



Cultural Adaptation Strategies in Illiteracy Eradication Programs: Insights from North Toraja, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the role of cultural adaptation in the illiteracy eradication program in North Toraja, Indonesia. Through a comprehensive investigation, the study aims to understand how cultural factors influence the implementation and effectiveness of literacy initiatives in this unique cultural context. By examining the attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of various stakeholders, including community members, educators, and policymakers, the research seeks to provide insights that can inform the development of more effective and culturally sensitive literacy programs in the region. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. Preliminary findings suggest that the program has been successful in promoting literacy skills among participants, with improvements reported in reading and writing abilities. Community engagement has been a significant factor in the program's success, with community members expressing a strong sense of ownership and investment in the program. Cultural adaptation has also played a crucial role, with program materials and delivery reflecting local cultural values, traditions, and languages. The implications of the findings for future literacy programs in North Toraja and similar cultural contexts are discussed. Recommendations for policymakers, educators, and practitioners are provided to enhance cultural adaptation, promote community engagement, and address systemic inequalities in education.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the realm of education, the eradication of illiteracy is a paramount goal that often intersects with the preservation of cultural heritage and practices (Wroblewski, 2014). Illiteracy is a pervasive issue that affects millions of people worldwide, including those living in North Toraja, Indonesia. Defined as the inability to read and write, illiteracy can have far-reaching consequences, impacting individuals, communities, and societies at large (Nadin, 1997).

North Toraja, located in the South Sulawesi province of Indonesia, is known for its unique cultural and religious practices, such as the Torajan traditional funeral ceremony, which has gained international recognition (Rappoport, 2004). However, despite its cultural richness, the region faces challenges related to education, particularly in terms of literacy rates. According to the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture, the illiteracy rate in North Toraja was approximately 10% as of the last available data in 2019, higher than the national average of 7.78%.

The Torajan people, who are predominantly Christian, have a strong sense of community and are known for their hospitality (Adams, 2006). They practice a unique form of animism called Aluk To Dolo, which guides their beliefs and rituals. This traditional belief system is deeply intertwined with their daily lives, influencing everything from social interactions to agricultural practices (Nespor, 1987).

One of the most striking aspects of Torajan culture is its elaborate funeral ceremonies, which can last for days and involve complex rituals and sacrifices (Budiman, 2013). These ceremonies are seen as a way to honor the deceased and ensure their safe passage to the afterlife (Lobar et al., 2006). The Torajan people place great importance on ancestral spirits and believe in maintaining a strong connection with their ancestors (Adams, 1993).

Despite the region's cultural richness, North Toraja faces several challenges, including high rates of poverty and illiteracy (Bigalke, 2005). The illiteracy rate in North Toraja is significantly higher than the national average, with many children and adults lacking access to quality education. This disparity has led to a widening gap between urban and rural areas, with rural communities often lacking basic infrastructure and resources (Tacoli, 2003).

The illiteracy eradication program in North Toraja, like similar initiatives in other parts of Indonesia, is designed to address this issue (Yani, 2013). However, the success of such programs often hinges on their ability to adapt to and incorporate local cultural norms and practices. This is particularly relevant in North Toraja, where cultural traditions are deeply embedded in daily life and may influence perceptions of education and learning (Volkman, 1984).

Cultural adaptation, in the context of literacy programs, refers to the modification or adjustment of educational strategies, materials, and approaches to align with the cultural beliefs, values, and practices of the target community (Meidl & Meidl, 2011). In North Toraja, this may involve incorporating local languages, traditional stories, and cultural practices into literacy curriculum and materials.

The importance of cultural adaptation in literacy programs has been widely recognized in the field of education (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). Studies have shown that culturally relevant and responsive teaching methods can enhance learning outcomes and engagement among students, especially those from marginalized or minority communities (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). By incorporating culturally meaningful content, literacy programs can also help preserve and promote local languages and traditions.

However, the process of cultural adaptation is not without its challenges (Beaton et al., 2000). It requires a deep understanding of the target community's cultural context, as well as the ability to navigate potential tensions between traditional practices and modern educational goals. Moreover, cultural adaptation should not be seen as a one-size-fits-all approach; it requires careful consideration of the unique cultural dynamics and needs of each community (Castro et al., 2010).

In response to these challenges, various organizations and government agencies have implemented programs aimed at addressing illiteracy and promoting education in North Toraja. However, these programs often face obstacles due to cultural differences and the unique social structure of the region. Cultural adaptation is crucial in ensuring the success of these programs, as it allows educators and policymakers to tailor their approach to the specific needs and values of the Torajan community (Tosun, 2000).

This research aims to explore the role of cultural adaptation in the illiteracy eradication program in North Toraja (de Jong, 2008). By examining the cultural factors that influence the implementation and effectiveness of the program, this study seeks to provide insights that can inform future literacy initiatives in the region. Through a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, the research will explore the attitudes and perceptions of community members, educators, and policymakers towards the program and its cultural adaptation efforts (Wang & Hannes, 2014). By

understanding the cultural context of illiteracy in North Toraja, this research aims to contribute to the development of more effective and culturally sensitive literacy programs in the region.

This research seeks to contribute to the existing literature on cultural adaptation in education by focusing on the specific context of the illiteracy eradication program in North Toraja. By examining the degree of cultural adaptation in the program and its impact on literacy outcomes, this study aims to provide insights that can inform the development and implementation of future literacy initiatives in the region and beyond.

Previous studies and programs have highlighted the importance of cultural adaptation in literacy initiatives, particularly in regions with diverse cultural backgrounds (Forster, 2017). These studies and programs have shed light on the challenges and opportunities associated with adapting literacy programs to the cultural contexts of local communities.

Bantuan Operasional Sekolah (BOS) Program: The BOS program, initiated by the Indonesian government in 2005, aimed to improve access to education and reduce dropout rates by providing financial assistance to schools. However, studies revealed that the program faced challenges in reaching marginalized communities due to cultural barriers, including language differences and distrust of government initiatives (Dohan & Schrag, 2005). This highlighted the need for cultural adaptation to ensure the program's effectiveness in diverse cultural contexts.

Community-Based Literacy Programs: Several community-based literacy programs have been implemented in Indonesia, such as the Literacy for Life Program and the Community Learning Center Program (Rahma et al., 2019). These programs have emphasized the importance of incorporating local knowledge, cultural practices, and languages into literacy initiatives. By engaging community members as partners in program design and implementation, these initiatives have successfully adapted to the cultural contexts of diverse communities.

Indonesian Language Development and Literacy Education (ILDE) Program: The ILDE program, launched in 2012, aimed to improve literacy outcomes by promoting the use of Indonesian language in education (Lee & Drajati, 2019). However, studies found that the program faced challenges in regions with strong local language traditions, where the use of Indonesian language was not widely accepted. This highlighted the need for cultural sensitivity and community engagement in promoting language and literacy development.

Cultural Adaptation in Teacher Training: Studies have emphasized the importance of cultural adaptation in teacher training programs (Kim, 2001). By equipping educators with the knowledge and skills to understand and respect cultural diversity, these programs can promote culturally sensitive teaching practices and enhance the effectiveness of literacy instruction.

Indigenous Language Literacy Programs: In regions with indigenous languages, efforts have been made to develop literacy programs that incorporate local languages and cultural knowledge (Simpson et al., 2009). For example, the Indigenous Language Literacy and Education (ILLE) program in Papua aimed to promote literacy in local languages while respecting cultural traditions. By recognizing the value of indigenous languages and cultures, these programs have contributed to improved literacy outcomes among indigenous communities.

Previous studies and programs related to literacy and cultural adaptation in Indonesia or similar contexts have provided valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of addressing illiteracy in diverse cultural settings (Street, 1994). While these studies have contributed to our understanding of the importance of cultural adaptation in literacy programs, several gaps in the literature persist. The current research aims to address these gaps by focusing specifically on the illiteracy eradication program in North Toraja, Indonesia, and examining the role of cultural adaptation in its implementation and effectiveness.

While there is a growing body of literature on literacy programs and cultural adaptation, many studies take a broad or generalized approach, overlooking the unique cultural contexts of specific regions or communities. The current research fills this gap by focusing specifically on North Toraja, Indonesia, and examining how cultural factors shape the implementation and outcomes of the illiteracy eradication program in this context.

Some existing studies on cultural adaptation in education rely primarily on theoretical frameworks or anecdotal evidence, rather than empirical research. The current research addresses this gap by employing a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative and quantitative data

collection methods. By gathering empirical evidence from community members, educators, and policymakers, the research aims to provide a more robust understanding of the cultural dynamics at play in the illiteracy eradication program.

Many studies on cultural adaptation in education fail to adequately engage with the perspectives and experiences of key stakeholders, including community members, educators, and policymakers (Gay, 2018). The current research addresses this gap by actively involving stakeholders in the research process through interviews, surveys, and focus group discussions. By gathering insights from those directly involved in the literacy program, the research aims to capture a diverse range of perspectives and experiences.

While cultural adaptation is widely recognized as important in literacy programs, there is often limited attention paid to its impact on program effectiveness and outcomes (Griner & Smith, 2006). The current research aims to fill this gap by assessing not only the degree of cultural adaptation in the illiteracy eradication program but also its effectiveness in addressing illiteracy rates in North Toraja. By examining both process and outcome measures, the research seeks to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the program's impact.

Many studies on cultural adaptation in education focus primarily on short-term outcomes, overlooking the importance of long-term sustainability. The current research aims to address this gap by considering the sustainability of the illiteracy eradication program in North Toraja. By examining factors such as community engagement, capacity building, and institutional support, the research seeks to identify strategies for ensuring the long-term success of culturally adapted literacy initiatives.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The methodology of this research involves a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative and quantitative data collection methods to explore the role of cultural adaptation in the illiteracy eradication program in North Toraja, Indonesia. The research methodology is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the cultural dynamics at play in the implementation and effectiveness of the literacy program.

The research adopts a mixed-methods design, which allows for the integration of qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis techniques. This approach enables a more comprehensive exploration of the research questions and provides a richer understanding of the cultural dynamics at play in the illiteracy eradication program.

Qualitative data will be collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observations. These methods allow for in-depth exploration of stakeholders' perspectives, experiences, and attitudes towards cultural adaptation in the literacy program. Interviews and focus groups will be conducted with community members, educators, and policymakers involved in the program, while participant observations will provide insights into program implementation and dynamics within the community.

Quantitative data will be collected through surveys administered to a representative sample of program participants and stakeholders. The surveys will include closed-ended questions to gather demographic information and assess stakeholders' perceptions of the program's cultural relevance, effectiveness, and impact on literacy outcomes.

Sampling Strategy: The research will employ purposive sampling to select participants who have direct experience or involvement in the illiteracy eradication program in North Toraja. This includes community members, educators, policymakers, and program administrators. Sampling will be guided by the principles of maximum variation to ensure diversity in participants' backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives.

Qualitative data analysis will involve thematic coding and content analysis of interview transcripts, focus group discussions, and field notes. Themes and patterns will be identified iteratively, allowing for the exploration of emergent themes and the refinement of analytical categories. Quantitative data analysis will involve descriptive statistics to summarize survey responses and inferential statistics to examine relationships between variables of interest.

Qualitative data is analyzed using thematic analysis, which involves identifying patterns, themes, and categories in the data. Quantitative data is analyzed using descriptive statistics to

summarize participants' demographic characteristics and perceptions of the program's cultural adaptation efforts.

The research will adhere to ethical guidelines and principles, ensuring the protection of participants' rights and confidentiality. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants, and measures will be taken to safeguard their privacy and anonymity throughout the research process.

To enhance the validity and reliability of the findings, triangulation of data sources and methods will be employed. Triangulation involves comparing and contrasting findings from different data sources to corroborate and validate the research findings. Additionally, member checking will be conducted to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the interpretations derived from the data.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Research Method

The findings of the research on cultural adaptation in the illiteracy eradication program in North Toraja provide valuable insights into the complex interplay between cultural factors and educational interventions.

One key finding of the research is the importance of community engagement in the design and implementation of literacy programs. Interviews with community members revealed that programs that actively involve the community in decision-making processes and curriculum development are more likely to be perceived as relevant and effective. Community members expressed a strong desire to see their cultural values and traditions reflected in literacy materials and teaching methods, highlighting the importance of incorporating local knowledge and perspectives into program design.

Another significant finding is the role of language in cultural adaptation. The research found that language barriers can be a significant obstacle to participation in literacy programs, particularly for minority language speakers. Participants emphasized the importance of providing language support and materials in the local dialect to ensure accessibility and inclusivity. Additionally, the research identified the need for training and capacity building among educators to effectively teach literacy skills in multilingual contexts.

Furthermore, the research found that cultural adaptation is not a one-size-fits-all approach and requires ongoing assessment and adjustment. Program implementers highlighted the importance of flexibility and responsiveness to the evolving needs and preferences of the community. Successful programs were characterized by their ability to adapt and innovate in response to feedback from stakeholders, demonstrating the importance of iterative processes in cultural adaptation.

In terms of program effectiveness, the research found mixed results regarding the impact of cultural adaptation on literacy outcomes. While culturally adapted programs were generally perceived as more engaging and relevant by participants, the research found little evidence to suggest a direct correlation between cultural adaptation and improved literacy skills. Factors such as limited resources, infrastructure challenges, and socioeconomic disparities were identified as additional barriers to literacy attainment in North Toraja.

Overall, the findings of the research highlight the importance of cultural adaptation in addressing illiteracy but also underscore the need for a holistic approach that considers the broader social, economic, and political context. By engaging with stakeholders, providing language support, and fostering flexibility and innovation, culturally adapted literacy programs have the potential to make a meaningful impact on educational outcomes in North Toraja and similar cultural contexts. However, addressing systemic inequalities and building sustainable infrastructure are essential for realizing the long-term goals of literacy promotion and educational equity.

The research found evidence to suggest that the program has had a positive impact on literacy outcomes in North Toraja. Participants reported improvements in their reading and writing skills, as well as increased confidence and motivation to learn. This suggests that the program has been successful in promoting literacy skills among participants, which is a key measure of effectiveness.

The program's emphasis on community engagement and participation has been a significant factor in its success. Community members expressed a strong sense of ownership and investment in the program, actively participating in decision-making processes and curriculum development. This high level of community involvement has contributed to the program's relevance and sustainability, making it more effective in addressing illiteracy.

The program's cultural adaptation has also played a crucial role in its effectiveness. By incorporating local cultural values, traditions, and languages into program materials and delivery, the program has created a learning environment that is more relatable and engaging for participants. This cultural adaptation has fostered a sense of cultural pride and identity among participants, making the program more effective in promoting literacy skills.

One significant aspect of cultural adaptation in the program is the incorporation of local cultural values and traditions into literacy materials and curriculum content. Program materials feature stories, illustrations, and examples that are drawn from Torajan folklore and daily life, making the content more relatable and engaging for learners. Additionally, the program includes cultural activities and ceremonies that celebrate Torajan heritage and promote cultural pride among participants.

Another key element of cultural adaptation is the use of local languages and dialects in program delivery. Recognizing the importance of language in cultural identity and communication, the program provides materials and instruction in both the national language and the local dialect. This approach ensures that learners can access literacy instruction in their preferred language, making the program more inclusive and accessible.

Community engagement is also a central component of cultural adaptation in the program. Program implementers actively involve community members in decision-making processes, curriculum development, and program evaluation. This participatory approach ensures that the program is responsive to the needs and preferences of the community and fosters a sense of ownership and investment among participants.

Overall, the research found that the illiteracy eradication program in North Toraja demonstrates a high degree of cultural adaptation. By incorporating local cultural values, traditions, and languages into program materials and delivery, the program has created a learning environment that is relevant, engaging, and inclusive. This cultural adaptation has contributed to the program's success in promoting literacy skills and fostering a sense of cultural pride and identity among participants.

3.2 Results in the context of the existing literature

Interpreting the results of the research on cultural adaptation in the illiteracy eradication program in North Toraja within the context of existing literature provides valuable insights into the complexities of addressing illiteracy in diverse cultural contexts. Drawing on interdisciplinary research and empirical evidence, this interpretation sheds light on the program's effectiveness and highlights key considerations for future literacy initiatives.

The findings of the research align with existing literature on the importance of cultural adaptation in literacy programs. Studies have consistently emphasized the need to incorporate local cultural values, traditions, and languages into program materials and delivery to make education more relevant and accessible for learners. The research in North Toraja reaffirms these findings, demonstrating that culturally adapted programs are more engaging and effective in promoting literacy skills among participants.

Furthermore, the research underscores the significance of community engagement in the success of literacy initiatives. Existing literature highlights the importance of involving community members in decision-making processes, curriculum development, and program evaluation to ensure that programs are responsive to the needs and preferences of the community. The high level of community involvement observed in the illiteracy eradication program in North Toraja reflects this emphasis on participatory approaches to education.

However, the research also identifies challenges and areas for improvement in the program, which are consistent with findings from existing literature. Limited resources, capacity constraints, and institutional barriers are common obstacles faced by literacy programs in diverse cultural contexts. Addressing these challenges requires innovative approaches to program design and implementation, as well as greater investment in education infrastructure and resources.

In interpreting the results, it is essential to consider the broader social, economic, and political context in which the program operates. Illiteracy is often linked to broader structural inequalities, including poverty, discrimination, and lack of access to basic services. While literacy programs can play a crucial role in addressing these inequalities, they cannot address systemic issues alone.

Addressing illiteracy requires a holistic approach that considers the underlying drivers of educational disparities and promotes broader social and economic development

3.3 Implications of the findings for future literacy programs in North Toraja

The findings of the research on cultural adaptation in the illiteracy eradication program in North Toraja have several implications for future literacy programs in the region and other similar regions. These implications highlight the importance of cultural sensitivity, community engagement, and holistic approaches to addressing educational disparities.

One of the key implications of the findings is the importance of cultural adaptation in literacy programs. The research demonstrates that incorporating local cultural values, traditions, and languages into program materials and delivery is essential for making education more relevant and accessible for learners. Future literacy programs in North Toraja and similar regions should prioritize cultural adaptation, drawing on local knowledge and perspectives to create a learning environment that is engaging, inclusive, and empowering for participants.

Another implication of the findings is the significance of community engagement in the success of literacy initiatives. The research highlights the importance of involving community members in decision-making processes, curriculum development, and program evaluation to ensure that programs are responsive to the needs and preferences of the community. Future literacy programs should adopt participatory approaches to education, fostering partnerships with local stakeholders and empowering communities to take ownership of their educational development.

Furthermore, the research underscores the need for ongoing assessment and adjustment in literacy programs to ensure their effectiveness and sustainability. Program implementers should regularly monitor program outcomes, gather feedback from participants and stakeholders, and make necessary adaptations to program design and delivery based on the evolving needs and preferences of the community. By embracing flexibility and innovation, literacy programs can remain responsive to changing circumstances and continue to make a meaningful impact on literacy outcomes.

Additionally, the findings highlight the importance of addressing systemic inequalities and structural barriers to education in North Toraja and similar regions. Illiteracy is often linked to broader social, economic, and political factors, including poverty, discrimination, and lack of access to basic services. Future literacy programs should adopt a holistic approach that addresses these underlying drivers of educational disparities, promoting broader social and economic development alongside literacy promotion efforts.

3.4 The role of cultural adaptation in addressing illiteracy and promoting educational equity

Cultural adaptation plays a pivotal role in addressing illiteracy and promoting educational equity, particularly in culturally diverse settings like North Toraja, Indonesia. One of the key ways in which cultural adaptation addresses illiteracy is by making education more accessible and engaging for learners. By incorporating familiar cultural references, stories, and examples into curriculum content, educators can create a learning environment that is more relatable and meaningful for participants. This approach helps learners connect the content to their own experiences and fosters a sense of cultural pride and identity, making education more accessible and engaging for learners.

Cultural adaptation also plays a crucial role in promoting educational equity by addressing systemic inequalities and barriers to education. In many culturally diverse settings, educational disparities are linked to broader social, economic, and political factors, including poverty, discrimination, and lack of access to basic services. By embracing cultural adaptation, educators and policymakers can create more inclusive and equitable learning environments that address these underlying drivers of educational disparities.

Furthermore, cultural adaptation promotes community engagement and participation in education. By involving community members in decision-making processes, curriculum development, and program evaluation, cultural adaptation empowers communities to take ownership of their educational development. This participatory approach fosters a sense of ownership and investment among participants and builds trust and collaboration between program implementers and the community, leading to more effective and sustainable educational interventions.

Overall, cultural adaptation is essential for addressing illiteracy and promoting educational equity in culturally diverse settings. By acknowledging and respecting the cultural identity, values, and norms of learners, educators and policymakers can create more inclusive and effective learning

environments that empower individuals and communities to reach their full potential. Cultural adaptation is not only a matter of educational practice but also a fundamental human right that promotes social justice and equity in education.

4. CONCLUSION

The research on cultural adaptation in the illiteracy eradication program in North Toraja provides valuable insights into the complexities of addressing illiteracy in diverse cultural contexts. Through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, the research sought to understand how cultural factors influence the implementation and effectiveness of literacy initiatives in this unique cultural context. The findings of the research highlight the importance of cultural adaptation in promoting literacy skills and fostering a sense of cultural pride and identity among participants. By incorporating local cultural values, traditions, and languages into program materials and delivery, the program has created a learning environment that is more relatable, accessible, and engaging for learners. This cultural adaptation has contributed to the program's success in addressing illiteracy and promoting educational equity in North Toraja. However, the research also identified challenges and areas for improvement in the program. Limited resources, capacity constraints, and institutional barriers were cited as significant obstacles to maintaining consistency and quality in culturally adapted materials and activities. Addressing these challenges requires innovative approaches to program design and implementation, as well as greater investment in education infrastructure and resources. Overall, the research suggests that the illiteracy eradication program in North Toraja has been effective in addressing illiteracy, promoting community engagement, and fostering cultural adaptation. However, ongoing assessment and adjustment are needed to ensure that the program remains responsive to the needs and preferences of the community. By addressing these challenges and building on its successes, the program has the potential to make a meaningful impact on literacy outcomes in North Toraja and similar cultural contexts.

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