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Project-Based Learning in MICE Education: Preparing University Students for the Creative Industry Workforce in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT
The Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) industry in Indonesia has witnessed substantial economic growth, yet a persistent misalignment endures between university curricula and the practical demands of the creative industry workforce. This qualitative study examines the perceived significance of MICE education in preparing graduates for professional engagement in business and creative sectors, while identifying the most pedagogically appropriate instructional model for higher education implementation. Sixteen sixth-semester students enrolled in the Business English Communication Study Program at Universitas Negeri Makassar (UNM) participated in two focus group discussions and eight semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, yielded four major themes for each research question. Participants expressed unanimous consensus on the centrality of MICE education to workforce readiness, underscoring its role in career diversification, applied English language use, and creative competency development. Project-Based Learning (PjBL), particularly when integrated with direct fieldwork in creative industry settings, emerged as the most suitable pedagogical model. These findings extend the existing literature beyond vocational polytechnic contexts into comprehensive university English language programs, offering evidence-based curriculum recommendations for higher education institutions.

Keywords: MICE education; Project-Based Learning; creative industries; workforce readiness; higher education;

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INTRODUCTION
The Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) industry has emerged as a significant driver of economic activity both globally and within Indonesia. Recent data indicate that Indonesia's MICE sector recorded an economic turnover of approximately Rp11.82 trillion in 2025, with governmental support extended to 134 national events that engaged over 44,800 micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). These figures demonstrate that MICE functions not merely as event coordination but as a structural component of the national supply chain and economic ecosystem.

The country's strategic geographic position, cultural diversity, and expanding infrastructure have contributed to steady sectoral growth. Emerging market analyses suggest that six high-potential verticals are driving MICE expansion between 2025 and 2026. Furthermore, creative industries currently contribute approximately seven percent of Indonesia's gross domestic product, reflecting substantial opportunities for MICE-related activities that integrate creative elements with business tourism.

Despite this rapid expansion, a critical gap persists between higher education curricula and the practical expectations of the MICE workforce. While several Indonesian universities — including Politeknik Negeri Jakarta (PNJ), Universitas Pendidikan Nasional (Undiknas), and Trisakti University — have established MICE-related study programs, the alignment between academic instruction and industry-defined competency remains inconsistent. Industry stakeholders have noted persistent

shortages in qualified human resources capable of responding to the sector's dynamic demands, with some professionals seeking training abroad due to limited domestic preparation pathways.

The post-COVID-19 transformation of the MICE industry has further amplified these demands. The widespread adoption of hybrid and digital event formats has reshaped required competencies, necessitating stronger capabilities in digital communication, technological integration, and adaptive thinking. English language proficiency has been consistently identified as a priority skill for tourism and MICE professionals, alongside growing demand for Mandarin, Japanese, and Korean (Nova & Lastari, 2024). These developments underscore the urgency for higher education institutions to reassess and strengthen MICE curricula in ways that produce genuinely industry-ready graduates.

Prior scholarship on MICE education in Indonesia has concentrated predominantly on vocational programs within polytechnic institutions. Trisnayoni et al. (2023) developed a Project-Based Learning model for event organizing and MICE courses at Politeknik Negeri Bali, demonstrating that the PjBL approach enhances student understanding of practical event organization aligned with industry requirements. Safitry, Akbar, and Syafganti (2025) assessed PBL implementation in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classes at PNJ, finding that the approach improved English speaking proficiency in approximately eighty percent of participants.

Research by Syaliha, Syafganti, and Rudatin (2026) documented MICE activity implementation during the IISMA-E exchange program at Frankfurt School of Finance and Management, revealing that MICE participation equipped students with firsthand experience in organizing international events and navigating global professional culture. In parallel, Nova and Lastari (2024) established that effective written and spoken English communication constitutes a foundational requirement for professional engagement in the MICE sector during the hybrid-technology era.

However, existing studies have focused almost exclusively on vocational education settings, leaving MICE learning within English language programs at comprehensive universities substantially under-examined. Moreover, student perspectives on appropriate pedagogical models for integrating MICE education into creative industry preparation have received limited scholarly attention. The present study was designed to address this gap by generating empirical evidence from a non-vocational university context.

Wijayanti and Indrayani (2023) similarly explored MICE students' perceptions of project-based learning within an Indonesian higher education context and reported positive outcomes in terms of student engagement and practical skill development, further supporting the pedagogical direction pursued in this study.

The novelty of this research resides in three interconnected dimensions. First, it situates MICE education within an English language study program at a comprehensive public university, departing from the prevailing focus on vocational polytechnic settings. Second, it investigates Project-Based Learning as implemented in direct creative industry fieldwork environments rather than simulated classroom conditions. Third, it employs student-centered qualitative methods to generate authentic, contextualized perspectives on MICE learning efficacy and workforce preparation.

The study is guided by two research questions:

RQ1: How do students perceive the importance of MICE learning in preparing graduates for engagement in business and creative industry sectors?

RQ2: What pedagogical model do students identify as most suitable for implementing MICE learning effectively in higher education?

Indonesia's MICE industry has demonstrated robust growth, with Jakarta alone hosting 149 exhibitions and conferences in 2025, compared to 139 events in 2024, with potential annual transaction values exceeding Rp100 trillion. The Ministry of Tourism has identified workforce development through MICE as a strategic priority, targeting increased employment and enhanced national competitiveness as an ASEAN MICE destination. At the regional level, Indonesia and Thailand have been jointly appointed to develop the ASEAN Competence Standard for MICE and Event Professionals, a framework that will shape human resource development across the region and holds direct implications for domestic higher education curricula.

This research is theoretically grounded in Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), which conceptualizes learning as a cyclical process involving four interrelated stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). ELT posits that knowledge is produced through the transformation of experience, making it particularly pertinent to MICE education, which inherently demands active participation in event planning, management, and execution.

Complementing ELT, Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism holds that learning is fundamentally a social process, emerging from collaborative engagement within authentic contexts. The zone of proximal development (ZPD) concept is especially relevant: learners achieve higher-order understanding when supported by more knowledgeable individuals, whether instructors, peers, or industry practitioners. In MICE education, this scaffolding manifests through collaborative projects, professional mentoring, and authentic problem-solving in real event environments. Together, these frameworks provide theoretical justification for prioritizing experiential, project-based, and industry-embedded instructional approaches.

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) is an inquiry-oriented pedagogical model that engages students in sustained, authentic projects addressing real-world challenges. The approach emphasizes contextual, student-centered learning through systematically structured activities that integrate theoretical knowledge with professional application. Contextual inquiry, critical reflection, and iterative refinement are central features that distinguish PjBL from conventional instructional delivery (Creswell, 2012).

Within the Indonesian higher education landscape, PjBL has gained recognition as an effective model for promoting hands-on, student-directed learning. Empirical evidence from studies on creative product development and entrepreneurship subjects indicates that PjBL accounts for approximately 42% of entrepreneurial intention and 33.6% of entrepreneurial readiness among vocational students. PjBL has also been shown to strengthen creativity, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and problem-solving — competencies collectively essential for MICE industry participation.

The MICE industry requires an expansive and multilayered skill repertoire. Liu (2022) identified four categories of employability competencies for MICE professionals: Core Generic Skills (CGS), Communicative Expression Skills (CES), Practical Hands-on Skills (PHS), and MICE Professional Skills (MPS). Competencies of greatest perceived importance include communication, innovation, organizational coordination, promotional planning, project implementation, crisis management, English language proficiency, and operational management (Adys et al, 2025).

The post-pandemic context has further foregrounded competencies such as flexibility, creative and critical thinking, adaptive problem-solving, and collaborative decision-making as essential attributes for MICE professionals (Lekgau & Tichaawa, 2022). These competencies align with broader creative economy expectations, in which graduates are required to demonstrate agility and innovative capacity in environments characterized by rapid change.

METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative research design employing focus group discussions (FGD) as the primary methodological framework. Qualitative methodology was selected to enable in-depth exploration of student perceptions, attitudes, and lived experiences regarding MICE learning, facilitating the capture of contextually rich data that quantitative approaches are unlikely to yield. The FGD format additionally fostered interactive discussion and generative dialogue among participants, enabling the emergence of shared and divergent perspectives through group dynamics.

The research was conducted within the Business English Communication study program, Faculty of Languages and Literature, Universitas Negeri Makassar (UNM), South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Participants comprised sixteen sixth-semester students enrolled in MICE Class. Participants were purposively selected based on their course enrolment and expressed willingness to participate in all data collection activities.

FGD sessions were conducted with participants divided into two groups of eight students each, following the compositional guidelines recommended by Krueger and Casey (2015). Each session lasted approximately 120 minutes and was facilitated by a trained moderator who ensured

equitable participation. The FGD protocol employed open-ended questions exploring students' understanding of the MICE industry and its career relevance, perceptions of MICE learning importance for workforce preparation, experiences with current pedagogical approaches, conceptions of effective MICE pedagogy, and perceived barriers to industry preparation. All sessions were audio-recorded with informed consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim.

Following the FGD sessions, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight participants — four from each group — to allow deeper exploration of emergent themes. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and followed a flexible protocol permitting probing and clarification. Interview questions addressed participants' specific MICE learning experiences, perceived alignment between learning activities and industry demands, suggestions for pedagogical improvement, career aspirations related to MICE and creative sectors, and reflections on personal competency development.

Data analysis followed the reflexive thematic analysis framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), proceeding through six phases: data familiarization, initial code generation, theme identification, theme review, theme definition, and report production. NVivo 12 qualitative analysis software was used to manage systematic coding, applied both inductively and deductively to semantic and latent content. Codes were iteratively reviewed and clustered into coherent themes addressing the two research questions, with a thematic map developed to represent inter-theme relationships. Discrepancies in interpretation were resolved through research team consensus.

Trustworthiness was established through Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria. Credibility was supported by data source triangulation (FGD and interview data), member checking, and peer debriefing. Transferability was addressed through thick contextual description of the research setting, participants, and institutional environment. Dependability was ensured through detailed documentation of procedural decisions and an audit trail. Confirmability was maintained through reflexivity practices, including a research journal documenting researcher positionality and potential analytic biases.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Finding

RQ1: Perceived Importance of MICE Learning

All sixteen participants expressed unanimous agreement regarding the critical importance of MICE education for preparing graduates to enter the business and creative industry workforce. Within this consensus, four distinct thematic perspectives emerged, reflecting the varied dimensions through which participants conceptualized MICE learning's value.

Theme 1: Career Opportunity Expansion

Participants consistently reported that MICE education broadened their professional horizon beyond the conventional career trajectories associated with English language graduates. One participant articulated:

> *Before taking this MICE course, I only thought about becoming an English teacher or translator. Now I realize there are so many opportunities in event management, conference organizing, and business tourism. The creative industry in Indonesia is growing, and MICE professionals are in high demand. (FGD1-P4)*

Another participant situated this within the contemporary labor market:

> *Teaching jobs are becoming saturated. MICE offer alternative career paths with better financial prospects. My friend who took MICE courses last year is now working as an event coordinator for a multinational company. (FGD2-P6)*

Theme 2: Bridging Academic Knowledge with Industry Practice

Participants identified a persistent gap between theoretical knowledge accumulated across their courses and the applied skills demanded by industry. MICE learning was perceived as a bridging mechanism. One participant explained:

> *In many courses, we learn theories about communication, about language, but we never really apply them to real situations. MICE learning makes us actually use English to plan events, negotiate with clients, and present proposals. This is what industry really needs. (FGD1-P1)*

A contrasting perspective was expressed by one participant regarding curriculum positioning:

I agree that MICE is important, but learning it only in the sixth semester is too late. We should have MICE components from the second or third semester so we can practice these skills longer. (FGD2-P3)

Theme 3: Development of Creative Industry Competencies

Participants emphasized MICE learning's role in cultivating competencies directly relevant to the creative industries, including adaptability, problem-solving, and innovative thinking. One participant reflected:

The creative industry values people who can think differently, who can solve problems when things go wrong at the last minute. MICE learning trains us to handle unexpected situations. During our event project, the venue changed three days before the event, and we had to reorganize everything. (FGD1-P8)

Another participant contextualized this within Indonesia's macroeconomic landscape:

Indonesia's creative economy contributes seven percent to GDP. MICE is part of that growth because events bring together creative people, showcase creative products, and generate business opportunities. If we want to work in the creative industry, we need MICE skills. (FGD2-P1)

Theme 4: Authentic English Language Application

As students in an English language program, participants placed strong emphasis on the opportunity MICE education afforded for purposeful, contextualized English use. One participant noted:

For us as English students, MICE courses are perfect because we use English for real purposes. We write sponsorship proposals in English, we present event concepts in English, we communicate with potential clients in English. This is much more motivating than doing grammar exercises. (FGD1-P5)

This finding aligns with Nova and Lastari's (2024) assertion that the MICE sector demands professionals capable of communicating proficiently in both spoken and written English. It further corresponds with Safitry, Akbar, and Syafganti (2025), who demonstrated significant English-speaking improvements through PBL in MICE contexts.

RQ2: Most Suitable Pedagogical Model

Analysis of FGD and interview data revealed strong, convergent consensus that Project-Based Learning (PjBL) — particularly when implemented through direct industry fieldwork — constitutes the most appropriate pedagogical approach for MICE education. Five themes were identified.

Theme 1: Authentic Learning Through Real Projects

Participants consistently prioritized engagement with actual projects over hypothetical or simulated scenarios. One participant elaborated:

Learning event management by reading about it is like learning to swim without water. With PjBL, we actually organized a real event. We had to find sponsors, manage budgets, coordinate with vendors, and handle unexpected problems. This is what made us ready for industry. (FGD1-P6)

Another participant highlighted the value of direct industry interaction:

Our class project was a small exhibition showcasing student creative works. We worked with local creative entrepreneurs as exhibitors. This direct interaction with industry people taught us professional communication and negotiation skills. You cannot learn those from lectures. (FGD2-P7)

This finding aligns with Trisnayoni et al. (2023), who demonstrated that PjBL facilitates stronger alignment between student learning and real-world event organization requirements.

Theme 2: Development of Cross-Functional Skills

Participants reported that PjBL cultivated competencies beyond technical event management, including teamwork, leadership, interpersonal communication, and adaptive problem-solving. One participant reflected:

In our project group, we divided responsibilities — logistics, finances, vendor coordination, marketing. We learned to work as a team, communicate effectively, and solve problems together. When someone was absent, others stepped in. This is exactly how real events work. (FGD1-P2)

A participant who served as project leader elaborated:

I learned to delegate tasks, monitor progress, motivate the team when things got difficult, and make decisions under pressure. These are leadership skills that will benefit me in any career. (FGD2-P8)

These findings resonate with Liu's (2022) identification of Core Generic Skills and Communicative Expression Skills as high-priority MICE employability competencies.

Theme 3: Direct Industry Exposure as Essential Component

Participants unanimously affirmed that fieldwork integration within creative industries constituted an indispensable element of effective MICE education. One participant stated:

> *PjBL in the classroom is good, but PjBL in the industry is much better. Our fieldwork involved working with a local event organizer company for one week. We saw how industry professionals manage events, handle clients, and solve real problems. This direct exposure is what prepared us most. (FGD1-P3)*

Another participant emphasized networking as an additional outcome:

> *Through our fieldwork, we met event professionals who later became our mentors. Some of us have already been offered internships or freelance opportunities from these contacts. Direct industry exposure opens doors that classroom learning cannot. (FGD2-P2)*

This finding corresponds with Mariam, Wartiningsih, and Sofa's (2022) finding that structured fieldwork experiences increase student confidence, collaborative problem-solving capacity, and time management discipline.

Theme 4: Motivation and Engagement Through Tangible Outcomes

Participants reported heightened motivation and sustained engagement when their work produced visible, real-world results. One participant explained:

> *In traditional courses, I study for the exam then forget everything. But for our MICE project, we were creating something real. Seeing our event actually happen, with real attendees who enjoyed the experience, gave me immense satisfaction and pride. (FGD1-P1)*

Another participant underscored the purposeful dimension of client-facing work:

> *The fact that our project outcomes were used by actual clients gave me a sense of purpose. I was not just completing an assignment; I was providing value to someone. This is much more engaging than writing essays. (FGD2-P4)*

Theme 5: Iterative Learning and Structured Reflection

Participants valued the iterative character of PjBL, which afforded opportunities to learn from initial errors and progressively refine their practice. One participant reflected:

> *Our first project attempt had many problems — miscommunication, unrealistic budgeting, insufficient marketing. But through reflection and feedback, our second attempt was much better. Making mistakes in a safe learning environment is valuable because we learned what not to do before working in real industry. (FGD1-P5)*

Another participant elaborated on the structured reflection component:

> *Each PjBL cycle included a reflection session where we discussed what worked, what did not, and why. This helped us internalize lessons and apply them to subsequent projects. Without explicit reflection, we might repeat the same mistakes. (FGD2-P6)*

Discussion

The findings provide robust support for Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory as an appropriate conceptual lens for MICE education. Participants' accounts of PjBL consistently reflected the four ELT stages: concrete hands-on experience in real events (concrete experience), team reflection sessions and personal debriefs (reflective observation), formulation of principles drawn from project outcomes (abstract conceptualization), and application of revised strategies in subsequent projects (active experimentation). The finding that participants valued iterative mistake-making within scaffolded environments corresponds precisely with ELT's central proposition that knowledge is constructed through the purposeful transformation of experience, including failure.

The centrality participants assigned to teamwork, industry engagement, and mentored fieldwork aligns substantively with Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist framework. Participants' descriptions of learning through interaction with industry practitioners, peer co-workers, and instructional supervisors reflect the ZPD concept in operation: guided participation enabled participants to achieve professional competencies beyond what independent study could facilitate. The development of cross-functional skills — communication, leadership, adaptive problem-solving — further demonstrates the social, relational nature of professional learning in MICE contexts, extending social constructivist principles into applied industry education.

The present findings both corroborate and extend existing scholarship on MICE education. Consistent with Trisnayoni et al. (2023), the research confirmed PjBL's effectiveness in enhancing student understanding of event organization aligned with industry expectations. The contribution of this study lies in demonstrating PjBL effectiveness beyond vocational polytechnic environments, establishing its viability within comprehensive university English language programs. This extension suggests that PjBL's benefits may be transferable across institutional types and disciplinary contexts.

The finding that the majority of participants experienced notable improvements in English speaking proficiency through PjBL is consistent with Safitry, Akbar, and Syafganti (2025), who reported similar benefits at PNJ. This convergence across distinct institutional settings strengthens the evidentiary basis for PjBL as an effective approach to English language development within MICE curricula.

Whereas prior research has focused predominantly on technical event management competencies, the present study reveals that students equally value the development of soft skills — particularly communication, collaborative leadership, and adaptive problem-solving. This finding is consistent with Liu's (2022) multi-category employability framework, which identifies communicative and generic skills alongside technical and professional competencies as foundational requirements for MICE graduates.

The findings further resonate with Wijayanti and Indrayani (2023), whose investigation of MICE students' perceptions of PjBL within Indonesian higher education reported positive outcomes in both engagement and practical competency development, reinforcing the cross-institutional robustness of PjBL as a model for MICE education.

CONCLUSIONS

This study aims to see the extent of the influence of organizational culture and work life balance on employee performance with job satisfaction as an intervening variable. Based on the results of research and hypothesis testing that has been carried out, the results of the study can be concluded that organizational culture has a positive and significant effect on job satisfaction at the Agam Regency Land Office. Work life balance has a positive and significant effect on job satisfaction at the Agam Regency Land Office. Organizational culture has a positive and significant effect on employee performance at the Agam Regency Land Office. Work life balance has no significant effect on employee performance at the Agam Regency Land Office. Job satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on employee performance at the Agam Regency Land Office. Organizational culture has a positive and significant effect on employee performance through job satisfaction as intervening at the Agam Regency Land Office. Work life balance has a positive and significant effect on employee performance through job satisfaction as intervening at the Agam Regency Land Office.

This study investigated the perceived importance of MICE learning in preparing university graduates for engagement in Indonesia's business and creative industry workforce, while identifying the most pedagogically appropriate instructional model for higher education implementation. Conducted within the English Study Program at Universitas Negeri Makassar, the research employed focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews with sixteen sixth-semester students, analyzed through Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis framework.

The findings reveal that MICE education is unanimously regarded as essential to graduate workforce readiness, fulfilling functions that include career pathway diversification, practical English language application, creative competency development, and the bridging of academic theory with professional practice. Project-Based Learning — particularly when implemented in direct partnership with creative industry practitioners — was identified as the most effective pedagogical model, generating benefits in authentic skill acquisition, cross-functional competency development, professional motivation, and reflective learning.

This research makes three contributions to the existing literature. First, it extends MICE education research from vocational polytechnic settings into comprehensive university English language programs. Second, it provides empirical, student-centered evidence for PjBL as an effective and contextually appropriate instructional approach within Indonesian higher education. Third, it

generates practical recommendations grounded in authentic student perspectives for curriculum development, industry partnership design, and assessment reform.

Higher education institutions seeking to prepare graduates for the expanding MICE and creative industries are encouraged to integrate PjBL-informed curricula featuring authentic project engagement, structured industry fieldwork, formalized reflection, and holistic competency assessment. Such approaches hold the potential to produce graduates who are not merely conversant with MICE principles, but genuinely equipped to contribute with confidence and capability to Indonesia's dynamic creative industry workforce.

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