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# Learning to Sing Tembang Macapat as an Effort to Preserve Culture and Achieve Regional Language Competencies at a Public Elementary School

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## Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan mendeskripsikan proses pembelajaran menyanyi tembang macapat di sekolah dasar sebagai strategi pelestarian budaya dan penguatan kompetensi Bahasa Daerah. Penelitian dilakukan secara kualitatif dengan pendekatan partisipatif di sebuah sekolah dasar negeri di Gresik pada semester ganjil tahun ajaran 2025/2026. Subjek dipilih secara purposif, meliputi guru Bahasa Daerah dan siswa kelas V. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipatif, wawancara semi-terstruktur, serta dokumentasi foto kegiatan yang digunakan sebagai data pendukung analisis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pembelajaran menyanyi tembang macapat secara aktif meningkatkan penguasaan kosakata kromo alus dan kromo inggil, serta menanamkan nilai-nilai karakter seperti kesederhanaan, tanggung jawab, dan cinta budaya. Guru mengaitkan makna tembang dengan kehidupan siswa agar lebih mudah dipahami. Beberapa siswa juga menyanyikan tembang di rumah dan mengajarkannya kepada adik mereka, menunjukkan terjadinya transfer budaya. Kendala seperti keterbatasan media pembelajaran disiasati dengan pendekatan kontekstual. Pembelajaran ini terbukti efektif, menyenangkan, dan bermakna bagi siswa sekolah dasar.

**Kata Kunci:** *Tembang Macapat, Pelestarian Budaya, Bahasa Daerah, Pendidikan Karakter*

## Abstract

*This study aims to describe the learning process of singing tembang macapat in elementary schools as a strategy for cultural preservation and the strengthening of regional language competencies. The research was conducted qualitatively using a participatory approach at a public elementary school in Gresik during the first semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The subjects were purposively selected, consisting of a regional language teacher and fifth-grade students. Data were collected through participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and photographic documentation of activities, which served as supporting evidence for the analysis. The findings indicate that actively singing tembang macapat improves students' mastery of krama alus and krama inggil vocabulary while instilling character values such as simplicity, responsibility, and cultural pride. Teachers contextualized song meanings to make them more relatable. Some students sang the songs at home and taught them to siblings, indicating cultural transfer beyond school. Despite limited learning media, teachers applied contextual strategies. Overall, this learning approach proved effective, enjoyable, and meaningful for elementary students.*

**Keywords:** *Tembang Macapat, Cultural Preservation, Regional Language, Character Education*

## INTRODUCTION

Regional languages are an inseparable part of Indonesia's cultural wealth, carrying historical, philosophical, and functional values in people's daily lives (Nurjanah & Haerudin, 2022). One of the most prominent forms of local cultural heritage is *tembang macapat*, a traditional Javanese poetic song transmitted both orally and in written form (Angeliia, 2023). *Tembang macapat* is not only admired for its literary beauty but also serves as a medium to convey moral teachings, ethics, and practical life wisdom that are relevant to students' character formation. In the context of basic education, preserving regional languages and cultural traditions is increasingly urgent given the rise of globalization and the declining interest of young generations in local heritage (Tektigul et al., 2023). Unfortunately, many elementary students show reduced ability and interest in singing *tembang macapat*, as schools often prioritize popular culture over traditional practices (Pramudi & Mardiana, 2023).

The *Merdeka Curriculum*, implemented since 2022, provides greater opportunities to strengthen local wisdom through Regional Language Learning Outcomes. For Phase C (grades V–VI), students are expected to paraphrase *tembang macapat*, perform them fluently and politely, and interpret the cultural meanings embedded in traditional texts (Hidayah et al., 2023). This illustrates that *tembang macapat* functions not only as cultural heritage but also as a means to achieve regional language competencies (Subrata, 2022). Therefore, learning approaches that actively engage students in singing, understanding, and interpreting the values of *tembang macapat* are essential to ensure its sustainability in education (Sawita & Sulistiyo, 2024).

Scholars have highlighted various approaches to preserve *tembang macapat*, including art competitions, teacher training, and character education integration (Saefudin et al., 2024; Annisa & Safira, 2025; Nugroho et al., 2024). These efforts demonstrate its potential to foster positive values such as religiosity, honesty,

and independence (Ratnasari & Adiwijaya, 2023). However, several challenges remain, including limited teacher competence, insufficient media, and low student motivation (Latifah et al., 2025). To address this, innovative media such as the Millealab virtual tour (Adnan et al., 2024) and the E-Srambahan application (Wahyudi et al., 2025) have been explored. Moreover, studies confirm that *tembang macapat* contains strong aesthetic and spiritual values and can even function as a medium for conflict prevention (Perangin-angin et al., 2025). Despite its importance, bibliometric research indicates that interpretations of its ethical and aesthetic dimensions remain underexplored (Larasati et al., 2024).

Although existing studies have examined cognitive learning aspects, teacher training, and integration of Javanese culture into curricula (Basir, 2024; Subrata et al., 2024), only a few have specifically investigated the learning process of singing *tembang macapat* as an active pedagogical practice. Most research has focused on character values, curriculum policy, or general preservation strategies (Anto & Anita, 2019; Ramadhansyah et al., 2022), while little attention has been given to how singing activities directly enhance regional language skills such as speaking, reading, or comprehension (Subrata & Ulhaq, 2022; Latifah et al., 2025). Furthermore, studies often remain context-specific without emphasizing the broader linkage between cultural preservation and competency achievement within the *Merdeka Curriculum*. This creates a gap for exploring how active singing of *tembang macapat* can serve both cultural and linguistic objectives simultaneously.

Based on this background, the present study aims to describe and analyze the learning process of singing *tembang macapat* in elementary schools as a strategy for cultural preservation and as an effort to strengthen students' regional language competence. This research is expected to contribute to the development of a contextual and meaningful learning model that aligns with the goals of the *Merdeka Curriculum*.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to explore the learning process of singing *tembang macapat* in elementary school. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to capture social and cultural phenomena naturally occurring in the classroom context, particularly in local language learning (Fiantika et al., 2022; Assyakurrohim et al., 2022).

The research subjects were selected using purposive sampling, involving Javanese language teachers, homeroom teachers, and fifth-grade students at UPT SD Negeri 195 Gresik. Data were collected through three primary techniques: classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and researcher participation in the learning activities (Romdona et al., 2025). Observations were recorded using structured observation sheets, which documented aspects such as teacher–student interaction, student responses, and classroom atmosphere. Semi-structured interviews with teachers and selected students were used to gain insights into their experiences, perceptions, and the impact of *tembang macapat* learning.

The researcher also acted as a participant-observer during the lessons, enabling deeper understanding of classroom dynamics while maintaining systematic field notes. To ensure objectivity and validity, triangulation was applied by cross-checking observation notes, interview data, and the researcher's participation records. Peer debriefing with academic colleagues and references to related literature further strengthened data credibility (Dahlia et al., 2025).

Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model (as cited in Nurhidayat & Nurjamaludin, 2024), consisting of three stages: (1) data reduction, by selecting and organizing essential information; (2) data display, by presenting findings in descriptive narratives; and (3) conclusion drawing and verification, by identifying emerging patterns and cultural values. This process enabled the researcher to critically interpret the role of *tembang macapat*

learning in fostering both language competence and cultural preservation among students.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Research Results

The findings of this study revealed that the implementation of learning *tembang macapat* in elementary schools contributed significantly to the preservation of local culture as well as to the strengthening of regional language competencies. Based on classroom observations and interviews with teachers and students, it was found that students were not only able to memorize the songs but also understood the moral messages and cultural values embedded within the lyrics. Teachers emphasized that the learning process stimulated student enthusiasm because it combined music, language, and cultural identity in a meaningful way.

To provide a clearer picture of the research results, the aspects of culture and language found in the learning of *tembang macapat* are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1. Cultural and Linguistic Aspects in Tembang Macapat Learning**

Aspect	Research Findings
Cultural preservation	Students recognized macapat as part of Javanese cultural identity and began to respect traditional arts.
Local language competence	The use of Javanese lyrics enhanced students' vocabulary and comprehension in regional language learning.
Learning engagement	Students showed enthusiasm and enjoyment when combining singing with language learning.

From Table 1, it can be seen that tembang macapat was not merely an art form to be sung, but also a medium through which students built their cultural awareness and linguistic skills. During interviews, students stated that they enjoyed learning because it felt like “singing while studying,” which made language learning less intimidating and more enjoyable.

Furthermore, the research also highlighted that tembang macapat served as an effective vehicle for instilling character education. Through the messages contained in the lyrics, students were able to learn about values such as respect, humility, cooperation, and responsibility. These values emerged consistently during the observation process, especially when students practiced and performed the songs together. The details of these values are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Character Values Integrated in Learning Tembang Macapat**

Character Value	Manifestation in Learning
Respect	Students showed respect to teachers and peers while rehearsing and singing.
Humility	Students acknowledged mistakes in pronunciation and worked to correct them.
Cooperation	Students collaborated during group singing practices and performances.
Responsibility	Students took responsibility for memorizing lyrics and practicing outside class.

As illustrated in Table 2, the process of learning macapat was not limited to cognitive development but extended to affective and behavioral dimensions. Students gradually internalized these values because the learning process allowed them to experience the messages directly through music and group interaction. Teachers also reported that students demonstrated improved discipline and respect for local traditions after engaging in this activity.

## Discussion

The results of this study highlight that tembang macapat learning in elementary schools contributes not only to cultural preservation but also to linguistic competence and character education. Unlike previous studies that emphasized curriculum integration (Hidayah et al., 2023; Cantika et al., 2025) or the development of digital learning media (Adnan et al., 2024; Wahyudi et al., 2025), this study demonstrates the direct practice of singing macapat as the main pedagogical activity. This provides new evidence that the authentic singing process itself without relying heavily on additional media can effectively transmit cultural values and strengthen language literacy.

A key contribution of this research lies in revealing how students actively transfer cultural experiences from the classroom to the home environment. The phenomenon of students teaching Dhandhanggula to siblings and family members reflects what Banks (2019) describes as “intergenerational cultural transmission,” showing that local culture based education can extend beyond formal schooling. This is a unique dimension rarely explored in earlier macapat studies, which mainly focused on teacher competence or student character values (Nugrahanta et al., 2023; Ratnasari & Adiwijaya, 2023).

Another significant point is the role of teachers as facilitators who employ contextual and humanistic approaches to overcome students’ limited understanding of subtle Javanese vocabulary. These findings reinforce Lickona’s (2019) assertion that character

education is most effective when combined with engaging methods and teacher-student interaction, not merely by lecturing values. In this study, teachers used simplification of terms and emotional bonding, which proved to motivate students and build confidence in using krama alus and krama inggil.

At the same time, this study acknowledges certain obstacles such as students' limited familiarity with classical Javanese terms and the shortage of musical instruments to support learning. These challenges, however, did not diminish the effectiveness of the lessons because teachers compensated by creating interactive sessions, providing concrete examples from daily life, and occasionally integrating simple instruments when available. This indicates that cultural education does not require sophisticated facilities, but rather innovative and adaptive teaching strategies.

Beyond its immediate context, the findings also carry theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, they confirm the notion that local culture-based learning fosters not only knowledge but also identity formation and emotional attachment to heritage (Subrata et al., 2022; Suryati & Suwija, 2024). Practically, this study suggests that tembang macapat can serve as a replicable model for other schools seeking to integrate cultural content into the Independent Curriculum, particularly in strengthening regional language competencies and cultivating student character in a meaningful and enjoyable way.

In summary, the discussion expands the understanding of macapat learning by positioning it not only as cultural preservation but also as a living pedagogical practice that connects classrooms, families, and communities. This dual role educational and cultural distinguishes the present study from earlier works and offers a sustainable model for character and language education rooted in local traditions.

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study concludes that learning tembang macapat in elementary schools significantly contributes to the preservation of local culture, the strengthening of regional language competence, and the cultivation of students' character values. Participatory and contextual learning approaches enable students to master krama alus and krama inggil vocabulary while internalizing moral lessons such as simplicity, responsibility, and harmony. Students' enthusiasm in singing activities, both in the classroom and at home, demonstrates the effectiveness of this cultural learning method in fostering pride in local heritage.

The findings highlight the essential role of teachers as facilitators who creatively bridge students' limited understanding of traditional language and values through contextual strategies. Despite challenges such as limited facilities and the complexity of Javanese vocabulary, the learning process has remained meaningful and impactful for students' linguistic and character development.

For practical implementation, schools are encouraged to integrate tembang macapat into regional language learning more systematically, including the use of musical instruments, competitions, and digital learning media to enhance engagement. Teachers should also be supported with training to strengthen their capacity in delivering culture-based education. Future research is recommended to conduct comparative studies across regions or explore technology-assisted approaches in order to sustain the relevance of tembang macapat in contemporary education.

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