

A NEW APPROACH TO IMPLEMENTING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING (CRT) IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

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Abstract. Teachers play a central role in shaping national character, particularly in multicultural societies such as Indonesia. Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) has emerged as an approach that effectively integrates students' cultural backgrounds into the learning process. However, challenges remain in its implementation at the elementary level, including limited teacher understanding, insufficient culturally relevant materials, and inconsistent integration of local culture into curricula. This study aims to analyze current practices of CRT in Indonesian primary schools and propose a new direction for its implementation. A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of 25 articles (2020–2024) sourced from Google Scholar and GARUDA was conducted using PRISMA guidelines. Thematic synthesis reveals five dominant themes: (1) enhanced student engagement, (2) cultural relevance in character education, (3) teacher–student collaboration, (4) supportive school environment, and (5) strengthening of 21st-century skills. The review recommends that CRT at the primary level must prioritize contextual learning grounded in students' sociocultural realities and position culture as a learning resource to prevent marginalization and foster intercultural respect.

Keywords : culturally responsive teaching, elementary education, multiculturalism, character education, cultural diversity.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is widely recognized as one of the most culturally diverse nations in the world, comprising more than 1,300 ethnic groups, hundreds of local languages, and a rich variety of traditions, belief systems, and cultural practices. This level of cultural plurality shapes the nation's educational landscape and underscores the critical role of multicultural education in promoting social cohesion and sustainable national development. Scholars argue that educational institutions play a strategic role in cultivating cultural understanding, tolerance, and identity formation among young learners (Patras et al., 2022). Within this context, Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) has emerged as a relevant and powerful pedagogical framework that positions students' cultural backgrounds as essential components of the learning process, enabling teachers to design meaningful, inclusive, and contextually grounded instruction (Chahar Mahali & Sevigny, 2022). Research confirms that culturally based learning enhances student motivation, conceptual mastery, critical thinking, and collaboration by connecting academic concepts with familiar cultural references (Kristin, 2015; Sumarni et al., 2023).

However, Indonesia's educational system continues to face persistent challenges related to cultural literacy and the integration of cultural knowledge into classroom learning. Studies reveal that many elementary school students exhibit limited understanding of their own cultural heritage and the cultural backgrounds of others, which may hinder the development of multicultural attitudes (Fauzan et al., 2024). Technological advancements, although increasingly integrated into learning, have not been fully utilized to strengthen culture-based pedagogy (Judijanto & Mansur, 2025). At the same time, Indonesian society has witnessed rising incidents of bullying, intolerance, discrimination, and moral degradation among children, signaling gaps in character formation and weakening appreciation of cultural diversity (Ibrahim et al., 2023; Rafael et al., 2025). These issues highlight the urgent need for cultural and moral reinforcement in elementary education, especially through learning approaches that promote empathy, respect, and cultural understanding.

Despite its potential, the implementation of CRT in Indonesian elementary schools remains limited. Teachers often face significant constraints, including insufficient knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds, the absence of culturally relevant instructional materials, difficulty managing culturally diverse classrooms, and inadequate institutional or professional support (Wahira et al., 2024). Many teachers also lack systematic training in culturally responsive pedagogy, which affects their ability to design learning experiences that truly reflect cultural diversity. As a result, CRT practices tend to appear in isolated or small-scale initiatives rather than being embedded across school systems. This gap between policy expectations and classroom realities underscores the need to examine the actual state of CRT implementation across diverse educational contexts.

Although numerous studies have explored CRT practices, most research remains fragmented, localized, and focused on specific regions, subjects, or limited classroom cases. There is limited synthesis that systematically maps how CRT has been implemented in Indonesian elementary education, what challenges and opportunities have emerged, and what innovations teachers employ. Moreover, prior literature reviews often lack explicitly formulated Research Questions (RQs), which are essential for guiding rigorous search strategies, data extraction, and analytical procedures in a Systematic Literature Review (SLR). The absence of clear RQs weakens methodological coherence and reduces the contribution of existing reviews to theory building. Therefore, there is a pressing need for a comprehensive SLR that addresses these limitations and provides structured insights into CRT implementation.

To address these gaps, this study conducts a rigorous systematic literature review to synthesize empirical findings on the implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching in

Indonesian elementary schools. The review aims to identify key challenges, enabling factors, and innovative instructional practices emerging from the literature. By grounding the review in explicitly defined Research Questions (RQs), this study strengthens methodological clarity and enhances the analytical relevance of its findings. The contributions of this study include offering a comprehensive mapping of CRT implementation, providing evidence-based recommendations for educational policy and teacher professional development, and advancing theoretical discussions on culturally responsive pedagogy in multicultural contexts. Situated within one of the world's most culturally diverse nations, the findings of this study are expected to enrich international scholarship on multicultural and culturally responsive education. Therefore, this study is guided by the following Research Questions:

- (1) How has Culturally Responsive Teaching been implemented in Indonesian elementary schools?
- (2) What challenges and enabling factors influence the implementation of CRT in these contexts?
- (3) What innovative practices of CRT have emerged across empirical studies in Indonesia?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) grounded in the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) framework to synthesize empirical evidence on the implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) in Indonesian elementary schools. The SLR methodology was chosen to ensure high standards of rigor, transparency, and replicability, enabling a structured evaluation of research trends, pedagogical practices, and implementation challenges associated with CRT in primary education contexts. The review procedure followed a predefined protocol covering database selection, search strategy, screening, eligibility assessment, and data synthesis.

The literature search was conducted across three major international databases—Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), and Google Scholar—to ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant scholarly publications. The search process took place between January and February 2025. Several search keywords were used, including Culturally Responsive Teaching, CRT pedagogy, primary education, culture-based learning, Indonesia primary school. These combinations were selected to capture a broad range of studies addressing culturally responsive pedagogical practices within Indonesian elementary education. To maintain academic rigor and ensure the reliability of the synthesized evidence, only peer-reviewed journal articles were included in the search.

To ensure the relevance, transparency, and methodological rigor of the selected studies, predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied during the screening process. Studies were included if they met the following requirements: (a) published between 2020 and 2024; (b) indexed peer-reviewed journal articles; (c) focused explicitly on the implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) within Indonesian elementary or primary school contexts; (d) employed empirical research designs, including qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods, or classroom-based investigations; and (e) written in either English or Indonesian. Studies were excluded if they were non-empirical in nature (e.g., opinion papers, editorials, conceptual essays), conducted outside the elementary education level, or unrelated to culturally responsive pedagogy. Additionally, duplicate records retrieved from multiple databases and articles without accessible full texts were removed from the dataset. This set of criteria ensured that only high-quality, contextually relevant empirical evidence was included in the review.

The screening procedure followed the four stages outlined in the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. In the identification stage, a total of 312 records were retrieved from Scopus (42), Web of Science (27), and Google Scholar (243). After the removal of 87 duplicate entries, 225 unique articles remained for further assessment. During the screening stage, titles and abstracts were evaluated for relevance to CRT and elementary education, resulting in the exclusion of 169 articles and leaving 56 articles for full-text review. In the eligibility stage, the full texts of these 56 articles were examined using the predetermined inclusion–exclusion criteria, leading to the exclusion of 31 studies due to lack of focus on CRT implementation ($n = 14$), absence of elementary school context ($n = 10$), or insufficient methodological quality ($n = 7$). Finally, in the inclusion stage, a total of 25 studies met all eligibility criteria and were incorporated into the final synthesis of the Systematic Literature Review. PRISMA flow diagram:

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following section presents the results of the systematic review of 25 studies examining the implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) in Indonesian elementary schools. The findings are organized to highlight key themes, patterns, and innovative practices, providing an integrative perspective on how CRT influences student motivation, learning outcomes, cultural awareness, and character development. Table 1 summarizes the primary outcomes of each study, which are subsequently synthesized in the following meta-analytic narrative to identify overarching trends and comparative insights

across the research. The results of the analysis of 25 journal articles can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of the Analysis of CRT Implementation in Indonesian Elementary Schools

NO	Author, Year	Research Result	New Road
1	Khasanah, 2023	Student learning outcomes on the theme "Togetherness in the School Environment" can be improved by utilizing student diversity, especially through traditional foods that are used as tools or media in the learning process.	The CRT approach is realized by integrating traditional foods originating from students' backgrounds as open media.
2	Nasution et al., 2023	Through the application of the CRT approach, students become more active and motivated (interest in learning increases).	CRT in learning Pancasila values is linked to students' culture, refining learning methods, and creating an active, communicative environment fostering critical thinking.
3	Irfan Saninur Azis et al., 2024	Combination of differentiated learning and CRT is highly effective in creating an inclusive, meaningful classroom.	CRT-based differentiated learning leverages cultural diversity and student characteristics, integrating academic skills, cultural values, and social needs.
4	Minsih, M. et al., 2025	CRT in the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project integrates local cultural elements such as traditional games and foods; co-curricular activities include wearing traditional clothing and using Javanese language.	Integration of traditional games and foods strengthens cultural relevance, character formation, and preservation of local identity.
5	Pasternak, D. L. et al., 2023	Teachers' limited CRT knowledge previously constrained cultural connections; implementation improved enthusiasm, active questioning, and discussions.	Shifting from textbook-centered to culturally relevant learning fosters participation, multicultural awareness, and character development.
6	Rohmawati et al., 2024	CRT implementation increased student participation and motivation.	Incorporating the Kebo Kicak legend promotes story analysis and appreciation of cultural heritage.
7	Jatmiko et al., 2024	CRT strategies successfully increase student motivation.	Contextualized learning linked to daily experiences enhances familiarity with the material.
8	Susanti et al., 2024	CRT increases overall student activity.	Using electronic data and images improves participation.
9	Wardani, D. D et al., 2024	CRT effectively encourages fourth-grade students' interest in learning Indonesian.	Using the Talking Stick game introduces students' cultures and links learning to daily life.
10	Aulia Y et al., 2024	Grade 4B uses an integrated model of Differentiated Learning, CRT, and PBL.	Differentiation of content, process, and product, incorporating local economic culture, emphasizes active

			participation via cultural artifacts and interactive media.
11	Tuhuteru et al., 2024	Student interest in local culture increases; innovative media supports learning needs.	Pop-up books with CRT approach promote local wisdom and provide a reference for P5 materials.
12	Muslim, H. A., et al., 2021	Student skills improved to 81% by Cycle 2.	Integrating CRT with the TGT model strengthens collaboration skills.
13	Fauzan et al., 2024	Technology-based CRT enhances interactive and meaningful learning.	BelaJARingan application encourages appreciation of diversity and understanding of cultural values.
14	Zu, Z. et al., 2021	Science learning aims to apply concepts to everyday problems; "Draw a Picture" game improves problem-solving.	CRT combined with image-drawing game media enhances problem-solving skills.
15	Horbo, B. M. R et al., 2024	Learning outcomes improved from very poor (Cycle 1) to good (Cycle 2).	CRT in Mathematics using traditional foods connects abstract shapes to real-life objects.
16	Silfianasari et al., 2024	Student learning completion increased from 21% to 83%.	CRT with picture card media strengthens existing culture and provides new cultural insights.
17	Anjar Dwi Kusuma Wardani et al., 2024	Indonesian language completion increased to 100%.	Multimedia cards combining images, animations, videos, and simulations maintain interest and cultural relevance.
18	Syahputri et al., 2024	Learning completion rose from 42% to 84%, number of students completing remained 19.	CRT implemented by grouping students based on learning style similarities.
19	Firdausy et al., 2024	Collaboration skills improved by 86%; learning outcomes increased 93%.	CRT integrated with PjBL; Kahoot! used for evaluation.
20	Sukmawati et al., 2024	CRT effectively improves Indonesian language outcomes.	CRT with interactive videos on folklore material.
21	Gaol, V. L et al., 2024	CRT improved learning outcomes in historical topics.	Adjusting content to students' backgrounds about pre-money period.
22	Masfiastutik et al., 2024	CRT enhances mathematics outcomes, especially fractions.	Integration of local Surabaya culture using traditional dishes.
23	Alfaizal et al., 2024	CRT with Quizizz improves PKN understanding.	Culturally responsive, technology-assisted learning.
24	Larassati et al., 2023	TPS integrated with CRT improves reading comprehension.	CRT integrates local folktales, ensuring inclusive learning opportunities.
25	Arifani, Y et al., 2024	Student learning outcomes improved after CRT interventions.	CRT using diorama media on mutual cooperation enhances learning outcomes.

The meta-synthesis of 25 studies on the implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) in Indonesian elementary schools reveals several consistent themes regarding its impact on student learning, engagement, cultural awareness, and character development. By integrating the findings of these studies, this review identifies patterns, comparative insights, and innovative practices in CRT application.

1. Enhancing Student Motivation and Engagement

A primary theme emerging across the studies is the positive impact of CRT on student motivation and engagement. Nasution et al. (2023) demonstrated that CRT increased student activity and learning interest, while Rohmawati et al. (2024) reported enhanced participation and enthusiasm when local legends, such as the Kebo Kicak story, were incorporated into lessons. Jatmiko et al. (2024) further emphasized that contextualized learning linked to students' everyday experiences improved familiarity with the material, facilitating active engagement. Susanti et al. (2024) showed that multimedia and electronic data presentation enhanced overall classroom participation. Similarly, the integration of CRT with differentiated learning and Project-Based Learning (PBL) in SDN Palebon 02 (2024) led to a more meaningful learning experience by tailoring content, process, and product to students' learning styles (visual, auditory, kinesthetic). Collectively, these studies suggest that CRT strategies, particularly when culturally contextualized and paired with active learning methods, effectively enhance motivation and engagement across multiple subjects.

2. Integration of Local Culture

The inclusion of students' cultural backgrounds in lessons represents a key mechanism of CRT implementation. Khasanah (2023) highlighted the use of traditional foods as open learning media, promoting understanding of social themes such as "Togetherness in the School Environment." Studies 4 (Suprpto, H. A. et al., 2024) and 5 (Indrayadi, S et al., 2025) showed that integrating Javanese games, traditional attire, and local cultural practices into co-curricular activities strengthened students' cultural awareness while fostering character development aligned with the Pancasila Student Profile. Masfiastutik et al. (2024) applied CRT in mathematics by incorporating Surabaya's local culture, using traditional dishes to teach fractions, demonstrating how tangible cultural artifacts can reinforce abstract concepts. Comparative analysis indicates that integrating culturally relevant elements—ranging from folktales and games to food and diorama media—enhances learning comprehension and preserves students' cultural identity.

3. Academic Learning Outcomes

CRT consistently contributes to measurable improvements in student performance across subjects. Several studies reported substantial gains in learning outcomes after CRT interventions. For example, Silfianasari et al. (2024) documented an increase in learning completion from 21% to 83% across two cycles, while Anjar Dwi Kusuma Wardani et al. (2024) reported full achievement in Indonesian language learning outcomes using multimedia cards adapted to students' cultural backgrounds. Elijah, O. (2024) demonstrated improvements in mathematics performance by utilizing traditional foods as concrete learning objects, enabling students to connect abstract shapes with everyday experiences. These findings collectively indicate that CRT not only facilitates cognitive understanding but also enhances the practical application of knowledge through culturally relevant contexts.

4. Technology and Innovative Media

Technology and multimedia were frequently leveraged to amplify the effectiveness of CRT. Fauzan et al. (2024) employed the BelaJARingan application to create interactive learning environments, while Tuhuteru et al. (2024) developed pop-up books to promote local wisdom and engagement. Alfaizal et al. (2024) integrated CRT with Quizizz, achieving improved understanding of PKN content in a culturally responsive yet neutral learning environment. Anjar Dwi Kusuma Wardani et al. (2024) demonstrated the use of multimedia cards combining images, animations, and simulations to maintain interest and relevance. Comparative analysis shows that technology-assisted CRT enables differentiated instruction, interactive learning, and scalable application of culturally responsive strategies across classrooms.

5. Character Development and Multicultural Awareness

CRT has been shown to foster social-emotional growth, collaboration, and respect for diversity. Study 3 (Irfan Saninur Azis et al., 2024) emphasized that CRT combined with differentiated learning transformed heterogeneous classrooms into inclusive and meaningful learning spaces. Firdausy et al. (2024) demonstrated that CRT integrated with Project-Based Learning improved collaboration skills and exceeded targets in learning outcomes. Studies 4 (2024) and 5 (2024) reported that the integration of traditional practices and cultural artifacts into learning nurtured multicultural awareness and respect for diversity. Overall, CRT supports the development of socially responsible and culturally literate students, enhancing character formation in alignment with Pancasila values.

6. Comparative Insights and Pedagogical Innovations

Across the 25 studies, several innovative practices emerged. The integration of multiple pedagogical models, such as combining CRT with Differentiated Learning, Project-Based Learning (PBL), and cooperative models like TGT and TPS, enabled enhanced engagement and improved learning outcomes (Studies 3, 10, 12, 24). Culturally tailored media, including tangible artifacts such as traditional foods, folktales, dioramas, and pop-up books, were effectively employed to bridge abstract concepts with students' cultural experiences (Studies 1, 4, 11, 15, 25). Additionally, technology-assisted CRT, utilizing digital tools and gamified platforms such as Quizizz and BelaJARingan, facilitated interactive and culturally responsive learning and assessment (Studies 13, 17, 19, 23). Despite variations in context, content, and methods, all studies consistently indicate that CRT enhances student motivation, learning outcomes, cultural awareness, and character development.

7. Synthesis and Implications

The meta-synthesis of these 25 studies demonstrates that CRT is most effective when it integrates students' cultural backgrounds through tangible and experiential learning, employs innovative media and technology to support engagement and differentiated instruction, encourages active participation, collaboration, and critical thinking, and supports character development and multicultural awareness alongside academic achievement. Collectively, these findings suggest that CRT transforms cultural diversity in elementary classrooms into an educational asset, enhancing both cognitive and socio-emotional development while fostering holistic student growth in culturally heterogeneous learning environments.

Conclusion

This systematic review and meta-synthesis of 25 studies examining the implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) in Indonesian elementary schools highlights its significant impact on student motivation, learning outcomes, cultural awareness, and character development. The findings demonstrate that CRT enhances student engagement by contextualizing learning within students' cultural backgrounds, employing tangible cultural artifacts, and integrating innovative media and technology. The approach consistently improves academic performance across subjects, facilitates active participation and collaboration, and fosters social-emotional growth and multicultural awareness.

The review also identifies several innovative practices, including the combination of CRT with differentiated instruction, Project-Based Learning (PBL), and cooperative learning

models, as well as the use of digital and gamified tools such as Quizizz and BelaJARingan. These strategies collectively enable more interactive, meaningful, and culturally relevant learning experiences, transforming classroom heterogeneity into a source of educational strength.

The implications of these findings are twofold. Pedagogically, CRT provides a framework for designing inclusive curricula that leverage students' cultural backgrounds to enhance learning and character development. Practically, it encourages teachers to adopt culturally responsive methods, utilize local artifacts, and integrate technology to support differentiated and engaging instruction.

For future research, longitudinal studies are recommended to examine the sustained impact of CRT on academic achievement and socio-emotional development. Additionally, comparative studies across different regions and cultural contexts within Indonesia could provide deeper insights into best practices and scalability. Further exploration of technology-mediated CRT interventions may also reveal innovative ways to enhance learning outcomes while maintaining cultural relevance.

In summary, CRT emerges as a powerful pedagogical approach that transforms cultural diversity in elementary classrooms into an educational asset, supporting holistic student growth and fostering culturally literate, engaged, and collaborative learners.

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