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Implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching to Improve Cultural Literacy of Elementary School Students

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of implementing the Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) approach in enhancing the cultural literacy of students at SD Negeri 25, Ternate City. The study employs a quantitative approach using a pre-experimental design—specifically, a one-group pre-test–post-test design. The subjects consisted of 21 fifth-grade students, selected through purposive sampling. Data analysis was conducted using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test. The statistical analysis results indicate a significance value of less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$), demonstrating a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores. Consequently, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Culturally Responsive Teaching approach is effective in improving the cultural literacy of elementary school students. These findings imply that an instructional approach responsive to the cultures and cultural experiences of learners can foster a more contextual, inclusive, and meaningful learning process, while also supporting the development of a character rooted in diversity at the elementary school level.

Keywords:
culturally responsive teaching, cultural literacy, elementary school, culture-based learning.

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a multicultural nation characterized by a highly complex diversity of ethnicities, languages, religions, and traditions. This reality presents both a strength and a challenge within the realm of education-particularly in primary schools, which serve as the foundation for the development of a child's character and social identity. Most primary schools in the city of Ternate accommodate students from diverse cultural backgrounds; consequently, social interaction within the classroom involves not only variations in academic ability but also differences in values, norms, and cultural practices (Hasrul et al., 2025; Hasrul, 2026). In this context, strengthening cultural literacy has become an urgent necessity that cannot be overlooked.

Cultural literacy is not simply defined as knowledge about culture, but includes the ability to understand, appreciate, and interact effectively with individuals from different cultural backgrounds (Nawir et al., 2025). The concept of cultural literacy is linked to intercultural competence, identity awareness, and an inclusive attitude toward diversity (Deardorff, 2020). At the elementary school level, cultural literacy plays an important role in preventing stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, and potential social conflict from an early age. Children who have good

cultural literacy tend to show empathy, tolerance, and the ability to work together in heterogeneous environments (Nurhaswinda, 2025).

However, the reality on the ground shows that learning practices at SDN 25 Ternate City are still often uniform and do not take into account the cultural background of students. Instruction tends to focus on general academic content, without integrating local cultural contexts or the diversity present among students in the classroom. This aligns with observations made by the researcher during a teaching practicum at SDN 25 Ternate City, which revealed several issues: a) social interactions among students tend to be confined to homogeneous ethnic groups; b) classroom instruction does not fully incorporate the local culture of Ternate; c) teachers have yet to systematically implement culturally responsive teaching (CRT) approaches; and d) there is a lack of experimental research examining the effectiveness of CRT on students' cultural literacy at SDN 25 Ternate City. Consequently, students' cultural literacy at the school has not developed optimally. This situation can lead to a "cultural mismatch" between students' learning experiences at home and at school, which in turn results in lower levels of student engagement and a lack of development in cultural sensitivity (Gay, 2018).

In the context of multicultural education, a culturally responsive approach to teaching is highly relevant. One such approach, widely developed in educational literature, is "Culturally Responsive Teaching"-pioneered by Gay (2018) and further strengthened by Ladson-Billings (2021). This approach emphasizes the importance of integrating students' cultural experiences, frames of reference, and learning styles into the instructional process to enhance educational effectiveness (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2021). According to Gay (2018), Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) is a pedagogical practice that utilizes students' cultural characteristics, experiences, and ethnic perspectives as conduits for teaching academic knowledge and skills in a more meaningful way. CRT aims not only to improve academic outcomes but also to foster a positive identity among students regarding their own culture, while simultaneously developing an appreciation for other cultures. Meanwhile, Ladson-Billings (2021) asserts that culturally responsive teaching must promote academic success, cultural competence, and a critical awareness of social realities among students.

The implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) in elementary schools is significant because, at this developmental stage, children begin to construct their social self-concept and group identity. If schools fail to accommodate students' cultural backgrounds, there is a risk that certain cultures may become marginalized within the classroom. Conversely, when teachers consciously integrate elements of their students' cultures into instruction—for instance, through the use of contextual examples, local folklore, regional languages as a bridge for communication, or discussions about the traditions of various ethnic groups—students feel acknowledged and valued. This sense of being recognized contributes to increased learning motivation and social engagement (Hammond, 2015).

In the context of cultural literacy, Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) holds strategic potential for enhancing three key dimensions: cultural knowledge, cultural attitudes (toward diversity), and cross-cultural interaction skills. Through guided discussions, collaborative cross-group learning, and critical reflection on diversity, students can develop a deeper understanding of the multicultural realities within their own environments. Recent research indicates that culture-based pedagogical approaches significantly improve social empathy and tolerant attitudes among elementary school students (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Gay, 2018).

The urgency of adopting a culturally responsive approach in elementary schools in Ternate City has become increasingly relevant, particularly in light of the emphasis on character education and the implementation of a curriculum centered on the Profil Pelajar Pancasila. However, the implementation of instruction that systematically integrates this approach remains relatively limited, especially in terms of empirical research at the elementary school level. Most existing

studies are either conceptual in nature or focus on secondary and higher education. Furthermore, social interactions among elementary students are not always harmonious. In some instances, cultural differences can lead to social clustering based on shared ethnicity, the use of stereotypes, and even the potential for verbal conflict (Hasrul & Ahmad, 2021). Such conditions indicate that students' cultural literacy has not yet developed optimally. If left unaddressed at an early stage, these patterns of exclusive interaction may persist into subsequent levels of education.

Based on these theoretical considerations and empirical conditions, there is a need for experimental research that directly examines the effectiveness of the Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) approach in enhancing students' cultural literacy in primary schools. Such research is essential for providing empirical evidence regarding the extent to which CRT can improve students' cultural understanding, tolerance, and cross-cultural interaction skills. Utilizing a quasi-experimental design, this study aims to compare the cultural literacy outcomes between classrooms that implement CRT and those that employ conventional teaching approaches. Theoretically, this research contributes to enriching the study of multicultural pedagogy at the primary education level in the city of Ternate. It also expands the application of CRT theory within a local context characterized by unique and diverse cultural traits. Practically, the findings are expected to serve as a recommendation for primary school teachers to develop more inclusive and contextualized instructional strategies.

Consequently, research on the effectiveness of the Culturally Responsive Teaching approach in enhancing students' cultural literacy in primary schools is relevant, strategic, and urgent. This endeavor is not merely oriented toward academic achievement, but also toward shaping a generation that possesses cultural awareness, social tolerance, and the readiness to live within a multicultural society.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative approach using a pre-experimental design, specifically the One-Group Pretest-Posttest Design. This design involves a single group of subjects who are administered an initial test (pretest), followed by an intervention—the implementation of a Culturally Responsive Teaching approach—and concluding with a final test (post-test) to measure the changes that have occurred.

The structure of this research design can be illustrated as follows:

Pre-test	Treatment	Post-test
$\mathbf{O_1}$	X	O_2

Figure 3.1 One-Group Pretest-Posttest experimental research design

Legend:
O_1 = Pretest (initial measurement of students' cultural literacy)
X = Treatment (instruction using the Culturally Responsive Teaching approach)
O_2 = Posttest (final measurement of students' cultural literacy)

Through this design, the researcher can compare pretest and posttest scores to determine whether there is an improvement in students' cultural literacy following the treatment. The difference between these two scores indicates the effectiveness of the applied approach. The selection of the One-Group Pretest-Posttest design is based on practical considerations and the conditions in elementary schools in Ternate City, where the research could be conducted within a single class without the use of a separate control group. Nevertheless, this design still provides an initial overview of the impact of the treatment on the variables under study.

Research Subjects

The subjects of this study are all fifth-grade students at SD Negeri 25 Kota Ternate, totaling 21 students—10 boys and 11 girls. The sampling technique employed is purposive sampling, based on specific considerations or criteria established by the researcher. This approach ensures that the selected respondents are the most relevant and appropriate for the research objectives (Subhaktiyasa, 2024).

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis in this study employs non-parametric statistics, specifically the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test. This test is used to determine whether there is a significant difference between pretest scores (before the intervention) and posttest scores (after the intervention) within the same group, following the implementation of the Culturally Responsive Teaching approach. The Wilcoxon test was chosen because the data are ordinal (Likert scale), the sample size is relatively small, and the data do not meet the assumption of normality (the normality test result shows a significance value, or Sig., of < 0.05).

The decision-making criterion is as follows: if the test result yields a significance value of less than 0.05, it can be concluded that there is a significant improvement in students' cultural literacy following the implementation of the CRT approach. Conversely, if the significance value is greater than or equal to 0.05, then there is no significant difference between the scores before and after the intervention.

DISCUSSION

In general, the presentation of research results in this section is organized according to the procedures and stages of the research implementation. The description of the research results includes:

Pre-Research Results

The pre-research phase serves as an initial stage designed to prepare all necessary requirements for the study prior to the implementation of the intervention. This phase began with a preliminary study at SDN 25 Ternate City to gain an overview of the baseline cultural literacy of fifth-grade students and the characteristics of classroom instruction. Observations and interviews with the class teacher revealed that instruction in Pancasila Education was still dominated by the lecture method, with textbooks serving as the primary learning resource. Although the subject matter covered Indonesia’s cultural diversity, the presentation rarely incorporated the students' own cultural experiences or the local culture of Ternate City into the learning context. Consequently, the students' understanding of cultural diversity remained purely conceptual, failing to evolve into an attitude of appreciation or the ability to interact effectively within a multicultural environment.

The findings from this preliminary study provided the basis for developing instructional materials using the Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) approach. These materials—comprising teaching modules, student worksheets, learning media, and assessment instruments—were designed for a three-session unit on "Indonesia’s Cultural Diversity" within the Pancasila Education curriculum. The teaching modules were structured to integrate the local culture of Ternate City, the students' cultural backgrounds, collaborative learning, and reflective activities, thereby making the instruction more contextual and meaningful.

Furthermore, the researcher developed a research instrument in the form of a cultural literacy scale, consisting of 20 statements. This instrument underwent validation and was confirmed to be reliable through statistical testing. Thus, the pre-research stage produces CRT-based learning devices along with research instruments that have met the eligibility requirements for use in the implementation.

Cultural Literacy Pre-test Results

The pre-test was conducted prior to the implementation of the intervention to assess the cultural literacy level of fifth-grade students, serving as a baseline for the study. Measurements were taken using a cultural literacy scale that had been validated and proven reliable. All students completed the questionnaire independently, with guidance provided by the researcher and the classroom teacher to ensure that every statement was clearly understood.

The pre-test results indicate that the students' cultural literacy falls within the low to moderate range. While most students are familiar with certain forms of Indonesian culture, their understanding of the diversity of both local cultures and those from other regions remains limited. Furthermore, the students' ability to connect cultural values to their daily lives and to demonstrate a reflective attitude toward diversity has yet to be optimally developed.

These findings indicate that students require learning experiences that are more contextual and participatory, and that provide them with the space to recognize and appreciate cultural diversity through direct, hands-on engagement. Consequently, the Culturally Responsive Teaching approach is considered appropriate for enhancing students' cultural literacy.

Results of the CRT Approach Implementation

The implementation of the Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) approach was carried out over three sessions within the Pancasila Education subject, focusing on the topic "The Cultural Diversity of Indonesia." Each session lasted for 6 lesson periods (6 × 35 minutes) and was designed based on CRT principles—integrating students' cultural experiences, local culture, collaborative learning, and reflection on cultural diversity. Overall, the implementation of the CRT approach succeeded in creating a learning environment that was more active, participatory, and contextual. Students appeared more confident in sharing their cultural experiences, more open to differences, and demonstrated a high level of engagement throughout the learning process.

Post-test Results for Cultural Literacy

Following the completion of the entire instructional sequence, the researcher administered a post-test using the same cultural literacy scale instrument employed in the pre-test. The post-test results indicate an increase in cultural literacy scores for the majority of students compared to the initial measurements. This improvement is evident across all dimensions of cultural literacy: cultural knowledge, an attitude of valuing diversity, the skills to interact with peers from different cultural backgrounds, and the ability to reflect on the importance of cultural preservation. Throughout the instructional process, students not only acquired new knowledge regarding Indonesian culture but also demonstrated a shift toward more open, tolerant, and appreciative attitudes regarding differences.

Based on the findings presented above, a graph illustrating the changes in scores between the pre-test and post-test is provided below, serving as evidence of the shift in students' cultural literacy before and after the implementation of the Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) approach.

Statistical Test Results Using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test

To determine the significance of the improvement in students' cultural literacy following the implementation of the Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) approach, an analysis was conducted using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test. This test was selected because it compares pre-test and post-test scores within the same group and is appropriate for use when the data do not meet the assumption of normality. The analysis results indicate that the significance value (Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)) is less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$). Consequently, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted. These results demonstrate a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores for students' cultural literacy after participating in instruction that utilized the Culturally Responsive Teaching approach.

These findings indicate that the CRT approach is effective in enhancing the cultural literacy of fifth-grade students at SDN 25, Ternate City. This improvement is evident not only in their knowledge regarding cultural diversity but also in the development of tolerant attitudes, the ability to collaborate within a multicultural environment, and an increased awareness of the importance of valuing and preserving culture as an integral part of the nation's identity.

This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of implementing the Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) approach in enhancing the cultural literacy of fifth-grade students at SDN 25, Ternate City. The research findings indicate that the implementation of CRT significantly improves students' cultural literacy. This is evidenced by an increase in cultural literacy scores between the pre-test and post-test, further supported by the results of the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test, which yielded a significance value of less than 0.05. These findings demonstrate that the CRT approach exerts a positive influence on students' ability to recognize, understand, appreciate, and reflect upon cultural diversity.

The improvement in students' cultural literacy is closely linked to the characteristics of the CRT approach, which positions culture as an integral component of the learning process. In this study, the teacher did not merely present concepts regarding Indonesia's cultural diversity; rather, the material was connected to the students' own real-life experiences. This strategy rendered the learning material more contextual, enabling students to more easily construct understanding based on their existing experiences. According to Gay (2018), instruction that integrates students' cultural backgrounds enhances the relevance of the material, strengthens student engagement, and assists them in deriving meaning from their learning experiences. Consequently, culture serves not only as an object of study but also as a learning resource that enriches the educational process.

During the intervention process, students demonstrated more active participation compared to the period before the intervention. This was evident when students discussed their respective regional cultures, shared experiences regarding family traditions, and collaborated in groups consisting of peers from diverse cultural backgrounds. Such activities provided students with opportunities to get to know one another, as well as to understand and appreciate the cultural diversity present within the classroom. This aligns with the perspective of Ladson-Billings (2021), who asserts that culturally responsive teaching aims not only to enhance academic achievement but also to develop cultural competence, enabling learners to maintain their own cultural identities while simultaneously respecting the cultures of others.

The research results also indicate an improvement in the dimension of cultural knowledge. Prior to the intervention, most students only had a general understanding of Indonesian culture; however, following the instruction, they became capable of explaining examples of local culture, identifying cultural diversity across different regions, and understanding the importance of cultural preservation. This improvement occurred because the learning material was presented through folktales, cultural imagery, group discussions, and examples closely related to the students' own lives. According to Hammond (2015), the learning process is more effective when new information is connected to the experiences and knowledge that learners already possess. Activating these experiences helps students build links between new concepts and the context of their daily lives.

Beyond the aspect of knowledge, there was also an improvement in the dimension of valuing cultural diversity. Throughout the learning process, students began to demonstrate a more open attitude toward peers from different cultural backgrounds. They no longer viewed differences as barriers to interaction, but rather as a form of richness to be explored together. This shift in attitude emerged because the learning process provided space for dialogue, reflection, and collaboration, allowing students to gain firsthand experience in interacting positively with their peers. These findings support the research of Parisu & Saputra (2025), which indicates that

strengthening cultural literacy starting from the elementary school level contributes to the development of tolerance, an appreciation for diversity, and the ability to coexist within a multicultural society.

The implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) also led to enhanced social interaction skills among students. During group activities, students were encouraged to listen to their peers' opinions, express their own ideas respectfully, and collaborate to complete tasks related to cultural diversity. Such experiences demonstrate that culture-based learning fosters not only cognitive development but also the social skills essential for daily life. These findings reinforce the research of Nurramadhani et al. (2025), which suggests that CRT is capable of shaping a character defined by global diversity—fostering a sense of "unity in diversity"—through collaborative interactions that honor the cultural identity of every learner.

The results of this study align with several previous studies. Febriana et al. (2024) found that the Culturally Responsive Teaching approach can enhance the multicultural literacy of elementary school students by integrating the learners' cultural experiences into the learning process. Similarly, Hani & Rokhmaniyah (2025) reported that the application of CRT in Pancasila Education lessons improves cultural literacy and fosters an attitude of respect for diversity. Furthermore, Azizah et al. (2025) indicated that elementary school teachers view CRT as an effective approach for making instruction more relevant to students' lives by utilizing local culture as a learning resource.

Nevertheless, this study offers a contribution that distinguishes it from prior research. Most previous studies have focused on improving academic learning outcomes, general multicultural literacy, or teachers' perceptions regarding the implementation of CRT. This study specifically examines cultural literacy as an outcome variable, encompassing four dimensions: cultural knowledge, an attitude of respect for diversity, cross-cultural interaction skills, and critical reflection. Moreover, the study was conducted within the context of elementary schools in Ternate City—a setting characterized by a diverse society and a strong local culture. Consequently, this research provides empirical evidence that the application of CRT can be adapted to primary education contexts in Eastern Indonesia and is effective in strengthening students' cultural literacy.

CONCLUSİON

The findings of this study imply that elementary school teachers should integrate local culture into the learning process-not only within the Pancasila Education subject but also in other subjects where such integration is feasible. Incorporating folklore, traditional games, local languages, arts, and the social practices of the local community can serve as relevant and meaningful learning resources for students. Instruction that values cultural diversity is expected to not only improve learning outcomes but also foster the development of students who are tolerant, inclusive, and committed to preserving local culture. Consequently, the application of the CRT approach serves as an effective strategy for enhancing the cultural literacy of elementary school students in Ternate City. Therefore, CRT can be considered a relevant pedagogical approach to support the strengthening of a character rooted in diversity and the preservation of culture at the elementary education level.

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