The Role of English as a Medium for Cultural Interpretation in Penglipuran Tourism Village: A Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) Analysis

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Abstract. In cultural tourism destinations, language functions not only as a means of conveying practical information but also as a vehicle for making the underlying meanings of objects and rituals accessible to foreign tourists. This study examines the impact of English usage on the cultural tourism experience in Penglipuran Tourism Village, Bangli, Bali, with particular emphasis on the mediating roles of cultural interpretation quality and tourists' cultural understanding. Data were collected from 150 foreign tourists using a Likert-scale questionnaire (1–5) through purposive sampling and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS). The use of English significantly influences the quality of cultural interpretation ($\beta = 0.514$); interpretation quality subsequently affects tourists' cultural understanding ($\beta = 0.541$); and cultural understanding is identified as the strongest determinant of the cultural tourism experience ($\beta = 0.562$). The effect of language on experience is indirect and is sequentially mediated by these two pathways ($\beta = 0.156$; $p < 0.001$). These findings indicate that English language proficiency in cultural destinations should be conceptualized as a capacity for cultural interpretation rather than merely as a service skill, in order to sustain the quality and longevity of cultural tourism.

Keywords: Cultural Interpretation, Cultural Tourism Experiences, Cultural Understanding of Tourists, English, Penglipuran Tourism Village

1 Introduction

Visits by foreign tourists to cultural destinations require more than courteous service. The impression formed during a visit to a traditional house or a ceremony depends not only on visual observation but also on the clarity with which underlying meanings are communicated. As the predominant language in international tourism, English carries local values and philosophies to foreign visitors. The narrative use of language significantly influences tourists' responses to destinations (Wang et al., 2025), and foreign-language explanations at heritage sites are consistently linked to the depth of interpretation visitors achieve (Quétel-Brunner & Griffin, 2014).

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Cultural interpretation drives this process. Effective explanations go beyond factual information to help tourists understand the social context behind traditions (Io, 2013). At agricultural heritage sites, the perceived value of a visit often depends on whether tourists grasp the logic and history of observed practices (Su et al., 2022). Interpretation also builds a destination's image and identity (Popescu et al., 2020; Uzzell, 2017), while protected areas connect visitors with local conservation values (Trobec, 2015).

The tour guide shapes interpretation quality directly. The guide's cultural interpretation relates to tourists' loyalty (Shi et al., 2023), and communication style and narrative elements encourage tourists to recommend the destination (Fu et al., 2023; Tatarusanu et al., 2021). As tourists' expectations change, guides shift from informants to experience organizers (Ho & Fung, 2026). A strong cultural experience strengthens the tourist's attachment to the destination's identity (Wang et al., 2026) and leaves a more lasting impression through emotional engagement (Jelinčić, 2020; Eck et al., 2026). Tourists' prior knowledge also shapes how they interpret explanations (Gao et al., 2018).

Although more people now discuss the relationship among language, interpretation, and experience, researchers on Indonesian tourism villages still prioritize technology, governance, and community participation (Renanti et al., 2026; Pola, 2019; Wan Shamsuddin et al., 2024). Researchers rarely treat language as a main variable for conveying cultural meaning to foreign tourists (Azizan et al., 2020; Tham & Chin, 2025). Penglipuran Tourism Village in Bangli maintains its spatial layout and cultural practices across generations while welcoming many foreign tourists, making it the right setting to close this gap.

This study examines how English is used as a medium of cultural interpretation to shape the cultural tourism experience of foreign tourists in Penglipuran. The argument is simple: language affects experience indirectly, through a chain that begins with interpretation and ends in understanding. Language proficiency allows the guide to convey the cultural context more fully, so that H1: the use of English has a positive effect on the quality of cultural interpretation. Good interpretation helps tourists synthesize accumulated knowledge, so H2 posits that the quality of cultural interpretation positively affects tourists' cultural understanding. Tourists who understand local values and norms interpret their visit more reflectively, so H3 posits that tourists' cultural understanding positively affects the cultural tourism experience. Sequential mediation approaches have been used to explain how interpretation and communication translate into attitudes through several intermediate stages (Xu et al., 2026; Yan et al., 2026; Naeem et al., 2024; Choudhury & Bhattacharjee, 2023; Sharma et al., 2024), so it is also proposed that H4: the quality of cultural interpretation and cultural understanding of tourists sequentially mediates the influence of English use on cultural tourism experiences. The entire relationship tested is summarized in Figure 1.

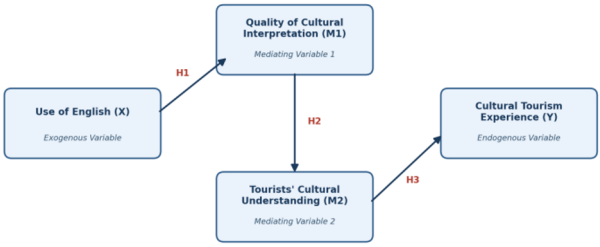


Figure 1. Research Conceptual Model

2 Methodology

An explanatory quantitative approach was employed to examine the causal relationships among English-language utilization, the quality of cultural interpretation, tourists' cultural understanding, and cultural tourism experience. The research was conducted in Penglipuran Tourism Village, Bangli Regency, Bali, which is recognized for its traditional spatial planning and hereditary cultural practices. Respondents consisted of foreign tourists who received explanations of local culture in English from guides or local residents.

Due to the unknown population size, purposive sampling was implemented. Respondents were required to be at least 17 years old, foreign tourists, and to have received an explanation of local culture in English. The minimum sample size was determined using the Cochran formula for unknown populations at a 10% error rate, resulting in 100 respondents; this number was increased to 150 to enhance model stability. The four variables were measured using a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5: use of English (X) as the exogenous variable, quality of cultural interpretation (M1) and tourists' cultural understanding (M2) as mediators, and cultural tourism experience (Y) as the endogenous variable. Definitions and indicators are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Variables, Construct Definitions, and Research Indicators

Variable	Definition of Construct	Indicator (Code)
English Language Utilization (X)	The extent to which English is used as a medium of communication and cultural interpretation by guides or local communities.	Clarity of cultural explanation (X1); guide communication capability (X2); the use of cultural terms (X3); ease of understanding explanations (X4); interaction with local communities (X5)
Cultural Interpretation Quality (M1)	The quality of conveying cultural meaning to tourists.	Explanation of symbolic meaning (M1.1); the delivery of cultural values (M1.2); explanation of cultural philosophy (M1.3); the relationship between culture and community life (M1.4)
Understanding Tourist Culture (M2)	The level of understanding of the tourists to the local culture after obtaining an explanation.	Understanding of cultural values (M2.1); understanding of cultural practices (M2.2); understanding of social norms (M2.3); Improvement of Balinese cultural knowledge (M2.4)
Cultural Tourism Experience (Y)	The quality of the cultural tourism experience felt by tourists.	Meaningful experience (Y1); involvement in cultural experiences (Y2); satisfaction with experience (Y3); desire to recommend destinations (Y4); positive impact on local culture (Y5)

Data collection involved a questionnaire survey, supplemented by field observations of English-language usage and a documentation review of village management reports. Structural equation modeling with partial least squares (SEM-PLS) was used for analysis. The measurement model was evaluated using outer loading, average variance extracted (AVE), Fornell-Larcker criteria, and heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratios for discriminant validity, as well as Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability for reliability (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Henseler et al., 2015). The structural model was assessed using R^2, effect size (f^2), Q^2predict, and model fit tests, with R^2 classification based on Chin (1998) and f^2 based on Cohen (1988). Pathway significance was tested using bootstrapping, applying a T-statistic threshold of 1.96 and p-values below 0.05 (Hair et al., 2022).

3 Result and Discussion

3.1 Result

Descriptive Statistics. An initial overview of the data at the construct level is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Construct Level

Variable	Red	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
English Language Utilization (X)	3.867	0.866	1	5
Cultural Interpretation Quality (M1)	3.760	0.865	1	5
Understanding Tourist Culture (M2)	3.656	0.898	1	5
Cultural Tourism Experience (Y)	3.963	0.783	1	5

All constructs received mean scores above 3.6 on a 5-point scale, indicating generally positive respondent ratings. The cultural tourism experience (Y) demonstrated the highest and most consistent ratings, while tourists' cultural understanding (M2) exhibited the lowest mean and greatest variability.

Evaluation of the Measurement Model. Convergent validity was evaluated using outer loadings (threshold ≥ 0.70) and average variance extracted (AVE; threshold ≥ 0.50). Reliability was assessed via Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (threshold ≥ 0.70). A summary of these results is provided in Table 3.

Table 3. Results of Convergent Validity and Reliability Evaluation

Variable	Indicator	Loading	AVE	CA	CR
English Language Utilization (X)	X1–X5	0.765–0.856	0.675	0.879	0.912
Cultural Interpretation Quality (M1)	M1.1–M1.4	0.828–0.892	0.743	0.884	0.920
Understanding Tourist Culture (M2)	M2.1–M2.4	0.811–0.850	0.683	0.847	0.896
Cultural Tourism Experience (Y)	Y1–Y5	0.742–0.832	0.586	0.824	0.876

All indicators demonstrated outer loadings above 0.70, AVE values above 0.50, and reliability coefficients exceeding 0.70, confirming convergent validity and reliability.

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Table 4) and the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio (Table 5).

Table 4. Discriminatory Validity (Fornell-Larcker)

Variable	M1	Y	X	M2
Cultural Interpretation Quality (M1)	0.862			
Cultural Tourism Experience (Y)	0.305	0.766		
English Language Utilization (X)	0.514	0.191	0.821	
Understanding Tourist Culture (M2)	0.541	0.562	0.256	0.827

Table 5. Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

Variable	M1	Y	X
Cultural Tourism Experience (Y)	0.353		
English Language Utilization (X)	0.580	0.219	
Understanding Tourist Culture (M2)	0.616	0.648	0.286

The square roots of AVE on the diagonal of Table 4 exceed the inter-construct correlations, and all HTMT values in Table 5 are below 0.90, with the highest value being 0.648. These results confirm discriminant validity, indicating that the measurement model is appropriate for structural evaluation.

Evaluation of the Structural Models. The structural model is tested through a bootstrapping procedure. Referring to Chin (1998), the R^2 value of 0.67 is classified as strong, 0.33 moderate, and 0.19 weak, while the predictive relevance is fulfilled when the Q^2predict is above zero. Both are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. R-Square and Predictive Relevance (Q^2predict)

Variable	R^2	R^2 Adjusted	Q^2predict
Cultural Interpretation Quality (M1)	0.264	0.258	0.246
Understanding Tourist Culture (M2)	0.293	0.287	0.057
Cultural Tourism Experience (Y)	0.316	0.311	0.032

The three endogenous variables produced R^2 values ranging from 0.264 to 0.316 and Q^2predict values above zero, indicating that the model accounts for a meaningful proportion of variance and demonstrates predictive capability, though additional factors may exist outside the model. The practical significance of each pathway was evaluated using effect size (f^2), as shown in Table 7, with Cohen's (1988) thresholds of 0.02 (small), 0.15 (medium), and 0.35 (large).

Table 7. Effect Size (f^2)

Pathway	f^2	Categories
X → M1	0.358	Large
M1 → M2	0.415	Large
M2 → Y	0.463	Large

All three direct paths produce a relatively large f^2. The results of the hypothesis test, including the path coefficients, T-statistics, and p-values, are summarized in Table 8.

Table 8. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path Coef.	T-stat.	P-values	Verdict
H1: X → M1	0.514	6.570	0.000	Accepted
H2: M1 → M2	0.541	8.505	0.000	Accepted
H3: M2 → Y	0.562	9.684	0.000	Accepted
H4: X → M1 → M2 → Y	0.156	4.581a	0.000	Accepted

a T value of serial indirect effects is estimated by the delta method of the three direct pathways; it is recommended to be confirmed with the specific indirect effect value on the SmartPLS bootstrapping output.

All four hypotheses are accepted. The direct path coefficient increased sequentially, from 0.514 on H1, 0.541 on H2, to 0.562 on H3, so that the tourist's cultural understanding became the strongest determinant of the experience. The serial indirect path on H4 of 0.156 remains significant, so interpretation and comprehension really bridge the influence of language. Model fit is also adequate, with an SRMR of 0.071 below the threshold of 0.08 and an NFI of 0.809, which is close to 1 (Table 9).

Table 9. Goodness of Fit Evaluation Results

Criteria	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.071	0.071
d_ULS	0.853	0.870
d_G	0.344	0.345
Chi-square	231.045	231.740
NFI	0.810	0.809

3.2 Discussion

The first finding shows that English proficiency strongly determines cultural interpretation quality (0.514, large effect size). Here, language conveys complete cultural meaning rather than merely supplementing service. This aligns with studies identifying guide communication skills as critical to interpretation quality (Shi et al., 2023) and evidence that foreign-language services affect the depth of interpretation at heritage sites (Quétel-Brunner & Griffin, 2014). Narratives built through language structure cultural explanations and make them easier to grasp (Wang et al., 2025; Korani et al., 2025).

Effective interpretation then promotes understanding (0.541). Contextual explanations let tourists synthesize accumulated knowledge instead of receiving isolated facts. This corroborates Io (2013) and matches research on agricultural heritage and conservation areas, where visitor knowledge rises as interpretation quality improves (Su et al., 2022; Trobec, 2015). Interpretation similarly links engagement to cultural outcomes in archaeological heritage settings (Dadizadeh & Doğan, 2024).

Cultural understanding was the strongest determinant of experience (0.562, highest effect size). Tourists who understand local values and norms interpret their visit more deeply. This matches studies linking cultural understanding and perception to experience quality and attachment to destination identity (Wang et al., 2026; Li et al., 2025), and findings that heritage management assessments relate to visit satisfaction (Vong, 2013; Arlt & Honggang, 2008).

The main contribution here is the indirect pathway. English proficiency affects visitor experience sequentially, through interpretation and understanding (0.156, statistically significant). The weak direct correlation between language and experience, shown in the discriminant results, supports this reading: language affects interpretation first, interpretation affects understanding, and understanding affects experience. This sequential mechanism matches studies showing that interpretation and communication affect attitudes through multiple intermediate stages (Xu et al., 2026; Yan et al., 2026; Naeem et al., 2024; Sharma et al., 2024; Choudhury & Bhattacharjee, 2023). Traveler online reviews likewise identify heritage interpretation as a key factor in experiential assessments (Liu & Liu, 2026)

Theoretically, these results support treating language as an instrument of interpretation rather than solely a service skill. In practice, English training for guides and managers should build the capacity to explain symbolic and philosophical meanings. Guides should prioritize deepening cultural understanding, the most variable and defining outcome, by developing structured interpretive narratives.

Weak to moderate R^2 values indicate that experiences are also shaped by factors outside the model, and the cross-sectional data from a single destination limit generalization. Further research can examine variables such as tourists' motivations and cultural backgrounds, and test the model in other tourist villages.

4 Conclusion

English shapes the cultural tourism experience of foreign visitors in Penglipuran Tourism Village through a chain of interconnected processes. Language affects the quality of cultural interpretation, which in turn affects tourists' cultural understanding, and this understanding is the primary determinant of the overall experience. Language's effect on experience is indirect, working through sequential mediation. English proficiency in community-based cultural destinations should therefore be treated as a tool for interpretation, and training should focus on communicating cultural meaning. The model explains a meaningful share of variance, but other factors matter too, and the single-destination data limit generalization. Future research can broaden the range of variables and contexts examined.

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