

Implementation of Field Study as an Active Learning Strategy in a Tourism Geography Course

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ABSTRACT

Active learning is a key approach in creating a dynamic and meaningful learning environment. One relevant active learning method for the Tourism Geography course is field study. This article aims to analyze the implementation of field study as an active learning strategy to enhance students' understanding and engagement. The study uses a mixed methods approach involving 30 students and 1 lecturer in a field activity at Rumah Pohon Waai, Central Maluku. Quantitative data were collected through questionnaires, tests, and final report assessments, while qualitative data were obtained through observations, interviews, and student reflections. The findings show that field study significantly improves conceptual understanding, analytical skills, as well as student motivation and participation in Tourism Geography learning. This article recommends the broader application of field study in experience-based learning in higher education.

KEYWORDS

field study
active learning
tourism geography
learning strategy
experiential learning

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1. Introduction

The course of Tourism Geography plays a crucial role in providing students with an understanding of the relationship between geographic aspects and the dynamics of the tourism industry. The concepts taught in this course cover various topics, such as spatial distribution, the utilization of natural resources, and the socio-economic impacts of tourism on communities and the environment. However, many students find it difficult to relate the theories they learn in class to real-world situations. This highlights the need for a more interactive and practical approach to learning, enabling students to develop their analytical skills in the context of real-world scenarios.

As education approaches evolve, with a growing emphasis on student engagement, the concept of active learning has become increasingly relevant, particularly in higher education. Active learning is not just a method to prevent students from becoming passive listeners; more importantly, it encourages students to actively engage in the learning process through various activities that stimulate critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Freeman et al., 2014). In the context of Tourism Geography, this approach is especially important as it helps students better understand complex concepts related to tourism planning and management (Sulaiman et al., 2018).

One active learning method that holds significant potential for implementation in Tourism Geography courses is field study. Field study provides students with the opportunity to directly observe tourism objects or destinations, allowing them to link the theoretical knowledge learned in class with practical experiences on the ground. This approach not only makes the learning process more engaging, but it also enhances students' understanding of both local and global contexts in the tourism industry (Dewi & Arifin, 2019). Through this activity, it is expected that students' involvement in the learning process will increase, thereby encouraging them to think more critically about issues faced by the tourism industry, such as environmental impact, sustainability, and conservation (Juhdi & Abidin, 2017).

However, despite the significant potential of field study, its application in higher education in Indonesia, particularly in the Tourism Geography course, remains relatively limited. Therefore, this

study aims to explore the implementation of field study as an active learning strategy in the Geography Education Program at Pattimura University. This research is expected to provide new insights into the impact of field study on student engagement and deepen their understanding of the concepts taught in this course. Furthermore, the findings of this study are anticipated to contribute to the development of experience-based learning methods in higher education.

Based on this background, the primary focus of this research is to examine the implementation of field study in the Tourism Geography course, assess its impact on the quality of learning and students' learning experiences, and explore the challenges encountered in its execution. Additionally, this study aims to offer recommendations for the further development of innovative teaching methods in the future

2. Method

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, using a descriptive quantitative design supported by interpretive qualitative data. The approach was used to analyze the effectiveness of field study as an active learning strategy in the Tourism Geography course within the Geography Education Study Program at Universitas Pattimura. The research subjects comprised 30 students and one course instructor, with field activities conducted at the Rumah Pohon Waai tourist site, Waai Village, Salahutu District, Central Maluku Regency.

Quantitative data were collected through questionnaires, comprehension tests, and final report assessments to measure improvements in cognitive, affective, psychomotor, collaborative, and evaluative domains before and after the field study. Qualitative data were obtained via observations, interviews, and analyses of student reflections to corroborate the numerical findings. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics—percentages and mean gains in learning outcomes—while qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns in students' learning experiences. The results of both strands were then triangulated to ensure the validity of the findings.

This research adhered to ethical principles: all participants provided informed consent, and data confidentiality was fully maintained.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Implementation of the Field Study at Rumah Pohon Waai, Salahutu District

The field study for the Tourism Geography course in the Geography Education Study Program at Universitas Pattimura was conducted in 2024 at the Rumah Pohon Waai tourist site, located in Waai Village, Salahutu District, Central Maluku Regency. The site was selected because its characteristics represent Maluku's distinctive natural and cultural tourism potential and provide scope for students to apply tourism geography theory learned in class. Rumah Pohon Waai is known for its combined mountain-and-sea panorama and is supported by glamping facilities.

Prior to the field activity, students received theoretical briefing on analyzing tourism potential using the 4A parameters (Attraction, Accessibility, Amenities, and Ancillary Services) and the extended 5A framework (Attraction, Accessibility, Amenities, Ancillary Services, and Activities). The briefing also covered the SWOT method (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) to assess feasibility and formulate destination development strategies. The one-day field study involved observation, interviews, and the preparation of a group final report.

3.2. Identification of Tourism Potential Using the 4A and 5A Parameters

During field observations, students identified the site's tourism potential using the 4A and 5A frameworks. For Attraction, they found that Rumah Pohon Waai's main appeal lies in its natural panorama and the distinctive treehouse structures that serve as an icon for educational and recreational tourism. In addition, the presence of natural hot springs and local traditions in Waai Village offer supplementary attractions that reinforce the destination's character.

Regarding Accessibility, students noted that access to Rumah Pohon Waai is relatively good, as it lies on the main Ambon–Suli route, approximately 30 minutes from Ambon's city center. Paved

roads and available public transport facilitate tourist visits. However, several students observed limitations in directional signage and parking capacity.

For Amenities, basic facilities such as gazebos, seating areas, and local food stalls are available, though not yet managed professionally. Cleanliness and sanitation facilities require improvement to better support visitor comfort. In terms of Ancillary Services, students observed limited support from formal institutions such as the local tourism office in promotion and destination governance.

With the additional Activities component in the 5A framework, students noted that visitors can engage in photography, sightseeing, light recreation, and participation in local community activities such as tree planting or environmental education. Their analysis indicates that Rumah Pohon Waai holds strong potential to be developed as a nature- and culture-based destination (Dewi & Arifin, 2019).

3.3. Interviews and Field Analysis

Beyond observation, students conducted interviews with visitors and site managers to obtain primary data on perceptions of attraction, services, and facilities. Most visitors stated that Rumah Pohon Waai is an appealing and comfortable family recreation site, while expressing expectations for enhanced facilities and more varied tourism activities.

Interviews with managers revealed key constraints, notably limited funding and insufficient promotion. These findings align with Sulaiman et al. (2018), who report that destination success is strongly influenced by infrastructure support, promotion, and local community participation.

Students also collected simple spatial data, including mapping facility locations, access routes, and viewpoints using digital mapping applications. These data formed the basis for feasibility analysis and the formulation of development strategies anchored in local potential.

3.4. Feasibility Analysis and Development Strategies Using the SWOT Method

Following observation and interviews, students assessed the feasibility of Rumah Pohon Waai using SWOT analysis. Key points include, Strengths: Striking natural scenery, unique treehouse structures, and proximity to Ambon as a main transport hub; Weaknesses: Insufficient supporting facilities, limited digital promotion, and non-professional management; Opportunities: Rising tourist interest in nature and local culture, and the potential for collaboration with private stakeholders and academia; Threats: Possible environmental degradation due to increasing visitor numbers and a lack of sustainable management regulations.

Based on this analysis, students proposed sustainable development strategies, including upgrading basic facilities, providing community training in tourism management, expanding digital promotion via social media, and adopting eco-tourism principles. Their analyses and recommendations were compiled in the final field study report containing a description of potentials, interview results, SWOT analysis, and a development strategy blueprint.

This method not only strengthened students' grasp of tourism geography theory but also trained them to think analytically and solution-oriented. These findings are consistent with Juhdi & Abidin (2017), who note that applying SWOT in field-based learning can enhance problem-solving skills and strategic thinking in tourism development contexts.

3.5. Educational Impact of the Field Study on Students

The field study at Rumah Pohon Waai functioned as an active learning strategy integrating authentic experience, collaboration, and context-based problem solving. Students did more than "observe"; they constructed knowledge through a cycle of experience–reflection–conceptualization–experimentation: applying the 4A/5A parameters to map potentials, conducting structured interviews with visitors/managers, and synthesizing findings into SWOT analysis and development recommendations in the final report. This pattern is consistent with experiential learning and place-based learning frameworks, which position fieldwork as a signature pedagogy in geography for providing real-world context, accelerating feedback between instructors and students, and fostering co-creation of knowledge through collaborative tasks and location-based problem solving (Kolb, 2015; Kent et al., 2019). For greater clarity regarding the field study's impact on learning quality, see Table 1 below.

Table 1. Indicators of Learning Quality Improvement Through the Tourism Geography Field Study at Rumah Pohon Waai

No.	Learning Aspect	Measurement Indicators	Instruments & Data Collection Techniques	Before Field Study (% of students meeting indicator)	After Field Study (% of students meeting indicator)	Notes on Improvement
1	Cognitive (Theory and Application)	a) Students understand the 4A/5A concepts for tourism potential analysis.b) Students can connect theory with field conditions.	Comprehension test & report-analysis rubric	56%	92%	Significant increase in understanding of tourism concepts and their application in the field.
2	Analytical & Problem Solving	Students can analyze destination feasibility and formulate development strategies using the SWOT method.	Final report assessment & instructor observation	48%	89%	Enhanced critical thinking and strategic synthesis.
3	Affective (Motivation and Attitudes toward Learning)	a) Student enthusiasm and active participation in learning activities.b) Awareness of the importance of sustainable tourism.	Learning-motivation questionnaire & reflective interviews	61%	94%	Increased learning motivation and concern for sustainability issues.
4	Psychomotor (Field Practice Skills)	a) Ability to conduct field observation and interviews.b) Use of digital mapping tools and documentation techniques.	Instructor observation & field-process assessment	52%	90%	Improved skills in collecting and processing field data.
5	Collaboration and Communication	Students can work in teams and communicate professionally with visitors/managers.	Observation of field activities & group-presentation rubric	68%	95%	Field study strengthened teamwork, leadership, and academic communication ethics.
6	Reflective and Academic Creativity	a) Students critically reflect on field experiences.b) Students generate creative ideas for tourism development.	Content analysis of student reflective reports	54%	88%	Increased reflective capacity and innovation in development proposals.
7	Evaluative (Learning Outcomes and Academic Achievement)	a) Average final grade in the Tourism Geography course.b) Student satisfaction with the field study method.	Final grades & learning-satisfaction survey	73% (average grade B)	93% (average grade A-)	Higher learning outcomes and greater student satisfaction with the learning process.
1	Cognitive (Theory and Application)	a) Students understand the 4A/5A concepts for tourism potential analysis.b) Students can connect theory with field conditions.	Comprehension test & report-analysis rubric	56%	92%	Significant increase in understanding of tourism concepts and their application in the field.

Source: Research data processing, 2024.

Table 2. Mean Scores of Student Learning Quality Before and After the Field Study

(Scale: 1–5; higher scores indicate better performance/attitudes)

Aspect	Mean Score Before	Mean Score After	% Increase
Cognitive (Understanding & Theoretical Analysis)	3.1 / 5	4.6 / 5	+48.4%
Affective (Motivation & Learning Attitudes)	3.3 / 5	4.7 / 5	+42.4%
Psychomotor (Fieldwork Skills)	3.0 / 5	4.5 / 5	+50.0%
Collaboration and Communication	3.4 / 5	4.8 / 5	+41.2%
Academic Creativity and Innovation	3.2 / 5	4.6 / 5	+43.7%
Evaluative (Grades and Learning Satisfaction)	3.6 / 5	4.8 / 5	+33.3%
Overall Mean Increase	3.27 / 5	4.67 / 5	+43.0%
Cognitive (Understanding & Theoretical Analysis)	3.1 / 5	4.6 / 5	+48.4%
Affective (Motivation & Learning Attitudes)	3.3 / 5	4.7 / 5	+42.4%
Psychomotor (Fieldwork Skills)	3.0 / 5	4.5 / 5	+50.0%

Source: Research data processing, 2024.

Drawing on observations, interviews, and quantitative analyses presented in Tables 1 and 2, the field study at Rumah Pohon Waai produced a significant positive impact on multiple dimensions of student learning quality. Overall, the mean increase of 43% across indicators indicates that the field activity effectively strengthened students' conceptual understanding, practical skills, and professional awareness within the context of the Tourism Geography course.

Cognitively, students demonstrated substantial gains in conceptual mastery—especially in connecting destination theory (4A/5A) with empirical field conditions. They were able to analyze relationships among Attraction, Accessibility, Amenities, and Ancillary Services and link these to visitor satisfaction and revisit intentions. This confirms that mapping tourism potential at Rumah Pohon Waai was not merely observational; it functioned as an analytical and evaluative process that cultivated students' interpretive capacity regarding destination dynamics (Hapsari & Yuliana, 2021; Dewi & Arifin, 2019).

These gains were also evident in procedural and methodological competencies. Students capably designed interview protocols, conducted systematic observations, and processed spatial data using digital applications. Metacognitive aspects developed through reflective engagement with findings, awareness of observational bias, and iterative revision of analyses prior to final reporting (Kolb & Kolb, 2017). These competencies show that the field study advanced not only technical skills but also higher-order thinking skills; this aligns with evidence that active, field-based learning strengthens critical, analytical, and conceptual reasoning (Freeman et al., 2014; Larsen et al., 2017).

In professional skill domains, applying SWOT for feasibility analysis enhanced students' strategic thinking and data-informed decision-making. Students did not only identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing Rumah Pohon Waai; they also formulated realistic and applicable strategies for sustainable tourism development. These outcomes are consistent with Juhdi & Abidin (2017), who emphasize that using SWOT in field-based instruction increases analytical competence and problem-solving in tourism planning. Furthermore, Sulaiman et al. (2018) note that SWOT effectively helps students understand interlinkages among physical, social, and economic factors in destination development success.

Affective and sustainability ethics domains also improved. The Waai field study fostered students' ecological awareness and social empathy. Through direct interaction with local communities, students learned to value social and cultural assets and to appreciate the need to balance tourism use with environmental conservation. This reinforces sustainability values central to tourism geography education (Sartika et al., 2020; Bell, 2016). Student reflections further indicated increased learning motivation, a stronger sense of responsibility, and a desire to contribute to community-based tourism management.

Collaborative and communicative capacities improved markedly as well. Students showed effective teamwork, distributed roles according to competencies, and communicated professionally with visitors and site managers. Group work during the field study strengthened peer learning and interpersonal skills that are vital in professional contexts, particularly in tourism and geography education.

Overall, the Rumah Pohon Waai field study can be categorized as a comprehensive active learning strategy, fulfilling key principles of student-centered learning: experiential, collaborative, reflective, and authentic. The activity not only improved academic achievement but also generated a scholarly artifact—a structured analytical report—that evidences scientific thinking from data collection and field analysis to the formulation of destination development strategies. Thus, the field study serves a dual function: as an active learning model and as a mini-research vehicle that consolidates students' professional competencies in Tourism Geography (Dewi & Arifin, 2019; Kent et al., 2019; Freeman et al., 2014).

4. 4. Conclusion

The implementation of a field study in the Tourism Geography course within the Geography Education Study Program at Universitas Pattimura—conducted at Rumah Pohon Waai, Waai Village, Salahutu District—proved effective as an active learning strategy that integrates theory with field practice. Students successfully applied the 4A/5A frameworks to identify tourism potential, conducted interviews with visitors and site managers, and analyzed destination feasibility using the SWOT method. This activity enhanced students' engagement, understanding, and analytical capabilities regarding tourism geography concepts. Beyond strengthening academic and research skills, the field study also fostered students' awareness of the importance of sustainable tourism management in Maluku. Accordingly, the field study is appropriate for adoption as an experiential, active learning model in higher education geography.

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