



CULTURAL LITERACY IN EDUCATION: THE KEY TO SHAPING CIVILIZED HUMANS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

The rapid development of digital technology in the industry 4.0 and Society 5.0 era has transformed education, offered global connectivity but also challenged cultural identity and character formation. Twenty-first-century competencies should therefore include cultural literacy, not just critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication. This study explores the foundations, importance, and teaching strategies for integrating cultural literacy in modern education using qualitative library research. The findings show cultural literacy is a multidimensional skill involving cultural knowledge, intercultural competence, ethics, and critical cultural awareness. It strengthens character education, national identity, global citizenship, and helps achieve educational goals. Key strategies include curriculum integration, culturally responsive teaching, project-based learning, digital literacy, community involvement, and authentic assessment. The study concludes that cultural literacy should be a core competency, connecting cognitive skills with ethical values, local wisdom, and cultural identity, to develop learners who are competent, ethical, culturally rooted, and globally aware.

Keywords: *Cultural Literacy; Twenty-First-Century Education; Character Education; Local Wisdom; Global Citizenship; Industry 4.0; Society 5.0.*

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Industry 4.0) and the transition toward Society 5.0 have fundamentally reshaped the global landscape by accelerating technological innovation and intensifying interconnectedness across geographical, cultural, and political boundaries. Rapid advances in digital technologies—including artificial intelligence (AI), big data, the Internet of Things (IoT), and cloud computing—have transformed how individuals communicate, learn, and interact within an increasingly networked society. For younger generations, digital platforms have become primary sources of information, socialization, and cultural exchange, providing unprecedented access to diverse perspectives, values, and lifestyles from around the world. While these developments

create significant opportunities for innovation and global collaboration, they also pose substantial challenges to preserving cultural identity, ethical values, and social cohesion.

The educational sector has been profoundly affected by these transformations. Contemporary education is no longer expected merely to cultivate cognitive excellence but also to prepare learners to navigate complex social, cultural, and ethical challenges in an increasingly digital world. Consequently, educational systems are under growing pressure to produce graduates who possess not only disciplinary knowledge and technical competence but also moral integrity, intercultural awareness, and social responsibility. Nevertheless, empirical observations suggest a persistent disparity between academic achievement and character development. Many graduates demonstrate strong intellectual capabilities while exhibiting limited social empathy, diminished respect for cultural diversity, inadequate digital ethics, and insufficient resilience against misinformation, disinformation, and online polarization. These phenomena indicate that academic excellence alone is insufficient to prepare students for the complexities of twenty-first-century society.

To address these challenges, UNESCO identifies four fundamental competencies required for twenty-first-century learning, commonly known as the 4Cs: Critical Thinking, Creativity, Collaboration, and Communication. These competencies have become the cornerstone of educational reforms worldwide, emphasizing learners' ability to solve problems, innovate, collaborate effectively, and communicate across diverse contexts. However, the increasing complexity of globalization and digital transformation suggests that these competencies should be complemented by an equally essential dimension: Culture. Cultural literacy enables learners to understand their own cultural heritage while developing the capacity to engage constructively with cultural diversity in an interconnected world. Rather than functioning as a peripheral component, culture serves as a normative foundation that shapes ethical reasoning, identity formation, intercultural competence, and responsible citizenship. Consequently, an emerging body of scholarship advocates expanding the traditional 4Cs framework into a 5Cs model, where Culture acts as an integrative element connecting cognitive competence with moral and social development.

Within this perspective, cultural literacy functions as a critical anchor that prevents learners from becoming detached from their social and cultural roots amid the disruptive forces of globalization. It equips students with the ability to critically evaluate global influences without losing their local identity and enables them to participate in multicultural environments with empathy, tolerance, and ethical responsibility. Therefore, culture should not be perceived as an obstacle to modernization but rather as a strategic asset that strengthens human capital, enhances social resilience, and promotes sustainable development in the digital era.

Indonesia provides a particularly compelling context for examining the integration of culture into twenty-first-century education. As one of the world's most culturally diverse nations, Indonesia possesses a rich repository of local wisdom that embodies universal values



of humanity, solidarity, mutual respect, and social responsibility. Indigenous philosophies such as gotong royong (mutual cooperation), sipakatau (humanizing and respecting others), and siri' na pacce (honor, dignity, empathy, and collective responsibility) represent enduring cultural principles that remain highly relevant to the demands of contemporary global citizenship. These local wisdom values not only reinforce national identity but also cultivate ethical leadership, collaborative behavior, intercultural competence, and civic responsibility—qualities that are increasingly recognized as essential competencies in the twenty-first century.

Against this backdrop, this article argues that integrating Culture as the fifth dimension of twenty-first-century competencies offers a more holistic educational framework for preparing future generations. By synthesizing global competencies with indigenous cultural values, the proposed 5Cs framework seeks to bridge the gap between academic excellence and character formation. Such an approach has the potential to develop learners who are intellectually capable, culturally grounded, ethically responsible, socially empathetic, and globally competitive. Accordingly, this article explores the theoretical foundations and educational implications of incorporating cultural literacy into twenty-first-century learning as a strategic pathway toward fostering resilient, inclusive, and sustainable human development in the era of Industry 4.0 and Society 5.0.

Building upon the foregoing discussion, this study addresses the growing need to reposition cultural literacy as a fundamental component of twenty-first-century education. Although contemporary educational discourse has extensively emphasized the development of critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication, comparatively less attention has been devoted to understanding the conceptual foundations and educational significance of cultural literacy in preparing learners for an increasingly interconnected and digitally mediated world. This gap raises several important questions: How should cultural literacy be conceptualized in the context of twenty-first-century education? What are its essential dimensions, and why has it become an educational imperative in the era of Industry 4.0 and Society 5.0? Furthermore, what role does cultural literacy play in strengthening student character and supporting national education goals? Finally, what pedagogical approaches and institutional strategies can schools and other educational institutions adopt to effectively integrate cultural literacy into teaching and learning practices?.

In response to these questions, this article aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of cultural literacy as a strategic framework for character education in the twenty-first century. Specifically, the study seeks to examine the theoretical foundations, dimensions, and educational urgency of cultural literacy; analyze its contribution to character formation and the achievement of national educational objectives; and propose practical pedagogical strategies for embedding cultural literacy into educational environments. Through this analysis, the study aspires to contribute to the development of a more holistic educational paradigm that balances global competencies with local cultural values, thereby preparing learners to become intellectually capable, ethically responsible, culturally grounded, and globally competitive citizens.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach using a library research design. The study aimed to examine the theoretical foundations, educational significance, and implementation of cultural literacy in twenty-first-century education through a critical review and synthesis of relevant literature. This approach was considered appropriate because the study focuses on conceptual analysis rather than empirical investigation.

Data Sources

The study utilized both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included policy documents, such as the Pancasila Student Profile issued by the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology and UNESCO's Futures of Education report. Secondary sources consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, book chapters, and conference proceedings related to cultural literacy, twenty-first-century skills, character education, and local wisdom.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through systematic documentation by identifying, selecting, and organizing relevant literature according to the research objectives. The collected data were analyzed using the qualitative analysis model of Miles and Huberman, which includes three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved selecting and categorizing relevant information, data display organized the findings into thematic narratives, and conclusion drawing synthesized the findings to explain the role of cultural literacy in twenty-first-century education.

To ensure the credibility of the analysis, source triangulation was employed by comparing information from policy documents, scholarly books, and peer-reviewed journal articles.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Conceptualizing Cultural Literacy in Twenty-First-Century Education

The findings of this library research indicate that cultural literacy has evolved from a narrow understanding of cultural knowledge into a multidimensional competency that enables individuals to participate effectively in culturally diverse and globally interconnected societies. The literature consistently demonstrates that cultural literacy is no longer confined to the acquisition of historical facts, traditions, or artistic heritage; rather, it encompasses the ability to interpret cultural meanings, appreciate diversity, negotiate differences, and make ethical decisions within complex social environments.

The concept of cultural literacy was initially introduced by E. D. Hirsch (1987), who defined it as the shared body of knowledge required for effective communication within a society. Hirsch argued that citizens need common cultural references to understand texts, public discourse, and social interactions. Although influential, this perspective primarily



emphasized cultural knowledge as a cognitive asset. Contemporary educational scholarship has significantly expanded this definition by positioning cultural literacy as a dynamic competence that integrates knowledge, attitudes, values, critical awareness, and intercultural communication skills.

In the context of twenty-first-century education, UNESCO conceptualizes culture as a fundamental pillar of sustainable development and lifelong learning. Cultural literacy enables learners to appreciate their own cultural heritage while respecting the identities, beliefs, and traditions of others. This perspective aligns with the growing emphasis on Global Citizenship Education (GCED), which encourages learners to become socially responsible, culturally responsive, and globally engaged citizens. Consequently, cultural literacy extends beyond knowing culture; it involves understanding how culture shapes identity, influences behavior, and contributes to peaceful coexistence in increasingly pluralistic societies.

The transformation from Industry 4.0 to Society 5.0 further reinforces the urgency of cultural literacy. Industry 4.0 introduced unprecedented technological innovation through artificial intelligence, big data, automation, and digital connectivity, whereas Society 5.0 seeks to ensure that technological advancement remains centered on human well-being. Within this context, technological competence alone is insufficient. Individuals must also possess ethical judgment, intercultural sensitivity, and the capacity to evaluate digital information critically. These competencies are deeply embedded within cultural literacy, making it an indispensable element of contemporary education.

The literature reviewed in this study reveals four interrelated dimensions of cultural literacy.

First, cultural knowledge refers to learners' understanding of cultural traditions, historical heritage, languages, customs, and local wisdom. This dimension provides the cognitive foundation for recognizing cultural diversity and preserving national identity. Educational institutions play an essential role in introducing students to both local and global cultural heritage so that they develop a balanced understanding of their own identities while appreciating other cultures.

Second, intercultural competence encompasses the ability to communicate effectively and respectfully across cultural boundaries. Rather than merely tolerating diversity, intercultural competence encourages dialogue, empathy, and collaborative problem-solving among individuals from different cultural backgrounds. As societies become increasingly multicultural due to globalization and digital communication, this competence becomes essential for both social harmony and professional success.

Third, ethical and civic responsibility reflects learners' capacity to apply cultural values in everyday decision-making. Cultural literacy encourages individuals to recognize social responsibilities, uphold democratic values, and contribute positively to their

communities. In this sense, cultural literacy serves as an ethical framework that guides responsible citizenship within both local and global contexts.

Fourth, critical cultural awareness enables learners to evaluate cultural information critically rather than accepting cultural narratives uncritically. Digital technologies expose students to enormous volumes of information, including misinformation, stereotypes, and cultural biases. Cultural literacy therefore requires learners to examine cultural representations critically, distinguish authentic knowledge from distorted narratives, and engage responsibly in digital environments.

These four dimensions are mutually reinforcing. Cultural knowledge provides the foundation upon which intercultural competence develops. Intercultural competence fosters ethical responsibility through respectful engagement with diversity, while critical cultural awareness enables learners to navigate digital information responsibly and make informed judgments. Together, these dimensions illustrate that cultural literacy is a holistic educational competency rather than a discrete body of knowledge.

One significant finding emerging from this review is that existing frameworks of twenty-first-century learning, particularly the widely adopted 4Cs—Critical Thinking, Creativity, Collaboration, and Communication—do not explicitly recognize culture as a foundational competency. While these competencies undoubtedly remain essential, they primarily emphasize cognitive and collaborative capacities. The literature suggests that without an explicit cultural dimension, these competencies risk becoming value-neutral and disconnected from learners' social identities. For example, critical thinking without ethical grounding may foster analytical ability but not moral responsibility; creativity without cultural awareness may overlook local wisdom; collaboration without intercultural understanding may be ineffective in diverse settings; and communication without cultural sensitivity may lead to misunderstanding and conflict.

For this reason, numerous contemporary scholars advocate broadening the traditional 4Cs framework by incorporating Culture as an additional competency. Rather than functioning as an independent skill, culture operates as an integrative dimension that informs how the other competencies are practiced. Critical thinking becomes more reflective when informed by cultural perspectives; creativity becomes more meaningful when rooted in local heritage; collaboration becomes more inclusive when guided by intercultural understanding; and communication becomes more effective when supported by cultural sensitivity.

The Indonesian educational context provides strong empirical and philosophical support for this expanded perspective. Indonesia's cultural diversity, comprising hundreds of ethnic groups, languages, and traditions, offers rich educational resources for character development. Indigenous values such as *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), *sipakatau* (mutual respect and human dignity), and *siri' na pacce* (honor, empathy, and collective responsibility) exemplify cultural principles that are compatible with universal human values promoted in global education. These values nurture cooperation, empathy, resilience,



integrity, and social responsibility—qualities increasingly demanded in contemporary societies.

The findings therefore suggest that cultural literacy should be understood not merely as knowledge about culture but as an integrated competency encompassing cultural understanding, intercultural engagement, ethical responsibility, and critical awareness. Such an understanding enables learners to preserve their cultural identity while participating actively in global society. Consequently, cultural literacy represents a strategic bridge between local wisdom and global competence, positioning education to produce graduates who are intellectually capable, morally responsible, culturally grounded, and internationally competitive.

From these findings, this study argues that Culture deserves recognition as the fifth core competency of twenty-first-century education. The proposed 5Cs framework—Critical Thinking, Creativity, Collaboration, Communication, and Culture—provides a more holistic educational paradigm by integrating cognitive excellence with ethical values, cultural identity, and social responsibility. Rather than replacing the existing 4Cs, the inclusion of Culture strengthens their relevance by ensuring that twenty-first-century competencies remain firmly anchored in humanity, diversity, and sustainable development.

The Role of Cultural Literacy in National Education

The analysis of the reviewed literature demonstrates that cultural literacy plays a pivotal role in achieving the broader objectives of national education by fostering learners who are intellectually competent, morally responsible, and socially engaged. Rather than functioning as a complementary component of the curriculum, cultural literacy constitutes a foundational element that supports character formation, strengthens national identity, and equips students with the competencies required to navigate increasingly diverse and interconnected societies. These findings suggest that cultural literacy should be embedded across educational policies, curricula, and pedagogical practices rather than confined to individual subjects such as history or civics.

In the Indonesian context, the role of cultural literacy is closely aligned with the philosophical foundation of national education, which emphasizes the holistic development of learners. Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System states that education aims to develop learners who are faithful, knowledgeable, creative, independent, democratic, and responsible citizens. These objectives extend beyond academic achievement and underscore the importance of character, ethics, and civic responsibility. The findings indicate that cultural literacy provides an effective framework for translating these educational aspirations into meaningful learning experiences by connecting cognitive development with moral values and cultural identity.

A significant policy initiative reflecting this orientation is the Pancasila Student Profile (Profil Pelajar Pancasila), which serves as the cornerstone of Indonesia's

contemporary educational reform. The framework identifies six key learner characteristics: faith and noble character, global diversity, mutual cooperation, independence, critical reasoning, and creativity. These dimensions correspond closely with the principles of cultural literacy identified in this study. Learners who understand and appreciate their cultural heritage are more likely to demonstrate respect for diversity, collaborate effectively with others, and make ethical decisions in both local and global contexts. Consequently, cultural literacy can be viewed as an integrative foundation that supports the realization of the Pancasila Student Profile.

The literature further indicates that cultural literacy strengthens learners' sense of national identity without promoting exclusivism or cultural isolation. In the era of globalization, national identity should not be interpreted as resistance to global culture but rather as the capacity to engage with global influences while maintaining one's cultural values and identity. Students who possess strong cultural literacy are better equipped to appreciate international perspectives without losing their understanding of local traditions, languages, and social norms. This balance is particularly important in multicultural societies, where harmonious coexistence depends on mutual respect and intercultural dialogue.

Another important finding concerns the relationship between cultural literacy and character education. Character formation is widely recognized as one of the primary objectives of education; however, character cannot be developed solely through explicit moral instruction. Instead, it emerges through continuous interaction with cultural values, social practices, and meaningful learning experiences. Cultural literacy provides learners with opportunities to internalize values such as empathy, integrity, respect, responsibility, and cooperation by engaging with authentic cultural contexts. In this regard, local wisdom serves not merely as cultural content but as a pedagogical resource for cultivating ethical behavior and civic responsibility.

Indonesia's rich cultural diversity offers numerous examples of local wisdom that can support character education. The principle of *gotong royong* encourages collaboration, collective responsibility, and mutual assistance. Likewise, *sipakatau*, originating from the Bugis-Makassar tradition, promotes respect for human dignity and equality in social interactions. The philosophy of *siri' na pacce* emphasizes honor, empathy, solidarity, and accountability toward the community. Although these values originate from specific cultural traditions, they embody universal ethical principles that are highly relevant to contemporary education. Integrating such values into teaching and learning enables students to recognize that local culture can provide meaningful guidance for addressing modern social challenges.

The findings also reveal that cultural literacy contributes significantly to the development of digital citizenship. Digital technologies have expanded access to information while simultaneously increasing learners' exposure to misinformation, hate speech, online discrimination, and cultural stereotyping. In this context, cultural literacy equips students with the ability to critically evaluate digital content, recognize cultural bias, and engage



responsibly in online communication. Learners who possess cultural awareness are more likely to demonstrate respectful digital behavior, appreciate diverse viewpoints, and avoid the spread of harmful or misleading information. Therefore, cultural literacy complements digital literacy by providing the ethical and cultural framework necessary for responsible participation in digital society.

From a broader educational perspective, cultural literacy also supports the implementation of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Global Citizenship Education (GCED). UNESCO emphasizes that sustainable development requires not only technological innovation but also respect for cultural diversity, social inclusion, and shared human values. The literature reviewed in this study confirms that cultural literacy enables learners to understand the interconnectedness of local and global issues while fostering empathy, intercultural dialogue, and collective responsibility. As a result, students become better prepared to address global challenges such as climate change, migration, inequality, and social conflict through culturally informed and ethically grounded decision-making.

An important implication emerging from this analysis is that cultural literacy should not be regarded as an additional competency that competes with existing twenty-first-century skills. Instead, it functions as the ethical and cultural foundation upon which these competencies can be effectively developed. Critical thinking becomes more meaningful when learners critically examine issues through multiple cultural perspectives. Creativity becomes more innovative when inspired by local knowledge and cultural heritage. Collaboration becomes more inclusive when learners appreciate diversity and practice mutual respect. Likewise, communication becomes more effective when individuals possess intercultural sensitivity and empathy. These interrelationships reinforce the argument proposed in this study that Culture should be recognized as the fifth core competency within the twenty-first-century learning framework.

Overall, the findings indicate that cultural literacy occupies a strategic position in national education by connecting educational philosophy, character development, cultural identity, and global competence. It enables education to move beyond the transmission of knowledge toward the cultivation of learners who are capable of responding to complex social realities with intellectual maturity, ethical responsibility, and cultural awareness. Accordingly, integrating cultural literacy across the curriculum represents not only an educational innovation but also a strategic investment in developing resilient, inclusive, and globally competent citizens capable of contributing to sustainable national development.

Pedagogical Strategies for Integrating Cultural Literacy into Twenty-First-Century Education

The findings of this study indicate that the successful integration of cultural literacy into twenty-first-century education requires a systematic and holistic approach that extends beyond the inclusion of cultural content in individual subjects. Rather than treating culture

as an isolated topic, educational institutions should position cultural literacy as a cross-cutting competency that informs curriculum design, pedagogy, assessment, and school culture. Such an approach ensures that students not only acquire knowledge about cultural diversity but also develop the attitudes, values, and behaviors necessary to live and collaborate in culturally pluralistic societies.

The literature consistently suggests that effective cultural literacy education is characterized by active, contextual, and experiential learning. Students develop cultural understanding most effectively when they engage directly with authentic cultural experiences, collaborate with diverse communities, and critically reflect on contemporary social issues. Consequently, the integration of cultural literacy should emphasize meaningful participation rather than passive knowledge acquisition.

One of the most important strategies is curriculum integration. Instead of limiting cultural education to subjects such as history, language, or civics, cultural literacy should be embedded across all disciplines. Science education, for example, can introduce indigenous ecological knowledge alongside modern scientific concepts. Mathematics can incorporate ethnomathematics by exploring traditional architectural patterns, weaving techniques, or local measurement systems. Language education can encourage students to analyze literary works representing diverse cultural perspectives, while social studies can examine local wisdom as a resource for addressing contemporary social and environmental challenges. Such interdisciplinary integration enables students to perceive culture as an integral dimension of knowledge rather than as an isolated academic topic.

Another key strategy is the implementation of project-based learning (PBL). The reviewed literature indicates that project-based learning provides authentic opportunities for students to investigate cultural issues, collaborate with local communities, and produce creative solutions to real-world problems. Projects may include documenting local traditions, developing digital archives of cultural heritage, producing multilingual storytelling media, organizing intercultural exhibitions, or promoting local cultural tourism through digital platforms. Through these activities, students simultaneously develop critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, and cultural awareness, illustrating the complementary relationship between cultural literacy and twenty-first-century competencies.

The digital transformation of education also highlights the importance of digital cultural literacy. Students increasingly encounter cultural information through social media, online communities, and digital content platforms. While these technologies expand access to global knowledge, they also expose learners to misinformation, cultural stereotypes, hate speech, and algorithm-driven bias. Therefore, digital literacy should be complemented by cultural literacy to enable students to critically evaluate online information, recognize cultural bias, verify sources, and engage respectfully in intercultural communication. Educational institutions should encourage learners to become responsible digital citizens who use technology not only for information consumption but also for cultural preservation and intercultural dialogue.



The literature further emphasizes the significance of community-based learning. Schools should establish partnerships with local communities, cultural practitioners, museums, indigenous leaders, and civil society organizations to provide authentic learning experiences beyond the classroom. Direct interaction with local communities enables students to appreciate cultural diversity through observation, participation, and reflection rather than relying solely on textbook knowledge. Such experiences also strengthen relationships between schools and communities while reinforcing the relevance of education to local social and cultural contexts.

Teachers play an equally important role in cultivating cultural literacy. The findings indicate that teachers should move beyond their traditional role as knowledge transmitters and function instead as facilitators of intercultural dialogue and reflective learning. This requires continuous professional development in multicultural education, culturally responsive pedagogy, inclusive classroom management, and digital learning strategies. Teachers who possess strong cultural competence are better equipped to create inclusive learning environments where students from different cultural backgrounds feel respected, valued, and encouraged to participate actively.

Assessment practices should likewise be redesigned to capture cultural learning outcomes. Conventional examinations focusing exclusively on factual knowledge are insufficient for evaluating cultural literacy. Instead, authentic assessment methods—including reflective journals, digital portfolios, collaborative projects, classroom observations, presentations, and community engagement reports—provide more comprehensive evidence of students' cultural understanding, ethical reasoning, intercultural communication skills, and civic responsibility. Such assessment approaches align more closely with competency-based education and support the holistic development of learners.

The synthesis of the reviewed literature suggests that these pedagogical strategies can be organized into an integrated framework for implementing cultural literacy within educational institutions, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Pedagogical Strategies for Integrating Cultural Literacy

Educational Dimension	Implementation Strategy	Expected Learning Outcomes
Curriculum	Integrate cultural literacy across all subjects through interdisciplinary learning	Stronger cultural understanding and contextual learning
Learning Process	Project-Based Learning, inquiry learning, and problem-based learning using local cultural issues	Critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and cultural awareness
Digital Learning	Promote digital cultural literacy through critical evaluation of online information and intercultural communication	Responsible digital citizenship and media literacy
Community Engagement	Collaborate with local communities, museums, cultural institutions, and indigenous leaders	Authentic cultural experiences and civic engagement

Teacher Development	Professional development in culturally responsive pedagogy and intercultural competence	Inclusive and culturally sensitive classroom practices
Assessment	Portfolio, reflective journals, presentations, and community projects	Holistic evaluation of cultural competence and character development

The findings demonstrate that these strategies are mutually reinforcing rather than independent initiatives. Curriculum integration provides the institutional foundation, while innovative pedagogies create meaningful learning experiences. Community engagement contextualizes learning within students' sociocultural environments, teacher competence ensures effective facilitation, and authentic assessment measures the development of cultural competencies. Together, these components establish a coherent educational ecosystem that supports the cultivation of culturally literate learners.

More importantly, the analysis indicates that cultural literacy functions as the connecting element among the four widely recognized competencies of twenty-first-century learning. Critical thinking is enriched through the examination of diverse cultural perspectives; creativity is enhanced by drawing inspiration from local wisdom and cultural heritage; collaboration becomes more effective when grounded in mutual respect and intercultural understanding; and communication is strengthened through empathy and cultural sensitivity. Consequently, Culture should not be regarded as an additional competency that competes with the existing 4Cs, but rather as the foundational dimension that gives meaning, ethical direction, and contextual relevance to them.

Based on these findings, this study proposes that educational institutions adopt a 5Cs Framework consisting of Critical Thinking, Creativity, Collaboration, Communication, and Culture. Within this framework, Culture serves as the integrative foundation connecting cognitive competencies with ethical values, character education, and social responsibility. The proposed framework enables educational systems to balance global competitiveness with local identity, ensuring that learners are prepared not only to succeed in technologically advanced societies but also to contribute responsibly to culturally diverse communities.

The proposed framework also carries important policy implications. Educational policymakers should recognize cultural literacy as a core educational competency within curriculum standards, teacher education programs, and student assessment systems. Such recognition would facilitate the systematic integration of cultural values into educational practice while supporting broader national goals related to character education, social cohesion, and sustainable development. Ultimately, embedding cultural literacy throughout the educational ecosystem offers a strategic pathway toward preparing future generations who are intellectually capable, ethically responsible, culturally grounded, and globally engaged.



Repositioning Cultural Literacy in Twenty-First-Century Education

The findings of this study reinforce the growing consensus that twenty-first-century education must extend beyond the development of cognitive competencies to encompass ethical, cultural, and social dimensions of learning. While contemporary educational reforms have largely emphasized the development of critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication, the present analysis demonstrates that these competencies alone are insufficient for preparing learners to navigate increasingly diverse, interconnected, and digitally mediated societies. Cultural literacy emerges as a complementary competency that provides the ethical and contextual foundation through which the other competencies can be meaningfully exercised.

The first major finding concerns the evolving meaning of cultural literacy. Earlier perspectives, particularly Hirsch's conceptualization, viewed cultural literacy primarily as the acquisition of shared cultural knowledge necessary for effective communication. The literature reviewed in this study, however, indicates a significant conceptual shift. Contemporary scholars and international organizations increasingly regard cultural literacy as a multidimensional competence encompassing cultural knowledge, intercultural communication, ethical awareness, critical reflection, and civic responsibility. This broader understanding reflects the realities of globalization, international mobility, and digital transformation, where individuals constantly interact with people, ideas, and values originating from diverse cultural contexts.

The second finding highlights the strategic role of cultural literacy within national education systems. In Indonesia, educational objectives emphasize not only academic achievement but also character formation and responsible citizenship. The analysis suggests that cultural literacy provides an effective bridge between these objectives by connecting national educational philosophy with contemporary global competencies. Local wisdom, represented by values such as **gotong royong**, **sipakatau**, and **siri' na pacce**, illustrates how indigenous cultural traditions can support universal values including empathy, cooperation, integrity, respect, and social responsibility. Consequently, cultural literacy should not be viewed merely as the preservation of cultural heritage but as a dynamic educational resource that strengthens both national identity and global citizenship.

The third finding demonstrates that the successful implementation of cultural literacy requires systemic educational transformation rather than isolated classroom activities. Curriculum integration, culturally responsive pedagogy, project-based learning, authentic assessment, digital literacy, and community partnerships collectively create learning environments in which cultural understanding develops through experience, reflection, and social interaction. These strategies are consistent with constructivist perspectives on learning, which emphasize that knowledge is actively constructed through meaningful engagement with authentic contexts rather than transmitted through passive instruction.

Taken together, these findings suggest that cultural literacy functions as an enabling dimension that enhances the effectiveness of the four competencies commonly associated with twenty-first-century learning. Critical thinking becomes more balanced when learners evaluate issues from multiple cultural perspectives. Creativity becomes more relevant when innovation draws upon local knowledge and cultural heritage. Collaboration becomes more inclusive when supported by intercultural understanding and mutual respect. Likewise, communication becomes more effective when learners demonstrate empathy and cultural sensitivity. Rather than replacing the established 4Cs framework, cultural literacy enriches its implementation by providing the values, perspectives, and ethical orientation necessary for responsible learning and participation in society.

Based on this synthesis, this study proposes a conceptual perspective in which Culture may be considered a foundational dimension that supports the implementation of the traditional 4Cs. This proposition does not imply the replacement of the existing framework; instead, it emphasizes that twenty-first-century competencies are more meaningful when developed within learners' cultural, ethical, and social contexts. Accordingly, educational institutions may consider adopting a more holistic competency framework that explicitly recognizes the importance of cultural literacy alongside cognitive and collaborative skills.

The proposed perspective also contributes to the broader discourse on education in the era of Industry 4.0 and Society 5.0. While technological advancement has transformed educational practices, the findings indicate that technology alone cannot guarantee the development of responsible, ethical, and socially engaged citizens. Human-centered education requires an equilibrium between digital competence and cultural understanding. In this regard, cultural literacy serves as an essential mechanism for ensuring that technological innovation remains aligned with human values, cultural diversity, and sustainable development.

From a policy perspective, the findings suggest several implications. First, curriculum developers should integrate cultural literacy across disciplines rather than restricting it to specific subjects. Second, teacher education programs should strengthen competencies in culturally responsive pedagogy and intercultural communication. Third, schools should establish stronger partnerships with local communities and cultural institutions to provide authentic learning experiences. Finally, assessment systems should evaluate not only academic performance but also learners' cultural awareness, ethical reasoning, and civic engagement.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. As a library research, the findings are derived from theoretical and documentary analysis rather than empirical investigation. Consequently, the proposed conceptual framework has not yet been validated through classroom implementation or quantitative measurement. Future research should therefore examine the effectiveness of integrating cultural literacy into different educational



settings, evaluate its impact on students' character development and intercultural competence, and develop reliable instruments for assessing cultural literacy across educational levels.

Overall, this study argues that cultural literacy should be repositioned from a peripheral educational topic to a strategic component of twenty-first-century learning. As globalization and digital transformation continue to reshape societies, education must cultivate learners who are not only intellectually competent but also culturally grounded, ethically responsible, socially empathetic, and capable of contributing to sustainable and inclusive development. Recognizing the central role of cultural literacy represents an important step toward achieving this broader educational vision.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the concept, educational significance, and pedagogical implementation of cultural literacy in the context of twenty-first-century education through a qualitative library research approach. The findings demonstrate that cultural literacy has evolved beyond the acquisition of cultural knowledge into a multidimensional competency encompassing cultural understanding, intercultural competence, ethical responsibility, and critical cultural awareness. In the era of Industry 4.0 and Society 5.0, these dimensions are increasingly essential for enabling learners to navigate rapid technological change, cultural diversity, and the complexities of digital society while maintaining their cultural identity and moral integrity.

The analysis further reveals that cultural literacy plays a strategic role in supporting national education by strengthening character formation, promoting social cohesion, and fostering responsible global citizenship. Within the Indonesian context, local wisdom—including values such as **gotong royong**, **sipakatau**, and **siri' na pacce**—provides a valuable foundation for integrating cultural literacy into educational practices. These indigenous values not only reinforce national identity but also embody universal principles of cooperation, respect, empathy, and responsibility that are highly relevant to contemporary global education.

The study also highlights that the effective implementation of cultural literacy requires a comprehensive educational approach. Curriculum integration, culturally responsive pedagogy, project-based learning, digital cultural literacy, community engagement, authentic assessment, and continuous teacher professional development should be viewed as complementary strategies for embedding cultural literacy across educational settings. Rather than positioning culture as a separate subject, educational institutions should integrate cultural literacy throughout the curriculum so that it becomes an integral component of teaching, learning, and school culture.

Based on the synthesis of the reviewed literature, this study argues that cultural literacy should be recognized as a foundational dimension that enriches the implementation of the widely adopted twenty-first-century competencies of Critical Thinking, Creativity,

Collaboration, and Communication (4Cs). By providing ethical orientation, cultural awareness, and contextual relevance, cultural literacy enables these competencies to contribute more effectively to holistic learner development. Consequently, the article proposes that educational stakeholders consider a more comprehensive perspective in which Culture functions as a complementary and integrative dimension within the twenty-first-century competency framework, thereby supporting the development of learners who are intellectually capable, ethically responsible, culturally grounded, and globally engaged.

Despite these contributions, this study is limited by its reliance on documentary and theoretical analysis. Future research should validate the proposed conceptual framework through empirical studies conducted in schools and higher education institutions, examine the impact of cultural literacy on student learning outcomes and character development, and develop reliable assessment instruments for measuring cultural literacy across different educational contexts. Such investigations would provide stronger empirical evidence to support the integration of cultural literacy into educational policy and practice in Indonesia and beyond.

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