ensure accuracy and consistency. The results obtained from all these data are presented in the following section.

## **FINDINGS**

In this section, the study findings are presented by combining qualitative responses from the open-ended questionnaires that students completed to assess the project with quantitative data from the Likert-scale satisfaction ratings, insights derived from systematic observations, and evidence from project artifacts. Together, these results offer a picture of how students experienced the interdisciplinary PBL project, how they applied course content to professional contexts, the difficulties they faced, and their overall views on teamwork and project relevance. The following subsections summarise the main themes identified in the analysis, supported by tables and figures for clarity.

### **Theme 1: Perceived Appropriateness of Project Timeline and Activities (Q1)**

Qualitative analysis of open-ended questionnaire responses revealed that most students found the project timeline and activities appropriate and well-structured. Students frequently commented on the clear organisation and progressive nature of the tasks, which facilitated a systematic approach to project completion. For instance, one student noted, 'The project was well-paced, and the deadlines helped us manage our time effectively.' However, some students also reported occasional conflicts with other coursework, which occasionally limited their attendance at group meetings. Despite these challenges, all groups completed their submissions on time, indicating effective time management and collaboration within the teams. Table 1 provides a summary of student responses regarding the project timeline and activity schedule. Systematic observations further corroborated these findings, showing active student participation and effective time management during group meetings, even when external coursework pressures were present.

Table 1  
Evaluation of project timeline and activity schedule (Q1)

Group	Summary of response
1	Timelines are appropriate; workload from other courses occasionally hinders meetings
2	Deadlines were suitable; some team members lacked commitment, but tasks were completed on time.
3	Timeline generally correct; occasional pressure closes to submission dates.

### Theme 2: Application of Course Content to Professional Contexts (Q2)

Students consistently reported that the PBL project significantly facilitated the application of both linguistic and professional knowledge to authentic industry scenarios. The qualitative data highlighted that students valued the opportunity to use specialised English vocabulary, improve public speaking skills, and simulate real-world travel package creation processes. Many expressed that the project made theoretical concepts tangible and relevant to their future careers. One student commented, 'Designing a real travel package made me realise how much English is needed in tourism, and I learned so many new terms.' The project was perceived as an effective bridge between academic learning and professional practice, enhancing their perceived employability. Table 2 further illustrates these findings, showing specific examples of how students applied their knowledge. Project documents (written reports and promotional materials), consistently demonstrated the practical application of theoretical knowledge and specialised English vocabulary in industry-relevant contexts, validating student perceptions.

Table 2  
Application of course content to professional contexts (Q2)

Group	Summary of response
1	Extensive use of specialised vocabulary; improved English communication; better knowledge of travel agency work.
2	Enhanced public presentation skills in English; task perceived as realistic and professionally relevant.
3	Greater readiness for public speaking in English; applied oral and written vocabulary in authentic contexts.

### Theme 3: Skill-Related Challenges and Development (Q3)

While the project fostered significant skill development, students also identified specific challenges, particularly concerning spreadsheet-based cost calculations and varying levels of confidence in English oral communication. Qualitative responses indicated that many students found the financial calculations complex, with one student stating, 'Excel was a big challenge; I had to learn a lot about pricing from scratch.' Additionally, although several students reported difficulties with public speaking in English, particularly those with lower initial confidence, the project contributed to enhancing these skills. The Likert-scale items in Q3b showed a noticeable improvement in areas such as 'English oral communication,' 'English writing,' 'use of specialised tourism vocabulary,' 'spreadsheet and cost calculation skills,' and 'teamwork and collaboration.'

with an average rating of 4.2 out of 5 across these areas, indicating significant perceived improvement. Table 3 details the specific challenges and skill improvements reported by students. Observations during presentations confirmed varying levels of English oral proficiency, while the quality of spreadsheets in project documents reflected the reported challenges in cost calculations, indicating areas where targeted support was needed.

Table 3  
Evaluation requirements and skill-related challenges (Q3)

Group	Summary of response
1	Creative itinerary design; difficulties obtaining supplier quotes; lack of Excel skills; low confidence in English presentations
2	Comfortable with presentation design; struggled with public speaking in English and pricing via spreadsheets.
3	Comfortable with presentation design; struggled with public speaking in English and pricing via spreadsheets.

#### Theme 4: Teamwork Experience (Q4)

The qualitative data revealed varied teamwork experiences across groups, ranging from highly collaborative to those facing internal challenges. Some groups reported persistent issues with unequal workload distribution and low commitment from certain members, as exemplified by a student's remark, 'Some members didn't pull their weight, which made it harder for the rest of us.' Conversely, other groups successfully overcame initial coordination difficulties, achieving strong commitment and mutual support. These experiences underscored the importance of active listening and equitable task allocation for project success. The questionnaire also included open-ended questions about teamwork, where students frequently mentioned learning to 'value active listening and consensus' and 'negotiate roles effectively'. Table 4 provides a summary of the diverse teamwork experiences. Systematic observations of group interactions during meetings and presentations provided direct evidence of these varied teamwork dynamics, highlighting instances of both effective collaboration and challenges in task distribution and commitment.

Table 4  
Teamwork experience (Q4)

Group	Summary of response
1	Uneven workload distribution; lack of motivation from some members; English proficiency issues.
2	Initial coordination problems due to workload; later, it was possible to achieve a strong commitment and mutual support.
3	Data Scheduling difficulties; learned to value active listening and consensus building, and pricing via spreadsheets.

#### Theme 5: Student Recommendations for Future Iterations (Q5)

Students provided several constructive recommendations for improving future iterations of the PBL project. Key suggestions included informing other course instructors of the PBL schedule to avoid overlapping coursework deadlines, implementing peer voting to

recognise the best project, and creating a dedicated website or blog to present their final travel packages. These recommendations highlight students' desire for enhanced inter-departmental coordination and opportunities for public dissemination of their work. One student suggested, 'A shared calendar for all courses would prevent conflicts,' while another proposed, 'Having a website to showcase our projects would be very motivating.' Table 5 summarises these recommendations.

Table 5

Student recommendations for future iterations (Q5).

Group	Summary of response
1	Greater control over group composition to ensure equitable contribution.
2	Peer voting to award the best project as a motivational tool.
3	Creation of a website or blog to publish package tour information.

### Theme 6: Overall Satisfaction with the PBL Project (Q6)

Quantitative data from the Likert-scale results indicated strong overall satisfaction with the PBL experience. A significant 80% of students awarded the highest possible rating (5/5) for overall satisfaction, while 13.3% gave a rating of 4, and 6.7% gave a rating of 3. This high level of satisfaction was further supported by qualitative feedback, where students frequently emphasised the authenticity of the learning process and its clear relevance to future professional roles in tourism. Comments such as 'This was the most useful project I've done in my degree' and 'It felt like real work, not just a class assignment' underscore the positive impact of the project. Figure 1 visually represents the distribution of overall satisfaction ratings. Observations of student engagement and enthusiasm throughout the project, coupled with the high quality of the final project documents, consistently supported the high satisfaction ratings and positive qualitative feedback.

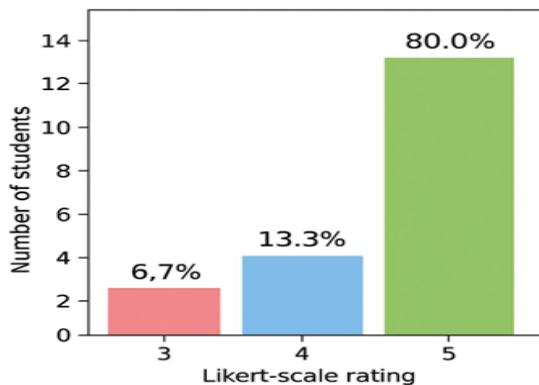


Figure 1  
Overall satisfaction with the PBL project (Q6)

## DISCUSSION

Our findings confirm the significant potential of Project-Based Learning (PBL) as an effective pedagogical method for integrating linguistic and professional competencies within higher education tourism programs. This outcome aligns consistently with prior research by Kokotsaki et al. (2016), Abilova et al. (2023), and Montoya-Reyes (2024). The interdisciplinary design of our project, which involved the joint application of curriculum content from 'English for Tourism' and 'Tourism Intermediation and Transport I', enabled students to engage in authentic, context-rich tasks that closely mirror industry practices. This effectively bridged the gap between theoretical instruction and professional application, a finding that supports and extends the work of Lin et al. (2017) and Vieira et al. (2023). This reinforces the idea that interdisciplinary PBL is not merely an alternative teaching method, but a key approach for ensuring practical relevance in specialised fields. This perspective is further supported by recent work from Green & du Plessis (2023), who emphasize that PBL's ability to promote learner autonomy through meaningful tasks directly contributes to the development of job-related skills, crucial for vocational education. Furthermore, the integration of linguistic and professional dimensions within a single learning experience, as observed in our study, is a feature that Markula & Aksela (2022) highlight as especially valuable in interdisciplinary settings, connecting academic instruction and professional practice.

The observed improvements in students' specialized vocabulary and public speaking confidence resonate strongly with the benefits highlighted by Farida (2024) and Cusen (2022) regarding language acquisition in authentic contexts. Our study further supports the notion that PBL enhances employability, a key finding also noted by Aznar & Pizarro-Barceló (2021) and Feeney & Murphy (2016) in the context of professional adaptability in tourism. From a language acquisition perspective, the project created significant opportunities for meaningful, task-based communication in English. This aligns with existing theories that emphasize the role of authentic contexts in facilitating vocabulary retention, improving fluency, and increasing learner confidence in public speaking. Our results, demonstrating perceived tangible improvements in specialized tourism-related vocabulary and effective communication in professional contexts, directly support the communicative goals outlined by Li (2024) and Coelho et al. (2024). These findings are consistent with the broader literature on language education for tourism, where PBL is recognized for facilitating experiential and autonomous learning by immersing students in meaningful tasks that require practical use of the target language. For instance, Ruiz & Ortega-Sánchez (2022) and Kurniadi & Cahyaningrum (2023) similarly found that authentic problem-solving fosters language acquisition, critical thinking, and learner autonomy in language learning contexts.

However, the varying levels of English oral proficiency among students and the associated difficulties in presentations suggest that while PBL provides the context, targeted scaffolding for specific linguistic challenges remains crucial. This nuance extends existing literature by underscoring the need for differentiated linguistic support within PBL frameworks, rather than assuming uniform benefits across all proficiency levels. The identified challenges, particularly limited proficiency in spreadsheet-based cost calculations and varying confidence in English oral communication, echo

difficulties noted in other tourism PBL contexts, such as those reported by Kuntariati & Paramita (2023). These findings highlight a critical need for targeted support in both technical and linguistic areas. This aligns with the call for more robust frameworks and empirical evidence to systematically assess transversal competences through PBL, as emphasized by Sánchez & Reyes (2025) and Tan & Shen (2023), particularly in complex, real-world scenarios]. The implication is that PBL designs should move beyond simply providing authentic tasks to actively integrate skill-specific training and resources, a point that is crucial for maximizing the effectiveness of PBL across diverse student populations

In terms of transversal competencies, the project effectively promoted collaboration, problem-solving, and project management—skills universally recognized as essential for employability in the tourism sector (Green & du Plessis, 2023). The observed variation in group experiences, ranging from persistent issues with unequal workload distribution to successful team cohesion, critically reinforces Rostom's (2019) observations regarding the significant influence of interpersonal dynamics on PBL outcomes. This study's findings suggest that while PBL inherently fosters these competencies, the process of overcoming coordination difficulties and achieving mutual support is as valuable as the final output. This implies that PBL models should explicitly incorporate mechanisms for conflict resolution and equitable task distribution to maximize the development of these critical transversal skills, thereby contributing to a more nuanced theoretical understanding of teamwork in pedagogical settings. Our results align with the broader literature emphasizing the development of 21st-century skills through PBL, as noted by Rocha et al. (2025), and highlight the importance of structured support for group dynamics to ensure equitable learning outcomes. Moreover, the need for explicit mechanisms for conflict resolution and equitable task distribution resonates with recent calls for a more systematic assessment of transversal competencies in interdisciplinary contexts, as articulated by Osipovskaya, et al. (2024).

The student recommendations for integrating gamification and digital dissemination also find resonance in previous work, such as that by Upadhye et al. (2022), which demonstrated how such strategies can enhance motivation and engagement in interdisciplinary learning environments. Furthermore, the emphasis on workload balance and targeted training in identified areas of difficulty aligns with the need for robust frameworks and empirical evidence to systematically assess transversal competencies through PBL, as highlighted by Sánchez & Reyes (2025) and Tan & Shen (2023). These suggestions provide practical pathways for future iterations and contribute to the theoretical discourse on enhancing student engagement and motivation within interdisciplinary learning environments, ensuring the continuous improvement of PBL methodologies. The focus on digital dissemination, in particular, aligns with the increasing importance of digital literacy and presentation skills in the modern professional landscape, as discussed by Li (2024) regarding practical English oral expression and communication skills.

## CONCLUSIONS

Our findings confirm the significant potential of Project-Based Learning (PBL) as an effective This interdisciplinary Project-Based Learning (PBL) experience proved particularly effective in helping tourism students strengthen their linguistic competence and better prepare for the professional realities of the sector. By integrating two core subjects, *First Modern Language: English* and *Tourism Intermediation and Transport I*, students undertook authentic, real-world tasks, such as designing travel packages in English. This approach led to notable improvements in specialised vocabulary, public speaking confidence, and a deeper understanding of industry practices. The high satisfaction ratings among participants point out the importance of the pedagogical value of interdisciplinary PBL in bridging the gap between academic learning and professional demands.

While highly effective, the project identified areas for refinement. Future iterations should consider strategies to mitigate challenges related to spreadsheet-based cost calculations and varying levels of English oral proficiency. To further enhance the experience, students recommended improving coordination across courses to avoid overlapping deadlines, implementing peer voting for project recognition, and creating a dedicated platform for showcasing final travel packages. These adjustments would strengthen the project's impact, ensuring continued relevance and effectiveness in preparing tourism graduates for a dynamic global industry.

### Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Further Research

Despite the valuable findings obtained, this study presents several limitations that provide open avenues for future research. First, the use of a convenience sampling method with a small sample size of 12 students restricts the generalisability of the results. Future studies could benefit from larger and more diverse samples to strengthen external validity.

Secondly, although the twelve-week duration of the study provided a meaningful basis for analysis, it did not permit an examination of the long-term effects of PBL on students' employability or the sustained development of their skills. Future research should therefore adopt longitudinal designs that allow these outcomes to be monitored over a longer period.

Thirdly, although the study presented a mixed-methods approach, its qualitative orientation meant that the quantitative data were largely limited to descriptive statistics. Further research could strengthen the empirical basis of the findings by incorporating more robust quantitative analyses, such as the inclusion of control groups or pre- and post-intervention measurements to capture skill development more systematically.

Finally, as the research was conducted within a specific institutional context, namely, the bilingual Tourism Degree at the University of A Coruña, further studies are needed to explore the applicability and effectiveness of this interdisciplinary PBL model across different academic disciplines and cultural settings.

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Participation in the study formed part of regular coursework, and all students provided informed consent for the use of anonymised data. No sensitive personal information was collected, and all procedures adhered to the University of A Coruña's ethical guidelines.

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**APPENDIX****Appendix A - Student Questionnaire***Project-Based Learning in Tourism (open-ended questions and Likert-scale questions)*

- Q1. PROJECT TIMELINE:  
How did you find the project timeline and the scheduling of activities?  
Were the deadlines appropriate?
- Q2. APPLICATION OF COURSE CONTENT:  
To what extent did the project help you apply what you learned in class (English for Tourism and Tourism Intermediation and Transport I) to real-world or professional contexts?
- Q3. SKILLS AND CHALLENGES:  
Q3a. What aspects of the project requirements did you find most challenging (e.g., spreadsheets, oral presentations, supplier contact)?
- Q3b. Please rate how much the project helped you improve in the following areas (Linear scale: 1 = Not at all, 5 = Very much):

Skill Area	1	2	3	4	5
English oral communication	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
English writing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Use of specialized tourism vocabulary	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Spreadsheet and cost calculation skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teamwork and collaboration	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

- Q4. TEAMWORK EXPERIENCE:  
How would you describe the teamwork experience within your group (e.g., workload distribution, communication, collaboration)?
- Q5. RECOMMENDATIONS:  
What suggestions or recommendations would you make to improve this project for future students?
- Q6. OVERALL SATISFACTION:  
How satisfied are you overall with your experience in the PBL project? (Labels: 1 = Very dissatisfied, 2= Dissatisfied, 3= Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 4 = Satisfied, 5 = Very satisfied)