

Public Outreach for Local Students in Oc Eo-Ba The Site Complex, An Giang Province, Vietnam : An Educational Approach to Public Archaeology

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Public Outreach for Local Students in Oc Eo-Ba The Site Complex, An Giang Province, Vietnam : An Educational Approach to Public Archaeology

Division of Human and Socio-Environmental Studies,
Graduate School of Human and Socio-Environmental Studies, Kanazawa University
NGUYEN Thi Thanh Ngan

Abstract

Archaeological museums actively preserve and shape public perception of the past by addressing the intricate demands of curation, management, and conservation. Archaeological museums serve as sanctuaries for the arts and centers for public education and awareness about local heritage values, while curators play an active role in interpreting the past in a meaningful manner. The Oc Eo Culture Relic Management Board is responsible for the preservation and promotion of the Oc Eo Culture at the Oc Eo - Ba The site complex in An Giang province in southern Vietnam, which includes outreach efforts aimed at informing the public about that ancient culture. With regard to the importance of outreach programs for individuals in the local community, the focus on local students is significant for their constructive instruction about local history through interpretation and connection with artifacts and experiences. This article is based on a qualitative descriptive study of students' participation in educational programs conducted by the Oc Eo Culture Relic Management Board in Oc Eo Town in the aforementioned province. It aims to analyze the involvement experiences of local students in history teaching about the cultural heritage and the archaeological experiment process at the site complex. The analysis of educational experiences showed that learning from museum exhibitions and outdoor activities could promote the increase in historical interest and heritage value awareness through the experience of relics and artifacts. Similarly, the development of archaeological heritage education for local students is a public outreach program that links students with their living heritage through the school curriculum and through experience and connection with archaeological sites, in which they actively and reflectively experience constructive knowledge of history.

Keyword

education approach, public outreach, public archaeology, museum education,
Oc Eo - Ba The site complex

オックエオーバテ遺跡コンプレックス (ベトナム・アンザン省)
複合体での地元学生への公開アウトリーチ：
公共考古学における教育アプローチ

金沢大学大学院 人間社会環境研究科 人間社会環境学専攻
グエン ティ タイン ガン

要旨

考古学博物館は、キュレーション、管理、保存の複雑な要求に応えながら、過去の保存と公衆の認識の形成に積極的に取り組んでいます。これらの博物館は、芸術の聖域であると同時に、地域の遺産価値に関する教育のための訪問先としても機能し、博物館のキュレーターは過去の意味を解釈する上で積極的な役割を果たしています。オックエオ文化遺跡管理委員会は、オックエオ一バテ遺跡コンプレックスにおけるオックエオ文化の保存と普及を担当しており、その中には、オックエオ文化について一般市民に情報を提供するためのアウトリーチ活動も含まれます。地域社会の各個人に対するアウトリーチプログラムの重要性を考慮すると、地域の歴史に関する知識を遺物や経験との結びつきを通じて構築するために、地元の学生に焦点を当てることが重要です。本研究は、ベトナムのアンザン省オックエオ町でオックエオ文化遺跡管理委員会が実施した教育プログラムにおける学生の参加を質的記述研究に基づいています。この研究の目的は、オックエオ文化遺産に関する歴史教育とオックエオ一バテ遺跡群での考古学的実験プロセスにおける地元学生の関与経験を分析することです。教育経験の分析から、博物館展示や屋外活動を通じて学ぶことが、遺物や遺跡とのつながりを通じて、歴史への関心や遺産価値の意識を促進する可能性があることが示されました。同様に、地元学生に対する考古学的遺産教育の発展は、学校のカリキュラムだけでなく、考古学的遺跡との経験やつながりを通じて、生きた遺産と学生を結びつけるための公共のアウトリーチであり、学生は積極的かつ内省的な方法で歴史知識を構築することができます。

キーワード

教育アプローチ、公共アウトリーチ、公共考古学、博物館教育、
オックエオ一バテ遺跡コンプレックス

1. Introduction

Recognizing the significance of educating and raising awareness among local students about cultural heritage, Vietnam museum and management agencies have increasingly organized various forms of summer activities and educational programs to enhance this goal. Engagement programs in various forms include integrating content into school curriculum, organizing site visits, and providing archaeological experiences and practices. The aim of educational programs is to increasingly students' awareness and understanding of the history, culture, and heritage of their local area, ultimately helping to build a strong foundation for a generation committed to preserving and

promoting the value of cultural heritage.

In particular, since the establishment of the Oc Eo Culture Relic Management Board (OECRMB), as a unit with the function operation as a museum in Oc Eo town about Oc Eo Culture and Oc Eo-Ba The site complex has organized numerous activities to promote and educate the public about local heritage value. To increase awareness, these activities are not only intended for the general public but also for students in the Thoai Son district of An Giang province. In these educational activities, students have the chance to participate in an archaeological excavation and gain firsthand knowledge of the Oc Eo Culture. Promotion efforts have expanded through various forms and programs, creating a diverse and engaging

environment that makes it easy for students to learn and understand Oc Eo Culture. This helps to foster a sense of national pride and contributes to preserving and promoting cultural heritage for future generations. These programs serve as a means of connecting the public and students, especially students with cultural and archaeological heritage values.

Oc Eo-Ba The site complex was first discovered by Louis Mallerert in 1944. Subsequently, foreign scholars conducted research that not only identified culture but also established its existence from the 1st to the 7th century AD. These findings have greatly influenced the study of ancient cultures in the Mekong Delta region up to the present day. The Oc Eo – Ba The site complex is considered a major urban and port center of the Funan kingdom and played a crucial role in the Oc Eo Culture in Southern Vietnam. With a long research history and the complex collection of artifacts and materials reflecting various artistic styles and cultural exchanges with countries such as India, China, and Rome, and attest to the flourishing period of this ancient city, given its significant historical and cultural values, the Oc Eo – Ba The site complex, which is under consideration for nomination to the UNESCO World Heritage list in 2022.

Although there have not been specific studies on public archaeology in the Oc Eo – Ba The site complex, archaeology in Vietnam in general is closely associated with the public (Nguyen Huy Nham 2019). The basis of my argument is that archaeological excavations always involve the participation of local people as laborers, and archaeologists connect with local people as an important resource in their research process. Regarding the conservation and promotion of a site's values, education and outreach are

also ways to connect the local community with archaeological sites, where museum curators play a significant role. In this article, the author explains the educational and outreach activities conducted by OECRMB for students at the Oc Eo – Ba The site complex through the lens of public archaeology. Through participation and observation of the outreach programs conducted by OECRMB for local students, combined with in-depth interviews with students and teachers, this article examines how local students enjoy summer activities about local cultural heritage history. It also considers the importance of enhancing the methods of promoting Oc Eo Culture to students. The author argues that education outreach programs for local students will not only change their perception of local cultural heritage but also lay the groundwork for enhancing the effectiveness of conserving and promoting the value of the Oc Eo cultural heritage and Oc Eo-Ba The site complex in the prospect to become UNESCO World Heritage in the future.

2. Education approach in public archaeology

In the trend of archaeology not being a standalone profession focusing solely on excavations by archaeologists, but rather expanding to involve connections with local people and sharing archaeological work with them. This has led to a growing interest in public archaeology, which can have a direct impact on local people's understanding of archaeology (Bolduc 2024, p.3) and open doors for them to access archaeological heritage in their own living spaces. Public archaeology first appeared with the report of Sir Mortimer Wheeler (1954, p.54) on the impression of the public in archaeology. Since then, many

researchers have developed public archaeology into various perspectives and approaches to demonstrate that archaeological activities should engage more with the public (McGimsey 1972, p.5-6; Schadla-Hall 1999, p.146-147; see also Merriman 2004, p.3). In the 21st century, Merriman (2004) stated that public archaeology has formed disciplinary practices and theoretical positions with an emphasis on the interaction between archaeology and the public. He proposed two models for public archaeology. On the one hand, “the deficit model” emphasizes the need for professional, expert archaeologists to educate the public on how to understand archaeology “correctly” in the space of public archaeological activity (Merriman 2004, p.6). On the other hand, Merriman supports an alternative “multiple perspective model”, which emphasizes the engagement of archaeologists with the public on archaeological issues in terms of enriching human experiences (Thomas et al. 2009; Holliman et al. 2009, see also in Richardson and Almansa-Sánchez 2015, p.198), in order to understand the core values of the public regarding archaeological perspectives (Merriman 2004).

Holtorf proposes three models of public archaeological practice: the “education model”, “public relations model”, and the “democratic model”, in which the educational model emphasizes on the public as having deficient perceptions about “the occupation of the archaeologist in terms of professional archaeologists” (Holtorf 2007, p.109). Following the models of public archaeology of Merriman and Holtorf, Matsuda (2016) proposed four different theoretical frameworks: educational, public relations, pluralist, and critical approaches, in order to understand how archaeologists engage with the public in reflecting the work of

their precursors. Significantly, in the educational approach, Matsuda (2016, p.2) focused on how people learn about the past and the importance of protection and conservation. He referred to the educational approach as a way to express an expert voice of archaeological knowledge to non-experts to facilitate and promote learning of the past based on archaeological thinking and methods, which could enhance the protection and conservation of archaeological remains.

In the various approaches to public archaeology, when considering the relationship between the public and archaeology, the education approach is the key concept in letting the public acknowledge archaeology and “presents a useful tool for influencing attitudes towards the utility of archaeology” (Arias-Ferrer and Egea-Vivancos 2017, p.91). Many researchers have argued that archaeology should be open and engaging to everyone. The public’s interest in and appreciation for archaeology are essential in creating opportunities for public involvement, leading to a better understanding of archaeology and increased preservation of sites (McManamon 1991, p.121, 122). Therefore, experts must actively participate in public outreach and education, offering engaging and informative archaeological experiences to the public, and educating communities about their cultural heritage (Holtorf 2007, p.109; Resnick 2021, p.116, 137).

In fact, the educational approach is not always a straightforward way to ensure that archaeological knowledge directly affects local awareness. Each community associated with archaeological heritage has a unique cultural, social, and economic context that necessitates different heritage education approaches. Experts will have specific educational orientations and ways to connect them with archaeology,

depending on the community and audience. Thus, defining and understanding the problems and needs of the public can offer new ways of engagement in heritage education (Almansa Sánchez 2016, p.145). While Wilson (2015, p. 223) argues that the educational approach will encourage public participation in archaeology and develop the public's understanding of archaeology's role and potential, it is important to consider how the educational approach can fulfill the need for "public benefit" (Oldham 2017, p.219) in the "neo-liberal economic climate". Therefore, flexible community engagement and new opportunities for collaboration in the educational approach will foster greater mutual benefits and increase public awareness in archaeology.

In addition to enhancing the knowledge of the public and local people about archaeology, education programs for students play a significant role in enhancing the public archaeology relationship. Heritage education for students takes many forms to help them study human activities from the past through the recovery and analysis of artifacts. Archaeology can serve as a valuable educational resource in environmental education, encouraging children to explore the outdoors, engage in hands-on activities, and learn about their archaeological heritage (Reetz et al. 2019, p.79). Students of all ages can be the target of school outreach education programs with many diverse activities: an introductory presentation and a brief history of archaeological investigations in the area; a presentation of findings from the current excavation, creating an opportunity for children to touch, feel, and think about them; and a brief guided walk to the excavation area (Reynolds 2014, p.182; Oldham 2017, p. 220). Workshops conducted for local schools

using museum exhibitions could "encourage students to document their experiences of both the historical and current events in their community" (Peers and Brown 2003; Griebel 2010, p. 78).

In Vietnam, top-down state-sponsored projects can also advance the interests of minorities, especially when archaeologists and museologists work together with local communities (Bodemer 2010; see Lertcharnrit and Niyomsap 2020). According to Nguyen Huy Nham (2021, p.183), successful public archaeology in Vietnam can be divided into three related groups: public education activities, understood as propaganda activities about cultural heritage law, and the value of heritage sites with the highest responsibility of heritage managers. Second, the interpretation of local people is understood as reporting and interpreting archaeological excavation results, such as exhibitions and excavation-visiting tours closely linked to the responsibility of archaeologists and museum managers. The last is public engagement in cultural heritage management through participation responsibility to protect heritage sites of the public. The aim of the public archaeology program is to help students understand the history and archaeology of the past. Joining an archaeological activity can show them archaeological processes, including excavation, mapping, and recording of information through a fun, enjoyable, and educational experience (Wilson 2015, p. 227). On the other hand, focusing on early and frequent consultation with the community, along with the practice of cultural protocols that we created for the field school in archaeology, can help local students honor their history and heritage (Lima et al. 2019, p. 69).

Generally, the role of educational programs

in enhancing public awareness and engagement with archaeology is diverse in different sociocultural contexts and historical backgrounds. Each educational approach emphasizes that heritage education for students is crucial in fostering connections with the past. These programs can take various forms such as presentations on local archaeological investigations, opportunities for hands-on experiences with artifacts, guided tours of excavation sites, and workshops using museum exhibitions. Such educational initiatives encourage students to explore and understand archaeological heritage, thereby strengthening the relationship between archaeology and the public. In the next section, this article explains the current situation of education programs for local students at Oc Eo–Ba The site complex in An Giang Province, Vietnam, which indicates how students related to the archaeological educational program have been conducted by the heritage management agency.

3. Research methods

To explain the importance of educational outreach programs for local students in enhancing their awareness of Oc Eo cultural heritage, this study draws on interviews conducted with various stakeholders related to the Oc Eo–Ba The site complex during June 2024. During this period, I participated in educational outreach programs titled “Enjoy Summer with Oc Eo Culture” conducted by OECRMB at the Exhibition House from June to August 2024. These programs attracted local students from numerous high and junior high schools in Oc Eo Town. Additional programs for elementary school students were conducted on the Go Cay Thi site. Unstructured interviews

were conducted during my observations of the outreach programs. Since each program lasted about an hour, my time to discuss and communicate with the students and teachers was limited. Museum curators and managers shared similar responses regarding outreach strategies and the management direction of OECRMB.

The interviews were recorded in Vietnamese, transcribed, and analyzed in Nvivo, including the transcription records. This study focuses on four main stakeholder perspectives: management, museum curators, local teachers, and students. Managers (M-#) are individuals involved in OECRMB’s management activities, with or without specialization in archaeology. Museum curators (C-#) are those working at OECRMB, involved in communication and curation outreach programs to promote Oc Eo Culture, although not necessarily specialized in archaeology. The research also included students (S-#) and teachers (T-#) from local junior and high schools in Oc Eo town, providing additional insights into outreach programs aimed at educating the younger generation about Oc Eo Culture.

4. Case study

Oc Eo–Ba The site complex from history to a prospect of a World Heritage

Oc Eo–Ba The site complex was discovered in the 1940s by French researchers, particularly Louis Malleret surveys and excavations which were published in the journal of the École Française d’Extrême-Orient (here after EFEO). Malleret published a preliminary report at Oc Eo in three volumes of “Archaeology of the Mekong Delta” from 1959 to 1963 (“L’Archaeologie Du Delta Du Mékong”).

Archaeological excavation activities in southern Vietnam were limited due to the war from 1945 to 1975. After 1975, when the Archaeology Department was established (now the Center for Archaeology - here after CA belonging to Southern Institute of Social Sciences - here after SISS), extensive research activities were carried out, including the collection of materials, surveys, and verification of sites. Several reconnaissance and exploratory excavations were conducted in the years 1979, 1980, 1981, and 1983-1985 (Dao Linh Con 2019) at Oc Eo - Ba The site complex. In 1983, the first-ever conference on Oc Eo culture in Vietnam was held in Long Xuyen city (An Giang Province), gathering numerous researchers who discussed various issues not only related to the Oc Eo Culture but also to other ancient cultures in Southern Vietnam, in which brought forth new insights and interpretations about the Oc Eo Culture, which garnered significant interest from the public, particularly from the leaders of the provinces in the Mekong Delta.

In 1998, the SISS and EFEO initiated a cooperation program to conduct archaeological excavations at the Oc Eo-Ba The site complex. The program began with excavations at the Linh Son Nam site, in the Oc Eo paddy field, Go Cay Thi A, Go Cay Thi B, and Go Oc Eo, were also excavated. From 2007, many excavation has conducted by the History Department of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ho Chi Minh City (hereafter USSH-HCMc) such as a national university-level scientific research project on pre-Oc Eo period sites in the southwestern region of Vietnam, which was led by Dang Van Thang (Dang Van Thang et al. 2009), or research project led by Pham Duc Manh from the same university focused on archaeological sites from the Oc Eo to post-Oc

Eo period in An Giang, which involved studying old materials, conducting field surveys, and establishing a Geographic Information System (GIS) for archaeological sites in An Giang, including the Oc Eo-Ba The area (Manh et al. 2011). Recognizing its significance, the Prime Minister issued Decision No. 1419/QĐ-TTg on September 27, 2012, designating the Oc Eo - Ba The archaeological and architectural site as a special national heritage site. Since then, the government has established specific policies for research, preservation, and management of the Oc Eo-Ba The site complex, involving all relevant parties.

In 2012, Professor Bui Chi Hoang from the CA conducted a research project at Oc Eo - Ba The archaeological site, in which revealed that Oc Eo-Ba The site complex is large in scale and holds significant Oc Eo cultural value that had not been fully assessed or thoroughly studied. This realization led to the proposal for a comprehensive on-site research project, implemented from 2017 to 2020, focusing on the evaluation of the Linh Son area to gain a better understanding of the previously studied central area. Subsequently, the Vietnamese government authorized the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences (hereafter VASS) to lead a three-year archaeological research project at the Oc Eo-Ba The site complex and the Nen Chua site (in Kien Giang Province). From 2017 to 2020, researchers and archaeologists, in collaboration with relevant ministries and the provinces of An Giang, conducted extensive excavations at various archaeological sites to gain a comprehensive understanding of the Oc Eo-Ba The site complex as a representative of the Oc Eo Culture. The research findings from 2017 to 2020 were published in the book "Oc Eo Culture: New Archaeological Discoveries in Oc

Eo-Ba The and Nen Chua Site Complex 2017-2020” marking a significant milestone in the study of Oc Eo culture.

On January 4th, 2022, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) officially included the dossier of the Oc Eo-Ba The Archaeological Site in the List of Prospective Submissions for World Cultural Heritage Status. Following this, national and international experts provided guidance to ensure that the dossier met UNESCO requirements, focusing on the construction schedule and necessary documentation, as per the template provided by the UNESCO World Heritage Center. From November 7th to November 11th, 2023, representatives from the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) conducted a survey using the Upstream Process, the initial step in creating World Heritage Sites, where ICOMOS appointed experts for an initial assessment. Additionally, on November 17th, 2023, an international conference titled “Oc Eo Culture in the Context of Asian Culture” was held by the VASS and the People’s Committee of An Giang Province in Long Xuyen, An Giang Province Vietnam, which was the first international conference focused on Oc Eo Culture, aiming to clarify the history, cultural values, and relationship between the ancient city of Oc Eo and the world in the first millennium AD.

Through the research history of over 80 years of Oc Eo-Ba The archaeological site, which show that Oc Eo-Ba The is important not only in southern Vietnam but also for its rich cultural heritage, which represents Oc Eo Culture and has been part of the Funan kingdom. Given its historical and cultural significance, there has been a movement to recognize the Oc Eo-Ba The site complex as a UNESCO World Heritage

Site according to its significant values. It needs to be recognized and supported to ensure the protection and conservation of the site for the future in the protection, management, and preservation of archaeological sites. Even though the preservation and promotion of the values of Oc Eo-Ba The site complex is crucial with the management efforts of state agencies, recognizing and considering coordination and collaboration with local communities in protection activities is also crucial. From now on, the responsibility of curators, management, and preservation of the Oc Eo Culture and Oc Eo-Ba The site complex is OECRMB.

OECRMB in An Giang Province is classified as a public non-business unit directly under the People’s Committee of Giang Province. It operates under the direct guidance and supervision of the Provincial People’s committee. This structure ensures that the management board has the necessary authority and support to carry out its tasks related to the preservation, development, and promotion of the Oc Eo Cultural Relic in An Giang including Oc Eo-Ba The site complex. OECRMB has two main departures: administration and tourism, and museum exhibitions. The Administration and Tourism department play a role in the organization of events, and the promotion of the OECRMB image is crucial for building awareness, fostering engagement, and enhancing the overall reputation of the organization. Museum exhibitions are pivotal in scientific research and site administration, concentrating on the archaeological site of the Oc Eo Culture, which includes the Oc Eo-Ba The site complex. The primary responsibility involves conducting archaeological investigations, surveys, and excavation. Additionally, the department emphasizes public outreach and communication,



Figure 1. The Oc Eo Culture Relic Management Board and the Oc Eo Culture Exhibition House (Photo: Nguyen Thi Thanh Ngan)

aiming to raise awareness of the importance of archaeological endeavors. (Fig.1)

In terms of promotion and education, the value of Oc Eo – Ba The site complex in particular and Oc Eo Culture in general have arranged many programs through social media, books, and mass communication. In terms of research and conservation, the OECRMB has conducted many conservation activities for the Oc Eo – Ba The site complex has been a priority in recent years from 2015 until now based on provincial funding, mainly focused on sites such as Go Cay Thi A and B, Linh Son Nam sites. Regarding international cooperation activities in the conservation and promotion of the site's values, in 2019, OECRMB collaborated with the Deahan Cultural Heritage Research Institute (South Korea) to organize two international exhibitions in South Korea. In research and cultural heritage conservation, they collaborated with national and international institutes to uncover numerous valuable relics and artifacts that contributed to the conservation and enhancement of the site's heritage.

Currently, the OECRMB is enhancing leadership and management, periodically reviewing and

inventorying the Oc Eo cultural heritage system, preparing and protecting the nomination dossier for the Oc Eo – Ba The archaeological site for UNESCO recognition. Additionally, they are focusing on training human resources and community education: improving the quality of guides with adequate knowledge of archaeology, culture, history, art architecture, and foreign language skills to serve visitors. Encouraging the local people living in Oc Eo town to engage in tourism and develop community tourism is also a priority. There is greater emphasis on the role and participation of the community, including organizations and individuals, particularly youth, students, and pupils, in caring for and promoting the values of Oc Eo's cultural heritage, allowing each person to participate in protection while benefiting from the values brought about by the site and artifacts.

The education outreach program for students in Oc Eo – Ba The site complex

Many cultural heritage sites in Oc Eo – Ba The are located in the living areas of modern communities. Most archaeological sites have been used as rice agriculture around Oc Eo paddy field, while the other parts have been home to the village's inhabitants around the Ba The mountain. The local people at Oc Eo town are familiar with this archaeological site and its associated ancient monuments and materials. Many have told the authors that they usually visit the heritage sites as playgrounds, staking their claim that archaeological sites are part of their lives. Thus, from this point of view, local people are key stakeholders in archaeological heritage management of Oc Eo – Ba The site complex. Therefore, outreach programs for local people living in Oc Eo town are important to increase their knowledge and awareness of Oc Eo culture in general and Oc Eo – Ba The site

complex in particular. When asked about the key subjects in conducting outreach programs, a museum curator responded that *“students are a more favorable audience for outreach efforts. Meanwhile, schools have the advantage that the Oc Eo Culture has already been incorporated into the curriculum. Therefore, implementing programs to collaborate with schools is convenient and easy. For the general public, creating a detailed plan and notifying local neighborhoods and hamlets in advance are required”*. (C-06)

The OECRM has developed a plan to coordinate the education of Oc Eo Cultural Heritage traditions with the activities of the “Enjoy Summer with Oc Eo Culture” program in 2024. The purpose is to create a playground for students during the summer vacation of the 2023–2024 school year to help students better understand the value of Oc Eo cultural heritage sites and develop their awareness and responsibility for contributing to the preservation and promotion of the special national relic site

of Oc Eo – Ba The. The goal of the program is to teach students about Oc Eo cultural heritage at the Exhibition House and other heritage sites by offering them hands-on experiences in preserving and promoting the significance of this cultural heritage. Students will learn about the meaning and function of each cultural artifact through exploratory activities and combine them with indoor and outdoor games. The participants included students from primary, junior, and high schools in Thoai Son district, An Giang province, specifically Vong The High School, Vong Dong Junior High School, Nguyen Cong Tru Junior High School, Vong The Junior High School, and Primary Schools A and B in Oc Eo town. (Fig.2)

“Archaeological heritage not only comprises sites, but a whole tangible culture consisting of artifacts and ecofacts that can be used to explain the processes—both global and specific—of historical shifts (Arias 1999, p.46) and encourages understanding and awareness raising” (Rivero et al. 2018, p.316). From this perspective, enhancing

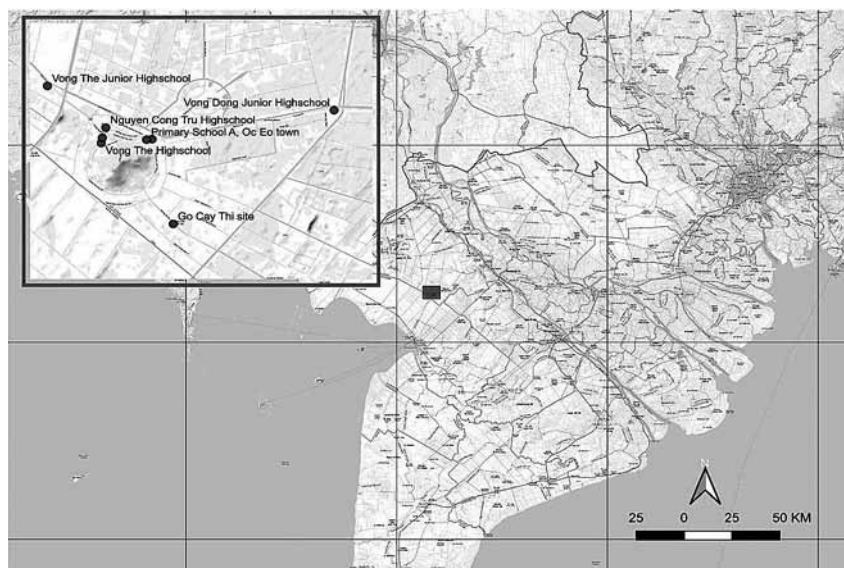


Figure 2. The distribution the location of schools in Oc Eo town

awareness not only involves introducing the archaeological process and findings, but also showcasing the values of Oc Eo heritage through exhibitions and historical artifacts displayed in these exhibitions. On the morning of June 10th, 2024, the OECRMB, in coordination with Vong The High School, Vong Dong Junior High School, Vong The Junior High School, Nguyen Cong Tru Junior High School, and A and B Primary schools in Oc Eo town, organized the opening ceremony of the “Enjoy Summer with Oc Eo Culture.” The event includes three main activities: “Experience and Discover Oc Eo Culture” Program, “I am an archaeologist” Program, and “I am a museum curator” Contest, an art contest titled “Oc Eo culture heritage through painting”. This article focuses on two education programs in which students directly participate and are involved in Oc Eo culture with the guidance of museum curators and archaeologists of OECRMB.

First, the “*Experience and Discover Oc Eo Culture*” Program targets students from Vong The High School, Vong Dong Junior High School, Nguyen Cong Tru Junior High School, Vong The Junior High School in Oc Eo town, with 50

students participating in each session. The students will engage in educational experiences through various activities, including games, quizzes, and multiple-choice tests with topics covered, including understanding through a magical crossword puzzle and learning about the significance of Oc Eo Culture and research history of Oc Eo – Ba The site complex. The program also features introductions and guidance on the history and development of Oc Eo Culture, utilizing the resources available at the OECRMB. Although it was said to be “compulsory summer activities” from school teachers, not many students participated because some students took the opportunity to visit their parents in Binh Duong Province or Ho Chi Minh City during the summer and some lived far from the conducted place. (Fig.3)

Second, “*I am an archaeologist*” Program aimed at students from grades 3, 4, and 5 at Primary Schools A and B in Oc Eo town. Each session included 50 students. The content focuses on practical skills education and experiences with the work of an archaeologist. Through direct interaction with artifacts and the tasks performed by archaeologists, the



Figure 3. The junior high school and high school students participated in the “Experience and Discover of Oc Eo Culture” at the Exhibition House with the direction of museum curators of OECRMB in June 2024.

(Photo: Nguyen Thi Thanh Ngan)



Figure 4. Primary school students participated in “I am an archaeologist” Programm at Go Cay Thi site with the direction of museum curators of OECRMB in June, 2024

(Photo: OECRMB)

program aimed to help students gain a deeper understanding of the value of Oc Eo cultural heritage. Students will be presented with artifacts, such as reconstruction pottery. They find ancient artifacts and reconstruct broken items as archaeologists, allowing them to learn through hands-on activities. The program aims to engage students to be more interested in such activities, whereas older children might feel less inclined to participate. These events will also explore historical developments under different periods, accompanied by related questions about the artifacts displayed in the exhibition. The aim was to stimulate knowledge about the formation and development of Oc Eo Culture, allowing children to consolidate the knowledge they have gained through the questions posed. (Fig.4)

With the assistance and support of OECRMB, the author had the opportunity to interview two museum curators guiding the program for students, five students, and two teachers from two high schools who participated in the “Experience and Discovery Oc Eo Culture” program. Unstructured interview questions were asked about their views on the Oc Eo

- Ba The site complex, their experiences in the program, and their evaluations of the educational program. While some students lived around the Oc Eo - Ba The site complex and showed an interest in learning about Oc Eo cultural heritage, others expressed a sense of disconnection from the archaeological sites because they lived farther away from the heritage area. Conversations with teachers demonstrated how local schools are trying to connect students with Oc Eo cultural heritage, increasing their awareness through both in-school and outside-of-school education. One teacher, who is also a local person living around the Oc Eo - Ba The archaeological sites, understands the importance of heritage education and is proud of living with Oc Eo cultural heritage for both students and themselves. Discussions with museum curators revealed their enthusiasm and passion for their work, with a desire to connect students with local heritage as much as possible through the contents of the program and by finding appropriate methods to increase student participation in every OECRMB program. All interviewees reported the significance of the

OECRMB program in connecting students with the history of the discovered Oc Eo – Ba The site complex, and in creating an environment for local students to broaden their perspectives on Oc Eo cultural heritage.

The experience of the author talking with students in junior high school in Oc Eo – Ba The site complex showed that if students are studying at schools in Oc Eo town, they will live around archaeological sites and usually visit some sites with roof-top cover sites such as LSAP and Go Cay Thi site. Other students living farther from their schools will be located outside Oc Eo town, such as Vong The Junior High School. The qualitative descriptive study was based on data obtained during the participation educational program with local students in the OECRMB program. Focusing on two main concerns concentrates on the involvement of students in the program and how interesting they were, combined with the observation by the author during the experiment of student participation.

During the observation and participation in outreach programs, I asked students several questions about their awareness of the programs, the frequency of their participation, and their interest in and motivation to join these programs. Most of the students I interviewed were junior high school students, and as a result, they felt shy and provided direct answers. Some were also worried that saying something incorrect about cultural heritage might be criticized by curators or teachers. Following are questions that I asked students about their awareness about outreach education program at OECRMB:

What is the program of OECRMB conduct for students that you know?

“Visiting Exhibition House” (S-01)

“Organizing the competitions to learn about Oc Eo culture” (S-03)

How many times did you participate in the programs?

“I participated 2-3 times” (S-01)

“I participated 5 times” (S-02)

What is the motivation for you to participate in the Enjoy Summer Program?

“I am curiosity about the program” (S-03)

“I am interested in Oc Eo Culture because I am living near the archaeological sites” (S-02)

Which is the most interesting of the programs you participated in?

“The national treasures” (S-03)

“Artifacts and heritage sites were the most interesting” (S-02)

What is the effect of the Enjoy Summer Program?

“It increase awareness about Oc Eo Culture” (S-01)

“I learned a lot about history” (S-02)

The interviews with museum curators, students and teachers reveal that the activities conducted by OECRMB provide interactive ways for students to connect with cultural heritage through cultural education, using participatory methods. Students responded that they joined the Enjoy Summer Program multiple times, which suggests that the programs retain the interest of students and that they found it worth revisiting. The primary motivation for students’ involvement in learning about Oc Eo Culture is curiosity and a specific interest in history, which highlights the educational benefits for students in increasing awareness of Oc Eo Culture and a deeper understanding of local history. The students’ responses demonstrate that the success and effectiveness of the Enjoy Summer

Programs organized by OECRMB are highly effective in engaging students and fostering their understanding of Oc Eo Culture. Evidence indicates that public outreach for students achieves educational goals and contributes to the preservation and appreciation of cultural heritage.

5. Discussion

The most important aspect of education and outreach programs is designed for students to increase their heritage awareness. OECRMB plays a role as a museum once the primary venue for archaeological research (Barker 2010, p.294) and are recognized as “the main institutional connection between archaeology as a profession and discipline, and wider society” (Shanks & Tilley 1992, p.68), which provide access to knowledge about humanity’s heritage (Apaydin 2019, p.75). This means that OECRMB requires a balance between the demands of access and interpretation with preservation and stewardship of archaeological heritage. This article focuses on the explanation and presentation function of OECRMB for local students, and it is clear that OECRMB plays a significant role in the educational mandate of archaeological heritage to provide an area in which to preserve, protect, and safeguard the findings with an educational purpose (Rivero et al. 2018, p.315). In fact, most OECRMB educational programs were conducted for students, all with the assumption that children enjoy learning about archaeology and indicate the effectiveness of the programs. As a manager of OECRMB stated that:

The work of promoting and educating the traditions of Oc Eo cultural heritage for students is implemented according to the

central government's policy, particularly the Ministry of Culture's directive on cultural heritage education during the first phase of 2022–2023. Specifically, the next phase of 2024–2025 will focus on educating students in Thoai Son district and An Giang province, thereby providing them with a meaningful platform for engaging with Oc Eo Culture (M-01)”

OECRMB has organized educational programs for students according to the principles of archaeology: “discovery and interpretation” (Henson 2017, p.44). The purpose and form of the organization differ depending on the target audience. For primary school students, OECRMB focuses on educating them about the discovery of the physical remains of past human activities. Junior and high school students focus on interpreting history through heritage and artifacts to enable them to engage more with the past. The duration of each activity was not long due to the hot weather conditions in the Oc Eo–Ba The area, ranging from 1 to 1.5 hours. During this time, museum curators and organizers must design a program suitable for each audience member and convey sufficient knowledge to educate pupils about Oc Eo Culture and Oc Eo – Ba The archaeological heritage.

Depending on the audience, for elementary school students, we only introduced the most familiar items to them, which are displayed in the exhibition, such as ceramic pots and bowls used for storing rice and food. We focused on introducing the most relevant aspects because overly in-depth content would be beyond their understanding. For middle school students, we delve slightly deeper, for instance, discussing the origins and historical periods, and providing more

information so that they can grasp some basic concepts. From there, if they develop passion, they can explore further on their own. (C-04)

Public education programs are as a part of an essential strategy to gain knowledge about history and historical process, and “to take part in an active and reflective way” (Arias-Ferrer and Egea-Vivancos 2017, p.92). Base on this assumption, the “Enjoy Summer Program” for students is a chance to enhance student participation in activities related to Oc Eo Culture and Oc Eo – Ba The site complex in particular. As mentioned above, even though students have learned about local history and Oc Eo Culture in the school curriculum, they do not have the participation and connection with realistic artifacts and heritage sites. Some local schools are located a long distance from heritage sites and Exhibition House as a disadvantage for students to connect with the heritage site. Education programs at Exhibition House create opportunities to enhance the connection between students and heritage values.

On the other hand, education and outreach programs for students are targeted at pupils under the age of 14, in which the best chance to obtain archaeology is known through education (Henson 2017, p.52). Educational contents in the program are diverse from the guide and introduction of museum curators at the exhibition house to allow students to be thoroughly familiar with the character and propensities of basic knowledge related to the Oc Eo – Ba The site complex. Let students gasp their minds and enhance their understanding of Oc Eo – Ba The archaeological sites and museum curators create quiz games combined with the enjoyment of gifts and encouragement. In this way, museum curators can foster a sense

of curiosity and enthusiasm among students as well as promote a deeper understanding of the Oc Eo civilization and its artifacts through engaging and interactive experiences. When asking about the challenges in conducting outreach education program for students:

We aimed to create programs at night to take advantage of better weather conditions. However, it is very difficult to monitor and manage students during night-time events. On the other hand, organizing activities during the day is challenging because of intense heat, which makes it impossible to hold games and related activities. We are currently working on finding solutions to overcome these difficulties. (C-06)

Because the education program is “not compulsory” for students to participate in during the summer, the issue is raised as to how to attract children to non-mandatory programs at the local level. Due to issues related to transportation and availability during the summer vacation, it is difficult to attract most students to participate in the program. Therefore, the creation of various programs could involve and interest more students in their participation. Additionally, offering virtual sessions or mobile exhibitions that can travel to different schools may help overcome transportation barriers and engage a broader audience. Providing encouragement or rewards for participation can also enhance student’s interest and involvement.

“If possible, I would like the OECRMB to visit the schools directly to promote the heritage site. In this way, children can share what they learn with their parents. Promotion here should not only rely on written documents and media, but also include organizing activities directly related

to Oc Eo Culture, such as performing Oc Eo dances. Asking students to come to the Exhibition House to learn is impractical because of many difficulties such as transportation. Therefore, why does it not promote and educate directly to schools? Instead of hosting 30–50 students at the Exhibition House, the management team could reach 300–500 students by visiting schools, significantly increasing the number of students exposed to Oc Eo culture” (T-01)

Another issue to consider is how educational programs can affect and benefit students. Concentrating solely on archaeological processes and heritage valuable to the exclusion of real content will probably make learners think that archaeology is fun and engaging, but is esoteric and does not contribute important knowledge about the world (Moe 2019, p.220). This implies that while students may find history and archaeology interesting, they do not necessarily contribute to their learning or foster long-term interest. During 1–1.5 hours of the summer programs, it is difficult for students to delve into all the information and knowledge the museum curators have shared with them. As Henderson and Levstik (2016) assumed that historical knowledge is much more likely to ‘stick’ if students build the knowledge themselves through the examination of primary resources such as photographs or artifacts or objects and formulating robust interpretations by themselves based on the evidence that they have analyzed. According to that, museum curators are those who conduct the program and the interaction with the artifacts are by students as a two-way interaction. It helps students access knowledge through their own interpretations and make adjustments based on the directions of the curators.

Additionally, museum curators’ roles and sharing are significant, making children interested in historical knowledge and Oc Eo Culture. Moe (2019, p.216) with his thirty-plus years of archaeology education can conclude that education is hard. “People construct knowledge for themselves, and we cannot place the correct knowledge in anyone’s brain”. This view, based on extensive experience in both education and archaeology, suggests that educating the public about archaeology is indeed challenging and compounded by a general disinterest in the subject. People often consider whether archaeology provides immediate economic benefits rather than value for community development. “When talking about history or history teaching, it is very common to find a lack of motivation among our students, usually because of the intrinsic problems of the discipline and the usual disconnect with their interests” (Arias-Ferrer and Egea-Vivancos 2017, p.104). Despite these problems, museums and archaeological displays are common instructional tools. Connecting students with context emphasizes the importance of the specific context in which the artifacts were found, as it can provide the necessary evidence to understand their meaning and relevance (Arias-Ferrer and Egea-Vivancos 2017, p.94).

On the other hand, OECRMB lacks archaeological experts and heritage educators. Despite that, in considering the educational program as an event organized for pupils to connect them with heritage, it does not necessarily need to be conducted by archaeologists. Archaeologists cannot educate the public alone (Moe 2019, p.217), but they can help formal and informal educators, such as schoolteachers or curators, by giving advice in approaching Oc Eo Culture and Oc Eo–Ba The site complex appropriately.

Even though the curators of the programs were not archaeologists, most of them received only basic training and had little archaeological experience¹. In the requirement of connecting students with heritage and sharing knowledge about the Oc Eo-Ba site complex, they are doing better than archaeologists who mostly concentrate on excavation rather than education works.

To enhance students' engagement in education programs, curators should consider sharing students what they want to learn rather than what the programs want them to learn. It allows us to contemplate the impacts of public archaeology on people and the positive effect on a particular group of communities that target local students. "The idea is to focus on people's needs first and see how we can articulate solutions using archaeology or archaeological heritage as a tool, becoming a kind of indirect participation that impacts society positively" (Almansa Sánchez 2016, p.145). This approach emphasizes that educational programs should prioritize students' interests and needs, making the content more relevant and engaging. It lets curators think again about the connection between schoolchildren and education (Oldham 2017, p.222) without controlled participation (Richardson 2013, p.3), but to be truly participatory. This suggests that more effort should be made to ensure that educational programs are genuinely participatory and inclusive, allowing students to play a more active role in their learning processes.

6. Conclusion

Archaeology education can enhance students' overall academic performance and help them understand various subjects in enhancing their

heritage value aspects. Education programs in public archaeology as a tool for broader educational goals about Oc Eo Culture in general and Oc Eo-Ba The site complex in particular. Since then, OECRMB has actively conducted many outreach programs, not only for local people but also for students, to increase their awareness and perception of local heritage in their living space. Depending on the age and particular circumstances of schoolchildren, OECRMB arranges programs in diversity and fixes with students.

Additionally, it is important to consider a wide range of educational approaches, such as tailoring educational content, to provide more meaningful and effective correspondence to the specific interests of children. Local students are the future generation in protecting local heritage and education for the wider community as a way for the community to value heritage, and will make a significant contribution to preserving and promoting archaeological sites. Giving students construction knowledge about Oc Eo cultural value makes them proud of the long-term value of archaeological heritage, and stable development could be developed in heritage tourism for the future. Heritage education is crucial for helping students appreciate the significance of archaeological sites and artifacts and fostering a sense of respect and value for cultural heritage. The OECRMB educational program for students has created a more engaging, relevant, and impactful archaeological education program that fosters deeper appreciation of cultural heritage.

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Notes

- ¹ This news focuses on "Forwarding Cultural Heritage to the Young Generation," highlighting how Gen Z museum curators effectively convey the significance of Oc Eo cultural heritage to younger audiences. https://nhandan.vn/trao-truyen-gia-tri-di-san-den-the-he-tre-post832078.html?gidzl=vpSrGjgtEqhhA3D1tAexJUqjEqB7gMGSydbb5C3xQX7zVsD8cgivGQjxCnkP_6aM-NfWJZW4iJayqROvJm (Access date: December 2th 2024).

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