

Empowering Character Through Culture: The Role of Teachers in Integrating Local Wisdom in Primary Education

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Abstract

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Character education based on local wisdom is a strategic approach to shaping students' personalities in alignment with regional cultural values. This study aims to explore the role of teachers in instilling character education through learning activities integrated with the local culture of Enrekang at MIS Muhammadiyah Kalosi. The research employed a descriptive qualitative method with data collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The findings reveal that teachers play a central role in fostering character values through modeling, habituation, and reinforcement of local cultural values such as mutual cooperation, tolerance, deliberation, and respect for parents and teachers. Teachers also face several challenges, including limited instructional time, lack of parental support, and students' low understanding of character values. To overcome these issues, teachers adopt adaptive strategies such as integrating character values into non-formal activities and enhancing communication with parents. These findings imply that the success of contextual character education requires sustained collaboration among schools, families, and the broader community.

Keywords: Character Education, Local Wisdom, Teacher's Role, Elementary School

Abstrak

Pendidikan karakter berbasis kearifan lokal merupakan pendekatan strategis dalam membentuk kepribadian siswa yang selaras dengan nilai-nilai budaya daerah. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi peran guru dalam menanamkan pendidikan karakter melalui pembelajaran yang terintegrasi dengan budaya lokal Enrekang di MIS Muhammadiyah Kalosi. Metode yang digunakan adalah deskriptif kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data berupa observasi, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru memainkan peran sentral dalam menanamkan nilai karakter melalui pendekatan keteladanan, pembiasaan, serta penguatan nilai-nilai lokal seperti gotong royong, toleransi, musyawarah, dan sikap hormat terhadap orang tua dan guru. Guru juga menghadapi kendala seperti keterbatasan waktu, kurangnya dukungan dari orang tua, dan rendahnya pemahaman siswa terhadap nilai karakter. Untuk mengatasinya, guru menerapkan strategi adaptif, termasuk integrasi nilai karakter dalam kegiatan nonformal serta peningkatan komunikasi dengan orang tua. Temuan ini mengimplikasikan bahwa keberhasilan pendidikan karakter kontekstual memerlukan sinergi berkelanjutan antara sekolah, keluarga, dan lingkungan sosial siswa.

Kata Kunci: Pendidikan Karakter, Kearifan Lokal; Peran Guru, Sekolah Dasar

INTRODUCTION

Character education has become one of the essential elements in the Indonesian education system. Its goal is not only to produce academically outstanding generations but also to shape individuals who are morally, socially, and spiritually strong. A major challenge faced by the world of education today is the emergence of various moral issues among students, ranging from increased cases of bullying, intolerant attitudes, to declining empathy and concern for others, including peers, teachers, and parents (Fitriyani, 2020; Ramli & Ikhsan, 2023). This phenomenon signals that the current approach to character education, which tends to be normative and limited to formal curriculum texts, has not fully addressed the real-life dynamics experienced by students. In this context, the role of teachers becomes central.

Teachers do not merely serve as subject instructors, but also as educators who shape students' character through role modeling, daily interaction, and classroom management that fosters a comfortable and educational atmosphere (Sauri, Supriatna, & Sukirman, 2022). This is particularly critical at the elementary school level, where children's character is being deeply and continuously formed. Unfortunately, previous research has largely focused on the integration of national character values and has paid little attention to the potential of local values that are already familiar in students' daily lives.

Indonesia is a country rich in culture and local wisdom. In daily community life, noble values such as honesty, cooperation, deliberation, and mutual respect are nurtured and expressed through traditions, local languages, and social practices. Research by Yusnidar, *et. al.*, (2020) shows that local values are more easily accepted and understood by students because they are emotionally and contextually close to their lives. Meanwhile, Iswanto (2021) emphasizes the importance of incorporating local cultural elements into the learning process to strengthen students' identities and enhance the effectiveness of character education. However, there remains a gap in field practices. Many teachers do not fully understand how to utilize local cultural values as sources for character education, nor have they found effective strategies to integrate these values into the existing curriculum. This is the gap that this study aims to address.

According to Keraf (2010), local wisdom encompasses all knowledge and wisdom of local communities used to regulate life, including maintaining harmony with nature, resolving conflicts, and fostering social relationships. This wisdom is typically unwritten but is passed down through traditions, folklore, and social practices. Sartini (2009) explains that local wisdom reflects a community's cultural identity and contains noble values such as honesty, mutual cooperation, deliberation, and concern for the environment and others. These values serve as an important foundation for character education. In the context of education, Tilaar (2002) emphasizes that local wisdom can be an authentic learning source as it closely relates to the realities of students' lives. Local wisdom can help shape children's character from an early age through contextual and meaningful approaches.

The application of local wisdom in elementary schools not only helps students recognize and appreciate their own culture but also strengthens their understanding of noble values such as cooperation, deliberation, politeness, and responsibility. These values are often manifested in community practices such as traditional customs, folk games, folklore, and deeply rooted systems of mutual assistance in social life.

According to Yusnidar, Hajar, and Nuraini (2020), the integration of local wisdom into learning positively influences student engagement and comprehension because the values are perceived as more relevant and relatable to their lives. This makes the internalization process of values more natural and meaningful. In addition, learning based on local wisdom enhances students' sense of identity and pride in their cultural environment. Iswanto (2021) also argues that the implementation of local cultural values in elementary schools can increase the effectiveness of character education by providing concrete contexts that are easy for students to understand. In this regard, teachers have an important role as a bridge between the national curriculum and the local context students encounter in daily life. Teachers can integrate local wisdom into various subjects, extracurricular activities, and community-based projects.

However, the challenges of applying local wisdom in elementary schools remain considerable. Many teachers lack training or clear guidelines for developing value-based local learning. Additionally, there is a tendency to prioritize formal academic approaches over the strengthening of students' cultural identity. Therefore, policies and training are needed to support teachers in developing systematic, creative, and relevant learning strategies based on local wisdom. Thus, local wisdom represents a rich and strategic resource for strengthening character education from an early age. Through the integration of cultural values into the learning process, elementary schools can become educational spaces that not only promote academic excellence but also shape moral individuals who are culturally grounded and globally competitive.

The research questions in this study focus on how teachers play a role in instilling character education in students at MIS Muhammadiyah Kalosi. This study also aims to identify the specific character values instilled by teachers, as well as the strategies and methods used in implementing character education within the elementary school environment. Additionally, this research seeks to explore the various challenges teachers face in conducting character education and the efforts or solutions implemented to overcome these obstacles so that the process of instilling character values can proceed effectively and sustainably.

METHODS

Research Approach

This study applied a descriptive qualitative approach to explore and describe the role of teachers in implementing character education based on local wisdom in elementary school settings. A qualitative approach was chosen because it focuses on understanding meaning, individual experiences, and social processes in natural contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Specifically, the research employed a case study design,

which allows for an in-depth investigation of a specific phenomenon within its real-life environment (Yin, 2018). The case study approach enabled the researcher to examine the cultural and educational context of MIS Muhammadiyah Kalosi in Enrekang, where the integration of local wisdom into character education takes place.

Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at MIS Muhammadiyah Kalosi, located in Enrekang Regency, a region known for its rich cultural heritage and strong community traditions. This school was purposefully selected as it actively incorporates local values into its educational practices. The participants in this study were selected using purposive sampling, a technique in which participants are chosen based on specific characteristics that align with the research objectives. The selected informants were elementary school teachers who met the following criteria: (1) a minimum of three years of teaching experience, (2) active involvement in school-based character education programs, and (3) a sound understanding of the local cultural values present in the Enrekang community (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). These criteria ensured that the data obtained were credible and relevant to the focus of the study.

Research Instrument

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument (human instrument) for data collection, interpretation, and analysis (Sugiyono, 2019). The researcher took an active role in observing teaching activities, conducting interviews, and analyzing data based on contextual understanding. This role allowed the researcher to respond flexibly to the research setting and probe deeper into participants' perspectives as needed, thereby enriching the depth and authenticity of the findings.

Data Collection Techniques

The data in this study were collected using three primary techniques: observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to understand how teachers implement character values in classroom settings and school activities. In-depth interviews were carried out to capture teachers' views, experiences, and strategies in integrating local wisdom into their teaching. Documentation—such as lesson plans, school programs, and cultural activity records—was used to support and validate the observational and interview data.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of three main components: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. Data condensation involved selecting, focusing, simplifying, and transforming the raw data obtained from the field. Data display was carried out by organizing the data into thematic categories to facilitate

interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn and verified continuously during the research process to ensure the credibility and validity of findings..

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Teachers at MIS Muhammadiyah Kalosi play a strategic role in instilling character values based on local wisdom in students. In the learning process, teachers function not only as transmitters of instructional content but also as role models, cultural facilitators, and social bridges between school and community. Character education that integrates cultural values such as mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), deliberation (*musyawarah*), and respect for parents and teachers is proven to be more easily understood and internalized by students because it is contextual and closely related to their daily lives. Based on interviews and observations, it was found that the integration of local values was carried out through three main approaches: habituation, strengthening local context in the learning material, and teacher exemplification. These strategies were manifested in various classroom practices.

One teacher explained:

"I often use local folktales such as La Upe in Bahasa Indonesia lessons. The children become more enthusiastic, and they learn about the values of courage and responsibility." (W.01/GR/Bahasa)

Another teacher added:

"Every morning before learning begins, we greet each other and pray together. This is a simple way to instill respect and courtesy. (W.03/GR/Civics)

From a social activity perspective, one teacher stated:

"We invite parents to share stories about mutual cooperation during harvest season. The children then understand that togetherness has long been a valued tradition." (W.05/GR/CommunityLeaders)

According to Tilaar (2004), effective education must be rooted in local culture to ensure that students remain connected to their cultural identity. In this context, teachers play a critical role in bridging local cultural values so they are naturally integrated into learning activities and social interactions within schools (Iswanto, 2021). Hence, teachers are not only academic instructors but also models of moral values, cultural facilitators, and social bridges connecting the school to the community.

Integration of Local Wisdom and Its Transformational Power

The findings reveal that integrating local wisdom into character education has a significant transformational power in shaping students' personalities. When teachers embed values such as *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), respect for parents, and love for local culture into daily lessons, students not only understand the values cognitively

but also internalize them behaviorally. This supports Tilaar's (2004) perspective that context-based education rooted in local culture more effectively touches the affective domain, enabling moral values to be accepted and practiced more naturally. This approach aligns with Freire's (2005) concept of humanizing education, which empowers learners to become active subjects who understand the world through their socio-cultural realities. Within this framework, the teacher functions as a cultural agent transmitting, interpreting, and revitalizing noble cultural values to the younger generation.

Despite the potential of this approach, challenges persist. Teachers often face a lack of explicit guidance in the national curriculum and limited training for culturally grounded instruction. This indicates a gap between national character education policy and its cultural implementation. Wibowo (2013) argues that ideal character education must be integrative, merging formal curricula with the local community's cultural values.

Table 1. Teachers' Roles and Implementation of Character Education Based on Local Wisdom at Primary Schools in Enrekang

No	Teacher's Role	Implementation in the Classroom
1	Cultural Facilitator	Incorporating local Enrekang folktales like <i>La Upe</i> or <i>Bissu</i> in Bahasa Indonesia lessons to teach courage and responsibility.
2	Ethical Role Model	Modeling respectful behavior in accordance with <i>sipakalebbi</i> values, showing courtesy in speech and attire.
3	Social Bridge	Inviting traditional leaders or parents to share stories of mutual cooperation (<i>mappatongko</i>) as inspiration.

Practical Integration and Daily Classroom Activities

In character education grounded in local wisdom, teachers serve not only as instructors but also as cultural agents who shape students' character through local traditions. As facilitators of culture, they incorporate Bugis folktales and traditional values into lessons (Sutrisno, 2021), model courteous behavior (Rahman, 2020), and bridge students with community wisdom by involving parents and elders (Iswanto, 2021). The integration of these values into daily learning has proven effective. Teachers at MIS Muhammadiyah Kalosi apply values such as mutual cooperation, deliberation, and respect through relevant classroom activities.

Table 2. Scheme of Local Wisdom Integration into Learning Activities

Local Wisdom Value	Classroom Activity	Character Trait Developed
Gotong Royong	Class clean-up	Social responsibility
Musyawah (Deliberation)	Group discussions	Democratic and tolerant
Respect	Morning greetings, prayers, polite language	Courtesy and respect

The following diagram presents the strategy of local value integration by teachers at MIS Muhammadiyah Kalosi:



Figure 1. Strategy of Integrating Local Wisdom Values into Character Education

Habituation: Teachers consistently instill character values through routine school activities such as greetings, group prayers, and collective classroom cleaning, fostering discipline and responsibility (Lickona, 1991). **Contextualization in Curriculum:** Local culture is embedded in the learning content for example, folktales in Bahasa Indonesia or civic lessons about local heroes enhancing students' understanding through familiar contexts (Yusnidar, Hajar, & Nuraini, 2020). **Teacher Role Modeling:** Teachers demonstrate values such as honesty, respect, and tolerance through their daily behavior, serving as direct role models for students (Musfiroh, 2012).

Challenges and Responsive Strategies

Despite well-planned strategies, challenges remain. Time constraints due to the dense academic curriculum limit the space for character education. Furthermore, limited parental involvement makes it harder to reinforce values at home. Teachers also reported difficulties when students do not receive consistent value reinforcement in their families. However, MIS Muhammadiyah Kalosi teachers responded with adaptive strategies:



Figure 2. Adaptive Educational Strategies Cycle

Intensive Communication with Parents: Through parent–teacher meetings, joint community clean-ups, and home visits to build mutual understanding. **Non-Formal Value Integration:** Through ceremonies, cleanliness competitions, and cultural events to embed character values in enjoyable ways. **Reflective Discussions:** Teachers engage students in dialogues that connect their experiences to moral values, deepening understanding. Research by Susanto (2019) supports these findings, emphasizing that successful character education relies heavily on collaboration between teachers, parents, and the surrounding environment. Mulyasa (2018) also stresses the effectiveness of contextual approaches that link character values with real-life experiences.

CONCLUSION

Character education is a foundational element in shaping the moral and social identity of primary school students. At MIS Muhammadiyah Kalosi, teachers act not only as educators but also as cultural agents who integrate local wisdom such as gotong royong, tolerance, deliberation, and respect into learning. These values, rooted in Enrekang’s culture, are taught through modeling, habituation, group activities, and collaboration with community figures. Despite challenges like limited time, low parental involvement, and students’ limited value comprehension, teachers respond with solutions such as parent engagement, integration into non-formal activities, and reflective discussions. Strengthening institutional support and family participation is

vital to sustain and optimize character education. Future research should examine the role of social context and digital media in reinforcing values among young learners.

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