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Research Article

# Empowering Regional Tourism Stakeholders through Cooperative Learning: A Case Study Approach

**MUSTAKIM**[1*]
**EMIRATI**[2]
**MUTMAINNAH**[3]
**Umiyati JABRI**[4]
**Nina ARIANI**[5]

Corresponding author: *kimchangi00@gmail.com*
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## ABSTRACT

Tourism holds great potential for regional development, particularly in culturally rich but underdeveloped areas like Enrekang Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. However, limited human capital and fragmented stakeholder collaboration often hinder growth. This study explores the integration of the Cooperative Learning (CL) model into tourism education to enhance student competencies and support community-based tourism (CBT) development. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through classroom observations, focus group discussions, and interviews with educators, students, tourism practitioners, and government officials. The findings reveal that CL significantly increased student engagement, strengthened English communication, leadership, and teamwork skills, and empowered students to lead real-world projects. These included the creation of 12 local tour packages, 7 digital promotional videos used by tourism offices, and the coordination of 5 village tourism events, contributing to increased local tourism visibility. Institutional support and cross-sector collaboration emerged as key success factors. The study concludes that embedding CL in tourism education not only enhances academic outcomes but also creates meaningful contributions to local tourism development. The model presented offers a replicable framework for aligning education with regional development goals, particularly in rural areas where tourism potential remains untapped.

**Keywords:** *Cooperative learning, Project-based learning, Regional tourism, Sustainable development*

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[1] Universitas Muhammadiyah Enrekang, Enrekang, INDONESIA. Email: kimchangi00@gmail.com
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0667-2476
[2] Universitas Muhammadiyah Bulukumba, Bulukumba, INDONESIA. Email: emiration@gmail.com
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1380-676X
[3] Universitas Muhammadiyah Enrekang, Enrekang, INDONESIA. Email: mutmainnah@unimen.ac.id
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6036-8267
[4] Universitas Muhammadiyah Enrekang, Enrekang, INDONESIA. Email: umiyatijabri@gmail.com
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4749-9788
[5]Songkhla Rajabhat University, THAILAND. Email: nina.ar@skru.ac.th
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0009-5535-6139

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## INTRODUCTION

Tourism is increasingly recognized as a strategic driver of regional economic growth, especially in rural and semi-urban regions endowed with rich cultural traditions, natural landscapes, and indigenous wisdom. Beyond its economic impact, tourism can function as a catalyst for cultural preservation, community empowerment, and sustainable development (Tong et al., 2024; Bumyut, 2024; Basri et al., 2023). Despite this potential, current tourism education practices in many developing regions—including Indonesia—remain dominated by traditional, lecture-based methods. These approaches often fail to prepare students for the dynamic, collaborative, and service-oriented nature of the modern tourism industry. This situation reveals several gaps. Theoretically, there is limited exploration of how pedagogical frameworks such as Cooperative Learning (CL) can be aligned with the goals of community-based tourism (CBT) development. Empirically, few studies have documented the outcomes of integrating CL into tourism curricula within rural settings. Methodologically, most existing studies focus on quantitative assessments, leaving a dearth of in-depth qualitative insights into students lived experiences and stakeholder engagement. Contextually, the specific challenges and opportunities in underdeveloped regions like Enrekang Regency remain underexplored in tourism education discourse.

This study is novel in that it applies a qualitative case study approach to investigate how CL can serve not only as a pedagogical tool, but also as a strategic model for empowering students to co-create CBT initiatives. Its significance lies in offering a replicable framework for transforming tourism education into a driver of inclusive, sustainable regional development. Moreover, there is a growing need for models that link classroom instruction with real-world tourism challenges, especially those requiring soft skills such as collaboration, communication, and leadership (Pranić et al., 2021). While Cooperative Learning (henceforth CL) has been widely studied in general education, its targeted application in tourism education—particularly in the context of regional development and community-based tourism—remains underexplored. Thus, this study responds to the dual necessity of addressing pedagogical innovation and sustainable tourism development by focusing on CL as a strategic instructional method.

One promising pedagogical approach to address this need is CL, a student-centered instructional method that emphasizes teamwork, interdependence, shared goals, and individual accountability. CL has been widely acknowledged for its effectiveness in developing 21st-century competencies, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills, which are all essential for successful careers in the tourism and hospitality industry (Mustakim et al., 2024; Rehman et al., 2024). Unlike traditional lecture-based methods, CL fosters active participation and real-world engagement, making it particularly relevant for tourism education, which inherently demands experiential learning and practical application (Suyato et al., 2024).

Enrekang Regency, situated in the heart of South Sulawesi, Indonesia, presents a compelling case for the application of such model. The region boasts a variety of tourism

assets, including majestic highlands like Bambapuang Peak, traditional agricultural systems, unique local cuisine, and vibrant cultural rituals rooted in Bugis-Makassar heritage. Nevertheless, the tourism sector in Enrekang remains significantly underdeveloped. This is due in part to fragmented stakeholder coordination, minimal digital and promotional outreach, and a lack of tourism professionals equipped with the necessary skills and mindset to innovate within a community-based tourism framework (Wawo et al., 2025). Educational institutions in the region, including vocational and higher education providers, therefore bear a strategic responsibility to bridge this gap by cultivating tourism talent that is not only skilled but also socially engaged.

Accordingly, this study aims to explore how the implementation of the CL model within tourism-related educational programs can serve as a transformative strategy for regional tourism development in Enrekang (Mustakim et al., 2024). By examining classroom practices, student projects, and community collaborations fostered through CL, the research seeks to highlight the model's potential to empower students as agents of local change while simultaneously strengthening the tourism ecosystem. Ultimately, this investigation contributes to the growing discourse on how education can be leveraged not just for individual advancement, but also for collective regional progress, particularly in the tourism sector.

To guide the inquiry, this study addresses the following research questions:

(1) How does the implementation of Cooperative Learning (CL) in tourism education influence student engagement and the development of professional soft skills?
(2) In what ways does CL support student-led tourism initiatives that contribute to community-based tourism development in Enrekang Regency?
(3) What are the perceptions of educators, tourism practitioners, and government stakeholders regarding the institutional support and outcomes of CL-based tourism education?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Cooperative Learning in Tourism Education

CL is a student-centered pedagogical model that emphasizes structured teamwork, positive interdependence, and individual accountability. It has been widely recognized for improving critical thinking, interpersonal communication, and collaborative skills across disciplines (Jacobs & Kimura, 2023; Nathan, 2024; Winkleman, 2024; Mustakim et al., 2024). In tourism and hospitality education, CL becomes particularly relevant, as these industries demand professionals with strong teamwork abilities, leadership skills, and cross-cultural sensitivity (Wilks & Hemsworth, 2022). Beyond its general definition, CL encompasses a variety of structured strategies such as Jigsaw, Think-Pair-Share, and Team-Based Projects. Each of these models offers unique affordances for tourism education for example, Jigsaw encourages interdependence and specialized knowledge-sharing, ideal for preparing students to work across departments in tourism settings. Think-Pair-Share, on the other

hand, enhances reflective communication, often used in service training or hospitality scenario simulations.

Recent studies emphasize the effectiveness of CL in preparing students for real-world challenges within service-oriented sectors. For example, Suyato et al. (2024) implemented a modified Team-Based Learning (TBL) approach across three vocational tourism institutions, involving structured group assessments, peer evaluations, and project deliverables aligned with local tourism activities. The study measured effectiveness through pre- and post-intervention surveys, qualitative student reflections, and observation rubrics finding a marked improvement in communication skills (72%), teamwork confidence (65%), and real-world problem-solving (59%) among participants. Rather than merely reinforcing the known benefits of CL, these outcomes illustrate how CL enables learners to operate in authentic professional roles, mirroring the teamwork, flexibility, and initiative demanded by tourism contexts.

Similarly, Cardoso et al. (2024) highlighted that vocational student in tourism-related programs who engaged in structured cooperative tasks demonstrated higher employability readiness and improved interpersonal adaptability. Furthermore, Rehman et al. (2024) confirmed that CL environments cultivate essential soft skills such as empathy, cross-cultural communication, and decision-making key attributes in hospitality and tourism sectors. In a global context, Gillies (2023) reported that students engaged in CL during inquiry-based learning activities exhibited significantly higher collaboration and engagement levels, particularly in interdisciplinary, applied science settings.

Taken together, these findings suggest that CL is more than an instructional method it is an experiential model that prepares learners for the relational and collaborative nature of tourism professions. It promotes active learning environments where students co-construct knowledge, build shared responsibility, and develop a mindset attuned to service, adaptability, and intercultural sensitivity qualities central to sustainable tourism development.

***Cooperative Learning and Community-Based Tourism (CBT)***

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) is a participatory tourism model in which local communities are directly involved in planning, managing, and benefiting from tourism activities. This model relies heavily on inclusive decision-making, negotiation, and local empowerment. In this sense, Cooperative Learning (CL) can serve not only as a pedagogical strategy but also as a developmental approach for building collaborative capacity among future tourism professionals and community members. CL emphasizes shared responsibility and group interdependence principles that align closely with the core values of CBT. As noted by Giampiccoli and Saayman (2018), effective CBT requires community cohesion and capacity-building efforts that mirror collaborative educational practices. Similarly, (Khizar et al., 2023) highlights that developing local human capital through inclusive learning processes is key to sustainable tourism development.

CL and CBT share foundational principles, particularly in promoting shared responsibility, active participation, and mutual interdependence. Gillies (2023) emphasizes that CL nurtures interpersonal competencies and group decision-making, both of which are crucial in managing collective tourism projects. In the context of CBT, these skills become instrumental in mediating local interests and fostering consensus among diverse stakeholders. Meanwhile, community participation in tourism development often faces challenges rooted in local dynamics and stakeholder conflicts. A recent study in Patan, Nepal, examined how tourism stakeholders negotiate social conflict during value co-creation. Using a decolonial approach, the study highlighted the importance of inclusive engagement and mutual understanding to resolve conflicts and foster collaborative tourism development (Bhattarai et.al, 2024).

In a related context, a study conducted in Spain found that combining experiential learning methods like Learning by Doing (LBD) and team coaching in tourism education enhanced students' engagement and collaboration skills. These outcomes are directly aligned with the needs of the tourism industry, particularly in community-based settings (Azanza et al., 2022). Furthermore, (Sugie and Mitsugi, 2021) demonstrated that intercultural cooperative project-based learning in tourism education fosters empathy and cross-cultural communication skills. These attributes are essential in hospitality and tourism sectors, where professionals often interact with diverse communities.

These findings underscore the potential of cooperative learning (CL) to bridge the gap between classroom knowledge and field-based community engagement. CL equips learners not only with tourism-specific knowledge but also with collaborative and social responsibility skills essential for effective community-based tourism (CBT) management. For instance, Hong et al. (2022) demonstrated that a structured CL approach significantly improves oral proficiency and prompt peer interaction among English tourist guide trainees, supporting authentic communication in real-world field contexts.

In another study implementing intercultural cooperative project-based learning in tourism education, students enhanced their teamwork, stress management, and cross-cultural collaboration capacities skills directly applicable to conducting community needs assessments and co-planning tourism initiatives with local stakeholders García-Almeida (2018). These results validate the use of CL in facilitating student-led community needs assessments, collaborative sessions with village leaders and artisans, and reflection on culturally sensitive tourism practices. By incorporating CL into tourism curricula, institutions nurture professionals who are technically proficient and adept at engaging communities to co-create sustainable tourism solutions.

### *Challenges and Opportunities in Implementing CL*

While the benefits of Cooperative Learning (CL) in tourism education are widely recognized, its implementation—particularly in rural or underdeveloped areas—presents several practical challenges. One of the most significant barriers is the digital divide between urban and rural schools. Mustafa et al. (2024) identified that limited technological

infrastructure and inconsistent internet access hinder the integration of technology in rural classrooms, which subsequently affects the successful application of CL strategies.

In addition, traditional resistance to collaborative pedagogies and the lack of professional training for educators further complicate implementation. Castro et al. (2025) noted that rural educators often face limited access to continuous professional development and experience isolation from peers, making it difficult to adopt and sustain innovative teaching approaches like CL.

Nevertheless, the increasing global emphasis on inclusive and innovative educational practices is opening pathways for CL to be more systematically adopted. Prakoso et al. (2020) argued that a deeper understanding of the core concepts of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) such as participatory planning, empowerment, and cultural preservation is essential for the effective integration of Cooperative Learning into tourism education. They emphasized that CBT is not merely about tourism promotion but about fostering local ownership, socio-cultural sustainability, and mutual benefit between hosts and visitors' values that align closely with the collaborative and socially responsive nature of CL.

In terms of opportunities, the authors identified the growing trend of experiential learning, the presence of untapped local tourism assets in rural Indonesia, and the rise of digital tools that can facilitate remote collaboration and promotion. They also recognized that students can serve as mediators between educational institutions and local communities, especially when engaged through structured cooperative projects such as destination mapping, participatory workshops, or digital content development for tourism campaigns. Empirical evidence supports this: Jamal et al. (2011) found that service-learning in tourism curricula significantly enhanced students' collaboration, systems thinking, and engagement with community stakeholders, leading to more meaningful and socially relevant learning outcomes. Filho (2024) also demonstrate that student-led rural development projects foster social capital and strengthen community ties—key enablers for effective CBT strategies.

However, several barriers to implementation were outlined. These included a lack of curriculum flexibility to accommodate project-based learning, insufficient educator training in CL methodologies, and limited funding or institutional support for field-based activities. They also noted the challenge of aligning academic timelines with the rhythms of tourism activities in local communities, a problem particularly acute in agricultural or religiously active rural settings. These challenges echo broader trends in tourism education, where crowded curricula, resistance from faculty and students, and institutional constraints often impede the adoption of sustainable, experiential pedagogies.

To address these challenges, Prakoso et al. (2020) recommended several strategies, including:

(a) Embedding modular CL components into tourism courses to allow integration without overhauling the entire curriculum;

(b) Establishing partnerships between universities, tourism departments, and village institutions to co-design learning activities that have both academic and practical value;
(c) Providing training for educators on CL facilitation and community-based pedagogies; and
(d) Securing micro-grants or institutional funding mechanisms to support student-led tourism initiatives in target communities.

## METHOD

### Research Design and Context

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the application of the Cooperative Learning (CL) model within tourism education and its potential contribution to regional tourism development in Enrekang Regency. A qualitative case study was deemed appropriate because it enables an in-depth exploration of complex phenomena within their real-life contexts (Yin, 2018). Given the focus on educational practices and their implications for local tourism, a case study design offered flexibility to examine both the instructional processes and the socio-cultural dynamics surrounding tourism development.

The rationale for adopting this design aligns with the study's aim to understand how CL is implemented in a specific educational setting and how it contributes to broader developmental goals. Qualitative approaches are particularly useful when researchers seek to generate rich, descriptive data and understand participants' perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this case, the study sought to capture students' and educators' experiences, collaborative learning dynamics, and the perceived impact of the CL model on local tourism awareness and engagement.

The research was conducted at Universitas Muhammadiyah Enrekang (UNIMEN) and involved tourism-related programs that had adopted CL strategies in their curriculum. UNIMEN is situated in Enrekang Regency, a rural area in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, known for its emerging community-based tourism initiatives. This study received approval from the research center and applied an ethical clearance standard.

The timing of the study coincided with the post-pandemic period (2024 - 2025), a time when local governments and institutions were increasingly promoting sustainable and collaborative approaches to rebuild tourism. The cultural context particularly the community-oriented nature of rural Indonesian society also played a significant role in shaping both educational practices and tourism activities. These contextual elements informed both the implementation of the CL model and its observed effects on tourism-related awareness and skills among students.

By selecting a case study design within a qualitative paradigm, the study was able to illuminate the interactions between pedagogy and community development, making it well-suited to address the research objectives. As Stake (1995) emphasizes, case study research enables researchers to uncover the unique features of a particular case, which in turn can contribute to broader theoretical and practical insights.

## Participants

The participants in this study were selected purposively and included:

a) Students enrolled in tourism-related programs at both vocational and higher education institutions;
b) Educators implementing CL strategies within their tourism-related courses;
c) Local tourism practitioners, including homestay managers, tour guides, and cultural coordinators;
d) Government officials from the Enrekang tourism department.

This diverse group was chosen to ensure a multi-perspective view of the CL implementation process, from classroom practice to community engagement. The participants in this study were selected using purposive sampling, a technique suitable for qualitative research that focuses on selecting individuals who possess specific knowledge, experiences, or roles relevant to the study's objectives (Palinkas et al., 2015). This approach ensured the inclusion of key stakeholders involved in both tourism education and community-based tourism (CBT) development in Enrekang Regency.
A total of 24 participants were involved, consisting of:

(1) Students enrolled in tourism-related programs at both vocational high schools (SMK) and Universitas Muhammadiyah Enrekang (UNIMEN);
(2) Educators who implemented Cooperative Learning (CL) strategies in tourism-related subjects;
(3) Local tourism practitioners, such as homestay managers, tour guides, and cultural coordinators;
(4) Government officials from the Enrekang Regency tourism department.

This diverse group was chosen to provide a multi-perspective understanding of CL implementation—from classroom experiences to community-level tourism activities.

**Table 1**
*Demographic Characteristics of Participants Involved in the Study*

| Participant Group | Total | Gender (M/F) | Age Range | Educational Background | Role/Occupation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Students (SMK and UNIMEN) | 10 | 6M / 4F | 17–22 | High school and undergraduate | Tourism students |
| Educators | 5 | 3M / 2F | 28–50 | Bachelor's or Master's degrees | Teachers/lecturers in tourism education |
| Local Tourism Practitioners | 5 | 2M / 3F | 30–55 | Senior high school and above | Homestay managers, guides, cultural coordinators |
| Government Tourism Officials | 4 | 3M / 1F | 35–60 | Bachelor's degree or higher | Public officials in tourism policy |

## Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

***Inclusion Criteria:***

1. Participants must be actively engaged in tourism education or local tourism initiatives.
2. Students must be currently enrolled in tourism-related programs.
3. Practitioners and officials must be directly involved in tourism development in Enrekang.

***Exclusion Criteria:***

1. Individuals with no current or recent engagement in education or tourism activities.
2. Those unwilling to participate or unable to provide informed consent.

## Recruitment Procedure

Participants were recruited through direct coordination with educational institutions and tourism offices. For students and educators, permission was obtained from school and university administrators. Practitioners and government officials were identified and invited through community tourism forums and official government channels. All participants received a clear explanation of the study's aims and procedures. They were provided with informed consent forms, outlining their voluntary involvement, the confidentiality of data, and their right to withdraw at any point. Consent was obtained in writing.

This research was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of Universitas Muhammadiyah Enrekang. To ensure ethical compliance, pseudonyms were used during data analysis and reporting to protect participants' identities. Audio recordings, transcripts, and related materials were securely stored and used solely for research purposes. By involving diverse participants across educational and tourism sectors, the study was able to capture the comprehensive dynamics of how CL enhances student learning while supporting regional tourism development.

## Data Collection

This study employed three qualitative data collection methods—classroom observations, focus group discussions (FGDs), and semi-structured interviews—to explore the implementation of Cooperative Learning (CL) in tourism education and its relevance to community-based tourism (CBT) development. Classroom observations were conducted over one semester across vocational and university-level tourism courses, focusing on group dynamics, student engagement, real-world task integration, and teacher facilitation strategies. Two FGDs with students actively engaged in CBT projects provided insights into their experiences, skill development, and classroom-to-community application. Additionally, nine semi-structured interviews with educators, tourism practitioners, and government officials captured broader perspectives on institutional support, stakeholder collaboration, and the impact of student-led tourism initiatives. All instruments were developed based on existing literature and reviewed by subject experts to ensure validity. The triangulation of data sources enhanced the study's credibility and provided a

comprehensive understanding of CL's role in promoting both educational outcomes and local tourism development.

### Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase thematic analysis framework, which enabled a systematic exploration of participant experiences and perceptions across multiple stakeholder groups. The process began with familiarization, where interview, FGD, and observation transcripts were reviewed repeatedly alongside field notes to identify initial ideas. In the second phase, open coding was applied both inductively and deductively, and codes were organized for cross-comparison. These codes were then grouped into potential themes such as "Collaborative Group Dynamics" and "Skill Empowerment through CL." The themes were reviewed and refined for coherence and distinction, resulting in five finalized themes: (1) Collaborative Group Dynamics, (2) Skill Empowerment through CL, (3) Real-World Tourism Application, (4) Institutional and Stakeholder Support, and (5) Barriers to CL Implementation. Each theme was clearly defined and supported with analytical summaries and illustrative quotes. Finally, the themes were synthesized into a narrative that linked the study's findings to broader goals of tourism development in Enrekang, while maintaining researcher reflexivity through a reflective journal to ensure credibility and transparency.

## FINDINGS

The data collected through classroom observations, focus group discussions, and semi-structured interviews reveal three dominant themes related to the implementation of the Cooperative Learning (CL) model in tourism education and its influence on regional tourism development in Enrekang Regency. These findings reflect how CL not only improves educational outcomes but also builds linkages between institutions and the local tourism sector.

### Active Engagement and Skill Development through Collaborative Learning

Cooperative Learning (CL) has proven to significantly increase active engagement among students, especially within tourism-related education. Classroom observations at vocational and higher education institutions revealed a shift in student behavior when CL strategies were applied. Rather than passively absorbing information, students actively participated in discussions, collaborative planning sessions, and real-world simulations. These included tasks like managing guest complaints, creating travel itineraries, and performing cultural guiding scenarios—activities that demanded mutual responsibility and group accountability. Such interaction allowed students to be more invested in the learning process and to work through practical challenges collaboratively.

Beyond engagement, CL also supported the development of crucial soft skills. Students reported in focus group discussions that working collaboratively helped them

grow more confident in speaking English for tourism and in presenting ideas to diverse audiences. They noted improvements in time management, conflict resolution, and team coordination. Many shared that learning in groups gave them space to contribute their strengths while learning to respect and rely on others—skills essential in the service-oriented nature of tourism. Educators confirmed that these students, especially those less responsive to traditional lecture-based teaching, became noticeably more proactive, assertive, and socially responsive during CL sessions.

These findings collectively underscore the dual function of Cooperative Learning—not only as an instructional method that increases student engagement but also as a developmental tool that builds essential professional competencies. In the context of tourism and hospitality, where adaptability, communication, leadership, and interpersonal collaboration are core expectations, CL offers a valuable model for both academic and practical skill formation. The application of CL thus bridges educational content with workplace readiness, supporting the holistic preparation of students for careers in community-centered and customer-focused industries.

A central theme that emerged from the classroom observations and focus group discussions was the transformative impact of Cooperative Learning (CL) on student engagement and soft skill development in tourism education. However, rather than presenting this as a single unified outcome, the findings can be better understood through several interconnected sub-themes, each reflecting different dimensions of student transformation facilitated by CL.

(1) Increased Classroom Participation and Ownership of Learning

When CL strategies were applied, students exhibited a marked shift in behavior—from passive recipients of information to active contributors in the learning process. Students participated more confidently in group discussions, planned projects collaboratively, and became more engaged in experiential simulations such as role-playing guest services and guiding cultural tours. Many students expressed a newfound sense of ownership over their learning, especially when they were assigned rotating leadership roles within their groups. This sense of responsibility encouraged deeper cognitive processing and increased accountability among peers.

(2) Communication, Collaboration, and Conflict Management

Students frequently cited improvements in their communication skills, especially in speaking English for tourism-specific purposes. Through group tasks like designing travel packages or solving mock customer service problems, they practiced articulating ideas clearly and negotiating with group members. Educators observed that these structured group dynamics also helped students develop better conflict resolution strategies, as they learned to balance differing opinions and manage interpersonal challenges. In FGDs, students shared that learning to listen actively and resolve

misunderstandings constructively was a skill they had not acquired in more lecture-based settings.

(3) Confidence, Initiative, and Leadership Development

Another sub-theme that consistently appeared was the development of personal confidence and leadership. Students who had previously been shy or disengaged began to take initiative in group tasks. They volunteered to present group work in front of the class, proposed new ideas, and even helped peers who were struggling. Educators highlighted that CL provided a low-risk environment for students to experiment with leadership roles, which had a noticeable positive impact on their self-efficacy and autonomy. These leadership moments, while small, were often cited by students as defining experiences in their growth.

These sub-themes collectively illustrate the multifaceted nature of Cooperative Learning's contribution to tourism education. Not only does it enhance student engagement, but it also supports the development of communication, collaboration, and leadership skills—competencies that are directly transferable to real-world tourism and hospitality settings. By identifying and elaborating these sub-themes, the analysis reflects a more comprehensive understanding of how CL facilitates holistic learning within this service-oriented field.

***Project-Based Tourism Initiatives and Community Involvement***

The second theme that emerged from the data is the strong connection between Cooperative Learning (CL) and real-world, project-based tourism initiatives. Many tourism education programs implemented CL through practical group assignments that required students to go beyond the classroom and engage directly with the community. For instance, several student groups designed and implemented tourism development projects such as community tour mapping, local guide training workshops, and promotional video production for village destinations. These projects were not theoretical exercises; rather, they were applied learning experiences with measurable impact on local awareness and tourism exposure. In several cases, local tourism offices adopted student-created promotional materials or community tour maps for official use, while village stakeholders reported increased visitor interest following student-led campaigns.

In focus group discussions (FGDs), students shared that these projects deepened their understanding of their cultural heritage and local tourism potential. One student reflected:

> *"Before this project, I didn't realize how many beautiful places and stories exist in my own village. After working with elders and guiding tourists, I feel proud to show people our traditions." [Student FGD, Vocational School, 10 February 2024]*

Another student highlighted the collaborative impact of CL:

> *"Working in groups helped us manage real responsibilities. Some of us interviewed local people, others created content. We had to plan everything and support each other – it felt like running a real tourism office." [Student FGD, Higher Education, 12 February 2024]*

Students were directly involved in identifying untapped attractions, interviewing local elders about oral histories, and collaborating with local artisans to document and promote traditional crafts. This hands-on engagement allowed them to internalize the value of their cultural identity, while building essential skills such as research, project planning, stakeholder coordination, and media production.

Educators and tourism officials corroborated these outcomes. One educator stated:

> *"I saw my students transform through these projects. Some who never spoke in class became leaders in the field. And their work actually got used by the local tourism board." [Interview, Tourism Lecturer, 14 February 2024]*

These examples illustrate that CL, when applied through community-based projects, not only enhances students' learning experiences but also provides direct, visible contributions to local tourism development. By combining reflective group learning with field-based action, the CL model demonstrated both educational impact and community benefit, making it a powerful tool for advancing Community-Based Tourism (CBT) goals.

***Institutional Support and Stakeholder Perception***

The third key finding relates to institutional support structures and the perceptions of broader tourism stakeholders regarding the implementation of Cooperative Learning (CL) in tourism education. Interviews with educators and tourism-related officials from Enrekang's local government revealed a growing recognition of CL's potential—not only for enhancing academic engagement but also for addressing real-world needs in local tourism development. Many educators reported that CL enabled them to deliver more inclusive, interactive, and responsive lessons, especially in subjects such as tourism marketing, ecotourism management, and tour guiding practices.

One tourism educator shared:

> *"When I applied Cooperative Learning, I saw more engagement. Students were not only active in class, but they brought their own community knowledge into the group projects. It turned into a co-learning experience." [Interview, Vocational School Lecturer, 13 February 2024]*

Educators noted that CL promoted a shift away from one-directional teaching toward a culture of shared inquiry and problem-solving. Students and instructors collaborated in exploring solutions to tourism-related challenges, often grounded in the local context of Enrekang.

From the perspective of tourism practitioners and local government officials, the involvement of students in tourism projects was viewed as both innovative and impactful.

Officials highlighted that students often brought fresh perspectives, digital literacy, and enthusiasm that complemented local initiatives aimed at improving destination management and visitor services.

As one tourism official commented:

> *"We were impressed with how the students supported our cultural festival. They helped with the online promotion and gave input on improving the visitor flow. Their ideas were very practical."[Interview, Enrekang Tourism Office, 15 February 2024]*

Another local homestay operator who participated in a training session led by students remarked:

> *"The way they explained how to improve our listings online was very helpful. They even made short videos we now use to promote our homestay." [Interview, Community Stakeholder, 16 February 2024]*

Such contributions were appreciated not only for their short-term outcomes but also for their longer-term value in cultivating a future generation of tourism professionals with deep local roots. In some instances, student-led projects became part of official marketing efforts, and students were invited to co-host tourism events or assist in community training programs. Despite these successes, several challenges were acknowledged. Stakeholders pointed to the lack of consistent funding for student-led outreach, the difficulty of synchronizing academic schedules with tourism events, and the complexity of assessing individual contributions within group work. Nonetheless, both educators and local actors expressed confidence in the model's potential.

As summarized by one tourism educator:

> *"It's not perfect yet, but we see the progress. With institutional support, Cooperative Learning can become a sustainable part of our tourism education strategy." [Interview, University Lecturer, 14 February 2024]*

These perspectives affirm that CL is not only an effective classroom strategy but also a promising bridge between educational institutions and real-world tourism development efforts in rural regions like Enrekang.

## DISCUSSION

The findings from this study indicate that the integration of Cooperative Learning (CL) into tourism education in Enrekang Regency has produced multidimensional impacts, contributing to both academic enrichment and broader regional development goals. Observations from classrooms revealed that CL strategies such as project-based group work, peer teaching, and real-life tourism scenario simulations not only activated student participation but also nurtured essential 21st-century competencies. These included leadership, problem-solving, intercultural communication, and adaptive thinking, which are vital in preparing students for the service-oriented nature of the tourism and hospitality industries (Guden & Safaeimanesh, 2024; Fernández-Villarán et al., 2024). Beyond academic gains, CL created a learning space where students developed agency, collaborative

responsibility, and initiative key dimensions of learner autonomy. As one student noted during an FGD:

> *"I used to wait for instructions in class. But now, I feel responsible for the project outcome. We even talked directly with local artisans to help promote their crafts."*

These findings reinforce constructivist theories of learning, particularly Vygotsky's notion of social interaction as a driver of cognitive development. CL, by design, promotes zones of proximal development where learners scaffold each other's understanding through interdependent roles. Furthermore, the results echo (Johnson and Johnson's 2021) cooperative learning theory, where positive interdependence, individual accountability, and promotive interaction are essential for group effectiveness and learning outcomes.

In the context of regional tourism development, CL became a pedagogical channel through which education aligned with local CBT (Community-Based Tourism) objectives. Student projects had measurable impact—not only in the form of completed outputs (e.g., promotional videos, community tour maps), but also through stakeholder uptake. For instance, several projects were adopted by the Enrekang Tourism Office as part of its official promotional toolkit, and students co-facilitated capacity-building workshops for rural homestay operators. This validates the role of CL as a mechanism for knowledge co-creation between academic institutions and local communities (Tong, Li, & Yang, 2024). As expressed by a tourism official:

> *"Their digital content helped our destination get noticed online. We've included it on our tourism website and even used their event design for the next cultural festival."*

However, the mechanisms through which CL contributes to tourism development extend beyond output. Students reported that working directly with stakeholders enhanced their sense of place, professional identity, and civic responsibility. The authentic context of these learning experiences enabled the internalization of soft skills that traditional didactic methods often fail to cultivate. These outcomes also align with pedagogical models of experiential learning, such as Kolb's learning cycle, where concrete experience and reflective observation are core to deep learning. In particular, the collaborative tasks provided real-world complexity that required students to adapt, mediate conflicts, and manage multiple expectations—skills critical in tourism-related employment.

The practical implications of these findings suggest that CL can serve as a strategic tool to revitalize tourism education, especially in underserved regions. Institutions may consider formalizing CL components in their curricula, investing in facilitator training, and building long-term partnerships with local tourism boards. Such efforts could ensure sustainability, while also enabling scalability of the model to other rural or semi-urban areas in Indonesia. Additionally, tourism policymakers could leverage student-led innovation through micro-grants, co-branding campaigns, and integrated tourism events that include academic institutions as key stakeholders.

Despite its strengths, this study also recognizes several limitations. First, the qualitative data, while rich in depth, may reflect biases due to social desirability among interviewees or the presence of the researcher during observations. Second, the study was limited to one region (Enrekang), which may affect transferability to regions with different cultural or institutional dynamics. Third, challenges such as inconsistent funding, unequal participation in group work, and scheduling mismatches with local tourism calendars persisted. For example, one educator noted:

> *"We planned a student-led event during a semester break, but many couldn't join because they had to go home or work."*

To address these, it is recommended that future programs allocate flexible timelines, establish clear roles in group tasks, and create local support systems for project continuity. In terms of comparative analysis, the implementation of CL in Enrekang shares similarities with tourism education models in Southeast Asia, such as Thailand and Vietnam, where community engagement and service learning are also growing trends. However, unlike some institutions in Thailand that have institutionalized CBT labs and interdisciplinary centers (e.g., Mahidol University), Enrekang's approach is still in the pilot stage, often depending on individual educators' initiative. A broader institutional policy and cross-departmental collaboration would enhance its long-term viability.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the impact of Cooperative Learning (CL) in tourism education on student outcomes and regional tourism development in Enrekang Regency. Results showed that CL significantly improved classroom engagement—with a 75% rise in active participation and a 60% boost in collaborative task performance—and helped students build key soft skills such as critical thinking, teamwork, and intercultural communication. Importantly, CL enabled students to take active roles in community-based tourism (CBT) projects, leading to the development of 12 tour packages, 7 digital promotional materials used by local tourism offices, and 5 village tourism events that enhanced destination visibility. The study highlights CL's potential to position students as co-creators in community development, bridging academic learning with real-world practice. When supported by institutional and stakeholder collaboration, CL emerges as a scalable, context-sensitive model for rural tourism education. Despite challenges like limited resources and educator training needs, stakeholders endorsed CL's dual impact—enhancing student competencies while promoting sustainable, locally driven tourism.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



| Author's Biography | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Name | *Dr. Mustakim, S.Pd.I, M.Pd* | | |
| Affiliation | *Universitas Muhammadiyah Enrekang* | | |
| Email | *kimchangi00@gmail.com* | Scopus ID | |
| Google Scholar | *https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=xHC_4ygAAAAJ&hl=id* | WoS ID | *If any* |
| Research Interest | *My research focuses on English Language Education, particularly Cooperative Learning and its role in enhancing students' speaking skills, motivation, and collaboration. I explore technology-enhanced approaches like project-based and podcast-assisted learning, as well as localized strategies in ESP and tourism education to improve outcomes in rural and underprivileged areas.* | | |



| Author's Biography | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Name | *Emirati, S.Pd., M.Pd* | | |
| Affiliation | *Universitas Muhammadiyah Bulukumba* | | |
| Email | *emirati@umbulukumba.ac.id emiration@gmail.com* | Scopus ID | |
| Google Scholar | *https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=joGhoZoAAAAJ&hl=id* | WoS ID | *If any* |
| Research Interest | *My research interests include digital innovation in English language learning, with a focus on technology integration to boost engagement and learning outcomes. I also explore cross-cultural understanding and intercultural competence in language teaching, along with sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic aspects of second language acquisition. Additionally, I examine learner-centered strategies in non-formal English education and flexible learning settings.* | | |



| Author's Biography | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Name | *Mutmainnah, S.Pd., M.Pd* | | |
| Affiliation | *Universitas Muhammadiyah Enrekang* | | |
| Email | | Scopus ID | *58556689100* |
| Google Scholar | *Mutmainnah (orcid.org/0000-0002-6036-8267)* | WoS ID | *If any* |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Research Interest | *My research focuses on the intersection of Applied Linguistics and Guidance and Counseling, exploring language use in counseling practices and its impact on communication.* |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | **Author's Biography** | | | |
| | Name | *Umiyati Jabri* | | |
| | Affiliation | *Universitas Muhammadiyah Enrekang* | | |
| | Email | *umiyatijabri@gmail.com* | Scopus ID | *57222334564* |
| | Google Scholar | *https://scholar.google.com/citations?hl=id&user=KJSDMoIAAAAJ* | WoS ID | - |
| | Research Interest | *My research interests center around English language education, with a focus on language teaching methodologies, instructional material development, and the use of technology in language learning. I am also interested in integrating cultural and character education into English language teaching, as well as exploring innovative approaches to improve students' engagement and language skills in diverse learning contexts.* | | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | **Author's Biography** | | | |
| | Name | *Nina Ariani* | | |
| | Affiliation | *Songkhla Rajabhat University, Thailand* | | |
| | Email | *nina.ar@skru.ac.th* | Scopus ID | |
| | Google Scholar | | WoS ID | - |
| | Research Interest | *Nina Ariani is a dedicated foreign lecturer at Songkhla Rajabhat University, affiliated with the Faculty of Education. Holding a master's degree in English Education, she focuses her research on ICT, teaching media, Cooperative Learning, Social Skills, educational technology, critical thinking in English Language Teaching (ELT), and Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). She is passionate about enhancing educational practices through innovative methods and fostering critical thinking in her students.* | | |