

Integration of Cultural Literacy in Elementary School Curriculum: An Empirical and Conceptual Literature Analysis

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Abstract

This study explores the integration of cultural literacy within the elementary school curriculum through an analysis of empirical and conceptual literature published between 2020 and 2025. Using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach guided by PRISMA 2020, nine primary studies were analyzed to identify patterns, challenges, and opportunities in implementing cultural literacy in basic education. The reviewed studies most prominently addressed local cultural knowledge, cultural identity, and intercultural communication, with digital storybooks, VR/AR-based learning, and project-based field experiences emerging as the most effective strategies for enhancing students' cultural understanding, engagement, and reading literacy. In contrast, limitations such as unequal technological access, varying levels of teacher competence, and inconsistent availability of culturally relevant learning materials were identified as key barriers. Conceptually, cultural literacy was consistently framed through cognitive, affective, and social dimensions aligned with the Pancasila Student Profile. The study concludes that integrating cultural literacy into the curriculum offers strong pedagogical value and recommends strengthening teacher capacity, expanding digital and print cultural resources, and conducting cross-regional research to build more generalizable evidence for policy development.

Keywords: Cultural Literacy, Curriculum Integration, Elementary Education,

Received: October 10, 2025

Revised: November 20, 2025

Accepted: December 07, 2025

Article Identity:

Kusumawati, F., Zakiah, L., Yunus, M., (2025). Integration of Cultural Literacy in Elementary School Curriculum: An Empirical and Conceptual Literature Analysis. *Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan (JIP) STKIP Kusuma Negara*, 17(2), 240-254.

INTRODUCTION

Literacy is globally recognized as a fundamental right and a prerequisite for meaningful participation in sustainable development. UNESCO emphasizes that literacy skills, when strengthened throughout life, enable well-being and active social engagement (UNESCO, 2025). In the post-pandemic learning landscape, the ability to process multimodal information has become increasingly crucial. Recent international assessments, such as PISA 2022, further highlight concerns regarding the decline in reading performance worldwide (OECD, 2022), reinforcing the need to re-examine how literacy, particularly its cultural dimensions, is fostered in schools.

Indonesia's sociocultural context presents unique challenges and opportunities for this effort. With more than 700 regional languages recorded across national and international databases (Kemendikbudristek, 2019; Ethnologue, 2025), and diverse ethnic practices documented through national census reports (UNFPA

in Indonesia, 2025), classrooms naturally reflect high levels of cultural plurality. Such diversity underscores the urgency of developing students' multicultural competence, which global citizenship education frameworks identify as essential for promoting empathy, dialogue, and social cohesion.

Policy developments within Indonesia support this orientation. The Independent Curriculum allows schools to design contextual learning that incorporates local cultural values, particularly through the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project. Curriculum guidelines highlight the importance of linking learning to cultural identity and community participation (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). Empirical studies similarly show that integrating local wisdom can increase student engagement, motivation, and character development (Muyassaroh et al., 2024; Irsan et al., 2024; Siska et al., 2021). These findings suggest that cultural literacy plays a strategic role in enhancing learning relevance, yet its implementation is not without obstacles.

Although national policies emphasize literacy as a core competency (Kemendikbudristek, 2023), studies indicate that culturally grounded literacy practices remain inconsistent across schools. Limited availability of culturally relevant materials, variations in teacher preparedness, and the episodic nature of cultural projects can hinder sustained integration (BPS, 2025; Ionesia, 2022; Safitri & Ramadan, 2022; Kelly et al., 2023). At the same time, research demonstrates that when instruction is explicitly connected to students' cultural contexts, improvements occur not only in reading comprehension but also in students' sense of identity and belonging (Eliyanti et al., 2024; Grote-Garcia & Ortlieb, 2023).

Conceptual literature further reinforces that cultural literacy encompasses cognitive, affective, and social dimensions, positioning it as a foundation for intercultural competence and value formation (Oxford Review, 2024; UNESCO, 2024). In Indonesia, this aligns directly with the "global diversity" dimension of the Pancasila Student Profile, emphasizing empathy, respect for difference, and responsible participation in diverse societies (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2022). However, studies also note inconsistencies in teachers' interpretations of cultural literacy, ranging from narrow understandings of local tradition to broader conceptions involving critical reflection and intercultural dialogue (Reskia et al., 2025; Huda et al., 2025).

Despite growing interest, existing research remains fragmented. Many studies focus only on classroom-level initiatives or isolated forms of cultural integration, while few map cultural literacy systematically across curriculum objectives, materials, pedagogy, and assessment. This gap highlights the need for a comprehensive synthesis of empirical and conceptual evidence to clarify how cultural literacy is defined, operationalized, and implemented in elementary schools.

Therefore, this study aims to (1) examine how cultural literacy is conceptualized and integrated into curriculum documents, learning materials, and classroom practices; (2) analyze empirical and conceptual approaches reported in the literature to identify their strengths, limitations, and contextual suitability; and (3) identify challenges and opportunities related to teacher readiness, resource availability, and policy support. By positioning cultural literacy as a cross-subject competency within the elementary school curriculum, this review offers a clear

operational understanding and provides evidence-based insights to strengthen its implementation in Indonesian schools.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework (Executive, 2025). The review followed four sequential stages: identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion. Literature was retrieved from the Scopus database using the keywords “*cultural literacy*” and “*elementary school*.” Inclusion criteria required studies to be published between 2020 and 2025, written in English, and categorized as empirical or conceptual research. Eligible studies explicitly addressed cultural literacy, cultural competence, local wisdom integration, or culturally responsive pedagogy within elementary education contexts.

Several exclusion criteria were applied to ensure relevance and methodological rigor. Non-research articles, closed-access publications, review papers, and non-English texts were excluded. Additional exclusions targeted studies focused solely on secondary or higher education, those addressing general or digital literacy without a cultural dimension, papers referencing culture only peripherally, and studies lacking sufficient methodological transparency for meaningful data extraction. These criteria ensured that the final corpus reflected both conceptual relevance and research quality.

The PRISMA workflow details the selection process. The initial database search identified 223 articles. During the identification stage, 145 articles were excluded, including non-research articles (85), closed-access publications (53), review articles (3), and non-English texts (4), leaving 78 articles for screening. Title and abstract screening removed 55 irrelevant studies, resulting in 23 articles. Of these, 10 were excluded due to misalignment with the research focus, leaving 13 articles for eligibility assessment. All 13 met the eligibility criteria, from which nine primary studies were included in the core SLR analysis, supplemented by four additional reports that supported the conceptual synthesis.

Following PRISMA guidelines, the analysis proceeded through an in-depth narrative synthesis. Each study was read closely to extract key information regarding its objectives, conceptualization of cultural literacy, instructional or intervention strategies, research design, and findings. Rather than employing formal thematic coding, the synthesis relied on iterative comparative reading to identify recurring patterns, points of divergence, and conceptual linkages across the studies. This approach enabled the reviewer to trace how different research contexts addressed cultural literacy, what pedagogical strategies appeared effective, and what structural or contextual challenges were repeatedly reported. The synthesis thus integrated empirical evidence and conceptual insights into a coherent understanding of how cultural literacy is defined, implemented, and supported within elementary school settings.

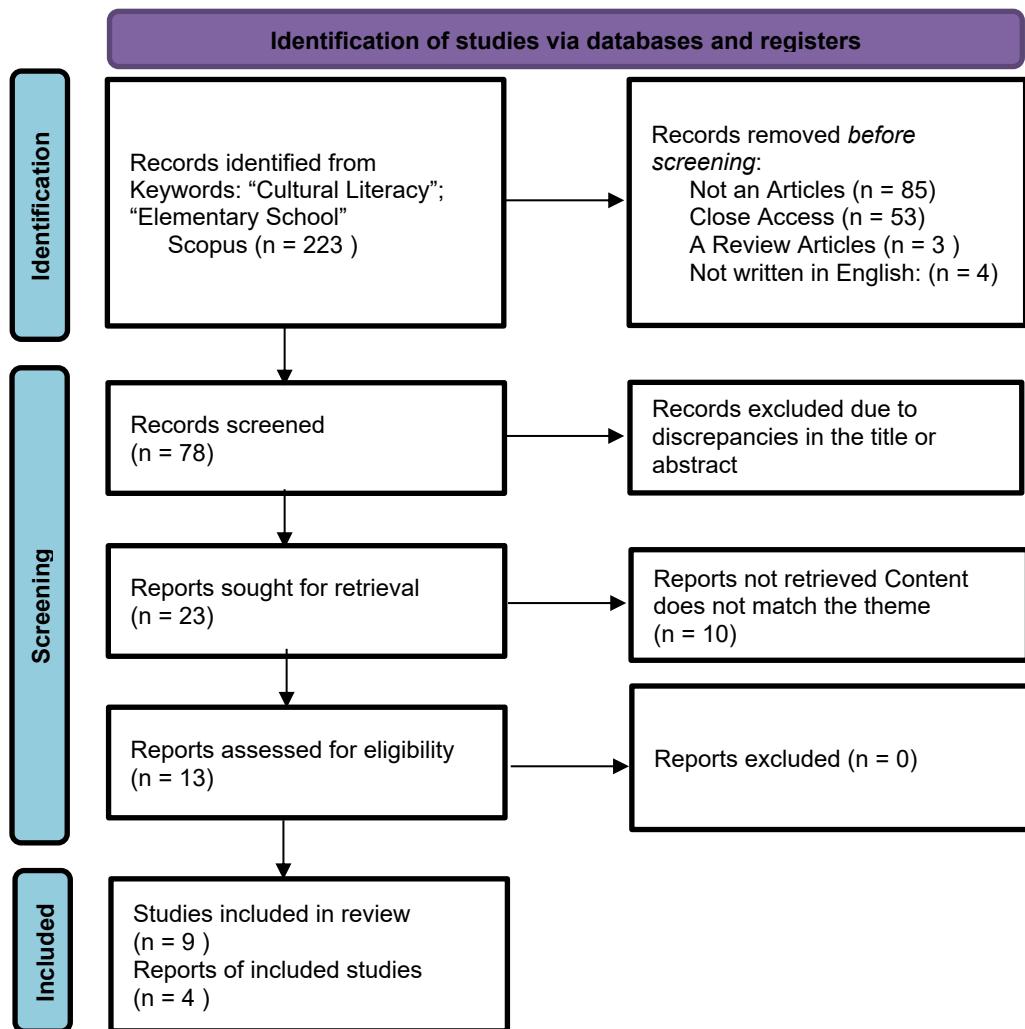


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 Workflow.

RESULT

The overall selection process based on the PRISMA inclusion criteria yielded nine key articles addressing the integration of cultural literacy in elementary and early secondary education contexts. Each study highlights diverse approaches, ranging from digital media development and the use of immersive technologies to project-based learning strategies and hands-on experiences. These findings provide a comprehensive overview of how cultural literacy is integrated into learning practices across a variety of educational contexts.

Table 1. Research synthesis results

Author (Year)	Location & Level	Approach /Intervention	Design & Sample	Measured Outcomes	Key Findings
Iasha et al. (2022)	Indonesia; Elementary School	VR-based field trip model for cultural literacy	Needs analysis, qualitative; 50 students & 28 teachers	Media needs, cultural awareness	Strong demand for VR media; students and

Author (Year)	Location & Level	Approach /Intervention	Design & Sample	Measured Outcomes	Key Findings
			(questionnaires + interviews)		teachers found VR helpful for learning about culture and making learning more engaging.
Syarif et al. (2024)	Indonesia; Cultural Geography course	Project-Based Learning + Field Trip (PjBL-FT)	Quasi-experimental / ANCOVA; N≈101	Post-test scores, variance homogeneity	PjBL-FT outperformed regular PjBL and conventional methods in creative thinking and cultural literacy.
Dharma et al. (2025)	Indonesia; Grade 5	Digital storybook based on Balinese culture and Pancasila	Experimental / multivariate; 114 students	Cultural-civic literacy, PPKn learning outcomes	High effects: literacy ES = 0.849; learning ES = 0.872; simultaneous ES = 0.851; p < 0.001.
Minsih et al. (2025)	Indonesia; Elementary School (<i>Sekolah Penggerak</i>)	Integration of cultural literacy in science learning (local wisdom, traditional tools, regional language)	Qualitative phenomenological; principals, teachers, students	Engagement and cultural identity reinforcement	Cultural literacy embedded through contextualized science learning; science-culture exhibitions and traditional games enhanced student engagement.
Huda et al. (2025)	Indonesia (meta-analysis of 14 studies,)	Local wisdom-infused experiential learning for	Meta-analysis (random effects)	Aggregate effect, publication bias	Cultural integration had a significant

Author (Year)	Location & Level	Approach /Intervention	Design & Sample	Measured Outcomes	Key Findings
	2019–2023)	reading literacy			positive effect on reading literacy ($p = 0.001$).
Ahdhianto et al. (2025)	Indonesia; Grade 5	Augmented Reality (AR) + experiential learning	PLS-SEM; N = 100	Understanding of cultural diversity	AR improved cultural understanding; simulation components were the most influential factor.
Un-udom et al. (2025)	Thailand; Elementary School	Trilingual local folktale animation (Thai–English–Mandarin)	R&D + classroom trial; N = 35	Cultural knowledge, communication skills	Significant improvement in cultural knowledge ($t = -10.16$, $p < 0.05$) and language ability (English & Mandarin).
Yuriananta et al. (2023)	Indonesia; BIPA (Indonesian for Foreign Speakers)	“Legend of Malang” RPG with gamification (Malang culture)	Qualitative; 3 students & 1 teacher	Responses & engagement, cultural schema	Culture-based RPG increased understanding and motivation; in-game dialogues fostered both language and cultural learning.
Kim et al. (2024)	United States; Grades 1–3 (follow-up in Grade 4)	Spiral content literacy intervention (MORE)	Long-term RCT + 14-month follow-up	Science vocabulary, reading comprehension, far transfer	Spiral curriculum promoted far transfer in reading and mathematics; provides a conceptual foundation

Author (Year)	Location & Level	Approach /Intervention	Design & Sample	Measured Outcomes	Key Findings
for cross-theme literacy integration.					

The synthesis of nine studies identifies clear patterns in how cultural literacy is conceptualized and implemented in elementary education. Rather than treating the studies separately, the findings cluster into four major thematic approaches: (1) digital and immersive media, (2) project-based and experiential learning, (3) local wisdom integration, and (4) gamification and multilingual approaches. Together, these themes highlight commonly used instructional strategies, their effectiveness, and the contextual factors shaping their outcomes.

A substantial body of evidence emphasizes the strong impact of technology-enhanced media on cultural literacy. Studies using Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), digital storybooks, and animated folktales report consistent gains in cultural awareness, understanding of diversity, and engagement. VR-based field trips (Iasha et al., 2022) and AR-supported experiential learning (Ahdhianto et al., 2025) demonstrate that interactive simulations are particularly effective. Digital storybooks grounded in Balinese culture (Dharma et al., 2025) show large effect sizes on cultural-civic literacy and PPKn outcomes, while trilingual animated folktales in Thailand (Un-udom et al., 2025) enhance both cultural knowledge and multilingual communication. Overall, immersive and narrative-rich technologies foster emotionally engaging and context-rich learning, though their implementation depends on digital infrastructure and teachers' technological competence.

Experiential approaches form a second dominant theme. Project-Based Learning combined with field trips (PjBL-FT) produced the highest gains in creative thinking and cultural literacy compared to PjBL alone and conventional instruction (Syarif et al., 2024). These findings suggest that direct engagement with cultural environments strengthens reflection and interpretation more effectively than classroom-based methods. Qualitative evidence from Minsih et al. (2025) further shows that contextualized learning using traditional tools, regional language, and culture-based exhibitions reinforces cultural identity and student engagement. While experiential models effectively connect cultural knowledge to lived experience, their scalability relies on logistical resources, institutional support, and teacher readiness.

A third theme focuses on integrating local wisdom into instruction. Meta-analytic results (Huda et al., 2025) indicate that local wisdom-based experiential learning significantly improves reading literacy, suggesting that cultural relevance enhances motivation and comprehension. Related studies (Muyassaroh et al., 2024; Irsan et al., 2024) report positive effects on character development, participation,

and affective engagement. This approach is valued for its authenticity and alignment with community values, but challenges arise from uneven access to cultural resources and the risk of superficial implementation when teachers lack sufficient cultural or pedagogical expertise. Gamification and multilingual approaches appear less frequently but remain noteworthy. RPG-based cultural learning (Yuriananta et al., 2023) increases learner motivation and supports cultural schema development through interactive storytelling. Similarly, trilingual folktale animations (Un-udom et al., 2025) preserve cultural content while strengthening multilingual communication skills. These approaches are particularly relevant for diverse classrooms, although their long-term effectiveness may depend on sustained engagement beyond initial novelty.

Across themes, several shared conclusions emerge. Digital and immersive media are the most consistently effective, especially when interactivity, narrative depth, and cultural authenticity are combined. Experiential and project-based models also play a crucial role in fostering empathy, reflection, and identity formation. Local wisdom integration provides meaningful contextual grounding but requires strong teacher preparation and resource support, while gamified and multilingual strategies offer innovative but still under-researched pathways. Common challenges include unequal access to technology, variation in teacher competence, limited culturally relevant materials, and inconsistent policy support. National context further shapes implementation priorities: studies from Indonesia emphasize local wisdom and character education, whereas research from Thailand and the United States highlights multilingualism and literacy transfer, reflecting differing educational goals.

DISCUSSION

Across all themes, the synthesis reveals several collective insights. First, digital and immersive media emerge as the most consistently effective tools, especially when they combine interactivity, narrative depth, and cultural authenticity. Experiential and project-based models are similarly impactful, particularly in fostering cultural empathy, reflection, and identity formation. Local wisdom integration offers strong contextual grounding but requires adequate teacher preparation and resource support. Gamification and multilingual strategies provide innovative pathways, though evidence remains limited compared to the other themes. In terms of challenges, the studies repeatedly highlight unequal technological access, variations in teacher competence, limited culturally relevant materials, and inconsistent policy support as major barriers to sustained implementation. Differences in national context also shape outcomes: studies from Indonesia focus heavily on local wisdom and character formation, while research from Thailand and the United States integrates multilingualism and literacy transfer, reflecting diverse educational priorities.

Digital and Immersive Media (VR, AR, Digital Storybooks, Animation)

A prominent cross-study pattern is the strong influence of digital and immersive media, particularly Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), digital storybooks, and animated folktales, on the development of cultural literacy in elementary learners. Across studies, these technologies consistently increase student engagement, deepen cultural comprehension, and strengthen emotional connection to cultural content. VR-based cultural exploration offers simulated access to cultural sites and practices that are otherwise difficult to experience, with Iasha et al. (2022) showing that VR field trips enhance both cultural awareness and cognitive, emotional involvement, highlighting immersion as a key mechanism of impact. Similarly, AR-supported learning environments (Ahdhianto et al., 2025) demonstrate how interactive simulations make cultural diversity more visible and concrete. Digital storybooks further emerge as highly effective tools; Dharma et al. (2025) report large effect sizes in cultural-civic literacy when Balinese cultural narratives are delivered digitally, as multimodal features, visuals, audio, and dynamic sequences, reinforce cultural symbolism and narrative immersion. Likewise, trilingual animated folktales in Thailand (Un-udom et al., 2025) show that animation can preserve cultural knowledge while simultaneously promoting multilingual and intercultural competencies.

Taken together, these findings indicate that immersive and narrative-driven technologies support cultural literacy by creating context-rich, emotionally engaging, and cognitively scaffolded learning environments that allow students to experience culture rather than encounter it only through text. By reducing abstraction and emphasizing embodied and narrative learning, digital media make cultural concepts more accessible and meaningful. However, the synthesis also identifies important constraints, including unequal access to technology, disparities in digital infrastructure, and variations in teachers' technological competence, all of which shape implementation quality. As a result, while digital and immersive media represent some of the most promising pathways for cultural literacy development, their effectiveness depends on technological readiness, sustained teacher support, and alignment with culturally authentic instructional materials.

Project-Based and Experiential Learning Models

A second dominant theme across the reviewed studies is the use of project-based and experiential learning to deepen students' cultural literacy. Across contexts, these approaches share a core pedagogical feature: they embed cultural knowledge within lived, observable, and participatory experiences, enabling students to construct meaning through direct interaction rather than passive reception. The quasi-experimental study by Syarif et al. (2024) offers strong evidence for this approach, showing that Project-Based Learning with Field Trip support (PjBL-FT) produced significantly higher gains in cultural literacy and creative thinking than both standard PjBL and conventional instruction. These findings suggest that experiential elements, especially direct exposure to cultural sites, enhance students' interpretive and reflective capacities by situating abstract cultural concepts within authentic contexts. Firsthand encounters with cultural artifacts, practices, and environments shift learning from symbolic representation to experiential understanding, narrowing the gap between curriculum content and cultural reality.

Qualitative evidence from Minsih et al. (2025) reinforces this pattern. Within schools implementing the Pancasila Student Profile framework, experiential learning was integrated into science instruction through traditional tools, regional languages, and culture-based exhibitions. These practices extended beyond knowledge transmission to cultivate cultural identity, belonging, and pride, demonstrating that experiential learning supports both cognitive and affective dimensions of cultural literacy. The interdisciplinary nature of these projects also reflects a broader trend in the literature: project-based learning aligns well with curricula that emphasize holistic competencies rather than isolated content objectives.

Cross-study synthesis identifies several mechanisms underlying the effectiveness of experiential and project-based models. First, they promote active learning through inquiry, observation, collaboration, and reflection—processes well suited to the relational and contextual nature of culture. Second, they foster authentic engagement by presenting culture as dynamic and lived rather than static or symbolic. Third, they support identity formation as students engage with cultural practices embedded in their communities and heritage.

However, implementation is shaped by contextual constraints. Limited resources may restrict field trips or community partnerships, while teacher readiness influences the quality of facilitation, curricular integration, and logistical management. Policy alignment, such as support provided by the Pancasila Student Profile, further enables schools to embed cultural learning systematically. Overall, the synthesis indicates that project-based and experiential models provide some of the most robust pathways for cultural literacy development when supported by adequate resources, trained teachers, and context-sensitive curricular frameworks.

Local Wisdom Integration

A third major theme across the reviewed studies is the integration of local wisdom into instructional materials, classroom practices, and learning environments. In Indonesian contexts, local cultural knowledge functions not only as curricular content but as an organizing principle shaping students' engagement, motivation, and cultural identity. This emphasis reflects Indonesia's linguistic and ethnic diversity and national policy priorities, particularly contextualized learning under the Pancasila Student Profile.

Overall findings show that embedding local wisdom enhances cultural literacy by grounding abstract concepts in students' lived experiences. Meta-analytic evidence from Huda et al. (2025) indicates that local wisdom-infused experiential learning significantly improves reading literacy, suggesting gains in both cognitive and affective engagement. Similarly, culture-based science instruction using traditional tools, regional languages, and cultural exhibitions (Muyassaroh et al., 2024; Minsih et al., 2025) strengthens students' cultural identity and sense of belonging. Across studies, cultural literacy develops more deeply when learning reflects students' cultural environments rather than relying on decontextualized materials.

Several strengths of local wisdom integration are evident. First, it provides cultural authenticity by linking curriculum content to community traditions, values, and practices, supporting identity formation and positioning culture as part of everyday life. Second, it increases relevance and motivation, as students perceive

learning as meaningful and reflective of their backgrounds. Third, it promotes character development, including mutual cooperation, respect, responsibility, and national identity, which align closely with Indonesia's curricular goals.

Despite these benefits, effectiveness is shaped by structural and pedagogical challenges. Studies report limited access to high-quality cultural resources and wide variation in teachers' ability to translate local knowledge into effective pedagogy. As a result, cultural learning may become ceremonial, superficial, or confined to isolated projects rather than integrated across subjects. Additionally, because local wisdom is place-based, its transferability across regions or national contexts is limited; practices effective in areas such as Bali or Jambi may require adaptation elsewhere.

Cross-study synthesis suggests that while local wisdom integration is highly contextually relevant in Indonesia, its success depends on systemic support. Key factors include sustained teacher professional development, collaboration with local communities and cultural practitioners, and curriculum frameworks that position cultural literacy as a cross-disciplinary competency rather than optional enrichment. In sum, the literature shows that local wisdom offers a strong foundation for cultural literacy development when tied to students' identities and community practices, but its sustainability relies on adequate resources, teacher preparedness, and institutional commitment to culturally responsive pedagogy.

Gamification and Multilingual Approaches

Gamification and multilingual approaches form a smaller but strategically important theme in cultural literacy research. Although less frequently studied than digital media or local wisdom integration, these approaches offer distinctive strengths that complement established pedagogies by expanding students' entry points into cultural learning, through interactive narrative engagement in gamification and linguistic hybridity in multilingual materials that reflect real-world communication.

The gamification study by Yuriananta et al. (2023) shows that narrative-based role-playing games (RPGs) can foster cultural understanding by immersing students in simulated cultural scenarios. RPGs allow learners to inhabit cultural narratives, make decisions in meaningful contexts, and reflect on moral and symbolic implications. Across studies, this aligns with evidence that interactive and emotionally engaging learning deepens cultural interpretation. Gamification therefore contributes not only to motivation but also to cultural schema formation, enabling students to internalize cultural values, patterns, and worldviews embedded in stories. Multilingual approaches, such as Thai–English–Mandarin animated folktales (Un-udom et al., 2025), further demonstrate how cultural literacy intersects with language learning. By situating culture within multilingual contexts, these materials show that culture is fluid and shared across linguistic boundaries rather than confined to a single language. The synthesis highlights two key outcomes: multilingual media promote intercultural communication skills and reinforce the social and relational dimensions of cultural literacy.

Together, gamification and multilingual approaches emphasize the value of diversified pathways into cultural literacy by encouraging procedural, dialogic, and interpretive engagement rather than static knowledge acquisition. However, the literature identifies important constraints. Gamified learning requires sustained

instructional scaffolding to move beyond entertainment toward meaningful cultural reflection, while multilingual approaches depend on teachers' linguistic competence and intercultural pedagogy, which vary across schools.

Context further moderates effectiveness. Gamification is most effective where students are familiar with digital gaming environments, whereas multilingual approaches are especially impactful in culturally diverse or multilingual settings. In more homogeneous contexts, additional scaffolding is often needed to clarify the purpose of linguistic diversity. Overall, while less prominent in the literature, gamification and multilingual approaches make unique contributions by promoting cultural learning that is dynamic, relational, and adaptable to globalized educational contexts. Their long-term impact depends on teacher capacity and their integration into coherent curricular frameworks rather than isolated activities.

Contextual Influences, Challenges, and Conditions for Successful Cultural Literacy Implementation

Cross-study synthesis indicates that the effectiveness of cultural literacy initiatives is strongly shaped by national context, educational systems, and institutional conditions. Although the reviewed studies employ diverse pedagogical approaches, their outcomes show that cultural literacy development is deeply contextual and inseparable from sociocultural and policy environments. Indonesian studies emphasize local wisdom, Pancasila values, and character formation, reflecting curriculum priorities that place cultural identity and moral development at the center of education. In contrast, Thai research highlights multilingual and multicultural competencies aligned with linguistic diversity and intercultural communication goals, while the U.S.-based study adopts a content literacy perspective, demonstrating how culturally integrated materials support reading comprehension and long-term academic growth. These variations illustrate that cultural literacy is not a uniform construct but adapts to national priorities, policy directions, and cultural norms, underscoring the need for flexible, context-responsive frameworks rather than standardized models.

Across contexts, several shared challenges influence sustainability and depth of implementation. Unequal access to technology constrains the use of VR, AR, and digital media in under-resourced schools. Variations in teacher expertise—particularly in culturally responsive pedagogy and contextualization—also affect implementation quality. Many studies report limited availability of culturally authentic materials, leading to cultural learning that may be superficial or ceremonial. Inconsistent institutional and policy support further restricts long-term, school-wide integration, often leaving initiatives dependent on individual teacher effort rather than systemic commitment.

Despite these barriers, enabling conditions consistently emerge. Schools that invest in sustained teacher professional development, adopt culturally authentic resources, and integrate cultural elements across subjects are more likely to sustain meaningful cultural literacy practices. Strategic use of digital tools—when aligned with experiential and community-based learning rather than isolated innovation—also enhances engagement and cultural understanding. These findings highlight that cultural literacy is not merely an instructional strategy but a systemic educational commitment requiring alignment among curriculum, teacher capacity, resources, and school culture.

Overall, the nine studies demonstrate that cultural literacy can be developed through multiple pathways operating via distinct pedagogical mechanisms. Technology-enhanced approaches foster immersion and multimodal engagement; local wisdom integration strengthens identity and contextual authenticity; and experiential models promote embodied learning through participation and reflection. Together, these mechanisms suggest that effective cultural literacy instruction depends on aligning pedagogy, cultural context, and learner experience within a multimodal, context-sensitive ecosystem rather than relying on isolated interventions.

CONCLUSION

The collective evidence shows that cultural literacy in elementary education is strengthened through multiple complementary approaches. Digital and immersive media enhance engagement and comprehension through multimodal interaction, while local-wisdom-based and experiential models deepen cultural understanding by grounding learning in authentic community contexts. Together, these findings demonstrate that cultural literacy develops most effectively through integrated, context-responsive instructional ecosystems. This review is limited by the small number of eligible studies, the concentration of research in Southeast Asia, and variations in methodological quality, which restrict the generalizability of conclusions. Expanding future studies across regions and employing more rigorous designs would strengthen the evidence base. Practically, schools would benefit from investing in teacher capacity, improving access to culturally rich and technology-supported materials, and embedding cultural literacy systematically across subjects. Future research should explore cross-cultural comparisons and examine long-term impacts on students' identity formation and academic development. Overall, cultural literacy functions as a foundational competency that connects students to their cultural roots while equipping them to navigate an increasingly diverse and globalized world

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