

# Teacher Strategies in Developing Student Identity Through A Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) Approach in Primary Schools

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## ABSTRACT

Indonesia as a nation has various ethnicities and cultures, which are characterized by unique languages, traditions and values. However, in the rapidly growing dynamics of globalization, this diversity is often faced with challenges in maintaining its authenticity. The erosion of identity is a serious concern today. Identity is not only about how individuals or groups recognize themselves, but also how they are recognized and accepted in society. In Indonesia, the educational process has an important role in forming and strengthening students' identities, especially at the elementary school level. This research aims to describe teachers' strategies in developing student identity through the Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) approach in elementary schools. This research uses a qualitative research approach and a phenomenological type. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The research subjects were the homeroom teacher and fourth grade elementary school students. This research is explained in several steps, namely data reduction, data presentation and drawing conclusions. The results showed that teachers integrated local culture in open materials by including folklore, local history, and traditional crafts. teachers also connect lesson material with students' daily lives to make learning more relevant and meaningful, using examples that come from students' daily experiences; Use of language relevant to students' cultural background; Teachers also use a variety of learning methods. The strategies used by teachers using the Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) approach have proven to be effective in helping students understand and appreciate their cultural identity.

## KEYWORDS

culturally relevant teaching (CRT); student identity; teacher strategies

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian nation is a diverse nation, with unique ethnic groups and cultures that have various different backgrounds that form the identity of Indonesia (PDSPK, 2016). Indonesia has more than 300 ethnic groups and 700 local languages spread across various islands and regions, creating a unique, beautiful, and diverse cultural mosaic (Riyadi, Prabowo, & Hakim, 2024). This diversity is a valuable asset for the Indonesian nation. Each ethnic group has its own identity, marked by unique languages, traditions, and values. However, challenges arise in preserving and maintaining this culture amid the rapid flow of globalization and modernization. According to Putri (2024), globalization impacts the fading of Indonesia's original culture and identity, especially among the younger generation. The flow of globalization affects individuals' relationships with their culture, including the dangers of cultural homogenization and Western cultural dominance (Otasevic, 2013). Many traditions and languages are beginning to be marginalized due to the growing influence of global culture. The younger generation is often exposed to and interested in global popular culture, such as Westernization, leading to a loss of interest and knowledge about their cultural heritage, thus eroding students' original identity.

The erosion of identity is a very serious concern today. Identity is not just about individuals or groups recognizing themselves but also about how individuals can be recognized or accepted in society. In Indonesia, the educational process plays an important role in shaping and strengthening students' identities, especially in elementary schools. Elementary schools are the primary foundation in shaping an individual's identity, which will determine how the individual will be in the future. A strong and positive student identity is crucial to supporting their social, emotional, and academic development (Husnaini, Sarmiati, & Harimurti, 2024). Student identity is an important aspect of educational development, encompassing not only academic achievement but also an understanding and appreciation of themselves and their cultural backgrounds.

Amid increasing cultural diversity, a culturally responsive teaching (CRT) approach is highly relevant and important. Not only does it aim to improve student learning outcomes, but CRT also emphasizes the importance of integrating students' cultures into the learning process to develop student identity and help students understand and appreciate their cultural identity (Achsani & Widajati, 2024). The Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) approach is a method that connects students' culture and habits with the subject matter (Husnaini et al., 2024). Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) is also a pedagogical approach that seeks to recognize, appreciate, and use students' cultural backgrounds as important resources in learning. According to Gay (2000), CRT is teaching "to and through the strengths of students' cultures." This means that teachers not only impart knowledge but also create an inclusive and supportive learning environment where all students feel valued and accepted.

The use of the environment and cultural background in the learning process is certainly in line with the principles of the independent curriculum outlined in the decision of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (KEMENDIKBUDRISTEK) Number 56/M/2022 concerning guidelines for implementing the curriculum in the context of learning recovery. This states that: learning is designed based on students' development, achievement levels, needs, reflecting students' characteristics or identity, continuous learning, relevant learning to students' environment and culture, and learning that can involve parents and the community around the school (Kepmendikbudristekdikti, 2022). At the elementary school level, where students are at the early stages of identity development, the application of CRT becomes very important. This is where students

begin to form an understanding of themselves and the world around them. Teachers can play a key role in helping students build a strong and positive identity by valuing and integrating their culture into learning.

The purpose of this study is to describe the strategies used by teachers in developing student identity through the CRT approach. This study focuses on strategies used by elementary school teachers in developing student identity through the CRT approach. This research is important because it provides insights into how teachers can use culturally responsive teaching strategies to support student identity development. By understanding effective practices, schools and educators can better design inclusive curricula and learning environments.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

This research uses a qualitative research approach and a phenomenological type. According to (Nartin et al., 2024) The qualitative research approach is a method used in research to understand social phenomena from the perspective of subjects or participants. The aim of this research is to describe teachers' strategies for developing student identity through the Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) approach in elementary schools.

Data was collected in three ways, namely in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The research subjects were the homeroom teacher and fourth grade elementary school students. Data collection techniques used include in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore teachers' understanding and experience in implementing CRT strategies, while classroom observations were used to see directly how these strategies were implemented in daily teaching practice. Document analysis involves examining teaching materials, lesson plans, and student projects to understand more about the integration of local culture and the learning methods used

This research was analyzed using the Milles & Huberman technique which consists of several steps, namely data reduction, data presentation and drawing conclusions. The validity of the data in this study was assessed to ensure that the measuring instruments used were truly valid. The validity of the data was evaluated through technical triangulation and source triangulation methods. According to (Minsih, Rusnilawati, & Mujahid, 2019) triangulation is a technique for verifying the validity of data by using external references, which function to check or compare the data that has been collected.

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Based on the data analysis obtained through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis, several strategies used by teachers through the Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) approach to develop students' identities were identified. This study shows that teachers employ the CRT approach using several strategies. The following are the CRT strategies used by teachers in elementary schools:

### **3.1. Integration of Local Culture into Lesson Plans**

Teachers design lesson plans by integrating the Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) approach, incorporating and connecting it to local culture. For example, this study is conducted in an elementary school in Jambi Province. The learning materials integrated with local culture are in the IPAS (Social Studies) subject for 4th grade, Semester II, with the Learning Outcomes (LO) being "cultural diversity, local wisdom, history (both figures

and periods) in the province where students live and relating it to current life contexts." Through this LO, teachers create various materials with local contexts, such as the first meeting covering the early history of Jambi Province, local figures in the development of Jambi Province, positive traits to emulate from local figures, the condition of the local area then and now, and the kingdoms that once thrived in the students' local area. A concrete example is the teacher incorporating folk tales like "The Story of Rang Kayo Hitam" into the material on the origins of Jambi Province, the biography of Jambi Province's heroes, local traditional foods, the local landscape, and more. Additionally, students discuss cultural values and their relevance to their current lives.

### **3.2. Connecting Lesson Material to Students' Everyday Lives**

Lesson materials are often linked to students' everyday lives to make learning more meaningful and relevant. Teachers use examples from students' daily experiences and their surrounding environment. In interviews, teachers mentioned that by connecting the concepts of lesson materials to real-life experiences, they help students see the connection between what they learn and the real world. This also supports students in developing their identities as they can see their cultural values and personal experiences reflected academically.

For example, in mathematics lessons, teachers use everyday activities such as shopping at the market or calculating harvest yields. Through these activities, students from different cultural backgrounds can recognize and appreciate local economic practices and shopping habits. In science lessons, teachers involve students in observing the school environment to study the local ecosystem, identifying local plants and animals, and linking these observations to lessons on biodiversity. In Indonesian language lessons, teachers teach folk tales where students read, retell, and write reviews of their own folk tales, which helps them build confidence, appreciate their identities, and foster pride in their cultural heritage.

### **3.3. Using Language Relevant to Students' Cultural Backgrounds**

The use of language relevant to students' cultural backgrounds is a crucial aspect of CRT. Teachers strive to use language that is understood by all students, including local languages if necessary. This helps students feel valued and engaged in the learning process. Teachers also encourage students to use their mother tongue as a tool in group discussions or presentations, allowing them to express their ideas more freely and confidently. For example, in a class where most students speak Malay-Jambi, the teacher allows the use of Malay-Jambi in group discussions to facilitate understanding of challenging concepts before switching to Indonesian.

### **3.4. Using Diverse Teaching Methods**

Teachers employ various teaching methods to accommodate different learning styles and ensure the involvement of all students in the learning process. These methods include group discussions, role-playing, community-based projects, and the use of visual and audio media. The use of diverse methods helps create a dynamic and inclusive learning environment. For instance, in IPAS lessons, teachers use role-playing where students act out local historical figures. This makes learning more enjoyable and helps students understand the roles and contributions of these figures in their history. Another example is the use of game-based learning methods such as interactive quizzes, puzzles, snakes and ladders, and traditional games. These methods can be adapted to include elements of local culture.

The culturally responsive teaching (CRT) design plays a crucial role in shaping students' identities in elementary schools. Teachers applying the CRT approach effectively integrate local culture into lesson plans. By incorporating familiar cultural elements such as folk tales, local history, and traditional crafts, teachers create a more contextual and relevant learning experience. This strategy increases student engagement, helps them connect more deeply with the material, and fosters a greater understanding of their own identities. According to Khasanah et al. (2023), the integrated CRT lesson design helps bridge educational gaps by providing equal opportunities and support tailored to the diverse backgrounds of students. Furthermore, Dwi, Nur, & Marsetiya (2024) state that using CRT principles in lesson planning creates an inclusive and empowering classroom environment for each student. However, resource limitations can be a challenge, as not all schools have access to comprehensive materials on local culture, requiring teachers to be creative in creating or adapting resources, and finding local cultural reading materials or sources can be difficult.

Additionally, teachers often connect lesson materials to students' everyday lives to make learning more meaningful. By using examples from students' daily experiences, such as market shopping or environmental observations, teachers enhance students' understanding and practical application of concepts. This strategy makes lessons more accessible and relevant for students. However, since students' everyday lives can vary greatly, teachers must ensure that the examples and applications used are relevant for all students. Research by Wati, Kurnisar, & Mutiara (2023) shows that to help students understand the importance and value of what they learn, teachers build connections between lesson content and students' personal experiences, such as leveraging students' cultural resources.

An important component of CRT is the use of language appropriate to students' cultural backgrounds. Teachers can facilitate students' comfort and engagement in the learning process by speaking in languages that all students can understand, even incorporating local languages if necessary. This approach helps students feel more comfortable and confident while aiding in the understanding of challenging ideas. However, accommodating every language in a class with high linguistic diversity can be challenging. Ilangko Subramaniam, Noorulafiza Abdul Muthalib, & Siti Nor Hamahida Zainal (2014) note that students feel more connected to their cultural identities when they can identify words in their mother tongue based on spelling and sound.

The use of diverse teaching methods helps meet the different learning needs among students. Methods such as group discussions, role-playing, and community-based projects make learning more engaging and enjoyable, increasing students' active participation and helping them understand and retain information better. However, some of these methods may require additional time and resources for preparation and execution. Overall, the CRT approach employed by elementary school teachers offers significant benefits for developing students' identities, though challenges need to be addressed. These strategies play a vital role in creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment, enhancing students' understanding, engagement, and pride in their cultural identities.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This research reveals that the teacher's strategy in developing student identity through the Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) approach in elementary schools is very effective. Teachers who use this approach succeed in integrating local culture in learning design, connecting lesson material with students' daily lives, using language that is relevant to students' cultural backgrounds, and applying a variety of learning methods. The CRT

approach not only increases student engagement and motivation, but also helps them understand and appreciate their own cultural identity. Despite challenges such as limited resources and linguistic diversity, these strategies have proven capable of creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment. Thus, the Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) approach is very important to implement in basic education in Indonesia to strengthen students' cultural identity and support their social, emotional and academic development.

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