

## Profiling Cultural Literacy Among Elementary Students Through the Local Wisdom of the "*Siraman Sedudo*" Tradition in Nganjuk

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### Abstract

This study explores the cultural literacy of fifth-grade students regarding the Siraman Sedudo tradition in Nganjuk Regency, East Java, using a qualitative descriptive approach. The research aims to uncover students' understanding, attitudes, and involvement in preserving this local wisdom rooted in ancestral heritage. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with a cultural figure, questionnaires distributed to 21 students of SDN 2 Werungotok (selected using purposive sampling), and relevant literature studies. The research was conducted between January and March 2023. The findings reveal that while most students are aware of the Siraman Sedudo ceremony and express pride in its uniqueness, their understanding tends to be superficial, focusing mainly on factual aspects such as the time of the event. In-depth knowledge regarding its historical significance, symbolic meanings, and spiritual values remains limited. The study also finds a gap between students' positive attitudes and their actual involvement in cultural preservation, often due to restricted access and lack of school-based cultural programs. Furthermore, social media emerged as a dominant source of information, albeit without sufficient context or educational framing. The research highlights the importance of integrating local cultural content into school curricula through project-based learning, narrative engagement, and collaboration with local communities. It concludes that education should serve as a dynamic platform for revitalizing cultural traditions, fostering active student participation, and ensuring intergenerational transmission of heritage. Recommendations for future studies and educational practices are discussed.

## INTRODUCTION

Understanding and preserving local wisdom is an essential aspect of safeguarding the cultural heritage of a region. In the era of globalization and the influx of foreign cultures, the urgency to protect local identity becomes increasingly critical. Indonesia, as a multicultural nation, possesses a vast wealth of cultural traditions, one of which is the *Siraman Sedudo* tradition in Nganjuk, East Java. This annual ritual is not merely a ceremonial event but also a reflection of the cultural identity of the local community, passed down from generation to generation (Bihari, 2023). As an inherited practice from the Majapahit era, *Siraman Sedudo* symbolizes resilience and cultural continuity. Its survival amidst modernization indicates a deep-rooted significance in the lives of the people.

The *Siraman Sedudo* ritual embodies spiritual, social, and cultural values deeply respected by the local community. It is based on the belief that the waters of Sedudo waterfall possess purifying power, bringing blessings and protection (Putri et al., 2022). The annual ceremony includes a sacred bathing procession involving community leaders and traditional figures, illustrating a blend of faith, tradition, and communal identity. The continuity of this tradition across centuries affirms the relevance and adaptability of local customs (Yetti et al., 2025). According to cultural anthropologists, traditions

survive because they evolve while maintaining their core values. This flexibility allows the community to maintain cultural identity while responding to changing times.

The *Siraman Sedudo* tradition also functions as an informal educational medium, transmitting values such as mutual cooperation, respect for ancestors, and devotion to God (Syawalna & Susilo, 2023). For the younger generation, especially children, exposure to such traditions can foster a deeper connection with their cultural roots. However, in the face of digital lifestyles and urban influences, such exposure is becoming less frequent. Formal education can play a pivotal role in addressing this gap through curriculum integration. When culture is brought into classrooms, students not only learn about it but also internalize its values in a meaningful context (Alkhudiry, 2022). Therefore, traditions like *Siraman Sedudo* should be actively promoted as part of character education.

In addition to its spiritual and educational dimensions, *Siraman Sedudo* has evolved into a cultural tourism attraction that contributes economically to the region. Tourists from various regions attend the event, generating income for local vendors and service providers (Baldi et al., 2022). This transformation demonstrates that cultural heritage, when managed well, can be a sustainable asset. The event creates employment opportunities, boosts small businesses, and supports local development. This economic aspect complements the cultural significance, reinforcing the community's motivation to preserve the tradition. Thus, the tradition embodies a multifaceted value spiritual, social, and economic that strengthens its role in local society (Solihin et al., 2025).

Despite the cultural and economic richness of the *Siraman Sedudo* tradition, there is growing concern about declining youth participation, particularly among elementary school students. Studies show that younger generations are becoming increasingly detached from traditional customs due to limited cultural exposure at home and school (Yulianti et al., 2022). This detachment, if left unaddressed, could result in the gradual erosion of cultural identity. One strategic solution lies in enhancing cultural literacy from an early age. Cultural literacy is not limited to knowledge about traditions but includes students' ability to reflect on, respect, and engage with cultural values in their daily lives (Aqli, 2022). Strengthening cultural literacy aligns with the goal of shaping nationally rooted, yet globally open-minded citizens.

According to Ernawati et al. (2024), local wisdom represents collective knowledge that evolves through communal experience and is transmitted intergenerationally. These values govern social, environmental, and spiritual life, making them essential for community coherence. In the educational context, integrating local wisdom like *Siraman Sedudo* into learning activities provides relevant, contextual, and meaningful experiences, especially in teaching explanatory texts (Munawaroh & Setyawan, 2024). Schools, as formal educational institutions, hold a strategic role in embedding cultural values in students' characters (Suri & Chandra, 2021). By adopting culture-based learning strategies, schools can both enrich student competencies and contribute to cultural preservation. This study, therefore, investigates students' understanding, attitudes, and involvement in the *Siraman Sedudo* tradition, while exploring how its integration into classroom learning can foster cultural literacy. This study, therefore, aims to explore students' understanding, attitudes, and involvement in the *Siraman Sedudo* tradition and how its integration into school curricula can enhance cultural literacy and foster the preservation of local wisdom.

## METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach aimed at illustrating and analyzing the cultural literacy of elementary students regarding the *Siraman Sedudo* tradition in Nganjuk Regency. This approach was chosen for its ability to explore meaning, understanding, and student experiences in interacting with their local culture. As a naturalistic and contextual method, qualitative research is well-suited to uncover cultural phenomena within educational settings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2023). The primary subjects of this study were 21 fifth-grade students from SDN 2 Werungotok, Nganjuk District, selected to assess their comprehension and involvement in the *Siraman Sedudo* tradition. Additionally, the research included an interview with a local cultural figure, Mr. Supanji, Head of DPD

Permadani Nganjuk, who possesses in-depth knowledge of the tradition's history, meaning, and preservation efforts. To enrich the theoretical framework and deepen the understanding of local wisdom and cultural literacy, the researcher also conducted a literature review using scholarly sources, including journal articles, books, and local cultural documentation.

Data collection was carried out through three main techniques: semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and literature review. An in-depth interview with the cultural figure was conducted to gain firsthand narratives on the philosophical values, cultural significance, and challenges of preserving *Siraman Sedudo* in a rapidly modernizing context. Insights from this interview served as a key reference for interpreting student questionnaire responses. The questionnaire, comprising both open- and closed-ended questions, was designed to assess students' understanding, attitudes, and involvement in the tradition, capturing both quantitative and qualitative data. To ensure the validity of the findings, data triangulation was applied by cross-verifying information from student responses, the cultural expert interview, and literature sources. Member checking was also conducted by confirming interview transcripts with the informant to maintain accurate interpretation. Data analysis followed Miles & Huberman (2013) model, involving three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. This process allowed for the systematic organization and interpretation of data to reveal a comprehensive picture of how cultural literacy is developed and expressed through the *Siraman Sedudo* tradition.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **Research Findings**

This study aimed to explore the cultural literacy of fifth-grade students at SDN 2 Werungotok in relation to the local tradition of Siraman Sedudo. The findings reveal three central aspects: students' understanding of the tradition, their attitudes toward its preservation, and their level of involvement in related cultural practices.

First, the students demonstrated a general awareness of the Siraman Sedudo tradition, particularly in terms of its occurrence and its association with the Javanese calendar (1st or 10th of Suro). However, this knowledge was largely superficial, as many students were unfamiliar with the deeper philosophical meanings behind the rituals. For example, most participants recognized the tradition as an annual event held at the Sedudo Waterfall, but few could explain the symbolism of the water or the role of the selected dancers. Their understanding was primarily shaped by stories from family members and exposure to media, rather than through formal education.

Second, in terms of attitude, the students exhibited a positive emotional connection to the tradition. They expressed pride in having a unique cultural heritage and showed interest in preserving it. However, this attitude was not always translated into active participation. Some students had never attended the event in person and only viewed it through social media platforms like YouTube or Instagram. This gap between emotional appreciation and active engagement suggests a need for structured cultural education within the school environment.

Third, the level of student involvement in the Siraman Sedudo tradition remained minimal. Only a few had engaged directly with the tradition, such as by attending with their families or participating in school discussions related to the event. Most students had never been involved in cultural performances, interviews with local elders, or class projects about the tradition. Factors contributing to this limited participation include the ceremonial exclusivity of the event, lack of access, and the absence of school-based cultural projects integrating the tradition into learning experiences.

Finally, the interviews with the local cultural figure, Mr. Supanji, provided contextual depth to the student data. He emphasized the sacredness of the ritual and the importance of intergenerational transmission of cultural values. His insights confirmed that the tradition is not only a spiritual practice but also a historical legacy tied to the identity of the Nganjuk community. The students' limited understanding of these values underlines the need for schools to play a more proactive role in cultural transmission.

In conclusion, although the students at SDN 2 Werungotok demonstrate an initial awareness and positive attitude toward Siraman Sedudo, their understanding and involvement remain limited. The findings underscore the necessity of incorporating local wisdom into formal education to foster deeper cultural literacy and ensure sustainable cultural preservation among younger generations.

**Table 1.** Themes and Findings on Students' Cultural Literacy of *Siraman Sedudo*

| Theme                              | Category                      | Description / Key Findings  |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Understanding of Ritual Elements   | Surface-level knowledge       | Most students are aware that <i>Siraman Sedudo</i> occurs on 1st of Suro but cannot fully explain the deeper meaning or spiritual symbolism of the ritual.        |
| Source of Knowledge                | Family and social media       | Knowledge mostly comes from stories told by parents or grandparents, and from short videos on platforms like YouTube or Instagram.                                |
| Attitude Toward Tradition          | Positive emotional connection | Students express pride in the tradition, seeing it as unique and part of their cultural identity, though their emotional engagement is not yet matched by action. |
| Participation in Cultural Practice | Observational and passive     | Few students have ever seen the ritual in person; most experiences are indirect and media-based.  |
| Educational Experience             | Lack of integration in school | Cultural content is not deeply embedded in school subjects; discussions of traditions are brief and lack contextual depth.  |
| Desire for Engagement              | Willingness to participate    | Some students express interest in joining cultural activities if opportunities were available through school or community-based programs.                         |

### Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that the majority of elementary students possess only a surface-level understanding of the *Siraman Sedudo* tradition. While many students can identify the time of the ritual usually during the 1st or 10th of Suro they are generally unable to explain the symbolic meanings behind its various elements. This aligns with previous research indicating that young learners often lack the ability to connect cultural practices with their deeper philosophical roots (Alam & Mohanty, 2023). Most of the students' knowledge stems from exposure to family storytelling and media rather than formal education. Such a pattern suggests that cultural knowledge is still informally transmitted, which can be inconsistent or incomplete. Without structured cultural education, students may retain only fragmentary understandings of their heritage (Stoddard, 2022).

In terms of attitude, students generally express positive emotional responses toward the tradition. They take pride in the uniqueness of *Siraman Sedudo* and recognize it as part of their identity. However, this appreciation does not always translate into proactive cultural participation. This discrepancy is supported by Pradesa et al. (2023), who emphasizes that positive affect must be supported by behavioral engagement to sustain cultural practices. Students admire the tradition but lack opportunities to participate or learn actively through formal or informal programs. The emotional attachment, though important, must be supported by accessible educational channels to foster cultural continuity (Barker et al., 2023).

The study also indicates that most students have never witnessed *Siraman Sedudo* in person. Their exposure is often mediated through digital platforms such as YouTube or Instagram, which present only visual representations without contextual depth. While digital media can serve as entry points for cultural learning, they often fail to convey the ritual's full spiritual and historical significance (Ergen, 2023). This suggests the need for guided cultural literacy programs where digital resources are used critically and complemented by discussion. Without interpretation and reflection, students risk reducing culture to mere spectacle. Therefore, educators and parents should collaborate to contextualize cultural content consumed online (Astuti et al., 2024).

The lack of integration of *Siraman Sedudo* into the school curriculum represents a missed opportunity to promote meaningful cultural education. Although some students recall hearing about

the tradition during Indonesian language lessons, these instances were brief and not designed to foster deeper engagement. Cultural content should be embedded into subjects like Bahasa Indonesia, Social Studies, or local content lessons using contextual and thematic learning (Yuliana et al., 2021). By incorporating local wisdom into explanatory texts, students can develop both literacy skills and cultural awareness. A contextual approach enables students to see the relevance of tradition in their lives. Without this integration, traditional knowledge may slowly fade from collective memory.

Another crucial finding is that students' desire to engage in cultural activities remains untapped. Several students expressed enthusiasm for participating in school-based or community-led cultural projects. This willingness shows that despite limited understanding, young learners are open to learning more if given the right opportunities (Solihin et al., 2024). Project-based learning models could be utilized to channel this interest, allowing students to research, document, or perform aspects of the *Siraman Sedudo* tradition (Widiastuti & Santoso, 2024). When students act as cultural researchers or storytellers, they internalize the values embedded in the tradition. These participatory experiences help bridge the gap between cultural knowledge and personal involvement.

Family remains a critical factor in shaping cultural awareness among students. Many who showed stronger understanding of the tradition cited stories from grandparents or parents as their main source of knowledge. This aligns with Elias & Brown (2022), who found that intergenerational storytelling plays a vital role in maintaining cultural identity among children. However, due to urbanization and shifting family dynamics, not all students have access to these rich oral traditions. In such cases, schools must serve as cultural mediators and facilitators. Collaborative programs involving elders, artists, and educators could help simulate the traditional transmission of wisdom.

Furthermore, the exclusivity of the *Siraman Sedudo* ritual limits students' direct engagement with it. As the event is sacred and limited to selected participants, most students can only observe or learn about it from afar. While this preserves the sanctity of the ritual, it also alienates young learners from firsthand cultural experience. To address this, schools could hold cultural simulations or localized festivals that reflect the spirit of *Siraman Sedudo* without compromising its sacred aspects (Brown, 2024). Educational reenactments can create emotional and cognitive connections to tradition. This balance between sacred preservation and inclusive education is essential for sustainable cultural transmission.

## CONCLUSION

This study has explored the cultural literacy of elementary school students regarding the *Siraman Sedudo* tradition in Nganjuk Regency, using a qualitative descriptive approach. The findings indicate that although students express a positive emotional attitude toward the tradition, their understanding remains largely superficial and symbolic knowledge is often absent. Most students are familiar with when the tradition is held but lack awareness of its historical, philosophical, and spiritual dimensions. This gap is rooted in limited exposure, minimal integration of local culture in formal education, and the exclusive nature of the ritual itself. However, the students' affective responses suggest strong potential for developing deeper cultural engagement through intentional pedagogical strategies and community collaboration. Thus, the research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on cultural literacy and underscores the urgent need for education systems to act as bridges between students and their cultural heritage. Importantly, the research also highlights the critical role of families, digital media, and educators in shaping students' cultural awareness. Although digital platforms are often the most accessible sources of information for students, the lack of context and guidance may lead to a reductionist view of culture. Therefore, schools must adopt a proactive role in curating and contextualizing cultural learning, combining formal instruction with participatory and project-based experiences. This study has helped to illuminate how cultural traditions such as *Siraman Sedudo* can become living educational resources rather than abstract relics. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the generalizability of these findings is limited to the study's context—namely, a

single public elementary school with a relatively small sample size. Broader conclusions about students' cultural literacy across regions or educational levels should be drawn with caution.

Based on the research findings, several recommendations can be proposed for future practice and study. First, it is essential for curriculum developers and education policymakers to incorporate local wisdom content such as *Siraman Sedudo* into subjects like Social Studies, Bahasa Indonesia, or local content (muatan lokal), not merely as supplementary material but as central themes for contextual learning. Second, schools should engage students in cultural projects that include field visits, storytelling sessions with elders, simulations of local rituals, or creative digital documentation. These efforts would support deeper learning and increase student participation in cultural preservation. Third, future research should expand to involve diverse schools in different rural and urban contexts to assess comparative levels of cultural literacy and involvement. A mixed-methods design combining qualitative and quantitative approaches could enrich the understanding of cultural engagement and reveal patterns across student demographics. Fourth, teacher training institutions need to provide educators with the skills and materials to teach local cultural content effectively and meaningfully. Finally, further studies may explore how digital platforms can be optimized as tools for cultural learning, not just as sources of content but also as spaces for interactive storytelling, collaboration, and reflection. By acting on these recommendations, stakeholders in education, culture, and local governance can collectively sustain and revitalize regional traditions such as *Siraman Sedudo*, ensuring that the younger generation not only inherits these practices but actively participates in their preservation and evolution.

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