

Perceptions and learning strategies in the teaching of traditional songs by elementary-school teachers

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Abstract: Children's life is dominated by activities for having fun, playing, and singing; and learning can also be done in these ways. Traditional songs, as part of children's literatures, which is loaded with values, must be taught to children. The study is aimed at revealing the perceptions, learning materials and strategies, and competencies of teachers toward traditional songs. The study had the participation of 38 elementary-school teachers taking a post-graduate study on-line by using questionnaires, interviews, and scores of exams in singing traditional songs. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed by condensation and inference drawing. Result results show that teachers like, can sing traditional songs, even songs from various ethnic cultures from different regions in Indonesia, and teach them to elementary-school children at school. They have awareness of the importance of traditional songs in the attempts to build characters, love and internalize local cultural values, and, most primarily, give delightful entertainments to school children. Learning is done by repetitive singing practice so that children can easily memorize songs and it gives children various useful experiences related to the social cultural life system of the society owner of the songs. Teachers are agreed that traditional songs must be continually taught to elementary-school students continuously as an effort to to preserve them.

Keywords: traditional songs, children literature, perception, learning strategy, elementary-school teacher



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INTRODUCTION

Children see and live their life full with joy. They spend the bigger portion of their daily activities playing and having fun. Since their early infancy, they are closed to rhyme plays, such as through nursery rhymes, lullabies, (Cob, 2007; Mullen, 2017), and various traditional songs. Traditional songs such as *tembang dolanan* (Javanese traditional children songs) have nice rhythmic elements that are pleasant for singing while moving and dancing. Nursery rhymes for young children, such as ages 3, 4, and 5 must have rhythmic flow patterns (Cop, 2007). Songs with flow rhythms often make children swing and weave, even if they only hear them. Children's world is the world of playing and singing. Even learning can be done by way of playing and singing (Gunawan & Zulaeha, 2017). By playing and singing, children will feel happy, satisfied with their needs, and, at the same time, secure, so that they will be able to self-regulate and understand emotions (Mullen, 2017).

This experience will give a significant substantial impact to children's psychological development in their later life phases. They will feel more secure and have the abilities to

develop their various aspects of emotional maturity. They will be able to fit in as they are dependent on how they are treated by the adults who take care of them (Mullen, 2017). When children sing various traditional songs, while dancing joyfully, their attention and feelings will totally be actualized. Songs and rhythms will be internalized children's psychology. It is why many experts are agreed that traditional songs can be used to to implant, form, and develop character values in children (Maryaeni, 2009; Nugrahani, 2012; Rosmiyati, 2014). This is also true with the growth and development of the senses of love and belonging as part of the social values that need to be institutionalized. It is, therefore, also true why Mullen (2017) has given her study the title "More than Words: Using Nursery Rhymes and Songs".

Traditional songs record and eternalize local wisdom values that are useful for the life of the traditional societies in various regions of Indonesia and of the world. When children learn and then sing the songs, such as lullabies, it means that they safeguard, protect, and preserve the local wisdom values of the societies (Harahap, Kahar, & Nasution, 2019). This way, in order to "save" these local values, the roles of parents in the home and teachers at school are of paramount importance. This means that parents and school teachers, as well as social bodies must, consciously, teach traditional songs to children in order to together help with their children's development. At school, there must be programs structurally designed to help children acquire the moral experiences of learning and singing traditional songs (Montreuil, Saint-Laurent, & Carnevale, 2017). It is for this reason that school teachers must have the adequate abilities of singing traditional songs and experiencing the moral values and understanding the meanings of the various traditional songs.

Much research has been done that is related to the learning of traditional songs, such as *tembang dolanan* in the elementary school in the frame of character education purposes. The examples are the studies by Nugrahani (2012), Rosmiyati (2014), and Kistanto (2020); traditional lullabies from North Sumatra by Harahap, Kahar, & Nasution (2019); or research on local wisdoms as learning sources for character education (Samani, Daryono, Ratnadewi, 2018). Hartiningsih (2015) conducted a study concerning the revitalization of children's play songs in the attempt to character development. Similar studies were conducted by Lee (2016) and Ilari (2018) who implemented music and traditional songs for the development of character education—traditional songs are often accompanied by dances and music—focusing on specific character values. Bates (2019) conducted a study concerning the learning of desirable character traits and neglecting the interpersonal relations within which 'character' develops. In relation to the use of digital media, Garlen & Hembruff (2021) conducted a study by way of using the YouTube media.

The foregoing studies about traditional songs above are much related to the learning processes to children, instructional models in the learning

activities, media sources that can be used, and the understanding of the meanings of the songs themselves, most of them in relation to character education purposes. However, the present study focuses on teachers' perceptions and learning activities at school and their competencies to sing traditional songs. A good, professional teacher must be equipped with the teaching strategies and mastery of the instructional materials to be taught to the children. The present study is aimed at revealing the teachers' perceptions, learning strategies and materials, and competencies in traditional songs.

Traditional songs that are inherited from generation to generation are parts of children literature of the genre traditional literature besides other genres such as fiction, poetry, and non-fiction reader (Nurgiyantoro, 2019). Traditional songs can be understood as a form of social expressions in the past commonly generated orally (Mitchell, 2003) and across generation from age to age (Licciardi, 2015). Traditional songs for children are those limited to songs that are suited to the psychology of children such as *tembang dolanan*, lullabies, and nursery rhymes like the ones studied by Cob (2007) and Mullen (2017) mentioned above. Just like traditional literatures, traditional songs can also be found in various areas of cultures and ethnicities in Indonesia and the world in their various forms.

Various genres of children's literatures, especially traditional literatures, are good media for character education learning. Besides playing and singing, one other favourite school activity is listening to stories. It can even be said that story telling is a compulsory ritual in classes of children of lower levels—kindergartens and elementary schools of the earlier classes (Nurgiyantoro, 2019). When the teacher signs the class that it is story-telling time (or singing), the class, that is formerly noisy, will be quiet to listen. Mullen (2017) also states that storytelling is a “fundamental human activity that helps children with a number of important functions, such as understanding narrative architecture and sequencing, acquiring knowledge, and learning about others”. On the other hand, playing and singing are also dominant children's daily activities; so it follows that character education can be developed through these two media (Gunawan & Zulaeha, 2017). Playing, story telling, and singing are children's activities that need to be taken into account.

The learning of traditional songs is part of the learning learning of arts categorized as immaterial culture (He, 2019) and, simultaneously, an “integral part of the culture and lifestyle of each nation” (Denac, 2018). The learning of traditional literature for children does not (yet) involve theories, but direct practice. The instructional strategies that are used must be ones that are directly related to practice; the choice of the instructional models, however, depends much on the teacher's descretion such as giving examples, demonstration, repetition practice, singing in unison, individual singing, and so on. From the psychological views of children's development,

children are keen and have high abilities in repeating; therefore, the songs to be taught to children must have a high repetitive characteristic (Wilkinson, 2019), or gradually more and more (He, 2019). This way, songs can be memorized by the children. It can moreover give better results if the songs are accompanied with dancing movements. Learning activities using singing and dancing are more impressive, amusing, and hilarious (Wilkinson, 2019).

The learning of traditional songs to children is preferably supplemented with their history and meaning (Oghiator, 2014). This is done in order that children know the history and cultural values of each song. Traditional songs have histories that are related to the cultural backgrounds of the time. Understanding, and simultaneously singing, traditional songs is an important way of preserving folk traditions; it has an important role in encouraging, developing, and arousing love of folk music among preschool children by way of systematic music education (Denac, 2019). This is one of the aspects that show the relation between the strategies of traditional song learning and story telling as it has been stated by Mullen (2017). Other than that, there must be “cooperation” among the teachers at school, parents at home, and community at large in order to teach, drill, and reinforce the learning of traditional songs so that they can be internalized in the children’s minds more intensively. The study by Burke & Cleaver (2019) also shows that such environment has positive impacts on the process and results of learning, shows authentic values, and gives beneficial experiences to children.

In the domains of philosophy, psychology, and cognitive sciences, perception is understood as the acquisition of the awareness or understanding of sensory information (Qiong, 2017). Perception is a unique experience of an individual and one can only describe it in one’s mind. Qiong (2019) describes perception as seeing, hearing, or feeling something (with the senses) and then identifying what it is within the interpretations learned from one’s language and culture. Perception is a multifaceted concept that is as complex as the human mind itself. Beforehand, Franz & Sarcina (2009) state that perception is the conscious reception, selection, processing, and interpretation of information by one’s brain via all senses. Perception is tightly related to the human characteristics that enables human beings to continuously interact spontaneously with the environments resulting in positive or negative perceptions (Hergan, 2019). Perception is also used to describe something that is received. Seen from the process, Qiong (2017) distinguishes perception in three phases namely selection, organization, and interpretation; meanwhile from its dimensions, perception can be seen as physical and psychological.

All these aspects, be they psychological or physical in their nature, or whether they are receptive, selective, processive, or interpretative in their aspects, that are related to traditional songs are asked to elementa-

ry-school teachers. Teachers will have perceptions towards an instructional material; whether they like it, how it is supposed to be taught, what are its advantages, what is its future prospect like, and such related aspects. Their responses to such questions become important information for research on perceptions. Perceptual research can also be done to students. The study by Harsasi (2015), for example, is one that investigates students' perceptions on the use of open educational resources for learning through the *E-learning* modes.

METHOD

The study was quantitative and qualitative research (Creswell, 2012). The quantitative component was derived from the questionnaire and document of scores of competencies in singing traditional regional songs of students in accordance with their ethnic backgrounds. The qualitative component was derived from the on-line questions and answers with some of the respondents through *Whatsapp* and *E-mails*. The primary data were the quantitative data while the qualitative data were used to scaffold research results and their interpretations.

The research subjects were 38 elementary-school teachers taking a post-graduate study program in Yogyakarta State University. They were regarded as highly educated people in their regions so that they were seen to have an important role at school in their own regions. Some of them were senior teachers with substantial teaching experiences, some were juniors with small numbers of experiences. This difference was one of the reasons why they were chosen as research subjects. Data about these respondents are presented completely in Table 1.

Table 1. Description of research respondents

No.	Indicator		Number		Remarks
			Frequency	Percentage	
1.	Gender	Male	9	23.7	Students from ethnic back- grounds of outside Java, for example: Lampung (4), South Kalimantan (2), South Sulawesi (2), West Sulawe- si, West Sumatra, Tanjung Pinang, Ternate, and Papua
		Female	29	76.3	
2.	Ethnic Origin	Java	25	65.8	
		Outside Java	13	34.2	
3.	Teaching Experience	<1–1 Year	9	23.7	
		2–5 Years	11	28.9	
		6–9 Years	4	10.5	
		10 Years up	14	36.9	
Total for Each Indicator:			38	100	

Data were collected in three ways; namely (a) by on-line questionnaires (of the 48 questionnaires sent, 38 respondents returned responses), (b) by interviews with some respondents who answered the questionnaires as well as representing their groups through *E-mails* and *Whatsapp*, and (c) by documentation of students' scores of exams in singing traditional songs

in accordance with their ethnic backgrounds. The questionnaire consisted of 3 items about the respondents’ personal identities and 13 questions on perceptions and instructional activities in the traditional song classes. The questionnaire items were closed Yes/No-type questions with a number of answer options for the Yes response. Validity of the questionnaire was obtained through focus-group discussions with some colleague experts. The specification of the questionnaire is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Specification of perceptual questionnaire of post-graduate student teachers on traditional song

Identity respondent teacher/student

1. Name :

2. Regional ethnic origin :

3. Teaching experience :

No.	Indicator	Number of questions	Notes
1.	Interest and perceptions on traditional song	5	Answers Yes and No and derivational responses for the Yes answer according to the respondent
2.	Perceptions on traditional song learning	5	
3.	Perceptions on usefulness of traditional song	1	
4.	Future programs	2	
Total:		13	

In addition, to identify the respondents’ abilities in singing traditional songs of their regions, measurement was taken from the documentation of their exam scores in singing traditional songs during classes. Scores were taken by individual singing performances by also considering their individual opinions and comments. Respondents gave opinions and comments on each of their peer’s singing performances. Data from the questionnaire and score documentation were analyzed by the descriptive quantitative technique on the *IBM SPSS Statistics* Version 26; meanwhile, qualitative data analysis was done through condensation and inference drawing to scaffold in the result and discussion sections.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Research results were obtained from answers to the perceptual questionnaires given by the respondents and the scores of their performances in singing their traditional songs. Results are displayed in tables and figures.

Teachers’ perceptions on traditional songs

Respondents’ responses on the questions about their interests and perceptions about traditional songs are presented in Table 3 (responses 1-4) and Figure 1 (response 5).

Table 3. Teachers’ perceptions on children’s traditional song

No.	Item indicator	Response (%)		Notes
		Yes	No	
1.	Do you accept and like the regional traditional song?	38 (100)	-	There are traditional songs from other regions that respondents can sing as well, especially popular ones that are found in the curriculum.
2.	Do you enjoy listening to the regional traditional song?	38 (100)	-	
3.	Do you sing your traditional ethnic songs?	34 (89.5)	4 (10.5)	
4.	Do you often sing traditional songs?	25 (65.8)	13 (34.2)	

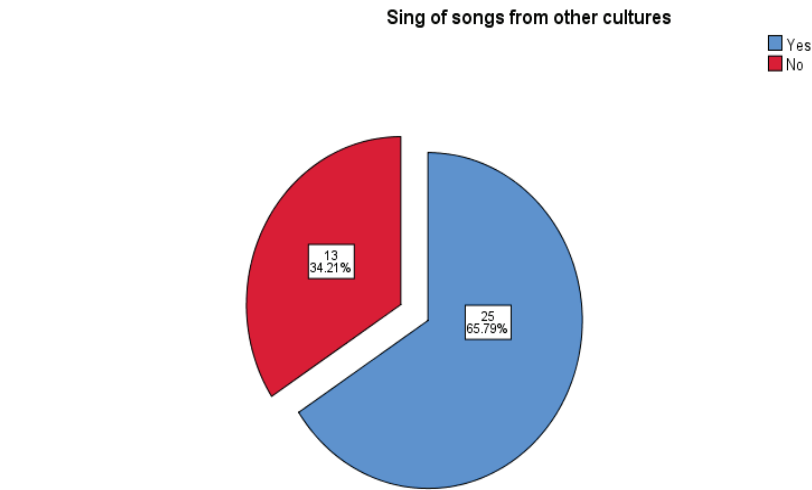


Figure 1. Respondents can sing traditional songs from other ethnic regions

All respondents accept, like, and can sing the traditional song from their ethnic regions. Many can even sing traditional songs from other regions; one, two, or three traditional songs from other regions. For example, songs from West Java, South Kalimantan, and Papua each gets a score of 18.4%; Makasar 5,3%; and other regions such as Ambon, North Sumatra, West Sumatra, Tarakan, etc. On the other hand, there are 8 (61,5%) of the 13 teachers from outside Java can sing a number of songs. However, this has already shown that they all accept, like, and can sing traditional songs from other regions, but still inside Indonesia.

Traditional song learning activities

Do the teacher respondents teach traditional songs to their students at their schools? The majority of the respondents (36) answer “Yes” (95%); only two teachers (2,5%) give the “No” answer. It turns out that these two respondents are new teachers who have teaching experience of less than one year. How many times in one week do they teach traditional songs to their students? Comparative answers are given in Figure 2.

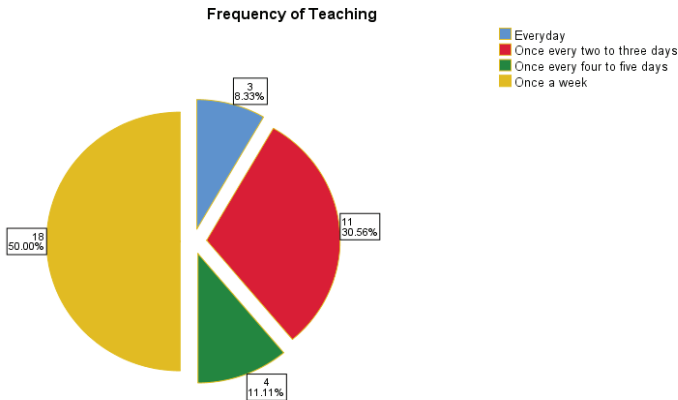


Figure 2. Frequency of teaching traditional songs in a week

On the question of from where these respondents learned the traditional songs, their answers are varied. Table 4 presents the respondents’ answers to the sources of learning to sing tradituonal songs. Respondents are allowed to list all sources, so some of their answers are more than one source.

Table 4. Teachers’ Sources for Learning Traditional Songs

No.	Teachers’ learning sources	Number		Remarks
		Frequency	Percentage	
1.	Parents	31	81.6	Roles of teachers at school and parents are dominant in teaching children traditional songs
2.	School in the past	36	94.7	
3.	Neighbourhood	27	71.1	
4.	YouTube	28	73.7	
5.	TikTok	7	18.4	
6.	Television	16	42.1	
7.	Radio	13	34.2	

Traditional songs are one genre in children’s literature in the oral type. Children’s literature must be taught in the elementary school. On the question whether they teach other genres of children’s literature to their students, all of the teacher respondents (38) answer that they do. Comparison of the genres (5 types) is shown in Table 5. For this question, respondents may give more than genre factually taught at school.

Table 5. Genre of children's literature taught at school

No.	Genre taught at school	Number		Notes
		Frequency	Presentage	
1.	Traditional literature	33	86.8	Most of the teachers teach all the genres of children's literature
2.	Children's poems	34	89.5	
3.	Children's fictions	34	89.5	
4.	Non-fiction readers	30	78.9	
5.	Comics	28	73.7	

The teaching of traditional songs to children at school must use specific instructional strategies such as demonstration, giving examples, singing practice, and explanation of song meanings. Respondents are asked what strategy they use to teach traditional songs at school. The comparative answers are shown in Table 6. For this question, the teachers may also give more than one strategy really implemented.

Table 6. Choises of strategies used to teach traditional songs at school

No.	Strategy of teaching	Number		Remarks
		Frequency	Percentage	
1.	Demonstration	25	65.8	Almost all teachers use the four strategies. Singing practice is done by all teachers
2.	Giving examples	32	84.2	
3.	Practice	38	100	
4.	Meaning explanation	31	81.6	

Usefulness of traditional songs

Are traditional songs useful? Confronted with this question, all the teacher respondents answer Yes (100%). The same answer is given when the teachers are asked that the primary advantages of traditional songs are (a) giving entertainment, (b) growing the sense of beauty, (c) internalizing local cultural values, (d) implanting love for local culture, (e) implanting local wisdom, (f) forming the characyter value of love for the country, and (g) preserving the use of local language and culture. All the respondents are agreed (100%). Although coming in different formulations, all these seven advantages are related to the attempts and purposes of character education that are directly and indirectly implanted, vertilized, and grown through the learning of traditional songs which also function to preserve them.

Learning programs to the future

The activities of the advantageous traditional song learning as mentioned above must be carried out continuously. On the question whether they agree that traditional song learning should be done continuously, all the teacher respondents answer (100%). When asked whether they agree if singing traditional songs be contested at school, almost all of the respon-

dents (37) answer that they do (97,4%), one respondent gives a negative answer. There are, meanwhile, 36 respondents (94,7%) who agree that such competition is held in the elementary school, 34 respondents (89,5%) in the junior high school, and 27 respondents (71,1%) in the senior high school. This means that it is most agreed that traditional song singing contests are staged in the elementary school.

Competencies in singing traditional songs

The competencies of the teacher respondents in in singing various traditional songs of their ethic origin are shown in Table 7. Seen from the observed mean score of the statistical calculation, it can be said that the teachers’ competency can be categorized as high. This means that teachers have adequate competence in singing traditional songs with the expectation that they can teach it to students as well.

Tabel 7. Description of teachers’ competency in singing traditional songs

	Descriptive Statistics				
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Exam score document	38	75	88	81.45	3.446
Valid N (listwise)	38				

Discussion

As part of children’s literature, children’s traditional songs must be taught to the elementary-school students as one of the ways to grow, love, and internalize the values of local cultures (Samani *et al.*, 2018; Harahap *et al.*, 2019) from the early ages (Rosmiati, 2014). This is one of the duties and responsibilities of the school teachers. In order to be able to fulfill this well, teachers must be able to show the proper attitudes and examples, have interests and delight in traditional songs, and are able to sing them well. This study has shown that teachers have obtained all these requirements which become their great competences in doing their jobs. Literature exists initially to give joy and entertainment; it, however, is useful simultabeously for the development of man’s soul in an harmonious way (Nurgiyantoro, 2019). This function works not only for the teachers, but it also applies to the school children who are just stepping to be introduced to life. Students are directed to have a good time lullaby songs (Harahap *et al.*, 2019), nursery rhymes (Cobs, 2007), and other various traditional songs (Kistanto, 2020).

The study also has shown that teachers learn traditional songs mostly from their parents, teachers at the school, and then people in the neighbourhood. This implies, directly or indirectly, that teachers must become the first and and most person to teach traditional songs to children as they have experienced in the past. Today, however, in the digital era, many tradi-

tional songs are also uploaded in YouTube; so, it can be readily used to help with the learning needs at school (Garlen & Hembruff, 2021). In the case of one forgetting a song, for example, or wanting to learn a song from another place, one can resource to this on-line facility. Some of the research respondents also confess to using YouTube to help with their teaching activities. This shows that teachers have enough capabilities to work with on-line facilities and, so, the problem of “technological stuttering”, as mentioned by Garlen & Hembruff (2021) can be eliminated.

Today’s digital availability has offered good opportunities for teachers and students to learn traditional songs from various ethnical cultures in other regions of the country, and even of the world. Many of the teacher respondents have made use of this facility to learn songs that are in the textbook and then practice the songs through YouTube. Such is the same with the students in finding their self-identities, ways of dressing, using languages, etc. (Ford, 2020). Ford further states that words and expressions that are most popular are those that come from songs, including traditional songs.

Almost all of the teacher respondents agree with the usefulness of traditional songs being shown and discussed. Because of these advantages, especially the one about giving fun and entertainment, all the teachers teach traditional songs to the students at least once a week. Some of the teachers give their students traditional songs even every day, or once in every two or three weeks. One of the main strategies they use to teach traditional songs to their students is the singing practice. It seems that all experts of the elementary education are agreed on this (Lee, 2016; Gunawan & Zulaeha, 2017; He, 2019). Learning with repetitive practice gives a guarantee that the songs will be easily memorized, loved, internalized, preserved, and secured in the childrens’ minds (Oghiator, 2014; Denac, 2018). Besides, traditional songs also have the characteristics of being funny; they will become good interconnectors among different generations (Wilkinson, 2019) and help to promote better understanding of the experiences of children (Montreuil, Saint-Laurent, & Carnevale (2017).

Besides the singing practice, another learning strategy that the teachers use is explaining the meaning of the songs, especially to the older children of grades 5 and 6. Explaining the meaning of the songs is an important step that must be done (Oghiator, 2014). Traditional songs can be categorized as immaterial culture, very valuable cultural resources (He, 2019), and an integral part of the culture and lifestyle of a nation (Denac, 20118). When children can understand the meaning of the songs and repeatedly sing them, it is expected that, in them, develops the awareness of the roles cultural education plays within the education system, improve the level of cultural literacy, and establish a proper connection between education and culture (Denac, 2018). Other than the songs, by internet teachers can also find backgrounds and meanings as materials for story telling.

The explanation of the meaning of traditional songs can be done while telling various related traditional stories. For example, when students sing the traditional songs *Iilir-ilir*, *Sluku-sluku Bathok*, and *Gundhul-gundhul Pacul* by the great Cleric Sunan Kalijaga, they are given the meaning of the songs—that contains religious Islamic teachings—followed by the teacher telling the stories of Sunan Kalijaga as one of the Moslem clerics delivering Islamic teachings in Java. In this case, the explanation of the meaning of the songs is given together with the story telling. For the elementary-school children, story telling is a classroom activity that must be given (Mullen, 2017); it is even called a ritual that must be done (Nurgiyantoro, 2019) especially in lower grade classes. When Mullen (2017) states that a traditional song is “more than words”, it can be taken to show the importance of story telling to accompany traditional songs. There are, then, a number of instructional strategies that can be used in traditional song learning such as singing practice accompanied by dancing movements and story telling.

Story telling can also be connected to the learning objectives of multicultural education to elementary-school students as contained in the textbook. It can be related to history, clothing, traditional song meanings, and others. It will be better if the stories are accompanied with the practice of singing the songs that are already popular in the ethnic cultures. For example, Widodo, Nursaptini, & Erfan (2022) have studied about the *sasambo* traditional dance that carries the meanings and spirits of unity, kinship, and equality in the Province of West Nusa Tenggara as a sample of multicultural education. In another place, Sairattanain & Thawarom (2022) use children’s literature in learning to integrate cultural knowledge into English teaching to immigrants in Thailand.

Traditional songs, as part of folklore and traditional literature, as well as a genre of children’s literatures (Mitchell, 2003), must be preserved (Denac, 2018). Traditional songs become a part of the social system that must be introduced to and understood by children to give them delightful and useful experiences (Montreuil, Saint-Laurent, & Carnevale, 2017) by way of instructional proceedings. Traditional song learning is a learning media to implant, fertilize, and develop character education since the early stages of children (Kistanto, 2020). This is an implication that can be drawn from the study for school teachers to have the awareness of their responsibility in teaching traditional children’s songs at school. In this relation, they are also reminded to always learn traditional songs from other ethnic cultures to enrich themselves and their students with traditional songs from other regions. This must be done at least for traditional songs that are listed as the instructional materials in the textbooks or in the curriculum. Finally, in this digital era, teachers are encouraged to use the YouTube and other digital facilities to help with traditional song learning in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

Traditional songs are not alien for elementary-school teachers. They like them and can sing them, even those coming from various different ethnic cultures in various regions in Indonesia. They also can, with due responsibility, teach them to their students at school knowing the importance of traditional songs in attempts to build characters, love and internalize the local cultural values, and, most importantly, give delightful entertainment to their school children. The world of children is one of play and fun; and this can be facilitated with children's traditional songs. The teaching of traditional songs to children can be carried out through the repetitive practice strategy so that children can memorize the songs well and easily. With these in mind, the learning of traditional songs will, directly or indirectly, give students various useful experiences related to the life system of the society, owner of the songs. School teachers are all agreed that traditional songs must continually be taught continuously to elementary-school children in order to, simultaneously, attempt to preserve them.

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