

Community-Based English Training for Enhancing the Professional Competence of Religious Pilgrimage Tour Guides in Palembang

Rahmadila Eka Putri^{1*}, Welly Ardiansyah¹, Nurvia Nathasya¹, Debby Fifiyanti¹, Faridatuljana Binti Mohd Noor², Priyanka Sasadara Pracena Putri¹, Marsya Hilwatullisah¹, Muhammad Rifqi Al Aufa¹

¹Department of Language and Tourism, Politeknik Negeri Sriwijaya, Jl. Srijaya Negara, Palembang, South Sumatra 30128, Indonesia

²Deputy Director (Academic), Politeknik Merlimau Melaka, Ministry of Higher Education, 77300 Merlimau, Malacca, Malaysia

Article Information

Article history

Received: December 15, 2025

Revised: May 15, 2026

Accepted: May 20, 2026

Abstract

Religious tourism constitutes not only a form of spiritual practice but also a channel for cultural diplomacy and global engagement. In Palembang, the annual Ziarah Kubro pilgrimage attracts a growing number of domestic and international visitors. However, limited English proficiency among local pilgrimage guides and pesantren communities constrains the effective communication of religious values, historical narratives, and local wisdom. This community service program aimed to enhance the English communication skills of students at Pesantren Al-Amalul Khair who are directly involved in pilgrimage-related activities, thereby supporting the professionalization of religious tourism services at the community level. The program employed a contextualized English for Tourism framework and commenced with a language needs analysis conducted through field observations, semi-structured interviews, and diagnostic pre-tests to identify participants' communicative needs. Participants were selected based on their active roles in guiding, hospitality, and religious tourism support. Training activities consisted of role-play simulations of guiding scenarios, guided speaking exercises, visual-based vocabulary instruction, and the collaborative development of bilingual digital brochures. Authentic communicative practice was reinforced through field mentoring during actual pilgrimage activities. Program evaluation was carried out using pre- and post-test, performance-based observation, and qualitative participant feedback. The findings indicated marked improvements in vocabulary mastery, functional guiding expressions, cultural interpretation abilities, and communicative confidence among participants. To ensure sustainability, the program facilitated the establishment of an English Club and provided bilingual learning resources tailored to religious tourism contexts. Overall, the program demonstrates that context-based English training integrated into community practices can effectively strengthen local capacity, enhance community engagement, and support the development of religious tourism services with global orientation.

Keywords: Communicative Competence Development; Community-Based English Training; English for Tourism; Pilgrimage Tour Guiding; Religious Tourism

*Corresponding Author

© 2026 Some rights reserved

Rahmadila Eka Putri

E-mail: rahmadilaekaputri@polsri.ac.id

INTRODUCTION

Religious pilgrimage tourism has emerged as a strategic form of cultural tourism that integrates spiritual practice, heritage preservation, and community-based economic participation. As one of the earliest forms of human mobility, religious tourism has demonstrated remarkable continuity and resilience, experiencing sustained growth in recent decades alongside renewed spiritual engagement and increasing scholarly attention within tourism studies (Carvache-Franco et al., 2024; Choe, 2025;

Kim et al., 2020; Raj & Griffin, 2020). Projections from Future Market Insights, supported by data from the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), indicate that religious tourism is expected to generate up to USD 41 billion in global revenue by 2033, with approximately 330 million individuals undertaking religiously motivated travel annually. These figures underscore the sector's substantial economic significance for destinations characterized by spiritual or sacred attractions (Kim et al., 2020). Within this expanding global landscape, visitor motivations are increasingly

heterogeneous, encompassing both religious commitments and secular or non-religious interests, thereby reflecting the evolving and multifaceted nature of contemporary pilgrimage tourism (Kayal, 2023).

Beyond its global scale, religious pilgrimage tourism is deeply shaped by localized historical, cultural, and social contexts. In cities with strong Islamic historical foundations such as Palembang, pilgrimage activities function not merely as devotional practices but also as socio-cultural events that actively construct the city's public identity and tourism narrative. Annual traditions such as *Ziarah Kubro* attract large numbers of pilgrims and reinforce Palembang's position as a significant religious destination, while simultaneously intensifying interactions between local communities and visitors from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In this sense, religious tourism encompasses a broad spectrum of activities, including visits to religious institutions, engagement with sacred sites, and participation in faith-oriented rituals and programs, all of which require meaningful interpretation and communication (Wight & Victoria, 2022).

Within this dynamic environment, community members particularly those residing along pilgrimage routes assume a central role as informal cultural mediators who communicate religious meanings, historical contexts, and ritual practices to visitors. Heritage plays a pivotal role in the sustainable development of tourism along pilgrimage and historical routes, as it fundamentally shapes the identity and distinctiveness of these destinations (Moscatelli, 2024). However, the expansion of religious pilgrimage tourism has simultaneously exposed structural challenges related to human resource readiness at the community level. While investments in physical infrastructure and event organization have progressed, the professional competence of community-based pilgrimage tour guides has not advanced at a comparable pace. This imbalance highlights the need to reconceptualize tourism development as a process that extends beyond logistical preparedness to include the capacity for effective cultural and heritage communication.

As pilgrimage tourism becomes increasingly internationally oriented, limitations in English communication skills among local guides have emerged as a critical constraint. Insufficient English proficiency restricts guides' ability to deliver coherent, accurate, and culturally sensitive interpretations of religious heritage, thereby diminishing the quality of visitor engagement and weakening Palembang's competitiveness within the broader religious tourism landscape. This concern is particularly salient given that religious tourism is projected to continue expanding despite recent global crises, reaffirming its

resilience and long-term relevance within global tourism systems (Collins-Kreiner, 2020). Such challenges are especially evident in *pesantren*-based communities, which are often located in close proximity to pilgrimage routes and possess substantial religious and historical knowledge, yet lack adequate linguistic resources to communicate this knowledge effectively to international audiences.

Field observations conducted at Pesantren Al-Amalul Khair further illustrate this gap between contextual knowledge and communicative capacity. Despite frequent interaction with pilgrims and visitors, students have limited access to structured English training specifically tailored to religious tourism contexts. Moreover, Pesantren Al-Amalul Khair possesses significant potential as a community-based religious tourism destination due to its close connection with pilgrimage routes and its involvement in supporting annual religious activities such as *Ziarah Kubro*. The *pesantren* environment frequently receives visitors and pilgrims, creating authentic intercultural interaction opportunities that require effective communication skills. This contextual condition indicates that the *pesantren* community has strong potential to develop English language competence, particularly for religious tourism communication, hospitality services, and pilgrimage tour guiding practices oriented toward both domestic and international visitors. Existing English instruction, when available, remains largely general in orientation and insufficiently connected to authentic communicative demands. Consequently, students exhibit low confidence in oral communication, limited awareness of the professional responsibilities associated with religious pilgrimage tour guiding, and inadequate preparation for intercultural encounters that require both linguistic competence and cultural sensitivity. This situation is particularly problematic given the central role of oral communication in shaping service performance, enhancing visitor satisfaction, and supporting overall organizational effectiveness within tourism-related services (Putri, 2025a).

From an educational standpoint, these conditions reflect a clear misalignment between community needs and prevailing language learning practices. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) emphasizes the importance of instructional design that is grounded in learners' actual communicative contexts and anticipated professional roles. Similarly, vocational English programs in higher vocational institutions, such as polytechnics, are structured to align students' academic foundations with clearly defined professional competencies (Putri, 2025b). Within the context of religious pilgrimage tourism, English competence extends beyond functional interaction; it entails the ability to articulate theological concepts, historical narratives, and ritual

procedures accurately while maintaining respect for religious values and cultural norms. In the absence of targeted, context-responsive training, community members risk continued marginalization from professional participation in tourism practices that increasingly operate within global communication frameworks.

Community-based English training was selected as the primary intervention model because it enables participants to develop language skills through authentic communicative practice and direct engagement with their social and professional environment. This approach is particularly relevant in tourism and vocational language education contexts, where language competence is closely connected to real interaction, service performance, and community participation. Previous studies have shown that experiential and communicative learning activities such as role-play and guided interaction can improve speaking fluency, vocabulary mastery, learner confidence, and participation in English learning contexts (Dwiyanti & Lolita, 2023; Puspita, et al., 2023; Rakasiw et al., 2024). In addition, experiential learning integrated with authentic interaction and reflective practice has been reported to strengthen communicative competence and intercultural awareness in professional and vocational education settings (Embarek & Hacene, 2024; Wibowo et al., 2024). Therefore, the integration of community participation, experiential learning, and contextual English training was considered appropriate for addressing the communicative and professional needs of prospective religious pilgrimage tour guides in Palembang.

In response to this gap, the present community service program adopts a community-based English training model aimed at enhancing the professional competence of religious pilgrimage tour guides in Palembang. The program integrates context-specific language instruction, guided communicative practice, and digital learning support to address both linguistic limitations and professional orientation. By situating English training within the lived experiences

and socio-religious contexts of *pesantren* communities, the program contributes to capacity building at the grassroots level and supports more inclusive and sustainable religious tourism development. Accordingly, this service activity aims to (1) enhance the English oral communication skills of community-based pilgrimage tour guides, (2) strengthen their professional readiness and intercultural communication competence in conveying religious and historical narratives to international visitors, and (3) support community capacity building through improved service quality within Palembang's religious tourism ecosystem, thereby reinforcing the city's position as a globally accessible religious tourism destination.

Based on the problems identified during the needs analysis, the community service program formulated several solution strategies and activity outputs, as presented in Table 1.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Materials

The main instructional materials employed in this community service program comprised a contextual English training module for religious tourism developed using Microsoft Word, as well as visual-based vocabulary presentation slides, digital educational brochures, and bilingual vocabulary cards systematically designed with Canva to ensure visual consistency and learner accessibility. In addition, DeepL Translator was used as a supportive role to aid bilingual comprehension and vocabulary clarification during guided activities, while the main focus remained on direct communicative practice, contextual language use, and facilitator-guided interaction, ensuring technology supported rather than replaced active language production. The main equipment used to implement the program consisted of Apple MacBook laptops as the primary computing devices and an Epson LCD projector for the effective projection and dissemination of instructional content during training and mentoring sessions.

Table 1. Solution of dedication program

Problems	Solutions	Activities	Outputs
Limited English communication skills in religious tourism contexts	Community-based English training	Role-play, guided speaking, vocabulary instruction	Improved speaking fluency and tourism vocabulary
Limited understanding of professional guiding and intercultural communication	Experiential and field-based learning	Guiding simulations and mentoring	Improved professional readiness and intercultural competence
Limited awareness of religious tourism opportunities	Participatory tourism learning	Discussion and collaborative activities	Increased interest in tourism-related careers
Lack of sustainable language learning support	Community-based learning support	English Club and bilingual materials	Sustainable learning resources and activities

Methods

Community-Based Participatory Action Research (CB-PAR) approach integrated with principles of Experiential Learning to ensure that instructional activities were contextually grounded and responsive to community needs. CB-PAR was selected to position community members not as passive recipients of intervention but as active agents involved in problem identification, learning design, and reflective evaluation, thereby enhancing relevance, ownership, and sustainability of the program outcomes. Experiential Learning further complemented this framework by structuring language development around authentic experience, guided practice, and reflection, which is particularly suited to vocational and community-based tourism contexts.

The program involved 15 Grade XII students of Pesantren Al-Amalul Khair identified as prospective religious pilgrimage tour guides. This participant group was intentionally framed as a pilot-scale intervention to allow intensive mentoring, close observation, and context-sensitive implementation. Consequently, the findings are not intended for broad generalization but to generate empirically grounded insights that may inform future program scaling and replication in similar community-based religious tourism settings.

The initial phase consisted of a community-based needs analysis involving the same cohort of students. Data were collected through systematic observation, semi-structured interviews, and diagnostic pre-tests to examine participants' English proficiency, communicative confidence, and awareness of professional guiding roles. The analysis revealed persistent limitations in functional spoken English, restricted domain-specific vocabulary, and minimal exposure to authentic guiding scenarios. These findings highlighted a structural mismatch between existing language instruction and the communicative demands of religious pilgrimage tourism, thereby informing the design of a contextualized English training program aligned with real-world guiding practices.

The training phase adopted Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as the primary pedagogical approach, supported by visual-based vocabulary instruction to enhance comprehension and retention. Learning activities were organized according to experiential learning cycles, encompassing concrete experience, guided practice, and reflective discussion. Instruction focused on authentic communicative tasks such as welcoming pilgrims, explaining religious and historical sites, managing visitor interactions, and conveying cultural, ethical, and spiritual values embedded in pilgrimage contexts. This approach sought to bridge classroom learning with situated communicative performance.

The emphasis on speaking skills was particularly critical given that, in Indonesian EFL contexts, oral communication is widely recognized as both the most challenging and the most essential language skill due to learner anxiety and limited access to authentic speaking opportunities (Ghafar & Raheem, 2023; Renanda et al., 2025). Guided speaking tasks, role-play simulations, and collaborative activities were therefore employed to promote functional language use, interactional competence, and learner autonomy, supported by instructional tools such as visual vocabulary cards, educational brochures, and structured speaking prompts.

The final phase involved field-based mentoring conducted during actual pilgrimage activities, enabling participants to apply acquired linguistic and professional competencies in real-world settings. This stage operationalized the action and reflection components of the CB-PAR framework, allowing participants to engage in authentic guiding while receiving formative feedback. Program evaluation employed mixed-method analysis, combining quantitative comparisons of pre- and post-test results with qualitative performance observation using analytic rubrics and reflective participant feedback. Data triangulation was applied to enhance validity and provide a comprehensive assessment of improvements in English communicative competence, professional confidence, and readiness to perform as religious pilgrimage tour guides within the local community.

The level of program success was measured using several evaluation parameters aligned with the objectives of the community service activities. The first parameter focused on English oral communication competence, including vocabulary mastery related to religious tourism, speaking fluency, pronunciation clarity, and the ability to explain religious and historical information in English. The second parameter examined professional readiness and intercultural communication competence, including participants' understanding of tour guiding responsibilities, ethical communication, hospitality awareness, and culturally appropriate interaction with visitors. The third parameter evaluated community engagement and sustainability indicators, such as participants' interest in religious tourism activities, openness toward tourism-related career opportunities, and active participation in collaborative learning activities, including the English Club and bilingual material development. These parameters were assessed through pre-test and post-test comparisons, observation rubrics, facilitator assessment, and reflective participant feedback.

Following the mentoring activities, an evaluation stage was conducted to measure the overall success of the community service program in achieving its objectives. The evaluation focused on three main

indicators: improvement in participants' English oral communication skills, enhancement of professional readiness and intercultural communication competence, and increased awareness of community-based religious tourism opportunities. Evaluation results were obtained through comparative analysis of pre-test and post-test outcomes, facilitator observations, and participant feedback collected during reflection sessions. This evaluation stage provided measurable evidence of the effectiveness and impact of the program within the pesantren community.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In relation to its stated objectives, the findings are derived from a triangulated evaluation combining quantitative pre- and post-test data, performance-based observation, and qualitative participant feedback. The analysis emphasizes outcomes achieved by community partners as indicators of program effectiveness within a Community-Based Participatory Action Research (CB-PAR) framework.

The results of the community service program are presented based on the implementation stages outlined in the methods section, namely the initial phase, the training phase, the final phase, and the evaluation phase. This structure is intended to demonstrate the continuity between the implementation process and the outcomes achieved by the participants.

Enhancement of English Oral Communication Skills in Religious Tourism Contexts

Initial Phase

The first objective of the program focused on enhancing participants' English oral communication skills for religious pilgrimage tour guiding. During the initial phase, pre-intervention observation indicated that participants' communicative competence was limited, with only approximately 30% able to perform basic guiding tasks. Linguistic performance at this stage was characterized by restricted domain-specific vocabulary, fragmented sentence structures, limited discourse coherence, and low oral fluency, which collectively constrained participants' ability to convey religious and historical information effectively.

Training Phase

The training phase implemented Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), supported by experiential learning cycles and visual-based vocabulary instruction to strengthen participants' communicative competence in religious tourism contexts. Guided speaking practice, role-play simulations, and collaborative learning activities were conducted to provide authentic communicative exposure related to pilgrimage

guiding and hospitality interaction.

Performance observations during the training activities confirmed qualitative improvements in participants' oral production. Participants demonstrated enhanced fluency, clearer explanation of religious and historical narratives, and greater pragmatic appropriateness in managing visitor interactions. These outcomes suggest that structured exposure to authentic communicative tasks facilitated not only linguistic development but also the ability to adapt language use to situational and interpersonal demands within pilgrimage tourism contexts.

The effectiveness of role-play as a core instructional strategy is consistent with recent empirical findings in communicative language teaching. Previous studies have demonstrated that role-play activities contribute significantly to improvements in speaking ability, vocabulary acquisition, and fluency, while simultaneously increasing learner confidence, improving test performance, and fostering a low-anxiety learning environment conducive to active participation (Dwiyanti & Lolita, 2023; Lim et al., 2024; Puspita et al., 2023; Rakasiwi et al., 2024). The present findings therefore corroborate existing research indicating that communicative and experiential approaches are particularly effective in developing task-based oral proficiency in tourism-related language use.

From a pedagogical perspective, these outcomes can be further explained through the lens of experiential learning, which conceptualizes knowledge as emerging from learners' active and meaningful engagement with real-world tasks. Experiential learning emphasizes direct experience and critical reflection, positioning interactive role-play not merely as a practice activity but as a transformative learning space. Within this space, learners develop self-expression, negotiate identity, build confidence, and enhance communicative competence by framing language as a social practice embedded in authentic contexts (Embarek & Hacene, 2024; Putri et al., 2025). Accordingly, the observed improvement in participants' oral communication skills reflects not only increased linguistic accuracy and fluency but also a deeper alignment between language use and the communicative realities of religious pilgrimage tourism.

Evaluation Phase

During the evaluation phase, post-test results demonstrated a substantial improvement in participants' oral communication outcomes following the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), supported by experiential learning cycles and visual-based vocabulary instruction. Approximately 80% of participants achieved functional English guiding competence, as

evidenced by increased lexical accuracy related to pilgrimage rituals, religious heritage, hospitality services, and visitor management. This improvement aligns with the view that a solid vocabulary base underpins both the development of literacy skills and learners' capacity to communicate effectively, particularly when engaging with conceptually complex and context-specific content (Zheng et al., 2025).

The comparative results presented in Table 2 indicate measurable changes in participants' perceptions, career orientation, and understanding of religious tourism guiding following the implementation of the program.

Table 2. Changes in participants' perceptions and readiness toward religious tourism guiding

Pre-Test	Post-Test
Around 40% of students showed limited interest in religious tourism, generally perceiving it only as visits to pilgrimage sites.	Approximately 60% of students expressed increased interest after understanding the broader scope and potential of religious tourism.
Nearly 50% of students preferred company-based jobs because they had limited exposure to career pathways in the religious tourism sector.	About 60% showed greater openness to exploring tourism-related careers after receiving clearer information about the available opportunities.
Around 70% of students had minimal understanding of religious tour guiding, including basic concepts and tour guide responsibilities.	Approximately 80% demonstrated improved understanding of religious tour guiding roles, including key principles of religious tourism and essential service standards.

Strengthening Professional Readiness and Intercultural Communication Competence Initial Phase

The second objective addressed the strengthening of participants' professional readiness and intercultural communication competence in conveying religious and historical narratives to international visitors. Pre-intervention findings indicated that nearly 70% of participants demonstrated a limited understanding of professional tour guiding roles. This limitation encompassed insufficient awareness of ethical communication principles, service quality standards, and intercultural sensitivity. At this stage, participants tended to conceptualize tour guiding primarily as the unidirectional delivery of information, with minimal attention to visitor-centred communication, adaptive interaction, or cultural appropriateness.

Final Phase

Field-based mentoring emerged as a critical factor in consolidating these competencies. By engaging in authentic guiding practices during actual pilgrimage activities, participants were able to translate conceptual knowledge into situated performance, followed by reflective feedback from facilitators. This process supported the internalization of professional norms and intercultural strategies, reinforcing the connection between language use, ethical service delivery, and cultural sensitivity in real-world contexts.

During the field-based mentoring phase, participants engaged in simulated and limited real-context pilgrimage guiding activities under facilitator supervision, allowing them to apply English expressions and intercultural communication strategies in authentic tourism settings. Observations showed improved confidence in greeting visitors, explaining religious locations, and answering basic questions in English, although some participants still experienced difficulties with fluency, pronunciation, and spontaneous communication during longer interactions. Limited exposure to authentic English-speaking environments and the short duration of mentoring also became implementation challenges. Nevertheless, the mentoring phase provided valuable practical experience that complemented the classroom-based training.

The observed outcomes are consistent with theoretical and empirical perspectives that emphasize experiential and community-based learning as effective mechanisms for fostering intercultural communicative competence in tourism professions. Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is widely recognized as a key skill for future professionals, particularly in globally oriented service sectors, and can be effectively developed through experiential learning approaches that incorporate role-play, multimedia resources, and reflective practice (Wibowo et al., 2024). Accordingly, the findings suggest that the integration of experiential and participatory learning within community-based training can meaningfully enhance both professional readiness and intercultural communication competence among prospective religious pilgrimage tour guides.

Evaluation Phase

Post-intervention data revealed a marked improvement in both conceptual understanding and applied performance. Approximately 80% of participants exhibited enhanced awareness of professional responsibilities, as reflected in their ability to structure explanations more coherently, maintain politeness and respect within religious contexts, and adjust language use in response to visitors from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. These

improvements indicate a shift from information-centred guiding toward a more professional and visitor-oriented communication approach that aligns with contemporary service standards in tourism.

Fig. 1 illustrates the delivery of instructional materials during the training phase, particularly the introduction of contextual English expressions related to religious tourism and pilgrimage guiding.



Fig. 1. Instructional material delivery

Fig. 2 demonstrates guided speaking practice and role-play activities designed to strengthen participants' communicative confidence and interactional competence in authentic tourism contexts.



Fig. 2. Guided practice

Community Capacity Building within Palembang's Religious Tourism Ecosystem

Initial Phase

The third objective focused on community capacity building through the enhancement of service quality within Palembang's religious tourism ecosystem. As an expanding form of special interest tourism, religious tourism generates direct economic benefits for local communities through pilgrimage-related spending, entrance fees, and donations, while also contributing to broader economic growth, tourism diversification, and poverty alleviation (Choe & Bagadion, 2024; Katić & Klarin, 2024). Within this framework, strengthening community participation and professional readiness is essential to ensure that the economic and social benefits of religious tourism are distributed more inclusively at the local level.

Pre-intervention analysis revealed structural limitations in participants' perceptions of religious

tourism and its associated career pathways. Approximately 40% of participants held a narrow understanding of religious tourism, while nearly 50% expressed a preference for company-based employment, indicating limited exposure to community-based tourism models and locally embedded professional opportunities. These findings suggest that prior to the intervention, religious tourism was not widely perceived by participants as a viable domain for sustainable community-based economic participation.

Training and Final Phase

Following participation in the CB-PAR-oriented program, participants demonstrated increased awareness of the socio-economic potential of religious tourism and greater engagement in community-based tourism activities. Community capacity building was further evidenced through the collaborative development and utilization of learning artifacts, including digital brochures and visual vocabulary cards. These artifacts functioned as tangible outputs of participatory engagement, reflecting participants' growing ability to translate linguistic competence into practical resources that support tourism services and visitor engagement. Compared with conventional classroom-based training initiatives, the integration of participatory design, experiential learning, and field mentoring resulted in outcomes that were more contextually relevant and closely aligned with the communicative and service demands of religious pilgrimage tourism.

Evaluation Phase

Post-test results indicated a positive shift in participants' perspectives. Around 60% of participants demonstrated increased interest in religious tourism and greater openness toward tourism-related careers, reflecting an expanded understanding of the sector's potential for community empowerment. This shift aligns with broader findings that religious tourism plays a significant role in enhancing recreational opportunities and socio-economic vitality in destinations characterized by strong religious and cultural attractions (Hassan et al., 2022).

Despite these positive outcomes, the program's limited participant scale and relatively short duration constitute important constraints. While appropriate for a pilot-scale intervention, these limitations suggest the need for extended implementation periods and broader community involvement in future programs to enhance sustainability and amplify impact across Palembang's religious tourism ecosystem.

Fig. 3 presents the feedback and evaluation session conducted to assess participants' learning experiences, communicative progress, and overall responses toward the program implementation.



Fig. 3. Feedback and evaluation



Fig. 4. Wrap-up session

Fig. 4 shows the wrap-up session involving facilitators and participants at the conclusion of the community service activities, reflecting collaborative engagement and program completion. The measurable changes resulting from the community service activities are summarized in Table 3.

Discussion

Taken collectively, the three program objectives constitute an integrated ecosystem of community impact rather than a series of isolated outcomes. The enhancement of English oral communication skills established a foundational linguistic capacity that enabled participants to perform guiding tasks more effectively within religious tourism contexts. This improved linguistic competence subsequently supported the development of professional readiness and intercultural communication awareness,

allowing participants to convey religious narratives, historical contexts, and ethical values with greater confidence, coherence, and cultural sensitivity. The interdependence of these outcomes underscores the role of language as both a technical skill and a mediating resource through which professional practice in tourism is enacted.

At the community level, these individual capacity gains translated into strengthened community readiness and improved service quality within Palembang's religious tourism ecosystem. This was reflected in participants' increased interest in community-based tourism pathways, as well as in the collaborative production of bilingual learning resources that functioned as shared community assets. Such outcomes indicate that the program's impact extended beyond individual skill acquisition to encompass collective forms of participation and resource development, which are essential for sustaining community-based tourism initiatives.

From a broader disciplinary perspective, these findings align with the view that research and intervention in religious tourism play a critical role in enhancing tourism services while simultaneously deepening scholarly understanding of religiously motivated travel (Najib et al., 2020). By integrating community-based participatory methods with experiential language learning, the present program demonstrates how applied educational interventions can contribute both to service improvement and to the conceptual advancement of religious tourism studies.

Through this interrelated process, language development functioned not merely as an educational outcome but as a catalyst for professional identity formation and community empowerment. The strengthening of communicative competence enabled participants to reposition themselves from informal actors to more confident cultural mediators, thereby reinforcing the role of *pesantren*-based communities as active stakeholders in the sustainable development of religious pilgrimage tourism. In this sense, the program

Table 3. Changes resulting from service activities

Indicators	Before Program	After Program	Changes
English guiding communication	Around 30% able to perform basic guiding tasks	Around 80% demonstrated functional guiding competence	Improved fluency, vocabulary, and confidence
Understanding of tour guiding	Around 70% had limited understanding	Around 80% understood guiding roles and service standards	Improved professional readiness
Interest in religious tourism	Around 40% showed limited interest	Around 60% showed greater interest	Increased tourism awareness
Tourism career orientation	Nearly 50% preferred non-tourism jobs	Around 60% became open to tourism careers	Expanded career perspectives
Community learning support	No structured tourism English activities	English Club and bilingual materials established	

highlights the strategic importance of aligning language education, professional training, and community participation within an integrated framework to support inclusive and sustainable tourism development.

CONCLUSION

This community service program successfully achieved its three primary objectives within the framework of Community-Based Participatory Action Research (CB-PAR). First, the program enhanced participants' English oral communication competence for religious pilgrimage tour guiding, as reflected in the increase from approximately 30% to 80% of participants demonstrating functional guiding ability after the intervention. Improvements were identified in vocabulary mastery, speaking fluency, communicative confidence, and the ability to explain religious and historical information appropriately in English within authentic pilgrimage tourism contexts.

Second, the program strengthened participants' professional readiness and intercultural communication competence in interacting with visitors from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Approximately 80% of participants demonstrated improved understanding of religious tour guiding responsibilities, ethical communication principles, hospitality standards, and culturally appropriate interaction strategies. The integration of role-play activities, experiential learning, and field-based mentoring further supported participants' confidence and practical performance during actual pilgrimage activities.

Third, the program contributed to community capacity building within Palembang's religious tourism ecosystem. Around 60% of participants showed increased interest in religious tourism and greater openness toward tourism-related career opportunities following the intervention. In addition, the establishment of an English Club and the collaborative development of bilingual learning resources, including digital brochures and visual vocabulary materials, supported the sustainability of language learning and community-based tourism service improvement.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that community-based English training integrated with contextual religious tourism practices can effectively strengthen linguistic competence, professional readiness, and community participation simultaneously. Despite these positive outcomes, the pilot-scale participant group and relatively short implementation period remain important limitations. Future programs are therefore recommended to involve broader community participation, extend

mentoring duration, and incorporate longitudinal evaluation to strengthen the sustainability and long-term impact of community-based religious tourism development in Palembang.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author express their gratitude to Politeknik Negeri Sriwijaya for funding support through DIPA contract No. 8055/PL6.2.1/PM/2025, Pesantren Al-Amalul Khair for active participation, and Politeknik Merlimau Melaka (Malaysia) for international collaboration support.

REFERENCES

- Carvache-Franco, M., Carvache-Franco, W., Orden-Mejía, M., Carvache-Franco, O., Andrade-Alcivar, L., & Cedeño-Zavala, B. (2024). Motivations for the demand for religious tourism: The case of the pilgrimage of the Virgin of Montserrat in Ecuador. *Heritage*, 7(7), 3719–3733. <https://doi.org/10.3390/heritage7070176>
- Choe, J. (2025). Religious tourism. *Tourism Geographies*, 27(3–4), 830–839. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2024.2423168>
- Choe, J., & Bagadion, A. M. (2024). The role of religious tourism for poverty alleviation in rural communities., In K. A., Shinde, & J. M., Cheer (Eds.), *A research Agenda for religious tourism* (pp. 71–84). Edward Elgar. https://ideas.repec.org/h/elg/eechap/21827_5.html
- Collins-Kreiner, N. (2020). Religion and tourism: A diverse and fragmented field in need of a holistic agenda. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 82, 102892. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2020.102892>
- Dwiyanti, A., & Lolita, Y. (2023). The effectiveness of role play in improving speaking skill of EFL students. *Prosodi*, 17(2), 138–148. <https://doi.org/10.21107/prosodi.v17i2.17064>
- Embarek, R., & Hacene, B. (2024). The role of experiential learning in teaching language skills. *Journal for Educators, Teachers and Trainers*, 15(3), 312-320. <https://jett.labosfor.com/index.php/jett/article/view/2371>
- Ghafar, Z. N., & Raheem, B. R. (2023). Factors affecting speaking proficiency in English language learning: A general overview of the speaking skill. *Journal of Social Science (JoSS)*, 2(6), 507–518. <https://doi.org/10.57185/joss.v2i6.107>
- Hassan, T., Carvache-Franco, M., Carvache-Franco, Hassan T., Carvache-Franco M., Carvache-Franco W., & Carvache-Franco O. (2024). Motivations as predictors of religious tourism: the Muslim pilgrimage to the city of Mecca. *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, 14(3), 419–435. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCHMSD-01-2022-0005>
- Katić, M., & Klarin, T. (2024). Religious pilgrimage as a tourist attraction: The case of Adriatic Maritime pilgrimages in Nin and Perast. *Religions*, 15(10), 1268. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15101268>
- Kayal, G. (2023). The personas and motivation of religious tourists and their impact on intentions to visit religious

- sites in Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of Tourism Cities*, 9(1), 201–219. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJTC-04-2022-0092>
- Kim, B., Kim, S. (Sam), & King, B. (2020). Religious tourism studies: Evolution, progress, and future prospects. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 45(2), 185–203. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2019.1664084>
- Lim, M., Bizzego, A., Chen, S. A., & Esposito, G. (2024). Openness to experience predicts engagement in role-play: Evidence from two methodologies. *Simulation & Gaming*, 55(4), 662–684. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10468781241239741>
- Moscatelli, M. (2024). Heritage as a Driver of Sustainable Tourism Development: The Case Study of the Darb Zubaydah Hajj Pilgrimage Route. *Sustainability*, 16(16), 7055. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16167055>
- Najib, M., Sumardi, R.S., Nurlaela, S., & Fahma, F. (2020). Determinant factors of muslim tourist motivation and attitude in Indonesia and Malaysia. *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 31(3), 936–943. <https://doi.org/10.30892/gtg.31301-524>
- Puspita, G. R., Romdani, R. K., & Kusumajati, W. K. (2023). Enhancing students' speaking skill through role-play technique. *Proceeding of International Conference on Education*, 39–44. <https://doi.org/10.37640/ice.02.443>
- Putri, R. E. (2025a). Vocational English grammar: Computer engineering students' misinformation error analysis on auxiliary verbs of passive voice in TOEIC reading. *Jurnal Sosial Humaniora dan Pendidikan (JSHP)*, 9(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.32487/jsdp.v9i1.2324>
- Putri, R.E. (2025b). English for hospitality: A representation of oral communication practices in food and beverage (F&B) services in the British mini-series "Boiling Point". *IJELR: International Journal of Education, Language, and Religion*, 7(1), 75–90. <https://doi.org/10.35308/ijelr.v7i1.11783>
- Putri, R. E., Nasution, M., & Agustina, M. (2025). Penguatan inklusivitas melalui pengabdian linguistik terapan: Optimalisasi keterampilan lisan bahasa inggris anak panti asuhan dengan metode simulasi peran dalam drama interaktif. *Mitra Teras: Jurnal Terapan Pengabdian Masyarakat*, 4(1), 23–34. <https://doi.org/10.58797/teras.0401.03>
- Raj, R., & Griffin, K. (2020). Reflecting on the impact of COVID-19 on religious tourism and pilgrimage. *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage*, 8(7), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.21427/D7VC7D>
- Rakasiwi, A. K., Wahyuni, S., & Yosephin, M. (2024). The effectiveness of using role play to improve speaking skill for students of senior high school. *Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Asia*, 4(1), 14–26. <https://doi.org/10.21154/edusia.v4i1.696>
- Renanda, C. A., Yunus. M., & Rachmawati. S. (2025). Improving speaking proficiency via role-play: An investigation from Indonesian secondary schools. *EDUCASIA*, 10(2), 191–205. <http://dx.doi.org/10.21462/educasia.v.i.id>
- Wibowo, A. H., Mohamad, B., Djatmika, & Santosa, R. (2024). Designing and assessing experiential learning pedagogy for an intercultural communicative competence training module: A quasi-experimental study. *Frontiers in Education*, 9. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2024.1470209>
- Wight, A. C., & Victoria, M. (2022). Hayan na ang mga Hampas-dugo! (the Penitents are coming!): Penitensya as religious-dark tourism. *Tourist Studies*, 22(1), 89–113. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14687976211067261>
- Zeng, Y., Kuo, L. J., Chen, L., Lin, J. A., & Shen, H. (2025). Vocabulary instruction for English learners: A systematic review connecting theories, research, and practices. *Education Sciences*, 15(3), 262. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15030262>