



Critical Literacy as a Strategy for Strengthening Adolescents' National Identity in the Face of the Hallyu Wave

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the "Wave to Worth" empowerment program in strengthening nationalism through critical literacy on the Hallyu wave among third-year students at SMP Negeri 2 Cianjur. Using a participatory approach and the frameworks of hegemony and Steven Lukes' three-dimensional theory of power, the five-week program (September–October 2025) included pre-tests, interactive sessions, group discussions, creative projects, and post-tests. Paired Samples T-Test results showed significant improvements in students' conceptual understanding and critical attitudes toward popular culture. Class IX.3 scores increased from 1.44 to 4.31 ($t = -16.406$, $p < 0.05$), while Class IX.10 improved from 1.70 to 4.67 ($t = -15.240$, $p < 0.05$). Students demonstrated greater ability to recognize media influence, distinguish personal preferences from external pressures, and appreciate local culture. These findings indicate that participatory, bottom-up education can effectively counter cultural hegemony and foster critical nationalism among the digital generation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the digital era of globalization, adolescents are often caught up in the global popular culture stream, one of which is the Hallyu Wave that shapes their preferences without critical awareness (Jin, 2025). As a top-performing middle school that produces high-achieving students, SMP Negeri 2 Cianjur faces this issue directly. Initial observations on September 18, 2025, revealed that most students are interested in Korean culture such as K-Pop, Korean dramas, fashion styles, cosmetic trends, and memes. This situation describes that students are deeply immersed in the global popular culture stream, but the observations also show a lack of critical literacy in understanding the impact of the Hallyu Wave. Many students are unable to identify, understand, and differentiate between personal preferences and media influence, as well as struggle to reflect on how external culture can shape their thinking patterns, behaviors, or even identities (Erikson, 1969; Freire et al., 2018).

In the context of intense global popular culture consumption, the lack of critical awareness and nationalism is a very important issue because it affects the formation of adolescent character, especially when they are active digitally, as social media increases vulnerability to "ideological power" (Lukes, 2005). Additionally, according to the results of the pre-test conducted, the component of student awareness in the indicator of preference shaping is the weakest.

Critical Literacy Against the Hallyu Wave is designed to address this problem. This program combines critical literacy education, analysis of popular culture, and counter-hegemonic strategies based on Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony and Steven Lukes' three-dimensional theory of power. Gramsci emphasizes the importance of developing critical consciousness or "counter-hegemony" among subordinated groups, which involves creating alternative narratives, institutions, and practices that oppose dominant ideology and power structures (Gramsci, in Sardar, 2024). He argues that while the ruling capitalist class establishes its power through cultural hegemony, this hegemony can be actively resisted and overthrown through counter-hegemony. In the current context, corporate media, researchers, and educational institutions play a similar role in reinforcing and legitimizing the neoliberal capitalist, nationalist, or other hegemonic discourses. This writing program encourages students to think about culture actively through participatory sessions during five weeks, including material delivery, interactive quizzes, group discussions, and creative projects.

This program aims to enhance critical understanding, creativity such as posters, music, and video cultural propaganda as forms of nationalism strengthening and long-term impact evaluation data with support from the school and the Guidance Counseling subject teachers. Overall, this initiative helps adolescents strengthen their nationalism and address popular cultural challenges. Related articles discuss various aspects of Hallyu, emphasizing K-pop, webtoons, films, and migration (Kim et al., 2025). The impact of Hallyu does not only permeate popular culture but also becomes a measure of positive lifestyle for many Asians (Ryoo, 2008, in Yong Jin, 2025). Hallyu was initially just a cultural phenomenon in certain regions, but its growth and impact far exceeded expectations, affecting all of Asia (Jin & Yi, 2020). It is still too early to predict the future of Hallyu based solely on current media trends (Jin, 2025).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Hallyu Wave: Global Popular Culture Phenomenon and Its Impact on Youth Identity

The Korean Wave, or Hallyu Wave, is a phenomenon of the spread of South Korean popular culture to various parts of the world that began in the late 1990s (Lee, 2011). The

Hallyu Wave as a global popular culture trend that affects youth, with a focus on its impact on national identity, cultural hegemony, and handling strategies through critical literacy. The Hallyu Wave, or Korean Wave, has evolved into a transnational phenomenon driven by social media and digital platforms, facilitating the spread of K-pop, dramas, and Korean cultural trends worldwide (Eunkyong et al., 2014). This phenomenon not only absorbs popular culture but also shapes a positive lifestyle for many Asians, enhancing the image of Korea through the halo effect, which changes perceptions of politics, economy, and society (Jin, 2025). However, this spread often exceeds expectations, heavily influencing young generations, especially through unlimited digital consumption beyond television or living rooms. Eunkyong et al., (2014) introduces the concept of "Hallyu fan-nationalism," explaining how the consumption of Korean culture produces intense emotional bonds, even transcending geographical boundaries and conventional national identities. Lyan's study shows that Hallyu fans do not merely enjoy cultural products but also absorb the values, behaviors, and aesthetic preferences embedded in Korean culture. This identification process can lead to identity conflicts, particularly among adolescents who are in a critical stage of self-formation (Erikson, 1969). This phenomenon becomes more complex when linked to the process of national identity formation. Mastrotheodoros et al., (2021) in their research titled "Developmental Interplay between Ethnic, National, and Personal Identity" found that adolescents experience dynamic negotiations of identity between personal, ethnic, and national aspects. When global popular cultures like Hallyu dominate the cultural consumption arena, tensions arise between local and global identities, potentially reducing pride in one's own culture and national identity.

From a critical perspective, the Hallyu Wave can be understood as a form of contemporary cultural imperialism (Jin, 2025). The concept of cultural imperialism refers to the dominance of cultural values, norms, and practices from one nation or group over another, occurring through mass media and popular culture industries. In this context, South Korea through its entertainment industry (K-Pop, Korean dramas, fashion, beauty products) has successfully created cultural hegemony that shapes the tastes, lifestyles, and aspirations of young generations in various countries, including Indonesia. Schachner et al., (2024) emphasize that adolescents are highly susceptible to the influence of dominant culture because they are in the phase of identity search and conformity with peer groups. Intense exposure to certain popular cultures can shift cultural preferences from local to global, creating what is known as "cultural displacement" where local culture loses its appeal to young generations.

2.2 Social Media and Adolescents' Ideological Vulnerability

Social media has become the primary space where adolescents construct their understanding of the world, values, and identity. Buckingham, (2019) in his article "Teaching Media in a 'Post-Truth' Age" explains that the digital era has created new challenges in media literacy, where information, values, and ideologies are disseminated in increasingly subtle and veiled ways. Social media algorithms create personalized echo chambers that reinforce users' preferences without providing space for alternative perspectives or critical reflection.

In the context of the Hallyu Wave, social media functions as an amplification mechanism that makes Korean content appear more dominant, more favored, and more "normal" compared to local cultural content. This phenomenon creates what Lukes, (2005) refers to as "preference shaping" or the formation of preferences, where individuals believe their choices are a result of free will, when in reality they have been shaped by invisible power structures.

Albardía et al., (2025) in their latest research emphasize that media literacy education is not enough just to teach how to use technology, but also must develop the ability to question content, identify biases, and understand the interests behind media production. However, most teenagers in Indonesia, including those in top schools, still do not have sufficient critical literacy skills to analyze the impact of media on themselves.

2.3 The Concept of Hegemony in the Context of Popular Culture

Gramsci, (1999) in "Selections from the Prison Notebooks" introduces the concept of hegemony as a form of dominance that is not exercised through physical coercion, but through consensus and agreement produced through cultural institutions, education, media, and everyday life practices. Hegemony works when the dominant group successfully makes its values, norms, and worldviews appear as "common sense" or natural and universal wisdom, so that the dominated group accepts and internalizes this dominance without resistance. Barrett, (1998) in his analysis of Gramsci and cultural studies explains that popular culture is the arena where hegemony is contested and negotiated. Popular culture is not just neutral entertainment, but a battleground for meaning and ideology. In the context of the Hallyu Wave, the Korean entertainment industry has successfully created cultural hegemony where Korean values, aesthetics, and lifestyles are accepted as standards of quality and aspiration by young generations in various countries.

Gramsci (1999), also emphasizes the importance of counter-hegemony as a strategy of resistance against cultural dominance. Counter-hegemony is carried out by building critical consciousness among the community through education and organization, so that they can recognize and reject dominant values that contradict their interests. In this case, the role of "organic intellectuals" or organic intellectuals become crucial, namely individuals who emerge from their own community group and act as agents of transformation through education and awareness. Empowerment programs like "Wave to Worth" can be understood as counter-hegemonic efforts aimed at building critical awareness among students about the cultural dominance of the Hallyu Wave. By teaching students to recognize the mechanisms of hegemony and develop the ability to critically reinterpret culture, this program seeks to create a space of resistance against global cultural dominance and strengthen national identity.

2.4 Steven Lukes's Three-Dimensional Theory of Power

2.4.1 Dimension One: Visible Power (Visible Power)

in "Power: A Radical View" develops a multidimensional analysis of power that goes beyond conventional understanding. The first dimension of power is the most visible and easily identifiable, namely power expressed through explicit decision-making, open conflict, and actions that can be directly observed. In the context of the Hallyu Wave, this dimension can be seen in the active decisions of teenagers to buy Korean products, watch Korean dramas, or attend K-Pop concerts.

2.4.2 Dimension Two: Agenda Setting (Issue Setting)

The second dimension of power is the ability to control the agenda, determining what issues enter or do not enter the public discussion space. Dowding (2006) explains that this dimension involves the process of "non-decision making," where those in power prevent certain issues from being debated. In the context of media and popular culture, social media algorithms and content curation by digital platforms determine what content is seen and goes viral, as well as what content is marginalized. The Hallyu Wave dominates the digital space

through systematic agenda-setting strategies: Korean content is massively promoted, trending topics are controlled, and the visibility of local content is minimized. As a result, local culture becomes "invisible" or uninteresting to teenagers because it rarely appears in their feeds.

2.4.3 The Third Dimension: Preference Shaping or Ideological Power

The third dimension is the most subtle yet the most powerful force in shaping individual preferences, desires, and awareness so that they desire things that are actually contrary to their own interests (Lukes, 2005). This is a form of ideological power that operates at the cognitive and psychological level, creating "false consciousness" where individuals are unaware that their preferences have been shaped by external power structures. In the context of the Hallyu Wave, teenagers believe that their affection for K-Pop or Korean dramas is their free choice, although their preferences have been shaped by massive exposure, peer group pressure, and media constructions about Korean cultural superiority. This third dimension of power is the primary focus of the "Wave to Worth" program, as to counter ideological power, critical awareness is needed to help students recognize how their preferences have been formed without their awareness.

2.4.4 Formation of Youth Identity in the Digital Era

In the context of adolescence, the Hallyu Wave contributes to the formation of cultural identity that begins early on, influenced by media and authoritative figures, and is important to be evaluated in mental health (Garrido-Yserte & Gallo-Rivera, 2020). Erikson (1969) explains that adolescence is a critical period in identity formation, where individuals experience an identity crisis and strive to find answers to the questions "Who am I?" and "Where do I fit in the world?". This process involves exploring various roles, values, and group affiliations before ultimately achieving stable identity commitment. develop this understanding by showing that adolescent identity formation involves dynamic interactions between three dimensions: personal identity (who I am as a unique individual), ethnic identity (who I am as a member of a specific ethnic group), and national identity (who I am as a citizen). These three dimensions mutually influence each other and can experience tension, especially when adolescents are exposed to strong cultural global influences.

Schachner et al., (2024) found that adolescents growing up in multicultural and globalized contexts face unique challenges in identity formation. On one hand, they have a heritage identity rooted in local culture and family; on the other hand, they have a peer group identity that is often influenced by global popular culture. When global culture becomes more appealing, trendy, and accepted by peer groups, adolescents tend to adopt a global identity and distance themselves from their local identity. The research also indicates that curriculum-based interventions that explicitly teach about cultural identity, local values, and critical thinking can help adolescents develop a more balanced and integrative identity. Programs that promote critical reflection on cultural influences and facilitate appreciation for local culture have proven effective in strengthening national identity without rejecting global cultural diversity.

2.4.5 Nationalism in the Global Era: Challenges and Opportunities

Nationalism in the context of globalization does not mean isolation from global culture or xenophobia towards foreign culture. Instead, critical nationalism is the ability to have a sense of pride and commitment to one's own nation while remaining open and critical of global culture Anderson (2006) Literature shows that consuming Hallyu can increase social connections but also lead to excessive consumerism and identity pressure, especially among active digital youth (Bauman, 1998; Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, in Samosir & Wee, 2024).

Extreme fanaticism like Koreaboo describes how identity can be formed obsessively through cultural consumption (Lyan, 2019 in Samosir & Wee, 2024). Lyan (2019) shows that new forms of nationalism can emerge through transnational fans who maintain their national identity while selectively and critically consuming global culture.

2.4.6 Critical Literacy and Empowerment Pedagogy

Preparation and handling of the Hallyu phenomenon involve critical media literacy, which is often considered a solution to social problems related to media, but needs to be integrated with broader reform campaigns (Buckingham, 2019). Critical media literacy must be supported by a foundation of critical thinking to address the risks of excessive exposure, misinformation, and hyperdigitalization (Albardía et al., 2025). Share & Mamikonyan (2020) define Critical Media Literacy (CML) as an educational approach that teaches students not only to consume media passively but also to analyze, evaluate, and produce media with critical awareness. CML stems from the tradition of critical pedagogy developed by Freire et al., (2018), which emphasizes that education must be a practice of liberation that empowers individuals to recognize and transform their conditions of oppression. In the context of popular culture and digital media, CML teaches students to:

1. Question who produces media messages and for what purpose
2. Analyze how media uses language, symbols, and techniques to influence audiences
3. Identifying the values and ideologies embedded in media content
4. Understanding how media represents certain social groups
5. Recognizing their own position as audiences and how they interpret media messages

Freire et al., (2018) in "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" critique the "banking" education model where teachers merely deposit knowledge into passive students' minds. Instead, he proposes a dialogic and participatory education model where students and teachers learn together through the process of reflection and action (praxis). Share & Mamikonyan (2020)Click or tap here to enter text. demonstrate that the participatory approach is highly effective in media literacy education because:

"Students are more engaged when they actively discuss and produce content. Learning becomes more meaningful when connected to students' lived experiences. The collective reflection process helps students realize that their experiences are not individual but structural. Creative media production gives students agency to express their own perspectives."

The "Wave to Worth" program adopts these participatory pedagogical principles by combining group discussions, critical reflection, and creative projects that allow students to actively construct their own understanding of popular culture and national identity.

2.4.7 Education as Counter-Hegemony

Buckingham (2019) asserts that media literacy education should be understood not merely as a technical skill, but as a political effort to empower citizens to participate critically and democratically in media society. In the context of global cultural dominance, literacy education becomes a form of counter-hegemony that helps students not only survive but also resist and transform oppressive power structures. Albardía et al., (2025) emphasize that in the post-truth and information overload era, critical media literacy is no longer a choice but an urgent necessity. Adolescents must be equipped with the ability to discern information, identify manipulation, and make informed and autonomous decisions.

3. METODE

The “Wave to Worth” program was held at SMP Negeri 2 Cianjur, a top-performing school known for its high-achieving students who are also active social media users. The sampling technique used was simple cluster sampling, which involves randomly selecting samples from natural groups (clusters) within the population. All members of the selected clusters were invited to participate (Sedgwick, 2014). The population consisted of 11 classes; a random selection was then made, and 2 classes were chosen as the sample. All students in the selected classes were included as respondents. The method used to collect and analyze data was a mixed-methods approach using a concurrent embedded model, a method that combines quantitative and qualitative approaches simultaneously but with unequal weighting, where one method (the primary method) dominates, and the other (the secondary method) is embedded within it to provide additional support or explanation. (Khabibullah & Malik Imam Sholahuddin, 2024). The program itself employs a participatory approach, in which students are actively involved as researchers, participants, and beneficiaries of the research (Yuliananda et al., 2023). This approach was chosen so that each process could be examined holistically, and the responses and insights gained would be more organic, in line with the students’ capabilities. This approach also helps researchers analyze changes in behavior and understanding in real-time to support or further elaborate on the quantitative data findings, making them clearer.

Validity testing was conducted prior to administering the test to ensure the instrument’s accuracy in measuring the intended construct; items were removed or replaced if found to be invalid, ensuring that all test items were validated. Next, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected; since this research employed a concurrent embedded design, quantitative and qualitative data collection were conducted simultaneously. After data collection, descriptive statistics, including the mean, minimum, maximum, and standard deviation, were calculated to describe and summarize the general characteristics of the data before proceeding to more complex analyses. The quantitative data were then analyzed using a paired-sample t-test, which is used to compare the difference between the means of two paired samples drawn from the same subjects, with each variable measured under different conditions, at a significance level of 0.05. All quantitative data were processed using SPSS software. For the processing of qualitative data, narrative interpretation was used, which was then integrated and analyzed to identify how the qualitative data expanded upon, improved the accuracy of, or even invalidated the quantitative findings. This analysis provided complete and comprehensive results (Khabibullah & Malik Imam Sholahuddin, 2024).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This program runs for 5 weeks from September 25 to October 23, 2025, and is scheduled every Thursday for 40 minutes each session. A total of 66 students aged 14 to 16 participated in this program. These students have backgrounds of intensive social media use and consumption of popular culture, such as the Hallyu wave (K-Pop, Korean dramas, memes, etc.) yet possess limited critical literacy skills, particularly in distinguishing personal preferences from media influence. Media/digital literacy is often framed within the spirit of ‘solutionism,’ where, when media regulation seems impossible, media literacy is viewed as an acceptable answer, even as a magic solution to all social and psychological issues related to media (Buckingham, 2019). This is also mentioned in Entman (2007) in Buckingham (2019) that bias remains a ‘topic that, strangely enough, is rarely discussed theoretically’ in public discourse on the media.

On September 18, 2025, observations were conducted in the sample class, followed by a discussion with school representatives: Mr. Dadang Sukandi, the Curriculum Director, who provided full permission and support, and Ms. Afwa, the Guidance and Counseling teacher involved in planning and facilitating this activity. The results of the observation showed that students have great potential to become active consumers of popular culture, but they do not understand its social and ideological impacts, thus opening opportunities for interventions in critical literacy and nationalism. The first session began with self-introductions, an explanation of the activity's objectives, and a description of the methods to be used, which then encouraged students to discuss and briefly reflect on popular culture. This was followed by a pre-test administered to the 66 students present from the two classes. During the pre-test, students demonstrated cooperative and enthusiastic attitudes, asking about terms they did not understand, such as "popular culture" and "hegemony." Most students answered the multiple-choice and attitude scale sections easily, but struggled with the essay section, particularly the parts asking them to name examples of popular culture they consume and the section asking them to reflect on the impact of media on themselves. This indicates that students' conceptual understanding of issues related to popular culture and symbolic power remains limited. Interestingly, once the definition of popular culture was explained, most students began to grasp the intended context and were able to answer these questions fluently. The answers given tended to be uniform, indicating that their perceptions of popular culture remain homogeneous and uncritical. Examples of popular culture they are familiar with include K-Pop, Velocity, TikTok dance challenges, and fashion trends; unfortunately, they have not yet been able to reflectively evaluate the impact of these cultural influences on local values or their views on nationalism.

The second session was conducted with a focus on popular culture and the Hallyu Wave, using PowerPoint to help visualize the material so it would be more engaging and easier for students to understand. The material presented covered the definition, characteristics, dimensions, and impact of the Hallyu Wave on social and cultural life, particularly among teenagers. Based on the results of the previous pre-test, most students demonstrated a limited initial understanding of Hallyu. Therefore, in this second session, emphasis was placed on the Hallyu Wave not only as a form of the spread of Korean culture worldwide but also as a form of cultural hegemony that influences lifestyles, aesthetic tastes, and even individuals' perspectives on their own identities and local culture.

Although there were some technical difficulties during the event, such as a projector that wouldn't work, forcing us to use a whiteboard as a visual aid, this did not dampen the enthusiasm during the session; in fact, it revealed a greater interest and curiosity than before. Several questions were raised, reflecting reflective engagement, such as "What is your perspective on K-Pop fans?" and "Why do so many people like things with a Korean flavor?" These questions indicate that the students are beginning to understand the concept of popular culture and are starting to relate it to social phenomena they experience firsthand. Increased understanding, changes in student attitudes, and the emergence of critical thinking became evident in this session, serving as a crucial foundation for the next phase: introducing and linking the Hallyu phenomenon to theories of power and nationalism. The third session focused on Steven Lukes's Three-Dimensional Theory of Power, which served as the core analytical framework for students to understand how power operates in tangible, invisible, and ideological ways in their daily lives. The session was conducted through group discussions to encourage students to be more active and to grasp abstract concepts through concrete examples. The three dimensions of power were explained step by step, starting with Visible

Power (power evident in direct decisions and actions), Agenda Setting (power in managing public issues and discourse), and the Formation of Preferences or Ideological Power (power in shaping individual desires and consciousness unconsciously). Additionally, group assignments in the form of creative and reflective mini-projects were assigned, specifically creating propaganda campaigns to strengthen nationalism, which were then presented at the next meeting.

Through a project presentation on the theme of nationalism, students were challenged to apply the knowledge they had gained during the previous three sessions regarding popular culture and the three dimensions of power according to Steven Lukes. The primary objective of this activity was to hone the students' critical and creative thinking skills so that they could identify strategies to strengthen their sense of nationalism and not be swayed by the dominance of foreign popular culture, particularly the Hallyu Wave. The presentations were conducted in an active and interactive manner, with time allocated for questions, opinions, and feedback from the students in the audience. This provided space for students to interpret the meaning of popular culture and symbolic power within practical contexts relevant to their lives as active media consumers.

The results of this program were also quantitatively validated by analyzing the pre-test and post-test data using SPSS software and applying parametric statistical tests, specifically Paired Sample T-Test. Results of the descriptive statistical analysis and the Paired Sample T-Test indicate a significant improvement in students' conceptual understanding and critical attitudes towards popular culture and the Hallyu Wave after the Wave to Worth empowerment program. In class IX.3, the average multiple-choice pre-test score of 1.44 increased to 4.31 in the post-test, with a calculated t-value of -16.406, which is greater than the table t-value of 1.669, indicating a significant difference (Sig. <0.05). Similarly, for the attitude statement, the score increased from 14.14 to 15.25 with a calculated t-value of -2.927. For class IX.10, the multiple-choice score increased from 1.70 to 4.67 (calculated t-value -15.240), and the attitude score from 13.90 to 15.63 (calculated t-value -3.653), both of which are significant. This finding, supported by primary data from 2025, demonstrates the effectiveness of the intervention in developing critical literacy and nationalism.

Table 1. Comparison of T Result (T-Test)

Class	Type of Question	T-Test	T-Table
IX.3	Multiple Choise	-16.406	
	Statement of Attitudes	-2.927	
			1.669
IX.10	Multiple Choise	-15.240	
	Statement of Attitudes	-3,653	

The following are the results of the pre-test section A completed by class IX.3, with Q indicating multiple-choice questions, showing quite striking variations in understanding levels between the questions. For the first item (Q1), all students answered correctly. This indicates

that the basic concept of popular culture has been generally understood by all participants, suggesting that they are familiar with the term, possibly because it frequently appears in daily life or on social media. However, for Q2, only about 3% of the students answered correctly. This value shows that their understanding of this Korean cultural phenomenon is still very limited, despite students often being exposed to Korean content. It means that students recognize its external form but do not yet understand the term and its conceptual context.

In Q3, the average correct answer rate only reached 6%. This indicates that students have not yet been familiar with the academic theory of power and need a deeper understanding of the basic concepts of Steven Lukes before they can relate it to the social phenomena around them. Next, Q4 achieved a percentage of 19.4%. This score indicates that a small portion of students have begun to understand that there is cultural dominance in media, but the majority still struggle to interpret this phenomenon within a cultural power or hegemony framework. Meanwhile, Q5 showed similar results with a correct answer rate of only 16.6%. The low score describes that students have not yet realized the ideological power mechanisms in popular cultural consumption, so their critical awareness of media and advertising influence remains weak.

Overall, the average percentage score of the pre-test for class IX.3 was only 28.8%, indicating that the participants on average could only answer correctly about one to two of the five questions given. This signifies that students' initial knowledge about popular culture topics and power theory is still low, especially in terms of analytical and conceptual aspects.

The post-test results showed a significant improvement in students' cognitive achievement. The average score for each item ranged from 2-97%, with a total average score of 90.5% out of a maximum of 100%. This indicates that most students were able to answer almost all the questions correctly. The questions with the highest mastery level were Q2 and Q3, which related to the understanding of the Hallyu Wave concept and the first dimension of power (decision-making power), demonstrating that students were able to grasp the basic concepts well. Meanwhile, Q4 had the lowest score, indicating that a small portion of students still did not fully understand the relationship between social media and symbolic power practices in the context of popular culture. Nevertheless, the overall post-test results for class IX.3 showed a high and consistent level of mastery of the material.

Table 2. Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test for Class IX.3

No	Question	Pre-test Result	Post-test Result	Enhancement
1.	Pop culture is...	100%	97.2%	2.8%
2.	<i>Hallyu Wave</i> refers to...	2.77%	100%	97.2%
3.	According to Steven Lukes's three-dimensional power theory, the first dimension is...	5.55%	97.2%	91.6%
4.	When social media more frequently displays K-Pop content compared to regional music, it is an example of...	19.4%	66.6%	47.2%
5.	When teenagers feel 'cooler' using Korean products even though they are influenced by	16.6%	91.6%	75%

The following are the pre-test percentage results for class IX.10, with A indicating multiple-choice questions. The results show that students' overall mastery level is still low, but there is a difference in pattern compared to the previous class. For item A1, the average correct answer rate reached 86.6%, indicating that most students have already recognized the basic definition of popular culture. This suggests that the term "popular culture" is familiar to them

and easily understood in daily contexts. However, for items A2 and A3, the average correct

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
P1	36	2	4	3.14	.639
P2	36	1	3	1.72	.566
P3	36	3	4	3.72	.454
P4	36	2	4	3.25	.604
P5	36	1	3	2.31	.624
PTOTAL	36	11	18	14.14	1.515
Valid N (listwise)	36				

answer rate was only 30-33.3% of students who understood the concept correctly, while the majority still struggled to differentiate terms and basic principles related to global popular culture and power theory. Furthermore, for item A4, the percentage was only 16.6%. This indicates that students' understanding of cultural dominance or symbolic power forms remains weak, as they were unable to see the relationship between media phenomena and cultural representation imbalances between local and global contexts. Similarly, regarding item A5, the result was the lowest, with a percentage of 13.3%. This number indicates that students' awareness of the ideological influence of media and advertising on consumption Behavior remains very low, emphasizing the need to strengthen critical literacy regarding popular culture.

Overall, the average total percentage was only 35.9%, showing that students on average answered only one to two out of the five questions correctly. This result confirms that the initial understanding of students in class IX.10 is still at a superficial level, especially in connecting popular cultural phenomena with ideological power mechanisms that influence adolescents' perceptions and behavior.

Meanwhile, the results of the multiple-choice post-test also show a positive increasing trend. The average overall score of 96.64% approaches a perfect score, indicating that students in this class have generally understood the entire material presented very well. Four out of five questions achieved an average score above 95%, with A1 and B2 at 100% indicating that all students answered correctly on the items measuring understanding of popular culture definitions and Hallyu Wave concepts. The item with the lowest score was A4 (90%), which measures students' ability to identify examples of ideological power implementation in social media, showing there is still a small space for enhancing reflective understanding of media. However, overall, the percentage increase tends to be relatively flat and stable.

Table 3. Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test for Class IX.10

No	Question	Pre-test Result	Post-test Result	Enhancement
1.	Pop culture is...	86.6%	100%	13.4%
2.	<i>Hallyu Wave</i> refers to...	33.3%	100%	66.7%
3.	According to Steven Lukes's three-dimensional power theory, the first dimension is...	30%	96.6%	66.6%
4.	When social media more frequently displays K-Pop content compared to regional music, it is an example of...	16.6%	90%	73.4%
5.	When teenagers feel 'cooler' using Korean products even though they are influenced by ads, this falls	13.3%	96.6%	83.3%

A simple descriptive analysis was also conducted on the results of the pre-test and post-test section B, which contained statements about students' attitudes towards the Hallyu Wave phenomenon and its hegemony. Descriptive analysis results indicate variations in students' level of awareness and critical attitudes toward popular culture. The first statement (P1 - "I follow social media trends because it's my own choice, not because of others.") has an average of 3.14 (SD = 0.639). This value is considered high, showing that most students feel their decisions to follow trends are independent and autonomous. However, these results can also be interpreted as perceived independence, which is a subjective belief that they are free to make choices, although they may still be influenced by social factors and media trends. The second statement (P2 - "Korean culture is cooler than Indonesian culture.") has a much lower average, namely 1.72 (SD = 0.566). This result shows that most students do not agree that Korean culture is superior to local culture, indicating a strong potential for cultural identity awareness among students. This finding serves as an initial positive indicator in assessing pride in one's own culture.

The third statement (P3 - "I feel proud of the local culture (food, language, music, clothing).") obtained the highest score, with an average of 3.72 (SD = 0.454). This score indicates that students have a high sense of pride in the local culture, both in the form of traditions and daily cultural expressions. Thus, the affective aspect of cultural identity is relatively strong in this group. Next, for the fourth statement (P4 - "Social media often influences how I think about myself."), the average was 3.25 (SD = 0.604). This value indicates that students are aware of the significant influence of social media on their self-perception, such as in terms of appearance, lifestyle, or the social standards constructed through media. This finding is important, as it shows an initial awareness of the power of media in shaping personal identity, an aspect that aligns with Steven Lukes' Agenda Setting and Ideological Power/Preference Shaping.

Meanwhile, statement number five (P5 - "I feel it is important to critically evaluate the popular content I consume.") obtained an average of 2.31 (SD = 0.624). This number is relatively low, indicating that students have not fully internalized the importance of critical thinking in dealing with popular culture. This suggests that the ideological power aspect, which is the ability to recognize the symbolic and ideological influence of media, still needs to be strengthened through empowerment programs. Overall, the total average attitude score (Mean = 14.14; SD = 1.515) indicates that students' level of awareness and critical attitude is still diverse: some have already been able to show pride in local culture, but there are still weaknesses in the reflective and critical dimension towards social media influence. Overall, these descriptive results show that students have a basic understanding of popular culture and affection for local culture, but do not yet have sufficient reflective and critical literacy to objectively evaluate the influence of popular culture, especially the Hallyu Wave. The low

average scores on several indicators of critical knowledge and attitude became a crucial basis for implementing the empowerment program "Wave to Worth," which was designed to strengthen cultural literacy and nationalistic awareness through participatory and reflective approaches in the school environment.

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Z1	36	2	4	3.69	.577
Z2	36	1	4	1.67	1.121
Z3	36	1	4	3.72	.741
Z4	36	1	4	3.22	.959
Z5	36	1	4	2.94	.984
ZTOTAL	36	11	20	15.25	2.196
Valid N (listwise)	36				

The results of the descriptive post-test analysis on the attitude statements for class IX.3 (Table Z) showed a sufficiently significant increase compared to the pre-test. The overall mean score (ZTOTAL) reached 15.25 with a standard deviation of 2.196, indicating that most students had a high level of agreement with the statements that had a nationalist and critical awareness of popular culture. Statement Z1 ("I follow social media trends because it's my own choice") had the highest mean of 3.69, indicating the strengthening of students' perception of autonomy in choosing trends without feeling blindly influenced. Meanwhile, Z3 ("I feel proud of local culture") was also high with a mean of 3.72, showing the positive effects of the local cultural propaganda activity assigned in the final project. However, the average score of Z2 (1.67) indicates that a small portion of students still hold the view that foreign culture, particularly the Hallyu Wave, is more attractive than Indonesian culture. Nevertheless, the overall trend still points toward an increase in reflective awareness and national pride.

The results of this study provide empirical confirmation of the previously established theoretical framework. The evidence of the positive influence of critical literacy and the strengthening of nationalism indicates that the hegemony of the Korean Wave does indeed operate in the realm of students' consciousness, rather than merely as a matter of entertainment preference. Students equipped with critical literacy skills are able to identify the values embedded in the cultural content they consume, so that the process of their identity formation is not entirely dominated by foreign cultural narratives. In other words, critical literacy functions as a mechanism of resistance against cultural domination that has been quietly at work in the lives of adolescents.

4. DISCUSSION

Although the results of this study reveal significant findings, there are several limitations that need to be addressed to avoid overgeneralization. First, the study sample was limited to two classes in a single school, meaning these results cannot yet be broadly generalized to all junior high school students in Indonesia, who have diverse social and cultural backgrounds

and varying levels of exposure to Hallyu. Second, the relatively short duration of the intervention does not yet prove whether the increase in nationalism is permanent or merely a short-term effect. Further research with a broader sample, more diverse instruments, and a longer timeframe is highly recommended to expand upon these findings.

5. CONCLUSION

The Wave to Worth empowerment program is a strategic effort to foster critical awareness and strengthen nationalism among students of SMP Negeri 2 Cianjur amid the flow of popular cultural globalization, particularly the Hallyu Wave phenomenon. Based on observation results, pre-tests, and the implementation of activities over five weeks as well as post-tests, it was found that most students understand the meaning of popular culture, but their awareness of the hidden ideological power behind media remains low. Through a series of participatory discussion activities, group reflections, propaganda project creation, and joint evaluations, a significant improvement was observed in students' ability to recognize the influence of external culture, distinguish between needs and desires, and critically evaluate the values they consume.

In addition to producing cognitive changes, this program also impacts affective and social aspects, where students demonstrate increased self-confidence, pride in local culture, and the ability to express their views reflectively. This empowerment asserts that participatory-based education and a bottom-up approach can be an effective strategy in combating cultural hegemony without being anti-global. With school support and sustainability through reflective media in the classroom, this program is expected to continue serving as a space for dialogue among the younger generation to develop a strong national identity amidst a dynamic global culture.

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