

From Synergy to Sojourn: How Collaborative Teaching on Spanish Culture Fosters Sustainable Tourism Education

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable tourism education integrates tourism economic, environmental and socio-cultural impacts and learners' understanding while fostering critical thinking, systems thinking, and responsible action toward sustainable development goals (SDG). While previous studies focused on collaborative teaching and sustainable tourism education separately, the integration of Spanish culture, computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL) and sustainable education are notably scarce suggesting the current research as both timely and innovative. This study addresses the gap by assessing learners' overall perceptions and understanding of Spanish culture in relation to sustainable tourism education. It exemplifies a collaborative pedagogical design that augments formal academic with authentic cultural insights from a native expert under the collaborative teaching module between HTT280 Geography and Culture in Tourism lecturers at UiTM Alor Gajah Campus and the Embassy of Spain in Malaysia. A post-webinar survey was administered to 98 participants following the session. Descriptive analysis summarized participants' perceptions while thematic analysis was employed to identify key cultural takeaways and additional feedback. Findings indicated that the webinar significantly enhanced participants understanding of Spanish culture, demonstrating its effectiveness in fostering cultural awareness. The webinar's content delivery and the value of the cultural experience was found to be effective. The native speaker's deep-rooted knowledge and firsthand experience in Spanish culture and tourism and shared reflections acted as key drivers that shaped their learning experience. The webinar's format, duration, and platform were perceived as effective in delivering ethical and cultural learning outcomes, suggesting that sustainable tourism education conducted virtually can be as impactful as conventional face-to-face methods. The study's implications suggest that adopting collaborative teaching to create authentic learning experiences fosters intercultural understanding, vital for sustainable tourism education. Furthermore, investing in digital technology demonstrates a scalable and environmentally-friendly approach to align cross-cultural education with sustainability principles. Consequently, stakeholders and policymakers should design a comprehensive syllabus integrating collaborative pedagogies and digital learning to enhance cultural competence while minimizing the carbon footprint.

Keywords: Sustainable tourism education, collaborative teaching, computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL), Constructivism, Spanish Culture

INTRODUCTION

Collaborative teaching is a pedagogical approach involving two or more instructors who work together in designing, delivering and assessing a particular syllabus to enhance learners. According to Yang (2023), it is fundamentally grounded in constructivist learning theory developed by Piaget and Vygotsky, and the work of Freire's critical pedagogy, which emphasizes dialogue, empowerment, and the democratization of education.

In the context of this study, collaborative teaching (CT) involves an interdisciplinary coalition between Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) and various public and private industry partners to promote lifelong learning and enhance UiTM's visibility. This collaboration spans six modules and delivery approaches, including content

development, delivery, and assessment to foster self-learning empowerment among all CT stakeholders (UiTM, n.d.).

The chosen model was Model 4 (Course Content Development and Delivery Collaboration), where the academicians from UiTM Alor Gajah campus partnered with the Embassy of Spain in Malaysia to jointly develop Chapter 7.2: Tourism and Culture in Europe (Spain) in the Geography and Culture in Tourism (HTT280) course reflecting the concept of synergy highlighted in the article's title. The industry partner then delivered the topic during the two-hour webinar titled “Viva España: Exploring Spain’s Cultural and Tourism Wonders.” The topic is one of the key components assessed in the final examination reinforcing its importance within the course structure.

Geography and Culture in Tourism (HTT280) is a second semester subject in the Diploma in Tourism Management program designed to equip students with the fundamental knowledge about geography and culture of the South East Asia, East Asia, Europe, North America and the Middle East in relation to tourism industry. The course covers basic geography knowledge like a country’s location relative to the equator and the hemispheres, and how these factors influence climate, topography, economic resources, the people and their culture- elements that shape its tourism attractions.

In this study context, “sojourn” is used metaphorically to describe a brief yet enriching cultural journey; a succinct yet insightful cultural experience participants get from the two-hour webinar offering participants a meaningful opportunity to explore the rich culture and tourism wonders of Spain. Guided by native expert through storytelling and visual presentations, this sharing session served as a virtual journey- allowing participants to immerse themselves in another culture which served as foundation for reflection, and intercultural awareness. In this regard, collaborative learning, formed the basis for the conceptual progression from sojourn to synergy as explored in this paper.

In contrast to collaborative learning which emphasizes the learners, collaborative teaching focuses on the educators. By leveraging technology and integrating diverse perspectives, this in turn encourages interdisciplinary co-design and co-delivery content. In the context of tourism education, when conducted digitally, collaborative teaching fosters dynamic and culturally rich learning experiences which aligns with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4, key pillar of sustainable education which promotes interdisciplinary thinking, global awareness, inclusivity, and ethical engagement. Consequently, it provides critical reflection on tourism’s social, cultural, and environmental impacts key competencies in preparing learners for sustainable tourism practices and responsible citizenship.

While studies on collaborative teaching is methodologically robust and theoretically grounded, Weddle (2022) argued that they lack interdisciplinary and critical theoretical framework and further suggested for longitudinal research and contextual factors as funding, institution’s size and students demographic be conducted to assess its effectiveness. Similarly, collaborative teaching enhances sustainable tourism education by fostering interdisciplinary understanding, modeling cooperative problem-solving, promoting critical and ethical thinking, and aligning learning with real-world, culturally grounded sustainability challenges.

Based on these premises and grounded in constructivist and computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL) theory, this study investigates how exposure to Spanish culture fosters sustainable tourism education. It assesses learners’ overall perceptions and understanding of Spanish culture in relation to sustainable tourism education. It examines learners’ overall perceptions and understanding of Spanish culture in relation to sustainable tourism principles.

This paper’s novelty lies in the integration of constructivist and CSCL approach in the collaborative teaching initiative delivered in a cross-cultural webinar context by a Spanish diplomat to Malaysian via YouTube Live. Leveraging rich-media content technology offers an innovative, technology-mediated model for sustainable tourism education. Additionally, immediate feedback from the post-webinar survey offers significant empirical insights into the pedagogical effectiveness, learning outcomes and technical delivery of live-streamed collaborative teaching in tourism education. Moreover, by aligning with global trends and emphasizing on the importance of sustainable tourism education within the Malaysian context, this study enriches the theoretical

discourse around sustainable tourism education and provides practical methodological contributions for future educators.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Collaborative teaching is rooted in two fundamental learning theories namely the constructivism developed from the work of Piaget, *The Origins of Intelligence in Children* (1936) and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory pioneered by Lev Vygotsky (1978) from his posthumous compilation of *Mind in Society*. Together, they provide a comprehensive framework for effective, learner-centered, and socially interactive educational environments.

Under constructivism, the central idea lies in learners' ability to actively construct their own understanding and knowledge by experiencing things and the reflection made based on those experiences as learning is seen as an active, contextual, and social process (Alzahraini & Wooland, 2013; Nyikos, & Hashimoto, 1997; Yang, 2023). In contrast, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory focuses on how social interactions and culture shape cognitive development. Social interaction, language and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) or the gap between what a learner can do alone compared to with guidance (scaffolding) are three central themes in social constructivism (Nyikos, & Hashimoto, 1997; Yang, 2023)

The constructivist learning theory posits that learners actively construct meaning through social interaction and cultural engagement. In relation to the topic under study, the concept fits ideally in exploring how students develop sustainable tourism literacy through collaborative exploration of Spanish culture. In terms of cultural context, the language, diagrams and the presentation slides act as medium to convey the knowledge to help participants understand local cultural values is central to both constructivism and sustainable tourism. The social interaction between participants and the speaker enhanced each other's knowledge by sharing perspectives and reflecting on them collaboratively. Exploring tourism issues in Spain such as over-tourism, cultural preservation, sustainable practices and tips and tricks when visiting Spain constitute the real tasks making learning more meaningful.

Additionally, the principles of Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning (CSCL) emphasizes the role of technology in supporting and enhancing teaching and learning (Alzahraini & Wooland, 2013, Yang, 2023). Leveraging technology provides both the technological infrastructure and pedagogical support for intercultural, virtual collaboration. Together, these theories support positive learning environments where tourism education becomes both culturally rooted and globally connected.

Within the frameworks of constructivism and collaborative teaching, active knowledge construction takes place when learners actively explore and engage with Spanish culture to understand sustainable tourism practices. The immersive cultural exploration they get even virtually, help them to learn through experience. This aligns with experiential learning concept. Real-time engagement between the speaker and participants using the technology, as well as peer-to-peer interaction, serve to enhance learners' prior knowledge under the speaker's guidance.

In this context, the speaker's primary role is to facilitate learning through active, contextual, and social engagement, guiding dialogue and reflection rather than simply lecturing. In this light, active two-way communication through shared interaction, reflection, and dialogue in the live discussion helps both parties to collaboratively construct meaningful knowledge. Both theories in the collaborative teaching model delivered through the webinar serves as an effective model for sustainable tourism education. It is culturally ingrained, socially interactive, and globally connected.

Consequently, it empowers participants to understand, analyze, reflect, and envision sustainable practices in real-world contexts. Similarly, Chen et al., (2022), identified four key points of teaching and learning methods to promote sustainability in tourism education namely developing collaborative and interdisciplinary learning skills, developing systems thinking skills, developing experiential learning skills, and developing techniques for increasing environmental awareness.

Ultimately, the collaborative teaching initiative supports SDG 4, SDG 11, SDG 13 and SDG 17. The webinar supports the United Nations' (n.d.) SDG 4 (Quality Education) by promoting inclusive, experiential, and digital learning. By integrating academic insight with Spain's real-world situation from a native speaker, learners engaged in cross-cultural experiences that go beyond traditional classroom setting. Additionally, by exploring

Spain's approach to tourism and culture, the United Nations' (n.d.) SDG 11 which emphasizes on Sustainable Cities and Communities, help to raise participants' awareness of sustainable and culturally sensitive tourism practices. In the long run, this encourages future tourism travelers and stakeholders to respect and preserve local heritage.

The United Nations' (n.d.) SDG 13: Climate Action is supported by highlighting the importance of climate, geography, and tourism influence on sustainability. It demands strong actions from the participants to protect the environment and the need to response to climate change through tourism practices adaptability. As for the United Nations' (n.d.) SDG 17 which focuses on Partnerships for the Goal, the collaborative teaching initiative itself demonstrates how global partnerships in education enriches learning and foster international understanding.

METHODOLOGY

This descriptive study employs a simple post-webinar survey administered to 98 participants following the two hours webinar on *Viva España: Exploring Spain's Cultural and Tourism Wonders*". The instrument included 5-point Likert-scale items measuring participants' perceived satisfaction toward speaker's delivery, program duration, platform, and overall experience. Quantitative data were summarized using descriptive statistics, while thematic analysis was applied to qualitative responses.

A descriptive analysis was conducted to summarize participants' perceptions of the webinar using frequency, percentages and mean scores. Results are reported using standard American Psychological Association (APA) format. Open-ended responses were analyzed thematically to identify key themes. Due to page number limitations, participant quotes were not verbatim but presented with minor corrections to grammar and spelling errors for clarity, while preserving the original meaning.

To complement the quantitative data and the thematic analysis, this study also tracked the number of YouTube views of the recorded webinar session to assess the collaborative teaching's effectiveness in terms of reach and engagement. This metric provided supplementary insight into the timeless and borderless life-long learning accessibility, knowledge dissemination and transference of the educational content which supports SDG4, SDG11, SDG 13 and SDG 17.

The findings were presented in an orderly manner, starting with the respondents' demographic profiles using frequencies and percentages followed by the descriptive statistics mean scores for the 5-point Likert scales items as shown in Table 1. The thematic analysis was then presented based on the key themes and supplemented by the webinar's latest YouTube view count. In line with APA guidelines, the results section reports only the analyses conducted. The interpretations and inferences are presented in the discussion section.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the survey of 98 respondents, the majority (95.8%, $n = 94$) were from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), with 37.5% ($n = 37$) were from UiTM Alor Gajah (part of UiTM Melaka), 33.3% ($n = 33$) from other UiTM Melaka campuses (Bandaraya Melaka and Jasin), and 25.0% ($n = 25$) from UiTM Puncak Alam leaving a smaller proportion (4.2%, $n = 4$) representing non-UiTM affiliated respondents. Of these, 30 respondents (30.6%) were male while 68 (69.4%) were female, reflecting typical gender distribution. As expected, these demographic distributions suggest that the event primarily reached its intended target audience. Descriptive statistics were computed for the five evaluation items measured on a 5-point Likert scale as presented on Table 1 below.

Table1 Descriptive Statistics for Likert-Scale Evaluation Items

Item	N	M	SD	Median	Skew
Did the speaker effectively convey the cultural and tourism highlights of Spain?	98	4.50	0.63	5	-0.087
How would you rate the quality of speaker's delivery and presentation?	98	4.49	0.59	5	-0.72
Was the duration of the program appropriate?	98	4.42	0.62	4	-0.58
How was the quality of the platform (Online channel)?	98	4.51	0.58	5	-0.68
How would you rate your overall experience at the event?	98	4.54	0.59	5	-0.88

As can be seen on Table 1, participants generally evaluated the program positively, with all mean values exceeding 4.40. The speaker's effectiveness in conveying the cultural and tourism highlights of Spain was perceived as excellent ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 0.63$, Median = 5, Skew = -0.87), indicating that most participants agreed or strongly agreed that the objectives were met. Similarly, the quality of the speaker's delivery and presentation was rated highly ($M = 4.49$, $SD = 0.60$, Median = 5, Skew = -0.72), with responses strongly clustered at the higher end of the scale.

Participants also perceived the duration of the program as appropriate ($M = 4.42$, $SD = 0.62$, Median = 4, Skew = -0.58) reflecting good time management and content pacing. The quality of the online platform used for delivery was rated excellent, with most participants giving top ratings ($M = 4.51$, $SD = 0.58$, Median = 5, Skew = -0.68) reflecting very high participant satisfaction. Notably, the overall experience was the most highly rated item ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 0.59$, Median = 5, Skew = -0.88), indicating a strong positive reception among participants and suggesting the event successfully met participants' expectations and leaving a favorable impression.

In summary, the results reflect strong participant satisfaction with both the content and delivery of the program, as indicated by the negative skewness values across items, showing that responses were consistently skewed toward the higher end of the scale. In addition, thematic analysis was conducted on two open-ended questions discussed in the following section.

The first was "What do you remember most about Spain from the sharing session?" Four major themes emerged as key takeaways from the cultural tourism webinar. These themes are presented in ascending order of frequency answer based on participant responses ($N = 98$).

Theme 1: Cultural, Heritage and Traditions as Catalysts for Learning

Participants frequently emphasized Spanish culture, festivals, greetings, and traditional practices as central learning points. For instance, respondents highlighted "Festival unique in Spain," "there's a lot of national interest such as Tomatina, San Isidro, Feria del Caballo," and "the music (Flamenco)," while others noted "Regional dress," "Basic language," and "The culture, festivals and tourism attractions". These cultural elements enhanced learner engagement and fostered intercultural competence by enabling participants to connect academic learning with authentic cultural narratives.

Theme 2: Gastronomy as a Medium for Cultural Sustainability

Participants' reflections on tapas and broader culinary traditions as "food in Spain culture, like Tapas" and "Their gastronomy" for instance, highlight how gastronomy can serve as platform for discussions linking food, cultural preservation and sustainable tourism, aligning with SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and SDG 11.

Theme 3: History, Art, and Architecture as Sustainable Tourism Assets

Highlighting Spanish landmarks, museums, and architectural heritage underscores how built heritage fosters both tourism appeal and cultural sustainability. One participant emphasized "One of the most captivating parts was the discussion around Spain's world-renowned art and architecture." Similarly, other participants reflected "It is really interesting when the speaker was talking about the culture and the places that has its own uniqueness like the Islamic building really amazed me" and "Spain museum like Meninas - Velázquez" as the most captivating part.

Theme 4: Travel Literacy and Tourism Planning

The session also sparked participants' interest in practical travel knowledge particularly on the best seasons to visit, budgeting, and accommodations. For instance, respondents highlighted "The best season to visit Spain," "Hotel and accommodation in Spain," and "The budget for tourists to go to Spain is 100–120 Euros" as key takeaways. These reflections entail the curiosity of future tourists developing a deeper understanding of tourism systems and planning ecosystem.

In essence, the thematic analysis implies that webinar key takeaways extended beyond Spanish culture and tourism fact, integrating the pedagogical value of the collaborative teaching approach and the embodiment of SDGs spirit.

For “Additional comment” which is optional, respondents’ feedback was grouped into two major key themes as follows:

Positive Feedback and Appreciation

Some respondents expressed their gratitude and satisfaction over the sharing session with phrases like “Great job”, “Thank you for a good sharing”, and “The best experience ever!!!”. Such insights demonstrate emotional and intellectual resonance with the session hence reflects affective engagement which is vital in transformative education and supports SDG 4, promoting inclusive and equitable quality education.

Overall Organization and Execution

Most participants who responded on this open-ended question regard the session as “interesting”, “a very good sharing session”, “OK” or “Good”. One respondent wrote lengthily highlighting numerous aspects of the session organization and execution as follows.

“Great session, and a very productive one. Huge thanks for the warm and welcoming arrangement for the listeners to attend this very interesting and informative session. The organization was excellent, thanks to all the efforts you and your team have made. Many thanks for this opportunity. Hopefully this great program can be more widely publicized / promoted in the future as more people can participate and benefits. The session in fact was practical and helpful as the program was broadcasted streamed online using YouTube platform which is comfortable for the listeners; available for replay after the live broadcast session for reference. Also, kindly consider more platform for live broadcast / streaming for this great session. Grateful for the valuable sharing. It’s always been a real pleasure to hear something important explained so clearly. Would like to hear more. Congratulations and thank you so much! May the Almighty repay all of your kindness and dedication”.

Another participant expressed their content with “I really love this kind of learning because the speaker himself is from Spain so the information and knowledge I got was really understandable”.

To complement the results, the study also revisited Viva Espana (2025), the publicly accessible YouTube recording of the session. The current view count reflects a wider audience and indicates widespread interests, reinforcing the relevance and impact of the descriptive and thematic analysis findings.

To recap, this study explored how exposure to Spanish culture can enhance sustainable tourism education by assessing learners’ overall perceptions and understanding of cultural elements in relation to sustainable tourism principles. This section discusses the findings in the context of sustainable tourism education and cross-cultural learning.

The findings suggest that the core competencies of collaborative teaching model grounded in constructivism and computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL) support Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) key thrusts areas including SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy), SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production), SDG 13 (climate action), and SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals).

Additionally, the convergence of cultural identity, tourism practices, and sustainability imperatives shows an enhanced capacity for system thinking. The educational impact of this collaborative teaching lies in its potential to foster transformative learning that supports long-term behavioral and attitudinal change.

By learning from Spain’s experience, participants develop critical awareness of how geographic characteristics such as climate and topography influence the country resources that shape its tourism appeal. As tourism industry is subject to seasonality and volatility issues, climate is one of the factors that affect tourism demand and sustainability.

Moreover, the appreciation of cultural and heritage assets underscores the importance of conserving these sites amidst modernization and environmental pressures, in alignment with sustainable development principles, as demonstrated in Mínguez's, (2022) findings.

While her study highlights how varying capacities for cultural resource management influence the competitiveness of tourism destinations in Spain, the present study extends this concept into the educational sphere. By cultivating participants' critical awareness of geographic and cultural assets, the collaborative teaching model equips future tourism stakeholders to approach destination management through a lens of sustainability and innovation.

Together, these elements foster informed decision-making, cultural respect, global partnership and promote socio-cultural and environmentally responsible traveler. This holistic understanding demonstrates the importance of sustainable tourism education in maximizing positive economic and socio-cultural impact while minimizing the negative impacts. When effectively integrated, it becomes key driving process to propelling the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and yields greater outcomes (Akinsemolu & Onyeaka, 2025).

Similarly, the collaborative synergy is enhanced via native cultural expert. In other words, the speaker's role was central in creating a virtual "sojourn" for learners and has successfully enhanced learners' cultural awareness, particularly in relation to Spain's heritage, values, and attractions. This aligns with sustainable tourism education element of exposing learners to international cultural perspectives. It served as an authentic example of cross-institutional cooperation, fostering learners' collaborative competencies, such as respect for diverse viewpoints and shared problem-solving, central to cultivating global citizenship.

This aligns with O'Dowd, (2020) "transnational" model that emphasizes multi partner, cross cultural networks and global citizenship education (GCE). Despite focusing on language/foreign-language education, the model and findings are generalizable to broader educational contexts including tourism, culture and sustainability as the focus is on global challenges, shared resources, and collaborative online engagement

Additionally, the use of a virtual platform confirms that the short-form virtual learning can be effective in fostering cross-cultural education, vital in sustainable, scalable tourism education models. In this digital era, employing a stable, well-functioning digital platform fosters sustainable and inclusive education, making cross-cultural learning accessible while supporting sustainable development agenda.

Virtual learning can be enjoyable and enriching, fostering more responsible, culturally sensitive attitudes consistent with sustainable tourism values. This supports Sapu & Thienmongkol (2025) findings that digital technologies are the key tools for preserving cultural resources and fostering sustainable development.

In essence, these insights clearly demonstrate the depth and clarity of the content delivered, affirming the pedagogical strength of incorporating native experts into the curriculum. They also highlight the effectiveness of collaborative teaching that leverage technology to support global access to education and lifelong learning, hence supporting SDG 4.3 (Quality Education) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). Collectively, the results affirm that virtual, collaborative, and culturally immersive pedagogy can be effective in advancing key educational goals in sustainable tourism.

CONCLUSION

The collaborative teaching effort effectively fostered four key learning outcomes namely systems thinking, sustainable tourism literacy, collaborative competencies, and intercultural awareness. Participants valued the co-teaching approach, gained authentic intercultural understanding and demonstrated increased ability to connect cultural insights with tourism sustainability. These elements are essential in shaping globally competent tourism professionals.

This study also highlights that virtual sustainable tourism education can be as impactful as traditional face-to-face methods. It underscores the importance of collaborative pedagogies and digital technologies in fostering intercultural understanding and sustainability.

There are several implications that can be inferred from the study. Firstly, policymakers and educators are encouraged to design curricula that combine authentic cultural engagement with scalable, low-carbon digital tools to promote cultural competence and align with sustainability principles.

Secondly, embedding collaborative teaching within academic modules supports deeper learning and promotes global competence. These key attributes reflect a positive shift in learner perceptions, indicating that educational content, even with low immersion, can be enjoyable and enriching, fostering more responsible, culturally sensitive attitudes. Not only it aligns with sustainable tourism values but nurture future tourism professionals with ethical awareness to operate in diverse cultural landscapes.

Despite the modest sample size and self-reported data, the findings underscore the potential of virtual co-taught formats in tourism and ethics education. This study provides a meaningful exploratory foundation for future research using larger samples and longitudinal studies using mixed-method designs

Therefore, future research should incorporate larger and heterogeneous sample across multiple institutions to enhance validity and generalizability of the findings. Additionally, comparative studies may investigate how collaborative teaching in other cultural contexts influences sustainable tourism learning. Furthermore, employing mixed-method approaches and objective learning metric to assess longitudinal learning outcomes.

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