

Empowering the Simalungun Script to Enhance Simalungun Cultural Heritage Among Junior High School Students at SMP Negeri 2 Raya

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ABSTRACT

The use of Simalungun script as a form of preserving local culture is increasingly being eroded by the currents of modernization and globalization. Through this community service program, the implementing team seeks to empower the Simalungun script among students at SMP Negeri 2 Raya. The aim of this activity is to enhance cultural awareness, reintroduce the Simalungun script in an applied manner, and equip students with basic skills in reading and writing the script. The implementation methods include educational outreach, training sessions, and hands-on practice in writing Simalungun script using interactive media. The results of the activity show an increase in students' interest and ability to recognize and use the Simalungun script. This program is expected to serve as the starting point for a school-based local culture preservation movement.

Keywords: Simalungun script, local culture, students, junior high school, empowerment

INTRODUCTION

The Batak script represents one of the traditional writing systems that flourished in North Sumatra, reflecting the rich cultural

heritage of the Batak people¹. Within the Batak script family, several variants exist according to sub-ethnic groups Toba, Karo, Mandailing, Pakpak, Angkola, and Simalungun each with its own distinctive form, phonetics, and stylistic features². The Simalungun script, in particular, was historically used for writing important documents such as genealogies, customary laws, incantations, and records of Simalungun history³. Therefore, the script functions not only as a communication tool but also as a symbol of identity, values, and civilization for the Simalungun people.

However, the cultural and historical value embedded in this script has increasingly faded. Globalization and modernization have led to the dominance of the Latin alphabet in education, governance, and media, causing the Simalungun script to be rarely used. Many younger generations are unfamiliar even with the basic forms of the script. This is alarming even in Simalungun

¹ Brakel-Papenhuyzen, C. (2010). Oral literary traditions in North Sumatra. *Wacana: Journal of the Humanities of Indonesia*. <https://doi.org/10.17510/WJHI.V12I1.77>

² Pardede, M., & Silalahi, R. (2020, January 1). *Batak Toba Concept of A Leader in Umpasa and Umpama*. <https://doi.org/10.4108/EAI.20-9-2019.2296741>

³ Sudarma, M., Ariyani, S., & Artana, M. (2016). Balinese Script's Character Reconstruction Using Linear Discriminant Analysis. *Indonesian Journal of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science*.

Regency its cultural homeland where, despite the continuity of traditional rituals, the use of the script is in decline. This reveals an imbalance between oral/traditional cultural preservation and the preservation of written literacy.

Educational institutions, particularly schools, have a strategic role in safeguarding local cultural heritage. Schools are not only academic centers but also vehicles for cultural and moral transmission. Introducing the Simalungun script through local content curriculum, extracurricular activities, or cultural projects can foster cultural pride and identity among students.

Concrete steps such as developing script-based learning modules, training teachers, and fostering collaboration with cultural figures are necessary to rescue the script from extinction. Additionally, integrating digital technologies to create learning applications offers an innovative approach compatible with the digital generation.

Empowering the Simalungun script at the junior high school level is of strategic importance. Students at this developmental stage possess the cognitive and affective readiness to comprehend and internalize cultural values. This age group tends to be curious, begins to develop abstract reasoning, and shapes their personal and cultural identity.

Thus, the introduction of the Simalungun script goes beyond cognitive learning; it also serves as character building and cultural pride. This community service program targeted students at SMP Negeri 2 Raya, a school geographically and culturally rooted in the Simalungun Batak community. The program included training, educational outreach, and writing practice, enabling students to apply their learning in real contexts. It is hoped that this initiative will spark sustained cultural awareness among the younger generation.

In this regard, the preservation of the Simalungun script is not merely a cultural project but a component of character education and local identity formation. Maintaining the script's relevance means

safeguarding Simalungun identity within the diverse cultural tapestry of Indonesia.

Implementation Method

This empowerment activity was structured into three interrelated stages that formed a cohesive learning process. Each stage was designed with specific objectives aimed at enhancing students' understanding, skills, and cultural awareness regarding the Simalungun script.

1. Local Cultural Awareness

The first stage involved outreach education on local culture, particularly the history and significance of the Simalungun script. Participants learned about the origins of the script, its function in traditional Simalungun life, and its role in ceremonies, genealogies, and historical texts. This session aimed to cultivate cultural awareness and ethnic identity among the students.

2. Script Training

The core of the program focused on training students in reading and writing the Simalungun script. They were taught to recognize letter forms, pronunciations, and proper writing techniques. Students practiced composing simple words and sentences, such as personal names, traditional expressions, and cultural terms. The training used interactive visual media and learning tools to facilitate retention and engagement.

3. Evaluation and Reflection

The final stage assessed the students' comprehension and writing skills through short tests and group reflections. In these sessions, students shared their insights and aspirations regarding the preservation of the script. This stage was crucial for gathering feedback and fostering long-term commitment to cultural conservation.

These three stages not only focused on technical proficiency but also laid the foundation for cultural awareness and personal attachment to heritage.

The instructional approach was varied and communicative, aiming to foster a positive and effective learning environment. Key methods included interactive lectures, live

demonstrations, and the use of visual and script-specific learning tools. This combination ensured both conceptual understanding and practical mastery.

Interactive lectures provided foundational knowledge through dialogic instruction, encouraging students to engage, ask questions, and participate actively. Demonstrations showed how to write and pronounce the script step-by-step, with students practicing under direct supervision. Visual aids such as posters, presentations, and short videos supported learning, and printed/digital writing tools were provided for hands-on practice. A participatory approach was emphasized, promoting active

student involvement through group work and real-time application.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The program successfully captured the interest of students at SMP Negeri 2 Raya. Their active participation in every phase from cultural outreach and script training to reflection demonstrated strong engagement. Most students were able to: a. Write their names correctly in the Simalungun script, b. Understand the structure and usage of the script in Simalungun cultural contexts, c. Compose simple words, including names of places, family members, and commonly used adjectives or verbs in the Simalungun language.



Picture 1. Participants trying to write Simalungun script

This engagement can be analyzed through participatory learning and intrinsic motivation theories. Students felt a personal connection to the material, as it aligned with their cultural identity and emotional experiences. The script served as a gateway to understanding their heritage and intellectual legacy.

Teachers played a crucial role in supporting culturally responsive education. They linked

the script to literary and artistic subjects for example, integrating it into poetry, prose, batik design, and calligraphy lessons.

Beyond cognitive acquisition, the initiative opened broader discussions on integrating local culture into curricula. These conversations emerged organically, reflecting a shared realization that culturally contextualized learning fosters identity pride and promotes multicultural values.



Picture 2. Participants Observing the Digital Version of Script Writing

This aligns with the principles of the *Merdeka Curriculum*, which emphasizes localized, project-based learning. The Simalungun script, as part of Indonesia's intangible cultural heritage, offers authentic educational content that fosters academic competence, cultural tolerance, and ancestral appreciation. The school's active role in this effort illustrates how formal education can revitalize local culture through inclusive and holistic pedagogy.

CONCLUSION

The empowerment of the Simalungun script at SMP Negeri 2 Raya demonstrates that local cultural preservation can be effectively pursued through formal education. Schools hold a strategic position in transmitting cultural heritage to future generations. Through outreach, training, and script writing practice, students not only learned about the script but also its embedded historical and cultural values.

This initiative affirms that a script is more than a writing system it is a mirror of civilization, identity, and local wisdom. Participatory and contextual teaching approaches enabled students to build both practical skills and a strong cultural connection. When local heritage is

integrated into the classroom, students engage more deeply and meaningfully.

Cultural preservation should not be left solely to cultural institutions or elders but must be embraced collectively through education. A heritage-oriented curriculum does not merely preserve tradition; it cultivates identity awareness, nationalism, and cultural appreciation among students. Thus, integrating the Simalungun script into the curriculum is essential for keeping its values alive amid contemporary societal shifts.

Recommendations

- Schools should incorporate the Simalungun script into both curricular and extracurricular activities.
- Local government support is needed to develop Simalungun script learning modules.
- Follow-up activities such as script competitions or cultural festivals can foster students' pride in their heritage.

Declaration by Authors

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