



Article

Enhancing Learning in Tourism Education by Combining Learning by Doing and Team Coaching

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Abstract: Learning by doing (LBD) and team coaching are experiential learning methods that can be used to enhance the depth of learning, motivation, and engagement in tourism education. This study explores the combined use of the two methodologies and reports on the experience of 42 students who participated in a practical case dealing with the strategic planning for sustainable tourism in a small town in Spain as a part of their undergraduate tourism education. The results obtained after the project evaluation confirm that LBD combined with team coaching is considered a valuable strategy for enhancing learning. Regarding the LBD method, students especially valued the opportunity to work within professional realities and exchange ideas with their classmates. Participants perceived team coaching as a valuable tool for enhancing team performance, communication, self-awareness (and that of others), conflict management, and problem-solving during project development. Professors and agents from public institutions involved in the project reported that students' proposals were highly applicable and close to reality, and they agreed that the combination of LBD and team coaching improved the quality of the course assignments.



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1. Introduction

European universities have been engaged in an intense debate regarding the need to change the teaching methods in traditional university education. As stated by Fernández-Villarán et al. [1], several factors have led to the need for this change. One factor is the adaptation of university studies to the European Higher Education Area, which prioritizes the acquisition of skills over content learning and establishes the weightage of subjects based on the European credit system (ECTS). The second factor is that students have to become active learners who construct knowledge in an individual or collaborative way and develop self-directed learning skills [2]. The third factor refers to the new generation of students who have grown up in a technology-infused world and are increasingly challenging educators to design successful academic courses [3]. Finally, another factor is the incorporation of technology and new market needs into the post-COVID-19 tourism scenario.

This change in the environment highlights the need for a change in the organizational model of universities. The importance of strengthening the relationship between universities and companies is evident, aiming at a fluid relationship between the two, not only to ensure the development of professional skills but also to facilitate the incorporation of future graduates into the professional world [3–5].

Along with the need for organizational change, universities need to implement a more flexible and versatile curricular model that responds to market needs [6]. The market stresses the need for professionals with competent soft skills. In recent years, social competences, also called transversal competences or soft skills, have become more important for companies as their experience shows that brilliant and intelligent professionals, who may have excellent technical skills, may not be able to participate in team work, handle

leadership responsibilities, or not be motivated to collaborate with others, which then leads to poor performance and lowers productivity. Thus, soft skills such as empathy, attitude, passion, team management, communication skills, creativity, and resilience or adaptability are becoming increasingly important competences in the profile of tourism professionals [3].

The acquisition of these competences requires an alternative to the existing traditional, rigid, static, and closed university teaching model. A new and more dynamic model, in which both the professors and the students take on new roles, is therefore needed [6]. In this model, the students become active agents and protagonists in their own learning, while the professor offers the instruments needed to think and reach conclusions in order to enable students to identify the possible consequences; this shall then promote the active participation of students and their own search for responses [7].

This new model requires active teaching and learning methodologies that stimulate analysis and reflection, improve the ability to critically analyze situations, and develop reasoning abilities in students. Consequently, the need to introduce innovative teaching methods and active methodologies that put the student at the center of learning and convert the professor into a facilitator, guide, and companion in the process is highlighted. Thus, the following research question has been formulated: How can experiential learning methodologies be implemented in tourism education?

Some active teaching and learning methodologies take advantage of technologies to generate virtual learning environments that support the students' immersion and participation. In this regard, serious games, game-based learning, and gamification have been proved to be effective in helping students accomplish learning objectives and in affecting motivation and behavior [8,9] by engaging them in the narrative of the game or by challenging them as players [10]. Game-based learning is widely used in tourism studies [11–13]. It is applied to learning areas such as cultural tourism [14] or natural tourism [15], and in learning strategic management techniques such as tourism marketing [14,16] or destination management. Other active methodologies, such as “learning by doing” (LBD) or “team coaching”, make use of real-life contexts and challenges to enhance learning. These methodologies are widely used, but the authors are not aware of the existence of data regarding the combined use of both teaching and learning strategies. This study seeks to address this gap in the literature.

This study is based on the understanding that the combined use of both methodologies is necessary as LBD requires a follow-up with the students. According to Gossiaux [17], the four pedagogical aspects that are significant in the conception of LBD are real-life simulation, management of non-successes, result requirement, and the monitoring of students' progress. Team coaching is a suitable methodology that can be used to monitor progress. This article demonstrates the potential of the combined use of “LBD” and “team coaching” in the acquisition of soft skills by students pursuing a degree in tourism at university.

1.1. The Combined Use of LBD and Team Coaching

1.1.1. Learning by Doing

Different terms are used to refer to the LBD methodology, such as experiential learning, cooperative learning, adventure learning, or apprenticeship. These focus on student learning and reflection on their experience to gain practical knowledge and expertise. This should not be confused with active learning, which includes methods that are intended to ensure a better understanding of the content, such as reading, debating, or problem-solving activities [3].

Experiential learning, or LBD, has been defined by the Simon Fraser University [18] as “the strategic, active engagement of students in opportunities to learn through doing, and reflection on those activities, which empowers them to apply their theoretical knowledge to practical endeavors in a multitude of settings inside and outside of the classroom”.

There is a wide range of design models that attempt to embed learning within real-world contexts, including laboratory sessions, workshop or studio work, apprenticeships, problem-based learning, case-based learning, project-based learning, inquiry-based learning, and cooperative (work- or community-based) learning. As explained by Bradberry and de Maio [19], these models are based on a specific experiences that give students the opportunity to participate in an activity. LBD is organized around problems that students will meet in their professional lives. This is followed by a reflection stage that allows students to think about the experience and share their reactions and observations, and finally, an applied component that allows students to apply what they have learned to a new situation.

The tourism industry involves a wide range of businesses dedicated to the service of people away from home. The product in this case is intangible, and as a result, creativity, emotional intelligence, teamwork, problem-solving abilities, adaptability, and leadership skills as well as technical skills are important. In general, these skills are difficult to learn in a classroom setting. Therefore, experts recommend that students should have hands-on experience within the industry alongside the coursework at a university [20,21].

Lee [22] suggests that experiential learning benefits in such a way that the student leaves the experience with a much “deeper understanding of the soft skills employers in today’s market so desperately seek” (p. 39). In this form of learning, students are not only able to apply the theory learned in the classroom and enhance their technical skills, but they also learn to work with a multitude of people and personality types and deal with issues on the human side of the business.

Most authors agree that learning by doing often leads to higher levels of motivation [23–26]. In some cases, experiential learning opportunities in the form of internships and role-playing simulations advance civic engagement, career development, cultural and community awareness, appreciation of diversity, and leadership skills [27,28]; they also create greater ownership of the whole process [23].

It is worth noting the value of reflective practice for both personal and professional growth in a range of practice settings [29]. Most of the LBD examples found in the field of tourism are in the area of marketing, business, or hospitality. Dev [30] used an experiment in a marketing class to test the theory that students would learn more from the course by working with actual marketing firms for a course project. The outcome indicated that the students’ confidence level in marketing abilities and creativity significantly increased. Jack [31] applied this to the hospitality industry, and based on student perceptions, it was concluded that the internship program improved leadership, creativity, and interpersonal communication in addition to specific administrative and management skills. Černá [32] demonstrated, by means of an example from FH Wien, how the team skills of students pursuing their bachelor’s degree in the field of tourism can be increased by problem-based learning. Morellato [33] suggested that cooperative learning may be used to develop digital competences. For the development of intrapersonal skills, Williams and Best [34] and Liang, Caton, and Hill [35] agreed on the suitability of travel and the internationalization of the curriculum. Coghlan [36] applied scenario-based learning to teach tourism management at the master’s level, and the results suggested that it is useful in developing critical thinking with regard to tourism and in building teamwork. Sitompul et al. [37] developed hard skills, soft skills, and working qualities. Morosan, Lawson, and Whalen [38] used active learning activities to improve technical skills, leadership, teamwork, communication, openness to diversity, and creativity. Matteucci and Aubke [39] demonstrated that service learning in tourism management facilitated self-awareness, confidence, self-esteem, and stress-resistance, as well as enhanced communication and problem-solving skills. Palmer-Silveira [40] used LBD in a tourism master’s program to improve communication skills.

These experiences suggest that the application of LBD methodologies may improve motivation, intrapersonal skills, creativity, and communication. However, experiential learning, or LBD, has the following limitations [23,41]:

- Motivation and emotional involvement. Some students show over-motivation. In many cases, some students will use their better preparation, superior communication and persuasion skills, extroverted personality, reputation, or seniority to dominate others and impose their preferred solutions.
- Uncertainty. Instructors structure and frame the problem. However, the student is an active part of the process and responsible for the content and learning dynamics. Sometimes the problem is not clearly defined, therefore leading to confusion and even disorientation.
- Alienation. This stems from a lack of interest, communication problems, not knowing how to work in a team, or the personal characteristics of the students (shyness, apathy, etc.).
- Hostility. Although in general, most students prefer LBD, some students are not comfortable with experiential learning and prefer traditional methods.

To reduce the impact of the above-stated issues, LBD has been combined with team coaching in the described project.

1.1.2. Facilitating LBD through Team Coaching

Coaching can be broadly defined as a powerful technique or tool for change that allows a person to be guided to success [42]. It involves everything that is carried out to explore the potential in another person [43] and to develop their skills [44]. It is therefore a systematized learning process oriented toward change that provides a series of specific tools depending on the areas of interest. In the workplace, coaching refers to a structured process that is aimed at enabling the development of specific factors of a professional's practice [45]. Coaching leads to individual and organizational benefits through challenge and support [46]. Individuals may display increased levels of personal confidence, competence, and personal agency, while the employees' ability to adapt to new roles or tasks may increase within organizations. Previous research has analyzed the impact of team coaching on team performance and has established its relationship with team effectiveness, effort, skills and knowledge [47], better written products [48] as well as safety and learning [49].

Although coaching has become a familiar term in organizations, research and practice in the context of higher education is still scarce. Coaching has been primarily used within the educational context and is mainly focused on maximizing student learning; this is typically accomplished through the promotion of professors' capacity to evaluate their own teaching practices and develop self-monitoring [50–52] and through observation, feedback, support, and the promotion of natural learning [53]. Recently, there has been a move in education toward creating a coaching role [54], and professors are increasingly seen as coaches that encourage students "to learn rather than teach them" [44] (p. 8). In this context, Whitworth, Kimsey-House, and Sandahl [55] stated that coaching can be seen as a cycle of action and learning combined to enable change, and the coach will thus be in charge of deepening the learning [55]. Therefore, coaching can be seen as an effective tool to create collaborative, active, and engaging learning methodologies [56].

Focused on this trend, in the case presented, the instructor played the role of a team coach that facilitated LBD and utilized the coaching process that aimed to promote effectiveness and performance. Team coaching can enhance students' effort, review or create strategies, and takes into consideration the knowledge and skills of the team members to accomplish the team's work. Furthermore, through direct interaction with the team, it can assist in member coordination and can foster the effective use of collective resources to carry out the team tasks [57].

2. Project Design

The literature described above reveals that LBD and coaching separately have their own unique benefits, and that both are effective in increasing learning. However, there is no evidence of the simultaneous implementation of both in undergraduate tourism studies.

The purpose of this study is to describe and evaluate a project based on the combined use of LBD and team coaching and its effects on the learning process. An exploratory case-study design was used to accomplish this. All aspects of this study were approved by the university, and consent for participation was received from all participants prior to any data collection.

The project consisted of developing a strategic tourism plan for a local tourist destination in northern Spain. The project was transversally developed in three subjects, which are taught in the first semester of the third year of the bachelor's program in tourism. The project was included in the three subjects' syllabus planning and development. These are People Management (PM), the subject that implements coaching as a learning methodology; Tourism and Digital Marketing (TDM); and Tourism Policies (TP), which use the LBD methodology for the development of the strategic tourism plan.

Figure 1 summarizes the project design and development, including the stakeholders involved, the proposed methodology, and the structure and content of the sessions.

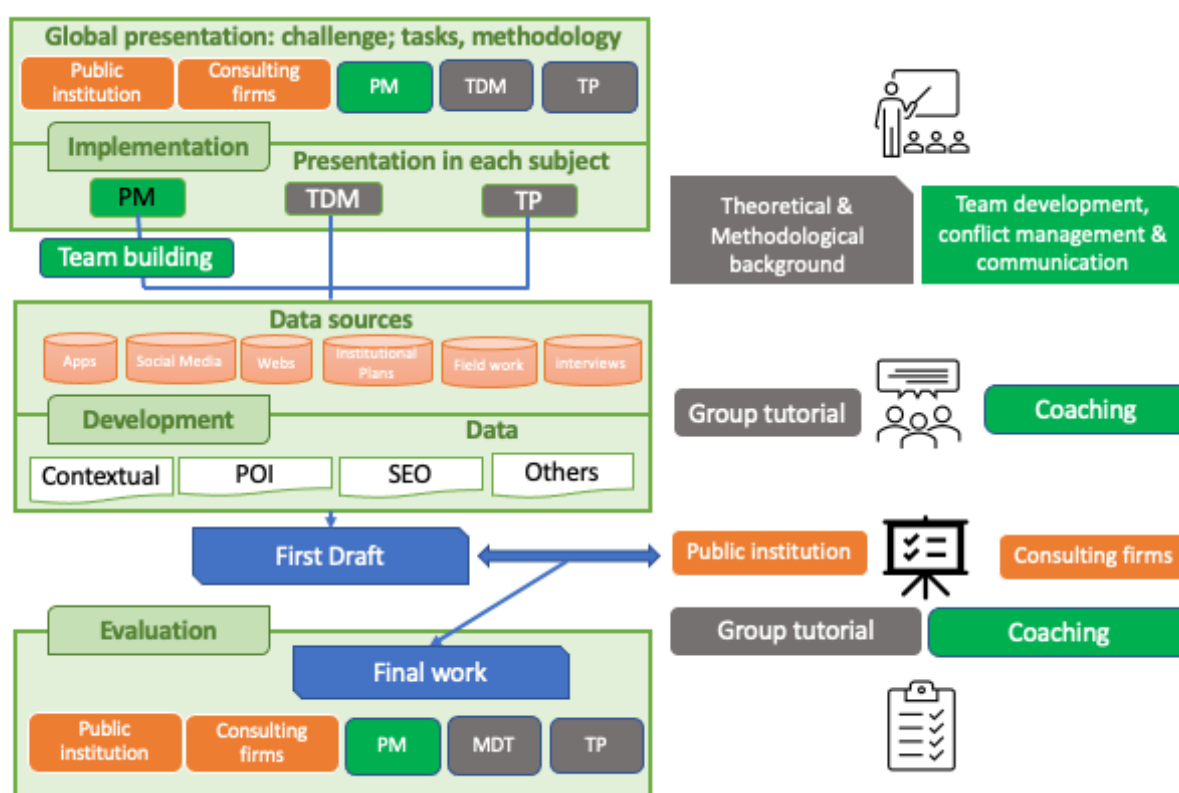


Figure 1. Project design.

The multidisciplinary and multidimensional character of tourism [49] includes the interaction between tourists, local population, public administration, and tourism companies. Based on this, the LBD and coaching project included four types of actors that facilitated the learning process: (1) public institutions or local government, (2) tourism consulting firms, (3) university professors in charge of People Management (PM), Tourism Digital Marketing (TDM), and Tourism Policy (TP) subjects; and (4) students.

The project was designed with the participation of the local government and tourism consulting firms. Tourist agents, together with the professors of the Tourism Marketing and Tourism Policy subjects, were in charge of presenting the task to the students as well as the methodological guidelines for its resolution. Professors made sure that there was cohesion and communication between the students and the tourism stakeholders. Businesspeople and local government staff provided essential information for the project development during the sessions scheduled throughout the semester. Each group was randomly assigned

to develop a tourism strategic plan related to one of the different types of tourism: cultural tourism, nature tourism, shopping tourism, industrial tourism, and business tourism, which was defined by professors in collaboration with the aforementioned agents.

For her part, the professor in charge of People Management arranged the students' workgroups and managed the intragroup communication strategies and conflicts. The students were divided into five small groups (six to eight students) [27], to whom the professors explained the learning and teaching strategies.

The students participated in the diagnosis phase of the tourism strategic plan and carried out an analysis of the destination as well as of the nearby destinations that are reference points for the local destination under study. As illustrated in Figure 1, students used both secondary sources (apps, social media, websites, etc.) and primary sources (contextual data, points of tourist interest (POI) data, web positioning (SEO), among others).

The monitoring process was carried out through two methodologies: group tutorials and coaching sessions. Group support tutorials were carried out for six days, interspersed throughout the development of the LBD project. The students developed the technical content of the LBD project with the support of the university professors in the tourism degree program and other tourism agents involved in group tutorials. Three coaching sessions were carried out with each group during the development of the LBD project. The coaching sessions focused on team building, conflict management, and communication. A specific group methodology was developed for the coaching process. The coaches focused on establishing the conditions under which students, working in teams, could learn from each other through questions and support. The sessions began with brief introductions, where the participants addressed topics related to teamwork and team development. The students were allowed to ask questions to clarify the problem and were invited to share reflections and come up with solutions to the problem presented. All students participated in the coaching sessions by asking questions and sharing reflections.

Project results were presented in class at the end of the semester. All the tourism institutions and professors involved in the LBD and coaching project were invited to attend the presentations of the student groups and to share their opinions on the results. The feedback allowed the students to improve their proposals and submit a final version, including the recommendations and interests of the tourism stakeholders.

After the formal presentations, the students and professors analyzed and evaluated the project according to the requirements and evaluation criteria established at the beginning of the course. In addition, both the professors and the local tourism stakeholders formulated their assessments, and where appropriate, offered guidelines for improvement.

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample

All students who participated in the project also participated in the evaluation process concerning the effects of the combined use of LBD and team coaching on learning enhancement. The selected participants ($n = 42$) were third-year tourism degree students enrolled in the three courses which implemented the LBD and team coaching methodology: People Management (PM), Tourism and Digital Marketing (TDM), and Tourism Policies (TP). The nonprobability convenience sample was defined on the basis of these three criteria: (1) students are enrolled in the three courses integrated into the university's Learning Model, (2) third-year students are assumed to have a certain degree of maturity, and (3) the soft skills developed in these subjects are decision making and creativity, which are driven by LBD and team coaching. Students were, on average, 20.35 years old ($SD = 0.79$) and predominantly female (77%); most of them were Spanish, except for five students from Austria, Italy, Mexico, and Peru. A total of 61% had work experience. The students developed an LBD project as part of the course assignments and received team coaching during the process.

3.2. Project Evaluation

Three evaluation techniques were used for the evaluation of the LBD and coaching project process and implementation: a group coaching evaluation session, a project evaluation survey, and an educational stakeholder evaluation meeting. The choice of these techniques was based on the objectives of the project and the requirement to obtain information about the process and team dynamics of each of the groups.

Firstly, an evaluation session was used to qualitatively assess the role of team coaching as a facilitator of LBD projects and the impact of both methodologies on learning enhancement. The following themes were considered in the evaluation session: (1) positive aspects of team coaching, (2) negative aspects of team coaching, (3) influence of team coaching on team performance and engagement, and (4) recommendations that would enhance team performance and engagement.

Secondly, the students were asked to respond to a questionnaire to evaluate the overall strengths and areas for improvement of LBD and coaching as a mixed-learning methodology. The survey was based on the study by Rué et al. [58], which had previously been used to evaluate the learning outcomes of similar activities produced by the involved students. about the project. The questionnaire included a section about sociodemographic data (sex, age, work experience, and nationality) and nineteen items about the project. More specifically, the questionnaire included one item about students' motivation ("How would you rate your motivation?"), one item about students' perceived performance ("How would you rate your team's overall performance?"), and seventeen items about the learning and teaching methodology (e.g., "The project has allowed me to understand the theoretical background of the subjects"; "The professors provided accessible tutorial support"). Additionally, three items about collaboration with public institutions were included (e.g., "The public institutions provided helpful feedback"). The participants responded using a five-point Likert-type scale, from 1 (totally disagree/poor) to 5 (totally agree/excellent). The questionnaire included two open-ended questions about weaknesses and suggestions for improvement.

Additionally, at the end of the semester, the professors and tourism agents from public institutions involved in the project evaluated the project development process and outcomes in a group meeting.

4. Results

Results on the capacity of the joint LBD and coaching methodology to enhance learning are derived from the data obtained in the evaluation session. These findings are accompanied by the results obtained from the questionnaire, which are understood as exploratory data (shown in Table 1), and the main conclusions from the educational stakeholders evaluation meeting.

Students' comments, expressed in the evaluation session, were analyzed using thematic analysis in order to identify, analyze, and report themes within our data [59]. The six phases proposed by Braun and Clarke [59] were followed. In phase 1, we read students' responses several times, took notes, and marked ideas for coding. In phase 2, a formal coding process was conducted. In phase 3, codes featuring similar contents were combined into themes. In phase 4, the themes were reviewed, and coherence and distinctiveness were assessed. In phase 5, the themes were defined and named, and in phase 6, the final analysis was conducted, selecting the most representative examples. To ensure the reliability of the analysis, the data were analyzed by the three authors independently, and an additional trained researcher was contacted for comparative purposes.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics derived from the survey data.

Items	M	SD
Motivation	3.69	1.01
Perceived team performance	3.96	0.66
Learning-teaching methodology	3.80	0.92
<i>I understand the evaluation criteria</i>	4.46	0.50
<i>The learning objectives are clear</i>	4.27	0.66
<i>The professors provided accessible tutorial support</i>	4.19	0.80
<i>The project has allowed me to apply what I studied to real situations</i>	4.15	0.73
<i>I have analyzed information and developed conclusions</i>	4.12	0.51
<i>The project has allowed me to work on professional realities</i>	4.08	0.84
<i>The project has allowed me to exchange ideas and learn with my classmates</i>	4.04	0.66
<i>I have been able to design and develop proposals</i>	4.04	0.72
<i>I have had spaces for personal initiative</i>	4.00	0.69
<i>I have been able to develop activities with my own criteria</i>	3.77	0.81
<i>The project has allowed me to manage personal relationships in the work carried out</i>	3.73	0.91
<i>The project has allowed me to relate the new information to what I already knew</i>	3.58	0.75
<i>I had sufficient information and documents to carry out the activity</i>	3.50	1.03
<i>The project has allowed me to understand the theoretical background of the subjects</i>	3.38	1.02
<i>The workload was adequate for the objectives</i>	3.23	1.27
<i>The amount of work was adequate</i>	3.00	1.16
<i>Coordination between courses has been adequate</i>	2.96	1.11
Collaboration with public institutions	3.58	1.00
<i>The public institutions provided helpful feedback</i>	3.69	0.67
<i>The experience exchange with the public institutions has been enriching</i>	3.58	1.13
<i>The public institutions have been accessible and supportive</i>	3.46	1.14

4.1. Positive Aspects of Team Coaching and LBD

In the evaluation session, fifty-eight comments about the positive aspects of team coaching were collected. Three main themes and six subthemes were identified for the positive aspects identified by the participants (Table 2).

Table 2. Students' perception of the positive aspects of team coaching.

Theme	Subtheme	Definition
Team performance	Group dynamics	Students find that group coaching enhances group dynamics
	Communication	Students find that group coaching fosters communication among team members
	Awareness of self and others	Students find that group coaching helps them know and understand themselves and others
	Conflict management	Students find that group coaching helps to find solutions to problems
Coach	Support from the coach	Students value the support and guidance of the coach
Skill development	Development of individual skills	Students find that group coaching is helpful for developing individual skills

4.1.1. Team Performance and Engagement

In line with research that demonstrates the impact of coaching on team performance [47–49], students expressed that group coaching enhanced team performance, for example, by supporting group dynamics, as two students observed:

"I think that we learned to connect and work better" (S4#)

"It has helped define our common goal" (S9#)

Fostering communication among team members was another positive aspect identified by students:

“Group coaching encourages open conversations” (S11#)

“We had serious and deep conversations” (S14#)

Students also indicated that group coaching helped them increase their awareness of self and others. For example:

“We know ourselves and others better” (S21#)

“We know each other better and we understand the positive aspects of each one” (S24#)

More specifically, forty-two comments were collected about the influence of team coaching on team performance and engagement. Two themes and five subthemes were identified (Table 3). As indicated in Tables 2 and 3, the students identified communication, awareness of self and others, and conflict management as positive aspects of team coaching as well as key elements that foster team performance.

Table 3. Students’ perception of the influence of team coaching on team performance and engagement.

Theme	Subtheme	Definition
Team performance	Communication	Students find that group coaching fosters team performance through the improvement of communication among team members
	Awareness of self and others	Students find that group coaching supports team performance through a deeper understanding of themselves and others
	Conflict management	Students find that group coaching enhances team performance by supporting problem-solving processes
Engagement	Motivation	Students find that group coaching improves students’ engagement by increasing their motivation
	Group cohesion	Students find that group coaching improves students’ engagement by increasing their group cohesion

Consistent with previous research [47], the students expressed that group coaching enhanced team performance in several ways; first, by supporting communication among team members, for example:

“Group coaching enhanced transparency and improved our communication, leading to better outcomes” (S105#)

Second, the students perceived that group coaching contributed to team performance by helping them increase their awareness of themselves and of others:

“Knowing the roles of each member is useful to work in a more efficient way” (S112#)

Third, the students indicated that the sessions supported problem solving. For example:

“We worked better, because even if we had a team crisis, after these sessions and our own meeting we could solve the situation” (S97#)

The questionnaire results support these findings, since, as shown in Table 1, the students perceived that the methodology enhances group performance ($M = 3.96$; $SD = 0.66$).

In line with previous research [46], the students expressed that group coaching supported their engagement in the project by improving team members’ motivation and participation. For example:

“I think that it motivated us and made us participate more in the group, and as a consequence, we were more engaged” (S114#)

“Group coaching improved the motivation level of the team, and we were more committed to the assignments” (S115#)

Moreover, the students indicated that their engagement was enhanced through team cohesion. For example:

“It was helpful for improving our cohesiveness” (S118#)

“The sessions made the group stronger, and we felt part of something important” (S120#)

Consistent with the literature on the impact of learning by doing on motivation [23–26], the results of the survey (see Table 1) also point out the positive role of the LBD methodology in conjunction with coaching in improving motivation ($M = 3.69$; $SD = 1.01$). Moreover, in the educational stakeholders evaluation meeting, the professors and tourism agents agreed that the participants were highly motivated towards the assignments and engaged during the different phases of the project.

4.1.2. Coach

In terms of the interaction with the coach, the students highly valued having the time to talk about their problems, and that they were able to solve them with external help and were also offered an external viewpoint, for example:

“It was a nice time to talk about our problems and solve them with external help” (S34#)

“We could talk about and discuss our problems and we had a professional opinion” (S35#)

Conflict management was identified as a positive aspect of team coaching, as one student observed:

“Team coaching was helpful in finding solutions to problems”

4.1.3. Skills Development

The participants perceived that the coach sessions supported their individual skill development. For example:

“It has improved our behavior and individual skills” (S47#)

“It improved our confidence” (S48#)

The acquisition of soft skills that employers are looking for in today’s tourism market [22] was reinforced by combining coaching and LBD. Table 1 shows the students’ perception of the usefulness of the LBD methodology for skills acquisition.

Regarding the evaluation by educational stakeholders, the tourism agents perceived that the students’ proposals were highly applicable and close to reality. The professors agreed that the combination of LBD and team coaching improved the quality of the course assignments.

4.2. Negative Aspects of Team Coaching

Twenty-three comments about the negative aspects of team coaching were collected. Three main themes were identified (Table 4).

Table 4. Students’ perception of the negative aspects of team coaching.

Theme	Definition
Participation	Students find that some students did not participate in the sessions
Duration	Students find that the number of sessions was inadequate
Skill development	Students find that group coaching is helpful for developing individual skills

Students indicated that one of the negative aspects of group coaching was that some team members did not participate in the sessions. For example:

“Not everyone participated in the sessions” (S58#)

“Not all the members gave an opinion in each coaching session” (S59#)

Students expressed that the duration of the group coaching sessions was not adequate. Some students perceived that the number of sessions was insufficient, for example:

“The team coaching process was too short” (S65#)

“There were not enough sessions” (S66#)

In contrast, other students found that the sessions were time consuming, for example:

“Maybe it was a little time consuming” (S68#)

Table 1 shows low scores in the evaluation survey (note that the standard deviations are high) regarding workload. Both the duration and the coordination between the three subjects appear as areas for improvement to be considered.

Moreover, a lack of coordination between the courses, especially in terms of time management and feedback, was also reported by professors in the educational stakeholders evaluation meeting.

4.3. Recommendations to Enhance Learning by the Combination of Learning by Doing and Coaching

With respect to student recommendations as to what would enhance learning, the students highlighted issues related to team performance and engagement. Twenty-nine comments were registered, and four themes were identified (Table 5).

Table 5. Students’ recommendations.

Theme	Definition
Duration	Students find that increasing the duration of group coaching sessions would be helpful
Participation	Students find that encouraging participation of team members would be helpful
Content	Students indicate that the content of the sessions should focus on task-related issues
Training	Students find that providing training to students would be helpful

First, the students expressed that they would like to have more sessions and to include group coaching in all the subjects. For example:

“Having more sessions would be helpful for team performance and engagement” (S129#)

“I would like to have coaching sessions in all subjects” (S123#)

Second, the students indicated that encouraging participation of all members would be helpful. For example:

“The instructor should encourage all the participants to speak in the coaching sessions at least for two minutes or have at least two compulsory minutes each to speak in every session. That would improve our results and motivation” (S137#)

“The instructor should take more control of the members that do not speak in the sessions to make sure that we are all engaged” (S140#)

Third, the students expressed that the content of the sessions should focus more on task-related issues. For example:

“Focus the coaching more on the explanation of tasks and activities rather than on team’s internal situation” (S142#)

Fourth, the students perceived that training them for the coaching process would be helpful. For example:

“Encourage students to be open-minded and resourceful to take advantage of the sessions” (S144#)

“Encourage students to let all emotions out, leave it all inside the sessions and not to take it personally” (S145#)

5. Discussion

This paper explores the value of combining real-life, client-sponsored, problem solving-based projects and coaching, and it presents a blueprint for their successful implementation as the capstone of different subjects. Therefore, the main contribution of this study is the combination of LBD and coaching as a teaching and learning strategy that enhances learning, motivation, and engagement in tourism undergraduate education.

This study also contributes to the practical understanding and implementation of LBD and coaching. First, an inductive understanding of LBD and coaching as learning and teaching methods is proposed. They are not conceived as a synonym for active learning or the practical application of what was previously learned in the classroom in real-life scenarios. They are understood as experiential learning because the problem posed by the tourism sector is put at the service of learning, and the subjects, each from their own perspective, are put at the service of solving the problem. Thus, LBD focused on solving the problem, and coaching aimed at supporting team management throughout the process. Second, unlike other proposals that chose to carry out LBD outside the classroom setting, through internships or study trips, the opening of the university to the tourism sector was proposed. The implementation was possible due to the participation of different stakeholders in the learning process. The joint participation of tourism professionals, professors, and coaches in the classroom became a key point. In the first place, the collaboration between the tourism sector and the university was understood to be a great opportunity for students to have a learning-by-doing experience that would enhance the traditional way of teaching. The students under study especially valued the role of professionals, the opportunity to work with real problems, and the exchange of ideas with professionals and among colleagues. The results associated with the contact with the human aspect of business, as obtained by Lee [22] regarding experiential learning benefits, were thus replicated. Secondly, the role of the team coach was viewed as essential in reinforcing instrumental competencies such as enhancing team performance, communication, awareness of self (and others), conflict management, and problem solving. In fact, most participants agreed that team coaching enhanced performance by supporting problem solving and communication and encouraged engagement by improving motivation and team cohesion. Finally, the role of professors was crucial in three different moments of the learning process. In the planning stage, a project that was replicable in other degree subjects was designed. The project was able to combine the soft and hard skills that the students had to acquire in the three different subjects owing to the common use of the combined LBD and coaching strategy. In the operational stage, the learning guide for the three subjects was jointly defined. Thus, all the three subjects shared the same schedule concerning problem presentation, theoretical and methodological support, intermediate feedback and coaching sessions, and presentation of deliverables. In the evaluation stage, the project resulting from the resolution of the problem was considered as an evaluation tool for the three subjects as well as in its presentation to the tourism professionals who formulated the problem.

Moreover, the study sought to examine the students' perceived effectiveness of the combination of learning by doing (LBD) and coaching as learning and teaching techniques. Our contribution lies in the fact that the combination of both techniques—as revealed by the evaluations provided by the students, professors, and tourism agents—may enhance the learning process by combining the benefits of both.

In light of the students' perceptions, the combination of LBD with team coaching may enhance the acquisition of interpersonal skills that “require personal and relational skills. These skills refer to the ability required to express one's own feelings and emotions, making it possible to work together towards common goals” [60] (p. 29). In line with previous studies [31,36,38–40,47], the students valued, as highly relevant learning outcomes of LBD in combination with team coaching, the acquisition of competencies such as learning motivation [23–26], team performance [32,38,47], and team engagement [57]. Additionally, students positively valued the acquisition of instrumental competencies “that function as a means to an end. That is, those that require a combination of manual skills

and cognitive abilities” [60] (p. 29), such as analytical thinking (analyzing information, designing proposals) or critical thinking (drawing conclusions). Furthermore, the students agreed with the authors [23] that experiential learning produces a greater appropriation of the entire process. In this regard, it is worth noting that the students’ evaluations also include references to systemic competences (creativity, enhancement of own criteria, or personal initiative).

In addition, feedback from professors and tourism agents reinforced the students’ perceptions regarding the effectiveness of LBD and team coaching as experiential learning methods that can be used to enhance the depth of learning, motivation, and engagement in tourism education.

Limitations and Future Research

The study presents some limitations that are understood as future lines of research that will allow for the consolidation of the joint use of LBD and coaching as a methodology that improves learning.

The study was designed with the use of nonprobability convenience sampling. The sample is made up of university tourism students that were selected because they were simultaneously studying the three subjects involved in the mixed LBD and coaching methodology. Therefore, they only represent a limited number of tourism students and lack enough representation to provide sufficient empirical evidence necessary for generalizing or inferring survey results. Consequently, there is a need for a future study to quantitatively test the validity and reliability of the combined use of team coaching and LBD. However, it is worth noting that the survey technique was combined with a group evaluation involving students who contributed to opening up discussions on the potential of experiential learning methods (LBD together with coaching) in order to improve the depth of learning, motivation, and commitment in tourism education. The purpose of the group evaluation was to identify and understand the students’ perceptions of the learning effects of LBD in combination with coaching, and it allowed us to qualitatively identify the students’ perceptions regarding motivation towards learning, perceived team performance, usefulness of the experiential learning methodology, and collaboration with public institutions. The group evaluation with the students and the evaluation sessions held with professors and tourist agents facilitated the collation of the results of the survey, which by themselves lack validity. Finally, it was verified that the trend pointed out in the results of the survey administered to the students is in line with the results obtained by Rué [58] when using the same questionnaire in a representative sample of students.

Moreover, further research would be necessary to identify the way to avoid the limitations of LBD and coaching regarding the uncertainty perceived by the students. The students expressed their ideas concerning the insufficient coordination between the stakeholders involved in LBD and coaching. As a consequence, the need to investigate the definition of collaboration and governance patterns among the different participating agents became evident. In addition, the amount of time dedicated to addressing the problem was also perceived as insufficient and contributed to increasing the students’ uncertainty. The subjective perception of time management should be measured to improve their competence in this regard and their perception of the amount of time available. This point encourages the future inclusion of instruments for measuring time management, such as the TSQ [61], TMQ [62], or TMBQ [63], and based on the results, we may further examine the effectiveness of LBD and coaching in helping students to improve their time management skills.

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