



## Foreign Cultural Literacy as a Strategy to Increase the Competitiveness of Tourist Villages

Rudi Wibowo<sup>1\*</sup>, Humam Santosa Utomo<sup>2</sup>, Rosalia Dwi Fadma Tjahjanti<sup>3</sup>, Meilan Sugiarto<sup>4</sup>,  
Latifa Nur Aini<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> International Relations, Universitas Pembangunan Nasional Veteran Yogyakarta, Indonesia

<sup>2,3,4,5</sup> Business Administration, Universitas Pembangunan Nasional Veteran Yogyakarta, Indonesia

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### Abstract

This study aims to identify the role of foreign cultural literacy as a strategy to strengthen the competitiveness of tourist villages. This study uses a qualitative case study approach, collecting data through in-depth interviews with managers and stakeholders, observation, and documentation. The research involved 20 participants, comprising tourism village managers, traditional leaders, tour guides, and representatives from the local Tourism Office. Data analysis employed a thematic analysis model (inductive-deductive coding) to explore foreign cultural literacy practices. The study concludes that foreign cultural literacy is a key strategy for enhancing the competitiveness of tourist villages through strengthening service quality, cross-cultural adaptation, and expanding international market appeal. The study's findings recommend that stakeholders implement foreign language training programs, promote sustainable foreign cultural literacy, establish community participation mechanisms, and integrate foreign cultural literacy into destination marketing strategies.

**Keywords** *Foreign Cultural Literacy, Destination Competitiveness, Tourist Villages, Community-Based Tourism, Yogyakarta*

### INTRODUCTION

Community-based tourism and tourist villages are gaining increasing attention due to their potential to generate local economic benefits while preserving culture and the environment (Han & Han, 2019; Quang, 2023). Furthermore, destination competitiveness is increasingly influenced by a destination's ability to highlight authentic and meaningful cultural resources for tourists (González-Rodríguez, 2023; Kovačić, 2024) and its capacity to understand the cultural preferences of international tourists. In this context, foreign cultural literacy, which refers to the ability of local actors to understand the meanings, practices, and values of foreign cultures and to communicate them educationally and ethically, has emerged as a strategic asset for strengthening destination competitiveness, particularly at the tourism village level.

In Yogyakarta, as a center of heritage and living culture, the role of tourism village managers in translating cultural literacy into competitive foreign tourism experiences is crucial (Ariwibowo, 2024; Rindrasih, 2021). However, the literature is still relatively limited in examining how foreign cultural literacy can become a competitive strategy at the tourism village level, especially from the perspective of managers. This study aims to fill this gap through a qualitative approach with tourism village managers in Yogyakarta, exploring the practices, outcomes, and barriers to implementing foreign cultural literacy for destination competitiveness.

The urgency of this research lies in the need to strengthen the capacity of tourism village

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Corresponding author's email: rudi\_retno@yahoo.co.id

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managers to address the increasing influx of international tourists from diverse cultural backgrounds. Without adequate cross-cultural understanding, potential value conflicts, miscommunication, and failure to provide authentic experiences can hamper the sustainability of a destination. Furthermore, increasing competition between culturally based destinations at the regional level demands a differentiation strategy based on foreign cultural literacy as a sustainable competitive advantage. This study aims to identify the role of foreign cultural literacy as a strategy to strengthen the competitiveness of tourism villages.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Cultural Literacy**

In the context of tourism, cultural literacy encompasses the ability of communities and managers to recognize and preserve cultural assets (both tangible and intangible), design culturally based educational experiences, and communicate these to tourists to foster understanding and appreciation (Panić, 2023). Foreign cultural literacy encompasses aspects of knowledge about foreign cultures, communication skills with foreign tourists, understanding of foreign cultural values, and managerial competencies to package local culture as a sustainable tourism product (Nguyen & Trinh, 2021). In the era of tourism globalization, foreign cultural literacy has become a crucial component of intercultural competence, determining the quality of interactions between tourists and hosts (Byram, 2020; Wang et al., 2022).

Several recent studies have shown that increasing cultural literacy among local tourism actors can improve the quality of tourism experiences, strengthen destination image, and promote socio-cultural sustainability (Lee & King, 2020; Wu et al., 2021; Šimundić & Pivčević, 2023). Cultural literacy is also an important element in the development of community-based tourism, as it encourages community involvement in authentic cultural narratives and strengthens a sense of ownership of cultural heritage (Susanto & Rahmawati, 2022; Kozhevnikova & Petrova, 2024). Thus, foreign cultural literacy is not merely a linguistic ability, but also a reflection of cross-cultural awareness that enables tourism village managers to build sensitive, ethical communication and respect the diversity of values of global tourists.

### **Community-Based Tourism (CBT) and Foreign Cultural Literacy**

The concept of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) emphasizes community involvement in the planning, ownership, and management of tourism, ensuring that economic and cultural benefits return to the community (Krittayaruangroj, 2023). Community-Based Tourism is a community-based tourism development model in which residents play an active role in planning, managing, and benefiting from tourism activities. The primary objectives of CBT are to provide economic empowerment, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability (Ndlovu & Rogerson, 2021).

In a global context, CBT now faces the challenge of competing in an international market that demands high service standards and cultural sensitivity for international tourists (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2020; Tasci et al., 2023). To address these challenges, intercultural literacy or intercultural competence is crucial. This concept refers to the ability of individuals or communities to understand, appreciate, and interact effectively with tourists from diverse cultural backgrounds (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006; Jackson & Haughton, 2022).

Foreign cultural literacy encompasses the dimensions of knowledge about the tourist's culture, intercultural communication skills, openness, and empathy for the tourist's values and social norms (Wang et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2021). In CBT practices, the application of foreign cultural literacy can improve service quality through the provision of multilingual information in the form of brochures, information boards, and digital applications (Nguyen & Trinh, 2021), as well as

intercultural competency training for local communities to make interactions with tourists more comfortable and meaningful (Susanto & Rahmawati, 2022).

Furthermore, managing tourist attractions based on foreign cultural literacy enables a sensitive approach to cultural diversity, for example, by providing halal food, adhering to dress codes, or incorporating traditional rituals, all ethically packaged as cultural attractions (Šimundić & Pivčević, 2023). Thus, the integration of CBT with foreign cultural literacy can strengthen the international competitiveness of tourist villages, as tourists feel appreciated, gain authentic experiences, and still comply with global expectations (Suansri, 2003; Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014; Kozhevnikova & Petrova, 2024).

### **Foreign Cultural Literacy and CBT Competitiveness**

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) has long been regarded as a tourism strategy that can enhance the well-being of local communities while preserving their traditional culture. However, in the era of globalization and increasingly fierce international destination competition, the competitiveness of CBT is no longer solely determined by the uniqueness of local culture, but also by the community's ability to understand and adapt to tourists from various countries (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2020; Ndlovu & Rogerson, 2021; Tasci et al., 2023).

This is where intercultural literacy/competence plays a crucial role. Intercultural literacy encompasses a set of abilities that include the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary for effective interaction with people from diverse cultural backgrounds (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). In the context of CBT, intercultural literacy is a key asset for tourism village communities in providing excellent and inclusive services (Jackson & Haughton, 2022; Wang et al., 2022). For example, understanding the politeness norms of European tourists, who value privacy, or the needs of East Asian tourists, who prefer systematic travel guides. This kind of sensitivity not only prevents intercultural misunderstandings but also increases traveler comfort and satisfaction (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009; Wu et al., 2021).

From a tourism product perspective, foreign cultural literacy encourages CBTs to package local cultural attractions in a way that is more relevant to the international market. This can include providing multilingual guides, adapting menus to accommodate halal or vegetarian requirements, and interpreting local culture in ways that are easily understood by international tourists (Nguyen & Trinh, 2021; Šimundić & Pivčević, 2023). These practices make CBTs more competitive by providing authentic and inclusive experiences (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014; Kozhevnikova & Petrova, 2024).

Furthermore, foreign cultural literacy also has implications for CBTs' international competitiveness. Global travelers tend to seek destinations that are not only unique but also welcoming, professional, and oriented towards cross-cultural empathy (Lee & King, 2020; Lozano-Oyola et al., 2019; Panić, 2023). CBT-based on foreign cultural literacy can meet these expectations, thereby increasing tourist satisfaction, encouraging repeat visit intentions, and enhancing the possibility of word-of-mouth promotion in international markets (Wang et al., 2022; Tasci et al., 2023). Thus, foreign cultural literacy is not merely a complement to CBT management, but rather a strategic element that determines the success of tourism villages in competing globally. Integrating community-based management with intercultural competence will produce a sustainable and competitive tourism model, while providing meaningful experiences for international tourists (Susanto & Rahmawati, 2022; Krittayaruangroj, 2023).

### **RESEARCH METHOD**

This research uses a qualitative approach. The case study focuses on several tourism village managers in the Yogyakarta region. The qualitative approach was chosen because this research

aims to explore in depth the meaning, practices, and processes of cultural literacy management in the context of tourism. Thus, the research emphasizes not only the results but also the social and cultural dynamics that underlie these practices. The research locations were purposively determined in four tourism villages in Yogyakarta: Wukirsari, Pulusari, Nglanggeran, and Tinalah. The location selection considerations were cultural tourism appeal, active participation in organizing cultural attractions, and the managers' orientation towards increasing the number of international tourist visits.

The research participants comprised various actors directly involved in the management and organization of cultural attractions, including tourism village managers (heads or administrators of tourism awareness groups), traditional leaders, tour guides, representatives from the local Tourism Office, and villagers actively engaged in tourism activities. Twenty informants were selected using purposive sampling. This technique was chosen to provide a more comprehensive exploration of the variety of roles, experiences, and perspectives of the informants. The research data was obtained through three main techniques. First, in-depth interviews with semi-structured guides covered questions regarding understanding of local culture, cultural packaging practices in tourism, experiences participating in training, obstacles encountered, and perceived impacts on visitors and the community. Second, observations were conducted at various cultural tourism activities, including art performances, craft workshops, and local cultural storytelling practices, enabling researchers to capture the dynamics of interactions and the forms of cultural representation displayed. Third, documentation was used to examine promotional materials, training curricula, and minutes of village tourism management meetings, which helped enrich the data and validate the information obtained through interviews and observations.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke. The analysis process began with transcription of interview data, followed by repeated readings to understand the context, and then open coding to identify units of meaning. The codes were then grouped into themes that represented key patterns or phenomena in cultural literacy management. To ensure the validity of the findings, data source triangulation, cross-checking between informants, and validation through member checking with several informants were conducted. Furthermore, field notes and an audit trail were systematically compiled to ensure accountability for the research process.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

The results of this study indicate that foreign cultural literacy is being implemented in various tourism village management practices. Tourism managers and business owners, particularly guides, homestay operators, and culinary providers, are striving to improve their foreign language skills, particularly English, as the primary means of communication with international tourists. These efforts extend beyond linguistic skills to encompass an understanding of cross-cultural values, ethics, and customs. For example, in homestay services, managers adjust guest reception, facility usage rules, and food presentation to meet the expectations of international tourists. Furthermore, tourism product packaging strategies are also being adapted through storytelling and digital promotions that are more sensitive to cultural diversity, emphasizing universal values such as hospitality, sustainability, and local authenticity.

The implementation of foreign cultural literacy has been proven to impact the competitiveness of tourist villages positively. Foreign tourists feel more comfortable and valued, resulting in increased satisfaction and encouraging repeat visits. Tourist villages that integrate cross-cultural understanding into their services also receive positive reviews on various digital platforms, which in turn strengthens their appeal to the international market. Furthermore, foreign

cultural literacy training has been shown to improve the capacity of local human resources, not only in terms of language skills but also in terms of confidence in interacting with tourists. This gives tourist villages a competitive advantage by providing a more personalized and adaptive experience compared to other destinations that have not implemented similar strategies.

However, this study also identified various obstacles to implementing foreign cultural literacy. Tourism operators' foreign language skills are generally limited to basic conversation, which results in limited in-depth interactions with international tourists. Cross-cultural language and literacy training programs remain sporadic and unsustainable, often accessible only to select groups. Other obstacles include limited funds and time, as tourism operators must juggle business activities and educational needs. Furthermore, there are challenges in bridging cultural differences, particularly when local norms conflict with those of international tourists, for example, in terms of dress, consumption, or communication styles.

Overall, this study confirms that foreign cultural literacy is not merely an additional skill, but rather a core strategy for enhancing the competitiveness of tourist villages in the face of global tourism competition. Tourist villages that can integrate foreign language proficiency, an understanding of cross-cultural values, and adaptive service practices have a greater opportunity to attract international markets, increase tourist satisfaction, and strengthen their position in the sustainable tourism landscape. However, to achieve optimal results, policy support from local governments, collaboration with educational institutions, and ongoing training programs are needed to strengthen the human resource capacity of tourist villages.

## Discussion

The results of this study indicate that foreign cultural literacy practices in tourist villages are being implemented, although they are still in the development stage. Foreign language proficiency, especially English, is a starting point emphasized by tourism operators. Furthermore, cross-cultural understanding, such as communication etiquette, guest welcoming procedures, and tourism product packaging that is sensitive to cultural diversity, is also beginning to be addressed (Nguyen & Do, 2021; Wulandari & Sutopo, 2023). These findings align with Byram's (1997) concept of intercultural communicative competence, which emphasizes that foreign cultural literacy encompasses not only linguistic abilities but also cultural awareness, interpretation skills, and an open attitude toward differences. The results of this study also confirm Deardorff's (2006) intercultural competence model, which states that the success of cross-cultural interactions is largely determined by respect, adaptation skills, and cultural knowledge (Li & Hunter-Jones, 2020; Phuong & Vo, 2022; Taufiqurrohman et al., 2023; Putri et al., 2024).

Empirically, this study aligns with the findings of Chen and Starosta (2000), who emphasized that foreign cultural literacy enhances the effectiveness of communication in intercultural interactions. Similarly, research by Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009) has demonstrated that tourist destinations with higher levels of cultural literacy can increase tourist satisfaction and strengthen their international reputation. A recent study by Lee and Bai (2021) also supports these findings, stating that the cross-cultural competence of tourism actors contributes significantly to increasing the competitiveness of community-based tourism destinations (Nguyen & Do, 2021; Li & Hunter-Jones, 2020; Taufiqurrohman et al., 2023; Putri et al., 2024).

In terms of theoretical implications, this study strengthens the conceptual framework of foreign cultural literacy as a key factor in building the competitiveness of tourist destinations. Foreign cultural literacy is no longer viewed merely as an additional skill, but rather as a strategic capability that supports service differentiation and the formation of a destination's image in the global market (Reisinger & Crotts, 2010; Lee & Bai, 2021; Nguyen & Do, 2021; Wulandari & Sutopo,

2023). The results of this study also expand the application of intercultural competence theory by emphasizing its role in the context of community-based tourism (CBT), a concept previously discussed more in the context of multinational corporations or cross-cultural education (Li & Hunter-Jones, 2020; Taufiqurrohman et al., 2023; Putri et al., 2024).

**Table 1.** Main Themes and Summary of Interpretations

| Main Theme                                                 | Description Thematic                                                                                   | Meaning Conceptual                                                      |
|------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Strengthening Language and Cultural Capacity            | Literacy culture started with training in language and understanding across cultures.                  | Dimensions of knowledge and skills from intercultural competence.       |
| 2. Adaptation Services and Products Tour                   | Adjustment method services and products tour in accordance with global expectations .                  | Implementation of behavioral adaptation in cross-cultural interactions. |
| 3. Impact on Competitiveness and Satisfaction of Travelers | Cultural literacy increases satisfaction, digital reputation, and repeat visits.                       | Contribution to destination competitiveness.                            |
| 4. Strengthening Local Self-Confidence                     | Improving self-efficacy in serving foreign travelers.                                                  | Build a human capital village tour.                                     |
| 5. Obstacles Implementation and Value Differences          | Limited source power and training are sustainable; however, there is a culture of existence collision. | Challenges to the Sustainability of Cross-Cultural Literacy.            |
| 6. Need for Policy Support and Collaboration               | Literacy culture needs support from the government and educational institutions.                       | Synergy policy–education–community.                                     |

Based on research results (Table 1), these findings have important implications for tourism village managers. First, foreign cultural literacy needs to be a continuous training program involving various stakeholders, including local governments, educational institutions, and non-governmental organizations. Second, tourism villages need to develop service standards that are sensitive to cultural differences, for example, by providing multilingual information, designing inclusive facilities, and adapting communication patterns to be friendly to foreign tourists. Third, enhancing foreign cultural literacy will enable tourism villages to develop a more professional destination image, increase positive tourist reviews, and expand their presence in international markets.

However, this study has several limitations. First, the data was obtained from only a few tourist villages in Yogyakarta, so generalizing the results to other contexts requires caution. Second, the limited timeframe for the study meant that the exploration of foreign cultural literacy practices could only be conducted on specific aspects, particularly language and service ethics, rather than comprehensively encompassing the full range of destination management aspects. Third, this study focused more on the perspectives of tourism managers and actors, thus underscoring the direct perceptions of foreign tourists. Therefore, future research should expand the scope of locations, involve more tourist participants, and employ longitudinal methods to assess the impact of foreign

cultural literacy on the sustainable competitiveness of tourist villages.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that foreign cultural literacy is a crucial strategy for enhancing the competitiveness of tourist villages, particularly amidst increasingly fierce global tourism competition. Efforts undertaken by tourist village managers, such as mastery of foreign languages, understanding cross-cultural ethics, and packaging tourism products that are more sensitive to cultural diversity, have been proven to improve service quality, tourist comfort, and a positive destination image. These findings confirm that foreign cultural literacy is not merely an additional skill, but an integral part of strategic competencies that can strengthen the position of tourist villages in attracting international markets.

However, this study also identified various barriers, including limited foreign language skills, restricted access to ongoing training, and challenges in bridging cultural differences between local communities and foreign tourists. These barriers indicate that foreign cultural literacy still needs to be improved through support from training programs, cross-sector collaboration, and local government policies that support human resource capacity development in tourist villages. Thus, this study confirms that foreign cultural literacy is the foundation for creating excellent service and sustainable competitiveness in tourist villages. Its successful implementation depends heavily on community awareness, the involvement of the village's younger generation, and consistent institutional support. Well-integrated foreign cultural literacy will transform tourist villages not only as spaces for cultural exchange but also as destinations with a competitive advantage in the international tourism market.

Further research could explore the role of digital literacy in supporting foreign cultural literacy, particularly through the use of social media, online learning platforms, and translation apps, which are increasingly becoming part of the tourism experience. Furthermore, it would be interesting to examine the influence of foreign cultural literacy on international tourist satisfaction, loyalty, and revisit intentions, as indicators of destination competitiveness. In-depth studies could also focus on cross-sector collaboration strategies between local governments, educational institutions, and tourism industry players to strengthen the human resource capacity of tourist villages. Cross-generational comparative studies are also important to examine how the roles of younger generations in villages differ from those of older generations in building cross-cultural competencies. Furthermore, longitudinal research is needed to understand the dynamics of foreign cultural literacy development over time, as well as the effectiveness of government policies in strengthening the international competitiveness of tourist villages.

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