



The Role of Tembang Dolanan in Javanese Language Learning in Primary Schools: A Systematic Literature Review

R. Panji Daru Tutuko, S.T.; Dr. Setiawan Edi Wibowo, S.Pd., M.Pd.; Dr. Agung Hastomo, M.Pd.

Primary Education Study Program, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

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Abstract

Javanese language teaching in Indonesian primary schools is challenged by the decreasing use of local languages in families and schools, as well as the strong dominance of national and global popular culture. In this context, tembang dolanan, traditional Javanese children's songs, hold considerable potential as a learning medium that is both engaging and rich in linguistic and cultural content. This article presents a systematic literature review on the role of tembang dolanan in Javanese language learning at the primary school level. The review adopts the PRISMA 2020 framework and draws on studies retrieved from Google Scholar, GARUDA, DOAJ, ERIC, and nationally indexed journal portals, using keywords related to tembang dolanan, Javanese language learning, and primary education. Selected articles were analysed in terms of research context, forms of tembang dolanan implementation, linguistic and cultural learning outcomes, and classroom challenges. The review indicates that tembang dolanan are generally used to enrich vocabulary, support pronunciation and oral fluency, enhance student engagement, and transmit character and cultural values associated with Javanese identity. The most promising results appear when tembang dolanan are embedded in multimodal instructional designs that combine singing, movement, games, and audiovisual media. However, the existing evidence base remains limited: few studies employ rigorous experimental or quasi-experimental designs or use instruments that explicitly measure Javanese language outcomes. The article concludes that tembang dolanan represent a strategic medium for strengthening both Javanese language learning and cultural preservation in primary schools, while highlighting the need for further research on the development and empirical testing of tembang dolanan-based teaching materials.

Keywords: *Javanese Children's Songs; Tembang Dolanan; Javanese Language Learning; Primary School; Culture-Based Learning; Cultural Literacy*

Introduction

Javanese language teaching in Indonesian primary schools faces significant challenges in efforts to preserve local language and culture. As a regional language with a rich history, culture, and tradition, Javanese is often marginalised in the national education curriculum. Most primary school pupils are more familiar with Indonesian, which is used as the main medium of instruction, while the use of Javanese is

steadily decreasing. This trend threatens the continuity of the language, especially among younger generations. At the same time, globalisation and the rapid development of digital technology exacerbate this situation, because many pupils are more attracted to global technology and popular culture that tend to neglect local cultural values.

Preserving Javanese should therefore be a priority in education, particularly at the primary level. In early childhood, pupils are in a developmental phase that is highly sensitive to the languages and cultures they encounter. It is thus important to integrate Javanese into the teaching–learning process through approaches that are enjoyable and relevant to their lives. One promising way to increase pupils’ interest in and understanding of Javanese is to use engaging and interactive learning media. In this regard, tembang dolanan, as part of Javanese cultural heritage, has great potential to be implemented as an effective instructional medium in primary schools.

Tembang dolanan are traditional Javanese children’s songs that are usually sung in the context of children’s games. Their lyrics are easy to remember and the melodies are simple, making them highly suitable for use in teaching language. At the same time, tembang dolanan are rich in cultural values that can be introduced to pupils from an early age. Despite their long presence in Javanese culture, however, the use of tembang dolanan in Javanese language teaching in primary schools has rarely been discussed in depth in the educational literature. This review therefore seeks to explore more deeply the role of tembang dolanan in Javanese language learning in primary schools. It also analyses the impact of using tembang dolanan on pupils’ language skills and examines how this medium can support the introduction and preservation of Javanese culture among younger generations.

Previous studies have discussed the use of music as an instructional medium. Learning that incorporates music has been associated with improvements in academic achievement, creativity, and pupils’ self-confidence (Chen et al., 2024). In the area of child language acquisition, the use of songs has been shown to support vocabulary enrichment and linguistic output, although stronger research designs are still needed to ascertain its causal effects (Hamilton et al., 2024). Other findings suggest that early exposure to music is related to children’s vocabulary development (Damayanti et al., 2025). From a multimodal pedagogy perspective, music-and-movement approaches in primary school have also been reported to strengthen pupils’ attention, memory, and participation (del Barrio & Arús, 2024). However, these studies focus on music in general and only rarely address tembang dolanan specifically as a medium for Javanese language learning in primary schools.

This review seeks to fill that gap by analysing the existing literature and exploring the role of tembang dolanan in enhancing Javanese language learning, as well as contributing to the development of culture-based learning theory in primary education. The novelty of this review lies in its focus on integrating cultural education perspectives with the practical teaching of Javanese through tembang dolanan.

Tembang dolanan occupy an important position in Javanese oral tradition. A number of studies indicate that dolanan songs contain ethical, social, and character values that can be transmitted to children, making them appropriate vehicles for cultural education in primary school (Widodo, 2011). Other research in primary education shows that instructional media based on local wisdom are effective for fostering nationalism and patriotism, so integrating local cultural forms such as tembang dolanan has the potential to strengthen identity and cultural pride in the classroom (Irvan & Mustadi, 2021).

Within a culture-based learning framework, internationally indexed educational research has found that local content can make learning more interesting, easier to understand, and more motivating for pupils (Alexon et al., 2024). Integrating cultural elements into language teaching is also associated with stronger memory processing, which in turn supports understanding and retention of concepts (Zuchdi &

Nurhadi, 2019). These arguments reinforce the urgency of bringing tembang dolanan into Javanese language instruction in primary schools. Previous studies on the use of songs in language learning show that songs are effective for supporting vocabulary enrichment and retention, facilitating practice of structures and grammar, and creating an enjoyable classroom climate that encourages pupil engagement. In classroom practice, teachers often integrate song lyrics and song-based activities to review vocabulary and patterns, which has a positive impact on pupils' participation and focus (Sevy-Biloon, 2018).

Nevertheless, research that directly investigates the use of tembang dolanan in Javanese language learning in primary schools remains very limited. This review therefore aims to address that gap by examining in depth the role of tembang dolanan in Javanese language learning and its impact on pupils' language skills.

In the context of Indonesia's multicultural and multireligious society, strengthening Javanese language and culture through primary education also contributes to broader multicultural understanding. By positioning tembang dolanan as a medium for language learning, character formation, and cultural literacy, this review aligns with current concerns in social sciences and education about how schools can nurture respect for diversity while maintaining local identities.

Research Questions and Objectives

The main objective of this review is to analyse the role of tembang dolanan in Javanese language learning in primary schools. The study focuses on two main aspects: first, how tembang dolanan can be used as an effective medium to teach Javanese language skills to pupils; and second, how tembang dolanan can introduce Javanese cultural values in the context of primary education. Accordingly, the review seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the potential of tembang dolanan in improving learning outcomes in Javanese language and in supporting the preservation of local culture.

More specifically, this review is guided by the following research questions:

- 1) How are tembang dolanan used as a medium in Javanese language learning at the primary school level?
- 2) What linguistic and cultural learning outcomes are reported in studies that integrate tembang dolanan into classroom practice?
- 3) What challenges and limitations are identified in the implementation of tembang dolanan-based learning in primary schools?

The review contributes on several levels. Theoretically, it enriches understanding of the use of culture-based media in regional language education, particularly Javanese. The findings add to the literature on culture-based language learning. Practically, the review offers recommendations for Javanese language teachers in primary schools to use tembang dolanan as an engaging and effective teaching tool. Using tembang dolanan can make the learning process more enjoyable and accessible for pupils, thereby increasing their interest in learning Javanese. Methodologically, the review illustrates how a systematic literature review approach can be used to explore the use of tembang dolanan in Javanese language learning, which may serve as a reference for future empirical research.

Methodology

This article is a systematic literature review on the role of tembang dolanan in Javanese language learning in primary schools. The review design was chosen to map empirical and conceptual evidence in a structured way, in line with the aim of the article as a systematic literature review.

The reporting of the review follows the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, covering the stages of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. A PRISMA flow diagram is used to report the number of records at each stage to ensure transparency and replicability.

Literature searches were conducted in Google Scholar, GARUDA, DOAJ, ERIC, and reputable national journal portals (with emphasis on SINTA 1–2). Additional searches in Scopus were carried out when access was available, in order to broaden coverage. The database list and coverage were compiled by combining international indexes and national portals.

The search strategy used bilingual (Indonesian–English) keywords combined with Boolean operators, for example:

- Indonesian: "tembang dolanan" OR "lagu dolanan" OR "dolanan anak" AND "Bahasa Jawa" AND ("sekolah dasar" OR SD OR MI), with additional terms such as media OR "video interaktif" OR audiovisual OR aplikasi.
- English: "Javanese children* song*" AND (learning OR teaching OR instruction) AND (elementary OR primary), with additional terms such as traditional song* AND (language learning OR vocabulary OR fluency).

The time span covered 2000–2025, with an emphasis on 2015–2025 for more recent evidence. All search strings, search dates, and the number of records retrieved from each database were documented.

Inclusion criteria were: (i) empirical, R&D, classroom action research, qualitative, quantitative, or review studies that use or analyse Javanese tembang or dolanan songs in the context of Javanese language learning in early childhood or primary education; (ii) written in Indonesian or English; and (iii) reporting outcomes relevant to language skills (for example vocabulary, pronunciation/fluency, comprehension) and/or cultural and attitudinal outcomes. Exclusion criteria were: studies at other educational levels without clear relevance to primary school; purely ethnographic studies without pedagogical implications; non-scientific writings (blogs, news, YouTube); and papers without full text or with unclear methods.

The selection procedure followed the PRISMA stages. During identification, all search results were exported with titles, authors, years, and sources. In the screening stage, two reviewers independently assessed the relevance of titles and abstracts against the inclusion criteria, resolving disagreements through discussion. In the eligibility stage, potentially relevant articles were read in full to verify domain relevance (tembang dolanan–Javanese language–primary education) and outcomes. In the final inclusion stage, studies that met the criteria were included in the synthesis and reasons for exclusion were recorded.

Data extraction covered: authors and year; context and setting (province, school type, grade); design; forms of tembang dolanan implementation (song titles, live singing, audiovisual media, interactive videos, applications; integration of movement or props); duration and frequency; language outcomes (vocabulary, fluency, listening/reading comprehension); cultural and attitudinal outcomes; instruments; main findings; limitations; and brief notes on quality.

To interpret the weight of evidence (rather than exclude studies automatically), an appraisal checklist appropriate to the design of each study was used—for example qualitative checklists or tools for non-randomised quantitative studies and mixed-methods studies. The results of this appraisal are reported descriptively.

Data were synthesised thematically. Initial grouping distinguished: (1) types of tembang dolanan implementation (face-to-face singing, audiovisual media, interactive video/application, multimodal or SAVI approaches); (2) outcomes, including language skills and cultural/character outcomes; (3) implementation conditions (class/grade, duration, frequency, teacher support, supporting media). The direction of effects (positive/mixed) was noted for each study. Where possible, simple quantitative summaries were considered. The scope of the review is limited to Javanese language learning in primary schools with tembang dolanan as the main medium or object, in line with the aim of examining the role of tembang dolanan in language learning and cultural preservation.

Results and Discussion

The review of 20 relevant articles shows that research on tembang dolanan and local-wisdom-based learning in Indonesia has developed beyond simple descriptive studies. Many studies now use development research (R&D), quasi-experiments, and even meta-analyses and bibliometric approaches (Suryanti et al., 2020; Muhammad et al., 2022). Teaching materials and media based on local culture—such as story calendars, comics, traditional games, and audiovisual resources—have been designed, validated, and tested with primary school pupils to observe their effects on character and learning outcomes (Irvan & Mustadi, 2021; Anggito et al., 2022).

From a language perspective, several studies indicate that tembang dolanan can support vocabulary enrichment, listening skills, and speaking fluency. Application-based media and joyful learning models that use tembang dolanan are reported to increase pupils' motivation and help them understand the meaning of song lyrics more deeply (Suryani et al., 2018; Rohmah et al., 2024). Teachers use the lyrics as sources of concrete vocabulary, simple sentence patterns, and opportunities for pronunciation practice and short dialogues in Javanese (Musfaizah, 2021; Veronika et al., 2017; Yanuarita, 2019). However, most of these findings are reported qualitatively, and there are still very few studies that measure Javanese language skills using standardised tests or detailed rubrics.

In terms of cultural and character education, the evidence is much stronger. Analyses of tembang dolanan lyrics show rich values of religiosity, cooperation, responsibility, and social care that are highly relevant for primary school pupils (Widodo, 2011; Musfaizah, 2021; Priani et al., 2021). When used regularly in classroom and school activities, tembang dolanan help strengthen character formation and cultural identity, and can even support child-friendly and

culture-based school initiatives (Dewi et al., 2023; Supeni et al., 2023). Similar findings in studies on pantun, Sundanese songs, and other folk songs confirm that traditional oral texts are powerful tools for cultural literacy (Adawiyah, 2019; Bagastian et al., 2023; Albacete-Maza et al., 2023).

Another important pattern concerns multimodal implementation. Many studies show that traditional songs are most effective when packaged together with movement, images, written texts, and digital media—rather than being used as stand-alone singing activities (Kristanto, 2020; Utami et al., 2025; Suryanti et al., 2020). This multimodal approach aligns with international evidence that combining auditory, visual, and kinaesthetic stimuli enhances attention, memory, and engagement (del Barrio & Arús, 2024; Hamilton et al., 2024).

At the same time, several challenges and limitations were identified. Not all teachers feel confident leading musical activities, and schools may lack sufficient facilities to use audiovisual or application-based media optimally (Suryani et al., 2018; Rohmah et al., 2024). Methodologically, most studies still rely on descriptive qualitative designs and small samples. Quasi-experimental research that compares classes with and without tembang dolanan-based interventions, supported by validated instruments for both language and character outcomes, remains scarce (Warikh et al., 2020; Raharja, 2021). As a result, while existing evidence strongly supports the cultural and character-building roles of tembang dolanan, their specific impact on Javanese language attainment still requires further rigorous study.

Conclusion

This systematic review shows that tembang dolanan hold significant potential for Javanese language learning in primary schools. They function not only as enjoyable songs and games, but also as media for enriching vocabulary, practising pronunciation, building confidence in speaking, and cultivating character and cultural literacy when designed in multimodal and contextual ways.

However, the current empirical evidence base is dominated by qualitative descriptions and studies focusing on character and cultural aspects. There is still a lack of quasi-experimental and experimental research using standardised language measures such as Javanese vocabulary tests, speaking rubrics, and lyric comprehension assessments. Future work therefore needs to develop micro-curricula based on tembang dolanan, create and validate assessment instruments for Javanese language skills, strengthen teacher capacity, and carry out methodologically robust studies. By doing so, the potential of tembang dolanan can be more convincingly demonstrated in terms of both language learning outcomes and the preservation of Javanese culture among primary school pupils.

Author Contributions

R. Panji Daru Tutuko, S.T. conceptualised the study, conducted the literature search, and drafted the manuscript. Dr. Setiawan Edi Wibowo, S.Pd., M.Pd. provided critical feedback on the research design and the interpretation of the findings. Dr. Agung Hastomo, M.Pd. supervised the overall study, refined the theoretical framework, and reviewed the final version of the manuscript.

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