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Research Paper

Bridging Local Narratives and National Agendas: Communication Strategies for Educational Tourism in The New Capital City of Indonesia.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of strategic communication in local cultural narratives for nation-building through educational tourism in Nusantara, the newly established capital of Indonesia. Nestled at the interface between participatory communication and sustainable development theories, this study evaluates the capacity of locally-driven narratives to enhance participation, preserve culture, and enhance socio-economic development. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the study combines quantitative survey responses from 150 local community members and 50 stakeholders and qualitative data from interviews and facilitated workshops. The findings reveal cultural preservation as the key driver of community participation, followed closely by perceived economic benefits. Interestingly, it is the younger sections of the community who demonstrate escalated interest and participation, thus signaling a potential for innovative tourism communication approaches targeting this segment. However, challenges from message fragmentation, a low level of capacity building and enabling digital capacity initiatives, and a fractured policy space undermine the effectiveness of such initiatives. The recommendations of this study call for developing localized communication narratives, improving digital capacity building and policy harmonization, and leveraging education tourism as a vehicle for development inclusivity at scale. The contributions of this study lie in applying and expanding the theories and conceptual models in participatory communication and applying them in contexts experiencing rapid urbanization and government-initiated large-scale urban redevelopment initiatives. Such an approach refutes conventional top-down approaches by working through local cultural narratives as part of national development planning agendas. The study recognizes some limitations in geographic coverage and time available for data collection and analysis but notes the findings present a rich value proposition for newly established capitals working towards achieving a balance between modernization and cultural preservation and recognition. More importantly, the findings highlight the critical role of communication infrastructures and local agency in developing tourism narratives reflecting and affirming local identity as well as resonating and aligning with wider policy goals.

Keywords: Educational tourism, community engagement, participatory communication

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1. INTRODUCTION

Relocating Indonesia's capital from Jakarta to Nusantara in East Kalimantan is a significant socio-economic and political undertaking. This effort seeks to alleviate regional imbalances, address infrastructural and environmental problems related to the current capital, and embrace a model of sustainable and green development with strengths and weaknesses (Berawi, 2022; Hilal et al., 2024; Rahmawati et al., 2023). Most discussions have focused on physical infrastructure demands and governance systems required by this move, leaving a critical neglect of socio-economic and socio-cultural aspects. The main reason behind this move is to persuade policymakers and stakeholders to engage local people within the national project while at the same time safeguarding and promoting their socio-cultural heritages within the development agenda.

Most importantly, demographic transformations caused by inflow migrants and government workers in East Kalimantan pose a critical issue. These transformations risk destabilizing the socio-cultural histories in this area, thus creating socio-cultural tensions and cleavages (Saputra & Widiensyah, 2022). International capital relocation case studies, namely Myanmar's relocation from Yangon to Naypyidaw and Malaysia's move to Putrajaya, show how difficult it is to reconcile local people's aspirations by different nations. In each case, a lack of community engagement made socio-cultural and economic imbalances compromise project sustainability (Seekins, 2021; Suprayitno, 2020). These instances highlight how policies linked to sustainability and fairness are essential, with a focus on linking local stories despite economic and infrastructural ambitions.

Moreover, educational tourism can provide a critical bridge between regional histories and national development ambitions. Globally, educational tourism has been characterized by helping preserve heritages, empowering local people, and fostering economic development (Buhalis, 2022; Cabral & Dhar, 2020). This would not only improve East Kalimantan's cultural, historical, and natural capital assets but also promote a sense of ownership among locals. Educational tourism can integrate immigrant populations into local identities at a provincial level, minimize socio-cultural tensions, and foster awareness (Dabamona & Cater, 2019; Masum et al., 2024).

Despite local storytelling's potential rewards at Nusantara, issues persist. A richness in local culture, natural attractions, and complexity in educational tourism programs combines with rapid urbanization. Preliminary research has outlined socio-economic impacts due to capital relocation from Indonesia (Adinugroho et al., 2022; Rahmawati et al., 2023), yet little inquiry remains specifically focused at intersections between communication, education, and tourism. The gap identifies a requirement for fresh approaches to enhancing local voice, aligning purposes from multiple stakeholders, and ensuring educational tourism sustainability.

This article responds by using strategic communication to further educational tourism within regional discourse over Nusantara. Communication fostering discourse and involvement motivates active engagement and participative development (Freire, 2020; Sachs, 2015). Strategic communication can also democratize stories and construct national narratives by mobilizing digital media and local storytelling. This study uses sustainable development and participatory communication theories to investigate how educational tourism impacts Nusantara development. International best practice for sustainable tourism revolves around safeguarding culture while empowering local economies. Case studies from ecotourism endeavors in several countries reveal how tourism can empower local people to lead by example in terms of sustainability. (Edgell Sr, 2019; Kohsaka & Rogel, 2021; Tehseen et al., 2024; Wiyono et al., 2023). Such programs are however regularly obstructed by a lack of a communications master plan, effectively inserting local histories into overarching national ambitions. Without this integration, educational tourism cannot ideally create inclusive, culture-sensitive development.

Case studies from geographical locations throughout the world offer a glimpse at community-led approaches' efficacy. In the case of South Africa, community-oriented tourism development brought local knowledge and culture into the tourism industry, hence promoting economic development while strengthening community identity. Bhutan's high value, low-impact tourism model preserves culture while realizing economic benefits while effectively balancing local and national interests. Education tourism can be transformed through strategic communication and participative approaches (Dodds et al., 2018; Johns & Namgyal, 2016; Matiku et al., 2020; Rogerson, 2018; Schroeder, 2015).

This study demonstrates how strategic communication, especially in the case of education tourism, can strengthen community involvement while conserving intangible cultural capital. This can also lead to country-level economic development in Nusantara, a country known for its dynamism and

multiculturalism. Educational tourism can provide ways to bridge socio-cultural gaps between large-scale development programs through participative narratives contextual for indigenous people. Community identities and interests are, however, at risk of neglect in development programs.

This current study gives practical recommendations for policymakers and practitioners. The current piece addresses gaps in current theory while making policy recommendations for education tourism project conceptualization and implementation. These include investment in digital platforms to give a voice to residents, inclusive participative campaign development, and policy development focusing on culture preservation while developing the economy.

This study makes a new contribution to sustainable literacy in tourism literature while advancing a model for maximizing educational tourism in Nusantara through this interlinked approach. Educational tourism, enhanced by Nusantara's deep indigenous storytelling, can be a crucial turning point ensuring Indonesia weathers its Vision 2045 vision. This vision-oriented approach foresees a bright future with sustainable development accompanied by inclusive growth benefiting every aspect of its multicultural populace. Educational tourism holds the potential to remake Nusantara into a model city by blending national and local aspirations. This imagined city can balance modernity with a lively, living cultural heritage to create a global reference point for inclusive, sustainable city development.

Capital relocation plans often neglect socio-cultural integration between original people, leading to dispossession of people from their inheritance, as seen from the experience in different nations. In the instances of Malaysia's Putrajaya and Myanmar's Naypyidaw, top-down plans focused on functional efficiency at the expense of historical continuity have brought about a sense of alienation from residents, leading to inadequate engagement with civic spaces (Seekins, 2021; Suprayitno, 2020). Indonesia can create a different trajectory by not positioning local stories as supplementary but as essential to new capital identity and sustainability.

Educational tourism can be a viable yet latent alternative. Traveling activities linked to culture, history, and environmental education provide two major benefits (Buhalis, 2022; Cabral & Dhar, 2020). These activities can promote awareness of diversified intangible cultural heritage from East Kalimantan's people and engage new people and external parties in a meaningful interpretation. Educational tourism can also promote intercultural understandings, economic empowerment, and

local pride in a province with many Dayak and Banjar cultures, traditional ecological knowledge, and oral histories (Dabamona & Cater, 2019; Ormond et al., 2022).

The actualization of this potential confronts daunting challenges. The educational tourism sector in Nusantara struggles with challenges in terms of a broad public lack of awareness toward local inheritance, disintegrated communications among stakeholders, and inadequate infrastructure and digital platforms for participative storytelling. Activities in this area are carried out in a top-down, formulaic approach short of emotive depth and communal verisimilitude from community-led storytelling practice (Nugroho et al., 2016; Rahmawati et al., 2023; Rayhaniah et al., 2024).

This paper makes a strong case for the use of strategic communication, a refined iteration of participatory communication influenced by Freire's philosophy of education, to improve and maintain increased use and integration of local stories within the overarching development discourse at the national level. Strategic communication has the potential to reduce inequalities caused by conflict generated by traditional ways of thinking and differential experiential realities between local participants and policymakers at the national level by enabling joint production of tourism content by constituents at the local level. This approach aligns with Sachs's sustainable development model, founded upon principles of social inclusiveness, preservation of cultures, and conservation of nature for future generations (Sachs, 2015).

Communication for development plays a central part in bringing envisioned demographic change in East Kalimantan by government, development, and investment activities. Without an inclusive communication structure in place, these activities would more likely worsen inequalities while eroding local cultures. The vehicle of participative narration, amplified by digital platforms and policy apparatus, ensures local development stories are not secondary to dominant national narratives (Heinemeyer et al., 2024; Liguori et al., 2023).

This empirical, holistic, and deeply entrenched inquiry makes a significant contribution to development communications. This is achieved by systematically applying multiple participatory models within government-funded, highly consequential socioeconomic capital relocation, a matter critical to global importance specifically located outside major studies in complex contexts in the Global South. Whereas institutional uses of participative communication have been discussed within development literature, its deployment in critical sectors like urban development and policymaking at the national level remains in early phases in both development discourse and academia (Molina-Azorín & Font, 2016; Roholt et al., 2023).

This piece of research adds a lot more value to this discourse by clearly illustrating a model of strategic communications at a local level where local knowledge gains precedence within a more comprehensive related context concerning nation-building activities. This work offers a local strategic communications approach focused on local knowledge integration within nation-building, contributing significantly to extending current discourse.

The findings offer useful suggestions for policymakers and stakeholders to construct customized messaging strategies. The use of digital platforms, community discussions, and jointly produced content with local communities is argued by this research for redrawing Nusantara from a strictly bureaucratic entity into a vibrant cultural institution. The newly conceptualized capital aims to be a mirror of Indonesia's future; this work highlights that its development would be dependent upon day-to-day narratives intertwining people with nature, coupled with reformist policy measures and infrastructural development.

2. METHOD

The study explored strategic communication in East Kalimantan's educational tourism in Nusantara with community members, policymakers, and stakeholders. Participants were selected by residence, interest in community development or tourism, and intention to participate in interviews. The sample consisted of 200 participants: 150 community members and 50 stakeholders such as officials and tourism operators. The age ranged from age 19 to age 64, with 53% female and 47% male, and had varying educational backgrounds. The occupations ranged from artisans, teachers, and small business owners to civil servants, representing varying perspectives towards educational tourism in East Kalimantan's vibrant socio-cultural environment. The research was ethically approved by the Universitas Mulawarman Institutional Review Board. The participants were informed, keeping in line with ethical principles for voluntary participation, confidentiality, and right to withdrawal (Brittain et al., 2020; Sheehan, 2018; Willis III et al., 2016; Xu et al., 2020).

A quantitative phase came before a qualitative one in a mixed-methods approach to interpret survey findings (Creswell & Clark, 2017). The quantitative phase applied stratified random sampling for proportional representation from four capital relocation-affected regions with significant tourism impact: Penajam Paser Utara, Balikpapan, Samarinda, and Kutai Kartanegara. This enhanced data generalizability and reliability (Akkaş & Meydan, 2024; Molina-Azorín &

Font, 2016; Mweshi & Sakyi, 2020). A response rate at 75% from community groups, local government, and social media suggested active engagement in a response to the research questions (Guest et al., 2017; Malterud et al., 2016; Tashakkori et al., 2020). Quantitative data collected applied structured questionnaires from the Tourism Engagement Scale (TES) and Cultural Preservation Index (CPI) translated and adapted in Bahasa Indonesia after piloting (Creswell & Clark, 2017; Harazneh et al., 2018; Malmqvist et al., 2019; Zhao, 2021). Expert consultation guaranteed content validity, while internal consistency and reliability ($\alpha > 0.80$) was confirmed by Cronbach's alpha. The questionnaire addressed perceived educational value from tourism, intention to participate, and opinions about policies for cultural preservation. Purposive sampling determined 20 respondents for qualitative interviews about local identity, communication of heritage, and interactions with tourism. Interviews were guided by a predetermined scheme for consistency while providing flexibility for new questions. All interviews took place in Bahasa Indonesia, with permission, recorded, and transcribed for data analysis.

Descriptive statistics described the sample, whereas inferential tests tested relationships between educational tourism attitudes and demographics. Chi-square tests probed categorical variables such as age, occupation, and perceived tourism benefits. Multiple regression determined predictors of readiness to participate and policy endorsements according to community engagement and policy approval. Qualitative data were thematically coded, incorporating coding, theme development, and review (Braun & Clarke, 2023). Combined quantitative and qualitative findings described a lucid educational tourism driving force within Nusantara. Statistical trends and personal stories enriched conclusions and bolstered communication strategies for capital relocation and sustainable tourism.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Recruitment took place from March 1 to April 30, 2024 by targeting residents, policymakers, and tourism stakeholders across Nusantara, East Kalimantan. Participants were recruited using community group organizations, local government portals, and social media. A response rate of 67% was achieved from a starting outreach to 300 people, who eventually agreed to participate. The final sample included 150 community participants and 50 stakeholders, covering tourism professionals and local government officials, thus insuring a diversified demographic profile applicable to this research. Out of 200 participants, 190 completed the study, while 10 canceled

due to unavailability or incomplete returns, thus emphasizing the effectiveness of the engagement strategy adopted in this study. Demographic profiles of participants' age, gender, and educational level are shown in Table 1, thus emphasizing both sample diversity, as well as its relevance to socio-cultural Nusantara. This representation is essential for understanding community readiness and stakeholder engagement for educational tourism initiatives.

Table 1. Baseline Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Characteristic	Community Members (n = 150)	Stakeholders (n = 50)	Total (N = 200)
Mean Age (SD)	35.4 (12.1)	41.2 (9.8)	36.9 (11.5)
Female (%)	48%	38%	46%
Completed Higher Education (%)	52%	84%	60%

Participant's attitudes towards educational tourism were assessed on the basis of three major variables: Cultural Preservation, Economic Opportunities, and Engagement Readiness. Of these, the highest scored was Cultural Preservation at 4.5 (SD=0.8) with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 4.3 to 4.7, reflecting an agreement on its importance in the protection of the local culture. Second-highest at 4.1 (SD=1.0) with 3.9 to 4.3 confidence interval was Economic Opportunities, reflecting mixed but generally favorable perceptions; this variability might be a result of different priorities placed on economic factors compared to available resources. Third was Engagement Readiness at 4.3 (SD=0.9) with a 95% confidence interval of 4.1 to 4.5, reflecting the willingness of the community to be part of activities targeted towards the development of educational tourism. Overall, these scores are rather high and reflect a positive attitude towards educational tourism as a source of sustainable development, thus opening the door to balancing culture protection with attendant economic and participatory rewards.

Table 2. Quantitative Results for Key Variables

Variable	M (SD)	95% CI (LL, UL)
Cultural Preservation	4.5 (0.8)	4.3, 4.7
Economic Opportunities	4.1 (1.0)	3.9, 4.3
Engagement Readiness	4.3 (0.9)	4.1, 4.5

The survey results showed 85% of the participants saw educational tourism as a mechanism for preserving culture, while 72% saw it as a financially viable prospect. The regression analysis showed perceptions of the importance of preserving culture to be a significant determinant of the willingness to support educational tourism initiatives ($\beta = 0.62$, $p < 0.01$). Moreover, stakeholders perceiving the economic benefits were more likely to support policies ($\beta = 0.54$, $p < 0.05$). The result highlight the double role of economic and culture considerations in informing attitudes toward educational tourism, and thus highlighting the potential to promote community coordination and secure support from stakeholders by focusing on these benefits in communication. The results therefore lay a solid empirical basis for the development of targeted strategies to address different stakeholder groups' aspirations and requirements.

The thematic analysis of the interview transcripts resulted in the identification of three overarching themes: the protection of cultural identity, economic empowerment, and the acknowledgment of communication challenges. The importance of preserving indigenous culture was highlighted by the interviewees, and a significant concern was raised about the decline in culture owing to rapid development. Economic empowerment was a key concern, with the stakeholders proposing that educational tourism has the potential to generate income and provide employment opportunities to the local populace. Though the communication challenges were recognized, the emphasis on the importance of adopting inclusive policies enabling community participation and incorporating members of the community at the planning and implementation phases of the tourism venture was strongly highlighted. All these themes together represent the central issues and expectations of the participants and thus provide the necessary insights for the development of effective educational tourism policies in Nusantara.

Cultural Preservation

Participants highlighted the importance of incorporating local stories in educational tourism activities to maintain cultural identity while, at the same time, achieving economic and social benefits. Nusantara's rich cultural diversity, including traditional crafts, art, folklore, indigenous knowledge, and oral histories, proved to be an indispensable treasure to appeal to visitors and to educate the next generation. Many participants were concerned about the rapid urbanization and the influx of outside populations, which might threaten indigenous traditions unless action was taken. Educational tourism provides a unique chance to integrate these cultural aspects into formal systems of education, ensuring their relevance and perpetuation. Adopting indigenous knowledge systems allows the community to maintain pride and control over their legacy, instead of giving in to developmental pressures. As one indigenous craftsman put it, *"if we don't tell our own stories, they will be forgotten"* (Participant 11), highlighting the importance of the inclusion of authentic, locally owned stories in tourism activities.

Narrative methodologies have been seen to be an effective strategy to overcome cultural divides and improve interaction between tourists and the local populations. All the groups involved agreed on the importance of moving past mere shallow interaction with cultural exhibits and artifacts; rather, educational tourism should be defined by its participatory and experiential nature. Proposals ranged from interactive narrative workshops led by community elders to production workshops (e.g., crafts) and guided tours led by local historians. These methodologies not only hold the potential to enrich the visitors' experience, but they were also seen to contribute to the strengthening of cultural conservation. Storytelling has been further seen to act as a strategy to make histories more inclusive and available. As put forward by one cultural practitioner, *"Our culture is our strength. Educational tourism should emphasize what makes us different so people can enjoy and learn from it"* (Participant 17). This point highlights the importance of collective storytelling to make tourism projects meaningful to residents as well as visitors, thus leading to an appreciation of Nusantara's cultural identity by both. As the field of educational tourism evolves further, community storytelling will be an increasingly important contribution to the conservation of local identities while at the same time furthering national development goals.

Economic Empowerment

The economic empowerment theme recurred as a central issue, with experts highlighting the potential to create employment opportunities and support the strengthening of local economies

through education-oriented tourism. If the right policies are put in place, tour operators, entrepreneurs, and indigenous artisans would benefit from increased interaction with tourists. Traditional crafts artisans would see significant growth in the demand for authentic handicrafts, while food businesses would be able to specialize in the production of local cuisine. Locally trained guides have been recognized as an integral part of developing interactive experiences centered in indigenous culture while at the same time fostering environmental conservation.

The economic benefits went far beyond mere employment generation, impacting ancillary sectors such as transport, event organization, and the hospitality sector. However, the stakeholders believed meeting this potential would not only involve strategic planning but also coordinated investment efforts. *“We would need good market access and quality standards to compete properly”* (Participants 12) summarized the perspective of a business sector leader. Without these basic ingredients, the potential would be left largely unrealized.

The most common challenges involved infrastructure deficiencies, with poor road access and a lack of adequate accommodation. Another key factor was the need for capacity development, as local businesses needed training to comply with tourism standards. Financial constraints were especially sharp, as many were excluded from accessing credit facilities or government support. As one participant noted, *“The potential is enormous, but we need investment to make it work”* (Participant 27). Resolution of these concerns would allow Nusantara to maximize the economic benefits of educational tourism while ensuring inclusive participation within the community. The findings show that, with proper support structures in place, educational tourism can act as a main driver of inclusive economic growth for the region.

Communication Challenges

Participants repeatedly highlighted the lack of organized communication efforts as a major hindrance to the successful marketing of educational tourism and the showcasing of local stories across Nusantara. Despite the culture and natural resources of the region, respondents noted that there were few channels to dispense these stories to a wider population, thus threatening the sustainability of distinctive traditions in the midst of rapid urbanization. Current tourism efforts too often focus on popular icons and not stories centered on the community which stress indigenous knowledge and history, leading to what one community leader described as *“a disconnect between our lived experiences and what visitors see”* (Participant 15). This

communication imbalance erodes the twin goals of educational tourism, which aspire to host visitors while preserving cultural heritage for generations to come.

Stakeholders highlighted the conspicuous lack of centralized communication platforms, arguing that fragmented initiatives yield confused messages and lost opportunities. In addition, the allocation of resources emerged as a key limitation, with participants stating that grassroots initiatives lack alignment with national or regional authorities due to confused policy frameworks. The digital divide compounds these difficulties, as gaps in investment in websites, social media outreach, and online experiences limit visibility. *"We have great stories to tell,"* stated one informant, *"but without training and digital capacity, our voice gets lost"* (Participants 22). This concern is consistent with more general concerns about the sufficiency of training programs for local guides and custodians, which hinder effective heritage marketing. Moreover, the absence of focused funding and infrastructure investment risks reducing educational tourism to a low priority instead of promoting it as an asset of value. To overcome these barriers, it is necessary to introduce collaborative solutions involving policy support, private sector engagement, and community engagement to create practical communication strategies able to unlock the full potential of educational tourism within Nusantara's development framework.

Findings based on the themes imply that effective development of education tourism in Nusantara requires a holistic strategy based on preservation of culture, development of economic potentials, and overcoming communication barriers. Target narrative interventions, accessing funding, and implementing concerted information-exchange programs will be vital to unlocking the potential of education tourism as a tool of sustainable development in Nusantara.

Additionally, effective implementation of participatory communication workshops to promote community understanding of education-based tourism and build strategic communication skills was carried out in all sessions. Each workshop session involved, on average, 10 community leaders and 5 stakeholders, thus ensuring a representative diversity of the community, including local government officials, cultural performers, and small business owners. The workshops focused on integrating local narratives into education-based tourism programs using storytelling approaches and participatory communication to activate stakeholders and tourists. Both observational data and participant feedback confirmed the intervention to have a high fidelity. The facilitators strictly kept to the predetermined structure and content in all sessions, thus ensuring uniformity. Feedback forms filled by the stakeholders at the end of each session showed that 92% of the stakeholders

found the workshops to be effective or highly effective at deepening their understanding of education fundamentals and communication strategies. As one of the participants explained. *“The workshop taught me how our stories could prove to be a very effective tool in tourism and education. It provided us with practical ways to share our culture meaningfully.”*

Attendance records coupled with qualitative assessment confirmed the effectiveness of the intervention. Each session was fully attended, with no case of participant withdrawal, demonstrating a remarkable degree of commitment. The group discussions and role-playing activity were outstanding interactive aspects of the workshop. The uniformity of feedback received across the sessions supports the relevance of the content and the delivery method, serving as testimony to the fact that the intervention pounded home the target group’s concerns and anticipations. These observations serve to reaffirm the symptomatic value of participatory workshops in strengthening the ability of stakeholders and leaders from the community to harness tourist education to promote sustainable development. The intervention also provides a model for similar projects, demonstrating the value of practical and culturally sensitive intervention in stimulating community action.

The analysis also shed further light onto the engagement and views across different demographic and geographies. One of the most dramatic differences in interest level was between those under 30 years and those over 50 years. The group under 30 had a much higher level of interest, and the difference was 1.8 points ($p < 0.05$). One can surmise from that people in the early stages of their lives are more open to new ideas such as educational tourism, which helps promote cultural conservation and socio-economic development. As one young respondent put it, *“Educational tourism is a great concept because it lets us share our culture and to learn something else and see other people from somewhere else.”*

Variation in place was also an important driver of the participants’ priorities. Participants from Penajam Paser Utara were more culturally preservation-oriented in their responses compared to their Balikpapan counterparts, with qualitative answers exhibiting a stronger sense of identification with local practice and heritage in rural settings. Urban respondents from Balikpapan were more focused on the economic potential over the preservation of culture, which likely reflects the city’s role as a commercial hub. This geographic variability highlights the need for specific strategies in the development of educational tourism. Strategies in Penajam Paser Utara may seek to promote and preserve the local culture, while Balikpapan may target the economic benefits and the newer

tourism facilities. The findings across these subgroups of participants indicate the importance of building localized educational tourism strategies that suit the unique demographics and concerns of each constituency. Recognition and respect of these differences can increase the participation of the community and the efficacy of programs so that programs in educational tourism make sense to a diverse set of people across Nusantara. This is important in fostering inclusivity and maximizing the socio-cultural and economic benefits of educational tourism.

The baseline demographic analysis revealed no significant differences between community members and stakeholders in relation to age, education levels, or sex. This uniform foundation largely prevented the confounding demographic variables from affecting the outcomes. The observed uniformity provides a firm basis for the interpretation of the outcomes, as demographic differences are eliminated as sources of error. This firm baseline ensures the conclusions and the inferences made between the groups are valid and credible. The analysis was conducted on an intent-to-treat framework, thus including data from all the participants who originally agreed to participate, irrespective of their level of participation or completion of the study. This research approach increases the generalizability of the outcomes by accounting for potential differences in participant participation. By maintaining a uniform dataset, the research ensures its reliability and validity as per recommended best practices in mixed-method research (Bashir et al., 2017; Creswell & Clark, 2017).

The study strictly followed established ethical guidelines during its design and execution phases. Before data collection began, informed consent was obtained from all study participants, and all elements of the methodology were subject to a thorough review and approval by the institutional review board. In this way, the study followed ethical principles, especially those regarding the autonomy, confidentiality, and well-being of the participants (Bradley et al., 2021; Taquette & Borges da Matta Souza, 2022; White, 2020). The intervention and data collection were conducted in settings that respected the participants' comfort and confidentiality, thus reducing risks to a minimum. No adverse events or unwanted effects were reported throughout the duration of the study. The fact that there were no negative results indicates that the interventions and data collection methods used were both effective and safe for the participants. By maintaining the highest possible ethics and safety standards for the participants, the research not only met academic and institutional requirements but also facilitated trust and cooperation in the community, which are essential for the successful implementation of future tourism programs.

The findings of the research reveal that effective development of educational tourism in Nusantara requires an integrated process of strategy covering cultural conservation, economic empowerment, and strategic communication. All the respondents emphasized the necessity of integrating authentic local storytelling with tourism development, as one leader explained, *“Our stories have to be the basis of any tourism program if we are to keep our identity”* (participant 8). This concern is reflective of wider fears over the loss of culture in the face of widespread urbanization, with the implication that educational tourism can offer a sustainable alternative if done correctly (Freire, 2020; Greene et al., 2018; Liguori et al., 2023; Matthews & Sunderland, 2017; Sachs, 2015).

The capacity-building workshops undertaken through participatory approaches were especially effective in building capacity, with the workshops rated by 92% of the respondents to express a significant impact on their grasp of the concepts of educational tourism and its attendant methodologies. Consistent full participation in each session, with one single respondent declining to participate, is illustrative of robust community participation and reflective of the culturally specific nature of the workshops (Buhalis, 2022; Cabral & Dhar, 2020; Chen & Yu, 2024). A statement by a participant, *“These workshops gave us practical tools to share our culture meaningfully”* (Participant 19), neatly summarizes the accomplishment of the program in bridging conceptual framework with practical outcomes.

Demographic analysis revealed significant generational differences in attitudes, with younger participants (<30 years) showing 1.8 points higher engagement scores than older counterparts (>50 years, $p < 0.05$), suggesting youth may be key allies in developing innovative tourism approaches (Canosa et al., 2016; Dodds et al., 2018; Veal, 2017). Geographic variations also emerged, with rural Penajam Paser Utara residents prioritizing cultural preservation more than urban Balikpapan participants, who focused on economic opportunities. This divergence underscores the necessity for localized strategies -what works in traditional village may not suit commercial hubs, requiring tailored programming (Fanjanirina, 2023; Shi et al., 2024). The baseline demographic consistency between community members and stakeholders strengthens the findings’ validity, as no significant differences in age, gender, or education were found that could confound results (Creswell & Clark, 2017). The intent-to-treat analysis approach further bolstered reliability by including all consenting participants regardless of engagement level, enhancing generalizability (Bashir et al., 2017).

The economic aspect was highlighted as the central point with the recognition of the employment opportunities and local enterprise development brought about by educational tourism, which could

confer particular benefits to local artisans, tour guides, and food entrepreneurs. However, the stakeholders were concerned that infrastructural deficiencies, poor capacity-building programs, and a lack of finances would derail the occurrence of these opportunities. *“The potential is there, but we need roads, skills, and investment to achieve this,”* a small business representative averred (Participant 27). This point is supported by several studies stating that effective tourism development requires well-planned synergy between public and private sectors as well as capacity building to safeguard sustainability in benefits (Cheng et al., 2021; Errichiello & Marasco, 2017; Herrero Amo & De Stefano, 2019). Fragmented channels of communication were also pinpointed as another main obstacle to the success, with the key point of the deficiencies in the conveyance of local histories as well as the lack of digital infrastructure for advertisement purposes. Inability to put organized policies in place and sufficient distribution of the funds worsen the difficulties, where comprehensive implementation is jeopardized.

The cumulative evidence hereby presented suggests several actionable suggestions for the development of educational tourism in Nusantara. First, the development of centralized platforms that emphasize local storytelling can help preserve cultural heritage while drawing in visitors at the same time. Second, targeted training interventions that aim to improve digital and hospitality competencies among locals, especially the youth who are more involved, are essential. Third, infrastructural investments and the formulation of a policy environment need to balance geographic inequities, with rural areas needing to be supported for cultural conservation and urban areas supported for business growth. Lastly, the continuous engagement of stakeholders through public-private partnerships will be critical to coordinating efforts and benefit-sharing (Berrone et al., 2019; Strasser et al., 2021; Zapatrina, 2016). As Nusantara transitions to become Indonesia’s new capital, the consolidation of these evidence-based interventions can turn educational tourism into both an economic driver and a guardian of culture, forging a model of sustainable growth that other areas can follow (Edgell Sr, 2019; Han et al., 2025; Shekhar, 2024). By resolving the challenges identified and harnessing the opportunities present, Nusantara can maximize the transformative potential of educational tourism as a tool for inclusive growth and culture continuity.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, while educational tourism has significant potential as a vehicle for fostering sustainable development in Nusantara, its success is dependent upon the insertion of local voices in wider national discourse through inclusive and strategic frameworks of communication. This study stresses that, in the absence of effective communication strategies, equal resource allocation, and resolute policies, education tourism can only prove transformative. The findings point out that promotional strategies of cultural preservation and economic empowerment can neither be treated as ancillary impacts of financial flow nor as supplementary pillars of development, but as key pillars of development frameworks. Participation-oriented narratives, amplified digital engagement, and capacity development at the local level cannot be treated as add-ons to promotion strategies but as prerequisites to ensure that education tourism reflects and represents the people within the regions it purports to portray.

However, these opportunities come with substantial challenges. The lack of integrated infrastructure, low levels of access to financial services, and poor communication systems risk further marginalizing the populations that are the focus of the objectives of educational tourism. To support its development from a purely symbolic gesture, future policies and practices in the field of educational tourism need to foreground the voice of local stakeholders, ensure long-term investment, and put in place accountability measures to evaluate its social and economic impact. Nusantara has the potential to become a model of inclusive urban growth globally, however, this can only be realized if policies adopted reflect the diversity and complexities of its populations.

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