

Historical Awareness and Cultural Heritage Preservation: A Qualitative Study in Senior High School Context

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how senior high school students and community members perceive the historical value of a local royal tomb in Nagauleng Village, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, and how these perceptions foster cultural heritage preservation awareness. Adopting a qualitative descriptive approach, data were gathered through in-depth interviews, participant observations, and document analysis with students, educators, community leaders, and local officials. Findings demonstrate that students' initial historical knowledge was fragmented and largely reliant on oral tradition. However, engagement in participatory cultural practices—such as tomb pilgrimages, mappenre bunga, and mappadandang ceremonies—effectively transformed tacit historical awareness into structured, explicit understanding. Participants conceptualized the royal tomb not merely as a burial ground but as a dynamic symbol of historical, cultural, and spiritual identity. While institutional support and active living traditions served as critical catalysts for preservation, limited written documentation and diminishing youth engagement emerged as significant impediments. Ultimately, the study highlights that incorporating local heritage sites into both formal and informal educational frameworks significantly enhances historical consciousness and strengthens community-driven preservation efforts.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Cultural heritage sites constitute vital material manifestations of collective memory and historical trajectory, anchoring present-day community identities within broader socio-cultural narratives (Bhatti & Pardaev, 2025). Among these tangible markers, royal tombs function as symbolic focal points that bridge centuries-old political and spiritual legacies with contemporary civic consciousness. Within national education frameworks across Southeast Asia—specifically in Indonesia—curricula emphasize local history as an essential foundation for character building, historical thinking, and regional identity (Firmansyah et al., 2025; Sariyatun & Marpelina, 2024). However, formal classroom

instruction frequently operates in isolation from the living heritage embedded in students' immediate environments, resulting in abstract pedagogical experiences that fail to cultivate authentic heritage stewardship ([Achille & Fiorillo, 2022](#); [Marques, 2025](#)).

This pedagogical disconnect is particularly acute within secondary history education, where traditional textbook-centric approaches prioritize macroscopic national narratives over localized historical encounters ([Strand, 2025](#)). Consequently, senior high school students often perceive history as a static set of memorized facts rather than a dynamic, place-based phenomenon ([Pan et al., 2022](#); [Suswandari et al., 2026](#)). While educational policy advocates for community-engaged learning, history teachers lack structured frameworks to connect classroom topics with nearby historical monuments, living rituals, and oral traditions ([Ratih et al., 2025](#); [Sari & Yanti, 2022](#)). This divide weakens students' emotional and cognitive attachment to local history, leaving heritage sites vulnerable to neglect and rapid socio-cultural detachment ([Siregar & Suboh, 2025](#)).

A salient example of this underutilized potential is found in Nagauleng Village, Cenrana District, Bone Regency, South Sulawesi. The village is home to the royal tomb of the 16th King of Bone, La Patau Matanna Tikka (Matinroé ri Nagauleng)—a pivotal historical figure who succeeded his uncle ([Fadillah et al., 2025](#)), La Tenritatta Arung Palakka, and played a decisive role in regional socio-political consolidation, inter-kingdom alliances, and the propagation of Islam across the Bugis region ([Anawagis et al., 2023](#)). Despite its profound historical, religious, and architectural significance, the tomb remains underintegrated into local secondary school curricula. Local historical knowledge among the youth remains fragmented, superficial, and reliant on uncoded oral traditions, leaving it highly susceptible to generational erosion amid rapid technological and social transformation ([Hasmiza et al., 2025](#); [Rahman et al., 2022](#)).

Theoretical perspectives on knowledge conversion offer valuable lenses for interpreting this heritage gap. Drawing on Nonaka and Takeuchi's knowledge management framework alongside Hanvey's levels of cross-cultural awareness ([Permatasari et al., 2026](#); [Zahedi, 2025](#)), historical understanding in traditional communities exists predominantly as tacit knowledge—embodied in ritual practices, local lore (pau-pau ri kadong), and elder memory. For secondary students, transforming this tacit cultural memory into structured, explicit historical consciousness requires mediated educational interventions ([Bandarsyah, 2025](#)). Furthermore, empirical studies consistently confirm that community perceptions of a site's symbolic and intrinsic value directly dictate preservation behaviors ([Yang et al., 2023](#)). Without intentional pedagogical scaffolding, students are unlikely to transition from passive proximity to active heritage preservation.

Despite growing academic interest in heritage education, a significant research gap persists regarding how rural Indonesian secondary schools can systematically leverage local sacred and historical monuments to foster preservation awareness. Existing literature heavily focuses on urban museum education or macro-level tourism studies, paying minimal attention to the socio-pedagogical dynamics of indigenous Bugis heritage contexts ([Adela et al., 2023](#); [Aziz et al., 2024](#); [Kadir, 2025](#); [Tahir et al., 2025](#)). Specifically, few empirical investigations have explored how student and community

perceptions interact to shape cultural preservation attitudes around royal mortuary sites in rural South Sulawesi.

To address these empirical and pedagogical gaps, this study examines the intersection of local heritage perception, educational integration, and awareness preservation in Nagauleng Village. Specifically, this research addresses three central questions:

1. How do high school students and local community members perceive the historical, cultural, and spiritual value of the Tomb of the 16th King of Bone?
2. What is the extent of heritage preservation awareness among SMA students in relation to this site?
3. What systemic factors support or impede the integration of local heritage sites into educational and community preservation frameworks?

By addressing these questions, this study contributes to the global literature on place-based learning, heritage education, and community-driven preservation, offering actionable frameworks for history educators, curriculum developers, and heritage managers across Southeast Asia.

2. METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive design, consistent with an interpretive paradigm that seeks to understand participants' meanings, experiences, and social contexts. Qualitative methodology was deemed appropriate given the exploratory nature of the research questions, which required rich, contextual data rather than statistical generalization. The study was conducted in Nagauleng Village, Cenrana District, Bone Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia—the site of the Tomb of the 16th King of Bone.

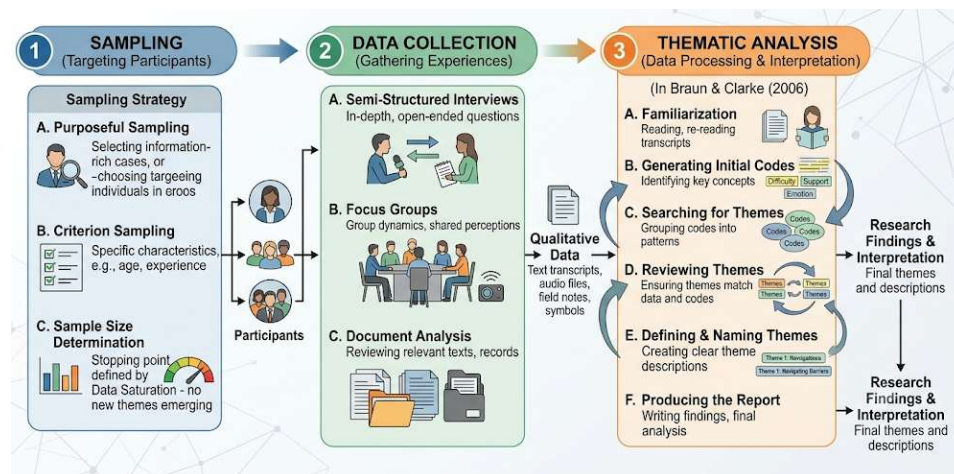


Figure 1. Qualitative Descriptive Design

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure informational richness and relevance to the research questions. The study involved three distinct participant groups: (1) senior high school students from the local High School who

received some formal instruction on regional history; (2) community members, including village elders, religious leaders, and tomb caretakers; and (3) local government representatives and village officials. A total of 18 participants took part in the study. Student participants ($n = 8$) were aged 16–18 years and enrolled in Grade 11 or 12. Community and official participants ($n = 10$) were selected based on their knowledge of and involvement with the heritage site.

Three primary methods were used for data collection. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with all 18 participants. Interview guides were developed around the three research questions, covering historical knowledge, perceptions of the site's significance, preservation behaviors, and perceived enabling or constraining factors. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and lasted between 30 and 60 minutes.

Participant observation was conducted across six visits to the site over a three-month period. The researcher observed cultural activities, including the weekly mappenre bunga ceremony, the annual haul (commemoration ceremony), and regular pilgrimage practices. Field notes documented physical conditions of the site, participant interactions, and ritual procedures.

Documentary analysis included examination of village administrative records, local government heritage documentation from the Bone Regency Cultural and Tourism Office in the year 2020, and academic sources related to Bone Kingdom history. This triangulation of data sources enhanced the credibility and depth of the findings.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the framework of Miles and Huberman, comprising three iterative stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Interview transcripts were coded inductively, with initial codes subsequently grouped into broader categories and themes. Member checking was conducted with five key informants to validate interpretive accuracy. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process, with the lead researcher maintaining a reflective journal to monitor potential biases arising from familiarity with the research context.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Student and Community Perceptions of Historical Value

Findings revealed that both students and community members held layered perceptions of the tomb's significance, though the depth and structure of these perceptions varied considerably.

Students' initial knowledge was predominantly fragmented. As S3 stated:

"I knew there was a king buried there, but I didn't really know why it mattered or what he did."

This finding was consistent across the student participant group, suggesting that formal schooling had not successfully contextualised the site within students' historical understanding. Community participants, by contrast, demonstrated richer narratives

about the tomb's significance. Community elder C2 described the 16th King of Bone as:

"a leader who brought discipline—not just in politics, but in religion. He insisted on Friday prayers when others were reluctant."

Such narratives, transmitted through oral tradition, portrayed the king as a religiously committed reformer whose legacy shaped both political and spiritual life in the Bone region.

The tomb was perceived not merely as a burial site but as a multi-dimensional symbol. Three distinct layers of meaning emerged from the data:

Historical-political significance: The king's role in consolidating the Bone Kingdom through strategic inter-regional alliances was recognised by community participants, though less by students.

Cultural continuity: The site was associated with living traditions including mappenre bunga (flower offering ceremonies) and mappadendang (communal harvest celebration), which were perceived as material links to ancestral heritage.

Spiritual significance: The tomb functioned as a site of ziarah (pilgrimage), undertaken at key life transitions—after marriage, before or after migration, and on religious holidays. Community member C7 noted:

"When I returned from working in Makassar, the first thing I did was come to pray here. It is a form of gratitude and respect."

Following structured socialisation activities facilitated through collaboration between village officials, teachers, and tomb caretakers, student participants demonstrated marked shifts in their articulations of the site's significance. Post-activity interviews revealed that students began to connect the tomb's history to their own cultural identity, with S6 commenting:

"Learning about this king made me feel proud to be from this village. I didn't know we had such important history here."

Level of Heritage Preservation Awareness Among Students

Analysis of student interview data and observational records revealed a differentiated landscape of preservation awareness, ranging from passive recognition to active participation.

Prior to the heritage education activities, most students demonstrated passive awareness—they acknowledged the existence of the tomb and its presumed importance but did not engage with it in a personal meaningful way. Observation data confirmed limited student presence at cultural activities held at the site, despite its proximity to the school.

Following the integration of heritage-related activities into school-community programming, a notable shift toward more active forms of awareness was observed. Several students began attending the weekly mappenre bunga ceremony voluntarily, and four student participants joined the haul committee for the annual commemoration. S1 reflected:

“Before, I thought ziarah was just for old people. Now I understand that it is part of keeping the history alive.”

The study identified a meaningful relationship between historical knowledge acquisition and preservation motivation. Students who demonstrated greater historical knowledge, whether from formal instruction or community engagement—also expressed stronger intentions to participate in preservation activities. This pattern supports the proposition that heritage education interventions targeting local sites can effectively shift student orientations from passive observers to active cultural stewards.

However, the level of active participation remained uneven. Two student participants indicated discomfort with certain pilgrimage practices they associated with religious ambiguity, reflecting a broader tension within the community around ensuring that ziarah practices remain consistent with Islamic teaching. Tomb caretakers and village religious leaders were observed proactively to address this tension through ongoing dialogue with visitors.

Enabling and Constraining Factors

Thematic analysis identified four primary enabling factors and three primary constraining factors shaping heritage awareness and preservation behaviour.

Enabling factors:

(1) Oral tradition and living cultural practices. The persistence of mappenre bunga, mappadandang, and ziarah practices sustained community connection to the site between formal educational interventions. These traditions functioned as informal heritage education that pre-structured participants’ receptivity to more explicit historical knowledge.

(2) Government institutional support. Local government participation in haul ceremonies and engagement from the Bone Regency Cultural Heritage Office lent institutional legitimacy to preservation activities and signalled to students and community members that the site was officially valued.

(3) Tomb caretakers as community educators. The two resident tomb caretakers functioned as informal educators, providing historical narratives to visitors and correcting misconceptions about the site’s practices. Their sustained presence ensured continuity of knowledge transmission.

(4) Inter-community ritual networks. The haul ceremony drew participants from multiple regencies (including Parepare, Barru, and Maros), creating a broader community of practice around the site and reinforcing its supra-local significance.

Constraining factors:

(1) Absence of written documentation. No accessible written historical record of the 16th King of Bone was available in the local language or in a format suitable for classroom use. Historical knowledge remained concentrated in the memories of elderly community members, creating a fragile chain of transmission.

(2) Declining youth engagement. Several community participants observed a generational decline in voluntary participation in cultural activities, attributing this to increased exposure to digital media and urban cultural influences. C4 noted:

“Young people are not uninterested—they simply do not know. Once they know, they come.”

(3) Inconsistent school-community integration. At the time of the study, there was no formalised mechanism for incorporating the heritage site into the local SMA curriculum. Heritage-related activities depended on individual teacher initiative and community goodwill rather than systematic institutional programming.

Discussion

The findings of this study illuminate several interconnected dynamics relevant to heritage education research and practice in the context of senior high school education. First, the transformation of students’ historical knowledge from fragmentary to structured understanding—observed across the study period—aligns with Nonaka and Takeuchi’s conceptualization of tacit-to-explicit knowledge conversion (Tammets, 2012; Zahedi, 2025). Before structured heritage education activities, students possessed what Polanyi would describe as “tacit” familiarity with the site: a vague sense of its importance (Tsoukas, 2012), internalized through cultural osmosis, but not explicitly articulated or academically grounded. The integration of community-led socialization with school-based activities functioned as a socialization–externalization mechanism that rendered implicit knowledge accessible and transmissible.

Second, the progression from passive to active heritage awareness observed among student participants resonates with Hanvey’s developmental model of cultural awareness (Cai et al., 2022; Pratt et al., 2026). Students moved from surface-level recognition—“there is an old tomb nearby”—toward what Hanvey characterises as “subjective familiarity,” wherein cultural phenomena are understood from the inside, with emotional as well as intellectual resonance. The affective dimension of this shift was evident in students’ self-reports of pride, belonging, and motivation to participate in preservation activities—responses that go beyond the cognitive outcomes typically targeted by formal history instruction.

Third, the enabling role of living cultural practices—mappenre bunga, mappadandang, haul ceremonies—suggests that intangible heritage functions as pedagogical infrastructure in ways that formal schooling often fails to replicate. These practices created repeated occasions for intergenerational encounter, allowing students to observe, ask questions, and gradually assume participatory roles within cultural rituals. This observation is consistent with Banda et al. (2024) and Lansiwu et al. (2024)’s argument that sustainable heritage preservation depends not on expert-led interventions alone, but on the active maintenance of community-based practices that embed heritage meaning in everyday life.

The constraining factors identified—particularly the absence of written documentation and the lack of curriculum integration—highlight structural barriers that individual motivation and community tradition alone cannot overcome. The oral

transmission chain for the history of the 16th King of Bone is concentrated in a small number of elderly community members and is not supported by accessible written resources in Bahasa Indonesia or the local Bugis language. This renders the knowledge base fragile, disproportionately dependent on the longevity and accessibility of individuals. Heritage education at the high school level will remain episodic and instructor-dependent until documentation and curriculum structures are systematically developed (Achille & Fiorillo, 2022; Vargas-Arteaga et al., 2024; Yan & Li, 2023).

These findings carry specific implications for high school history teachers in similar contexts. Rather than treating local heritage sites as supplementary material, teachers can productively frame them as primary sources that contextualise national curriculum content—connecting macro-historical narratives about Islamic kingdoms in South Sulawesi to the material and living heritage present in students' own communities. Methodologies such as oral history interviews with community elders, ethnographic observation of cultural rituals, and collaborative heritage documentation projects offer pedagogically rich approaches that are feasible within existing curriculum structures.

This study is not without limitations. The findings are drawn from a single village context and cannot be generalised to other heritage sites or student populations without further corroboration. The relatively small participant sample, while appropriate for qualitative inquiry, limits the scope of claims that can be made. Future research should employ longitudinal designs to assess the sustained effects of heritage education interventions, and comparative studies across multiple heritage sites and school contexts would strengthen the evidence base for policy and curriculum development.

4. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that the Tomb of the 16th King of Bone in Nagauleng Village represents a significant but underutilized educational resource for high school students in Bone Regency. Initially, students' historical knowledge of the site was fragmentary and largely derived from ambient oral tradition rather than formal instruction. Structured community-school heritage education activities facilitated a meaningful transformation: students developed more structured historical understanding, stronger cultural identification, and heightened motivation to participate in preservation activities.

The study identified a productive ecology of enabling factors—living cultural practices, institutional government support, dedicated tomb caretakers, and inter-community ritual networks—that can be strategically leveraged in heritage education programming. At the same time, the absence of accessible written documentation and the lack of formal curriculum integration represent systemic constraints that require deliberate institutional responses.

These findings carry three principal recommendations. First, local governments and educational authorities should collaborate to produce accessible written documentation of local heritage sites in Bahasa Indonesia, suitable for classroom use. Second, High School history teachers should explore project-based learning approaches that position local heritage sites as primary historical sources, creating structured opportunities for

students to engage in oral history collection, site documentation, and cultural participation. Third, school-community partnerships should be formalized—through memoranda of understanding between schools, village administrations, and heritage bodies—to ensure that heritage education activities are sustainable beyond the commitment of individual teachers. The broader implication of this study is that historical awareness among young people is not a fixed trait but a cultivable capacity, responsive to educational intervention and community engagement. Heritage sites need not be passive monuments: when pedagogically activated, they become living classrooms in which students encounter history not as a distant past but as a present inheritance that they are invited to sustain.

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