

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICES ON LOCAL CULTURE IN INDONESIA

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Received: 6 October 2025; Accepted: 25 November 2025

Abstract

In response to cultural homogenization driven by globalization, integrating local culture into early childhood education (ECE) supports culturally responsive pedagogy. This study explores how ECE teachers in Indonesia perceive and apply local culture in curriculum and lesson planning. Using a cross-sectional survey of 74 teachers in Lebak Regency, Banten, the study analyzed cultural awareness, planning behavior, and teaching strategies. Results show that teachers value local traditions and incorporate food, clothing, games, housing, and folklore into classroom activities using project-based learning, field trips, and discussions. These are commonly integrated into thematic units like “My Environment” and “My Country.” However, only 30.41% of teachers formally document cultural elements in lesson plans, indicating a gap between practice and written curriculum. This gap may hinder the formal preservation of intangible heritage. The study highlights the need for institutional support and professional development to strengthen the alignment between teaching practices and curriculum documentation.

Keywords: culturally responsive pedagogy, curriculum integration, early childhood education, globalization, local culture

Introduction

Early childhood education (ECE) represents a foundational stage in children’s cognitive, emotional, social, and cultural development. During this critical period, teachers play a pivotal role not only in facilitating learning but also in shaping children's values, attitudes, and sense of identity. A key avenue through which this role is realized is the integration of local culture into the curriculum. Embedding cultural elements in early education fosters children's understanding of heritage, strengthens cultural identity, and cultivates respect for diversity. This approach aligns with the principles of culturally responsive pedagogy, which emphasizes the importance of drawing on students’ cultural backgrounds to enhance learning (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

In this context, culture is not merely a collection of artifacts or traditions but a dynamic system of meanings that shapes worldviews and behavior. Groh (2019) defines culture as socially transmitted patterns of behavior, values, and symbols, while Geertz (1973) describes it as historically transmitted meanings embodied in symbols. For young children, cultural learning is most effective when it is grounded



in their immediate environment and everyday experiences, making local culture especially relevant.

In Indonesia, the integration of local culture into education is both encouraged and mandated by national policy. Article 36 of Law No. 20/2003 on the National Education System requires that curriculum development take into account the cultural diversity of society. This principle reflects the educational philosophy of Ki Hajar Dewantara, who advocated for instruction that reinforces national identity and cultural awareness from an early age.

Despite national mandates, the implementation of local culture in early childhood education (ECE) remains challenging. Globalization, technological advancement, and urbanization have contributed to the gradual erosion of traditional cultural practices, rendering them less visible in daily life. As a result, young children risk becoming increasingly disconnected from their cultural roots unless educators take deliberate action to bridge this gap. ECE teachers are thus positioned as cultural agents, responsible for designing learning experiences that meaningfully connect children to their heritage.

While previous studies have examined culturally responsive teaching in ECE (Alaca & Pyle, 2018; Shih, 2022) there remains limited empirical evidence on how teachers perceive, plan, and integrate local cultural content—particularly in rural, culturally rich regions such as Lebak Regency in Banten Province. Much of the existing literature focuses on urban or Western contexts, creating a gap in understanding culturally responsive practices in non-Western and underrepresented settings.

This study seeks to address that gap by investigating how kindergarten teachers in Lebak understand and implement local cultural elements in their curriculum. With its strong cultural heritage, Lebak serves as an ideal context to explore how early education can support cultural preservation. By examining teachers' perceptions, curriculum design, and pedagogical strategies, this research offers new insights into the enactment of culturally responsive pedagogy in rural Indonesia and informs curriculum development, teacher preparation, and policy for cultural sustainability.

Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by two complementary theoretical frameworks: Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Dewey's experiential learning model. Together, these perspectives provide a robust foundation for understanding how culturally embedded practices can serve as meaningful contexts for fostering critical thinking in early childhood education—particularly in non-Western contexts such as Indonesia, which remain underrepresented in existing research.

C. P. D. (1978) emphasized that learning and development are inherently social and cultural processes. Cognitive growth begins at the interpersonal level through interaction with others before being internalized at the intrapersonal level. Central to his theory is the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), defined as the distance between what a child can accomplish independently and what they can achieve with appropriate guidance. Within the ZPD, adult mediation and peer collaboration are essential, as communication and shared activities serve as tools for internalizing culturally meaningful knowledge. Through these social

exchanges, children are gradually able to participate in and master culturally valued practices, thereby linking cognitive development with cultural transmission.

Guided participation, an extension of Vygotsky's theory, highlights the active involvement of children alongside more knowledgeable members of their community—such as parents, teachers, siblings, and neighbors—in everyday cultural practices. Through these collaborative interactions, children not only develop practical skills but also internalize culturally valued modes of thinking. Contemporary scholars (Edwards et al., 2019) have extended Vygotsky's framework by emphasizing the role of culturally responsive pedagogy in early childhood education, stressing the importance of embedding learning within meaningful local contexts.

In parallel, Dewey (2004) experiential learning theory conceptualizes education as a continuous process of reconstructing experience through interaction between the child and their environment. Dewey argued that learning is most effective when rooted in real-life experiences that are socially and culturally relevant to the learner. He positioned educators as facilitators who structure and guide these experiences to foster reflective thinking and social competence. According to Dewey, meaningful learning emerges through active participation, inquiry, and reflection within the child's lived context. Together, these theoretical perspectives frame this study's investigation into how adult-child interactions—mediated by local cultural narratives and community practices—can support the development of critical thinking as a higher-order cognitive skill. By anchoring early childhood learning in familiar cultural experiences, this approach provides a nuanced and contextually grounded pathway for advancing children's cognitive and social development.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach using a cross-sectional survey design. The primary objective was to investigate kindergarten teachers' perspectives and practices concerning the integration of local cultural elements into early childhood education. The cross-sectional design allowed data to be collected at a single point in time, offering a comprehensive snapshot of current practices across several sub-districts in Indonesia.

Participants

The study involved 74 kindergarten teachers from seven sub-districts in Lebak Regency, Banten Province, Indonesia: Gunung Kencana, Cijaku, Warung Gunung, Muncang, Malimping, Rangkasbitung, and Cibadak. These sub-districts were selected using random sampling, with accessibility as a key consideration. Participation was voluntary, and participants were selected based on their availability during the data collection period. All participants had prior experience teaching young children and were actively involved in implementing the early childhood curriculum.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected over a two-week period using an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The instrument comprised both closed-ended

(Likert-scale) items and open-ended questions designed to explore teachers' beliefs, planning behaviors, and pedagogical strategies related to local culture. The questionnaire was informed by the literature on culturally responsive pedagogy and reviewed by experts in early childhood education to ensure content validity and alignment with the study's objectives. Collaboration with local education coordinators supported the distribution and follow-up process. Prior to completing the survey, participants were provided with detailed information about the study and gave informed consent. Participation was voluntary, and all responses were kept confidential.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions and percentage calculations, were used to analyze the quantitative data. Open-ended responses were examined using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns. Although no formal validity or reliability testing was conducted, expert reviews guided the questionnaire design to enhance content relevance and internal consistency.

Findings and Discussion

Knowledge of local culture

Children's development is inherently shaped by the environments in which they live, with the cultural context embedded in daily life playing a significant role. The term culture originates from the Sanskrit word *Buddayah*, the plural of *Budi*, meaning "reason." Culture encompasses the traditions, practices, and social norms manifested in the institutions and daily interactions of a community (Ødegaard & Hedegaard, 2020). It includes the collective ways of life—such as religion, food, clothing, language, rituals, and music—that characterize a group. Furthermore, culture is understood as a system of shared ideas, values, beliefs, knowledge, and customs that are passed down through generations, often extending beyond local contexts to the international level (Groh, 2019).

A survey conducted among kindergarten teachers in Lebak Regency revealed that 80% of the 74 participants demonstrated an accurate understanding of local culture. These respondents described local culture as the unique heritage of a particular region, distinct from that of other areas, and transmitted intergenerationally. In contrast, 8% of teachers misinterpreted local culture merely as the customs surrounding them, while the remaining 12% provided incorrect or unclear responses, such as identifying local culture as Indonesia's original culture, preserved culture in nearby environments, or a form of culture that is natural and unaffected by external influences.

Regarding the importance of kindergarten teachers' knowledge of local culture, 63% of respondents stated that such knowledge enables them to effectively provide culturally relevant learning experiences for children. Specifically, they emphasized that: 1) As kindergarten teachers, they are responsible for transferring cultural knowledge to children, and the broader the teacher's understanding, the richer the material the children can receive; 2) This knowledge allows teachers to deliver appropriate cultural education within the learning process; 3) Teachers can educate children about local traditions and help preserve them; and 4) Introducing local culture enables children to recognize the cultural richness and diversity in their

region, fostering a sense of care and respect for cultural heritage. Furthermore, local cultural wisdom is considered essential in shaping children’s moral character and instilling noble values. An additional 30% of respondents noted that understanding local culture enhances: 1) Teachers’ insight and knowledge of their own cultural context; 2) Appreciation and acceptance of cultural differences across regions; 3) Adaptability to the community environment; and 4) Respect for regional diversity, which they also identified as important for self-improvement. The remaining 7% of responses were less relevant or did not directly address the question.

Integrating local culture into early childhood education not only supports children’s learning within their sociocultural context but also prepares them to engage with broader societal challenges both now and in the future (Widiastuti, 2012). Culture plays a central role in shaping how children learn, interact, form relationships, and share information. In this context, culture refers to the shared understandings, behaviors, traditions, and values that define a particular group. It provides a lens through which individuals interpret their environment and connect with others. Thus, culture influences daily life, behavior, and the ways individuals participate in their communities. In Lebak Regency, various local cultures coexist, and teachers demonstrate awareness of this cultural richness, as illustrated in the following figure 1.

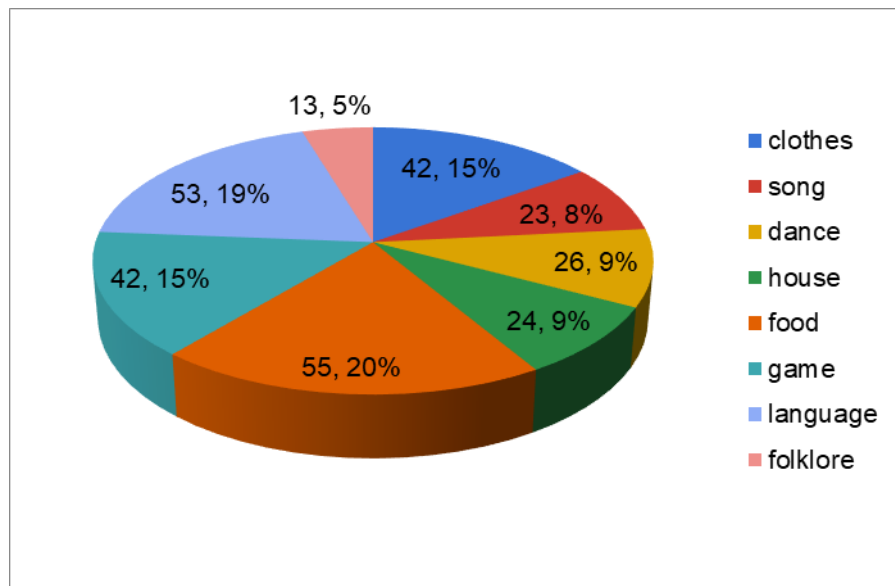


Figure 1: Types of Lebak Culture

Based on the data presented in Figure 1, it is evident that teachers are able to identify several cultural elements that are still preserved in the Lebak area, Banten. The majority of respondents demonstrated awareness of regional foods (20%), local language (19%), traditional games (15%), and traditional clothing (15%). A smaller proportion mentioned folklore, regional songs, traditional dances, and traditional houses. The specific names of the cultural elements mentioned by the respondents are detailed in the following Table 1.

Table 1: Known Cultures and Their Types/Names

No.	Known Culture	Type/ name of culture
1	Traditional food	Rabeg, Sate Bandeng, Karedok, Sayur Asem, Angeun Lada, Ayam Bakakak, Opak Singkong, Jojorong, Pasung, Emping, Keceprek, Kue Cincing, Lotek, Gemblong, Ketimus, Rengginang, Gipang, Serabi, Apem
2	Traditional games	Engkle, Kolecer, Jajangkungan, Gatrik, Oray-Orayan, Boy-Boyan, Cingciripit, Sempring
3	Traditional clothing	Batik Lebak, Batik Baduy, Baju Kampret, Jamang Nyangsang/ Kutung, Koncer/ Lomar/ Telekung, Pangsi
4	Folk songs	Rangkasbitung, Bubuy Bulan, Ngarengkong, Dayung Sampan, Tong Sarakah, Cing Cang Keling, Manuk Dadali, Basisir Carita, Pileuleuyan, Tokecang, Cingciripit, Jereh Bu Guru, Laut Kidul, Surantang Surinting
5	Traditional dance	Jaipong, Grebeg Terbang Gede, Manuk Dadali, Rampak Bedug, Tepak Tilu, Bendrong Lesung
6	Traditional house	Leuit, Julang Ngapak, Sulah Nyanda, Jalopong
7	folklore	Rangkasbitung history, Warunggunung history, Pandeglang, Baduy Tribe story Si Kancil Mencuri Timun, Tanjung Lesung/ Raden Budog, Saija Adindan, history of Old Banten
8	Local language	Sunda

This cultural knowledge needs to be introduced to children as future generations and as key agents in preserving existing local traditions.

Inclusion of local cultural material in the curriculum and learning plans

Local culture should be introduced to children through the learning process; therefore, it needs to be integrated into the curriculum. Based on the survey results, 33% of respondents stated that incorporating local culture into the curriculum is very necessary, while 47% considered it necessary. The remaining 20% were less certain or did not express a clear opinion.

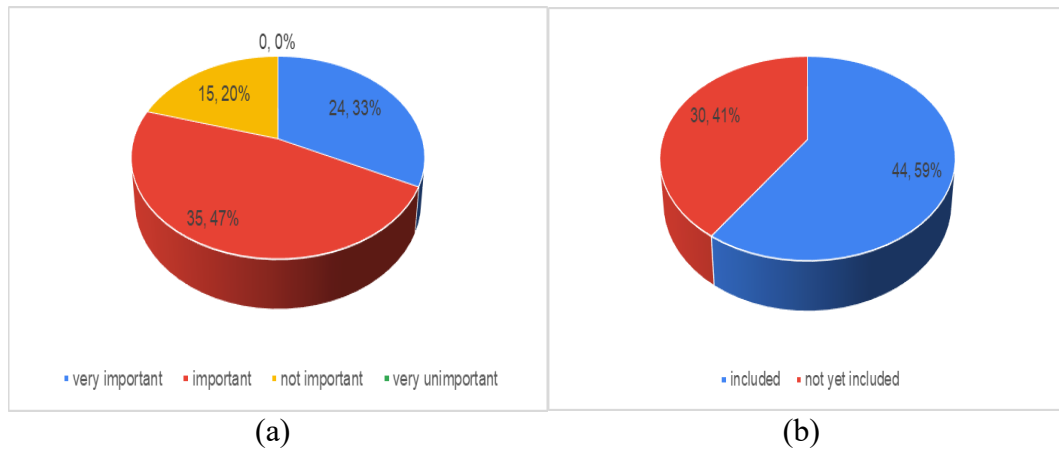


Figure 2: The Importance of Incorporating Local Culture into the Curriculum (a); Local Culture Incorporation into the Curriculum (b)

However, despite the recognition of its importance, only 59% of those who viewed it as necessary or very necessary had actually included local culture in their curriculum, while 41% had not (see image above right). The reasons for these responses are illustrated in the figure 3 below.

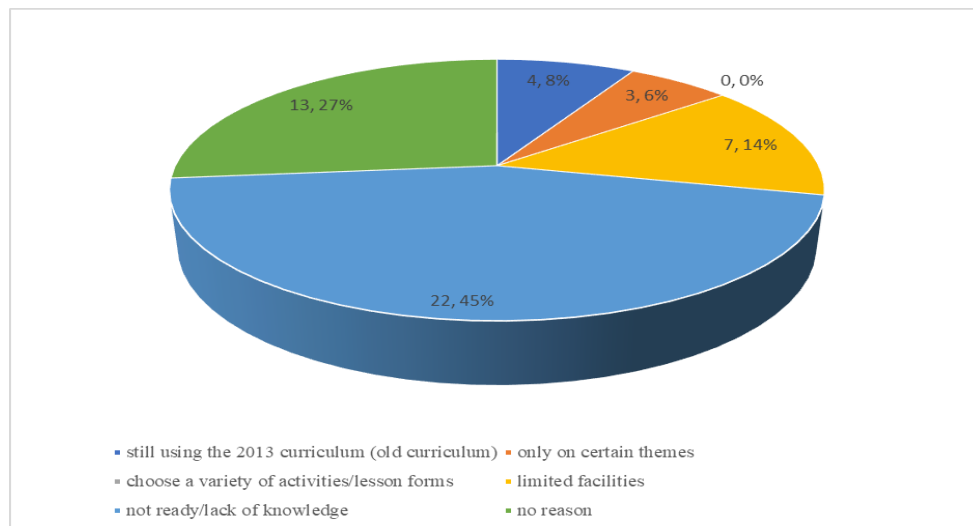


Figure 3: Reasons for Not Including Local Culture in the Curriculum

The primary obstacle preventing teachers from integrating local culture into the curriculum is a lack of knowledge, cited by 45% of respondents. An additional 14% identified limited facilities as a constraint, while 27% did not provide a specific reason. The integration of local culture into the curriculum is a vital initiative aimed at preserving cultural heritage, emphasizing the importance of actions that support the foundational elements of societal life. Preschool curricula should be designed to encourage children to engage in play and exploration within their everyday environments and communities, thereby laying the foundation for deeper exploration and reflection in later stages of education (Ødegaard & Hedegaard, 2020)

The importance of incorporating local culture into early childhood education is underscored by Taiwan's curriculum model, which seeks to transmit cultural

concepts, values, beliefs, knowledge, and customs across generations (Shih, 2022). In Indonesia, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology highlights culture as a core principle in learning, which must be thoughtfully considered and implemented. National guidelines emphasize that learning should be relevant, contextually grounded, and culturally responsive, involving parents and the community as educational partners. Educators are encouraged to design learning experiences that are needs-based and connected to real-world contexts, the environment, and local culture in order to foster students' interest and engagement (Anggraena et al., 2022). Therefore, the notion that educators refrain from incorporating local culture due to the continued use of the 2013 Curriculum (Kurikulum 2013 or Kurtilas) appears to be inaccurate. When cultural content is included in the curriculum, it should be reflected in instructional planning and subsequently implemented in teaching practices. Related to this, survey data show that 32% of respondents considered it very important and 54% considered it important to integrate local culture into lesson planning, while 14% viewed it as unimportant.

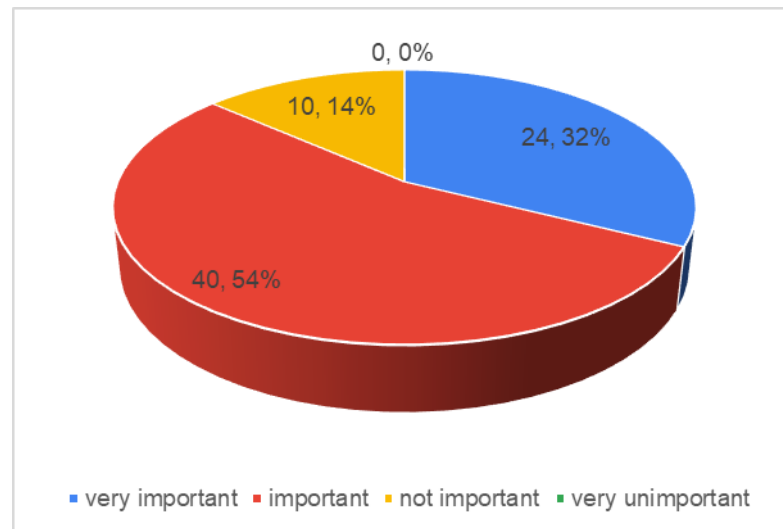


Figure 4: The Importance of Including Local Culture in Learning Planning

Nevertheless, although the importance of incorporating local culture into lesson planning is acknowledged by the majority of respondents, its practical implementation remains inconsistent. Only 35% of respondents reported that they consistently integrated local cultural content into their lesson plans. In contrast, 42% stated that they did so occasionally, and 23% acknowledged that they had not included it at all. The reasons for the infrequent or absent inclusion are attributed to several challenges, as illustrated in the figure below.

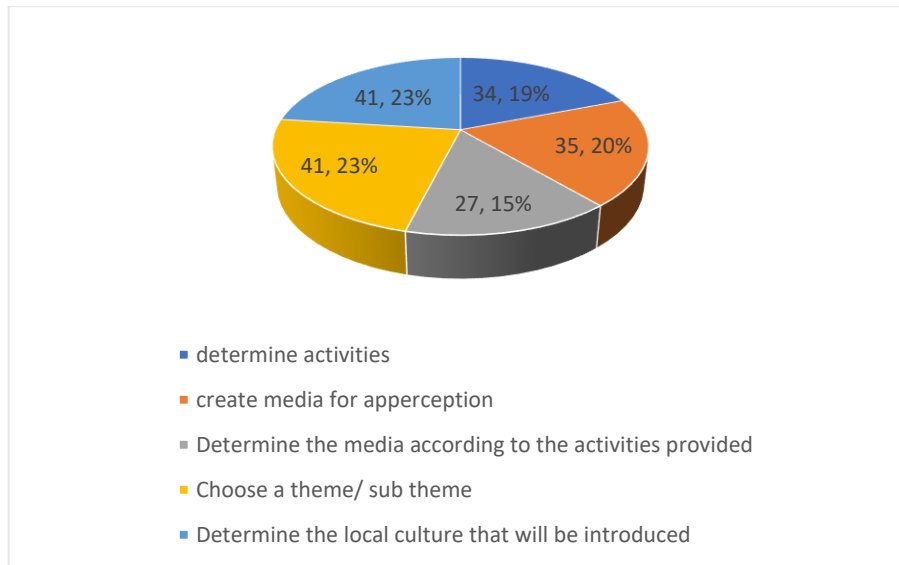


Figure 5: Difficulties in Preparing Plans Related to Local Culture

The figure illustrates that educators encounter challenges in developing lesson plans, particularly in selecting appropriate themes (23%) and determining which aspects of local culture to introduce to young children. In the context of early childhood education in Indonesia, the 2013 curriculum continues to adopt a thematic learning approach. Thematic learning is designed to integrate knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, and creative thinking through a unifying theme. The curriculum comprises 11 themes, distributed across two semesters. The first semester covers the themes of Myself, My Family, the Environment, and Animals, while the second semester includes the themes of Plants, Vehicles, the Universe, and My Country. The themes most commonly used by respondents to introduce elements of local culture are presented in the following figure.

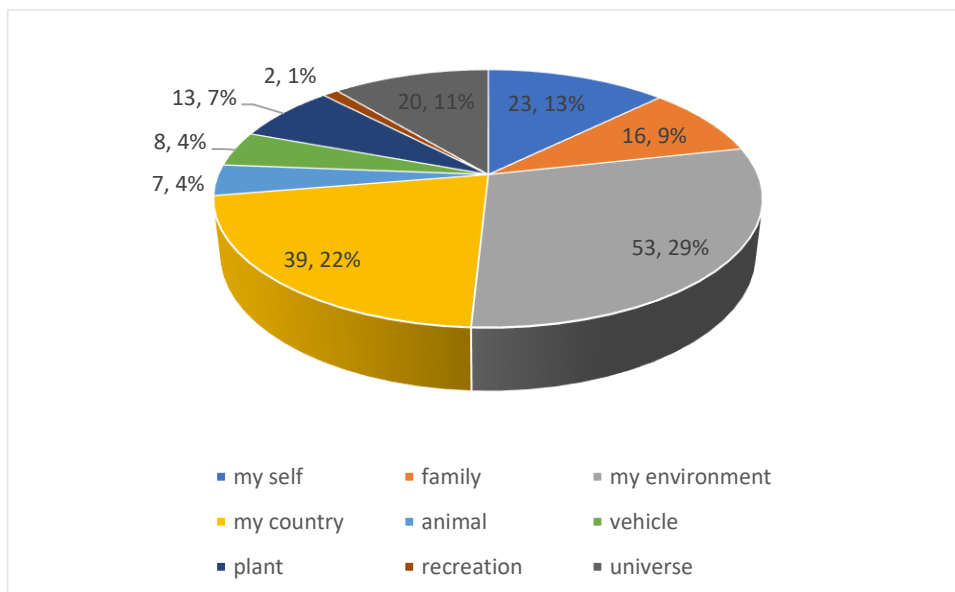


Figure 6: Themes for Introducing Local Culture

Based on the illustration, it is evident that local culture is most frequently introduced through the theme *My Environment* (34%), followed by *My Country* (18%). The environment serves as a medium in which living beings reside and interact, possessing unique characteristics and functions that are reciprocally related to the existence of those inhabiting it, particularly humans, who play a more complex and active role (Rusdina, 2015). Children must be introduced to their environment to foster an understanding of their surroundings, including the physical setting, community members, and prevalent cultural practices. The environment also serves as a learning resource for children, offering diverse facilities and information that support the development of their full potential. According to the Indonesian Minister of National Education Regulation No. 58 of 2009 on Early Childhood Education Standards, early childhood infrastructure must: (1) be safe, comfortable, well-lit, and meet children's health standards; (2) align with developmental stages; and (3) utilize local environmental resources, including recyclable or repurposed materials, to create an engaging and developmentally supportive learning space (Kementerian Pendidikan Nasional Republik Indonesia, 2009).

The environment, as expounded by Sikandar (2015), constitutes the nexus where situations and conditions intersect with personal needs and objectives, thereby engendering lifelong experiences. Sikandar identifies three primary environmental realms: the family, the school, and the community. It is imperative to introduce children to these spheres to instil in them an understanding that they coexist with others and do not lead solitary lives. Children must learn to recognize individual uniqueness and develop an appreciation for both similarities and differences. In line with this, Malaguzzi, the founder of the Reggio Emilia approach, refers to the environment as the "third teacher." Accordingly, in Reggio Emilia schools, the environment is intentionally designed, flexible, and capable of shaping children's identities as influential participants in their own lives and in the lives of others (Biermeier, 2015). Complementing this view, Maria Montessori emphasizes the role of the "prepared environment," where both teachers and children are mutually influenced by their learning surroundings. The educator's role involves careful observation and the continuous adaptation of the environment in response to the child's needs.

A lack of knowledge among teachers regarding the existing local culture in the Lebak region presents significant challenges in selecting appropriate materials to introduce to children. This limitation also contributes to the exclusion of local cultural content from the curriculum and its minimal integration into early childhood education practices. It is essential for every teacher to possess sufficient cultural knowledge to effectively introduce local traditions and practices to young learners. Such knowledge serves as the foundation for delivering information and also facilitates the transmission of values, attitudes, and skills relevant to children's holistic development. In culturally diverse school settings, new teachers are expected to acquire and apply a range of competencies that enhance cultural adaptability and deepen their understanding of varied cultural constructs (Salmona et al., 2015).

To ensure teachers possess adequate cultural competence, professional development and training focused on local culture are crucial, particularly for novice teachers or those relocating from different regions. Integrating a local

culture-based learning model into teacher education programs can significantly enhance pre-service teachers’ instructional capabilities (Widada et al., 2019). Teachers who are well-equipped with such knowledge can facilitate cognitive development in children, including conceptual understanding (Herawaty et al., 2018), symbolic representation (Widada et al., 2019), and problem-solving abilities (Iswinarti & Suminar, 2019), as well as improvements in early literacy skills such as reading (Ratminingsih et al., 2020). Another strategic effort to enrich teachers’ cultural understanding involves fostering partnerships between preschools, families, and the wider community. Effective communication between parents and teachers can provide a foundation for the development and implementation of local culture-based curricula. In this context, parents of young children act as valuable educational resources in the integration of local cultural knowledge into early learning environments (Shih, 2022).

Strategy for introducing local culture in learning

Based on the preceding discussion, it is evident that the majority of teachers have incorporated elements of local culture into the learning process. Two thematic areas that are most frequently employed to facilitate this cultural introduction are “My Environment” and “My Country.” The specific strategies utilized by teachers—encompassing the selection of materials, learning activities, instructional methods, and educational media—are summarized in the table below.

Table 2: Learning Components and Cultural Integration

Themes/ Sub-themes	Introduced culture	Activity	Method	Media	
My Environment	Traditional Food	Make “cilok”	Hands-on practice	Ingredients for making cilok	
		Making traditional cake	Question and answer; bringing the cake as a medium	Leaves, bananas, flour and cooking utensils	
		Coloring of traditional food picture	Tell a story	picture	
	Traditional game	visit to the “emping” making place		Hands-on practice	picture, video
		Playing of traditional game		Hands-on practice learning	There isn’t any
		Playing of congklak		picture	Question and answer picture
		Drawing, coloring, stick engklek		Hands-on practice	chalk to make pictures of hopscotch, gobak, broken roof tiles for gaco
	Traditional house	Playing of oray-orayan		Hands-on practice	Teacher and child
		Colorful traditional bamboo house		Coloring pictures of traditional houses	crayon

		Coloring and sticks	listening	Paper, scissor, glue
		Coloring of saung baduy	Questions and answers and demonstrations	Baduy saung drawing, and colored pencils clothes
	Traditional clothes	Traditional use clothing activities	Questions and answers and assignments	
		Introduction to how to make batik	Story and visuals	Picture
		Tell a story	Tell a story	Picture
My country	Traditional food	Make regional specialties	direct practice methods, storytelling and question and answer	Videos and picture
		coloring pictures, tasting food	Picture and traditional food	Crayons and food
	Traditional clothes	Drawing, coloring, connecting pictures	Question and answer method, demonstration method, field trip	Visual and audiovisual media
		Wearing various traditional clothes	Hands-on practice	Traditional clothes
		Coloring	Storytelling method	Mobile media
	Traditional game	Fortification game (Permainan bentengan)	Play	Tell a story
		The ankle game (Permainan engkle)	Hands-on practice	Storybook
		Play marbles	Play	Marbles
	folklore	Tell stories and practice	Storytelling method	Magazine
		Tell a story	Tell stories about local culture, for example folklore	Media dolls in traditional clothing in the Banten region
	Traditional house	Drawing, coloring, connecting pictures	Question and answer method, demonstration method, field trip	Visual and audio visual media
		drawing houses and coloring	buku cerita	worksheets, notebooks

The data in Table 2 indicate that across both themes, “My Environment” and “My Country,” there are recurring cultural elements introduced to children, including regional foods, traditional clothing, traditional games, and traditional houses. However, folklore appears exclusively within the “My Country” theme. In terms of learning activities—particularly those related to traditional foods and games—teachers have made efforts to provide real, tangible materials during instruction. This hands-on approach allows children to observe, touch, and practice directly, thereby enhancing their sensory experiences and cultural understanding. For instance, when introducing local foods such as *cilok* or traditional cakes,

teachers incorporate authentic materials such as banana leaves, flour, and cooking utensils. These materials not only familiarize children with the ingredients but also enable them to engage in the preparation process, thus fostering a deeper appreciation of the cultural significance behind these items. Such strategies have been shown to spontaneously capture children's attention and promote meaningful understanding of the complex knowledge embedded in their local environment.

In contrast, when introducing traditional houses, teachers employ activities such as drawing, coloring, connecting, and pasting images, utilizing media such as crayons, colored pencils, and worksheets. The methods implemented to convey local cultural content include question-and-answer sessions, hands-on practice, storytelling, and field trips. Among these, questioning is frequently employed as a means to assess children's understanding. Through this method, teachers communicate specific cultural knowledge and subsequently pose questions to evaluate whether the children have accurately grasped the information. The responses provided by the children reflect their cognitive abilities, particularly in processing and internalizing new knowledge. This process highlights the presence of active interaction and communication not only between teachers and students but also among the children themselves. Such interaction aligns with one of the key features of John Dewey's educational theory. As cited by (Dar, 2021), Dewey emphasizes that interaction and communication, when centered on fostering and deepening shared meaning, significantly enhance learning and developmental outcomes. In this context, children are afforded opportunities to consider, integrate, and engage with the perspectives, ideas, and experiences of their peers, thereby promoting collaborative meaning-making within their groups.

Essentially, early childhood education offers various avenues for preserving the cultural heritage of Lebak. A range of methods and media can be leveraged to cultivate children's curiosity while simultaneously minimizing monotony in the learning experience. This finding is consistent with prior research highlighting the effectiveness of game-based, conversational, and literary text-oriented approaches in teaching local culture (Kanoksilapatham, 2020; McCarthy & Goldman, 2019). Among these, storytelling—particularly in the form of folklore—emerges as a strategic pedagogical tool. Das and Chhaparia (2023) underscore storytelling as a powerful medium that connects generations through cultural narratives, thereby strengthening cultural resilience and fostering early awareness. Traditional clothing also constitutes a key component of local cultural content introduced to children. As emphasized by Adepeko et al. (2023), the early introduction of traditional attire plays a critical role in its preservation, serving not only as a symbol of cultural identity but also as a medium for self-expression and social cohesion.

Thematic learning serves as an overarching framework through which knowledge, attitudes, and skills are developed in early childhood education. Instructional content is typically delivered prior to the activity, allowing subsequent tasks to reinforce prior knowledge and cultivate positive attitudes toward the subject matter. In this context, data from the study revealed that 66% of educators introduced elements of local culture during the apperception phase—an instructional strategy aimed at connecting children's prior knowledge with new concepts. Conversely, 30% of respondents reported initiating activities without any prior introduction to the material. Apperception, as a pedagogical approach, is critical for activating existing cognitive frameworks and ensuring meaningful

learning. The absence of such preparatory engagement can hinder children's understanding, resulting in rote participation devoid of contextual comprehension. As Liu (2015) highlights, one of the core competencies of effective educators lies in their capacity to analyze and adapt teaching practices to students' specific sociocultural contexts. This task becomes particularly complex when educators are working with learners from diverse ethnic, cultural, or racial backgrounds. Similarly, Vermunt (2014) argues that facilitating student learning that is active, meaning-oriented, self-regulated, and collaborative imposes increasingly demanding and multifaceted roles on teachers

To enhance not only children's learning outcomes but also their sense of self-efficacy within the learning process, educators must intentionally foster self-regulation skills (Zaki, 2018). In line with this, Ki Hajar Dewantara emphasized that education is fundamentally about guiding the intrinsic potential of each child, enabling them to achieve personal well-being and social harmony (Anwar et al., 2020). Consequently, early childhood educators are required to engage in ongoing critical reflection, assessing whether their pedagogical strategies align with the core principles of early childhood education. Such reflection must take into account the developmental stage of the child, the sociocultural demands of the time, and the extent to which learning experiences are both meaningful and enjoyable—thereby nurturing a sustained interest in learning. This reflective and child-centered approach echoes Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy, positioning learning as a holistic endeavor rooted in the child's context. Furthermore, as Dewey (as cited in Sikandar, 2015) emphasized, teachers—recognized as key agents within the learning community—play a pivotal role in shaping and directing educational experiences.

Conclusion

Educators in Lebak, Banten, Indonesia, exhibited a strong familiarity with their local cultural heritage, encompassing traditional foods, games, clothing, architecture, and folklore. In classroom settings, a variety of pedagogical strategies—such as experiential learning, interactive discussions, and storytelling—were employed to introduce these cultural elements. These strategies were further enriched by the use of diverse media, including physical artifacts, educational videos, and art tools, to enhance student engagement and participation. Despite the widespread incorporation of cultural content in instructional activities, the formal integration of local culture into curriculum documents and lesson planning remained limited. This discrepancy highlights a disconnect between pedagogical practices and curriculum development, which stands in contrast to the national directive mandating the inclusion of local wisdom in early childhood education. The findings point to an urgent need for stronger institutional support and focused professional development to enable educators to systematically embed cultural content into instructional planning. Intentional planning for cultural education not only demonstrates teacher preparedness in transmitting cultural values but also cultivates children's appreciation for, and emotional attachment to, their cultural and national identities.

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