

Building the Character of the Younger Generation by Optimising the use of The Spice Route Heritage as a Medium for Contextual Learning and Cultural Identity

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ABSTRACT :The Spice Route is one of the most significant historical legacies that established Ternate as a global trading hub from the 15th century onwards. The presence of spices, particularly cloves and nutmeg, attracted the attention of European nations and brought about major changes in the political, social and cultural spheres of North Maluku. This article discusses the use of the Spice Route heritage site in Ternate City as a medium for historical education. Research findings indicate that experiential learning at the heritage site can enhance pupils' interest in learning whilst strengthening their understanding of Ternate's role in global trade. This article also offers strategic recommendations, including the development of a Spice Route curriculum, the use of digital technology, multi-stakeholder collaboration, the strengthening of local identity, and the enhancement of teachers' competencies. Through a contextual and interactive approach, the historical heritage of the Spice Route can serve as a source of inspiration and a means of character-building for the younger generation.

KEYWORDS: Spices, Heritage, History, culture, Ternate

INTRODUCTION

The city of Ternate holds a strategic position in world history as one of the hubs of the Spice Route since the 15th century (Ridha Ajam & Ahmad, 2022). Cloves and nutmeg, which thrive in this region, made it a prize sought after by foreign nations, ranging from the Portuguese, Spanish, and Dutch to the British. The spice trade not only drove the global economy but also had a profound impact on the political, social, cultural, and religious spheres of North Maluku (Hara et al., 2025). Key events such as the onset of colonialism, the formation of local alliances with foreign powers, and inter-ethnic conflicts all stemmed from a commodity whose value at the time even surpassed that of gold. Thus, Ternate was not merely a spice-producing region but also a pivotal node in the shaping of global history (Siregar, 2024).

In the context of education, the historical legacy of the Spice Route has not yet been fully utilized. History education in schools is still dominated by a textual and rote-learning approach, which often leaves students feeling bored and struggling to understand the relevance of history to their lives. In fact, various studies show that learning based on direct experience and context can enhance student motivation and understanding (Mu'jizah et al., 2022). Heritage sites such as Fort Oranje, Fort Kalamata, Fort Kastela, and the Sultanate Palace of Ternate hold important narratives that can serve as both learning resources and tools for fostering cultural identity awareness (Lukito et al., 2025).

The urgency of this research stems from the gap between the immense potential of the Spice Route heritage and the current practice of history education in schools. If this potential is not fully harnessed, there is concern that the younger generation will come to know Ternate merely as a producer of spices, without understanding its strategic role in world history. The literature review that forms the foundation of this study draws on experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984), which emphasizes the importance of direct experience as the primary source of learning. Additionally, the concept of heritage education provides a framework that historical sites are not merely of aesthetic or tourism value but possess a strong educational function (Jamal & Kim, 2005).

Previous research has shown that heritage-based approaches can enhance student engagement in history learning. For example, a 2021 UNESCO study on the utilization of ancient trade routes in several countries demonstrated that integrating heritage into the curriculum strengthens cultural awareness and local pride (Labadi et al., 2021). In Indonesia, the Spice Route Revitalization program launched by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2020 also underscores the importance of reviving the historical significance of spices to strengthen national identity. These research findings serve as a foundation for the argument that Ternate, with its wealth of heritage sites, holds significant potential to serve as a model for local history-based education (Guillén-Peñafiel

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et al., 2024).

Based on the above discussion, the objective of this study is to analyze the role of the Spice Route heritage site in Ternate in enhancing students' interest in and understanding of history, as well as to formulate recommendations for heritage-based learning strategies that are more contextual, creative, and relevant to the educational needs of the 21st century. In this way, it is hoped that the Spice Route will not only be viewed as the past but also as a source of inspiration and a means of character building for the younger generation (Saputra, 2024).

RESEARCH METHODS

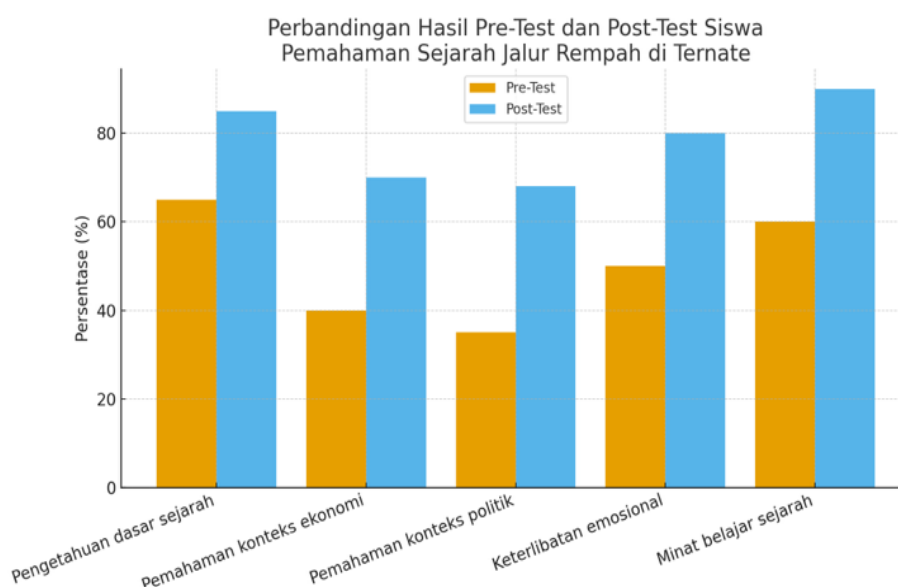
This study employs a descriptive quantitative approach supported by qualitative data (Barroga et al., 2023). The research subjects were elementary and secondary school students in the city of Ternate. Research instruments in the form of pre-tests and post-tests were used to measure improvements in students' knowledge before and after visits to heritage sites. Additionally, participatory observations were conducted during field activities at Fort Oranje, Fort Kalamata, Fort Kastela, and the Sultan's Palace to directly observe students' engagement in the learning process. In-depth interviews were also conducted with teachers and students to explore their perceptions, experiences, and the challenges they faced in heritage-based learning. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and comparative methods, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically to understand the dimensions of students' motivation, attitudes, and cultural awareness.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

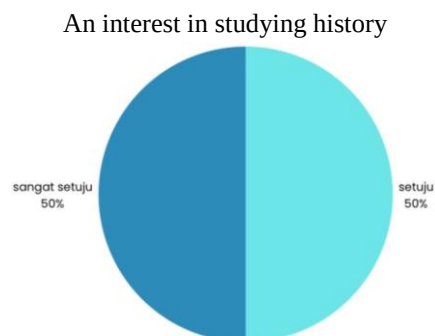
RESULTS

The results of the study indicate that heritage-based learning has a significant impact on students' interest and understanding. Initially, most students viewed history as a boring subject because it focused on memorization. However, after participating in field-based learning, they showed greater enthusiasm, asked questions actively, and engaged in discussions. Students' understanding It has also evolved from simply recognising Ternate as a producer of spices to a more complex understanding of the links between spices, colonialism, global trade, and socio-cultural impacts. Nevertheless, there remains a knowledge gap, particularly regarding the motivations of European nations for coming to the Moluccas and the impact of colonialism on local economic and political structures. The role of teachers in this process is crucial as facilitators; although there are still limitations in the use of digital technology and creative teaching methods from an affective perspective, students demonstrate a stronger sense of pride in their local identity after realising Ternate's significant role in global history.

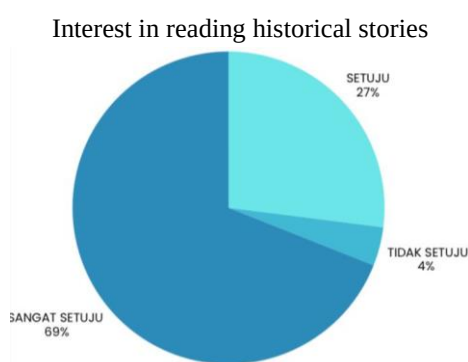
In addition to improvements in cognitive aspects, there has also been positive development in affective aspects. The majority of pupils stated that they felt a greater sense of pride in their local identity after learning that Ternate played a strategic role in world history. The supervising teachers also reported that pupils had become more active in asking questions and participating in discussions, indicating an increase in their motivation to learn. Thus, this section not only presents figures but also reinforces the narrative that heritage education is capable of transforming pupils' perspectives on history.



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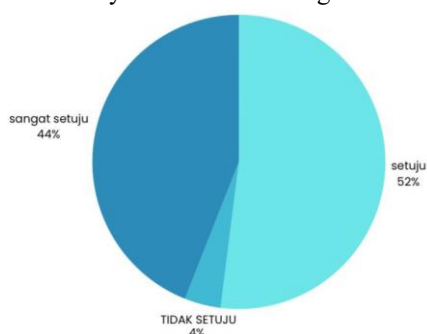


The survey results, visualised in a pie chart, show that all respondents (100%) have a positive interest in learning about the history of the Spice Route. This finding reinforces the view that the history of spices is considered both fascinating and important, both as cultural knowledge and as part of local identity. This fact serves as a valuable asset for developing innovative, creative and contextual learning methods to ensure that this interest is sustained.



Furthermore, data on interest in reading historical stories shows that 69% of pupils strongly agreed, 27% agreed, and only 4% disagreed. These results indicate that a narrative approach using stories of figures, events and struggles associated with the Spice Route is more effective at capturing pupils' attention than a rigid presentation of historical facts.

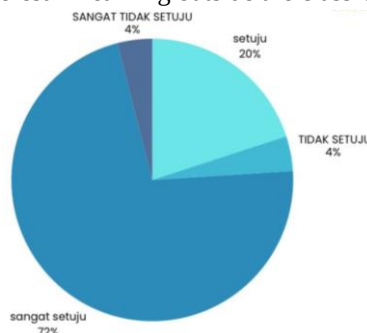
Pupils' curiosity about historical figures and events



Pupils' curiosity about historical figures and events was also found to be very high. A total of 72% of respondents stated they strongly agreed, 20% agreed, whilst 4% disagreed and 4% strongly disagreed. These findings confirm that historical figures and significant events that took place in Ternate can serve as an effective entry point for stimulating curiosity whilst deepening pupils' understanding of the course of history.

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Interest in learning outside the classroom



The findings on learning outside the classroom show that 44% of respondents strongly agreed, 48% agreed, 4% disagreed, and 4% strongly disagreed. The majority of students felt that learning activities at heritage sites were far more enjoyable than conventional classroom learning. They considered that on-site visits not only enriched their historical knowledge but also provided a recreational experience that fostered motivation to learn.

DISCUSSION

The research findings demonstrate that utilising the Spice Route heritage sites in Ternate can bring about tangible changes in how students perceive history learning. Learning activities conducted through field trips to historic forts, sultanate palaces, and other significant sites have made students more actively engaged. They do not merely listen to explanations but also experience first-hand the historical atmosphere that they had previously only read about in books. This approach makes history feel more alive, closer, and more relevant to their daily lives.

Heritage-based learning has also been shown to encourage pupils to ask questions, engage in discussion and reflect on their experiences. Pupils' interest grows when history is conveyed through narratives of figures and events linked to the Spice Route. Stories of struggle, diplomacy, and Ternate's role in global trade provide an emotional dimension that makes it easier for students to grasp historical values. This narrative approach demonstrates that history need not be viewed as a collection of rigid facts, but rather as a series of meaningful human experiences.

In addition to enhancing cognitive understanding, this learning also has a strong affective impact. Students demonstrate a greater sense of pride in their local cultural identity after learning about Ternate's significant role in world history. Thus, heritage education not only builds knowledge but also strengthens identity and a sense of ownership of the nation's heritage. This aligns with the objectives of character education, which emphasises the importance of cultural awareness as the foundation for shaping the younger generation.

Furthermore, the research findings also underscore the relevance of this method to the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which promotes project-based learning and real-world experiences. Pupils are more motivated when learning history not only in the classroom, but directly at historical sites. Such activities provide them with opportunities to develop critical thinking skills, collaboration, and empathy for the values of past struggles. In other words, heritage sites function as living laboratories that provide a comprehensive learning experience.

Nevertheless, the research also notes the existence of challenges. Teachers still face limitations in utilising digital technology to complement field experiences. Yet, the digitisation of materials such as interactive maps, documentary films, and learning applications can further enrich history learning and reach more students. Another challenge is the need for stronger integration between the national curriculum and local potential. The history of the Spice Route must be positioned not merely as part of a local narrative, but as an integral part of global history that has shaped world civilisation.

Thus, heritage-based learning in Ternate is not merely an innovative strategy for teaching history, but also a strategic effort to preserve cultural identity and strengthen the character of the younger generation. If developed sustainably through collaboration between schools, the government and the community, heritage education will become a vital tool in fostering historical awareness whilst reinforcing Ternate's position as a global spice city.

CONCLUSION

Research on the utilisation of the Spice Route heritage in the city of Ternate demonstrates that historical heritage is not only of cultural value but also serves a strategic function within the world of education. The background to this research stems from the disparity between Ternate's rich history as a key hub in global trade and the current practice of history teaching in schools, which remains dominated by rote learning. Through a contextual and experience-based approach, particularly via direct visits to heritage sites such as Fort Oranje, Fort Kalamata, Kastela, and the Sultan's Palace, pupils demonstrated significant improvement in cognitive,

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affective, and learning motivation aspects.

The results of the pre-test and post-test showed a significant improvement in understanding, from an average of 45% to 80%, confirming the effectiveness of this method in deepening students' understanding of history. The questionnaire, visualised through graphs and pie charts, also revealed that almost all respondents had a positive interest in studying the history of spices, an interest in historical narratives, a high level of curiosity about historical figures and events, and a preference for learning outside the classroom. All of this provides strong evidence that experience-based learning is capable of transforming students' perspectives on history, from something initially perceived as boring into something enjoyable and relevant to their lives.

Further discussion indicates that the success of this method is inseparable from the teacher's role as a facilitator. However, teachers' limitations in utilising digital technology and creative methods remain a challenge that must be addressed immediately through continuous training. More broadly, the integration of cultural heritage into the curriculum, the use of digital media, and multi-stakeholder collaboration between schools, local government, site managers, and the community are key to the sustainability of this programme.

It can therefore be concluded that the Spice Route is not merely a narrative of the past, but a living heritage that is relevant to the character-building of the younger generation. Optimising the use of the Spice Route's heritage as a medium for contextual learning will strengthen cultural identity, improve the quality of history education, and support regional socio-economic development through the development of educational destinations. Ternate, with all its historical riches, has great potential to become a national model for heritage-based education.

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