



Enhancing Students' Cultural Awareness through Local Literature-Based Learning Activities in Maluku

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ABSTRACT

Cultural awareness plays a crucial role in education, particularly in culturally rich regions such as Maluku, Indonesia, where local cultural heritage represents an essential component of students' identity formation. However, the integration of local literature into classroom learning activities remains limited, resulting in insufficient student engagement with their own cultural heritage. This study aims to examine how local literature-based learning activities enhance students' cultural awareness in Maluku. The research employed a qualitative case study design involving secondary school students in Maluku. Data were collected through classroom observations, student reflections, and semi-structured interviews to explore students' responses and cultural awareness development during the implementation of local literature-based learning activities. The learning activities included reading and discussing Maluku folklore, identifying cultural values, and engaging in reflective discussions. The findings indicate that the integration of local literature into learning activities significantly enhanced students' cultural awareness, as reflected in their increased understanding of cultural values, appreciation of local traditions, and strengthened sense of cultural identity. Students demonstrated active engagement and positive responses throughout the learning process, suggesting that local literature provides meaningful and relevant cultural learning experiences. Furthermore, local literature-based learning created opportunities for students to connect academic content with their cultural environment. These findings suggest that incorporating local literature into educational practices can serve as an effective strategy for promoting cultural awareness and preserving cultural heritage among students. This study contributes to the growing body of research on culturally responsive pedagogy and highlights the importance of integrating local cultural resources into formal education.

Keywords: Cultural awareness; local literature; cultural heritage; literature-based learning; culturally responsive pedagogy; Maluku

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, education plays an essential role not only in developing students' academic competencies but also in fostering cultural awareness and identity. Cultural awareness is increasingly recognized as a fundamental component of education because it enables students to understand, appreciate, and respect their own cultural heritage as well as the cultural diversity of others, (Olayinka & Ridwan, 2020; Petri et al., 2025). Cultural awareness refers to the ability to recognize cultural values, beliefs, traditions, and social practices, which helps individuals develop intercultural competence and social understanding, (Delgado et al., 2024). In educational contexts, cultural

awareness contributes significantly to students' personal development, social interaction, and identity formation. As societies become more interconnected, students must develop cultural awareness to navigate multicultural environments effectively and maintain a strong sense of cultural identity, (Owens et al., 2024).

Education system serves as a powerful medium for transmitting cultural knowledge and preserving cultural heritage across generations. Cultural heritage includes traditions, customs, language, literature, and social values that define the identity of a community, (Connor, 2024; Obed et al., 2024). Schools play a vital role in preserving cultural heritage by integrating cultural knowledge into formal education, ensuring that younger generations understand and appreciate their cultural roots. According to Banks (2015), culturally responsive education helps students connect academic learning with their cultural experiences, making learning more meaningful and relevant. When students learn about their cultural heritage, they develop a stronger sense of identity, belonging, and cultural pride, which are essential for their psychological and social development. Furthermore, education that incorporates cultural heritage promotes cultural continuity and helps prevent the loss of traditional knowledge and cultural practices, (Yatim et al., 2025).

One of the effective approaches to promoting cultural awareness in education is through the integration of local culture and cultural heritage into learning activities. Local culture-based education allows students to learn through culturally relevant content that reflects their social and cultural environment, (Maftuh et al., 2025). This approach aligns with sociocultural learning theory, which emphasizes that learning is influenced by social and cultural contexts, (Arguido et al., 2025). When educational content reflects students' cultural backgrounds, students are more likely to engage actively in the learning process and develop deeper understanding. Research has shown that culturally relevant teaching enhances student motivation, engagement, and academic achievement while also strengthening cultural identity, (Hossain, 2024). Therefore, integrating local cultural content into educational practices is essential for promoting both academic learning and cultural awareness.

Literature, particularly local literature, plays a significant role in cultural education and cultural awareness development. Literature reflects the cultural values, beliefs, and traditions of a society, making it an important medium for cultural transmission, (Semiyeva, 2025). Through literature, students can explore cultural narratives, understand cultural perspectives, and develop empathy and cultural understanding. Literary works provide meaningful insights into cultural identity and social experiences, allowing students to connect with their cultural heritage. According to Julia & Jeyanthi (2024), literature serves as a bridge between language and culture, enabling students to understand cultural contexts and develop cultural competence. Furthermore, literature-based learning helps students develop critical thinking, reflection, and cultural awareness by engaging with culturally meaningful content.

Local literature, including folklore, myths, legends, and traditional stories, is particularly valuable for promoting cultural awareness because it reflects the unique cultural identity of a specific community. Folklore and traditional stories contain cultural values, moral lessons, and social norms that shape cultural identity and social behavior, (Soraya & Arafah, 2025). These literary forms serve as cultural resources that help preserve cultural heritage and transmit cultural knowledge to future generations. According to Sawita & Sulistiyo (2024), folklore plays an important role in education by reinforcing cultural values and social norms while also providing entertainment and



cultural expression. When students engage with local literature, they gain deeper understanding of their cultural traditions, values, and historical experiences, which contributes to the development of cultural awareness and identity.

The integration of local literature into learning activities is consistent with culturally responsive pedagogy, which emphasizes the importance of connecting learning content with students' cultural backgrounds, (Patanduk et al., 2025). Culturally responsive teaching recognizes that students learn more effectively when educational materials reflect their cultural experiences and identities. Research has shown that culturally responsive teaching improves student engagement, motivation, and academic outcomes while also promoting cultural awareness (Darmawan et al., 2025; Fatmawaty et al., 2024). By incorporating local literature into classroom learning, teachers can create culturally meaningful learning experiences that enhance students' cultural understanding and appreciation. Literature-based learning activities, such as reading traditional stories, discussing cultural values, and reflecting on cultural themes, provide opportunities for students to explore their cultural heritage in meaningful ways.

Despite the recognized importance of cultural awareness and local literature in education, many educational systems continue to prioritize standardized curricula that often overlook local cultural content. Globalization has contributed to the dominance of global and national educational content, which sometimes marginalizes local cultural knowledge, (E et al., 2022; Taptiani et al., 2024). As a result, students may have limited opportunities to learn about their cultural heritage, leading to decreased cultural awareness and weakened cultural identity. This situation is particularly concerning in culturally diverse countries such as Indonesia, where cultural heritage plays an essential role in shaping national and local identity. Without intentional efforts to integrate local cultural content into education, cultural heritage may gradually decline as younger generations become less familiar with their cultural traditions.

Indonesia is one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world, with hundreds of ethnic groups, languages, and cultural traditions. Cultural diversity is an important national asset that must be preserved through education. The Indonesian education system recognizes the importance of cultural education in promoting national identity and cultural preservation. According to Wilodati & Maftuh (2023) dan Sukardi et al (2019), multicultural education helps students understand cultural diversity while also strengthening their cultural identity. Integrating local culture into education enables students to develop cultural awareness, cultural pride, and cultural responsibility. This approach is particularly important in regions with rich cultural heritage, such as Maluku.

Maluku is known for its rich cultural traditions, oral literature, folklore, and indigenous knowledge systems. Local literature in Maluku reflects the cultural identity, historical experiences, and social values of the Maluku people. Traditional stories, legends, and folklore serve as important cultural resources that can be used in educational settings to promote cultural awareness and cultural preservation. However, despite the availability of rich local literature, its integration into classroom learning remains limited. Many schools rely primarily on standardized textbooks that do not adequately represent local cultural content. As a result, students may have limited exposure to their cultural heritage, which may affect their cultural awareness and cultural identity.

Learning activities that incorporate local literature provide opportunities for students to engage actively with cultural content and develop cultural awareness. Literature-based learning activities allow students to explore cultural themes, reflect on cultural values, and develop cultural understanding. According to Taye (2025), literature

provides meaningful experiences that allow students to interpret and connect literary texts with their personal and cultural experiences. This process enhances students' cultural awareness and promotes deeper learning. Furthermore, culturally relevant learning activities improve student engagement and motivation by making learning more meaningful and relevant to students' lives (Shih, 2024).

Previous studies have demonstrated the importance of integrating cultural heritage and local literature into education to promote cultural awareness and cultural identity. However, there is still limited research focusing specifically on the use of local literature-based learning activities to enhance students' cultural awareness in the context of Maluku. Most existing studies focus on general cultural education or culturally responsive teaching without specifically examining the role of local literature in enhancing cultural awareness in this region. Given the rich cultural heritage and literary traditions of Maluku, there is a need for research that explores how local literature-based learning activities can enhance students' cultural awareness.

Therefore, this study aims to examine how local literature-based learning activities enhance students' cultural awareness in Maluku. This study contributes to the field of culturally responsive education by providing empirical evidence on the effectiveness of local literature-based learning in promoting cultural awareness and cultural preservation. Furthermore, this study highlights the importance of integrating local cultural resources into educational practices to support cultural identity development and cultural sustainability.

Theoretical Framework

Cultural Awareness in Education

Cultural awareness is a fundamental concept in education that refers to individuals' ability to recognize, understand, and appreciate the values, beliefs, traditions, and practices of their own culture and those of others. It plays an essential role in fostering intercultural competence, identity development, and social interaction (Arham & Tjalla, 2024; Rahayu et al., 2025). Cultural awareness involves not only cognitive understanding but also affective and behavioral dimensions, including respect for cultural diversity and appreciation of cultural heritage, (Thi et al., 2024). In educational settings, cultural awareness enables students to develop a deeper understanding of their cultural identity and strengthens their sense of belonging within their cultural community.

According to Yusri et al (2023), cultural awareness consists of several key components, including cultural knowledge, cultural understanding, cultural attitudes, and cultural skills. Cultural knowledge refers to understanding cultural practices, traditions, and social norms. Cultural understanding involves interpreting cultural meanings and perspectives. Cultural attitudes include openness and respect toward cultural differences, while cultural skills refer to the ability to interact appropriately in cultural contexts. These components collectively contribute to intercultural competence, which is essential in multicultural societies.

Cultural awareness also plays a critical role in identity formation. Students who develop cultural awareness are more likely to develop a strong sense of cultural identity and cultural pride, (Syaputra et al., 2024). Cultural identity refers to individuals' sense of belonging to a particular cultural group, which influences their values, beliefs, and behaviors. Education plays a key role in supporting cultural identity development by providing opportunities for students to learn about their cultural heritage. When students



understand their cultural background, they develop greater self-confidence, cultural pride, and social responsibility, (Reyes et al., 2025). Therefore, promoting cultural awareness in education is essential for both individual and social development.

In addition, cultural awareness contributes to culturally responsive education, which emphasizes the importance of integrating students' cultural backgrounds into teaching and learning processes. Nurbatra (2022) explains that culturally responsive teaching uses cultural knowledge, experiences, and perspectives to make learning more meaningful and effective. When students engage with culturally relevant content, they are more motivated and actively involved in learning. This engagement enhances both academic achievement and cultural understanding. Therefore, cultural awareness is not only an educational outcome but also an important component of effective teaching and learning.

Cultural Heritage and Local Literature

Cultural heritage refers to the traditions, customs, beliefs, and cultural expressions that are passed down from one generation to another, (Jisha & Gill, 2025). It includes both tangible and intangible elements, such as historical artifacts, language, rituals, folklore, and traditional stories. Cultural heritage serves as a foundation for cultural identity and social continuity, providing individuals with a sense of belonging and connection to their cultural community. Preserving cultural heritage is essential for maintaining cultural diversity and cultural sustainability.

Local literature is an important form of cultural heritage that reflects the cultural identity, values, and traditions of a particular community. Local literature includes folklore, myths, legends, oral traditions, and traditional narratives that have been transmitted across generations, (Harpriyanti, Haswinda & Kamariah, 2025). These literary works contain cultural knowledge, moral values, and social norms that contribute to cultural education and cultural preservation. According to Kashaka (2025) folklore serves several important functions, including transmitting cultural values, reinforcing social norms, and preserving cultural identity. Through local literature, cultural knowledge is preserved and communicated to future generations.

Local literature also plays an important role in education because it provides culturally relevant learning materials that reflect students' cultural backgrounds. When students engage with local literature, they develop a deeper understanding of their cultural traditions and cultural identity. Literature serves as a medium for cultural transmission, allowing students to explore cultural narratives and cultural perspectives, (Simel, 2024). By reading and analyzing local literary texts, students gain insight into their cultural heritage and develop cultural awareness.

Furthermore, local literature supports culturally responsive education by connecting learning content with students' cultural experiences. According to Ebele (2024), integrating indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage into education promotes cultural sustainability and empowers local communities. When educational content reflects local culture, students are more likely to engage in meaningful learning and develop cultural pride. Therefore, local literature serves as an important educational resource for promoting cultural awareness and cultural preservation.

Literature-Based Learning Theory

Literature-based learning is an instructional approach that uses literary texts as the primary medium for teaching and learning. This approach emphasizes the use of literature

to develop students' cognitive, emotional, and cultural understanding, (Ri & Rul, 2021). Literature-based learning allows students to engage with meaningful and authentic texts that reflect cultural experiences and human values. Through literature, students can explore cultural themes, analyze cultural perspectives, and reflect on cultural identity.

Hassan et al (2023) reader-response theory provides an important theoretical foundation for literature-based learning. According to this theory, meaning is constructed through the interaction between the reader and the text. Students actively interpret literary texts based on their personal experiences, cultural background, and prior knowledge. This process enables students to connect literary content with their own cultural experiences, enhancing cultural understanding and awareness. Literature-based learning encourages active participation, critical thinking, and personal reflection, which are essential for meaningful learning.

Literature-based learning also aligns with constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes that knowledge is constructed through active engagement and social interaction, (Wiyono et al., 2025). According to constructivist theory, learning occurs when students actively interact with learning materials and connect new knowledge with their existing knowledge. Literature provides opportunities for students to engage in discussion, reflection, and interpretation, which promote deeper learning and cultural understanding. Through literature-based learning activities, students develop cultural awareness by exploring cultural themes and cultural values embedded in literary texts.

Furthermore, literature-based learning enhances students' empathy and cultural sensitivity. According to (Qi & You, 2025) literature enables readers to understand different cultural perspectives and develop empathy toward others. By engaging with culturally meaningful texts, students develop cultural awareness and intercultural competence. Therefore, literature-based learning is an effective approach for promoting cultural awareness and cultural education.

Learning Activities

Learning activities refer to structured tasks and instructional processes designed to support students' engagement and understanding during the learning process. These activities provide opportunities for students to interact with learning materials, teachers, and peers to achieve learning objectives. According to (Hidayati, 2023; Vromans et al., 2023) learning activities are classroom procedures that facilitate learning and help students develop knowledge, skills, and understanding. Learning activities play an important role in promoting active participation and meaningful learning.

Active learning is an essential component of effective learning activities. Alice et al., (2021) explain that active learning involves students' direct participation in learning tasks, such as reading, discussing, analyzing, and reflecting. Through active learning activities, students are not passive recipients of information but active participants in constructing knowledge. This process helps students develop deeper understanding and improves their engagement in learning.

Learning activities also support student-centered learning, where students play an active role in the learning process. Karim et al (2023) states that student-centered learning emphasizes student participation, interaction, and responsibility for learning. Activities such as group discussions, reflection, and collaborative tasks allow students to explore ideas and develop their understanding. These activities enhance students' motivation and learning outcomes.



In culturally responsive education, learning activities should reflect students' cultural background and experiences, (Ablasa, 2025). Local literature-based learning activities provide culturally relevant learning experiences by using literary texts that reflect students' cultural heritage. Activities such as reading local stories, discussing cultural values, and reflecting on cultural themes help students understand their culture and develop cultural awareness.

In this study, local literature-based learning activities involve reading Maluku local literature, discussing cultural meanings, and reflecting on cultural values. These activities enable students to engage actively in learning and develop cultural awareness. Therefore, learning activities play a crucial role in promoting meaningful learning and enhancing students' cultural awareness.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine how local literature-based learning activities enhance students' cultural awareness in Maluku. A qualitative approach was chosen to explore students' experiences, responses, and cultural understanding during the learning process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study design allowed the researcher to investigate the implementation of local literature-based learning activities in a real classroom setting.

The study was conducted in a secondary school in Maluku, Indonesia. The participants consisted of 25 secondary school students selected through purposive sampling based on their participation in literature learning activities. The teacher also participated as the facilitator of the learning activities. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their participation was voluntary.

The learning materials consisted of Maluku local literature, including folklore and traditional stories that reflect local cultural values and traditions. The learning activities were implemented in four sessions. Each session included reading local literary texts, group discussions, and reflective activities. Students were encouraged to identify cultural values, discuss cultural meanings, and reflect on their cultural understanding.

Data were collected through classroom observation, student reflections, and semi-structured interviews. Classroom observations were conducted to examine students' participation and engagement during learning activities. Student reflections were used to understand students' cultural awareness development. Interviews were conducted to explore students' experiences and perceptions of the learning activities.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify themes related to students' cultural awareness, (Dalle et al., 2025) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher reviewed the data, identified key themes, and interpreted how local literature-based learning activities contributed to students' cultural awareness.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

The findings of this study indicate that local literature-based learning activities contributed positively to enhancing students' cultural awareness. These findings were derived from classroom observations, student reflective writings, and semi-structured interviews. The results revealed three main themes: improvement of cultural knowledge, development of cultural understanding, and enhancement of cultural appreciation and identity. These components are essential elements of cultural awareness, which involves

knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of cultural values, (Arif et al., 2025; Saidah et al., 2025).

First, students demonstrated significant improvement in cultural knowledge after participating in local literature-based learning activities. Initially, many students had limited familiarity with cultural values and traditions presented in Maluku local literature. However, after engaging in guided reading and group discussions, students were able to identify cultural elements such as traditional practices, social norms, and moral values. Classroom observations showed that students actively analyzed cultural themes and explained cultural meanings embedded in the stories. Student reflections also indicated increased awareness of cultural traditions and the importance of preserving cultural heritage. This finding supports previous research suggesting that literature serves as an effective medium for transmitting cultural knowledge, (Arias-ferrer et al., 2018).

Second, students developed deeper cultural understanding through reflective and collaborative learning activities. Students were able to interpret cultural meanings and relate literary content to their own cultural experiences. Interviews revealed that students gained a better understanding of the importance of cultural traditions and their relevance to everyday life. This finding aligns with (Agustin et al., 2025; Primasari et al., 2025) reader-response theory, which emphasizes that students construct meaning by connecting literary texts with their personal and cultural experiences.

Finally, local literature-based learning activities enhanced students' cultural appreciation and cultural identity. Students expressed positive attitudes toward their cultural heritage and demonstrated increased cultural pride. Students also showed greater engagement and enthusiasm during learning activities. This finding supports culturally responsive teaching theory, which states that culturally relevant learning enhances student engagement and cultural awareness, (Abacioglu et al., 2020). Overall, local literature-based learning activities effectively enhanced students' cultural awareness by promoting cultural knowledge, understanding, and appreciation.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study support the theoretical framework of cultural awareness, literature-based learning, and culturally responsive teaching. The results demonstrate that local literature-based learning activities enhance students' cultural knowledge, cultural understanding, and cultural appreciation.

First, the findings confirm that literature serves as an effective medium for cultural transmission. Literature reflects cultural values, traditions, and social practices, enabling students to learn about their cultural heritage, (Burhanudin et al., 2025). By engaging with local literature, students gained cultural knowledge and developed cultural awareness. This finding supports Seng et al (2025) theory that cultural awareness involves understanding cultural practices and values.

Second, the findings support literature-based learning theory, which emphasizes the role of literature in promoting meaningful learning. According to Noviadi et al (2023) literature allows students to connect literary texts with their personal experiences, enhancing learning and understanding. In this study, students connected cultural themes in local literature with their own cultural experiences, which enhanced their cultural awareness.



Third, the findings support culturally responsive teaching theory, which emphasizes the importance of integrating students' cultural backgrounds into learning, (Syawaludin et al., 2024). Local literature-based learning activities provided culturally relevant learning experiences that reflected students' cultural identity. This approach enhanced student engagement, motivation, and cultural awareness. When students engage with culturally relevant materials, they are more likely to participate actively and develop meaningful understanding.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that culturally relevant learning activities enhance student engagement and motivation. Students showed increased interest and participation during local literature-based learning activities. This finding aligns with constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes active student engagement in learning. Learning becomes more meaningful when students connect learning content with their cultural context.

The findings also highlight the importance of integrating local cultural resources into education. Local literature provides culturally meaningful learning materials that enhance students' cultural awareness and cultural identity. Education plays an important role in preserving cultural heritage by transmitting cultural knowledge to younger generations. By incorporating local literature into learning activities, educators can support cultural preservation and cultural sustainability.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that local literature-based learning activities are an effective approach for enhancing students' cultural awareness. These activities promote cultural knowledge, cultural understanding, and cultural appreciation. The findings suggest that integrating local literature into classroom learning can support culturally responsive education and cultural preservation.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how local literature-based learning activities enhance students' cultural awareness in Maluku. The findings demonstrate that integrating local literature into classroom learning effectively promotes students' cultural knowledge, cultural understanding, and cultural appreciation. Through guided reading, group discussions, and reflective activities, students were able to identify cultural values, interpret cultural meanings, and develop positive attitudes toward their cultural heritage. These learning activities enabled students to connect literary content with their own cultural experiences, making learning more meaningful and relevant.

The findings support the theoretical perspectives of cultural awareness and culturally responsive teaching, which emphasize the importance of integrating cultural content into education to promote cultural identity and cultural understanding. Local literature serves as an effective educational resource because it reflects the cultural values, traditions, and identity of the community. By engaging with local literature, students develop greater awareness of their cultural heritage and a stronger sense of cultural identity.

Furthermore, local literature-based learning activities enhanced student engagement and motivation, as students actively participated in discussions and expressed their cultural perspectives. These findings suggest that culturally relevant learning activities contribute to meaningful learning and cultural preservation. Education plays a critical role in preserving cultural heritage by transmitting cultural knowledge to younger generations.

Therefore, integrating local literature into classroom learning is an effective strategy for enhancing students' cultural awareness and promoting cultural sustainability. Future studies may explore the implementation of local literature-based learning in different educational contexts and examine its impact on broader educational outcomes.

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