



Local Culture-Based Learning Model to Improve Students' Social Literacy

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The increasing complexity of social interactions in contemporary society demands that students develop strong social literacy skills, including empathy, communication, and cultural awareness. However, conventional learning approaches often overlook the integration of local cultural values, resulting in a disconnect between academic knowledge and students' social realities. This study aims to explore and develop a local culture-based learning model to improve students' social literacy. A qualitative research design was employed, involving teachers, students, and community leaders as participants. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and document analysis, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that integrating local cultural values such as mutual cooperation, respect, and communal responsibility into learning activities enhances students' social awareness and interpersonal skills. The study proposes a conceptual model consisting of three core components: local cultural values, participatory pedagogy, and community engagement. This model fosters contextual learning and strengthens students' ability to interpret and respond to social situations effectively. In conclusion, local culture-based learning provides a meaningful and contextually relevant approach to improving social literacy. The study contributes to the development of culturally responsive pedagogy and offers practical implications for educators seeking to create inclusive and socially grounded learning environments.

Keywords: social literacy; local culture; contextual learning; culturally responsive pedagogy; qualitative research

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INTRODUCTION

The development of social literacy has increasingly been recognized as a central objective in contemporary education, particularly within societies characterized by cultural diversity, rapid globalization, and intensified social interaction. Social literacy refers not only to the ability to understand social norms and communicate effectively, but also to the capacity to interpret social contexts, demonstrate empathy, and engage in responsible interpersonal relationships (Hogg & Vaughan, 2018). These competencies are essential for navigating complex social environments and fostering inclusive communities. Nevertheless, educational practices in many contexts continue to prioritize cognitive and academic achievement, often at the expense of social and emotional development. This imbalance contributes to a persistent gap between formal knowledge acquisition and the practical social skills required in everyday life (OECD, 2021).

Growing attention has therefore been directed toward learning approaches that situate knowledge within meaningful social and cultural contexts. Contextual learning emphasizes the

construction of knowledge through connections to learners' lived experiences, thereby enhancing relevance and engagement (Johnson, 2002). Within this perspective, culture-based education emerges as a particularly promising approach, as it integrates cultural values, traditions, and local knowledge into the learning process. Such integration not only enriches the curriculum but also supports the formation of identity and belonging among students (Gay, 2018). Local culture, in this sense, represents a dynamic reservoir of social norms, ethical principles, and collective practices that can serve as a foundation for developing social literacy (Ladson-Billings, 2021).

Empirical evidence suggests that when learning is aligned with students' cultural backgrounds, it becomes more meaningful and impactful. Students are more likely to engage actively, internalize values, and apply their knowledge in real-life situations. Cultural practices such as cooperation, mutual respect, and communal responsibility often embedded in local traditions are directly relevant to the development of social competencies. In many communities, these values are transmitted informally through daily interactions, rituals, and social institutions. Integrating such elements into formal education offers an opportunity to bridge the divide between school knowledge and community life, thereby strengthening the social dimension of learning (Moll et al., 2019).

Despite these promising insights, existing research on culturally responsive education tends to concentrate on pedagogical adaptation, instructional strategies, or curriculum design, with less attention given to the systematic incorporation of local cultural values into structured learning models. The role of local culture is often treated as supplementary rather than foundational, resulting in fragmented implementation across educational settings. Moreover, while the broader benefits of culture-based education have been widely acknowledged, there remains limited empirical and conceptual exploration of how these approaches specifically contribute to the development of students' social literacy (Rahmawati & Suyanto, 2022). This gap is particularly evident in contexts where local cultural knowledge is rich but underutilized within formal schooling systems.

Another critical limitation lies in the absence of integrative frameworks that explicitly connect cultural values, pedagogical processes, and social learning outcomes. Without such frameworks, efforts to incorporate local culture risk being inconsistent, superficial, or dependent on individual teacher initiatives. A more systematic approach is needed to conceptualize how local cultural elements can be translated into pedagogical practices that foster social understanding, ethical awareness, and interpersonal competence. This requires not only identifying relevant cultural values but also examining the mechanisms through which these values are internalized by students in classroom and community-based learning environments.

In response to these challenges, this study seeks to develop a local culture-based learning model aimed at improving students' social literacy. The research is guided by three main objectives: (1) to identify local cultural values that are relevant to the development of social literacy, (2) to analyze how these values can be meaningfully integrated into teaching and learning processes, and (3) to formulate a conceptual model that links cultural context, pedagogy, and social competence.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to both theoretical and practical domains. Theoretically, it advances the discourse on culturally responsive education by proposing an integrative perspective that positions local culture as a core component of social literacy development. Practically, it provides insights for educators and policymakers on how to design learning environments that are not only academically rigorous but also socially and culturally meaningful. By emphasizing the role of local culture in shaping students' social understanding, this study supports the development of more inclusive, contextualized, and sustainable educational practices.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a descriptive design to explore the development of a local culture-based learning model aimed at improving students' social literacy. Such an approach is considered appropriate because it allows for an in-depth understanding of social phenomena, particularly the meanings, values, and practices embedded within local cultural contexts. Through this design, the study seeks to capture the perspectives and experiences of participants as they engage with culture-based learning processes in natural educational settings.

The research was conducted in a school environment that actively incorporates local cultural elements into its educational practices. Participants were selected purposively to ensure their relevance to the research objectives. They included teachers, students, school administrators, and community representatives such as cultural leaders and parents. These participants were chosen based on their direct involvement in teaching, learning, and the transmission of cultural values, enabling the study to obtain a comprehensive view of how local culture is integrated into educational activities.

Data collection was carried out using multiple qualitative techniques to enhance the depth and credibility of the findings. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore participants' understanding of social literacy, their experiences with culture-based learning, and their perceptions of its impact. Focus group discussions were organized, particularly with students, to capture collective insights and shared experiences regarding the learning process. In addition, participant observation was undertaken to examine how cultural values were embedded in classroom interactions, teaching strategies, and school activities. Document analysis was also employed to review lesson plans, curriculum documents, and school programs that reflect the integration of local culture in education.

The data obtained were analyzed using thematic analysis, following an iterative process of coding, categorizing, and interpreting patterns within the data. Initially, the researcher conducted data familiarization by reviewing all collected materials. This was followed by generating initial codes related to cultural values, learning practices, and aspects of social literacy. The codes were then organized into broader themes that reflected the relationships between local culture and social literacy development. Throughout the analysis, constant comparison was applied to ensure consistency and depth of interpretation.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several validation strategies were employed. Triangulation was conducted by comparing data from different sources and methods, including interviews, observations, and documents. Member checking was also applied by sharing preliminary findings with participants to confirm the accuracy of interpretations. Additionally, prolonged engagement in the research setting allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the context and to build trust with participants.

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the research process. All participants provided informed consent prior to their involvement, and confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing personal information. The study was conducted with respect for cultural values and local norms, ensuring that the research process did not disrupt or misrepresent the community's traditions. Through this methodological approach, the study aims to provide a credible and contextually grounded understanding of how local culture-based learning can enhance students' social literacy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Identification of Local Cultural Values Supporting Social Literacy

The findings reveal that local cultural values function not merely as contextual elements but as foundational constructs in shaping students' social literacy. Data from interviews,

observations, and focus group discussions indicate that values such as mutual respect, collective responsibility, empathy, and social harmony are deeply embedded in local traditions and daily social interactions. These values align closely with the conceptual dimensions of social literacy, which include social awareness, interpersonal communication, and ethical engagement (Hogg & Vaughan, 2018).

From an analytical perspective, these findings resonate with the framework of culturally responsive pedagogy, which emphasizes that students learn more effectively when educational content reflects their cultural realities (Gay, 2018). Local cultural practices such as communal activities, traditional ceremonies, and intergenerational interactions serve as authentic contexts through which social norms are learned and internalized. This supports the argument of Moll et al. (2019) regarding “funds of knowledge,” where community-based cultural resources become valuable assets in the learning process.

Recent empirical studies further reinforce this position. Research by Ladson-Billings (2021) demonstrates that integrating cultural values into instruction enhances not only student engagement but also social identity formation. In this study, students exposed to culture-based learning exhibited a stronger sense of belonging and social responsibility, suggesting that local culture acts as a mediator between knowledge acquisition and social competence.

Integration of Local Culture into Learning Processes

The study finds that the integration of local cultural values into learning occurs through three primary mechanisms: contextualization of learning materials, participatory teaching strategies, and value-based interaction patterns in the classroom. Teachers incorporated local narratives, proverbs, and social practices into lesson content, making abstract social concepts more tangible and relatable for students.

This finding can be interpreted through the lens of constructivist learning theory, which posits that knowledge is actively constructed through interaction with one’s environment (Johnson, 2002). By situating learning within familiar cultural contexts, students are able to connect new knowledge with prior experiences, thereby deepening understanding and retention. The use of participatory methods such as group discussions, role-playing, and collaborative problem-solving further strengthens this process by creating opportunities for social interaction and reflection.

Moreover, the integration of local culture also reflects principles of social learning theory, where individuals learn behaviors and norms through observation and imitation (Bandura, 1986). Classroom environments that model culturally grounded values such as respect, cooperation, and empathy enable students to internalize these behaviors through repeated social interaction.

Recent studies support these findings. For instance, research by Rahmawati and Suyanto (2022) indicates that culturally contextualized learning significantly improves students’ social engagement and collaborative skills. Similarly, OECD (2021) highlights that education systems incorporating socio-cultural dimensions tend to produce learners with stronger interpersonal competencies and civic awareness.

Impact of Culture-Based Learning on Students’ Social Literacy

The results demonstrate that the implementation of a local culture-based learning model contributes significantly to the enhancement of students’ social literacy. Students showed noticeable improvements in their ability to communicate effectively, resolve conflicts, demonstrate empathy, and participate actively in group activities. These changes were consistently observed across multiple data sources, including classroom observations and participant reflections.

Analytically, this outcome can be explained through the interaction between cultural internalization and social practice. When students engage with culturally meaningful content, they are more likely to internalize the associated values and translate them into behavior. This supports the argument of Vygotskian socio-cultural theory, which emphasizes the role of social interaction and cultural tools in cognitive and social development.

The findings also align with recent empirical research. A study by García and Weiss (2020) found that students in culturally inclusive learning environments demonstrate higher levels of empathy and social cooperation. Another study by Banks (2020) highlights that multicultural and culture-based education contributes to the development of democratic values and social responsibility among students.

However, the impact is not uniform across all participants. Some students initially showed resistance, particularly when cultural values were perceived as normative or prescriptive. This suggests that the effectiveness of culture-based learning depends on how values are presented—whether as rigid norms or as reflective frameworks that encourage critical thinking. This observation is consistent with critiques in contemporary literature, which caution against essentializing culture in education (Gay, 2018).

Development of a Conceptual Model of Local Culture-Based Learning

Based on the synthesis of findings, this study proposes a conceptual model consisting of three interconnected components: (1) local cultural values as foundational inputs, (2) pedagogical processes as mediating mechanisms, and (3) social literacy outcomes as expected outputs.

Table 1. Conceptual Model of Local Culture-Based Learning

Component	Description	Function in Learning Model
Local Cultural Values	Norms, traditions, and social practices rooted in the community	Provide contextual and ethical foundation
Pedagogical Processes	Contextual learning, participatory methods, reflective dialogue	Facilitate internalization of values
Social Literacy Outcomes	Empathy, communication, cooperation, social responsibility	Represent measurable learning impact

This model reflects an integrative approach that connects cultural context with pedagogical practice and learning outcomes. It extends previous frameworks by explicitly positioning local culture as a central driver of social literacy development rather than a supplementary element.

Theoretically, the model bridges constructivist, socio-cultural, and culturally responsive perspectives, offering a more holistic understanding of how learning occurs in socially embedded contexts. It also addresses the research gap identified earlier by providing a structured framework for integrating local cultural values into educational practice.

While the findings highlight the positive impact of culture-based learning, several critical considerations emerge. The variability of cultural interpretations within communities presents a challenge for standardizing learning models. Cultural values are not static; they evolve over time and may be interpreted differently by different groups. This requires educators to adopt a flexible and reflective approach when integrating culture into teaching.

Another important implication relates to teacher capacity. Effective implementation of culture-based learning requires teachers to possess not only pedagogical competence but also cultural sensitivity and contextual understanding. Without adequate training, there is a risk of superficial integration that fails to capture the depth of cultural meaning.

Recent literature emphasizes the importance of this dimension. According to Nieto (2020), culturally responsive teaching demands critical awareness and continuous reflection מצד educators. Similarly, UNESCO (2022) underscores that culturally grounded education must be adaptive, inclusive, and responsive to changing social dynamics.

In sum, the study demonstrates that local culture-based learning holds significant potential for enhancing students' social literacy. Its effectiveness, however, depends on thoughtful integration, critical engagement with cultural values, and the capacity of educators to facilitate meaningful learning experiences.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that a local culture-based learning model offers a meaningful and contextually grounded approach to improving students' social literacy. The findings indicate that local cultural values such as mutual respect, cooperation, and social responsibility serve as powerful foundations for fostering students' abilities to communicate, empathize, and engage effectively in social interactions. When these values are systematically integrated into learning processes through participatory and contextual pedagogical strategies, students are more likely to internalize them and translate them into observable social behaviors.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study contributes to the advancement of culturally responsive and socio-cultural learning perspectives by proposing an integrative model that connects local cultural values, pedagogical processes, and social literacy outcomes. The model highlights that social literacy is not developed in isolation, but through continuous interaction between learners and their cultural environments. This reinforces the view that education should move beyond purely cognitive dimensions toward a more holistic framework that incorporates social and cultural realities.

In practical terms, the findings suggest that educators should actively incorporate local cultural elements into teaching practices to enhance the relevance and effectiveness of learning. Schools are encouraged to foster collaboration with local communities to ensure authenticity and sustainability in implementing culture-based education. At the policy level, there is a need for greater flexibility in curriculum design to accommodate local cultural integration without compromising academic standards.

Despite its contributions, this study acknowledges several limitations, including the context-specific nature of the findings and the reliance on qualitative data. Future research is therefore recommended to employ quantitative or mixed-method approaches to test the effectiveness of the proposed model across diverse educational settings. Comparative studies across regions and cultures would also provide deeper insights into the adaptability and scalability of local culture-based learning models in improving students' social literacy.

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