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Situated hybrid learning in ESP through fieldwork and digital reflection

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Abstract

This article analyzes a situated hybrid learning experience in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) developed around the Camino Mendocino, a lesser-known pilgrimage route located in the Sierra Norte area of Madrid. The intervention combined classroom preparation, fieldwork, post-visit digital reflection and a broader learning sequence aimed at identifying tourism, heritage and communicative needs. The study examined students' perceptions of the educational value of the experience, focusing on perceived learning, classroom–real-world connection, place connection, well-being, cooperation, organization, satisfaction and perceived contribution to professional English learning. An exploratory and descriptive case-study design was adopted. Data were collected through an adapted post-visit questionnaire completed by 65 university students who participated in the field trip. Closed-ended responses were analyzed descriptively, while open-ended responses were examined thematically and represented through a simplified Sankey diagram. The findings indicate a positive evaluation of the experience, particularly in relation to place connection, well-being, cooperation and the perceived link between academic learning and real-world observation.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes; hybrid learning; fieldwork; digital reflection.

[es] Aprendizaje híbrido situado en ESP mediante trabajo de campo y reflexión digital

Resumen

Este artículo analiza una experiencia de aprendizaje híbrido situado en inglés con fines específicos (ESP) desarrollada en torno al Camino Mendocino, una ruta de peregrinación poco conocida situada en la Sierra Norte de Madrid. La intervención combinó preparación en el aula, trabajo de campo, reflexión digital posterior a la visita y una secuencia de aprendizaje más amplia orientada a identificar necesidades turísticas, patrimoniales y comunicativas. El estudio examinó las percepciones del alumnado sobre el valor educativo de la experiencia, atendiendo al aprendizaje percibido, la conexión entre aula y contexto real, la vinculación con el lugar, el bienestar, la cooperación, la organización, la satisfacción y la contribución percibida al aprendizaje profesional del inglés. Se adoptó un diseño exploratorio y descriptivo de estudio de caso. Los datos se recogieron mediante un cuestionario adaptado posterior a la visita, cumplimentado por 65 estudiantes universitarios que participaron en la salida de campo. Las respuestas cerradas se analizaron

descriptivamente, mientras que las respuestas abiertas se examinaron temáticamente y se representaron mediante un diagrama de Sankey simplificado. Los resultados indican una valoración positiva de la experiencia, especialmente en relación con la vinculación con el lugar, el bienestar, la cooperación y la conexión percibida entre el aprendizaje académico y la observación de contextos reales.

Palabras clave: inglés con fines específicos; aprendizaje híbrido; trabajo de campo; reflexión digital.

Summary: 1. Introduction. 2. Theoretical framework: ESP, hybrid learning, fieldwork and digital reflection. 3. Methodology. 3.1. Research design. 3.2. Educational context and participants. 3.3. Design of the educational intervention. 3.4. Instrument. 3.5. Procedure. 3.6. Data analysis. 4. Results. 5. Discussion. 6. Conclusions. 7. References.

1. Introduction

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in higher education is increasingly expected to prepare students not only to master specialized vocabulary, but also to operate in complex professional, intercultural and situated communicative contexts (Chan, 2021a). ESP learning should connect with the communicative practices that students are likely to encounter in their future professional environments, especially when English is used to describe places, interpret heritage, formulate proposals, negotiate meanings or address real-world problems (Chan, 2021b). This is particularly relevant in tourism-related ESP contexts, where students need to communicate destinations, services, routes, local narratives and sustainability-oriented recommendations to diverse audiences (Chen et al., 2022). ESP can therefore operate as an integrative space in which linguistic, professional and intercultural capacities are developed together (Costa & Mastellotto, 2022).

Blended and hybrid learning are no longer limited to the alternation between face-to-face and online instruction, but involve the purposeful integration of physical, digital, synchronous, asynchronous, individual and collaborative learning spaces (McCarthy & Palmer, 2023). For ESP, this broader understanding of hybridity is relevant because professional communication often emerges from situated problems rather than from decontextualized linguistic practice. Fieldwork can therefore provide a bridge between classroom-based learning and professional language use, particularly when digital reflection helps students organize observations and transform situated experience into evidence for later communicative tasks (Ruan et al., 2021).

The present study is situated at the intersection of ESP, fieldwork, hybrid learning and digital reflection. The educational intervention was developed around the Camino Mendocino, a lesser-known pilgrimage route located in the Sierra Norte area of Madrid. The route provided a situated context for observing tourism, heritage, accessibility, communication and sustainability-related issues within a broader ESP learning sequence. The aim of this article is to analyze students' perceptions of this situated hybrid ESP experience, focusing on perceived learning, classroom–real-world connection, place connection, well-being, collaboration, organization, satisfaction and perceived contribution to ESP learning.

The article addresses the following research objectives: (1) to describe the pedagogical design of a situated hybrid ESP experience combining classroom preparation, fieldwork, digital reflection and evidence-based evaluation; (2) to analyze students' perceptions of learning and classroom–real-world connection after the field trip; (3) to examine students' responses regarding place connection, well-being, environmental awareness and interest in tourism-related natural and cultural routes; and (4) to explore students' perceptions of collaboration, organization, satisfaction and perceived contribution to ESP learning. The study is exploratory and focuses on students' perceptions rather than causal effects. The contribution of the study to ESP lies in showing how a field-based, hybrid learning sequence can extend professional language learning beyond the classroom by connecting situated observation, digital reflection and subsequent professional communication tasks.

2. Theoretical framework: ESP, hybrid learning, fieldwork, and digital reflection

The theoretical rationale of the study rests on three complementary perspectives. ESP connects language learning with the communicative practices and professional demands of specific communities (Basturkmen, 2010); situated and experiential learning emphasizes participation in meaningful contexts and the transformation of concrete experience (Kolb, 1984; Lave & Wenger, 1991); and hybrid learning provides a framework for articulating physical and digital learning spaces within a coherent pedagogical sequence

(McCarthy & Palmer, 2023). In tourism education, these perspectives converge because professional communication is closely connected with places, visitors, heritage and situated decision-making.

Hybrid and blended learning should not be reduced to a simple alternation between face-to-face and online instruction but understood as the purposeful integration of learning spaces and modalities (McCarthy & Palmer, 2023). Research on hybrid and flexible learning has expanded substantially in higher education and has focused largely on students' and teachers' perceptions of these arrangements (Wong et al., 2023). For the purposes of this article, hybrid learning is understood not as the mere addition of digital tools to a conventional course, but as the deliberate articulation of physical, digital, individual, collaborative, synchronous and asynchronous learning spaces. In fieldwork-based ESP, learning expands across classroom preparation, the physical territory visited, digital reflection and subsequent professional outputs.

Fieldwork has strong pedagogical potential in higher education because it allows students to encounter knowledge as situated, embodied and contextual. Ruan et al. (2021) highlight the relevance of technologically supported fieldwork in higher education, particularly when location-based services and digital platforms are used to support preparation, data collection, spatial awareness and post-fieldwork learning. For ESP, the field trip can function as a professional learning environment in which students observe communicative needs and later transform those observations into language-mediated outputs.

Recent empirical work supports this connection between professional language learning and authentic or semi-authentic contexts. Project-based English for Tourism has been associated with high levels of student motivation and perceptions of practical relevance for future professional activity (Montoya Reyes, 2024), while field trips with English for professional purposes students have been linked to real-world contextualization, social interaction and autonomous learning (Hariyanti et al., 2024). Chen et al. (2022) show that sustainability in tourism education requires active, interdisciplinary, experiential and problem-oriented approaches. Fernández Laso and López Ronco (2022) also emphasize the importance of heritage education in the training of future tourism professionals in the Community of Madrid. The Camino Mendocino provides such a context by linking local heritage and landscape with sustainable tourism, professional communication and ESP.

In addition, fieldwork-based learning can relate to active methodologies such as design thinking, project-based work and problem-solving. Although the present article does not analyze the subsequent student projects, the intervention formed part of a broader sequence in which students later developed proposals related to the Camino Mendocino. Terrado Sieso et al. (2024) show that design thinking can contribute to applied learning, innovation, creativity and lifelong self-directed learning.

Experiential learning does not automatically lead to deep learning. Its educational value depends on the extent to which students are guided to interpret, organize and reflect on what they have experienced. Learning involves the transformation of concrete experience through reflection, conceptualization and subsequent application (Kolb, 1984). Digital reflection helps transform fieldwork from an isolated event into a structured learning process in which students' observations, memories and responses become evidence for evaluating the educational value of the experience. A field trip may expose students to authentic contexts, but the ESP value of the experience becomes clearer when students are required to verbalize, categorize and transform that experience into professional language. Digital reflection can therefore serve as a bridge between embodied experience and professional communication.

Finally, the intervention combined observation, movement, oral explanation, peer interaction, written reflection and later project-based work. Rather than treating learning styles as fixed categories, the study approaches them as processes activated through the interaction between students, territory, digital tools and professional tasks. Taken together, these perspectives explain the intervention as a situated hybrid ESP experience in which professional language learning emerges from classroom preparation, field-based observation, collaborative interaction and digital reflection. Despite growing interest in tourism ESP, field-based learning and hybrid learning, these strands have largely been investigated separately. Tourism ESP research has focused mainly on classroom-based professional projects (Montoya Reyes, 2024), field-trip research with English for professional purposes students remains comparatively limited (Hariyanti et al., 2024), and hybrid-learning studies have concentrated predominantly on combinations of face-to-face and digitally mediated learning (Wong et al., 2023). Few studies have integrated ESP, situated fieldwork and digital reflection within a single tourism-related learning experience from the students' perspective. The present study addresses this gap.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This study adopts an exploratory and descriptive case-study design aimed at analyzing a situated hybrid learning experience in ESP. The study does not seek to establish causal effects, but to examine students' perceptions of the learning value of a field-based ESP activity supported by digital reflection. It combines descriptive quantitative data from a post-visit questionnaire with qualitative evidence from open-ended responses, focusing on perceived learning, place connection, environmental and tourism-related awareness, collaboration, organization, satisfaction and perceived contribution to ESP learning.

3.2. Educational context and participants

The intervention was implemented in a university tourism ESP course at the Complutense University of Madrid. The activity was designed to move ESP learning beyond the conventional classroom and to situate language use within a real professional and territorial context.

The final analytical sample consisted of 65 students who attended the field trip and completed the post-visit questionnaire. The sample was intentional and context-bound, as is typical of classroom-based innovation studies. The findings are therefore interpreted in relation to this specific teaching context.

3.3. Design of the educational intervention

The intervention was structured around three complementary phases: pre-visit preparation, fieldwork and post-visit reflection. Before the visit, students were introduced to the aims of the activity and to the relevance of the Camino Mendocino as a potential context for sustainable tourism, heritage interpretation and professional communication in English. The preparatory phase focused on tourism vocabulary, sustainable destination development, accessibility, route interpretation, signage, storytelling and local heritage communication.

The fieldwork phase took place in the Sierra Norte area of Madrid, with particular attention to the Camino Mendocino. During the visit, students engaged in direct observation of the environment and attended explanations about the route, the landscape and its cultural, natural and tourism-related potential. Students identified real or potential challenges associated with the route, including signage, accessibility, conservation, services, hospitality infrastructure, leisure opportunities and its visibility as a tourism resource.

After the field trip, students completed a post-visit questionnaire. The questionnaire included closed-ended items and open-ended questions that invited students to reflect on what they had learned, how they had felt during the visit, what they had found memorable or uncomfortable, and whether the experience had contributed to their learning of ESP.

3.4. Instrument

Data were collected through a post-visit questionnaire specifically adapted for this educational experience. The instrument combined items adapted from Powell et al. (2019) with items created for the specific context of the Camino Mendocino, ESP learning, tourism, organization and student satisfaction. The questionnaire was therefore treated as a contextual evaluation tool, not as a fully validated psychometric scale in its adapted form; accordingly, the results are interpreted descriptively and exploratorily.

The questionnaire included the following sections: (i) sociodemographic information, including age and gender; (ii) perceived learning, with items addressing students' perceptions of what they had learned about the environment, the relationship between people and place, the use of scientific or specialized terminology, and the connection between classroom learning and real-world experience; (iii) tourism, sustainability and place awareness, including items on natural and cultural heritage, pilgrimage routes, sustainable tourism, environmental impact and the perceived value of protecting places such as the Sierra Norte; (iv) interest, well-being and place connection, with items exploring students' interest in nature, outdoor activities, protected areas, the Camino Mendocino and future visits to the area; (v) cooperation and group work, including items on listening to others, respecting different points of view, helping peers, sharing tasks and cooperating responsibly during the visit; (vi) organization and satisfaction, covering information received before the visit, transport, clarity of explanations, difficulty of the route, safety, time management, overall satisfaction and willingness to recommend or repeat the activity; and (vii) open-ended questions, which invited students to describe a memorable moment, identify any negative or uncomfortable aspects of the visit, express how they felt during the experience and explain whether the field trip helped them learn English.

3.5. Procedure

The intervention was implemented as part of the regular teaching sequence of the ESP course. During the week prior to the visit, students received four hours of preparatory instruction on the aims of the activity, the characteristics of the route and the aspects they were expected to observe. The field trip was then carried out as a situated learning activity in the Camino Mendocino and Sierra Norte area. Immediately after the visit, students completed the post-visit questionnaire individually. This timing was intended to capture students' immediate perceptions while the experience was still recent. Before analysis, the dataset was reviewed for completeness and consistency.

3.6. Data analysis

The closed-ended items were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for all categorical and Likert-type items, while measures of central tendency and dispersion were calculated where appropriate. Internal consistency was examined only for multi-item sections that could reasonably be interpreted as coherent dimensions: perceived learning, interest, well-being and place connection, and cooperation and group work. Cronbach's alpha was calculated as a preliminary estimate of reliability for the present sample, although it was interpreted with caution because alpha should not be treated as automatic evidence of unidimensionality or overall measurement quality (Taber, 2018).

No reliability coefficients were calculated for sociodemographic variables, single items, open-ended questions or heterogeneous organizational indicators. Reliability analyses were therefore used only as preliminary sample-specific evidence, not as psychometric validation of the adapted questionnaire. The open-ended responses were examined through a basic thematic analysis. To deepen the qualitative interpretation, responses were manually coded into two linked dimensions: (a) the dominant experiential focus of the response; and (b) the perceived pedagogical outcome of the visit in relation to ESP learning. The experiential dimension included four categories: natural and landscape experience, social and shared experience, heritage and route experience, and physical challenge and discomfort; the pedagogical dimension included three categories: clear ESP contribution, partial or mixed ESP contribution, and limited or no ESP contribution. For the purposes of visualization, each valid response was assigned one dominant code in each of the two dimensions. The resulting coded dataset was represented through a simplified Sankey diagram, which was used as an exploratory visualization of the relationship between fieldwork experience and perceived ESP learning. Students' emotional responses and comments on negative or uncomfortable aspects were analyzed narratively rather than incorporated into the Sankey diagram, to preserve the readability of the figure.

4. Results

Of the 65 students participating in this intervention, 42 identified as female (64.6%), 22 as male (33.8%) and 1 as other (1.5%). Age information was available for 63 participants. The mean age was 21.05 years ($SD=1.64$), with ages ranging from 18 to 27.

The results are organized into three internally coherent Likert dimensions, two descriptive sets of contextual and organizational indicators, and the qualitative analysis of open-ended responses. Preliminary internal consistency was examined only for the questionnaire sections that included conceptually related multi-item scales. The three Likert-scale dimensions retained for reliability analysis were: (i) perceived learning, composed of eight Likert-type items, which showed excellent internal consistency in the present sample (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$); (ii) interest, well-being and place connection, also composed of eight items, which showed good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$); and (iii) cooperation and group work, composed of eight items, which also showed good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$). These coefficients indicate good internal coherence in this sample but do not constitute full psychometric validation.

Students' responses suggest a generally positive perception of the learning value of the field trip. Across the eight Likert-type items related to perceived learning, the overall mean score was 3.81 out of 5. A total of 76.9% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they could follow and understand the explanations given by the guide ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 0.83$). Similarly, 73.8% agreed or strongly agreed that they had learned something they would remember for a long time ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.96$). Other learning-related items also received positive evaluations. 73.8% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they could explain at least one example of how humans affect the environment in Sierra Norte ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.75$), while 69.2% reported that they had improved their skills in observing and describing what they saw in nature ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.83$). The

lowest percentage of positive responses within this block was found for confidence in using scientific or specialized terms heard during the trip, although the result remained favorable: 66.2% agreed or strongly agreed with this item ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 0.91$). The 0–10 items showed a similar pattern. Students rated their overall learning from the field trip with a mean score of 6.85 ($SD = 2.30$; median = 7), with comparable scores for learning about the interaction between the environment and tourism ($M = 6.72$, $SD = 2.32$; median = 7), how people can change tourism ($M = 6.88$, $SD = 2.29$; median = 7), and how their own actions affect the environment and tourism ($M = 6.86$, $SD = 2.28$; median = 7).

Interest, well-being and place connection was the highest-rated dimension in the questionnaire, with an overall mean score of 4.09 out of 5. The strongest responses concerned well-being and environmental protection: 86.2% agreed or strongly agreed that nature is important for their own well-being ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 0.70$). Similarly, 83.1% felt calm and relaxed in places such as Sierra Norte ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.72$), and 81.5% considered it important to protect places such as Sierra Norte, even if they do not visit them often ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.82$). Future engagement was also positively rated: 80.0% of students stated that they would like to visit Sierra Norte again in the future ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.91$), and the same percentage reported that they would like to do more outdoor activities after the trip ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 0.79$). In addition, 78.5% expressed interest in learning more about protected natural areas such as Sierra Norte ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.78$). Responses related to place connection were also favorable, although slightly less emphatic. A total of 69.2% agreed or strongly agreed that they felt connected to the landscapes they saw in Sierra Norte ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.89$). Similarly, 70.8% reported that the trip made them more interested in nature and pilgrimage routes ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 0.85$).

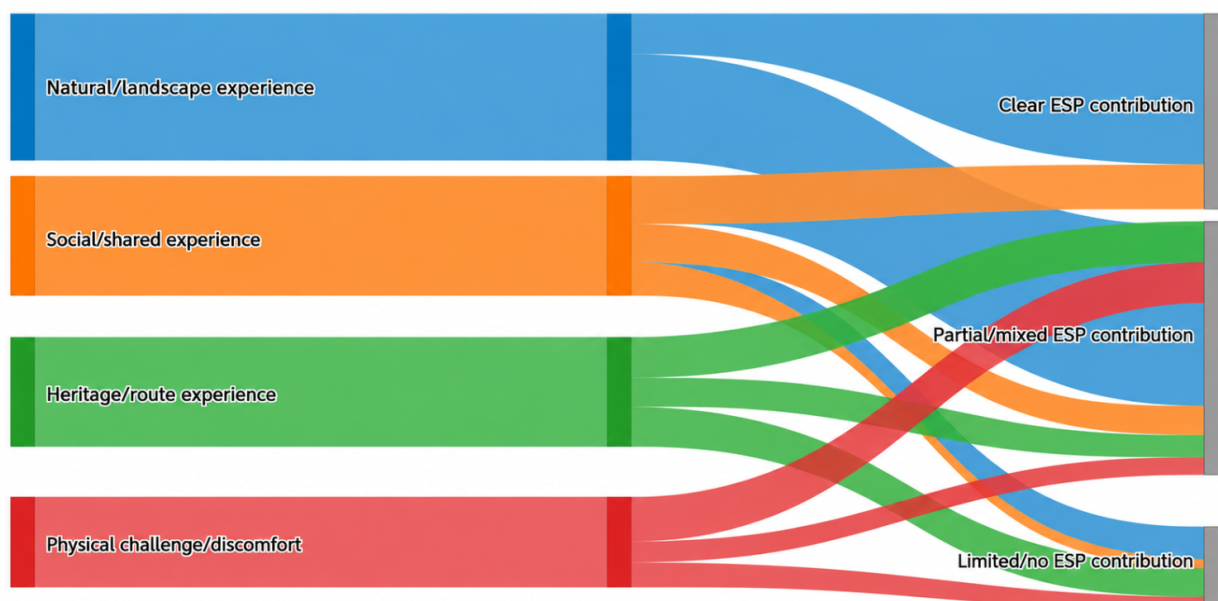
The cooperation-related items were also rated positively, with an overall mean score of 4.12 out of 5. 86.2% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they could talk openly with their group about their observations and answers ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 0.71$). Likewise, 83.1% stated that they helped their classmates when needed ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.77$). High levels of agreement were also found for listening to classmates' ideas (81.5%; $M = 4.17$, $SD = 0.72$), feeling respected by others in the group (81.5%; $M = 4.17$, $SD = 0.76$), and following the rules and behaving responsibly during the trip (81.5%; $M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.79$). In addition, 80.0% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they worked well with their group during the activities ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 0.83$). The lowest result within this dimension concerned the perception that the trip improved students' relationship with their classmates. 72.3% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 0.75$).

In addition to the three internally coherent Likert dimensions, the questionnaire included a set of contextual items on tourism, sustainability and students' awareness of the visited place. These items were analyzed descriptively, rather than as a separate psychometric scale, because they combined different response formats and addressed related but not identical aspects of the field-trip experience. As indicated above, the 0–10 items showed moderately positive values, with median scores of 7 across the four items. Students reported that they had learned a fair amount about the field trip, the interaction between different parts of the environment and tourism, the ways in which people can change tourism, and the effect of their own actions on the environment and tourism.

Regarding the questions assessing the organizational aspects of the field trip, the response options ranged from very poor to excellent. The results were generally positive, although more moderate than in the dimensions of place connection and cooperation. The best-rated aspects were the information provided before the trip and the transport to and from Sierra Norte. In both cases, 80.0% of students rated these aspects as good or excellent. Organization and safety were rated as good or excellent by 75.4% of students, followed by time available for each activity (72.3%) and clarity of explanations (70.8%). The weakest organizational result concerned the difficulty level of the walk or routes: only 44.6% of students rated this aspect as good or excellent, while a substantial proportion considered it acceptable. General satisfaction with the trip was high. On a five-point scale, students' mean satisfaction score was 3.98 ($SD = 0.94$). Finally, 80% of students stated that they would recommend doing this field trip again with another class.

The open-ended responses provided additional insight into the experiential value of the field trip. Students' responses were manually coded into two linked dimensions and represented in Figure 1 through a simplified Sankey diagram. The first dimension captured the dominant experiential focus of each response: natural/landscape experience, social/shared experience, heritage/route experience, and physical challenge/discomfort. The second captured the perceived ESP outcome: clear ESP contribution, partial/mixed ESP contribution, and limited/no ESP contribution.

Figure 1. Sankey diagram showing the relationship between students' dominant experiential focus and their perceived pedagogical ESP outcome



The qualitative findings were organized around the four experiential themes used in the thematic coding and represented in the Sankey diagram. Their relationship with the three ESP outcome categories is reported below.

Natural/landscape experience: Natural and landscape experiences constituted the most frequent experiential theme. Students referred to the river, forest, stream, views and surrounding landscape as particularly memorable features of the visit. One student recalled, "When we arrived at the forest and saw the little stream and the amazing views, we took pictures with a group of friends and with the teacher." In the Sankey analysis, this category was predominantly associated with clear ESP contribution ($n = 22$) and partial/mixed ESP contribution ($n = 16$), while only three responses were linked to limited or no ESP contribution.

Social/shared experience: Students highlighted walking, talking and taking photographs with classmates, suggesting that peer interaction formed an important part of the experience. One student summarized the memorable aspect simply as "*Walking with friends*." Social/shared experiences were predominantly associated with clear ESP contribution ($n = 6$).

Heritage/route experience: Heritage and route-related experiences included references to the church, museum, mural and the Camino Mendocino itself. One student stated, "*I liked the explanation about the mural with the feet, it helped me understand a bit more the Camino Mendocino*." This category showed a more distributed relationship with perceived ESP learning, with four responses coded as clear ESP contribution, three as partial/mixed contribution and two as limited or no contribution.

Physical challenge/discomfort: Students mentioned route length, mud, weather conditions, hunger and the physical demands of walking. One student commented, "*I didn't know the walk was going to be so long*," while another noted, "*The only bad thing was that the path was a bit difficult to walk, and we were all very hungry. There wasn't time to eat, and the schedule wasn't arranged well*." Physical challenge/discomfort was associated with clear ESP contribution in four responses and partial/mixed contribution in two.

Across these four experiential themes, students' perceptions of ESP learning were generally positive but not uniform. Most responses were clearly affirmative ($n = 43$), often referring to vocabulary, confidence, the subsequent assignment or the ability to discuss the Camino Mendocino in English. One student stated, "*yes I learned new specific words*." However, some responses reflected a partial or limited contribution because English was not used consistently during the visit. One student explained, "*Not really since it wasn't made in English, but I think I can talk about it in English*," while another stated, "*Well, the visit not at all because was on Spanish but after the case study 4 I will say affirmative*." These responses distinguish direct language use

during fieldwork from subsequent English-mediated learning. Overall, the Sankey visualization indicates that natural/landscape and social/shared experiences were most consistently connected with positive ESP perceptions, whereas heritage/route experiences showed a more varied pattern.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that the Camino Mendocino field trip was perceived by students as a valuable, situated hybrid learning experience in ESP. The strongest perceptions concerned place connection, well-being and collaboration, alongside positive evaluations of learning and classroom–real-world connection. These findings are consistent with previous research on educational tourism and experiential learning, which has shown that field trips can support learning, social connection and professional awareness when they are designed as structured educational experiences rather than as isolated visits (Arcodia et al., 2021). They also support the value of preparation and follow-up in educational visits (Lee et al., 2020).

The present study adds a specific ESP perspective to this line of research. Situated field experience can function as disciplinary input for ESP when students observe, interpret and later communicate tourism-related issues through English, thereby extending professional language learning beyond classroom-based simulation. The results also support current approaches to ESP that emphasize the need to connect language learning with professional practices and workplace-related communication needs. Chan (2021a) argues that university students need opportunities to identify the communicative demands of professional environments before entering the workplace. Similarly, Chan (2021b) shows that graduates often experience difficulties when they move from university to work because professional communication involves more than linguistic accuracy: it requires understanding contexts, genres, expectations and situated practices. Costa and Mastellotto (2022) also underline the role of ESP in higher education as a way of developing disciplinary communication, transversal skills and intercultural competence. From this perspective, the Camino Mendocino intervention can be understood as a semi-authentic professional context, where students observed signage, accessibility, services, heritage interpretation, storytelling possibilities and sustainability-related issues. At the same time, the fact that some students did not identify a direct contribution to English learning indicates that fieldwork-based ESP requires explicit language mediation during the visit, not only before and after it. Brief, structured in-situ language tasks linked to specific stops and observations could strengthen this mediation.

The findings also contribute to the literature on hybrid learning in higher education. McCarthy and Palmer (2023) argue that blended learning should be defined through coherent pedagogical integration rather than through the mere combination of online and face-to-face instruction. The present intervention supports this view by integrating classroom preparation, physical fieldwork, peer interaction, digital reflection and subsequent project-based work within a single learning sequence. Digital mediation served to document and reflected on the field experience, while the physical visit remained the central source of situated evidence. This also connects with sustainability-oriented tourism education, which requires active, experiential and interdisciplinary teaching methods rather than the transmission of theoretical content alone (Chen et al., 2022). The Camino Mendocino provided a context in which tourism potential, accessibility, environmental protection, heritage and visitor experience could be considered together, in line with the emphasis on heritage education in Tourism degrees (Fernández Laso & López Ronco, 2022). As part of a broader pilgrimage tradition, the Camino Mendocino can relate to research on religious, spiritual and pilgrimage tourism. Brumec et al. (2023) show that Camino de Santiago pilgrims' motivations may combine secular, spiritual and religious dimensions, while Choe (2025) emphasizes the diversity and complexity of religious tourism as a field involving place, belief, identity, mobility and visitor experience.

Collaboration was another strong dimension in the results, which is relevant because professional communication in tourism and destination development is collaborative by nature and involves negotiating meanings, interpreting visitor needs and designing shared solutions. Terrado Sieso et al. (2024) show that design thinking can support competence development, creativity, innovation and self-directed learning. The present intervention applies a similar problem-oriented logic to ESP and sustainable tourism. The open-ended responses provide further evidence of the embodied and affective nature of learning. The Sankey analysis showed that natural/landscape and social/shared experiences were more consistently associated with positive ESP perceptions, whereas heritage/route experiences generated a more varied pattern. At the same time, these responses remind us that fieldwork involves bodily and logistical conditions that must be carefully planned. The relatively low rating of route difficulty, together with comments about mud, cold weather, tiredness and lack of time, indicates that accessibility and physical comfort are pedagogical issues, not merely organizational

details.

The study also contributes to discussions on digital reflection and authentic assessment. Hu et al. (2025) argue that digital technologies are increasingly used in authentic assessment in higher education, but that their integration varies depending on how authenticity is conceptualized. In the present study, the post-visit questionnaire functioned as a reflective and evaluative tool through which students articulated learning, memorable experiences, difficulties and perceived contributions to English learning. From the perspective of learning styles and learning processes, the intervention offered multiple channels for engagement: visual observation, oral explanation, walking, peer interaction, emotional experience, digital reflection and later project-based production. This variety supports a broader view of learning as experiential, social, affective, reflective and professional.

6. Conclusions

This article examined a situated hybrid learning experience in ESP based on a field trip to the Camino Mendocino and Sierra Norte and supported by post-visit digital reflection. The aim was not to measure causal impact, but to analyze students' perceptions of its educational value in relation to learning, classroom–real-world connection, place attachment, collaboration, organization, satisfaction and perceived contribution to professional English learning. The findings show that the field trip was positively evaluated by the 65 students who participated in the intervention. The strongest results were found in the dimensions of place connection, well-being and collaboration. These results suggest that fieldwork can support ESP learning when it is embedded in a structured sequence that connects preparation, situated observation, explicit language use, reflection and later professional communication tasks.

From an ESP perspective, a key contribution of the intervention was its capacity to move language learning beyond the classroom. The Camino Mendocino functioned as an open learning environment in which students could identify tourism-related needs, observe issues of accessibility, signage, landscape interpretation and sustainability, and later transform these observations into professional proposals. More specifically, the study suggests that situated field experience can function as disciplinary input for ESP when observation of real tourism contexts is explicitly connected with professional communication through English. Its contribution therefore lies not in fieldwork alone, but in the pedagogical articulation of situated observation, language mediation and digital reflection. The study therefore supports a broad pedagogical understanding of hybrid learning, in which classroom preparation, physical fieldwork, peer interaction, digital reflection and project-oriented work operate as complementary components of the same learning process.

Thus, the pedagogical implications of the study are threefold. First, fieldwork in ESP should be designed as a structured learning sequence rather than as an isolated visit. Second, English should be integrated more visibly into the fieldwork phase itself through structured in-situ language tasks, including mandatory field vocabulary logs, guided observation sheets, short oral reports or micro-presentations at selected stops, and prompts requiring students to describe, interpret or evaluate signage, accessibility, services, heritage interpretation and storytelling. These tasks would help ensure that English remains an active medium of professional observation and communication even when some expert explanations are delivered in Spanish. Third, digital reflection should be used not only to collect students' impressions, but also to help them organize evidence, connect experience with language and prepare professional outputs.

However, the results also reveal an important area for improvement. Although most students perceived the visit as useful for English learning, some did not identify a direct contribution to ESP during the field trip itself, partly because the use of English was not explicit throughout the whole activity. The organizational findings also point to practical considerations. While students evaluated the general organization, transport, safety and information positively, the difficulty of the route was the weakest aspect. Future replications of similar fieldwork experiences should therefore include careful planning of accessibility, walking conditions, timing, weather-related issues and the physical demands of the activity, together with alternative routes or contingency options when necessary.

The study has several limitations. It is based on a single group from one university ESP context. It relies on students' perceptions rather than direct measures of language development. The questionnaire was administered only after the field trip and its adaptation to this intervention cannot be treated as a fully validated scale. Finally, the article does not analyze the quality of students' subsequent projects or compare fieldwork-based and digital-only conditions. Consequently, future research could extend this work in several directions. Future studies could adopt pretest-posttest designs, compare fieldwork-based and digital-only conditions, and

analyze the linguistic and professional quality of students' subsequent outputs to move beyond perceived learning.

In conclusion, the Camino Mendocino field trip illustrates the pedagogical potential of combining ESP, situated fieldwork and digital reflection within a coherent hybrid learning sequence. Its contribution to ESP lies in showing how professional language learning can be extended beyond classroom-based simulation by connecting real places and disciplinary observation with explicit language mediation, collaborative interpretation and subsequent professional communication.

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Conflicto de intereses

No existe ningún conflicto de interés entre los autores y revisores.



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