



Integrating toba batak culture in elementary school learning: An effort to strengthen the local identity of the nation's children

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Info artikel	Abstract
Keywords: Toba batak culture, elementary education, cultural preservation, local values, culture-based learning	This paper describes the implementation of Toba Batak culture-based learning in elementary schools and analyse the roles of teachers, schools, families, and traditional leaders in preserving local cultural values. The research background departs from the phenomenon of the weakening of the younger generation's attachment to Toba Batak culture due to globalisation and the dominance of digital popular culture. This study uses a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews with teachers, principals, parents, and traditional leaders, and documentation of learning activities at Lumban Bulbul Elementary School in Toba. Data analysis was carried out through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and thematic conclusion drawing. The research results indicate that Toba Batak culture-based learning in elementary schools is still in early stages and has not been fully integrated into the curriculum. Teachers have attempted to link local cultural elements through regional songs, folk tales, storytelling competitions, <i>Tor Tor</i> performances, and <i>Ulos</i> exhibitions. However, limited teaching materials, lack of training, and minimal collaboration with traditional institutions remain obstacles. Meanwhile, families remain the primary agents of cultural heritage transmission through the Batak language, participation in traditional ceremonies, and the instillation of the values of <i>Dalihan Natolu</i> , <i>Hamoraon</i> , <i>Hasangapon</i> , and <i>Hagabeon</i> . Traditional leaders also play a role in maintaining cultural continuity through social activities and collaboration with schools. The research implications emphasise the need to develop local culture-based learning guidelines, teacher training on integrating cultural values into the curriculum, and formal partnerships between schools and traditional institutions to ensure the sustainability of cultural preservation.

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1. Introduction

Culture is a system of values, norms, and symbols that regulate and direct human behaviour in social life (Febrian et al., 2025; Bogale & Debela, 2024; Koentjaraningrat, 2009; Hidayat & Yatminiwati, 2023). Culture encompasses all processes and outcomes of human development that are passed down from generation to generation to improve the quality of life (Syarifuddin et al., 2022; Aslan, 2019). Thus, culture is not only a traditional heritage, but also a source of knowledge, morals, and character that shapes the identity of a society.

In the world of education, local culture has great potential to enrich learning experiences and strengthen student identity (Sakti et al., 2024; Mahrinasari et al., 2024; Asmayawati et al., 2024). Culture-based education serves not only to transfer knowledge, but also to internalise values, ethics, and local wisdom (Atmojo et al., 2025). This is in line with the *Merdeka Belajar* (Freedom of Learning) policy and the strengthening of the Pancasila Student Profile, which emphasises the importance of contextual, character-based learning rooted in the nation's culture (Taimur & Sattar, 2020).

However, reality shows that integrating local culture into elementary school learning is still not optimal. Globalisation and the penetration of popular culture have caused the erosion of local identity among children. Numerous students in culturally rich areas, including the Toba region, are no longer familiar with regional languages, traditional symbols, or noble values such as *Marsiadapari* (cooperation) and *Poda Na Lima* (moral guidelines for life). This condition indicates a disconnect between ancestral culture and the learning they experience in school.

In addition, the uniform national curriculum still provides limited space for contextual local content. Teachers often face difficulties integrating regional culture into the learning process due to the lack of relevant teaching materials and guidelines. As a result, learning in elementary schools becomes meaningless and does not reflect the students' socio-cultural context. In fact, basic education is a crucial phase for instilling character, values, and identity awareness from an early age.

This situation is exacerbated by the community and local government's view, which emphasises culture as an economic asset rather than a source of educational value. Various cultural festivals in Toba Regency, such as the Soposurung Art Festival or the Lake Toba Enchantment Carnival, highlight the aspects of performance and tourism rather than their educational significance. This process of commodification causes the Batak Toba culture to often appear on the surface as entertainment. Still, it loses the depth of value that can be transferred to the younger generation through education.

Elementary schools actually have a strategic role in cultural preservation. Through learning that integrates the values, symbols, and practices of Batak Toba culture, students can learn about responsibility, cooperation, politeness, and respect for others and their ancestors. Integrating culture into learning will help students understand academic knowledge and build character and pride in their cultural identity.

Previous studies have shown that culture-based education is effective in shaping the character and identity of students (Faustine, 2025; Helda & Rose, 2025; Faturahim et al., 2024; Rahayu et al., 2024). However, most of these studies focus on the cultural contexts of Java, Bali, and Minangkabau. Meanwhile, studies on the Toba Batak have mostly discussed ethnographic aspects, traditional rituals, and tourism (Pitana & Putu, 2005; Ardika, 2015) without deeply examining how these cultural values can be applied in elementary school learning.

This gap is the basis for this research. A study is needed to examine how the Batak Toba culture can be integrated into the elementary school curriculum as a source of contextual

learning and a medium for shaping student character. In terms of state of the art, this research is at the intersection of cultural pedagogy, local wisdom-based learning, and character education. This approach places culture as a living learning resource (living curriculum) that fosters self-awareness, regional identity, and morality in students (Sumarni et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2024).

Thus, this study aims to formulate strategies for integrating Batak Toba culture into elementary school learning to preserve cultural values, strengthen character, and shape students' local identity contextually and sustainably.

2. Literature review

2.1 Local culture-based education

Local culture-based education is a strategy to integrate local values, norms, and wisdom into the learning process so that students not only acquire academic knowledge but also internalise cultural identity and national character (Wulandari et al., 2024; Mundzir, 2024). This educational model is essential to implement in elementary schools because this period is a stage of identity and moral values formation. Through culture-based learning, students are expected to understand their ancestors' cultural heritage and foster a sense of pride in their local identity (Firdaus et al., 2025). In the context of globalisation, culture-based education also functions as a tool for preserving and protecting national identity. UNESCO (2009) emphasises that cultural preservation through education is integral to sustainable development oriented towards diversity and social sustainability.

2.2 History and philosophical values of batak toba culture

The Batak Toba culture has strong historical and philosophical roots. According to legend, the Batak Toba people believe that they are descendants of Debata Mulajadi Nabolon, the creator god of heaven and earth, who descended his descendants on Mount Pusuk Buhit, Sianjur Mula-Mula, on the shores of Lake Toba (Simanjuntak, 2006). This mountain symbolises the Batak people's origins and is their spiritual and cultural centre.

In the Batak Toba belief system, there is a concept known as *Dalihan Natolu*, a social philosophy consisting of three elements of relationship: *Hula-Hula* (female giver), *Dongan Tubu* (blood relatives), and *Boru* (female receiver). This philosophy emphasises the importance of balance, mutual respect, and social solidarity in community life (Sianipar, 1991). Other values, such as *Hamoraon* (prosperity), *Hasangapon* (honour), and *Hagabeon* (descendants), form the basis of the moral and social orientation of the Batak Toba community (Siahaan, 2009).

2.3 Dimensions of Batak Toba culture and their relevance to education

Batak Toba culture encompasses various aspects of life, ranging from language, belief systems, morals, customs, knowledge, arts, and customary law. The Batak language and *Pustaha* script are the main identities that contain philosophical and social ethical values (Piliang, 2003). The Batak language contains values of politeness, democracy, and respect for others, while the Batak script serves as a medium for storing the knowledge and spirituality of the community (Siahaan, 2009).

In terms of beliefs, although the majority of the Batak Toba community now adheres to Christianity, elements of animism and indigenous beliefs remain, such as the concepts of *Tondi* (soul), *Sahala* (spiritual power), and *Begu* (ancestral spirits) (Nainggolan, 2012). The traditional beliefs of *Ugamo Malim* (Parmalim) remain as a form of spirituality and cultural identity that teaches the values of honesty, simplicity, and love (Nainggolan, 2012).

In addition, traditional Batak Toba knowledge, such as the *Parhalaan* calendar system, traditional *Gondang Sabangunan* music, and *Sibaso* (conventional medicine) practices, reflects local wisdom that can be integrated into science, mathematics, arts, and social studies learning in elementary schools (Eron, 2016). Integrating this knowledge not only introduces culture but also strengthens students' appreciation for the sources of knowledge from their ancestors.

2.4 Cultural integration in elementary school learning

The integration of local culture into learning can be done through contextual and thematic approaches. Asriadi (2023) & Wahyuni & Dafit (2024) explain that multicultural education helps students understand diversity and appreciate cultural identity. Yuniati & Fathoni (2025) add that culturally responsive teaching allows teachers to connect students' learning experiences with their cultural context. In the context of Batak Toba, cultural integration can be applied through regional songs, folk tales, traditional games, *Tor Tor* dances, and traditional activities such as *Mangalahat Horbo* or *Mangain Marga*. These activities serve as a medium for cultural preservation and student character building. Thus, Batak Toba-based learning plays a vital role in strengthening the local identity of the nation's children from an early age.

2.5 Challenges in cultural preservation through education

Several studies show that implementing a culture-based approach still faces several obstacles. Teachers often find it challenging to develop culture-based teaching materials due to limited guidance and training (Rahmawati et al., 2020). In addition, collaboration between schools and traditional institutions and community leaders is minimal, so preserving cultural values is less than optimal. Another challenge is the influence of global popular culture, which distances the younger generation from the language and traditions of their ancestors (Atmojo et al., 2025; Saragih & Ramadan, 2021). Therefore, basic education needs to serve as a bridge between tradition and modernity. Through a curriculum sensitive to local culture, contextual teacher training, and school-indigenous community partnerships, the noble values of the Batak Toba people can continue to thrive and be passed on to younger generations.

3. Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to describe and understand the meaning of preserving Batak Toba cultural values in the context of learning in elementary schools. This approach was chosen because it can naturally reveal the community's social realities, values, and culture-based educational practices. Through this approach, the researcher sought to understand how teachers, principals, and parents play a role in transmitting local cultural values to children in formal educational settings.

The research was conducted in Lumban Bulbul of Balige District, Toba, in North Sumatra. This location was chosen because it has a distinctive character as a priority tourist area and a living space for the Batak Toba culture. On the other hand, this region reflects the tension and harmony between efforts to preserve local culture and the pressures of modernisation and the commercialisation of tourism. These conditions make it contextual and relevant to the research focus. The research was conducted after obtaining official permission from academic institutions and the local government.

The research data sources consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through field observations and in-depth interviews with education stakeholders, namely teachers, school principals, and parents, and was supplemented with the views of traditional leaders and representatives from the education office. Secondary data was obtained from

education policy documents, institutional reports, media archives, and literature relevant to cultural preservation and education based on local wisdom.

Data collection techniques were carried out in three main ways:

- 3.1** Field observation, conducted descriptively and participatively in elementary school environments, to understand the implementation of culture-based learning, cultural expressions in school activities, and community involvement in the education process.
- 3.2** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers, principals, parents, and community leaders to explore their views, experiences, and strategies in transmitting Batak Toba cultural values to children. A semi-structured approach was chosen to give researchers flexibility in exploring issues that arose naturally in the field.
- 3.3** Documentation studies included analysis of the curriculum, school programs, local regulations, and other relevant written sources to reinforce the results of observations and interviews.

Data analysis was conducted using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion/verification. Data was reduced during the collection stage by selecting and grouping relevant information according to the research focus. Data presentation was in the form of thematic narratives and matrices to facilitate the identification of patterns and relationships between phenomena. The final stage of drawing conclusions and verification was carried out through critical reflection and triangulation of sources and techniques to ensure the validity and credibility of the findings.

With this methodological framework, the study is expected to clearly describe how Batak Toba cultural values are represented, taught, and passed on through basic education practices. The research results are expected to provide theoretical contributions to strengthening local culture-based learning models and practical contributions to schools and local governments in designing strategies for cultural preservation through sustainable education.

4. Results

4.1 Implementation of Batak Toba culture-based learning in elementary schools

The research results show that implementing Batak Toba culture-based learning in elementary schools in Lumban Bulbul Village, Balige District, in Toba Regency, is still in its early stages and has not been fully integrated into the school curriculum structure. Based on four weeks of observation at Lumban Bulbul Elementary School, elements of Batak Toba culture appeared more often in thematic activities, creative projects, and school ceremonial activities than in regular classroom learning activities.

In the first week of observation, a learning activity themed "The Diversity of My Nation's Culture" featured students wearing traditional Batak clothing with *Ulos* and *Sortali*. The teacher introduced several cultural symbols, such as *Dalihan Na Tolu*, a social structure in Batak Toba society that emphasises mutual respect between families. However, this introduction was descriptive and was not followed by a discussion of the philosophical values.

The fourth-grade teacher explained that:

"We want children to learn about Batak customs early, but no specific guidelines or modules exist. We usually include it when the theme is 'cultural diversity' or the school holds a traditional clothing competition."

Another teacher added:

"In Indonesian language class, I often ask the children to write Batak folk tales, such as Si Boru Deak Parujar or Tano Ponggol. But it's only a writing assignment; we don't discuss the moral values or cultural philosophy."

From interviews with the principal, it was learned that school policy does not explicitly regulate integrating local culture into lesson plans (RPP) or other teaching tools. The principal said:

"Our teachers have tried introducing Batak culture, but it is still spontaneous. The local government has not developed a content curriculum. We hope there will be guidelines for these activities to be focused and sustainable."

In addition to interviews, field observations revealed several learning practices that already contain cultural values. For example, in arts and cultural activities, students are invited to sing regional songs such as *Butet*, *Sinanggar Tulo*, and *O Tano Batak*. Teachers explain the meaning of the lyrics, especially the moral messages about love, hard work, and pride in one's homeland. In between activities, several students enthusiastically imitated simple dances accompanied by Batak *Gondang* music played on the school's loudspeakers.

In social studies class, the teacher took the initiative to introduce the *Dalihan Na Tolu* kinship system through a simple family chart. The teacher explained the roles of *Hula-Hula* (giver of a wife), *Dongan Tubu* (cousin), and *Boru* (receiver of a wife) and emphasised the values of respect and social responsibility in these family relationships. However, reinforcing these cultural values has not yet become part of the assessment or reflection of learning.

A fourth-grade student named N.L. said in a small group interview:

"I like learning Batak songs. But other subjects rarely discuss customs. Sometimes it's only during competitions or school events."

Observations also found that the learning activities with the strongest cultural elements occurred outside the classroom. During one Clean Friday activity, students were invited to work together to clean the school environment. The teacher used this opportunity to explain the value of *Marsiadapari* (cooperation) as one of the main characteristics of the Toba Batak people. The teacher told the students:

"Children, when we work together like this, it is called Marsiadapari. In Batak customs, people willing to help each other are a sign of having a good heart."

The students' response was quite positive; some students enthusiastically replied that they also often help their parents at home, for example, by helping to clean the yard or dry rice. Simple activities like this provide a natural space for teachers to instil cultural values without being bound by textbooks.

However, based on interviews with several teachers, the main obstacle in implementing culture-based learning is the lack of teaching materials and contextual learning media. One teacher stated:

"If there were children's storybooks in the Batak language that were adapted to the curriculum, it would definitely be easier. Now we must search for them online or get stories from parents."

Meanwhile, local traditional leaders emphasised the importance of collaboration between schools and traditional communities:

"Schools must work together with the Raja Parhata or traditional elders. They can help explain the meaning of customs, such as when Mangalahat Horbo or Mangidah Jambar. Children will then understand the philosophy behind each ceremony."

In addition, parents also play a role in strengthening culture-based learning at home. Several interviewed parents admitted that they still encourage their children to speak Batak at home, even though not all children respond well. One mother said:

"We often tell our children to speak Batak, but they respond in Indonesian. Now children prefer to watch YouTube rather than listen to their grandmother's stories."

These findings indicate a shift in socio-cultural practices that impacts the sustainability of local languages and values. Therefore, schools have become a strategic arena for reviving cultural customs, symbols, and values that have begun to erode.

Overall, findings reveal that Batak Toba-based learning at Lumban Bulbul Elementary School is already beginning to be implemented through local activities such as regional songs, folk tales, traditional symbols, and social cooperation. However, this integration is still partial and has not been planned within a systematic curriculum framework.

Thus, the implementation stage of Batak Toba culture-based learning in elementary schools in Lumban Bulbul Village can be categorised as an initiation stage, namely the initial stage of towards full integration, where understanding and practice have begun to grow but still require policy support, resources, and pedagogical innovation to achieve practical sustainability.

4.2 The role of teachers and schools in transmitting batak toba cultural values

Teachers and principals have a strategic position in transmitting Batak Toba cultural values in the school environment. They not only function as teachers of academic knowledge but also as agents of local cultural preservation who play a role in instilling traditional values in the younger generation. Based on in-depth interviews and observations at Lumban Bulbul Elementary School, this role is carried out through two main channels: (1) the integration of cultural values into classroom learning, and (2) the instillation of cultural values in non-formal activities at school.

In an interview, the principal of SDN Lumban Bulbul stated that awareness of the importance of cultural preservation already exists among teachers, but is still limited by the absence of structured guidelines. He said:

"We are aware of the importance of local culture. However, teachers do not yet have standard guidelines. We want training on how to teach Daliha Na Tolu values in learning activities, so that children not only know about them, but can also practice them in their daily lives."

Stemming from observations of fifth and sixth-grade classes, several teachers try to instil cultural values through contextual methods. Fifth-grade teachers, for example, use a project-based learning model when discussing the theme "My Social and Cultural Life." In this activity, students were asked to create a mini-drama about the life of the Batak Toba community in their village, highlighting the values of *Marsiadapari* (cooperation) and *Somba Marhulahula* (respect for elders). After the performance, the teacher invited the students to reflect together on the moral meaning of the story.

The teacher explained in an interview:

"I told the children that cooperation is part of the Batak tradition. If they are not united, they cannot progress. Hence, I linked cultural values to the way they learn. For example, when creating a drama, they had to divide tasks, help each other, and listen to their friends' opinions."

Observations indicate that this strategy fosters student cooperation and a sense of responsibility. Students were seen actively discussing and helping each other, even using the Batak language in some conversations during rehearsals. This activity became a natural means of reviving the regional language in school settings that Indonesians generally dominate.

The fourth-grade teacher also added that the value of *Somba Marhulahula* is often used as the basis for shaping polite character and respect for teachers and parents. He stated:

"We often say respecting teachers and parents is the same as practising traditional values. That is how we relate lessons to life. For example, when discussing respect for

others in civics class, I relate it to Batak customs that emphasise Somba Marhulahula."

Observations of the weekly flag ceremony reinforce this statement. During the speech, the principal often slips in cultural messages, such as the importance of *Marsipature Hutanabe* (building one's hometown) and maintaining the family's good name. These messages are delivered in a style characteristic of the Batak people, firm but full of symbolic meaning. In the context of character education, this practice is a tangible form of integrating cultural values into routine school activities.

In addition to teachers and principals, the role of school supervisors is crucial in promoting cultural initiatives. In an interview with the supervisor of Balige District Elementary School, he stated:

"We encourage schools in Toba to start promoting local culture as part of their learning. However, a few teachers can still develop teaching materials based on local wisdom."

This condition aligns with the results of interviews with several teachers who complained about the limitations of media and teaching materials. A sixth-grade teacher said:

"National thematic books do not mention Batak culture very much. Thus, we often use regional songs or folk tales such as Si Martua Raja as an introduction. But we still need appropriate modules or worksheets."

Observations also show that most teachers take the initiative to use local resources such as pictures of traditional *Jabu Bolon* houses, *Gondang* musical instruments, and *Ulos* as visual media in arts, culture, and social studies lessons. Students are asked to redraw these cultural symbols while explaining their meanings. For example, one student drew a *Ragidup Ulos* and explained that the cloth symbolises a prayer for a person to live a prosperous and long life.

The interaction between teachers and students in culture-based learning shows a process of internalising values. For example, in one reflection activity, a student said:

"I now know that helping friends is a Batak custom. I used to think it was just a school rule."

This statement implies that students are beginning to associate everyday social behaviour with broader cultural meanings. In thematic analysis, this illustrates the formation of cultural awareness that grows from contextual learning experiences.

However, implementing teachers' and schools' roles in transmitting cultural values still faces several obstacles. In addition to the lack of appropriate teaching materials, time constraints in the national curriculum make it difficult for teachers to integrate cultural values deeply into each subject. Most cultural activities are outside class hours, such as in *Batak Cultural Arts* extracurricular activities or when celebrating Independence Day and National Teachers' Day.

A second-grade teacher stated:

"During core lessons, it is challenging to discuss customs. Thus, we usually insert it into Friday cultural activities, or when the children perform dances."

Overall, the research results show that teachers and schools at SDN Lumban Bulbul have played an essential role in transmitting Batak Toba cultural values. However, they are still in the process of strengthening this role. They have become the main bridge between tradition and modernity, reviving the values of *Marsiadapari*, *Somba Marhulahula*, and *Elek Marboru* in basic education oriented towards character building.

4.3 The role of parents and traditional leaders in cultural inheritance

Families and traditional leaders play an essential role as the first educators and guardians of community cultural values in the context of local wisdom-based character education. Interviews with eight parents of students revealed that most families still strive to introduce traditional

values through regional languages, involvement in family ceremonies, and the application of social behaviours that reflect the values of respect and togetherness. One informant, a housewife, said:

"At home, we teach our children to use the Batak language, even though they are sometimes embarrassed. We also invite them to participate in traditional ceremonies to know how to respect others."

Meanwhile, a father added:

"Children nowadays watch YouTube more often than listen to their grandmother's stories. Thus, we deliberately tell them stories about the origins of their clan or legends of Lake Toba so that they don't forget."

These findings imply that families know the importance of cultural education as part of character building for children at home. However, challenges arise due to the dominance of digital media, which has replaced traditional interactions between generations. Therefore, families try to integrate traditional values into their daily activities to avoid losing touch with their cultural roots.

Grounded in the perspective of the indigenous community, interviews with community leaders reveal concerns about the shift in values among the younger generation. One traditional leader said:

"Children today are smart at school, but many do not know the meaning of Dalihan Natolu. Schools should help us preserve our customs through lessons."

This statement indicates the need for collaboration between formal educational institutions and indigenous communities. Field observations also support this finding, where cultural activities such as *Gotilon* parties or harvest celebrations contextualise students' learning. In these activities, students are spectators and actively involved in understanding the symbolic meanings and moral values.

This involvement reflects the relationship between formal education and community-based education, where the learning process is not limited to the classroom but is extended to the socio-cultural realm. Thus, the inheritance of local culture is not only the responsibility of families or traditional leaders, but also an integral part of an education system oriented towards character building and national identity.

4.4 Challenges and efforts to preserve cultural values through education

Analysis of the observation results and interviews in the field shows that preserving Batak Toba cultural values through basic education faces several fundamental challenges. These structural, artistic, and pedagogical challenges affect the effectiveness of passing on local values to the younger generation.

4.4.1 The first challenge concerns the limited availability of teaching materials and learning guidelines based on local culture. Most teachers said they did not have a curriculum guide that specifically integrated Batak Toba cultural values. One teacher said:

"We want to teach about Batak customs and values, but they are not in the textbooks. Hence, we usually look for them or ask the students' parents."

This situation means that culture-based learning tends to depend on teachers' personal initiative without systematic support from educational institutions.

4.4.2 The second challenge is the limited training available to teachers on Batak Toba philosophy and cultural values. Several teachers admitted they had never received training on integrating local culture into learning. As a result, traditional values are often taught only at a symbolic level, without delving into deeper philosophical and moral meanings. This means that

cultural learning does not fully contribute to shaping students' character.

4.4.3 The third challenge arises from the lack of collaboration between schools, local traditional institutions, and cultural figures. In fact, this kind of cooperation can potentially enrich students' learning experiences through field activities, traditional arts practices, or cultural dialogues. One school principal said:

"We have invited traditional leaders to explain Dalihan Natolu, but we have not been able to do so regularly because we do not yet have formal cooperation with traditional institutions."

4.4.4 The fourth significant challenge is students' dominance of global popular culture. Children are more exposed to digital culture and social media oriented towards foreign cultures, so local languages and symbols are increasingly rarely used. Observations show that most students are more comfortable speaking standard Indonesian or inserting terms from digital media, rather than using the Batak language. As a result, there is an emotional distance between students and their cultural roots.

Despite these obstacles, schools and communities are undertaking many positive initiatives. Several schools are collaborating with traditional leaders to organise activities such as storytelling competitions in the Batak language, *Tor Tor* performances, and *Ulos* exhibitions. These activities serve as a means of cultural preservation and a forum for character building among students through values such as cooperation, respect, and responsibility. One teacher explained:

"Children feel prouder when they perform Tor Tor dances or wear Ulos, because they feel it is part of who they are."

These efforts demonstrate that education plays a strategic role in maintaining the continuity of local culture. Integrating traditional values into school activities enriches learning and fosters students' awareness of identity and cultural pride from an early age.

5 Discussion

The research findings confirm that the preservation of Batak Toba cultural values at the elementary education level cannot be separated from the social, family, and traditional community contexts in which students live. Through a descriptive qualitative approach, observations and interviews show that schools are essential to bridge academic knowledge and local cultural values. However, this role has not been optimised due to various structural and cultural constraints.

First, the research results imply that teachers often face limitations in teaching materials oriented towards the Batak Toba culture. Teachers must take the initiative to develop their own learning materials based on personal experience and knowledge. This is in line with the findings of Parmiti et al (2021) which states that primary education often lacks curriculum guidelines integrated with local values. In this context, teachers' efforts to create simple innovations such as storytelling competitions in the Batak language or *Tor Tor* performances have strategic value in preserving cultural identity in the school environment.

Second, interviews with parents and traditional leaders reveal that families are still the leading agents in transmitting cultural values. However, challenges arise when children are more exposed to global popular culture through digital media than traditional cultural practices. This phenomenon indicates a shift in values from collectivity to individuality. In the framework of character education, this condition requires schools to strengthen the function of community-based cultural education as a form of contextual education that instils the values of togetherness, respect, and responsibility (Anning, 2025; Atmojo et al., 2025).

Third, the relationship between schools and indigenous communities is still sporadic and ceremonial. Several schools have involved indigenous leaders in cultural activities, but no planned collaborative mechanism exists. According to Sakti et al (2024), the involvement of local communities in education not only enriches the learning experience but also strengthens students' sense of belonging to their culture. These findings indicate the need for a sustainable partnership model between schools, families, and indigenous institutions in designing culture-based learning (Simamora et al., 2023; Malik, 2025; Cantika et al., 2024) .

In addition, the noble values of the Batak Toba people, such as *Dalihan Natolu*, *Hamoraon*, *Hasangapon*, and *Hagabeon*, remain the moral foundation of community life, but are beginning to erode due to modernisation and cultural homogenisation. Through basic education, these values can be revitalised in the form of learning activities that connect local knowledge with the context of students' lives (Sularso, 2016; Thaib, 2024). Social studies or civics education, for example, can highlight the concept of *Dalihan Natolu* as a representation of a social system that teaches balance, honour, and social responsibility.

Thus, this discussion emphasises that preserving Batak Toba cultural values through basic education is not merely an effort to maintain traditions, but also a strategy for building character and national identity amid the tide of globalisation. Education rooted in local culture enables students to understand themselves as part of a community with its values, history, and wisdom. Therefore, the revitalisation of local culture through education needs to be directed towards strengthening collaboration between schools, families, and indigenous communities, as well as developing contextual teaching materials that describe the socio-cultural reality of the Batak Toba community.

6 Conclusion and implications

This study concludes that preserving Batak Toba cultural values at the elementary education level is a complex process that requires strong relationships between families, schools, and indigenous communities. The observations and interviews imply that families still play a central role as the leading agents in inheriting cultural values through language, traditions, and daily social practices. Values, such as *Dalihan Natolu*, *Hamoraon* (prosperity), *Hasangapon* (honour), and *Hagabeon* (lineage), continue to be taught in the family environment as the moral foundation and cultural identity of the Batak Toba community. However, the influence of global popular culture and the dominance of digital media have led to a decline in the younger generation's attachment to local language and traditions.

Schools play a strategic role as a bridge between academic knowledge and local cultural values. Teachers' efforts to integrate cultural elements into learning activities through storytelling competitions in the Batak language, *Tor Tor* performances, and *Ulos* exhibitions prove the great potential of basic education as a means of cultural revitalisation. However, implementing culture-based learning still faces various obstacles, such as the limited availability of relevant teaching materials, the lack of teacher training in integrating local wisdom into the curriculum, and the lack of collaboration between schools and traditional leaders. These conditions indicate that strengthening teacher capacity and policy support from local governments are essential factors in the sustainability of cultural preservation efforts.

Traditional leaders and local communities play a vital role in maintaining the continuity of cultural values by strengthening the relationship between the younger generation and their traditional roots. Through collaboration with schools, traditional leaders can act as cultural resource persons and guardians of noble values internalised in contextual learning. Therefore, a sustainable partnership between families, schools, and indigenous communities is needed to

ensure that Batak Toba cultural values are taught as knowledge and lived as guidelines for life. Revising local culture through education emphasises the importance of making schools a space for cultural life, where students learn to recognise their identity, appreciate diversity, and foster responsibility for preserving the nation's cultural heritage.

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