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Research Paper

Education as the Core of Cultural Governance in Tourism: A Tiered Integrative Model

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ABSTRACT

The governance of Traditional Cultural Expressions (TCE) in tourism has relied primarily on legal protection, preservation policy, and economic utilisation, yet these instruments do not by themselves produce cultural understanding among tourism actors. The persistent difficulty lies in the gap between cultural protection and cultural interpretation in tourism practice. This study develops a conceptual framework positioning tourism education not as a complement to legal and economic instruments but as the mechanism that connects them. Using a qualitative conceptual design, the study analyses Indonesian cultural and tourism policy, national and regional competency standards, and the tourism education literature, read against international scholarship on culture-based tourism education. The analysis finds that Indonesian tourism curricula remain oriented toward technical and service competencies, so that cultural understanding develops informally if at all, and TCE is readily promoted as an attraction while remaining inadequately understood as a living system of values. In response, the study proposes an education-centred model of cultural governance built on three interrelated dimensions: tiered learning, which advances cultural competency progressively from foundational awareness to strategic governance capacity; integrative governance, which links legal frameworks, educational institutions, tourism industries, and cultural communities; and differentiative curriculum design, which accommodates Indonesia's diverse local cultural contexts while maintaining national competency standards. The framework yields recommendations spanning curriculum reorientation, community-based experiential learning, ethical institutional partnerships, cross-sector coordination, and the enrichment of regional competency standards such as the ASEAN MRA-TP with substantive national cultural content. Conceptual in nature, the model requires empirical testing, but it offers a theoretical and policy foundation for curriculum reform and culturally sustainable tourism governance in Indonesia.

Keywords: *Traditional Cultural Expression, Cultural Governance, Tourism Education, Cultural Heritage, Experiential Learning*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Traditional Cultural Expression (TCE) constitutes an integral part of national identity and, at the same time, represents a strategic resource for tourism development (Kasih et al., 2023; Setiyono et al., 2024). In many societies, TCE embodies collective memory, inherited knowledge, ritual practices, artistic expressions, oral traditions, and community-based values that continue to live within social life (Wong & Fernandini, 2010). Within tourism, TCE functions not only as an attraction but also as a cultural marker that differentiates one destination from another, it provides meaning, narrative, and identity to tourism experiences (Carter & Beeton, 2004; Pantović et al., 2023).

At the global level, cultural tourism has become increasingly significant, contemporary tourism is no longer dominated only by sightseeing or object-based consumption (Fang, 2020). Tourists increasingly seek experiences that are authentic, participatory, and connected to local communities, this shift has encouraged destinations to place culture at the centre of tourism development strategies (Paulauskaite et al., 2017; Smith, 2015). However, the growing importance of culture also creates new governance challenges. As culture becomes increasingly packaged and promoted for tourism purposes, the risk of commodification, simplification, and distortion of cultural meaning becomes more pronounced (Dahles, 2013; Shepherd, 2002).

Many countries now offer nature-based tourism products with stronger management systems, clearer sustainability standards, and more integrated destination governance (Fredman & Tyrväinen, 2014). In the Indonesian context, these issues are particularly important because Indonesia has long relied on the richness of its natural and cultural resources as the foundation of tourism development. Yet, the comparative advantage of natural resources is no longer sufficient in a competitive and environmentally vulnerable global tourism landscape (Butarbutar & Soemarno, 2013; Ollivaud & Haxton, 2019). Consequently, Indonesia needs to strengthen alternative tourism resources that are more deeply rooted in identity, community, and cultural uniqueness, therefore, TCE offers such potential because it is living, diverse, and inherently difficult to replicate (Jaszi, 2010; Rusmana et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, positioning TCE as a strategic tourism resource cannot be approached superficially. TCE is not merely a product to be displayed, performed, or sold. It is a living system of values embedded in community life (Harbs, 2023). When TCE is detached from its social and ethical context, tourism may transform it into a simplified spectacle. In such circumstances, culture may continue to exist visually, but lose its meaning (Setiyono et al., 2024). Therefore, the central challenge is not only how to protect TCE legally, but how to ensure that tourism actors understand, interpret, and practise it responsibly.

Existing approaches to the governance of TCE in tourism tend to focus on regulatory protection, preservation policy, and economic utilisation (Safa'at & Bakri, 2017; Djulaeka & Zulkifli, 2018; Kasih et al., 2023). These approaches are necessary, especially in preventing exploitation and providing institutional legitimacy. However, they are not sufficient to guarantee cultural sustainability, where regulation can determine what is permitted and prohibited, but it cannot automatically build cultural awareness among tourism actors (Cohen, 2002). Preservation policy can document cultural practices, but it cannot always ensure that their meanings are understood in tourism practice (Engelhardt & Rogers, 2009). Economic utilisation can generate income, but it may also produce distortion when not guided by ethical and cultural understanding (Skinner, 2019).

These condition reveals a fundamental gap in cultural governance, the problem is not merely the absence of regulation, but the absence of an educational mechanism capable of cultivating sustained cultural understanding among tourism actors. Tourism education in Indonesia has often been shaped by industry-oriented needs, with strong emphasis on technical skills, service quality, and operational competence (Ernawati & Pearce, 2003; Sutono et al., 2025). Although these competencies are important,

they do not fully address the cultural and ethical dimensions required in managing TCE within tourism. Education should not be treated merely as a supporting instrument or a supplementary curriculum component, instead, it should become the primary mechanism through which cultural values are transmitted, interpreted, and translated into tourism practice (Cooper, 2002; Edelheim, 2020). In this sense, education bridges the gap between legal protection, cultural preservation, and tourism utilisation (Saputra, 2024).

Based on the background discuss before, this study therefore grounded in the argument that education should be repositioned as the core mechanism of cultural governance in tourism. This study aims to examine the limitations of existing approaches to the governance of TCE in tourism and to propose an education-centered cultural governance model. The model is designed to be tiered, integrative, and differentiative, it is tiered because cultural learning should develop progressively from basic awareness to strategic governance capacity, it is integrative because it connects legal, cultural, economic, educational, and community dimensions and it is differentiative because it allows curriculum and policy adaptation according to the diversity of local cultural contexts in Indonesia. Moreover, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the limitations of existing regulatory and sectoral approaches in governing traditional cultural expression within tourism?
2. How can education be positioned as the core mechanism of cultural governance in tourism?
3. What conceptual model can integrate culture, tourism, education, and policy in a tiered, integrative, and differentiative manner?

The contribution of this article lies in its attempt to reframe tourism education as a governance instrument. Rather than viewing education merely as a provider of technical labour skills for the tourism industry, this study positions education as a central mechanism for sustaining cultural meaning, strengthening ethical tourism practice, and ensuring that TCE is not merely utilised but also understood and transmitted.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Cultural tourism development

Cultural tourism has undergone a significant transformation over recent decades, it is no longer understood simply as the consumption of monuments, performances, museums, or cultural objects. Cultural tourism has increasingly involves deeper engagement with local practices, values, stories, and ways of life, this transition from object-based cultural tourism to experience-based cultural tourism, in which tourists seek active involvement and meaningful interaction, this transformation is closely linked to the broader discourse on sustainable tourism (Borseková & Vitálišová, 2024; Rise, 2025; Smith, 2015).

Culture is increasingly recognised as both a development resource and a source of identity, Wasela, (2023) argue that culture plays a crucial role in sustainable tourism development because it connects economic activity with social identity and community continuity. Similarly Sihombing et al., (2024) emphasise that cultural tourism must balance utilisation with preservation so that tourism does not weaken the very cultural resources on which it depends.

Prakoso et al., (2020) argue that local community involvement is essential for maintaining authenticity and sustainability, community-based approaches have also become increasingly important in cultural tourism. García-Hernández et al., (2021) further demonstrate that cultural destinations are shaped not only by physical heritage but also by social spaces, community dynamics, and everyday cultural practices, therefore cultural tourism cannot be separated from the communities that produce, practise, and transmit culture (Santa & Tiatco, 2019). These developments show that cultural tourism

must be governed with sensitivity. Culture is not a passive object; it is a dynamic social practice. Therefore, cultural tourism requires a governance framework that does not reduce culture into a commodity, but recognises its social, ethical, and educational dimensions (Du Cros et al., 2026).

2.2. Traditional Cultural Expression (TCE)

Traditional Cultural Expression (TCE) is closely related to intangible cultural heritage, where it includes cultural forms that are inherited, practised, adapted, and transmitted within communities (Marc, 2017). TCE may appear in the form of oral traditions, performing arts, rituals, ceremonies, craftsmanship, local knowledge, traditional design, and other forms of cultural expression rooted in collective life.

Within tourism context, TCE may serve as a strong attraction because it provides uniqueness and identity. Bendix, (2018) mentioned that culture can be transformed into a commodity when it is reproduced primarily for tourist consumption, in such cases, cultural practices may be simplified, staged, or detached from their original social meaning. Moreover, analysis of staged authenticity also remains relevant in understanding how tourism may reconstruct cultural practices to meet tourist expectation (Rickly et al., 2025). Salazar and Graburn, (2014) explains that tourism imaginaries shape the way destinations and cultures are represented. Cultural experiences are not simply encountered; they are narrated, packaged, marketed, and consumed. Tiberghien et al., (2017) further suggest that tourists' cultural experiences are shaped by perceptions and expectations, which may not always correspond to the lived realities of local communities.

The use of TCE in tourism still has significant challenges, in contemporary tourism, this issue has become more complex, where in Indonesia, the challenge is particularly visible in destinations where culture has become a major tourism attraction (Noerkaisar & Dhanial, 2025; Yuli, 2024). For example, in Bali, tourism can generate economic benefits while also transforming cultural practices. Such transformation is not always negative, but it must be managed carefully. Without adequate understanding, tourism may encourage selective performance, simplification, or commercial adaptation that weakens cultural meaning (Dwipayana et al., 2025; Mudana et al., 2025).

The central issue, therefore, is not only whether TCE is protected, but whether it is understood. Legal protection and preservation policy are necessary, but they cannot stand alone. TCE must also be transmitted through education, practised within communities, and interpreted responsibly by tourism actors.

2.3. Tourism education, cultural education, and experiential learning

Education plays a strategic role in shaping cultural understanding, education is not merely a mechanism for transferring knowledge, but also a process of forming values, attitudes, sensitivity, and interpretive capacity (Trahar, 2010; Zalli, 2024). According to Cushner and Mahon, (2009), in multicultural societies, education helps learners understand diversity and develop intercultural competence, the importance of intercultural competence in modern education, while Mariyono, (2024) highlights the role of multicultural education in building awareness of cultural diversity.

In tourism education, the integration of culture has become increasingly important. Tourism professionals do not only provide services; they also interpret destinations, represent local identity, and mediate encounters between visitors and host communities (Coles et al., 2012; Zhang et al., 2013). Therefore, tourism education should not be limited to technical and operational competencies, it must also develop cultural literacy, ethical sensitivity, and the ability to engage with local communities respectfully (Rise, 2025; Semwal et al., 2024). Therefore, experiential learning is particularly relevant in this context. Coulson and Harvey, (2013) conceptualises learning as a process grounded in direct experience, reflection, conceptualisation, and application. Boud, (1993) further emphasise that learning

becomes meaningful when experience is connected to reflection and contextual understanding. In relation to TCE, this means that students and tourism actors cannot fully understand culture through classroom instruction alone, they need direct engagement with communities, cultural practitioners, rituals, spaces, and local narratives (Jamal et al., 2011). Community-based experiential learning also strengthens the role of communities as knowledge holders. Deale et al., (2010) argue that communities provide authentic sources of learning in sustainable tourism education. Thomas, (2024) further indicate that community involvement in tourism learning can support both student development and community empowerment.

In Indonesia, tourism education still faces challenges in integrating culture as a core competency (Sutono et al., 2025). Ernawati and Pearce, (2003) argue that vocational tourism education is often strongly influenced by industry demands, and cultural integration in tourism education remains partial and uneven (Sutono et al., 2025). Gunawan et al., (2025) further highlight the difficulty of aligning national policy, local cultural needs, and educational practice.

These studies indicate that the challenge is not only curricular but also epistemological. Cultural knowledge is often contextual, oral, embodied, and community-based, while formal education tends to organise knowledge into structured modules and measurable competencies. This creates a gap between living cultural knowledge and institutional learning systems.

2.4. Cultural governance in tourism

Cultural governance refers to the ways in which cultural resources, values, institutions, actors, and practices are coordinated, regulated, interpreted, sustained and it is broader than legal regulation (Djelic & Sahlin-Andersson, 2006; Qaissi, 2024). Moreover, governance involves not only rules but also implementation mechanisms, institutional arrangements, and coordination among actors (Sager & Gofen, 2022).

Cultural governance becomes complex in tourism because it draws together sectors with divergent priorities. Tourism is oriented toward experience, competitiveness, and economic value; the cultural sector toward preservation and identity; the education sector toward knowledge formation and competence development. Local communities, for their part, are concerned with dignity, continuity, participation, and benefit. Left uncoordinated, these differing orientations tend toward fragmentation rather than complementarity. The same problem is recognised internationally, where tourism is understood not as a self-contained economic sector but as one intersecting with infrastructure, culture, environment, education, labour, and community development. Tourism governance therefore calls for integrated policy arrangements. However, the connection among these sectors is not yet sufficiently operationalised. The existence of laws does not automatically produce integrated governance. In practice, cultural preservation, tourism development, and tourism education often operate in separate institutional spaces. This fragmentation creates a gap between normative recognition and practical implementation.

2.5. Theoretical foundation

This study is built on three interrelated theoretical foundations which are cultural governance, tourism education, and experiential learning. First, cultural governance provides the conceptual basis for understanding that TCE cannot be managed only through legal protection. Governance involves coordination among institutions, actors, values, and practices. In this sense, cultural governance requires mechanisms that connect regulation, community participation, economic utilisation, and knowledge transmission. This perspective is essential because the sustainability of TCE depends not only on formal rules, but also on how culture is understood, practised, and transmitted.

Second, tourism education provides the institutional pathway through which cultural understanding can be developed among tourism actors. Tourism education is not merely a technical training system for producing industry labour. It is also a process of forming professional judgment, ethical awareness, cultural literacy, and interpretive competence. When tourism education is reduced to operational skills, it may produce technically competent graduates who lack the ability to engage with culture responsibly. Therefore, tourism education must be repositioned as a strategic component of cultural governance.

Third, experiential learning explains how cultural understanding can be formed through direct engagement and reflection. TCE is a living practice. It cannot be fully understood through textual explanation alone. Students and tourism practitioners need to encounter cultural communities, observe cultural practices, participate in reflective learning, and understand the meanings attached to cultural expression. Experiential learning therefore provides the pedagogical basis for connecting formal education with community-based cultural knowledge.

The integration of these three theoretical perspectives forms the foundation of the education-centered cultural governance model proposed in this study. Cultural governance explains the need for integrated coordination. Tourism education provides the institutional mechanism. Experiential learning provides the pedagogical method. Together, they support the argument that education should be placed at the core of cultural governance in tourism.

The literature on cultural tourism has expanded significantly, particularly in relation to sustainability, authenticity, experience, and community-based tourism (Krittayaruangroj et al., 2023). However, much of this literature continues to focus on destination management, tourist behaviour, heritage preservation, and tourism products (Azmi et al., 2023). Studies on tourism education have also developed, especially in relation to curriculum design, competency standards, and experiential learning (Cooper, 2002; Edelheim, 2020; Thomas, 2024). Nevertheless, the role of tourism education as a governance mechanism for sustaining TCE has not been sufficiently explored. Existing studies often treat education as a supporting component rather than as a central mechanism of cultural governance (Zalli, 2024).

Therefore, this study addresses that gap by positioning education as the core mechanism linking cultural protection, tourism utilisation, community knowledge, and policy implementation. Its novelty lies in developing an education-centered cultural governance model that is tiered, integrative, and differentiative. In this model, education is not merely a curriculum supplement but the central mechanism through which cultural meaning is understood, transmitted, and translated into tourism practice.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Data collection

This study adopts a conceptual qualitative research design. It combines normative juridical analysis, policy analysis, literature review, and conceptual model development. This design is appropriate because the study does not seek to measure empirical variables or test statistical relationships. Instead, it aims to analyse existing legal, policy, and educational frameworks and to construct a conceptual model for improving the governance of TCE in tourism.

This study relies on secondary data obtained through document analysis and literature review. The sources include primary legal materials, including Indonesian laws and regulations related to culture, tourism, and education. Secondary legal and academic materials, including books, journal articles, and prior research on TCE, cultural tourism, tourism education, and governance. Policy and institutional documents, including reports from international organisations and tourism-related institutions and

comparative materials from selected international practices in culture-based tourism education. The normative juridical approach is used to examine legal frameworks related to culture, tourism, and education in Indonesia. This approach conceptualises law as a system of norms that can be analysed in terms of structure, principles, consistency, and interrelationship with broader policy objectives.

Policy analysis is used to identify gaps between normative frameworks and implementation needs. The study draws on the logic of policy analysis as a method for examining problems, evaluating alternatives, and formulating contextually relevant recommendations. In this article, policy analysis is used to explain why regulatory protection alone is insufficient and why education should be positioned as a governance mechanism.

The Indonesian regulatory frameworks consulted include (Law on the Advancement of Culture, 2017), (Law on Tourism, 2009) and (Law on the National Education System, 2003). The study also considers regional competency frameworks such as the ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement on Tourism Professionals and the Common ASEAN Tourism Curriculum as contextual references for tourism education standards.

The literature reviewed in this study covers the period from 2000 to 2025, with particular emphasis on scholarly works, policy reports, and institutional documents published between 2000 and 2025. Earlier foundational works are included selectively where they remain theoretically relevant. The literature was selected based on relevance to four thematic areas: cultural tourism, Traditional Cultural Expression, tourism education, and cultural governance.

The selection process involved several stages. First, relevant literature was identified through academic databases, books, legal documents, and institutional reports. Second, the sources were classified according to their thematic relevance. Third, sources were screened based on conceptual contribution, recency, and relevance to the Indonesian context. Fourth, selected works were synthesised to construct the conceptual foundation of the proposed model. These include, among others, Kolb's experiential learning theory and Greenwood's discussion of cultural commodification. The time frame was selected to ensure that the study captures contemporary developments in cultural tourism, tourism education, experiential learning, and cultural governance, while still retaining foundational theories necessary for conceptual development.

Because this study is conceptual in nature, it does not use field instruments, respondents, samples, or empirical variables. The validity of the argument is therefore based on theoretical coherence, policy relevance, consistency of synthesis, and the logical relationship between the problem, literature, analysis, and proposed model.

3.2. Data analysis

Data were analysed qualitatively through four stages. The first stage involved descriptive mapping of the concepts, legal frameworks, and policy structures related to TCE, tourism, and education (Stoffelen, 2019). The second stage involved critical analysis of the limitations of existing regulatory and sectoral approaches. The third stage involved comparative analysis of selected international practices in culture-based tourism education (Mustafa et al., 2025). The fourth stage involved conceptual synthesis to formulate the education-centered cultural governance model. The analysis was conducted by connecting three theoretical dimensions which are cultural governance, tourism education, and experiential learning (Toker & Rezapouraghdam, 2021). These dimensions were used as analytical lenses to explain why education should be positioned as the core mechanism of cultural governance in tourism (Yatim et al., 2025).

The model was developed through a process of conceptual synthesis (Kelley-Gillespie, 2009). First, the study identified the governance problem, namely the gap between regulatory protection and cultural understanding in tourism practice. Second, it examined theoretical perspectives that explain

the role of governance, education, and experience in sustaining culture. Third, it analysed international practices to identify strengths and limitations in existing approaches. Fourth, it formulated a model that integrates legal, cultural, economic, and educational dimensions (Piattoni, 2010). The resulting model is tiered, integrative, and differentiative. It is designed to function not only as a conceptual contribution but also as a policy-oriented framework for tourism education and cultural governance in Indonesia.

4. RESULT

4.1. *Global and national challenges in the governance of traditional cultural expression*

Global developments indicate that TCE faces increasingly complex pressures within tourism. Culture is no longer positioned only as heritage to be protected, but also as an economic resource to be packaged, promoted, and consumed. This transformation may generate benefits for communities and destinations, but it may also encourage excessive commercialisation and simplification of meaning. The living heritage perspective emphasises that culture survives through transmission and practice. TCE is sustained not only by documentation but by communities that continue to perform, interpret, and adapt it.

In tourism, however, culture is often staged to meet tourist expectations. Cultural commodification help explain how cultural practices may lose social context when transformed primarily into tourism products. In Indonesia, the challenge is intensified by the increasing role of culture as a tourism resource. As natural destinations face environmental pressures and global competition, TCE becomes increasingly important as a source of differentiation. However, without adequate governance, the use of TCE in tourism may lead to distortion. Tourism actors may reproduce cultural symbols without understanding their ethical, spiritual, historical, or community-based meanings.

Therefore, cultural governance in tourism must move beyond protection and promotion. It must also ensure cultural understanding. This is where education becomes essential. If tourism actors understand TCE only as a product, then culture will be vulnerable to reduction. If they understand TCE as a living system of values, then tourism can become a space for preservation, interpretation, and transmission.

4.2. *International benchmarking in culture-based tourism education*

International experiences show that various countries have integrated culture into tourism education and destination development through different approaches (Edelheim, 2020). These experiences provide useful lessons for Indonesia, although none of them can be adopted mechanically (See Table 1).

For example, in the Japanese experience shows the strength of value internalisation. Cultural values such as hospitality, respect, and social discipline are embedded in social practice and reflected in tourism service (Watkins, 2006). However, this model is difficult to replicate in countries where cultural transmission is not already strongly embedded in social systems. Indonesia requires a more explicit educational framework.

South Korea demonstrates how culture can be connected with creative industries, storytelling, and global tourism branding (Son et al., 2023). This approach is useful for showing how TCE may be developed creatively. However, it also carries the risk of commodification when culture is shaped excessively by market demand

European countries provide lessons in heritage management, conservation, and interpretation. Their strength lies in institutional structure and professional standards. However, their approaches may not always be sufficient for living and community-based TCE, which requires more dynamic engagement (Elena & Donato, 2020). In African context, South Africa offers lessons in community-based tourism

education. Its strength lies in direct learning with communities (Collins & Snel, 2012). However, the model may face challenges of sustainability if it is not integrated into formal education systems.

Table 1. International Practices in Culture-Based Tourism Education

Country/ Region	Main approach	Strength	Limitation	Lesson learn for Indonesia
Japan	Value-based cultural service and social internalisation	Strong service culture rooted in local values	Cultural learning is often implicit and not always formalised in tourism curriculum	Cultural values should be internalised, but Indonesia needs a more structured and explicit educational framework
South Korea	Creative-industry and cultural content approach	Strong cultural branding and innovation through tourism and media	Risk of reducing culture into market-oriented content	TCE can support innovation, but must not lose depth and meaning
Europe	Heritage-management and conservation approach	Strong professionalisation of heritage management	Greater emphasis on tangible heritage than living cultural practice	Indonesia needs structured cultural competence while maintaining focus on living TCE
South Africa	Community-based tourism education	Strong community involvement and local learning	Implementation may depend heavily on local capacity and may lack systematic curriculum integration	Cultural communities should become learning partners in tourism education

Adapted from: (Collins & Snel, 2012; Elena & Donato, 2020; Son et al., 2023; and Watkins, 2006).

These international experiences show that Indonesia needs a model that integrates value internalisation, creative innovation, heritage competence, and community-based learning. The proposed education-centered cultural governance model seeks to integrate these strengths while adapting them to Indonesia's cultural diversity and policy context.

4.3. Governance fragmentation between culture, tourism, and education in Indonesia

Indonesia already has important regulatory frameworks that recognise the relationship between culture, tourism, and education. Law No. 5 of 2017 on the Advancement of Culture provides a foundation for the protection, development, utilisation, and guidance of culture. This law affirms that culture is not only an object of preservation but also a foundation for national development and identity.

Law No. 10 of 2009 on tourism recognises tourism as a sector that must respect cultural values, religious norms, and local wisdom. It places culture as one of the essential resources of tourism development. Meanwhile, Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System positions education as a means of developing human capacity, character, and civilisation. These three laws indicate that the normative relationship between culture, tourism, and education already exists.

However, the main problem lies in fragmentation. The cultural sector tends to focus on preservation, documentation, and cultural advancement. The tourism sector tends to focus on destination development, visitor experience, competitiveness, and economic value. The education sector tends to focus on curriculum, competence, and institutional learning outcomes. These sectors often operate in parallel rather than within an integrated governance system.

As a result, TCE may be protected normatively but not sufficiently understood by tourism actors. It may be promoted as a tourism attraction but not adequately taught as a system of values. It may be included in education, but only as supplementary content rather than as a core competency. This demonstrates that Indonesia does not merely need more regulation; it needs a stronger mechanism to translate regulation into understanding and practice.

The ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement on Tourism Professionals (MRA-TP) also influences tourism education in Indonesia by encouraging competency standardisation and labour mobility (Soydhurum, 2012). However, such standards primarily address technical and professional competencies. They do not fully address the contextual and ethical dimensions of TCE. Indonesia therefore has strategic space to enrich regional competency standards with national cultural content.

4.4. Education as the core of cultural governance

Education occupies a strategic position in cultural governance because it shapes how tourism actors understand and practice culture. Regulation may provide protection, but education forms interpretation. Policy may establish direction, but education builds capacity. Tourism development may create demand for cultural experiences, but education determines whether such experiences are managed ethically.

In this study, education is understood not merely as formal schooling but as a broader mechanism of cultural transmission, it includes curriculum, experiential learning, community engagement, professional training, institutional partnerships, and reflective practice. Through education, TCE can be understood not only as an attraction but also as a living cultural system.

This position challenges the dominant view that tourism education is primarily designed to produce industry-ready graduates. While technical competence remains important, it is not sufficient. Tourism actors must also understand cultural values, community rights, local histories, symbolic meanings, and ethical boundaries. Without this understanding, tourism may produce culturally insensitive products and experiences.

Education therefore functions as the mechanism through which protection and utilisation are reconciled, aligning legal norms with practical conduct, cultural communities with tourism institutions, and national policy with local implementation. Its most important role is to sustain the intergenerational transmission of TCE and to ensure its responsible interpretation within tourism practice.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Paradigm shift: from regulation-centered to education-centered cultural governance

The governance of TCE in tourism has often been regulation-centered. This approach assumes that cultural sustainability can be achieved through legal protection, institutional preservation, and administrative control. Such an approach is important, but it remains incomplete. The limitation of a regulation-centered approach lies in its inability to directly shape cultural understanding. A regulation may prohibit misuse, but it cannot automatically create sensitivity.

A policy may encourage preservation, but it cannot automatically produce ethical interpretation. A tourism programme may promote culture, but it cannot guarantee that tourism actors understand the meaning of what they promote. For this reason, a paradigm shift is needed. Education must be positioned as the core of cultural governance. This does not mean that law and policy become less important. Instead, law and policy must be connected to education so that their values can be internalised and practiced.

The shift towards education-centered cultural governance has several implications. First, culture must be positioned as a core competency in tourism education. Second, experiential learning must be strengthened so that students learn directly from cultural communities. Third, tourism education institutions must collaborate with cultural institutions and communities. Fourth, curriculum design must allow local adaptation because TCE differs across regions. Fifth, cultural competence must be evaluated not only through knowledge tests but also through reflective, ethical, and contextual indicators. This paradigm shift is particularly relevant for Indonesia. As a culturally diverse country, Indonesia cannot rely on a uniform and purely technical tourism curriculum. It needs a curriculum that allows differentiation according to local cultural contexts while maintaining national and regional competency standards.

5.2. Proposed model: education-centered cultural governance for traditional cultural expression

Based on the analysis above, this study proposes an education-centered cultural governance model for TCE in tourism. The model is based on the premise that cultural sustainability depends not only on legal protection and economic utilisation but also on the quality of cultural understanding among tourism actors.

The model integrates four dimensions which are legal, cultural, economic, and educational (see Table 2). The legal dimension provides protection, legitimacy, and normative direction. The cultural dimension provides values, identity, meaning, and community-based knowledge. The economic dimension concerns the utilisation of TCE as a tourism resource and source of competitiveness. The educational dimension connects these dimensions by transmitting values, building understanding, and shaping ethical practice.

In this model, education is positioned at the core. It does not replace law, culture, or economic development. Rather, it connects them. Education ensures that legal protection is understood, cultural values are transmitted, and economic utilisation is conducted responsibly.

Table 2. Components of the Education-Centered Cultural Governance Model

Component	Function	Governance Role	Educational Implication
Legal dimension	Provides protection, legitimacy, and normative direction	Establishes the legal basis for safeguarding TCE	Introduces cultural-legal awareness in tourism education
Cultural dimension	Maintains values, identity, meaning, and community continuity	Ensures that TCE remains rooted in community life	Develops cultural sensitivity and contextual understanding
Economic dimension	Supports responsible tourism utilisation and destination competitiveness	Connects TCE with sustainable tourism development	Teaches students to design tourism experiences without reducing cultural meaning
Educational dimension	Transmits values, builds understanding, and shapes ethical practice	Bridges legal protection, cultural meaning, and tourism utilisation	Functions as the core mechanism of cultural governance
Community dimension	Provides living knowledge and cultural authority	Ensures participation and authenticity	Positions communities as learning partners, not merely tourism objects

Source: Author own elaboration, (2026)

The model is designed around three key principles: tiered, integrative, and differentiative. The tiered principle means that cultural learning should be developed progressively, based on four tiered which are basic level where learners develop cultural awareness, follow by intermediate level, where they understand local cultural contexts, at the advanced level where they connect TCE with tourism

experience design, and finally at the strategic level, they develop governance, policy, and management capacity.

The integrative principle means that tourism education must connect classroom learning, community experience, legal understanding, cultural practice, and tourism application. Culture cannot be taught only as theory. It must be connected to living communities and real tourism contexts. The differentiative principle means that curriculum and learning models must be adaptable to local cultural characteristics. Indonesia's cultural diversity makes uniform cultural education ineffective. Tourism education institutions in different regions should have space to develop locally grounded cultural modules while still meeting national and regional standards.

5.3. Tiered framework for culture-based tourism education

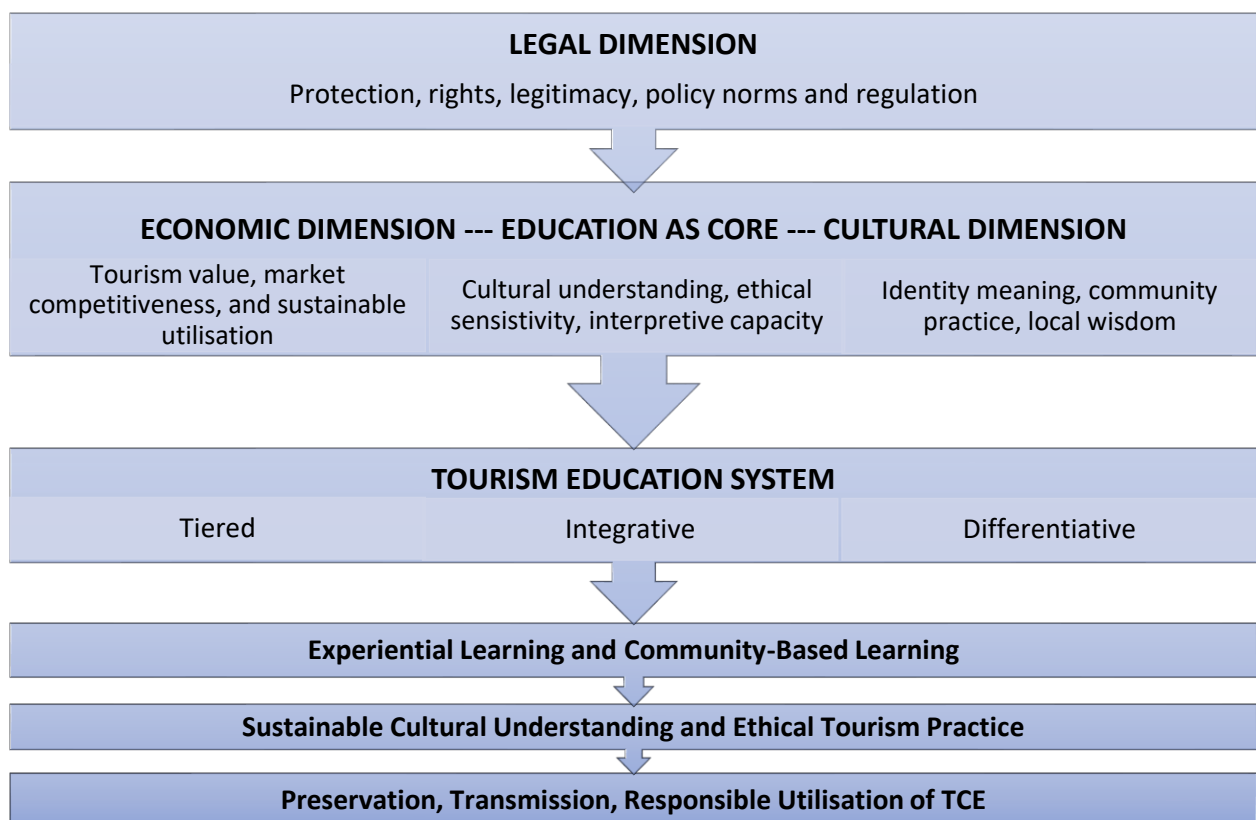


Figure 1. Education-Centered Cultural Governance Model for Traditional Cultural Expression in Tourism

Source: Author own elaboration, (2026)

Implementing education-centred cultural governance requires a structured educational framework that is progressive, contextually grounded, and connected to tourism practice. Such a framework can be organised across four levels of increasing cognitive and professional demand, moving from awareness through understanding and application to formulation. At the foundational level, tourism education should cultivate cultural awareness. Students are introduced to Indonesia's cultural diversity, national identity, local wisdom, and the ethical obligations that accompany work in the tourism sector, with the aim of establishing respect for culture as a living system of values rather than a static resource to be consumed. At the intermediate level, attention shifts to local cultural understanding. Students engage with the specific traditional cultural expressions of the region in which their institution or destination is situated, learning not only culture's visible forms but also its social meanings, community context, and ethical boundaries.

At the advanced level, education connects traditional cultural expressions with the design of tourism experiences. Students learn to develop tourism products, interpretation, storytelling, and visitor encounters without reducing or flattening cultural meaning, an undertaking that demands creativity, sensitivity, and genuine collaboration with the communities concerned. At the strategic level, particularly within higher education and postgraduate study, students develop the capacity to formulate policy, governance models, curriculum frameworks, and long-term strategies for sustainable cultural tourism. Traditional cultural expression is approached here not as an attraction to be marketed but as a governance question requiring legal, cultural, educational, and economic integration. Taken together, this tiered structure enables tourism education to produce practitioners who are technically competent, culturally literate, and ethically accountable.

5.4. Policy implications

The education-centred cultural governance model carries a number of practical implications for policy in Indonesia. Most immediately, tourism education policy should position traditional cultural expression as a core competency rather than as supplementary content. Where culture is treated as a general subject running alongside the technical curriculum, it remains peripheral to how graduates understand their professional obligations; establishing it as a structured learning domain in its own right is the precondition for everything that follows.

Curriculum development should accordingly integrate cultural governance, experiential learning, and community-based learning. The distinction that matters here is between learning about culture and learning from the communities that practice and sustain traditional cultural expression, and only the second produces the kind of situated knowledge on which ethical interpretation depends. Realising this at scale requires stronger coordination among the ministries and institutions responsible for culture, tourism, and education, since cultural governance will otherwise remain fragmented across mandates that rarely meet a fragmentation that reproduces at the institutional level precisely the separation between protection and utilisation that the model seeks to bridge.

At the institutional level, educational providers should be encouraged to build partnerships with cultural communities, museums, cultural centres, traditional art groups, and local governments. These partnerships must be designed on ethical terms, with benefit-sharing arrangements ensuring that communities gain materially and reputationally from their educational and tourism engagement rather than serving as unpaid content for the curriculum. Accreditation and quality assurance systems should reinforce this by recognising cultural competence as an assessable learning outcome, with indicators covering cultural sensitivity, ethical interpretation, community engagement, and the capacity to design culturally responsible tourism experiences.

Regionally, Indonesia should treat the ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement on Tourism Professionals and associated competency frameworks as a floor rather than a ceiling, enriching them with national cultural content. This approach allows the country to satisfy regional professional requirements while converting its cultural distinctiveness into an identity-based competitive advantage rather than surrendering it to standardisation. Finally, policy incentives should be developed for institutions that successfully embed traditional cultural expression across curriculum, research, community service, and destination partnerships through grants, accreditation recognition, and collaborative programmes so that integration is rewarded rather than merely mandated. Taken together, these implications indicate that the proposed model is not solely conceptual. It offers a basis for curriculum reform, institutional collaboration, and cross-sector cultural governance in tourism, and its components can be adopted incrementally as coordination capacity develops.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The governance of Traditional Cultural Expression in tourism cannot rest on regulation, preservation policy, or economic utilisation alone. These instruments matter, but none of them produces cultural understanding among tourism actors as a by-product, and the gap between cultural protection and cultural interpretation remains where the difficulty concentrates. This study has argued that education is the underused mechanism in that space. Tourism education in Indonesia has been oriented largely toward technical and service competencies, leaving cultural understanding to develop informally if at all, with the consequence that TCE is readily promoted as an attraction while remaining inadequately understood as a living system of values.

The study's conceptual contribution is an education-centred model of cultural governance. Its novelty lies in treating education not as a complement to legal and economic instruments but as the mechanism that connects them through linking protection, cultural meaning, tourism utilisation, and community-based learning within a single framework. The model is tiered, in that cultural learning progresses from foundational awareness to strategic governance capacity; integrative, in that it draws law, culture, tourism, education, and community into a common structure; and differentiative, in that it accommodates the diversity of Indonesia's local cultural contexts rather than imposing a uniform template. Taken together, these features reframe tourism education as a governance instrument in its own right: a means not only of preparing a workforce, but of safeguarding cultural meaning, strengthening ethical practice, and sustaining the transmission of TCE across generations.

Five recommendations follow, first tourism curricula should be reoriented to position TCE as a core competency, sequenced progressively from awareness to governance capacity. Second, experiential learning should be strengthened so that students and practitioners learn directly from cultural communities, encountering TCE as living knowledge rather than as a static object of study. Third, educational institutions should establish structured partnerships with cultural communities and cultural institutions on ethical and reciprocal terms that deliver tangible benefit to those communities. Fourth, cross-sector coordination among culture, tourism, and education authorities should be strengthened, since integrated policy mechanisms are required where sectoral programmes have proved insufficient. Finally, national competency standards should be enriched with substantive cultural content, treating regional frameworks such as the ASEAN MRA-TP as a floor to build upon rather than a ceiling to meet.

These conclusions are advanced within the limits of a conceptual qualitative design. The study draws on no field-based empirical data no interviews, surveys, or direct observation and the model should therefore be read as a theoretical and policy-oriented framework awaiting empirical examination. Case studies, curriculum analysis, interviews with tourism educators, and fieldwork with cultural communities would each test different components of the framework and establish the evidence base that policy implementation would require. Future work along these lines would also clarify how far the model travels beyond the Indonesian setting that shaped it.

The sustainability of TCE in tourism depends, in the end, less on how culture is protected or promoted than on how it is understood. Education offers the most strategic route to that understanding, and education-centred cultural governance offers a way for traditional cultural expression to be used in tourism without being severed from its meaning, its dignity, or its community roots.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS (CRedit)

Violetta Cherryline: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft, Visualization, Writing – revision.

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Nensi Lapotulo: Writing – Review & Editing, Project Administration.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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