

The Festival of Tunas Bahasa Ibu: Reviving Javanese Script to Strengthen Identity among Elementary School Students

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Abstract

Revitalizing local literacy, particularly Javanese script, is essential for strengthening cultural identity and character building in elementary education. However, existing studies still show limited attention to how school-based cultural revitalization programs, especially those delivered through performative activities, affect students' literacy development and cultural identity formation. This study aims to describe students' Javanese script literacy and cultural attachment before participating in the Festival of Tunas Bahasa Ibu (FTBI), analyze FTBI's role in revitalizing Javanese script, and formulate strategies for strengthening students' cultural identity. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through observations, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and documentation, and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model. The results show that before FTBI students' literacy was limited and motivation tended to be low, while FTBI produced significant improvement in reading and writing abilities alongside increased pride, sense of belonging, and awareness that Javanese script is part of students' identity. The study concludes that FTBI works effectively because it provides contextual cultural learning, pedagogical scaffolding, school habituation, family support, and social recognition through festival-based performance, while challenges such as time constraints and mastery complexity require adaptive and systematic teaching strategies. Theoretically, these results extend beyond the local Cilacap context by providing evidence that performative, festival-based cultural learning can operate as an "identity-learning mechanism," offering transferable implications for global cultural education literature.

Keywords:

Cultural Identity Revitalization, Festival of Tunas Bahasa Ibu, Javanese Script

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Abstrak

Meremajakan literasi lokal, khususnya aksara Jawa, merupakan hal yang penting untuk memperkuat identitas budaya dan pembentukan karakter dalam pendidikan dasar. Namun, studi-studi yang ada masih menunjukkan perhatian yang terbatas terhadap bagaimana program revitalisasi budaya berbasis sekolah, terutama yang disampaikan melalui aktivitas performative, berdampak pada perkembangan literasi siswa dan pembentukan identitas budaya mereka. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan literasi aksara Jawa siswa serta keterikatan budaya mereka sebelum berpartisipasi dalam Festival Tunas Bahasa Ibu (FTBI), menganalisis peran FTBI dalam revitalisasi aksara Jawa, serta merumuskan strategi untuk memperkuat identitas budaya siswa. Dengan menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara semi-terstruktur, kuesioner, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sebelum FTBI, literasi siswa masih terbatas dan motivasi cenderung rendah, sedangkan FTBI menghasilkan peningkatan yang signifikan dalam kemampuan membaca dan menulis sekaligus meningkatnya rasa bangga, rasa memiliki, dan kesadaran bahwa aksara Jawa merupakan bagian dari identitas siswa. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa FTBI berhasil secara efektif karena menjadi pembelajaran budaya yang kontekstual, dukungan pedagogis, pembiasaan di sekolah, dukungan keluarga, serta pengakuan sosial melalui pertunjukan berbasis festival. Sementara itu, tantangan seperti keterbatasan waktu dan kompleksitas penguasaan memerlukan strategi pengajaran yang adaptif dan sistematis. Secara teoretis, temuan ini melampaui konteks lokal Cilacap dengan memberikan bukti bahwa pembelajaran budaya berbasis festival yang bersifat performatif dapat berfungsi sebagai “mekanisme pembelajaran identitas” sehingga menawarkan implikasi yang dapat ditransfer untuk literatur pendidikan budaya global.

Kata Kunci:

Revitalisasi Identitas Budaya, Festival Tunas Bahasa Ibu, Aksara Jawa

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INTRODUCTION

Primary education plays a strategic role in cultivating cultural values among the younger generation as part of shaping national identity and character. This commitment is clearly stated in Article 32 Paragraph (1) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, which emphasizes the state's obligation to promote national culture. In the educational context, efforts to preserve culture can be realized through the integration of local content—including regional languages and scripts—into the learning process (Nuriadi, 2023). Therefore, schools do not only function as academic institutions, but also as cultural spaces that transmit cultural values, norms, and symbols to students.

Cultural heritage functions as a system of meanings passed down across generations, and it plays an important role in shaping how individuals think, act, and behave. Therefore, in an educational perspective, culture should not only be treated as a subject to be taught, but also as the context and even the learning process itself (Andriyanto et al., 2025). One cultural heritage that requires early revitalization is Javanese script (Aksara Jawa). Beyond its function as a writing system, Aksara Jawa embodies identity, history, and local wisdom in Javanese society (Nurhayati & Abdurrahman, 2018). However, evidence suggests that students' literacy in Javanese script at the primary school level is declining. Rather than being positioned as a cultural identity resource, Javanese script is often perceived as difficult and less relevant to students, particularly due to the dominance of the Latin alphabet and learning approaches that remain conventional and emphasize rote memorization (Avianto & Prasida, 2018). This situation is further worsened by globalization, which encourages cultural detachment among young people (Noor, 2019).

In classroom practice, these challenges are increasingly visible in the low level of students' interest, the complexity of Javanese script structure, and the limited innovation in the learning process (Andriyanto et al., 2025). As a result, a gap emerges—both cognitively and emotionally—between students and Javanese script as part of their cultural identity (Harwati & Sathian, 2024). Consequently, Javanese script is not only seen as difficult, but also as less appealing and less relevant to modern life (Wulandari et al., 2025). These issues indicate that learning Javanese script cannot rely solely on conventional approaches focused on rote memorization and technical mastery. Therefore, revitalization efforts are needed to bring Javanese script back to life as a meaningful cultural practice in students' everyday experiences. In this context, revitalization is not only about preserving the script's form, but also about reactivating cultural values through learning experiences that are contextual, participatory, and enjoyable. In this way, students do not only learn how to read and write Javanese script, but also understand the cultural meaning embedded within it (Widianto, 2018).

One program that supports these revitalization efforts is the Festival of Tunas Bahasa Ibu (FTBI). The event is held as a forum for developing and appreciating students' abilities in regional languages at the primary school level, including literacy in Javanese script. FTBI does not only function as a competition, but also as a culture-based learning medium that is performative in nature. Through this program, students do not merely learn Javanese script in a theoretical way; they also have opportunities to perform, internalize, and celebrate their culture in a broader social setting. As a result, culture is not treated only as an object of study, but as a lived experience that nurtures students' pride and strengthens their sense of identity (Patintingan, 2025).

Recent studies indicate that the revitalization of regional languages and scripts is a crucial issue for sustaining local cultural heritage. Data from the Agency for Language Development and Development (Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa) show that most regional languages in Indonesia are in a threatened state (Abdani et al., 2025). Therefore, revitalization efforts can

no longer rely solely on formal classroom instruction; they must be packaged in ways that are contextual and participatory. One approach that has been developed is the revitalization of regional languages through the Festival Tunas Bahasa Ibu program, which provides students with opportunities to express themselves and creatively compete (Lisdawati et al., 2025). Other research also highlights that experience-based and culture-context-based approaches can increase students' motivation and engagement in learning regional languages (Istianah & Setyasto, 2023). In addition, applying Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational values through the among system has been proven effective in fostering students' cultural awareness as well as their learning independence (Claramita, 2026).

However, research that specifically examines the role of FTBI in the revitalization of Javanese script at the primary school level remains limited. Moreover, prior studies often focus either on (a) the program's implementation at a macro level or on (b) learning outcomes—particularly technical literacy—without thoroughly examining how participation in FTBI contributes to students' cultural attachment and identity. Therefore, empirical evidence is still lacking regarding the relationship between FTBI participation and improvements in students' Aksara Jawa literacy together with strengthened cultural identity. In addition, although studies such as Dewilde et al. (2021) contribute to understanding literacy development in educational interventions, they tend to emphasize measurable learning effects rather than how learners construct cultural attachment through participation. Similarly, Harwati & Sathian (2024) identifies cognitive and affective gaps between students and Aksara Jawa as part of cultural identity, but it does not specifically test how a festival-based, performative learning intervention can reduce those gaps. This study addresses that limitation by focusing on both literacy and cultural attachment in relation to FTBI-based participation.

This study aims to describe students' Javanese script literacy and cultural attachment before they take part in the Festival of Tunas Bahasa Ibu, analyze the festival's role in revitalizing the Javanese script, and formulate strategies to strengthen students' cultural identity. The study focuses on three main aspects: (1) students' Javanese script literacy and cultural attachment, (2) the role of the Festival of Tunas Bahasa Ibu in the revitalization of Javanese script, and (3) strategies to strengthen students' cultural identity through a festival-based approach. It is expected that this research will contribute to the development of contextual, culture-based learning, particularly for the revitalization of Javanese script and the strengthening of cultural identity among primary school students.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design to explore the Javanese script revitalization process in depth. The primary focus of the research is the implementation of the Festival of Tunas Bahasa Ibu (FTBI) at the primary school level, which is considered a real-world phenomenon in efforts to strengthen the cultural identity of young people (Lisdawati et al., 2025). Using this framework, the relationship between local language preservation activities and the development of students' cultural pride can be analyzed comprehensively.

The study is conducted in the Dabin 2 Karangpucung area, Cilacap Regency, involving three partner schools: SD Negeri Sindangbarang 03, SD Negeri Sindangbarang 04, and SD Negeri Gunungtelu 01. Data collection is carried out longitudinally over five months, from November 2025 to March 2026, to capture students' full range of experiences—from the preparation stage, to the competition implementation, and finally to short-term effects after the festival. Purposive

sampling was used in this study, involving 100 students from the three schools as the overall study population. From this group, a smaller set of three students' samples was then selected for more in-depth qualitative data collection. To enrich the findings, key informants were also recruited, including students who participated in the Javanese script competition, guiding teachers with at least five years of experience teaching local languages, school principals, and students' parents. By centering the competition participants and experienced teachers, the study captures both learners' lived experiences and the teaching practices that help sustain cultural identity. Meanwhile, the inclusion of principals and parents offers a broader view of how the educational environment and family support work together to strengthen children's cultural identity.

Data were collected using observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation studies. Observation focused on recording students' behaviors and enthusiasm throughout FTBI activities. Interviews were conducted to examine policy and system-level support, particularly the strategic roles of schools and teachers in strengthening regional language literacy. In addition, students' work products were analyzed to assess the development of their technical writing skills in Javanese script. To maintain research integrity and uphold ethical, human-centered principles, all participants' identities were anonymized. Data collection was carried out only after receiving official approval from the schools and obtaining consent from students' parents.

All collected data were processed using the interactive analysis model by Miles & Huberman as quoted in *Qualitative Data Analysis*. In this approach, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing are carried out continuously and iteratively until a coherent narrative is formed. To sharpen the findings, thematic analysis was also applied to identify underlying patterns and to interpret the deeper meanings behind the observed phenomena. To ensure the credibility and accountability of the research results, triangulation was conducted operationally in the field through two interrelated steps: (1) triangulation of sources and (2) triangulation of techniques. First, source triangulation was carried out by comparing information across different participant groups and evidence types. For example, interview data from teachers about the implementation of coaching strategies and curriculum integration were cross-checked with (a) students' written Javanese script products collected before and after the FTBI competition and (b) observational records of students' participation during activities (e.g., reading aloud accuracy, writing correctness, and collaborative behavior). Similarly, principals' descriptions of institutional support (such as facilities and literacy routines) were verified through documentation studies, including FTBI-related materials (banners, literacy-corner artifacts, and supporting documents) and the observed availability of those facilities during the implementation period. Second, technique triangulation was executed by validating interview findings using non-interview evidence. For instance, when teachers stated that students' enthusiasm increased due to performative learning activities, this claim was validated through observation indicators (student engagement, participation intensity, and creative use of Jvanese script) and student work evidence such as quality and completeness of characters, *Sandhangan* (diacritics), and *Pasangan* (subscripts). When inconsistencies were identified between interview claims and field evidence, the researcher conducted follow-up checking in the next interview session or revisited the observation notes to confirm whether the discrepancy was due to context, timing, or interpretation.

This process was documented throughout data collection to maintain an audit trail, ensuring that interpretations were grounded in consistent evidence from multiple angles. Data validity was therefore not treated as a general statement; rather, it was operationalized by repeatedly matching (a) what participants reported in interviews with (b) what was shown in students' products and

(c) what was observed during FTBI activities. The thematic aspects and indicators for this semi-structured interview are detailed systematically in Table 1.

Table 1. Thematic Interview Aspects and Indicators

Interview Themes	Indicators
SWOT Analysis of Javanese Script Preservation	Stength: School policies, curriculum implementation, institutional support, and the role of teachers. Weakness: Implementation constraints of FTBI and student enthusiasm levels. Opportunity: The impact of FTBI and the fostering of cultural identity awareness. Threat: Revitalization challenges and external obstacles in program execution.
Implementation of FTBI	Teacher involvement in execution and the effectiveness of the student coaching process.
Participant Response to the FTBI Competition	Awareness of cultural identity, Javanese script proficiency, learning experiences, and attitudes toward using the script.
Program Evaluation	Comprehensive assessment of the program's implementation.
Follow-up Action Plan	Stakeholder expectations and strategic plans for future program sustainability.

Meanwhile, the aspects observed during the implementation of the observation are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Indicators of Observation

Aspects	Description
Student Participation in FTBI	Students' active involvement during activities (writing, reading, and Javanese script competitions).
Javanese Script Reading Proficiency	Students' proficiency in accurately pronouncing simple Javanese script texts.
Javanese Script Writing Skills	Students' ability to correctly write basic characters, <i>Sandhangan</i> (diacritics), and <i>Pasangan</i> (subscripts)
Cultural Significance Awareness	Students' understanding of the function and value of Javanese script as a cultural heritage.
Regional Cultural Pride	Students' positive attitudes and expressions when utilizing Javanese script in their work or performances.
Collaboration and Participation	Students' teamwork and active engagement in groups while preparing for FTBI projects.
Creative Use of Javanese Script	Innovative application of Javanese script across various media (posters, performances, or written works).
Teacher Exemplarity	The role and conduct of teachers in guiding and mentoring the use of Javanese script during activities.
School Environmental Support	Availability of supporting facilities such as literacy corners, FTBI banners, and Javanese script information boards.
Impact on Cultural Identity	The positive transformation or influence on students' cultural identity following the activities.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Students Javanese Script Literacy

Field findings indicated that students' literacy in Javanese script before participating in FTBI was at a concerning level. Most students encountered basic challenges, especially in distinguishing characters with similar shapes such as, *sa* and *pa*, as well as *tha* and *ta*. In this study, students were categorized as "struggling" when they were still having difficulty recognizing Javanese script characters. They were considered "proficient" when they could identify Javanese characters and understand the corresponding *Pasangan* and *Sandhangan* for each one. Students were labeled "highly proficient" when they could reading and write sentences fluently in Javanese script, including both pasangan and sandhangan. As a result, the majority of students were classified in the "struggling" category: they could recognize only a limited number of characters and had not developed adequate reading and writing skills. Figure 1 presents the percentage distribution of students' Javanese script reading proficiency prior to the FTBI.

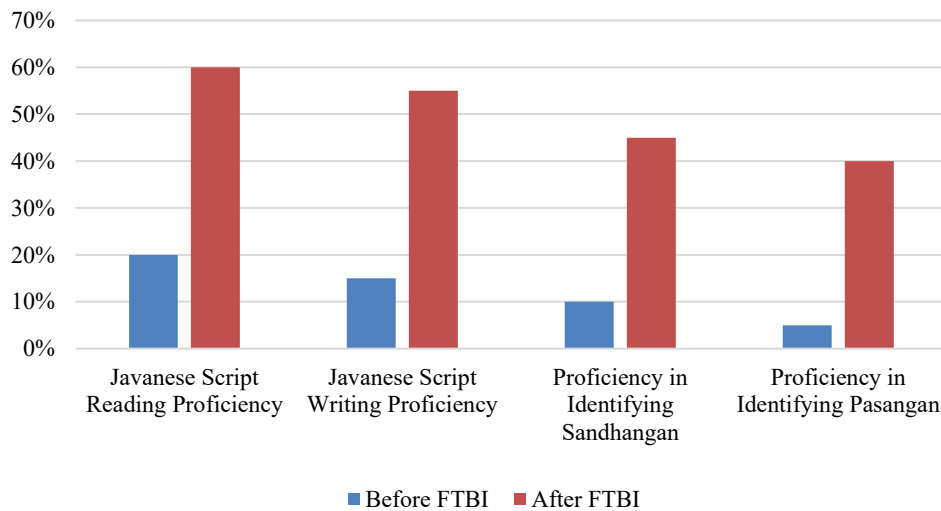


Figure 1. Students' Javanese Script Ability

This study investigated Javanese script reading proficiency among students in grades 4–6 in the Dabin 2 area of Karangpucung, Cilacap Regency, involving three partner schools: SD Negeri Sindangbarang 03, SD Negeri Sindangbarang 04, and SD Negeri Gunungtelu 01. Prior to FTBI implementation, the collected data showed a literacy condition that required serious attention. In reading, only 15% of students were categorized as highly proficient and 20% as proficient, while 40% were still struggling to read fluently and 25% were non-proficient. A parallel pattern was also observed in writing skills, where only 10% were highly proficient and 15% were proficient; the majority fell into the difficult (35%) and non-proficient (40%) categories. Overall, these results reflect substantial challenges in regional language instruction and underline the need for a more meaningful and motivating approach.

The low level of competence was closely associated with students' limited interest and motivation to learn Javanese script. Classroom observations showed that students tended to be passive and displayed low enthusiasm during learning activities. This lack of engagement appeared to be driven by boredom, which was reinforced by the continued use of conventional teaching methods. Teachers generally relied on lecture-based approaches and repetitive writing

exercises that students perceived as rigid and monotonous. In line with this situation, Figure 1 also highlights the improvement in students' Javanese script ability following the intervention.

The Festival of Tunas Bahasa Ibu Roles in Revitalization of Javanese Script

Based on Figure 1, students' abilities showed a significant improvement after participating in FTBI. Previously, the limited use of innovative learning media created a weak connection between lesson content and students' everyday lives, making Javanese script learning feel monotonous. This condition not only reduced students' understanding but also gradually lowered their enthusiasm for developing cultural literacy from an early age. However, this study indicates that efforts to revitalize Javanese script learning in elementary schools in the Dabin 2 area of Karangpucung, Cilacap, have evolved into an educational and cultural practice that extends beyond formal instruction. These findings are further reinforced by the observational results presented systematically in Table 3.

Table 3. Observation Results of FTBI

Indicators	Description
Student Participation in FTBI	Most students are enthusiastic, especially in writing. However, about 20% remain passive and require teacher encouragement.
Javanese Script Reading Proficiency	Some students can pronounce the text but still struggle with <i>pasangan</i> and <i>sandhangan</i> (diacritics)
Javanese Script Writing Skills	Basic character writing is correct, but many errors persist in the placement of diacritics and subscripts..
Cultural Significance Awareness	Deep understanding is mostly limited to quiz contestants; other students still find it difficult to explain
Regional Cultural Pride	Students show pride when displaying their posters; some were seen taking photos of their own work
Collaboration and Participation	Cooperation is generally good, though some groups are still dominated by one or two students.
Creative Use of Javanese Script	Posters, script cards, and poetry are present, indicating that students' creativity has increased in the Creative Use of Javanese Script.
Teacher Exemplarity	Teachers actively use the script on the whiteboard and provide direct corrections to students' writing.
School Environmental Support	A script corner exists in the library along with FTBI banners, but info boards have not been updated.
Impact on Cultural Identity	Based on brief interviews, students feel more familiar with the script and proud to write their own names.

To complement the observational data and provide a deeper insight into field implementation, the researcher conducted a series of interviews with educational practitioners. Furthermore, the interview results with teachers and school principals are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Interview Results with School Principals and Teachers

Interview Themes	Informant	
	Principal	Teacher
SWOT Analysis of Javanese Script Preservation	Strong commitment from the school, supported by the BOS budget and teachers' creativity in using contextual	The program's main strength lies in its use of adaptive learning media, such as digital apps and play cards, supported by a structured and intensive coaching system. Despite this, limited time

	<p>and technology-based learning methods, is a key strength.</p> <p>However, limited preparation time—often disrupted by exam schedules—and the lack of modern, engaging reference books for students remain challenges. At the same time, FTBI offers a valuable opportunity to strengthen students' cultural pride while helping them build a Javanese script digital literacy ecosystem.</p> <p>To ensure the program's success, it is also important to address potential psychological pressure or nervousness during competitions and the lack of support for Javanese script literacy from families at home.</p>	<p>allocation and the complexity of formal writing rules (pakem) can make it harder for students to develop a deep, shared understanding. On the other hand, integrating digital technology into Javanese script writing creates strong opportunities to keep regional culture relevant and appealing for future generations. Still, the lack of visual literacy habits in public spaces and the tendency to view Javanese script as “just images” may weaken students' skills if practice is not continued consistently.</p>
Implementation of FTBI	The program is implemented creatively through the integration of local content curriculum, contextual learning methods such as traditional songs and environmental exploration, and intensive extracurricular support.	The activities are implemented through varied learning methods, ranging from the use of the "Nulis Aksara Jawa" Android app to intensive coaching techniques such as independent selection, reading drills, and mock competitions
Program Evaluation	The program has proven effective in significantly improving students' academic competence and successfully shifting their perception of Javanese script from a boring subject to a source of pride.	The program has successfully improved writing accuracy and spontaneous reading speed, while fostering students' pride and confidence in their cultural identity.
Follow-up Action Plan	Schools plan to develop a digital ecosystem through gamification and social media, provide "Aksara Corner" facilities, and strengthen competency certification to ensure sustainable cultural preservation.	Future plans focus on strengthening Javanese script digital literacy and optimizing time allocation to address the complexity of writing rules that students still find challenging.

Following the completion of the event, we conducted several interviews to measure its overall effectiveness. For a deeper look into the students' responses regarding the FTBI implementation, the interview results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Interview Results with Students

Informant	Participant Response to the FTBI Competition
Student 1 (S1)	S1 felt very happy and proud to represent the school in the FTBI event, even though they were nervous at first. Before joining the activity, S1 thought Javanese script was difficult and boring, knowing only a few basic characters. However, the intensive practice sessions—using script card games—made learning feel like a fun “secret code.” Performing on the competition stage greatly increased S1’s confidence and courage. Now, S1 is proud to understand and appreciate their ancestral heritage, and they hope Javanese script lessons at school will continue using exciting, game-based methods.

Student 2 (S2)	S2 found the Javanese script short story writing competition at FTBI to be both valuable and highly challenging. Even though S2 had already learned basic characters from their grandfather, their technical skills, especially using pasangan (subscripts), improved greatly through intensive teacher mentoring. For S2, learning Javanese script is more than just writing—it also involves understanding the history and the philosophical values behind ancestral wisdom. Competing with talented participants initially made S2 nervous, but it ultimately strengthened their pride in staying connected to their cultural roots. Receiving an honorary mention was a heartfelt moment that showed their hard work truly paid off..
Student 3 (S3)	S3 started the FTBI experience with low self-confidence, but they were able to overcome their fear of performing in the Javanese script reading competition. Before joining the program, S3 believed the Javanese script was made up of complicated “images” that could not realistically be learned. With the teacher’s patient guidance, using singing methods and a relaxed approach, S3 gradually began to enjoy the learning process. When it was time to compete on stage, S3 transformed from a shy student into someone more courageous and confident. Now, S3 feels very proud and special for mastering a skill they once thought was impossible, and they hope future classroom lessons will continue to focus on patience and creativity so other students feel valued.

Participation in FTBI brought about positive changes that went beyond technical skill development. Students also showed shifts in their attitudes and feelings toward Javanese culture. Over the course of the program, they began to feel proud of their literacy abilities—skills they previously may have seen as unimportant or difficult. This emotional change suggests that Javanese script is no longer viewed as a burden in learning, but as a meaningful personal achievement. Figure 2 illustrates these changes in students’ attitudes after FTBI.

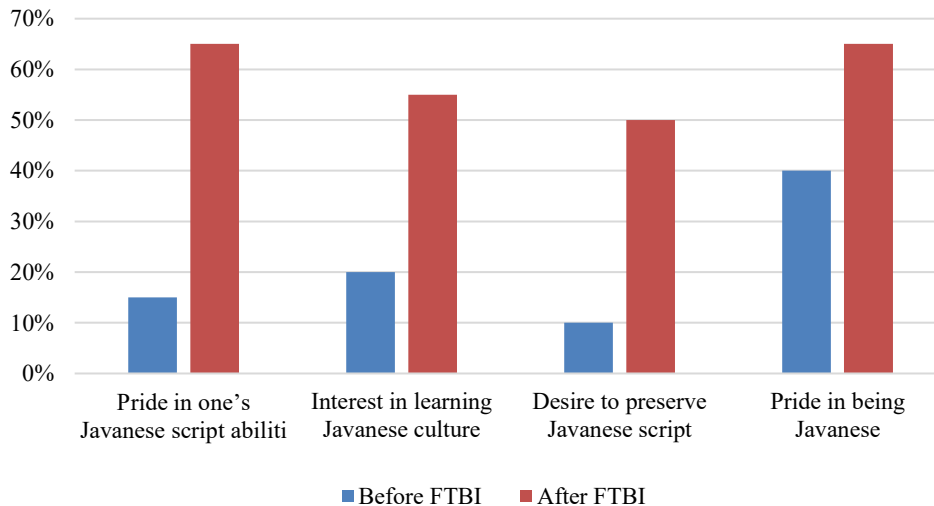


Figure 2. Students' Attitudes Before and After the FTBI

Discussions

The discussion is organized into three main parts. First, it explores revitalizing Javanese script as an educational cultural practice in elementary schools, focusing on how the script can be integrated into learning activities. Second, it discusses the role and implementation of the Festival Tunas Bahasa Ibu in revitalizing Javanese script, including how the program supports student engagement and skill development. Third, it examines how the revitalization of Javanese script

strengthens students' cultural identity, highlighting changes in students' attitudes and pride toward Javanese culture.

Revitalizing Javanese Script as an Educational Cultural Practice in Elementary Schools

The revitalization of Javanese script in primary education is a strategic effort to integrate cultural values into the learning process. Learning that connects culture with students' experiences has been shown to increase their involvement and deepen their understanding of the material. This approach is also important because there are still various obstacles, such as students' low interest and limited learning media (Nurhayati & Abdurrahman, 2018).

In this study, the revitalization process does not focus only on cognitive aspects, but also builds meaningful learning experiences through contextual and participatory activities. From the perspective of Ki Hajar Dewantara's *Sistem Among*, this shift helps explain why the FTBI approach produces more engagement: the program guides students through "among" principles—supporting growth through appropriate care, examples, and freedom within boundaries, rather than simply demanding mastery. Learning becomes more meaningful when students are treated as active learners who are nurtured according to their pace and needs, which is consistent with the participatory nature of the activities described in this study.

The research in Dabin 2 Karangpucung, Cilacap shows that Javanese script revitalization is not only carried out through formal lessons, but also grows into an educational cultural practice integrated into school activities, supported by observation data presented systematically in Table 1. Based on Table 3, the Festival Tunas Bahasa Ibu (FTBI) activities show that students' involvement in learning Javanese script is generally good. Students demonstrate strong enthusiasm, especially in writing competitions. Even so, a small number of students remain passive and require teacher guidance. Aligned with the *Sistem Among* principle, this pattern suggests that not all students develop at the same pace and may need more individualized mentoring (Rosanawati et al., 2025). In practice, teachers' role here is not merely to evaluate, but to provide direction and motivation so that every student can gradually participate according to their readiness.

In terms of skills, most students can read and write basic Javanese script, but they still face difficulties in using *Pasangan* and *Sandhangan*. Regarding cultural understanding, only some students are able to explain the function of the script as cultural heritage. However, FTBI helps build positive attitudes, such as pride in local culture, seen through students' enthusiasm in presenting and documenting their work. Collaboration and creativity also begin to develop through making media like posters and simple performances, although these aspects still need improvement. This developmental progress can be interpreted through *Sistem Among*'s emphasis on habituation and guided practice—students learn culture not only by receiving information, but by repeating meaningful activities that gradually strengthen both skill and confidence. When teachers provide concrete examples and create opportunities to "practice and show," students are more likely to build competence while also internalizing cultural values.

The role of teachers in this program is effective through providing examples and direct mentoring, and it is supported by school facilities such as the Javanese script corner and other learning tools. Overall, FTBI has a positive impact on strengthening students' cultural identity by improving their knowledge and pride in Javanese script as part of local heritage. This finding aligns with research stating that local culture-based learning can increase students' involvement, understanding, and cultural identity (Dewilde et al., 2021). The results also indicate a shift from conventional approaches toward more contextual and meaningful learning, because involving direct experiences makes students more actively engaged (Suharyo, 2021). This is consistent with

findings that culturally responsive teaching improves Javanese script learning outcomes by positioning culture as part of students' learning experiences (Bahari et al., 2025). Within the Sistem Among framework, teachers also function as facilitators who "lead without forcing," which helps students connect their cultural learning to real experiences in school life. As a result, Javanese script becomes part of students' identity-building rather than an isolated topic to memorize (Nalle et al., 2025).

Overall, the study suggests that revitalizing Javanese script at the primary school level in Dabin 2 Karangpucung, Cilacap is organized not only as regional language learning, but as an educational cultural practice supported through formal instruction, school routines, and performative reinforcement through FTBI. This shows that revitalization is moving away from purely textual knowledge transmission toward a more living, participatory, and contextual process of cultural inheritance. Evidence of this shift includes school policies integrating Javanese script into local content, using the script in symbolic areas within the school, routine writing of Javanese-script quotations, and providing a script corner and extracurricular activities as spaces for practicing culture.

Importantly, the findings emphasize that revitalization will be more effective when culture is not treated as an "object to memorize," but as a learning experience that students can observe, touch, practice, and showcase (Maruti et al., 2025). In this way, Javanese script becomes relevant in students' school life as a meaningful symbolic system, not merely forced as a legacy from the past. Therefore, revitalization in this study is not only about preserving written forms, but also about reactivating cultural meaning in educational settings. Observationally, most students are actively involved in FTBI activities—especially reading, writing, competitions, and creating works using Javanese script. Yet, some students still need encouragement, which indicates that school programs alone cannot automatically ensure equal participation for all students. Revitalization of Javanese script requires strong pedagogical mediation so that the learning experiences can reach students with different motivations, abilities, and readiness levels. From the Sistem Among standpoint, this mediation is essential because education should "grow" learners by respecting their individuality—teachers create conditions where all students can participate meaningfully, while support is provided progressively for those who need it.

The Role and Implementation of the FTBI in Revitalizing Javanese Script

Preparation for the Festival of Tunas Bahasa Ibu (FTBI) in Dabin 2 Karangpucung is carried out through intensive mentoring over three months in four systematic stages. The program starts with talent identification, introduces basic Javanese script, strengthens key materials such as *Sandhangan* and *Pasangan*, and then focuses on consolidation through competition simulations and mental coaching. During this process, the guiding teachers apply the Among Ki Hajar Dewantara principles, meaning they do not only transfer knowledge, but also act as role models who build students' motivation and provide moral support.

When the competition was held in January 2026, the approach showed clear positive results. Students demonstrated high enthusiasm, supported by strong involvement from parents and teacher mentors. Although the jury noted differences in students' abilities—especially regarding the accuracy of complex writing techniques—most students were able to perform competitively. Assessment did not only focus on the correctness of the script, but also on neatness, reading fluency, and clarity of articulation when communicating in the mother tongue.

Overall, participation in FTBI significantly improves students' Javanese script literacy compared to their condition before the program. This success is also well received by teachers

and the school principal, who see FTBI as an effective momentum for cultural revitalization. Beyond being a competition, the festival helps reawaken young people's interest and appreciation for Javanese script, which may otherwise be easily forgotten. From Stuart Hall's identity perspective, this improvement can be understood as a process of cultural identification—students do not only learn a script system, but gradually reposition Javanese script as part of who they are (Hall et al., 1996). As the program repeatedly places the script in meaningful school performances, students internalize its value and begin to see it as symbolically “theirs,” not something distant or imposed.

a) Form of Javanese Script Revitalization

Field data shows that revitalization in primary schools in Dabin 2 Karangpucung runs through several main patterns: curricular instruction, cultural habituation, extracurricular enrichment, creative learning media, and integration with festival activities. Structured classroom learning covers basic script, *Sandhangan*, and *Pasangan*. What stands out, however, is that teachers do not stop at conventional methods. They use contextual strategies such as *Dolanan* songs, script cards, guessing games, searching for Javanese script in the surrounding environment, and even Android-based applications to support Javanese script literacy. This indicates that effective revitalization depends not only on curriculum, but on teachers' ability to transform traditional material into learning that feels close to children's world. In a cultural literacy perspective, learning to read and write Javanese script is not only a technical skill, but also the ability to access, interpret, and give meaning to cultural symbols within real life. When students look for script in village signs, information boards, or school media, they are not simply learning letters—they are guided to recognize cultural traces in their social environment. This aligns with Hall's view that identity is formed through representation: when students encounter Javanese script in everyday spaces and learning media, the script becomes a visible cultural sign that helps them “recognize themselves” within the culture it represents.

b) FTBI as a Performative Space for Implementation

A key finding is that FTBI functions not merely as a competition, but as a performative space for implementing Javanese script revitalization. In FTBI, Javanese script becomes a skill that is displayed, tested, and valued socially, rather than something learned only to obtain a score. According to interviews with the school principal and teachers, FTBI is understood as an evaluative instrument, a driver of achievement, a stage of pride, and a catalyst that changes students' perceptions of Javanese script. Before the festival, students tended to view the script as difficult, complicated, and less relevant. After mentoring and festival participation, many begin to see it as interesting, prestigious, and even “cool.” This suggests that social legitimacy plays an important role in cultural revitalization. A culture can feel “alive” again when it is represented in a prestigious public setting within the school and educational community.

Within primary education, FTBI can be viewed as cultural pedagogy based on performance. The festival creates learning situations involving intense practice, discipline, repetition, mental strengthening, and public expression. Students are not only asked to “be able,” but also to “be brave” in showing their cultural abilities in a social space. This process provides emotional experiences—nervousness, pride, fear, happiness, and relief—that strengthen students' learning traces and emotional attachment to the culture being learned. Therefore, FTBI should not be reduced to a ceremonial annual event. The findings confirm that the festival works as an institutional mechanism connecting school-based cultural learning with the formation of students' cultural identity, making FTBI more than just a “competition container,” but a socio-pedagogical tool to bring Javanese script back to life among younger generations. In Hall's terms, public

performance helps students negotiate identity through cultural codes: when Javanese script is publicly valued, students can link the script to a desirable self-image (proud, competent, recognized), which strengthens identification and reduces cultural distance.

c) Students' Responses

Interview results show a significant transformation in students' responses to Javanese script. Before FTBI, most students saw it as something difficult, confusing, and foreign. Some even described it as "complicated images" or "secret codes" that were hard to understand. This early response suggests that the main problem is not only the absence of learning content, but also the psychological and cognitive distance between students and a script system that is no longer dominant in everyday life.

After the FTBI mentoring experience, students begin to reinterpret Javanese script in a more positive way. They report that learning feels enjoyable, challenging, and even interesting. These changes do not happen instantly, but through a staged and non-threatening pedagogical process. Teachers start from simple tasks—writing their own names, recognizing basic script, reading short words—then gradually build confidence so students can dare to perform. This implies that students' acceptance of local culture is strongly shaped by how the culture is taught. When Javanese script is taught rigidly and focused only on memorization, students tend to treat it as an academic burden. In contrast, when it is taught through games, visual support, gradual practice, and emotional reinforcement, the script becomes something students can master and enjoy. In other words, cultural literacy for children depends not only on transferring cultural content, but also on designing cultural learning experiences.

Furthermore, the shift in students' responses is not limited to interest—it also includes a sense of ownership. Some students express pride because they can write their names, read simple texts, or show their writing results to their parents. This indicates that symbolic abilities such as reading and writing Javanese script carry strong affective value in building personal relationships with culture. As a result, revitalization through FTBI increases not only participation, but also reduces the distance between students and their cultural heritage. Using Hall's identity framework, these changes can be read as a movement from "being outside" the cultural meaning of the script to "participating in" it—students begin to position themselves as legitimate members of the cultural community, not just as learners of a separate school subject.

d) Role of Teachers and Schools

The research data shows that teachers and schools play central roles in the success of Javanese script revitalization. Teachers are not only technical instructors of reading and writing, but also cultural facilitators, motivators, coaches, curators of learning, and—most importantly— affective figures who support students' courage. In many cases, students' success is not determined solely by learning materials, but by the quality of the pedagogical relationship built during mentoring. Students who were initially afraid, shy, and quick to give up can develop when teachers provide patient, step-by-step support and value even small improvements.

This highlights that school-based cultural revitalization in primary education strongly depends on teachers' capacity as cultural transmission agents. Teachers who can shift approaches from memorization to experience, from fear to bravery, and from obligation to pride are essentially carrying out meaningful cultural education. In this context, teachers not only teach Javanese script knowledge, but also shape how students view Javanese culture as something worth loving and protecting.

The school's institutional support also appears strong. Schools provide curricular policies, mentoring time, practice media, habituation to use Javanese script in public school spaces, and

logistical assistance for FTBI. Some schools even develop Javanese script corners, creative spaces, and ideas for using digital technology as part of strengthening script learning. This shows that cultural revitalization will be more sustainable when it is not placed entirely on individual teachers, but is supported by the school's institutional commitment.

In conclusion, these findings emphasize that local wisdom-based primary education requires structural support from the school. Culture should not only be taught inside classrooms, but also be present as part of the school ecosystem. When Javanese script appears on name boards, bulletin boards, reading corners, and festival activities, the school is building a symbolic environment that strengthens the message that local culture is a legitimate part of academic life. Thus, the success of Javanese script revitalization in this study depends on the synergy between teachers' pedagogy and school policy. Hall's theory also clarifies why this institutional support matters: identity grows through repeated cultural representations in meaningful spaces. When schools consistently display and practice Javanese script, students receive stronger cues about belonging, legitimacy, and cultural value—so identification becomes sustained, not temporary (Ramadhansyah et al., 2022).

Strengthening Students' Cultural Identity Through the Revitalization of Javanese Script

Participation in FTBI has proven to bring positive transformation that goes beyond improving technical literacy skills. The program also fosters changes in students' attitudes and feelings toward Javanese culture. Through this process, students begin to develop pride in the literacy abilities they have gained—abilities that previously may have felt trivial or too difficult. These emotional shifts show that Javanese script (aksara Jawa) is no longer viewed as a burden in learning, but instead as a meaningful personal achievement.

More deeply, this phenomenon can be understood as a process of strengthening cultural identity, as reflected in Stuart Hall's perspective. In Hall's terms, identity is not something students simply "have," but something that is continually formed through representation, participation, and meaning-making. FTBI creates a space for students to experience how aksara Jawa is represented as part of themselves, not merely as historical content. In that space, aksara Jawa is no longer seen merely as an outdated ancient writing system, but as a symbol that connects students to historical narratives and the legacy of their ancestors. As a result, aksara Jawa becomes an identity marker that feels relevant to young people today.

The success of internalizing these cultural values is further reinforced by support from a wider ecosystem beyond school. The strengthening of identity becomes even more solid because of synergy with family and the surrounding community. This environment helps students feel that their efforts to preserve aksara Jawa are dignified, recognized, and appreciated by the social community around them. This also aligns with Ki Hadjar Dewantara's "among" philosophy, where education should guide children according to their nature and context. Rather than forcing learning as a top-down requirement, FTBI appears to nurture students through culturally meaningful activities that resonate with their daily social world—so students are not only learning aksara Jawa, but also growing within the atmosphere that sustains it.

The most important finding of the study is that revitalization of aksara Jawa through FTBI has a real impact on strengthening students' cultural identity. This impact is visible not only in improved abilities to read and write, but also in the growth of pride, a sense of belonging, and awareness that aksara Jawa is part of their own identity. Observation results show that students appear proud when they display posters, written works, or when they demonstrate their ability to read aksara Jawa. Some students even explicitly express pride because they can write their own names and share their writing with their families.

These findings suggest that cultural identity in elementary school children does not grow through lectures about culture. Instead, it develops through personal and social experiences of success. When students can read short texts, write stories, or perform in public using aksara Jawa, they gain symbolic experiences that local culture is not only a relic of the past, but also a competence they can learn and master. Such experiences strengthen students' emotional connection to the culture. This is also consistent with the idea that identity is formed through lived practice, not only through knowledge—students “become” cultural subjects when they are allowed to act, create, and be recognized. In Stuart Hall's view, this is where identity gains meaning: students repeatedly experience aksara Jawa as a language of self, community, and belonging.

This also confirms that children's cultural identity is performative and practical. In other words, identity is not formed only through knowledge about culture, but through active involvement in cultural practices. Within this context, FTBI provides a space in which students do not only study aksara Jawa, but also become “subjects of culture” who use it actively. This is especially important in early education, because childhood is a crucial stage for building a sense of belonging to social and cultural surroundings. Through the lens of Ki Hadjar Dewantara, early education should “educate in freedom” while still guiding—meaning learners develop confidence and inner readiness when their growth is supported, not pressured. FTBI's structure—training, celebration, and public demonstration—helps children feel safe to try, supported to improve, and proud to be seen.

Finally, the revitalization impact is reflected in how students position themselves toward Javanese culture. Before FTBI, aksara Jawa was generally perceived as old, difficult, and far from their daily lives. After participating in training and festivals, students begin to view aksara Jawa as something special, valuable, and worthy of pride. This perception shift becomes an important indicator of successful cultural revitalization. Overall, revitalization of aksara Jawa not only improves cultural literacy skills, but also strengthens students' cultural identity as young generations who remain connected to their roots.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this study aimed to examine how the revitalization of aksara Jawa through FTBI contributes to elementary students' cultural identity, and whether it can be implemented effectively within school contexts. The findings show that FTBI helps students develop cultural pride and a stronger sense of belonging through contextual learning, repeated practice, teacher mentoring, family support, and social recognition during the festival, supporting the view that cultural identity grows when local culture is experienced as a living and meaningful part of everyday school life. Scientifically, this study contributes evidence that FTBI is an effective school-based model for connecting cultural preservation with elementary education, not only improving students' aksara-related abilities but also encouraging students to see local culture as a skill they can learn, perform, and develop over time. In addition, the study highlights practical learning conditions that shape success—such as time constraints and the need for structured scaffolding—showing that implementation must be designed to fit real classroom realities. To strengthen the sustainability of FTBI and broaden its impact, policymakers should consider integrating FTBI activities into the national or regional academic calendar as a planned, school-supported cultural program. This step would help secure appropriate class time, give the program formal recognition in school planning, and support ongoing aksara Jawa practice beyond occasional extracurricular activities.

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