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Muaro Jambi Site as an Object of Historical Study Based on Immersive Learning Media in Strengthening the Spice Route Programme

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Abstract

The Muaro Jambi site became a special attraction when the government, through the ministry of education culture research and technology, introduced the spice route programme. The Muaro Jambi site, which is a product of the spice trade route or spice route, can be used as an object of historical learning study as stated in the learning outcomes

of phase E. However, with various obstacles and problems that exist, the site as an object of historical study of the spice route has not been used optimally. Therefore, this study will provide a view on how to use the site using renewable technology such as immersive technology that symbolises visualisation and digitalisation.

Keywords: Muaro Jambi, Spice Route, Immersive, History, Learning Media

1. Introduction

History learning becomes important when the government is aggressively striving to realise Indonesia's golden generation in 2045 by forming a young generation that has a sense of pride in the country and has insight and Indonesian character (Kurniawati & Sugiharto, 2022) ^[17]. Hasan explained that learning history can develop students' mindset in recognising the values of the nation that have been fought for in the past (Hasan, 2012) ^[12]. Of course, with the recognition of these values, learners can maintain and adapt these values to the lives they live today and in the future. In order to achieve this, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia (Kemendikbudristek) came up with a programme called the Spice Path programme.

The programme is an effort to introduce the public, especially the younger generation, to the importance of spice commodities in shaping civilisations that we can still feel today. Spice commodities succeeded in giving birth to various new cultures as a form of the successful process of exchanging knowledge, culture, social, language, and beliefs carried out by the Indonesian people and the global community (Basmar, *et al.*, 2021) ^[5]. Given this success, we as the younger generation should be aware of the importance of Indonesia's role in building global civilisation as evidenced by the many traces and legacies of the results of this civilisation.

The rich heritage of past civilisations in the form of tangible and intangible objects can be an option for educators to be used as an object of study in the learning process, especially in history learning (Nasr & De Santillana, 1968) ^[24]. History educators can make use of various heritages of past civilisations such as music, architecture, technology, fashion, food, script, language, and beliefs that are local in nature (Pyae, 2018) ^[30]. The local approach referred to by Sartono Kartodirjo as lococentric can make it easier for students to understand a historical phenomenon (Cakranegara, 2020; Fiqri & Al Fikri, 2021; Tabroni, *et al.*, 2020) ^[7, 8, 42]. Before understanding history with a broad context, in this case national history, students should be directed to look at their surroundings from the smallest things such as the environment around their homes, schools, villages and cities (Janti, 2019) ^[14].

One of the historical relics of the cultural heritage of past civilisations that can be used as a learning resource is the Muaro Jambi Site. The nickname The City of Ancestor on the cultural heritage site is considered appropriate considering that this cultural heritage is a relic that influenced civilisation in the Asian region in the past (Kerlogue, 2011) ^[16]. In the 7th century AD, the Muaro Jambi Site was a multinational centre of religious education in addition to Nalanda University in India (Poesponegoro & Notosusanto, 1993) ^[27]. Therefore, the site is considered suitable if it is used as an object of study of local history based on the spice route as a learning resource for educators and students.

However, in its implementation, there are still various problems in making the Muaro Jambi Site as a source of learning the history of the spice route, such as the lack of interest in the site as an object of historical learning material, narratives that have not been compiled in full, and the lack of learning media that raise the site, as well as not allowing learning visits to the site given the minimal number of hours of learning history. These problems are then exacerbated by the lack of understanding of educators in developing and utilising local history learning resources in the history learning process. This is due to the educational background of most educators who do not have two skills at once such as conducting historical research and developing interesting historical learning media. Therefore, it takes a very long time to develop interesting local history learning media (Santosa, 2017; Susilo & Sofiarini, 2020; Sodiq, *et al.*, 2014) [33, 40, 38].

These problems, if the solution is not found, will have an impact on the less-than-optimal introduction to local historical objects, especially the Muaro Jambi Site as part of the object of study of the history of the spice route. Of course, through this study, it is shown how important the spice route is in learning history and how immersive technology with virtual tours can help educators in introducing the Muaro Jambi Site and other local historical sites as part of efforts to strengthen the spice route programme.

2. Material and Methods

This study uses a literature study by collecting various data relevant to the study under study and conducting field observations through distributing questionnaires to educators and students. The data that has been collected by researchers is then analysed to build a meaningful discussion description in describing how the Muaro Jambi Site as an object of study of the history of the spice route can be introduced through immersive technology in an effort to strengthen the spice route program.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 The Spice Route as a Way Forward for Civilisation

Indonesia has long been known by foreigners as a producer of superior spices such as pepper, nutmeg, cloves, and pepper. No doubt Indonesia with all its natural wealth became a bone of contention for foreign nations such as Arabia, India, China, Europe (Alya, *et al.*, 2022) [1]. The spices then became the prima donna for foreign nations which would later give birth to shipping lanes as a form of their efforts in controlling the spice commodity trade (Purwanda, 2022) [28]. The shipping route resulting from the spice trade is what became known as the Spice Route. The Spice Route illustrates that the spice commodity was successful in connecting Indonesia as an archipelago with foreign nations across the ocean (Utomo, 2016) [44]. The existence of cultural interactions as a result of shipping and spice trade then gave rise to a new culture as a result of fusion and mixing between cultures. The results of the fusion and mixing of these cultures will later give a pattern of cultural diversity in Indonesia (Wijaya, *et al.*, 2021) [48].

Cities that were originally limited to trading centres then transformed into centres of all forms of communication, interaction, and exchange of knowledge that had an impact on aspects of community life such as religion, tradition, culture, language, and technology (Ariwibowo, 2021) [3].

One of the values that should be modelled and preserved from the socio-economic life in the trading cities is the value of tolerance in appreciating all differences. As has been explained, the trading towns in coastal Indonesia became a place where all skin colours, religions, and races brought by foreigners met. This condition illustrates that the cities were able to accommodate all groups, religions, races, and skin colours to interact with each other without thinking about all the differences. It was intended to create an atmosphere of peace, prosperity, and tranquillity among traders and local communities (Muslimin, 2022) [22].

The glory of the Spice Route and its value is a special attraction for the government to reconstruct and revitalise the traces of the Spice Route heritage that still exist so that they can be used as capital for today's society in social life. Departing from this, the government through the Ministry of Education and Culture then established the Spice Route as a cultural priority programme in 2021. The implementation of Spice Route-themed activities such as the Malay International Seminar in the World Spice Trade Network in the framework of Kenduri Swarnabhumi and the Spice Route Cultural Muhibah in 2022 has illustrated that the Spice Route is a manifestation of the government's seriousness in opening the views of local and global communities regarding Indonesia's role as a world maritime axis in the past, present and future.

3.2 Muaro Jambi Site as a Product of Spice Civilisation

Indonesia's coastal areas played an important role in the success of the Spice Route as a centre for spice commodity trade as well as a centre for knowledge exchange between nations (Ma, 2017) [18]. This can be seen when in the VII century, the Sriwijaya Kingdom on the east coast of Sumatra became the centre of spice trade and religious education in Southeast Asia (Wicahyah, *et al.*, 2022) [45]. Arab news in 844-848 AD wrote that the Sriwijaya Kingdom was a producer of camphor, tin, sandalwood, ebony, ivory, and spices (Poesponegoro & Notosusanto, 1993) [27].

In addition to being known for its agricultural products, the Srivijaya Kingdom is known to have played a major role in regulating sea traffic in the Malacca Strait for foreigners heading to the Spice Islands in Maluku so that Srivijaya was considered a ruler in the region (Siregar, 2016; Kanumoyoso, 2018) [37, 15]. The geographical location of Srivijaya, which was in the middle of the spice trade shipping route between China and India, transformed the kingdom into the centre of world civilisation (Saputra, *et al.*, 2014) [35]. The existence of trade activities carried out by foreign nations then encouraged the emergence of Hindu Buddhist civilisation as evidenced by the records of a Chinese pilgrim named I-Tsing.

In 671 AD, I-Tsing visited and stayed in Sriwijaya for 6 months to learn Sanskrit grammar with the aim that Buddhist priests from China could read Buddhist scriptures in Sanskrit (Soekmono, 1973) [39]. During his 6-month stay, I-Tsing then saw that more than a thousand Buddhists were pursuing studies and good deeds in Sriwijaya (Putra & Yuliati, 2021) [29]. I-Tsing suggested to the people, especially Buddhist priests from China who wanted to deepen Buddhism, that they should stay in Sriwijaya before heading to Nalanda in Central India (Hamid, 2021) [11]. Therefore, many people such as Buddhist priests visited and stayed in Sriwijaya to learn more about Buddhism before they travelled to India (Sholeh, 2019) [36]. This explanation

illustrates that the rapid development of Buddhism in Srivijaya is inseparable from the influence of the "Spice Route" shipping route, which initially focused only on spice commodity trading activities carried out by Srivijaya, India and China.

Some archaeological remains from the Sriwijaya period can be found to this day, such as the Muaro Jambi site. The site is evidence of the success of the Sriwijaya Kingdom in utilising the "Spice Route" in advancing its trade. The Muaro Jambi Site area, which is located on the east coast of Sumatra, is certainly an advantage when trade traffic in all directions from both west and east meets in this area. The advantages gained from this strategic position then included the east coast of Jambi as a trade area of interest to various nations because it connected Persia, Arabia, India, China and Vietnam, as well as Indonesia itself. In addition, the existence of large river routes such as the Batanghari River made it easier for foreigners to trade and look for sources of international trade commodities such as honey, gharu wood, resin, ivory, and gold obtained from goldwashing (Rusmiyati, 2014).

The establishment of temple buildings at the Muaro Jambi Temple Site was intended by the rulers of the Sriwijaya Kingdom as a facility for foreigners, especially from China, who stayed to worship and learn about the teachings of their religion, namely Buddhism (Hall, 1988: 56) ^[10]. The Muaro Jambi site with all its features was then considered an example of the advanced civilisation that existed during the Sriwijaya Kingdom. This was reinforced by a report written by Frederick Martin entitled *The Archaeology of Hindoo Sumatra* in 1937 which argued that the site was the capital of an advanced civilisation in its time (Schitger, 1937). Frederick Martin's view was later supported by the opinion of John N. Miksic, an archaeologist. He estimated that Muaro Jambi used to be one of the centres of maritime trade activities run by the Sriwijaya Kingdom in addition to the Palembang region (Miksic, 1985) ^[21].

Of course, the findings of tangible cultural heritage that still exist around the Muaro Jambi Site can provide an illustration to the younger generation that the Indonesian nation has an important role in global civilisation. In addition, the site with its role in the Spice Route can be a collective memory for the younger generation to always be aware of the wealth and glory that has been obtained from their ancestors. This is in line with the focus of the Spice Route programme, which is to increase public awareness in preserving, utilising, and developing the cultural heritage of the Spice Route as a world heritage.

3.3 The Spice Route Programme in History Learning

Currently, the spice route is something that is often discussed by academics, especially observers of history and culture. The Spice Route in relation to today is a programme designed to reconstruct the maritime cultural route known as the Spice Route as a world heritage. Various efforts have been made in the success of this programme such as identifying traces that still exist in showing a series of socio-cultural interactions from the past (Muslimin, 2022) ^[22]. The Spice Route is a perspective that is currently needed in seeing traces of the role of the archipelago's society for hundreds of years. These traces are very valuable and important to be used as objects of learning studies, especially learning history in the current global era (Santoso & Aziz, 2022) ^[34].

The application of introducing the Spice Route to students has been included in the phase E history learning outcomes, namely first, students can understand the concept of the origin of ancestors and the Spice Route. Second, learners can analyse and evaluate the origin of ancestors and the Spice Route within the local, national and global scope. Third, learners are also able to originate the ancestors and the Spice Route in the past, present, and future dimensions. Fourth, learners can analyse and evaluate the origin of ancestors and the Spice Route from the patterns of development, change, sustainability, and recurrence, Fifth, learners can analyse and evaluate the origin of ancestors and the Spice Route diachronically and synchronically (Mustakim, 2023) ^[23].

These history learning outcomes apply to class X which has used the independent curriculum. The application of the Spice Route in history learning is a manifestation of the government's efforts to strengthen the unification of Indonesia by starting to unite regions, ethnic groups, and cultural values so that it will give birth to a national identity (dono & Kanumoyoso, 2016) ^[19]. This implies that the spice commodity which is used as a symbol of the glory of the Nusantara civilisation is then revived in the learning process so that students have awareness and emotional ties to various cultural heritages that can open stories about the glory of spice commodities in the past.

Looking at current conditions, raising the glory of spice commodities in history learning is a must for the Indonesian people in facing global competition today. Amidst the uncertainty of global conditions, the government is trying to make the spice route that has existed for thousands of years as a foundation to play an active role in the international world as the world's maritime axis in the past, present and future (Notohamijoyo, 2023) ^[25]. The efforts made by the government through the spice route programme are in line with several expressions that have historical elements such as *magistra vitae*, never leave history, and learn from history. The phrase shows that it is a great loss if we as a nation are unable to take the values that exist in every historical event.

3.4 Immersive Technology in Spice Route History Learning Media

Although it has laid the foundation with the existence of learning outcomes and materials related to the spice route, of course, it must be accompanied by the use of interactive digital learning media in conveying information about the glory of the spice route through some of its cultural heritage such as the Muaro Jambi Site. Various digital learning media can be utilised by educators considering the characteristics of students who currently tend to always use digital devices such as smartphones (Amarulloh, *et al.*, 2019; Rahmandani, *et al.*, 2018) ^[2, 31]. Although students have close proximity to smartphone technology devices through various social media applications such as WhatsApp, Instagram, X, and Telegram which make it easy for them to communicate with friends, family, and others (Wijaya, *et al.*, 2022) ^[47, 49].

One of the suitable solutions in solving various problems faced by educators is the use of immersive technology in developing historical learning media in this case local historical objects. In the book *Innovating Pedagogy* (2017) writes that there are new disruptions regarding innovation and change in the field of education such as Immersive

Learning. Immersive learning allows a person, be it an educator or a learner, to be in a situation as if they were there (Yusro, *et al.*, 2022; Hemmati, 2022)^[50, 13]. The use of immersive technology that can be used in learning history is through virtual tours of historical objects.

The use of virtual tours of historical objects is considered to be able to improve students' understanding of the concepts of human origin and the spice route in the history learning outcomes. This is in line with several previous studies including; first, a study entitled Virtual Museum Space as the Innovative Tool for the Student Research Practice explains that the use of virtual museums in Ukraine can improve the quality of the educational process by forming information and media literacy in students (Tserklevych, *et al.*, 2021)^[43].

Second, a study entitled Student Interest in Understanding European History through the Museum Virtual Tour 360 explains that students' interest in learning European history is increasing. In addition, the museum virtual tour also arouses critical reasoning and enlivens the imagination of students so that an interactive dialogue process occurs between educators and students (Bandarsyah, 2021)^[4]. Third, a study entitled Using Virtual Tours to Facilitate Sustainable Site Visits of Historic Sites explains that by utilising a 360 virtual tour based on historical sites, students experience a lot of progress in their ability to learn history (George, 2018)^[9].

The three previous studies are then supported by the opinions of students who researchers interviewed on 18 August 2022 regarding their interest in learning local history using virtual tours. They are very interested in using virtual tours in the local history learning process by exploring various historical object sites such as the Muaro Jambi Site. This is further strengthened by the results of an interview conducted by researchers with one of the educators. The educator stated that immersive technology-based media such as virtual tours can increase students' understanding and awareness of the importance of preserving the cultural heritage of the spice route through its relics such as the Muaro Jambi Site.

However, there is something interesting about the importance of using virtual tours as conveyed by one of the students when the researcher interviewed on 14 September 2023. The learner said that the use of virtual tours as a form of immersive technology can overcome the problem of access to the historical object directly. Because of the distance and physical limitations of students, learning that utilises local history objects is hampered. The opinion of these students is in line with research entitled Immersive multisensory virtual reality technologies for virtual tourism. In this research, virtual tours can provide the best experience and satisfaction after prospective visitors, in this case students, have access to digital visualisations of these historical objects. Of course, the best experience provided by the virtual tour will make students able to experience learning directly so that it provides an increase in knowledge that was originally only a picture to be real and clear (Wijaya, *et al.*, 2022)^[47, 49].

The introduction of the cultural heritage of the spice route such as the Muaro Jambi Site to students should be done considering that the area has strong potential to become a UNESCO world heritage. This is because on the site there are scattered temples as centres of worship, a network of artificial ditches connecting each temple, ancient ponds

around the temples, and lakes that are always connected to the flow of Batanghari tributaries which empties into the Malacca Strait (Parwati, 2017)^[26]. In addition, the distribution area of settlement files and temples in the Muaro Jambi Temple Complex is also thought to have been built with the concept of Buddhist cosmology (Widiatmoko, 2009)^[46]. The use of the Muaro Jambi Site as an object of historical study in learning media can also help local and national governments in making the younger generation aware of preserving and promoting these cultural heritage as a form of responsibility from the heirs of the masterpieces of Indonesia's previous ancestors.

4. Conclusions

Traces of the existence of the spice route such as those at the Muaro Jambi Site can be used as an object of historical study by educators. However, with various obstacles that exist, the use of renewable technology such as immersive technology is important to consider its existence. The presence of immersive technology such as virtual tours in various historical objects will certainly facilitate educators in introducing the rich cultural heritage of local communities through history learning. It also supports the efforts of the government when various narratives and introductions to the historical objects of the spice route are introduced so as to create historical awareness of Indonesia's very important position in the past and today.

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