

Exploring Elementary School Teachers' Perceptions of Cultural Character Literacy (CCL) in Literacy Learning: Evidence from a Mixed-Method Needs Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates elementary school teachers' perceptions, challenges, and instructional needs regarding the integration of Cultural Character Literacy (CCL) in literacy learning. Employing a mixed-method convergent design, the study involved 43 elementary school teachers from two cities and two regencies in Riau Province, Indonesia. Quantitative data were collected using questionnaires, while qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews. The findings indicate that teachers strongly support the integration of literacy, local culture, and character education as a unified instructional framework in elementary classrooms. Teachers perceived Cultural Character Literacy as essential for improving students' reading interest, reading comprehension, cultural awareness, and moral development in the digital era. However, several implementation challenges were identified, including low student motivation toward reading, the influence of digital media, inconsistencies between school and family environments, limited culture-based learning resources, and difficulties integrating character values into literacy instruction. The study further revealed that teachers require a contextual, student-centered, interactive, and culturally responsive learning model supported by practical implementation guidelines and authentic character assessment instruments. Observation sheets, contextual rubrics, self-assessment, peer assessment, and reflective journals emerged as the most preferred assessment approaches for evaluating students' character development. The findings suggest that Cultural Character Literacy should be conceptualized as an integrated pedagogical framework combining literacy development, cultural values, and character education through contextual and experiential learning approaches. This study provides empirical foundations for developing a culturally responsive CCL model aligned with elementary teachers' pedagogical needs and students' sociocultural contexts.

Keywords: *Cultural Character Literacy; literacy learning; elementary education.*

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INTRODUCTION

The growing complexity of twenty-first-century education has shifted the meaning of literacy from merely reading and writing competencies toward multidimensional capabilities that integrate cultural awareness, ethical reasoning, social participation, and character formation (Kurniaman et al., 2025). In elementary education, this transformation is particularly important because primary school years represent the foundational stage in shaping students' identities, values, and social behaviors (Rifai et al., 2026). Across many countries, however, rapid globalization, digital culture, and transnational media exposure have gradually weakened children's attachment to local culture and moral values, generating concerns regarding declining empathy, tolerance, discipline, and cultural appreciation among young learners (Riyanto et al., 2025).

Several countries have responded differently to this challenge through culturally grounded literacy and character education policies (Nadilla et al., 2025). In Finland, literacy education emphasizes holistic learning, intercultural understanding, and life-value education embedded within daily school culture (Khotimah &

Hidayat, 2023). Finnish elementary schools position character and well-being education as an integral part of literacy learning rather than as separate instructional components (Erni et al., 2025). In Japan, cultural and moral education are systematically integrated into elementary schooling through routines, discipline, collaborative activities, and moral education subjects that cultivate social responsibility and collective values (Aulia & Saputro, 2024). Singapore adopts a citizenship-oriented character curriculum emphasizing multicultural harmony, national identity, and values education integrated across subjects and school activities (Irmayati et al., 2025). Meanwhile, South Korea has increasingly combined digital innovation with socio-emotional and culturally responsive pedagogy, particularly by strengthening teachers' roles in balancing technological advancement with humanistic education (Oh & Ahn, 2024). Australia has also promoted culturally responsive literacy learning by emphasizing diversity, indigenous perspectives, and inclusive educational practices within elementary classrooms (Takiddin et al., 2025).

Compared with these countries, Indonesia has implemented literacy and character education through various curriculum reforms, including the strengthening of the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* and school literacy movements (Hidayat et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the integration of cultural literacy and character values into classroom literacy instruction remains fragmented and inconsistently implemented across schools (Kurniaman, Permana, et al., 2024). Existing literacy practices in Indonesian elementary education continue to focus predominantly on academic reading competence and cognitive achievement, while contextual cultural understanding and character internalization often receive limited pedagogical attention (Riyanto et al., 2025). As a result, elementary students frequently experience literacy learning disconnected from their sociocultural realities and local wisdom contexts.

Recent studies have demonstrated that culturally responsive literacy instruction contributes significantly to students' tolerance, cultural awareness, identity formation, and moral development (Zufriady et al., 2025). For example, cultural literacy has been found to positively influence elementary students' tolerance attitudes in multicultural educational settings. Other studies emphasized that integrating local wisdom into literacy learning strengthens students' social character, environmental awareness, and appreciation of cultural diversity (Alwanda, 2026). Comparative studies from Indonesia, Japan, Finland, and Singapore further reveal that successful character education systems share common characteristics, including contextual learning, school culture habituation, collaborative participation, and strong teacher involvement.

Despite the increasing scholarly attention toward literacy and character education, several research gaps remain unresolved (Ruyadi et al., 2026). First, prior studies largely examine literacy education, cultural education, and character education as separate constructs rather than integrating them into a comprehensive instructional framework. Second, comparative international studies have predominantly focused on curriculum policy and implementation outcomes, while limited attention has been devoted to teachers' perceptions and instructional needs as the basis for model development. Third, although many countries have successfully integrated culture-based character learning into elementary education, empirical studies exploring how Indonesian elementary teachers perceive the urgency, challenges, and pedagogical needs of Cultural Character Literacy remain scarce (Windiyaning et al., 2025).

From the perspective of educational innovation, teachers play a central role as curriculum interpreters, instructional designers, and facilitators of literacy practices (Noviana et al., 2023). Teachers' perceptions are therefore essential for developing an applicable and contextually relevant instructional model (Kurniaman et al., 2023). Previous research has shown that teachers often recognize the importance of culturally responsive and character-oriented learning; however, they continue to face challenges related to instructional resources, pedagogical strategies, curriculum flexibility, and contextual implementation. Consequently, a systematic needs analysis grounded in teachers' perspectives becomes necessary to construct an effective Cultural Character Literacy (CCL) model suitable for elementary education in Indonesia. Therefore, this study aims to explore elementary school teachers' perceptions, challenges, and instructional needs regarding the integration of Cultural Character Literacy in literacy learning. By employing a mixed-method approach, this study seeks

to generate empirical foundations for developing a culturally responsive and pedagogically relevant Cultural Character Literacy (CCL) model for elementary schools.

Research Questions

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do elementary school teachers perceive the integration of Cultural Character Literacy in elementary literacy learning?
2. What challenges do teachers encounter in implementing Cultural Character Literacy in classroom practices?
3. What instructional needs do teachers identify for developing a Cultural Character Literacy (CCL) model in elementary schools?
4. How can teachers' perceptions and instructional needs inform the development of an effective Cultural Character Literacy (CCL) model?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural Character Literacy in Elementary Education

The concept of literacy in the twenty-first century has expanded from conventional reading and writing competencies toward multidimensional literacies that integrate cultural understanding, ethical awareness, citizenship, and character formation (Çağlayan & Başal, 2025). In elementary education, cultural literacy is increasingly recognized as a strategic approach for strengthening students' social identity, moral values, and intercultural understanding within diverse societies (Enright et al., 2022). Recent studies emphasized that cultural literacy contributes significantly to students' character development, social empathy, tolerance, and national identity formation.

Cultural literacy in elementary education refers to students' ability to understand, appreciate, and practice cultural values within their daily social interactions and learning experiences (Kurniaman et al., 2026). Riyanto et al., 2025, argued that cultural literacy enables students to strengthen their understanding of cultural diversity while simultaneously fostering positive character development and civic responsibility. Similarly, (Lestari & Ramadan, 2023) found that cultural and citizenship literacy activities significantly improved elementary students' global diversity character through contextual and creative learning practices. These findings indicate that literacy learning integrated with cultural values has substantial potential to support holistic student development (Dewi et al., 2023).

The growing relevance of cultural literacy is closely associated with globalization and digital transformation (Kurniaman et al., 2024). Contemporary elementary students are increasingly exposed to global digital culture that may gradually reduce their awareness of local wisdom and cultural identity (Guslinda et al., 2024). Consequently, educational institutions are required to implement learning approaches capable of balancing global competencies with local cultural values. Research on local culture and character education trends demonstrated that integrating local wisdom into learning environments helps students maintain moral resilience and cultural identity amidst rapid social change (Guslinda et al., 2023). Therefore, the development of a Cultural Character Literacy (CCL) model becomes increasingly important within elementary school contexts.

Teachers' Perceptions Toward Cultural and Character-Based Learning

Teachers play a central role in implementing culturally responsive and character-oriented instruction because they function as curriculum interpreters, learning facilitators, and classroom decision-makers (Mulyani et al., 2022). Their perceptions strongly influence how cultural values and character education are integrated into literacy learning (Zufriady et al., 2024). Several international studies revealed that teachers generally acknowledge the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy; however, practical implementation remains challenging due to limited training, resources, and instructional guidance.

Developed the Culture-DPACK framework to evaluate Chinese language teachers' perceptions regarding the integration of digital and cultural literacies into classroom instruction (Xu et al., 2025). The study revealed that teachers' perceptions of cultural literacy integration were significantly associated with their technological pedagogical competencies and instructional confidence. This finding suggests that teachers' pedagogical readiness becomes a critical factor in successfully integrating cultural literacy into classroom practices. Similarly, (Tardif-Grenier et al., 2022) reported that elementary school teachers who demonstrated greater openness toward cultural diversity developed more positive relationships with students and stronger perceptions of inclusive classroom environments. Nevertheless, the study also identified challenges related to teachers' professional efficacy when managing culturally diverse classrooms. This indicates that positive perceptions alone are insufficient without adequate pedagogical support and instructional frameworks.

In another study, (Çağlayan & Başal, 2025) explored preschool teachers' perspectives regarding cultural diversity and found that many teachers still possessed limited awareness and practical understanding of culturally responsive teaching strategies. Teachers in culturally homogeneous educational settings particularly experienced difficulties in adapting instructional approaches to increasingly diverse student backgrounds (Siregar & Aulia, 2023). These findings reinforce the importance of conducting needs analyses to understand teachers' instructional challenges and professional needs. Research from South Korea further demonstrated that multicultural awareness among elementary teachers positively influenced educational continuity and inclusive learning practices. Teachers with higher multicultural awareness tended to demonstrate stronger adaptive pedagogical practices and greater sensitivity toward students' sociocultural backgrounds (Suhardiyo et al., 2025). Such evidence highlights that teachers' perceptions are fundamental for constructing effective culturally responsive learning models.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Literacy Learning

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) has become an important theoretical foundation for integrating cultural values into literacy instruction. CRT emphasizes the incorporation of students' cultural experiences, local contexts, and social realities into classroom learning processes. Research consistently demonstrates that culturally responsive pedagogy improves student engagement, motivation, classroom participation, and learning outcomes. A bibliometric study conducted by (Nirmala et al., 2025) revealed that CRT approaches in elementary learning significantly improved students' participation, twenty-first-century skills, and affective development. The study further emphasized that culturally responsive instruction encourages teachers to become more innovative in designing adaptive and contextual learning experiences.

Also found that collaborative curriculum development supported teachers in implementing culturally sustaining pedagogical practices more effectively (Enright et al., 2022). Teachers involved in collaborative instructional design demonstrated stronger abilities to connect classroom learning with students lived experiences and local social issues. This suggests that effective implementation of cultural literacy requires both pedagogical collaboration and contextual instructional support.

Recent developments in educational technology have additionally contributed to culturally relevant pedagogy (Kurniaman et al., 2022). Demonstrated that artificial intelligence-based instructional tools assisted teachers in integrating culturally relevant pedagogy into classroom practices more efficiently (Wang et al., 2025). Their findings indicated that teachers often experience challenges related to time constraints, pedagogical adaptation, and instructional resources when implementing culturally responsive learning. AI-supported systems may therefore provide opportunities for enhancing culturally contextualized literacy instruction in future educational environments.

Research Gap and Conceptual Positioning

Although previous studies have extensively discussed cultural literacy, culturally responsive pedagogy, multicultural education, and character education, several important gaps remain unresolved. First, most prior studies examine literacy education, character education, and cultural learning separately rather than

integrating them into a unified instructional model. Second, existing studies predominantly focus on curriculum implementation, student outcomes, or policy analysis, while relatively limited research investigates teachers' perceptions and instructional needs as the basis for educational model development.

Third, empirical studies specifically exploring Cultural Character Literacy (CCL) within Indonesian elementary education contexts remain scarce. Existing literature has not sufficiently explained how teachers perceive the urgency, challenges, and pedagogical requirements of integrating cultural character literacy into literacy learning practices. Moreover, there is still limited evidence regarding the instructional components needed to construct a practical and contextually relevant CCL model for elementary schools.

Therefore, this study positions itself as an effort to fill these gaps by conducting a mixed-method needs analysis focused on elementary school teachers' perceptions, challenges, and instructional needs regarding Cultural Character Literacy integration. The findings are expected to provide empirical foundations for developing an applicable and culturally responsive CCL model in elementary literacy education.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-method research design using a convergent approach to explore elementary school teachers' perceptions, challenges, and instructional needs regarding the development of a Cultural Character Literacy (CCL) model (Creswell, 2014). The mixed-method approach was selected because it enables researchers to integrate quantitative and qualitative data to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of educational phenomena (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Quantitative data were used to identify general trends and patterns related to teachers' perceptions and needs, while qualitative data provided deeper insights into teachers' experiences, challenges, and expectations regarding the integration of cultural character literacy in elementary classrooms. The study focused on conducting a needs analysis as the foundational stage for developing an instructional model. Needs analysis is considered essential in educational model development because it helps identify contextual instructional problems, user expectations, and pedagogical requirements before designing a learning framework. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings allowed the researchers to strengthen the validity and comprehensiveness of the study findings.

Participants

The participants of this study consisted of 43 elementary school teachers from two cities and two regencies in Riau Province, Indonesia. The participants were selected from various public elementary schools to obtain diverse perspectives regarding literacy learning practices and cultural character education implementation in elementary classrooms. This study employed purposive sampling as the sampling technique. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method in which participants are intentionally selected based on specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives (Andrade, 2021). The use of purposive sampling was considered appropriate because the study specifically targeted teachers who had direct experience in implementing literacy learning and character education at the elementary school level. Furthermore, purposive sampling allows researchers to obtain information-rich participants capable of providing relevant and in-depth data aligned with the aims of the study (Campbell et al., 2020). The inclusion criteria for participants were: (1) active elementary school teachers, (2) having experience in literacy learning implementation, and (3) willing to participate voluntarily in the study. The demographic diversity of participants was expected to provide broader perspectives regarding the challenges and instructional needs related to Cultural Character Literacy integration in elementary education.

Instrument

The study utilized two primary instruments: a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide. The questionnaire was designed to collect quantitative data regarding teachers' perceptions, challenges, and instructional needs related to Cultural Character Literacy implementation. The questionnaire consisted of

several dimensions, including: (1) perceptions of cultural literacy importance, (2) perceptions of character education integration, (3) instructional challenges, (4) teacher readiness, and (5) instructional model needs. The items were developed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Likert scales are widely used in educational research because they allow researchers to measure participants' attitudes, perceptions, and opinions systematically and quantitatively (Joshi et al., 2021).

To strengthen content validity, the questionnaire items were adapted from previous studies on cultural literacy, character education, and culturally responsive pedagogy and were reviewed by educational experts prior to data collection. Expert judgment is considered important in ensuring the relevance, clarity, and representativeness of instrument items (Taherdoost, 2022). In addition, a pilot test was conducted to ensure the clarity, reliability, and appropriateness of the instrument items before the actual data collection process. Pilot testing is commonly recommended to improve instrument quality and minimize measurement bias in educational research (Majid et al., 2020).

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews to gain deeper insights into teachers' experiences and pedagogical expectations regarding Cultural Character Literacy integration. The interview guide included open-ended questions related to literacy practices, cultural value integration, instructional barriers, and expectations for an effective CCL learning model. Semi-structured interviews were selected because they provide flexibility for participants to express their perspectives while maintaining consistency across interview sessions (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews enable researchers to explore participants' experiences in greater depth while still maintaining alignment with the research objectives (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019).

Data Analysis

Quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including percentages, means, and standard deviations, to identify patterns of teachers' perceptions, challenges, and instructional needs regarding Cultural Character Literacy implementation. The quantitative analysis aimed to provide an overview of the dominant tendencies among participants related to the proposed instructional model. Meanwhile, qualitative data from interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis process involved several stages, including data transcription, coding, categorization, theme identification, and interpretation. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes and meaningful patterns emerging from teachers' experiences and perspectives regarding literacy learning and character education integration. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, data triangulation was conducted by comparing quantitative and qualitative results. The integration of both datasets enabled the researchers to develop a more comprehensive understanding of teachers' needs and pedagogical challenges in developing a Cultural Character Literacy (CCL) model for elementary education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study employed a mixed-method approach to explore elementary school teachers' perceptions and instructional needs regarding the development of a Cultural Character Literacy (CCL) model. Quantitative data were obtained through questionnaires distributed to 43 elementary school teachers from two cities and two regencies in Riau Province, while qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The integration of both datasets enabled a comprehensive understanding of teachers' perceptions, challenges, and pedagogical needs related to Cultural Character Literacy implementation.

Teachers' Perceptions of the Integration of Cultural Character Literacy in Elementary Literacy Learning

The findings revealed that elementary school teachers generally demonstrated positive perceptions toward the integration of Cultural Character Literacy (CCL) in literacy learning. Most participants agreed that literacy learning should not only focus on reading skills but also integrate cultural values and character development. Teachers believed that literacy activities connected to local culture could make learning more contextual, meaningful, and relevant to students' daily lives. Many teachers stated that students' current literacy conditions

remained relatively low, particularly in reading comprehension, critical thinking, and reading interest. Students tended to prefer digital entertainment and visual media over reading books. Consequently, teachers perceived the integration of cultural values and character education into literacy learning as an important strategy for improving students' engagement and moral development.

Teachers also emphasized that local culture had already been partially integrated into learning activities through Budaya Melayu Riau (BMR), folklore, traditional games, regional dances, local language use, and contextual cultural practices. However, the implementation remained limited and inconsistent across schools and subjects. One participant explained:

“Local culture has already been used in learning activities such as folklore, regional arts, and Malay cultural traditions, but the resources are still limited (P3).”

These findings indicate that teachers perceive Cultural Character Literacy as highly relevant and necessary for strengthening literacy learning, cultural awareness, and students' character formation simultaneously.

The quantitative findings demonstrated that teachers showed positive perceptions toward the integration of Cultural Character Literacy (CCL) in elementary literacy learning. Most teachers agreed that literacy learning should not only focus on reading skills but also integrate cultural values and character education. The questionnaire results revealed high mean scores on several indicators related to the importance of culture-based and character-oriented literacy learning. Teachers strongly agreed that integrating local culture into literacy instruction could improve students' learning engagement, contextual understanding, and character formation.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Perceptions toward Cultural Character Literacy (CCL)

Indicators	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Literacy reading needs	3.28	0.71	Moderate
Students' reading comprehension	3.26	0.68	Moderate
Reading interest condition	3.16	0.74	Moderate
Importance of character integration	4.09	0.59	High
Difficulties integrating character values	2.88	0.81	Moderate
Availability of culture-based learning resources	2.58	0.76	Low
Integration of local culture in learning	3.63	0.64	High
Contextual learning implementation	3.51	0.66	High
Student-centered learning needs	3.84	0.61	High
Need for literacy-based learning models	4.18	0.54	Very High
Need for character-based learning models	4.18	0.52	Very High
Teachers' readiness to implement CCL	3.67	0.63	High
Need for CCL model development	4.18	0.50	Very High
Need for practical learning guidelines	3.56	0.65	High
Need for character assessment instruments	4.18	0.49	Very High

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of teachers' perceptions toward Cultural Character Literacy (CCL) implementation in elementary schools. Overall, the findings indicate that teachers demonstrated positive perceptions regarding the integration of literacy, culture, and character education in classroom learning. The highest mean scores were identified in the indicators related to the need for literacy-based learning models ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.54$), need for character-based learning models ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.52$), need for CCL model development ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.50$), and need for character assessment instruments ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.49$), all categorized as very high. These findings indicate that teachers strongly support the development of an instructional model that integrates literacy learning, cultural values, and character education

systematically in elementary schools. The relatively low standard deviation values also suggest that teachers' responses were fairly consistent across participants.

Furthermore, teachers showed high perceptions regarding the importance of character integration ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 0.59$), indicating that participants considered character education as an essential component of literacy learning. Similarly, the indicators of student-centered learning needs ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.61$), teachers' readiness to implement CCL ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 0.63$), integration of local culture in learning ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.64$), need for practical learning guidelines ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 0.65$), and contextual learning implementation ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 0.66$) were categorized as high. These results suggest that teachers expected learning approaches that are contextual, interactive, culturally responsive, and centered on students' real-life experiences. Meanwhile, several indicators were categorized as moderate, including literacy reading needs ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 0.71$), students' reading comprehension ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 0.68$), reading interest condition ($M = 3.16$, $SD = 0.74$), and difficulties integrating character values ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 0.81$). These findings indicate that teachers still perceived students' literacy conditions as relatively problematic, particularly regarding reading comprehension and reading motivation. In addition, teachers experienced moderate difficulties in integrating character values into literacy learning practices.

The lowest mean score was found in the indicator availability of culture-based learning resources ($M = 2.58$, $SD = 0.76$), categorized as low. This finding indicates that teachers perceived limited availability of instructional resources related to local culture and cultural literacy. The result suggests the necessity of developing more accessible and contextually relevant culture-based learning materials to support the implementation of Cultural Character Literacy in elementary education.

Challenges in Integrating Character Values

The results further showed that teachers encountered several difficulties in integrating character values into classroom learning. The dominant challenges identified by participants included inconsistencies between school education and family environments, the influence of social media and gadgets, limited instructional time, and difficulties connecting learning materials with character values. Teachers reported that although schools attempted to cultivate positive values such as discipline, honesty, responsibility, and respect, these efforts were often not reinforced within students' home environments. Some participants emphasized that parental supervision and environmental influences significantly affected students' character formation. One participant stated:

“The biggest challenge is the inconsistency between education at school and the environment at home and in society. (P5)”

In addition, teachers expressed difficulties in integrating character education naturally into literacy learning because many reading materials did not explicitly contain contextual character values.

The quantitative findings revealed that teachers still experienced moderate difficulties in implementing Cultural Character Literacy in classroom practices. The mean score for difficulties in integrating character values was 2.88, indicating that teachers encountered several pedagogical and contextual challenges. In addition, the availability of culture-based instructional resources received a relatively low mean score (2.58), indicating limited teaching materials related to local wisdom and cultural literacy.

Table 2. Challenges in Implementing Cultural Character Literacy (CCL)

Indicators	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Difficulties integrating character values	2.88	0.81	Moderate
Availability of culture-based learning resources	2.58	0.76	Low
Students' reading comprehension condition	3.26	0.68	Moderate
Students' reading interest condition	3.16	0.74	Moderate

Table 2 presents the challenges encountered by teachers in implementing Cultural Character Literacy (CCL) in elementary schools. Overall, the findings indicate that teachers still experience several pedagogical and contextual barriers in integrating literacy, culture, and character education into classroom practices.

The indicator students' reading comprehension condition obtained a mean score of 3.26 (SD = 0.68), categorized as moderate. This finding indicates that teachers perceived students' ability to understand reading texts as still relatively limited. Many students were considered able to read fluently; however, they still experienced difficulties in identifying main ideas, interpreting information, and drawing conclusions from reading materials. The relatively moderate standard deviation suggests that teachers' perceptions regarding students' reading comprehension were fairly consistent across participants.

Similarly, the indicator students' reading interest condition achieved a mean score of 3.16 (SD = 0.74), also categorized as moderate. This result suggests that students' reading motivation and interest in literacy activities remain problematic. Teachers reported that many students preferred visual digital entertainment, such as videos and social media, rather than reading books or literacy materials. The slightly higher standard deviation indicates some variation in teachers' perceptions regarding students' reading interest across different schools and contexts.

The indicator difficulties integrating character values obtained a mean score of 2.88 (SD = 0.81), categorized as moderate. This finding demonstrates that teachers encountered challenges in integrating character education into literacy learning activities. Several factors contributed to these difficulties, including inconsistencies between school and family environments, limited instructional time, curriculum demands focused on academic achievement, and the influence of digital culture on students' behavior. The relatively higher standard deviation indicates greater variation in teachers' experiences regarding character integration challenges.

Meanwhile, the lowest mean score was identified in the indicator availability of culture-based learning resources (M = 2.58, SD = 0.76), categorized as low. This finding indicates that teachers perceived a lack of instructional materials related to local culture, folklore, contextual literacy texts, and culture-based teaching resources. The result suggests that limited access to culturally relevant learning materials remains one of the major barriers to implementing Cultural Character Literacy effectively in elementary schools.

Overall, Table 2 demonstrates that the implementation of Cultural Character Literacy still faces several challenges, particularly related to students' literacy conditions, the integration of character values, and the limited availability of culture-based instructional resources. These findings highlight the need for practical instructional models, contextual learning materials, and systematic pedagogical support to strengthen Cultural Character Literacy implementation in elementary education.

The Use of Local Culture in Learning

The findings revealed that local culture had generally been introduced in elementary learning activities, although its implementation remained limited and inconsistent across schools and subjects. Most teachers stated that local culture was integrated through Malay culture lessons (Budaya Melayu Riau), traditional games, folklore, local language usage, arts, dances, food, and contextual learning activities. However, teachers also highlighted several limitations, particularly the lack of culture-based teaching materials, insufficient references related to local wisdom, and limited teacher competence in local cultural knowledge. Some teachers admitted that they were not native to the region, which affected their understanding of local culture integration. One teacher explained:

“Local culture has been implemented, but culture-based reading materials are still very limited. (P4)”

These findings indicate that although local culture integration has begun to appear within elementary education, its implementation still requires more systematic instructional support.

Teachers demonstrated very high levels of agreement regarding the need for a Cultural Character Literacy (CCL) learning model in elementary education. The questionnaire results revealed that participants strongly supported the development of literacy-based and character-oriented instructional approaches that could integrate local cultural values into classroom learning. In addition, teachers emphasized the importance of practical learning guidelines to assist classroom implementation and facilitate the integration of literacy, culture, and character education systematically. Furthermore, participants highlighted the urgent need for comprehensive character assessment instruments capable of evaluating students' behavioral and moral development objectively and contextually. These findings indicate that teachers require a structured, practical, and culturally responsive instructional framework to support the effective implementation of Cultural Character Literacy in elementary schools.

Table 3. Teachers' Instructional Needs for Developing a CCL Model

Indicators	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Need for literacy-based learning models	4.18	0.54	Very High
Need for character-based learning models	4.18	0.52	Very High
Need for practical learning guidelines	3.56	0.65	High
Need for character assessment instruments	4.18	0.49	Very High

Table 3 presents teachers' instructional needs for developing a Cultural Character Literacy (CCL) model in elementary schools. Overall, the findings indicate that teachers demonstrated very high levels of agreement regarding the necessity of an instructional model that integrates literacy, culture, and character education systematically.

The indicators need for literacy-based learning models ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.54$), need for character-based learning models ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.52$), and need for character assessment instruments ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.49$) were categorized as very high. These findings demonstrate that teachers strongly support the development of instructional approaches capable of improving students' literacy skills while simultaneously strengthening character formation and cultural awareness. The relatively low standard deviation values indicate that participants' responses were highly consistent, suggesting shared perceptions among teachers regarding the urgency of developing a Cultural Character Literacy model.

In addition, the indicator need for practical learning guidelines obtained a mean score of 3.56 ($SD = 0.65$), categorized as high. This result indicates that teachers require practical and systematic implementation guidance to support classroom application of Cultural Character Literacy. Teachers expected clear instructional procedures, contextual teaching strategies, culture-based literacy materials, and practical examples of classroom activities that could facilitate the integration of literacy, local culture, and character education.

Overall, Table 3 suggests that teachers require a comprehensive instructional framework supported by practical guidelines and valid character assessment instruments to implement Cultural Character Literacy effectively in elementary education. These findings further reinforce the importance of developing a contextual, student-centered, and culturally responsive learning model that aligns with teachers' pedagogical needs and classroom realities.

Teachers' Needs for a Cultural Character Literacy (CCL) Learning Model

Regarding instructional model needs, the majority of participants emphasized the importance of developing a learning model that is interactive, student-centered, contextual, innovative, and integrated with literacy, culture, and character education. Teachers expected a model capable of increasing students' reading interest while simultaneously strengthening character values and cultural awareness. Several teachers recommended Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL), Project-Based Learning (PjBL), inquiry learning, and

experiential learning approaches because these models were considered more relevant to students' daily lives and sociocultural contexts. One participant stated:

“The learning model should be enjoyable, interactive, student-centered, and connected to students' real-life experiences. (P7)”

Another teacher emphasized that the learning model should integrate literacy activities with local culture and character education to make learning more meaningful and contextual. Overall, the findings demonstrate that teachers strongly support the development of a Cultural Character Literacy (CCL) model that combines literacy learning, cultural values, and character development into a unified instructional framework.

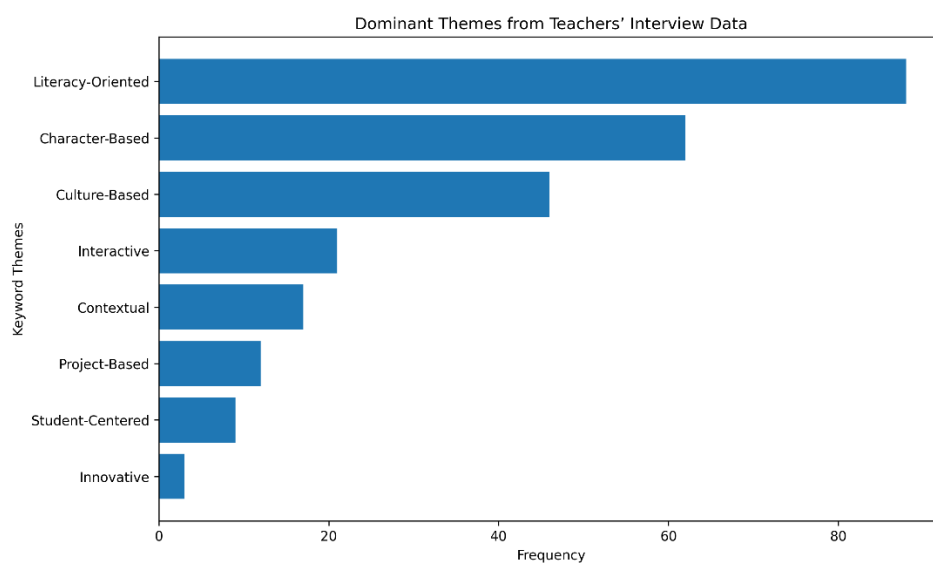


Figure 1. Frequency Distribution of Dominant Themes in Teachers' Perspectives toward Cultural Character Literacy (CCL) Learning Models

Figure 1 illustrates the dominant themes emerging from teachers' interview data regarding the expected characteristics of a Cultural Character Literacy (CCL) learning model in elementary schools. The findings reveal that the most dominant theme identified by participants was literacy-oriented learning, with the highest frequency of responses. This result indicates that teachers strongly emphasized the importance of strengthening students' literacy skills, particularly reading comprehension, reading interest, and literacy engagement, within the learning process. The second most dominant theme was character-based learning, demonstrating that teachers considered character education as an essential component of literacy instruction. Participants highlighted the importance of integrating values such as discipline, honesty, responsibility, cooperation, and respect into classroom learning activities. This finding suggests that teachers expected literacy learning not only to improve academic competencies but also to support students' moral and behavioral development.

Furthermore, culture-based learning emerged as another highly dominant theme. Teachers emphasized the importance of integrating local culture, particularly Budaya Melayu Riau (BMR), folklore, traditional games, local language, and regional values into literacy instruction. According to participants, culture-based learning could make literacy activities more contextual, meaningful, and relevant to students' sociocultural backgrounds. Other themes identified in the interviews included interactive learning, contextual learning, project-based learning, student-centered learning, and innovative learning models. Although these themes

appeared less frequently than literacy-, character-, and culture-oriented approaches, teachers still considered them important for creating meaningful and engaging classroom experiences. Interactive and contextual learning approaches were viewed as effective strategies for encouraging active student participation and connecting literacy learning to real-life situations.

Meanwhile, project-based and student-centered learning approaches were perceived as useful for promoting collaboration, creativity, and experiential learning. Innovative learning models were also expected to address students' changing learning preferences in the digital era. Overall, Figure 1 demonstrates that teachers strongly expect a Cultural Character Literacy (CCL) model that integrates literacy development, character education, and local cultural values through interactive, contextual, and student-centered learning approaches. These findings provide important empirical foundations for designing a culturally responsive and pedagogically relevant CCL learning model for elementary education.

Teachers' Needs for Character Assessment Instruments

The study also found that teachers considered character assessment instruments highly necessary in elementary education. Most participants admitted experiencing difficulties in assessing students' character development objectively and systematically. Existing assessments were still predominantly focused on academic achievement, while affective and behavioral aspects received less structured evaluation. Teachers expected practical, contextual, and easy-to-use character assessment instruments that could measure values such as discipline, responsibility, cooperation, honesty, politeness, and respect for local culture. Some teachers suggested the use of observation sheets, peer assessment, reflective journals, anecdotal records, and self-assessment techniques. One teacher explained:

“Character assessment instruments are very important because character cannot only be judged subjectively; it needs structured and objective indicators. (P10)”

These findings indicate that teachers require comprehensive character assessment guidelines to support the implementation of Cultural Character Literacy learning effectively and sustainably.

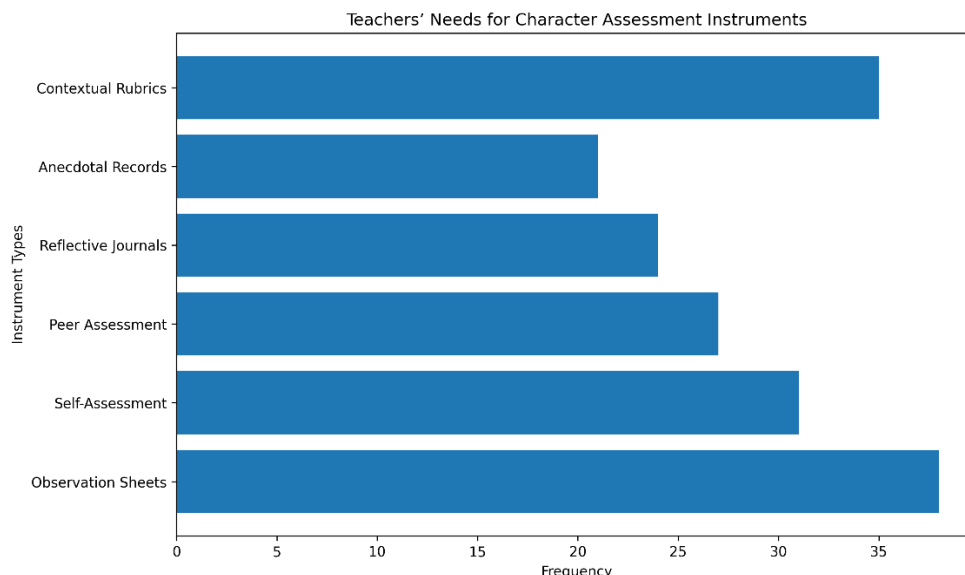


Figure 2. Dominant Types of Character Assessment Instruments Required by Elementary School Teachers for Cultural Character Literacy (CCL) Learning

Figure 2 illustrates teachers' needs for character assessment instruments in the implementation of Cultural Character Literacy (CCL) learning in elementary schools. The findings indicate that teachers strongly emphasized the importance of using various assessment instruments to evaluate students' character development comprehensively and systematically. The most dominant assessment instrument identified by teachers was observation sheets, which obtained the highest frequency. This finding suggests that teachers considered direct classroom observation as the most effective strategy for monitoring students' behavioral development, attitudes, discipline, responsibility, and social interactions during learning activities. Observation-based assessment was perceived as important because character development is often reflected through students' daily behaviors rather than written academic tests.

The second most frequently identified instrument was contextual rubrics, followed by self-assessment instruments. Teachers explained that contextual rubrics could help standardize character evaluation processes and make assessment more objective and measurable. Meanwhile, self-assessment was considered important for encouraging students' self-reflection and awareness regarding their own attitudes and behaviors. In addition, teachers highlighted the importance of peer assessment, indicating that students' interactions with classmates could provide valuable information regarding cooperation, empathy, communication, and social responsibility. Several participants also emphasized the usefulness of reflective journals for documenting students' learning experiences and moral reflections throughout classroom activities.

Although obtaining the lowest frequency, anecdotal records were still considered important by teachers because they allow educators to document specific student behaviors and significant character-related incidents occurring during the learning process. Overall, Figure 2 demonstrates that teachers require diverse, practical, and contextually relevant assessment instruments to support the implementation of Cultural Character Literacy effectively. The findings further indicate that teachers expect assessment systems capable of evaluating not only cognitive achievement but also students' affective, moral, and behavioral development in authentic classroom contexts.

Discussion

This study explored elementary school teachers' perceptions, challenges, and instructional needs regarding the integration of Cultural Character Literacy (CCL) in elementary literacy learning. The findings demonstrate that teachers strongly support the integration of literacy, culture, and character education into classroom instruction. At the same time, teachers identified several pedagogical and contextual challenges related to literacy conditions, character integration, instructional resources, and assessment practices (Kelly et al., 2021). These findings provide important implications for developing a culturally responsive and contextually relevant Cultural Character Literacy (CCL) model for elementary education.

The findings revealed that teachers perceived Cultural Character Literacy as an important approach for strengthening students' literacy competencies and moral development simultaneously. Teachers emphasized that literacy learning should not merely focus on reading skills but should also cultivate cultural awareness, social responsibility, and positive character values. This finding aligns with previous studies highlighting that culturally responsive literacy instruction contributes positively to students' engagement, motivation, identity formation, and social development (Comstock et al., 2023).

The strong emphasis on literacy-oriented learning identified in this study reflects growing concerns regarding students' declining reading interest and reading comprehension. Teachers reported that students tended to prefer visual and digital entertainment rather than reading activities, which negatively affected literacy development. This finding supports previous research showing that digital culture and media exposure increasingly influence elementary students' literacy behaviors and learning motivation (Kusumawati et al., 2025). Consequently, literacy instruction requires more contextual, engaging, and culturally meaningful learning experiences capable of connecting reading activities with students' real-life contexts.

The findings also indicate that teachers considered character education as an inseparable component of literacy learning. Participants highlighted the importance of integrating values such as honesty, discipline,

responsibility, cooperation, and respect into classroom instruction. This result is consistent with culturally responsive teaching (CRT) theory, which emphasizes that learning should address not only cognitive achievement but also students' affective, moral, and sociocultural development. Previous studies similarly found that culturally responsive pedagogy supports students' social-emotional growth and character formation through contextualized learning experiences (Nirmala et al., 2025).

Another important finding concerns the integration of local culture into literacy learning. Teachers generally agreed that local culture, particularly Budaya Melayu Riau (BMR), folklore, traditional games, and regional values, could make literacy learning more contextual and meaningful for students. This finding supports previous literature indicating that integrating local wisdom into classroom instruction strengthens students' cultural identity, intercultural understanding, and emotional connection to learning materials (Kusumawati et al., 2025). In addition, culturally grounded literacy instruction enables students to connect academic content with their sociocultural realities, thereby improving engagement and participation.

However, despite teachers' positive perceptions, the findings revealed several challenges in implementing Cultural Character Literacy in classroom practice. One of the major barriers involved inconsistencies between school-based character education and students' home environments. Teachers explained that values taught in schools were not always reinforced by families and communities. Similar findings were identified in previous studies demonstrating that effective character education requires collaboration among schools, parents, and communities (Windiyani et al., 2025). Without consistent environmental support, character internalization among students becomes difficult to sustain.

Another significant challenge identified in this study was the limited availability of culture-based instructional resources. Teachers reported difficulties finding literacy materials containing local cultural values and contextual moral messages. This finding corresponds with previous studies emphasizing that resource shortages remain one of the major obstacles in implementing culturally responsive pedagogy in elementary schools. Teachers also highlighted limited pedagogical guidance and insufficient training related to cultural literacy integration, indicating the necessity of more systematic professional development programs (Lavigne et al., 2022).

The findings further revealed that teachers strongly needed an instructional model that is student-centered, contextual, interactive, innovative, and culturally responsive. Most participants recommended Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL), Project-Based Learning (PjBL), inquiry learning, and experiential learning approaches because these models encourage active student participation and real-world learning experiences. This finding aligns with previous studies showing that culturally responsive and contextual learning approaches improve students' motivation, participation, collaboration, and twenty-first-century skills (Setiawati & Rizqi, 2025) (Ambarwati et al., 2025).

The dominance of literacy-oriented, character-based, and culture-based themes identified in the interview findings also demonstrates that teachers expect an integrated instructional framework rather than fragmented instructional practices. Previous literature has frequently examined literacy education, character education, and cultural learning separately. However, this study indicates that teachers perceive these components as interconnected and mutually reinforcing within elementary education contexts (Tulak et al., 2025). Therefore, the proposed Cultural Character Literacy (CCL) model should integrate these dimensions systematically into classroom instruction.

Another important contribution of this study concerns teachers' needs for character assessment instruments. Teachers strongly emphasized the necessity of practical, contextual, and objective assessment tools capable of evaluating students' behavioral and moral development comprehensively. Observation sheets, contextual rubrics, self-assessment, peer assessment, reflective journals, and anecdotal records emerged as the most preferred assessment approaches. This finding reflects the growing recognition that character development cannot be evaluated solely through conventional cognitive testing (Radini et al., 2026). Previous studies similarly highlighted that authentic assessment approaches are more effective for evaluating students'

affective and behavioral competencies in culturally responsive learning environments (Kurniaman, O., & SB. Sismulyasih, 2019).

Furthermore, the findings imply that teachers require not only instructional innovation but also institutional and professional support. Teachers' readiness to implement Cultural Character Literacy was relatively high; however, participants still expressed concerns regarding limited resources, curriculum demands, and instructional guidance. Similar findings were reported in cross-cultural studies on culturally responsive teaching, where teachers recognized the value of culturally grounded instruction but lacked confidence and institutional support for implementation. This indicates that successful implementation of Cultural Character Literacy requires comprehensive support systems, including curriculum integration, teacher training, culture-based instructional resources, and assessment frameworks.

Overall, this study contributes theoretically and practically to the growing discourse on culturally responsive literacy education in elementary schools. The findings demonstrate that Cultural Character Literacy should be conceptualized as an integrated instructional framework combining literacy development, cultural awareness, and character education within contextual and student-centered learning environments. The study also provides empirical evidence regarding teachers' pedagogical needs and implementation challenges, which can serve as foundational considerations for developing an effective Cultural Character Literacy (CCL) model for elementary education.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study investigated elementary school teachers' perceptions, challenges, and instructional needs regarding the integration of Cultural Character Literacy (CCL) in elementary literacy learning. The findings demonstrate that teachers strongly support the integration of literacy, local culture, and character education as a unified instructional framework capable of strengthening students' literacy competencies, cultural awareness, and moral development simultaneously. Teachers perceived Cultural Character Literacy as a relevant and necessary pedagogical approach for addressing declining reading interest, limited reading comprehension, and weakening character values among elementary students in the digital era. The study further revealed several challenges in implementing Cultural Character Literacy in classroom practices. These challenges include students' low reading motivation, the influence of digital media and social environments, inconsistencies between school and family character education, limited availability of culture-based literacy materials, and difficulties integrating character values naturally into literacy instruction. In addition, teachers experienced limitations related to practical instructional guidance and objective character assessment instruments.

The findings also indicate that teachers require a learning model that is student-centered, contextual, interactive, literacy-oriented, and culturally responsive. Teachers emphasized the importance of integrating local wisdom, particularly local cultural values and contextual learning experiences, into literacy instruction. Furthermore, participants strongly highlighted the need for practical implementation guidelines and authentic character assessment instruments, such as observation sheets, contextual rubrics, reflective journals, and peer assessment, to support effective classroom implementation. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings provides important implications for the development of an effective Cultural Character Literacy (CCL) model. The proposed model should systematically integrate literacy learning, character education, and local cultural values through contextual and experiential learning approaches. In addition, the model should provide practical pedagogical guidance, culture-based literacy resources, and authentic assessment systems to support teachers' instructional practices in elementary schools.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the growing discourse on culturally responsive literacy education by positioning Cultural Character Literacy as an integrated pedagogical framework rather than separate instructional constructs. Practically, the findings provide empirical foundations for designing a culturally grounded and pedagogically relevant CCL model aligned with teachers' classroom realities and students' sociocultural contexts. Future research is recommended to develop, validate, and experimentally test

the effectiveness of the Cultural Character Literacy (CCL) model in improving students' literacy competencies, cultural understanding, and character development in elementary education.

Credit authorship contribution statement

OK contributed to conceptualization, methodology, supervision, project administration, writing – original draft, and writing review and editing. **R** contributed to conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data curation, and writing original draft. **FR** contributed to investigation, data curation, formal analysis, and writing original draft. **ZU** contributed to investigation, data collection, resources, and writing review and editing. **BAF** contributed to data curation, formal analysis, visualization, and writing original draft. **Z** contributed to methodology, validation, supervision, and writing review and editing. **EN** contributed to validation, supervision, project administration, and writing review and editing. **All authors** contributed to the interpretation of the results, critically reviewed the manuscript, approved the final version, and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest.

Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Due to ethical and privacy considerations, the dataset is not publicly available in full; however, relevant data and materials may be provided for research and verification purposes upon reasonable request, subject to applicable ethical and institutional requirements.

Ethical Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles for research involving human participants. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional authority prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and all participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study. Informed consent was obtained from the participants, and confidentiality and anonymity of their personal information were maintained throughout the research process. The collected data were used solely for academic and research purposes and were securely managed to protect participants' privacy.

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Generative AI Statement

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) as a generative artificial intelligence tool to assist with language refinement, grammar checking, and improving the clarity and readability of the manuscript. The authors independently reviewed, verified, and revised all AI-assisted content and remain fully responsible for the accuracy, originality, interpretation, and final content of the manuscript. Generative AI was not used to generate research data, conduct the statistical analysis, or replace the authors' scientific judgment.

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