

## Culture and Thematic Learning: Indonesian Teachers' Perspectives

Tiyas Abror Huda<sup>1\*</sup>, Een Yayah Haenilah<sup>2\*\*\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Doctoral Student, Departement of Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Lampung

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Lampung  
Email: [tiyas.abror@staff.unila.ac.id](mailto:tiyas.abror@staff.unila.ac.id), [een.yayahhaenilah@fkip.unila.ac.id](mailto:een.yayahhaenilah@fkip.unila.ac.id)

**Abstract:** Education and culture are two things that cannot be separated because the inclusion of culture in education will make learning more meaningful. The purpose of this research was to find out the perceptions of elementary school (SD) teachers in Lampung Province regarding the integration of culture in thematic learning in elementary schools. Much research has been conducted on the integration of culture into learning in elementary schools, but this research focuses more on the cultural context in Lampung Province. Data collection was carried out by distributing questionnaires through the Google Form, where the questionnaire had previously been tested for validity and reliability. Then it was strengthened by interviews to dig deeper into integrating culture into learning. Furthermore, the data obtained were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The research results show that cultural integration in learning can (1) be a learning resource that is parallel to the main material as a form of introducing and preserving culture as early as possible in elementary school, (2) help students achieve their cognitive, affective, and psychomotor competencies, and (3) become additional references for teachers so that learning can be more real for elementary school students because culture is inherent in students' daily lives. (4) Of course, in practice, there are many obstacles faced by teachers, namely limited teacher knowledge related to culture, lack of supporting resources, limited learning time, lack of support from student parents, inadequate facilities, limited ability of teachers to teach children's songs according to the theme, available teaching materials, and still using a subject approach, making it difficult for teachers to combine material according to the theme. Therefore, real collaboration is needed between teachers, school principals, communities, and policymakers to support each other and integrate culture in elementary schools as early as possible.

**Keywords:** culture; elementary school; Indonesia; teachers' perspective; thematic

### INTRODUCTION

Learning and culture themselves have a close relationship because integrating culture into learning will help achieve learning goals. In the post-COVID-19 education context, educational, health, and racial disparities are increasing and attracting more attention than ever before. Particularly considering what to teach during a global post-pandemic, curriculum and teaching topics are also a growing focus. Teaching that is culturally relevant or responsive is pedagogy (Gay, 2010) that are based on the practice of the teacher's cultural competence or teaching skills in a cross-cultural or multicultural environment (Diller, J., & Moule, 2005). Teachers who use this method encourage each student to relate learning content to their cultural context (Scherff, L; Spector, 2011). How to teach the right way to maximize the potential of children based on the culture that students experience every day Teaching methods that promote, support, and respect student culture and identity are very important, especially in today's classroom.

Indonesia and culture are something that cannot be separated; even in its formation, Indonesia was founded by various cultures. Indonesia is a country that has many tribes, customs, and cultures (Debora et al., 2023). Even though our language and the basis of our country are unified nationally, these cultural differences still exist in people's daily lives. As is well known, the diversity of our society and the classrooms is growing in terms of racial,

ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity. Since a large portion of this variability makes it difficult to suit each student's needs, education in schools needs to have purpose.

In an effort to realize meaningful learning, the government is implementing thematic learning in elementary schools. Where each subject must be connected so that it becomes a unified and related unit packaged in a learning theme. Thematic learning is expected to help elementary school students achieve learning objectives according to their level of thinking. At the age of elementary school children, students are still in the concrete and integrated thinking stage (Piaget, 1972), where the child can understand something based on what he experienced himself. so that learning in elementary school should be as real or concrete as possible so that it is easy for elementary students to understand. In elementary school, student learning is, of course, very different from learning in children above it. In addition to concrete learning, the most important thing is that the learning that is developed in elementary schools is not to prepare students to become experts in certain fields of knowledge, but to lay the foundation for intellectual and behavioral development that will occur at the next level of education (Babbitt, 2012).

Integrating culture into thematic learning in elementary schools is very appropriate, but in practice, whether teachers know the right way to integrate culture is still an issue. What's more, teachers are currently more preoccupied with using textbooks that have been presented by the government or publications that are not contextual to the culture of students' daily lives. Whereas the utilization of local wisdom culture in learning can simultaneously instill identity in students from an early age (Novitawati & Anggreani, 2021), so that, besides learning objectives being achieved, it also strengthens love for local culture, and in the end, the existence of culture is maintained. Therefore, research on incorporating local culture into thematic learning in elementary schools is appropriate and important to equip students with the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes to respect local culture. The results of this study will help fill in theoretical research holes in the fields of teaching culture and elementary learning.

Referring to the explanation above, we realize the importance of integrating culture into elementary school learning. However, empirically, even though elementary school teachers have used culture in learning, they only focus on national and regional cultures that come from other regions in textbooks (Darajah, 2021). Therefore, it is hoped that this research will broaden our insights about the perceptions of school teachers from Lampung province on the integration of local culture in thematic learning in elementary schools.

The purpose of conducting this research was to find out (1) the perceptions of elementary school teachers towards culture and their role in thematic learning; (2) the perceptions of elementary school teachers towards integrating local culture in the classroom; and (3) the benefits and constraints faced when integrating local culture in elementary thematic learning.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study used descriptive research, where researchers used a questionnaire in the form of a Google Form, which was then distributed to elementary school teachers in Lampung province. The questionnaire used was adapted from a questionnaire made by Darajah, (2021). Furthermore, to strengthen the answers to the questionnaire and deepen them, the researchers used interview techniques regarding the research topic. The questionnaire contains statements that are arranged to have five answer criteria or use a Likert scale. Although the questionnaire created by Darajah, (2021) has been declared valid and reliable, before being used in this study, the questionnaire was tested again for validity and reliability on 30 elementary school teachers. After being tested for validity and reliability, the questionnaire, which initially consisted of 44 statement items, was only

declared valid for 36 of them. Questionnaire items are declared valid when  $r_{count}$  is greater than  $r_{table}$  0.361, while items are declared reliable because the value of Cronbach's alpha is greater than 0.7, which is worth 0.747. Then the questionnaire that has been tested for validity and reliability was distributed via Google Form to 125 elementary school teachers spread across districts and cities in Lampung province. After obtaining the data, interviews were conducted to clarify, confirm, and deepen the teacher's perceptions that might not have been accommodated in the questionnaire. The interview activity was carried out virtually, accompanied by the researcher recording each teacher's answer, which was then used to strengthen the results of the questionnaire. For value categorization, adopt (Widoyoko, 2011) as follows:

**Table 1.** Criteria for Assessing Elementary Teacher Perceptions of Cultural Integration in Learning

No	Average Score Range	Category
1	$x > 4,2$	Strongly agree
2	$3,4 < x \leq 4,2$	Agree
3	$2,6 < x \leq 3,4$	Enough
4	$1,8 < x \leq 2,6$	Don't Agree
5	$x < 1,8$	Strongly Disagree

Source: (Widoyoko, 2011)

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Integrating culture into learning is a must, in addition to giving a meaningful impression to students and maintaining that culture so that it is known and exists in everyday life. The following are the demographics of the elementary school teachers who participated in this study:

**Table 2.** Demographic Distribution of Elementary School Teachers Who Participated in The Study

No	Regency	Number of Respondents
1	Bandar Lampung	77
2	West Lampung	1
3	South Lampung	11
4	Central Lampung	1
5	East Lampung	1
6	Metro	11
7	Pesawaran	8
8	Pesisir Barat	4
9	Pringsewu	2
10	Tanggamus	1
11	Tulang Bawang	1
12	Tulang Bawang Barat	4
13	Way Kanan	3
<b>Total number</b>		<b>125</b>

Source: Researcher Data

Based on Table 2 above, the district or city with the highest number of respondents is the City of Bandar Lampung, and the five districts represented by one respondent are the Regencies of West Lampung, Central Lampung, East Lampung, Tanggamus, and Tulang Bawang.

Furthermore, the following is a table of the distribution of respondents based on gender, where the number of female respondents totaled 101 teachers, while the number of male respondents was fewer, namely 24 teachers.

**Table 3.** Respondent Demographics by Gender

No	Gender	Amount
1	Man	24
2	Woman	101
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>125</b>

Source: Researcher Data

### Elementary School Teachers' Perceptions of Local Cultural Terms

The discussion starts with the perceptions of elementary school teachers in terms of understanding cultural terms in thematic learning at elementary schools in Lampung Province, based on the questionnaire in Table 4. It can be seen that the mean or average value of the questionnaire on aspects of elementary school teachers' perceptions of culture is 4.16. This indicates that the respondents, namely elementary school teachers in Lampung Province, agree with all the definitions listed in the statement items that have also been included in the questionnaire.

**Table 4.** The Average Score Obtained Regarding the Perceptions of Elementary School Teachers About Cultural Terms

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
	125	1	5	4,16	0,741

Source: Researcher Data

Furthermore, the teacher's perception of local cultural terms for each item is explained in Table 5 below.

**Table 5.** Perceptions of Elementary School Teachers in Lampung Province about the Term Culture

Item	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
All art forms, locations, institutions, and artifacts are products of culture.	125	1	5	4,20	0,768
Culture is the practice of culture, which includes cultural language and behavior as systems, procedures, situations, and way of life.	125	3	5	4,20	0,625
Culture is a cultural perspective including perceptions, beliefs, values, attitudes, and ethical (outside) and emic (inside) views.	125	1	5	4,22	0,718
Culture is a cultural community, including national communities, communities, and relations that coexist.	125	2	5	4,10	0,761
Culture is personal, including the concept of identity and life history.	125	2	5	4,18	0,664

In Table 5 above, it is stated that the cultural perspective, which includes perceptions, beliefs, values, and attitudes, as well as ethical (outside) and emic (inside) views, is something that is upheld, although other points of view are still upheld. also upheld by SD in Lampung province. If it is assumed that a belief has the following belief bases: 1) artifacts, places, institutions, and art are examples of today's products; 2) cultural behavior and

language are examples of current practices; 3) national and local society and relations at that time; and 4) daily personal aspects covering the principles of identity and daily life. Then, the researcher further interviewed several teachers who had the opinion that culture is a habit that has been passed down from generation to generation in a place, either in the form of behavior, handicrafts, etc. Attitudes and patterns of behavior are habits that are inherited and owned by certain communities, and culture is a way of life that develops and belongs to a group of people. The proximity of culture to each individual can also be used as an approach to solving problems; For instance, include classic games in the physical education program for younger pupils might serve as an example of leading a healthy lifestyle (Ospankulov et al., 2023).

Furthermore, in general, the role of culture in thematic learning in elementary schools in Lampung province agrees that it has an important role in thematic learning. This is supported in Table 6 below.

**Table 6.** Teacher Perceptions of Overall Aspects of Cultural Integration Items in Learning

	<b>N</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
	125	1	5	3,93	1,013

Based on Table 6 above, it shows that the average score of the entire questionnaire is 3.93. So that it can be categorized as agreeing that culture plays an important role for thematic learning. So that teachers believe that local culture needs to be integrated in addition to introducing and preserving local culture around students, as well as content in thematic learning. Cultural engagement can directly involve students in discovery and learning that is no longer lecturing and also enhance the learning experience in the classroom (Tabor & dkk, 2023). Besides that, integrating local culture is also an effort to preserve culture (Elfariani & Huda, 2023), strengthen student character (Effendi & Sahertian, 2022), foster love for the motherland (Ardianti, S.Pd. et al., 2019), and strengthen character according to the culture of each region (Anshory, 2017).

### **Elementary School Teachers' Perceptions of Cultural Integration in Thematic Learning**

**Table 7.** Teacher Perceptions about the Use of Learning Resources

<b>Item</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Teachers only use textbooks	125	1	5	4,40	0,858

The findings from the questionnaire show that teachers strongly agree with only using textbooks to integrate culture into thematic learning. However, based on teacher interviews, learning resources used to integrate culture into thematic learning come from the environment, musical instruments, traditional dances, folk songs, traditional games, fairy tales or local folklore, teacher information, the internet, and others. The use of the Internet, or ICT, in learning is a new solution to increasing elementary school students' interest in learning. This is supported by the research of Naluwoza et al., (2023), which shows that the use of ICT in elementary schools is very important if schools want to encourage student engagement and record better learning outcomes.

### Teacher's perception of cultural content criteria that can be integrated into thematic learning

**Table 8.** Teacher Perceptions of Cultural Content Criteria

Item	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Provides cultural information for students	125	1	5	4,28	0,730
Developing students' cultural behavior	125	1	5	4,30	0,724
Improving students' ability to interpret culture	125	1	5	4,36	0,726
Develop students' individual abilities related to worldviews and personal competencies.	125	1	5	4,16	0,656

Based on the results of the questionnaire in table 8 above, only one item can be interpreted as agreeing, while the other three strongly agree about the cultural content criteria that can be integrated into thematic learning as listed in the questionnaire in table 8 above. After that, the interviews resulted in the view that cultural content is integrated into thematic learning so that students respect local wisdom more so that they can continue to preserve it and also so that they can respect and respect other cultures. As the results of research show, understanding the local context is very important when proposing interventions to open up the possibility of intercultural dialogue (da Silva et al., 2023).

### Elementary school teachers' perceptions of the function of culture in elementary thematic learning

**Table 9.** Perceptions of Elementary School Teachers about the Function of Culture in Elementary Thematic Learning

Item	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Thematic learning can be used by students to participate in cultural experiences.	125	1	5	4,24	0,681
Thematic learning can be used to describe cultural experiences.	125	1	5	4,15	0,688
Students can utilize thematic learning to determine, clarify, and defend cultural beliefs, as well as to contrast and compare them with viewpoints from both their own and other cultures.	125	1	5	4,15	0,735
Thematic learning can be used by students to express their thoughts.	125	3	5	4,24	0,614

Based on Table 9, we can interpret that culture and thematic learning are interrelated, where thematic learning can be used by students 1) to participate in cultural experiences; 2) to identify, explain, and justify cultural perspectives; 3) to compare and contrast them with perspectives from their own individual culture and the culture of others; and 4) to express their thoughts. As well as in the interview, according to the teacher, the students' manifestations of respecting diversity are: 1) there are no students who are in groups of the same ethnic group; 2) no students mock one ethnicity and another; 3) students can learn the language and culture of other tribes; 4) students can work well together in doing assignments in class, carry out discussions well, and students can reason critically and be creative to the fullest; and most importantly, 5) mutual respect for ethnic and cultural differences. This supports the results of Zhou, (2023), who found that participatory drama can evoke cultural experiences that are connoted by the body to find meaning. Then how can the teacher support

the welfare of students' mathematics by recognizing and then fulfilling the values that students adhere to in mathematics class (Hill & Tiong, 2023)

### Teacher's Perception of the Purpose of Cultural Learning in Thematic Learning

**Table 10.** Teacher's Perception of the Purpose of Cultural Learning in Thematic Learning

Item	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
demonstrating the performance of the behavior or cultural competence	125	1	5	4,10	0,668
demonstrate understanding of the information presented	125	2	5	4,15	0,585
Demonstrate the ability to make cultural explanations.	125	2	5	4,12	0,619
demonstrating the expression of self-awareness in culture	125	2	5	4,17	0,551

Based on Table 10 above, all teachers have an average score agreeing that the goals of cultural learning are as written in the questionnaire. Furthermore, in interviews, the teacher expects cultural values to be internalized in students in the form of: 1) values of independence, religion, mutual cooperation, politeness, and hospitality; and 2) values of determination and willingness to do good and think positively and wisely in carrying out tasks and functions. The instructor also hopes that every student will be inspired to use what they have learned and be able to show that they have understood a concept or that they have generated significance in a subject through a variety of cultural manifestations. Research demonstrating how using documentaries in cultural education can greatly increase students' motivation lends credence to this (Al-Obaydi & Pikhart, 2023).

### Teacher's perception of the types of learning activities for cultivating culture in thematic learning

**Table 11.** Teachers' Perceptions of Types of Learning Activities for Inculcating Culture in Thematic Learning

Item	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Teachers use operational activities, rituals, dialogues, role plays, performances, drama, simulations, and field experiences.	125	3	5	4,33	0,622
Teachers use authentic materials, pedagogical materials, experiences, and personal accounts.	125	1	5	4,11	0,748
Teachers use cultural analysis, research, and research projects.	125	2	5	4,11	0,748
The teacher uses reflection, focused speaking, and focused writing.	125	2	5	4,08	0,706

Based on Table 11 above, the teacher agrees on the types of activities listed in the questionnaire. Furthermore, in the interview, the teacher conveyed the impact. convenience for students to understand the material, providing interesting experiences for students, and providing meaningful learning. In addition, the teacher also conveys the negative impacts, namely: 1) the teacher does not understand the culture around him; 2) students forget their original culture and can spur ego and individualism by being proud of their own culture; and 3) the lack of utilizing media with a learning process will have a bad impact on students.

Furthermore, Amani & Mgaiwa, (2023) stated that the use of traditional songs and dances, storytelling, local and cultural learning materials, and pets—five culturally responsive learning practices—embodied in the schools under study proved to have a significant role in promoting inclusive classrooms and fostering meaningful learning.

### Teachers' perceptions of the teacher's role in integrating culture into thematic learning

**Table 12.** Teacher Perceptions of the Teacher's Role in Integrating Culture in Thematic Learning

Item	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
The teacher acts as a model and trainer	125	2	5	4,29	0,662
The teacher acts as a resource and facilitator	125	2	5	4,34	0,651
The teacher acts as a supervisor and research assistant	125	3	5	4,41	0,584
The teacher acts as a listener, witness, and co-worker	125	2	5	4,26	0,734

Based on Table 12 above, teachers strongly agree about the teacher's role in integrating culture into thematic learning, namely as a model, trainer, resource, facilitator, mentor, research companion, listener, witness, and co-worker. Furthermore, in the interview, the teacher also described another role of the teacher in this cultural integration process, namely that apart from being a teacher, the teacher also acts as a coach, trainer, and facilitator, as well as a student motivator, learning moderator, learning motivator, and learning evaluator. In addition, the teacher's additional roles are: 1) collaborating with the local cultural community; 2) establishing communication with student guardians; 3) creating learning content related to culture; and 4) building cultural awareness. Research conducted by Romlah et al., (2023) states that the teacher's role in incorporating local cultural values and religious teachings into learning actually contributes to strengthening cultural identity and encouraging a harmonious life despite diversity in the educational environment.

### Benefits of Integrating Culture in Thematic Learning

**Table 13.** Benefits of Integrating Culture in Thematic Learning

Item	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Cultural integration can help students achieve cognitive, affective, and psychomotor competencies	125	1	5	4,28	0,795

Based on Table 13 above, teachers strongly agree that cultural integration can help students achieve cognitive, affective, and psychomotor competencies. This is in line with some research results showing that cultural integration in learning can increase student activity (Lestari et al., 2023), student learning outcomes increase (Nugrahaeni & Riyanto, 2023), students become more interested and understand quickly, easily accept, and consider what the teacher conveys (Nurazizah et al., 2023), and students are more creative and innovative, not only being able to sing group vocals but also having dance and theater talents in one group task (Dhiku et al., 2023).



## Teacher Obstacles to Integrating Culture in Thematic Learning

**Table 14.** Teacher Constraints in Integrating Culture in Thematic Learning

Item	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Teachers do not realize the importance of cultural integration in the classroom	125	1	5	3,45	1,185
Teachers do not have sufficient cultural competence to integrate culture into classroom learning	125	1	5	3,37	1,179
Teachers do not have the impression of integrating culture into classroom learning	125	1	5	3,60	1,148
Lack of teachers who understand culture	125	1	5	3,26	1,159
Cultural learning is officially not included in thematic learning programs	125	1	5	3,33	1,130
Lack of learning materials that have cultural content	125	1	5	2,91	1,163
There are no guidelines for teachers on integrating culture into classroom learning	125	1	5	3,01	1,175
Lack of learning media that can support culture-based thematic learning	125	1	5	2,74	1,194
The teacher only integrates culture on themes related to Indonesian	125	1	5	3,19	1,162

Based on Table 14 above, teachers agree that they are not aware of the importance of cultural integration in class, teachers do not have sufficient cultural competence to integrate culture in classroom learning, and teachers do not have the impression to integrate culture in classroom learning. For other statement items, the average teacher answers quite agreeably that the teacher does not understand culture because cultural learning is not officially included in a special program, there is a lack of culturally charged material, there are no guidelines for integrating culture in learning, there is a lack of supporting media, and teachers only integrate culture on themes related to Indonesian. This was further deepened in the interviews, where the obstacles experienced by the teacher were as follows: 1) Limited knowledge of teachers regarding culture; 2) Lack of supporting resources; 3) Limited learning time; 4) Lack of support from student parents; 5) Inadequate facilities; 6) Limited ability of teachers to teach children's songs according to the theme; available teaching materials; and 7) Still using a subject approach, making it difficult for teachers to combine material according to the theme. This agrees with Darojah, (2021) that the lack of native Indonesian teachers and material about culture is a barrier that prevents teachers from integrating culture.

## CONCLUSION

From the presentation of the research results that have been presented, it can be concluded that (1) teachers need to understand the meaning and definition of culture before integrating it in learning; (2) teachers are aware of the important role of culture in thematic learning in elementary schools; (3) although teachers use textbooks in learning, it is also necessary to be supported by other learning resources such as from the surrounding environment and the internet, and even include content on musical instruments, traditional dances, folk songs, traditional games, fairy tales, or local folklore as learning resources. (4) The criteria for learning content must be to provide cultural information, be able to develop

students' cultural behavior, improve students' cultural interpretation until they are able to respect and appreciate local and world cultures, (5) Thematic learning can be used by teachers to maximize cultural integration in schools. (6) The purpose of cultural integration is to introduce, demonstrate, and be aware of what their culture is like and how to respect other people's cultures. (7) There are many activities that can be carried out in cultural integration that, of course, have positive and negative impacts. (8) The teacher realizes the important role of the teacher in learning; (9) Cultural integration in learning is proven to be able to achieve three student competencies, namely cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. (10) Of course, in practice, there are many obstacles faced by teachers; therefore, real collaboration is needed between teachers, principals, communities, and policymakers to support each other and integrate culture in elementary school classes as early as possible.

## NOTES

\* Tiyas Abror Huda is a student at the Doctor of Education Faculty of Teaching and Education at the University of Lampung. He has been a doctoral student in education since 2022. He is interested in researching elementary school teacher education and teacher development.

\*\*\*Een Yayah Haenilah is a professor of curriculum development. He currently serves as head of the education doctoral study program at the faculty of teacher training and education at the University of Lampung. He is interested in researching pedagogy, curriculum, curriculum development, early childhood education, and elementary school teacher education. He is on the Editorial Advisory Board of the Journal of Child Education, PG PAUD teacher training and education faculty, Lampung University.

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