

Heritage Education for Conservation: A New Perspective from the My Son Sanctuary, Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a new approach to Heritage Education aimed at sustainable conservation, with the My Son Sanctuary, Vietnam, serving as a case study. By enhancing understanding of historical, cultural, and architectural values, along with identifying existing threats to the heritage, the author proposes a new model of 'Heritage Education for Conservation' for the My Son Sanctuary. This model seeks to provide knowledge, encourage active community participation, foster greater individual responsibility, and strengthen perthereforenal connections to heritage. Ultimately, it contributes to raising awareness and promoting conservation behaviors, while simultaneously building a strong local community committed to safeguarding cultural heritage.

Keywords: Education; Heritage; Heritage Education; Conservation; My Son Sanctuary

INTRODUCTION

Heritage education represents a proactive approach that goes beyond the traditional framework of material conservation, moving toward the dissemination of knowledge and the enhancement of community awareness. My Son, a unique complex of ancient Cham architecture located in Central Vietnam, has been subjected to the erosion of time, the devastation of war, climate change, and unregulated tourism development, all of which have caused severe degradation of the monuments (Ho, 2024). In addition to ongoing restoration efforts, the implementation of 'Heritage Education for Conservation at My Son' has become an urgent matter.

The objective of this initiative is to transform My Son from a static sightseeing destination into a dynamic learning center. Instead of merely admiring the ancient beauty of its towers, the community is invited to engage in an exploratory and immersive journey. By integrating historical, architectural, and cultural knowledge with learner-centered education models, while altherefore linking visitors with the local community and strengthening multimedia communication, participants can better recognize the importance of conservation-not only for tangible heritage but altherefore for the intangible values asthereforeciated with it. This study highlights that Heritage Education is not merely a communication tool but a core conservation strategy, and the model applied at My Son could be replicated to preserve other cultural heritage sites across Vietnam.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Heritage education is the process of using the cultural, historical, and natural values of heritage to educate communities, particularly younger generations, in order to raise awareness and foster responsibility for the protection of cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2013). It is an essential tool for ensuring the sustainability of conservation efforts (Tawalbeh, Al-Naamneh, Al Sekhaneh and Hwari, 2019). Rather than simply transmitting historical knowledge, Heritage Education seeks to awaken community consciousness and responsibility toward

the value of heritage. As a distinctive educational method, heritage serves as a vivid resource of learning materials, enabling learners to gain deeper insights into history, traditions, and national identity. Once communities recognize heritage as an invaluable legacy handed down by their ancestors, they are compelled to respect and preserve it as a sacred duty for both the present and future generations (Dang, 2022).

Heritage education fosters strong connections between people and heritage. According to Teng Wai Lao (2022), the goal of Heritage Education is 'to raise community awareness and understanding of the historical, architectural, cultural, and artistic values of heritage for the sake of conservation' (Teng, 2022). Through Heritage Education programs, communities have opportunities to learn and practice traditional dances, rituals, and handicrafts (Duong, 2025). These practices empower communities to become cultural custodians, ensuring that heritage is preserved and transmitted across generations. As Van Trinh (2024) notes, 'Heritage education is one of the most significant relations for preserving and promoting heritage values, effectively complementing the teaching of national cultural traditions' (Van, 2024).

The core value of Heritage Education for conservation lies in shifting heritage from a static entity into a dynamic force that carries meaning in contemporary life. It not only transmits knowledge of the past but also evokes emotional connection and a sense of responsibility, especially among younger generations. As Tran The Cuong (2023) affirms: 'For highly nation, heritage plays a vital role - it preserves the memory of origins, embodies traditions of patriotism, and reflects the unyielding struggles of past generations in building and safeguarding the country' (Tran, 2023).

RESEARCH METHOD

This article employs a qualitative approach to examine the issue of Heritage Education for conservation from the perspective of the My Son Sanctuary, Vietnam. Thematic and discourse analyses are conducted based on secondary resources from both international and Vietnamese literature on Heritage Education programs in general and My Son in particular, including conservation reports and prior research. Interviews with heritage site managers, tour guides, local residents, visitors, and students provide direct evaluation of the effectiveness of current educational programs. These insights facilitate to identify gaps that must be addressed in order to propose a new educational model tailored to the specific context of My Son, thereby ensuring sustainable outcomes for the future.

RESULTS

Challenges Facing the My Son World Heritage Site

The My Son Sanctuary, also known as the My Son Relics or the My Son Holy Land, is a renowned historical and cultural heritage site located in Duy Xuyen (historically Quang Nam province, now under Danang city), Vietnam (Hardy, Cucarzi and Zolese, 2009). The sanctuary embodies distinctive values of history, spirituality, art, architecture, cultural exchange, and tourism (Ngo, 2006). As one of the most culturally significant sites in Central Vietnam, its architecture once comprised more than 70 towers of the ancient Champa civilization, serving as a major religious and spiritual center under the Bhadravarman dynasty in the 4th century (Tran, 1988). In 1999, the My Son Sanctuary was inscribed by UNESCO as a World Cultural Heritage site (Tran, 2013).

Time, war, natural disasters and the increase in tourists have made the My Son relic site face challenges in conservation (Ho, 2024). Many temples and towers were severely damaged, requiring meticulous restoration efforts and large financial investments as well as the joint efforts of the whole community in many different ways and measures (Quang Nam Provincial People's Committee, 2018). In addition to international cooperation activities with experts from Italy, Korea, India, Japan... and international organizations LERICI, ILO, MAG, JICA (Vu, 2015)..., to find solutions for restoration and rehabilitation of the relic, the local government has organized propaganda to introduce the values of My Son cultural heritage, contributing to raising awareness and community responsibility to participate in protecting and promoting the value of the relic site (My Son Cultural Heritage Management Board, 2016), this is considered a method that plays a quite important role in contributing to the preservation of My Son heritage, because it creates a solid foundation to spread to the awareness and actions of the whole community (Potocnik, 2020). Without deep understanding and appreciation, the heritage will gradually fade away, no matter how great the efforts to preserve the material are (Tran & Nguyen, 2025).

Heritage education at My Son Sanctuary is organized in many Forms

(1) Organizing the compilation and promulgation of programs and documents on education about the World Cultural Heritage of My Son in general schools (Vinh, 2014), with 02 sets of documents "Education about My Son cultural heritage in schools" and "Designing teaching activities, collective activities in the educational program about My Son cultural heritage" including 9 lesson designs for 9 grades from grade 1 to grade 9, interspersed with some designs for collective activities on the topic of My Son heritage in the eyes of students (Gia, 2014). This document provides the most basic and concise knowledge for teachers to design lesson plans and appropriate educational activities about My Son heritage (Nguyen, 2024); writing, painting at schools (Nguyen, 2025) ...

(2) Promote participation in exhibition activities introducing images of My Son in Ho Chi Minh City, Hue, Hanoi, Nghe An ... to introduce and educate the image of My Son heritage to the Vietnamese community at home and abroad (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2024; Nguyen, 2025).

(3) Apply scientific achievements to build a multilingual automatic explanation system through QR code scanning with handheld mobile devices, a 3D virtual reality cinema room to vividly introduce the heritage site, build and upload VR360 movies about the heritage site to the internet so that visitors can update remotely (Nguyen, 2025; Minh, 2018 and Dong & Tran, 2024); promote the value of My Son heritage site on the media YouTube, Facebook, Web myson 360.vn (Nguyen, 2025).

Heritage education activities initially bring My Son World Heritage closer to the community.

Heritage education activities for conservation in recent times have brought the image of My Son heritage closer to the community, thereby changing their awareness of the special importance of the heritage, making the community actively protect and preserve the heritage (Tho & Minh, 2021), encouraging everyone to join hands to protect and promote the value of the heritage. When the community, especially the young generation, has a high awareness of conservation, they will contribute to creating a civilized and sustainable tourism environment, where heritage values are respected and promoted properly, while attracting more tourists.

Heritage education content in My Son is still simple

Heritage education activities for conservation in My Son are still passive, not stimulating multi-dimensional and close interactions between local authorities and the community in heritage conservation (My Son Cultural Heritage Management Board, 2024). The content is still simple and unprofessional, not suitable for different audiences (local people, domestic people and tourists), even the target audience of heritage education is still narrow, mainly primary and secondary school students, the community is mainly local people, tourists are mainly those who come to visit and experience the relic, so it is not closely connected with the community and tourists, thereby not encouraging them to become part of the process of heritage education and conservation in the future.

The Future Model of “Heritage Education for Conservation” at My Son

Learner-Centered Approach

This approach emphasizes learners' active engagement in conservation. Le L.T.T. (2023) asserts: “Cultural heritage carries profound significance; it enables communities and individuals to understand identity and continuity, fosters social cohesion, respect for diversity, human creativity, and connections both locally and globally (Le, 2023)”. Thus, heritage education at My Son should shift from one-way knowledge transfer by teachers, guides, or presenters to learner-centered models. Learners actively discover and solve problems through workshops, such as: (1) Cham pottery-making, (2) Brocade weaving, (3) Temple construction techniques, (4) Apsara dance and ritual performances, (5) Traditional music instruments. Technologies such as GIS and 3D digitization of towers and artifacts (Dong and Tran, 2024) can recreate My Son's ancient space, immersing learners in its history. Such models not only transmit historical and cultural knowledge but also foster emotional bonds and personal attachment to heritage, enhancing intrinsic motivation (Sturgis, 2025) and ensuring effective long-term conservation.

Community Engagement through Experiential Activities

Heritage education is a powerful tool for heritage conservation (Koush, 2024), especially at a heritage site with historical value such as My Son, Vietnam. Engaging local communities is key to ensuring the sustainability of heritage conservation, as cultural heritage is often associated with local communities (Nguyen, 2022), in the

process of survival and development, local people directly interact and are influenced by the heritage. An important aspect of this is training local people to transform them from passive to active in heritage conservation, by (1) providing them with in-depth knowledge of the history, architecture, culture and values of My Son heritage, thereby helping them better understand the importance of conservation and their sense of responsibility and (2) training them to become tour guides, helping them earn extra income and creating a quality local human resource. They can tell authentic stories imbued with local cultural identity, helping visitors have a deeper and more intimate experience.

For the above model to be effective, it is necessary to organize guided tours, seminars, and workshops right at the My Son heritage site for them, such as the program "Heritage education in my homeland" to educate the community about heritage through visiting and experiencing activities at the heritage (Nguyen and Do, 2024). In coordination with the Department of Education and Training, local authorities will develop a heritage education program and local history books about My Son heritage to promote and educate the local community during community activities. Local communities can participate in small research projects, heritage learning competitions, or painting and poetry writing sessions about My Son. This will build love and pride for heritage within the community.

Strengthening Multimedia Communication

Multimedia communication models can make heritage education more effective by creating interactive platforms where people learn, share, and engage in conservation. Open and interactive systems can fundamentally reshape how diverse audiences connect with cultural content.

In order for heritage education for conservation in My Son to be effective in the future, a multimedia communication model needs to be built and deployed here soon. This model needs to be used in a variety of channels to spread the message of preserving My Son heritage widely and attractively, such as: (1) Social networks with platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok are used to post short articles, beautiful images and videos about My Son. (2) Videos with high-quality documentary footage, entertaining short videos, or interviews with experts are produced to provide an in-depth and authentic look at the relic, stories about My Son, the excavation and restoration process are told in an engaging and easy-to-understand way. (3) Podcasts with podcast episodes about My Son, the content can be historical stories, in-depth analysis of architecture, culture, or sharing from researchers and tour guides.

DISCUSSION

Discourses on heritage education for conservation at My Son highlight strong efforts in cultural preservation. Existing models - curriculum development, exhibitions, and multilingual narration - demonstrate comprehensive approaches but remain passive, without mobilizing all stakeholders such as high school and university students. Proposed models - learner-centered education, community engagement, and multimedia strategies - offer more dynamic solutions aligned with My Son's values and digital-era trends.

They identify specific workshops, community training, and media strategies that integrate traditional academic approaches with modern technologies, creating a holistic framework for conservation.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of "Heritage Education for Conservation at My Son Sanctuary" provides an innovative and effective perspective for safeguarding world heritage in Vietnam. By integrating heritage into education through (1) learner-centered approaches, (2) community engagement, and (3) multimedia communication, the model raises awareness, strengthens responsibility, and applies digital technology. It creates sustainable connections between past and future. This approach demonstrates that conservation is not solely the responsibility of experts but a continuous process built upon the awareness and accountability of each individual. It is a replicable model that contributes to the sustainable development of Vietnam's cultural heritage.

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