



Museum-Based Cultural Education as a Vehicle for Community Empowerment and Cultural Literacy in Indonesia

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Abstract

This study explores how museum-based cultural education serves as a vehicle for community empowerment and cultural literacy by analyzing the case of Museum Galeri Bahari Banuraja (Mugaba) in West Bandung, Indonesia. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through direct observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Findings reveal that while Mugaba possesses rich maritime and Sundanese heritage collections, its educational program remains passive, with minimal interactive or participatory learning strategies. Limited use of local language, absence of storytelling practices, and weak digital outreach constrain its impact on youth engagement and cultural literacy development. However, the museum has stimulated local tourism and economic interest, suggesting latent potential for community revitalization. To address these challenges, the study recommends incorporating participatory storytelling, training guides in experiential pedagogy, curating intergenerational workshops, enhancing digital platforms, and establishing partnerships with local schools and artists. These strategies aim to reposition rural museums as inclusive, culturally grounded learning hubs. The study contributes to rethinking rural cultural institutions as dynamic platforms for education, identity formation, and sustainable development.

Keywords: Museum-Based Education, Community Empowermen, Cultural Literacy, Community Education

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana pendidikan budaya berbasis museum dapat berfungsi sebagai wahana pemberdayaan masyarakat dan literasi budaya melalui studi kasus Museum Galeri Bahari Banuraja (Mugaba) di Bandung Barat, Indonesia. Dengan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi langsung, wawancara semi-terstruktur, dan analisis dokumen. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa meskipun Mugaba memiliki koleksi warisan maritim dan budaya Sunda yang kaya, program pendidikannya masih bersifat pasif, dengan minimnya strategi pembelajaran partisipatif dan interaktif. Penggunaan bahasa lokal yang terbatas, ketiadaan praktik mendongeng, dan lemahnya kehadiran digital membatasi dampaknya terhadap keterlibatan generasi muda dan pengembangan literasi budaya. Namun demikian, keberadaan museum telah memicu minat wisata dan aktivitas ekonomi lokal, mengindikasikan potensi laten untuk revitalisasi komunitas. Untuk mengatasi tantangan ini, studi ini merekomendasikan penerapan storytelling partisipatif, pelatihan pemandu dalam pedagogi eksperiensial, lokakarya lintas generasi, peningkatan platform digital, serta kolaborasi dengan sekolah dan seniman lokal. Strategi ini bertujuan menjadikan museum pedesaan sebagai pusat pembelajaran inklusif dan berakar budaya. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi dalam mereposisi lembaga budaya pedesaan sebagai platform dinamis bagi pendidikan, pembentukan identitas, dan pembangunan berkelanjutan.

Kata kunci: Pendidikan Berbasis Museum, Pemberdayaan Komunitas, Literasi Budaya; Museum Desa, Pendidikan Masyarakat

A. Introduction

The preservation and transmission of cultural identity have become increasingly critical in the face of accelerated globalization, digital expansion, and social homogenization. As the world experiences growing interconnectedness, many communities are confronted with the erosion of traditional knowledge and values, particularly among younger generations who are more exposed to global pop culture than to local heritage (Farlina, Nurhayati, and Noor 2025). In this context, education has been globally recognized not only as a tool for knowledge dissemination but also as a strategic medium for cultural sustainability (Nurhayati, Dina, et al. 2024; Rosita et al. 2020). Culturally responsive education strengthens community resilience and intergenerational knowledge continuity, thereby supporting sustainable development

goals (Musa and Nurhayati 2025; Tini, Nuraeni, and Nurhayati 2025; Yosfiani and Nurhayati 2023). While formal education systems have attempted to include cultural components in curricula, the role of non-formal education—especially that delivered through community institutions like museums—has gained renewed attention for its unique capacity to localize and contextualize cultural learning.

Museums are not merely repositories of artifacts; they are dynamic cultural institutions capable of engaging communities in the co-construction of meaning, identity, and historical consciousness (Song, Gilardi, and Lam 2024). Within this frame, community-based museums are particularly positioned to act as platforms for public education, encouraging active citizen engagement with cultural narratives. In Southeast Asia, museum education has begun to pivot toward more participatory approaches, emphasizing interaction, storytelling, and experience-based learning (Cusripituck, Knoop, and Yamabhai 2024). However, in practice, many local museums in developing countries, including Indonesia, remain underutilized in educational terms, often constrained by limited pedagogical frameworks, insufficient outreach strategies, and lack of integration into broader learning ecosystems (Latief et al. 2024). Rural and community-based museums, in particular, often struggle with systemic challenges such as minimal funding, inadequate staffing, limited access to digital infrastructure, and a lack of formal training in museology or education (Clarke-Vivier, Bishop, and Markin 2021). These limitations highlight the need for empirical exploration of how museums function as cultural education spaces in specific socio-cultural and geographic contexts. In Indonesia, a country with extraordinary cultural diversity and rich maritime heritage, the urgency of strengthening cultural literacy through education has grown substantially.

Cultural literacy—defined as the ability to understand, appreciate, and communicate cultural values—has been linked to stronger civic participation and cultural sustainability (Ali and Khayat 2024). However, a growing body of literature has noted a concerning trend of language attrition and weakening cultural identities among Indonesian youth (Komara et al. 2021; Rumsari and Nurhayati 2020; Syafrudin and Nurhayati 2020). Despite the inclusion of local content in school curricula, these measures often fall short of providing meaningful cultural engagement. In contrast, non-formal learning environments such as museums, community art centers, and cultural villages offer promising alternatives, yet these spaces remain under-researched.

Recent research proposes frameworks to enhance the cultural and educational effectiveness of museums. Immersive XR technologies, such as AR, MR, and VR, can improve visitor experiences and learning outcomes in cultural heritage sites (Innocente et al. 2023). Machine learning-based virtual museums have shown potential in improving students' cognitive performance in cultural education (Ermatita, Puspasari, and Zulkardi 2023). Scholars emphasize the importance of accessibility in museums and cultural spaces to ensure equal opportunities for all visitors, regardless of their physical conditions or health status (González-Herrera et al. 2023). Additionally, the integration of inclusive design and digital storytelling in cultural tourism can address diverse visitor needs and increase motivation (Kasemsarn, Harrison, and Nickpour 2023). These frameworks aim to transform museums into more engaging, educational, and accessible spaces that cater to a wider range of audiences and enhance the overall cultural tourism experience.

Despite these insights, most empirical studies in Indonesia have concentrated on school-based cultural education or large urban museums, leaving a significant research gap concerning rural, community-initiated institutions. Community-based museums located outside metropolitan centers often operate with limited governmental support, yet they play a pivotal role in preserving local heritage and engaging surrounding communities. One such institution is the Museum Galeri Bahari Banuraja (Mugaba), envisioned as both an educational and economic revitalization project aimed at raising regional cultural consciousness through maritime and Sundanese heritage. While structurally robust and rich in collections, Mugaba faces challenges in effectively delivering educational value to its target communities.

Methodologically, this study applies a qualitative case study approach framed within the constructivist paradigm, combining ethnographic observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis to capture the depth and nuance of Mugaba's educational practices. Theoretically, it is grounded in cultural sustainability theory and the community of practice framework (Wenger, 1998), allowing for an analysis of how informal learning and cultural engagement intersect in community-driven institutions. This dual anchoring facilitates a comprehensive understanding of both the educational process and the sociocultural dynamics at play.

This study seeks to evaluate the educational function of Mugaba by analyzing its programmatic structure, pedagogical approaches, and community engagement strategies. Specifically, it addresses the question: To what extent does Mugaba utilize a community-based, culturally grounded approach to strengthen public cultural literacy?

The study contributes to the literature by offering a detailed single-case analysis of a rural museum's role in advancing cultural education in Indonesia. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on museum-based education as a mechanism for community cultural empowerment in peripheral regions. The findings offer implications not only for museum managers and educators but also for policymakers aiming to leverage cultural institutions for national identity formation and sustainable development.

B. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to examine how Museum Galeri Bahari Banuraja (Mugaba), located in Desa Pangauban, Kecamatan Batujajar, Kabupaten Bandung Barat, facilitates community-based cultural education. Case study research is appropriate for investigating complex social phenomena in depth within their real-life contexts (Iswahyudi et al. 2023; Nurhayati, Kurnianta, and Anggraeni 2024; Sugiyono 2018). The qualitative orientation, rooted in interpretivism, enabled the researcher to explore the perspectives of those involved in the museum's educational mission and cultural engagement efforts. Mugaba was established in 2019 by Admiral (Ret.) Ade Supandi to preserve maritime and Sundanese heritage and to provide informal educational experiences to the public. The three-story facility includes exhibition rooms, a maritime simulator, a library, and a rooftop viewing area. Despite its well-developed infrastructure, the museum's effectiveness as an educational institution had not been empirically evaluated.

Data collection involved three triangulated qualitative techniques: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Observations were conducted across multiple site visits, focusing on guided tours and independent visits by school groups and community members. The researcher documented visitor interactions, guide explanations, and exhibit engagement through field notes. Three semi-structured interviews were conducted with museum staff: the Head of Operations, a simulator facilitator, and the receptionist. A review of internal documents such as brochures, visitor logs, and promotional materials complemented primary data. Public online content from Mugaba's social media was also examined to assess public outreach and branding strategies. Data were analyzed thematically using Miles and Huberman's (1994) framework: data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. Codes were developed from recurring themes related to cultural transmission, language use, and community participation. Reflexive memos (Finlay, 2002) were used to monitor researcher bias and maintain analytic transparency.

C. Discussions

The case of Museum Galeri Bahari Banuraja (Mugaba) in Desa Pangauban, West Bandung, offers a compelling site to examine how museum-based education can function as a vehicle for community empowerment and cultural literacy. Based on field data collected through direct observation, semi-structured interviews, and document review, this section analyzes the effectiveness, limitations, and potential of Mugaba's cultural education program, integrating theoretical insights into nonformal education, constructivist museum learning, and community-based cultural transmission.

The museum was established in 2019 by Admiral (Ret.) Ade Supandi with the intention of preserving maritime heritage and Sundanese cultural identity in a region known more for its military significance than its local traditions. During field interviews, the Head of Program Operations emphasized that Mugaba was created to “educate the people of Batujajar about their cultural and maritime roots, “especially young people who, according to staff accounts,” “have very little awareness of this history.” This vision echoes Wibowo's (2024) calls for museums to be democratized spaces of informal learning and cultural sustainability. Structured across three floors, Mugaba houses collections of maritime artifacts, military memorabilia, and Sundanese cultural displays. However, as observations revealed, these materials are curated in a way that is largely visual and non-interactive. The educational program, according to staff interviews and visitor interaction logs, follows a linear four-phase structure: preparation, socialization, facilitation, and evaluation. During school visits, for example, the process includes technical preparation of exhibit spaces, briefings delivered by staff guides, tours of key artifacts, and a brief feedback session.

Despite this structured approach, empirical evidence shows that learning remains passive. Observation checklists indicated that no hands-on components or storytelling sessions were offered during visits. When asked whether students are ever invited to engage in performance, reenactment, or crafting activities, one staff member responded, “We only explain and walk through the exhibits. We are not trained in doing more than that.” This finding is significant in light of Anton et al.'s (2018) advocacy for experiential and constructivist museum learning, where visitors co-create meaning rather than passively consume information. In one observation during a weekday school visit, approximately 30 students were led through the maritime exhibit without being asked a single question by the guide. Students responded politely but passively, and the only moment of visible engagement occurred when one student took a photograph near

a naval uniform. At no point were students invited to share prior knowledge, express their impressions, or interact with objects. The tour concluded with a standard group photo without reflective discussion.

A critical example of this passivity can be seen in the “Budaya Sunda” section of the museum. Although it features traditional musical instruments and depictions of Sundanese rituals, these are not accompanied by audio-visual demonstrations, guided practice, or interactive signage. Observations revealed that even when groups included Sundanese-speaking children, Bahasa Indonesia was used exclusively, reducing linguistic immersion. This is a missed opportunity to leverage language as a medium of cultural literacy, a point strongly emphasized in Rizki et al.’s (2022) research on youth identity and vernacular language use. One specific example involves a display of “angklung” instruments, which were showcased behind glass without any instruction, touch-based interaction, or digital simulation of sound. Visitors could only observe, not engage—undermining the instrument’s cultural vitality. The lack of interactive content also limits the museum’s function as a community empowerment tool. As community-based education scholars argue, empowerment stems not from exposure alone, but from participation and co-production of knowledge (Musa and Nurhayati 2025; Nurhayati, Tersta, et al. 2024; Nurhayati, Bimantoro, and Ahsan 2025). At Mugaba, visitors are guided through displays, but there is no platform for them to contribute their own stories, reflections, or cultural artifacts. This one-way educational model unintentionally mirrors the top-down approaches common in formal schooling, which nonformal education aims to counter. In a documented interview, the museum coordinator acknowledged, “We haven’t yet created structured workshops or discussion forums because we are unsure how to design them and lack trained personnel.” This reflects a broader challenge of under-resourced rural cultural institutions: possession of rich content without the pedagogical scaffolding to transform it into active learning experiences.

The implications of these limitations on community engagement are substantial. Without mechanisms for participatory involvement, the community becomes passive recipients of cultural information rather than active cultural agents. This reduces the museum’s ability to foster a sense of ownership and belonging, particularly among youth, who are critical to long-term sustainability of cultural transmission. Geographical and infrastructural barriers also inhibit community engagement. Mugaba is situated on the edge of Desa Pangauban, accessible via a damaged road that discourages regular visitation. According to field notes, the last 200 meters approaching the museum consist

of uneven terrain and poor lighting, making it inaccessible for some school buses and for elderly visitors. This logistical isolation contributes to what the museum staff described as “fluctuating and often low visitor numbers,” a reality corroborated by sparse entries in the visitor logbook reviewed during the research. The visitor logbook, for instance, recorded only 14 formal visits over a six-month period in 2023, with the majority occurring during national holidays or coordinated school trips. No regular monthly programming or public workshops were documented.

Compounding these structural limitations is the museum’s limited digital and promotional presence. Document analysis revealed that no printed educational materials, brochures, or visual guides are distributed to visitors. Online platforms such as Instagram are rarely updated and lack structured educational content. When asked about this, staff admitted that “no team is responsible for digital learning or communications,” and efforts are “mostly informal.” This reflects a broader problem identified by Bernardi and Gili (2019) in which rural museums fail to connect with digital-native audiences due to underinvestment in communication strategies. By contrast, successful cases such as the Douro Museum in the Portugal or Rumah Budaya Sumba in East Nusa Tenggara have shown how integrating storytelling sessions, student-created exhibits, and social media-based learning modules can increase both physical and digital engagement (Dhajo and Sulistyorini 2023; Vieira et al. 2022). Mugaba could draw on these comparative cases to guide incremental change.

Despite these shortcomings, Mugaba has contributed to community-level cultural awareness and economic development. Several local residents interviewed informally noted that the museum has raised the visibility of Desa Pangauban, prompting increased land interest and tourism curiosity. A café on the museum’s second floor and surrounding food stalls attest to some level of economic spillover. Additionally, local schools have shown interest in scheduling repeat visits, although this remains sporadic and dependent on available transportation and sponsorship. Nonetheless, when measured against the broader goals of cultural literacy and empowerment, Mugaba’s current impact is limited. Field observations found that visitors, particularly students, often appeared disengaged during tours. Only a minority asked questions, and none were observed participating in activities that encouraged emotional connection to the material. This aligns with Yang and Chung’s (2015) findings that cultural education programs must go beyond information transfer to create affective and reflective engagement. The most glaring gap in Mugaba’s education design is the absence of localized narrative forms, such as *dongeng Sunda* or folk drama. Traditional storytelling

serves as a potent vehicle for moral education, identity formation, and historical consciousness (Ghofur and Nurhayati 2023b, 2023a; Juita et al. 2023; Lebaka 2021). Yet, not once during observational sessions was a traditional story invoked. This omission not only limits pedagogical variety but also severs the museum from an essential part of Sundanese culture—oral narrative transmission. When queried about this, staff responded that “we are aware of traditional stories but have no time or method to integrate them.” Mugaba’s institutional awareness of its educational limitations, however, opens the door to future innovation. In interviews, staff expressed an interest in creating hybrid events—competitions, cultural exhibitions, and digital showcases—that could engage broader audiences. But they also noted that “we lack the expertise and resources to plan these programs fully,” revealing a common dilemma among rural institutions that possess content but not pedagogical infrastructure (Iis et al. 2025; Nurhayati, Nurjaman, and Rukanda 2024; Nursanti and Nurhayati 2024; Qudsi and Nurhayati 2023; Susanti and Nurhayati 2024). The result is a latent potential for cultural empowerment that remains untapped.

From a theoretical perspective, the Mugaba case illustrates the tension between physical access to cultural content and active cultural participation. The museum houses meaningful artifacts and is embedded in a rich historical landscape, yet without participatory tools, cultural literacy remains superficial. This reflects the broader critique of heritage institutions that preserve memory but do not animate it through learning (Saidi 2019). The findings also underline the importance of contextual and linguistic specificity in community education (Farlina, Nurhayati, and Noor 2025; Nurhayati 2021; Rahmat et al. 2024; Ratnawulan et al. 2025). Cultural literacy involves internalizing the values, symbols, and practices of a community—not merely recognizing them (García Ochoa, McDonald, and Monk 2016; Nurhayati, Dina, et al. 2024; Tini, Nuraeni, and Nurhayati 2025). Without using local language or integrating cultural practices into learning, Mugaba’s educational model risks being perceived as external or abstract rather than lived and embodied. The field data affirm that Mugaba currently functions more as a site of symbolic preservation than as a platform for dialogic education. It reinforces identity through artifacts and space but stops short of enabling community members—especially youth—to articulate, perform, and evolve their cultural knowledge. Empowerment, in this context, requires a shift from static display to dynamic co-creation, where community voices are not only welcomed but structurally embedded into programming.

To fully realize its potential, Mugaba must expand its scope from being an artifact-oriented museum to becoming a community-engaged learning hub. This would involve (1) incorporating participatory storytelling; (2) training guides in experiential pedagogies; (3) curating intergenerational workshops on traditional practices; (4) producing multilingual materials; and (5) establishing collaborations with local schools, artists, and cultural institutions. Quantitatively, developing a visitor engagement index and measuring the number of active participants in future programs would provide clearer evidence of progress. The museum's geographic position, thematic uniqueness, and leadership vision make it an ideal candidate for piloting rural museum revitalization models in Indonesia. However, this transformation depends on external support—both policy and funding—to develop the human capital and pedagogical capacity needed for such a shift. If implemented, Mugaba could emerge as a leading model for community-driven, culturally grounded education—not only in West Java, but across Southeast Asia.

D. Conclusion

This study investigated how Museum Galeri Bahari Banuraja (Mugaba), a community-based cultural institution in rural West Java, serves as a vehicle for cultural literacy and community empowerment through nonformal education. It addressed a critical research gap by analyzing the role of a rural museum in fostering localized knowledge, identity continuity, and cultural engagement among youth and general visitors. The findings highlight that while Mugaba possesses symbolic significance and structural potential, its educational delivery remains largely passive and monologic. Exhibits are rich in historical and cultural content, but learning is limited to visual observation and explanation, with little to no incorporation of Sundanese language, storytelling, or hands-on cultural activities. These limitations hinder the museum's capacity to cultivate deep cultural literacy or serve as a participatory learning space. Nevertheless, Mugaba's presence has positively affected local visibility, tourism potential, and land value—demonstrating indirect pathways to empowerment. The research affirms that museum-based education must move beyond preservation toward participatory pedagogy grounded in community realities. Cultural literacy can only flourish when learners are co-creators of meaning, when their language, traditions, and experiences are acknowledged within the learning process. For institutions like Mugaba, this shift requires educational training for staff, digital content development, and stronger ties with local schools and cultural practitioners. The implications for policy and practice include the need for national and regional education and culture offices to

invest not only in museum infrastructure but also in program design, digital integration, and community co-management models. Empowering museums as educational agents requires enabling them with tools, training, and funding to engage communities meaningfully. Future research should explore longitudinal impacts of museum-based learning on youth identity, the role of language in nonformal cultural education, and comparative studies across multiple rural museums in Southeast Asia to understand regional trends and contextual adaptations in cultural literacy initiatives.

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