

Integrating Local Wisdom into Citizenship Education: Strengthening Cultural Identity and Character Development in Elementary Schools

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Abstract

Background: In the 21st century, the younger generation faces an alarming decline in national character due to the growing influence of cultural acculturation. Education is increasingly challenged to preserve cultural identity and instill civic values from an early age. Citizenship Education (PKn) offers a strategic platform to actualize local wisdom values and foster cultural pride among elementary school students

Aims: This study aims to analyze how integrating local wisdom into Citizenship Education can strengthen students' love for culture, enhance their civic attitudes, and contribute to character development in elementary schools.

Methods: The research employed a mixed-method approach, combining descriptive qualitative and quantitative analysis. Data were collected through classroom observation, structured interviews, student questionnaires, and documentation involving 45 fourth-grade students at Pannara Antang Elementary School. The analysis examined students' responses, behavioral changes, and the statistical significance of local wisdom integration in character formation.

Results: Findings revealed that incorporating folklore, regional songs, and traditional games into PKn lessons significantly increased students' appreciation of local culture. Quantitative analysis confirmed the positive effect, with a t-value of 5.437 exceeding the critical value, indicating a strong influence of local wisdom on character development. Students demonstrated improved honesty, tolerance, respect, and pride in their cultural identity, while teachers recognized the method's ability to create meaningful learning experiences despite time and material limitations.

Conclusion: This study concludes that local wisdom plays a crucial role in enriching Citizenship Education and cultivating sustainable cultural identity. Beyond academic learning, integrating cultural values fosters moral character, civic responsibility, and a sense of belonging among young learners. The findings underscore the importance of developing culturally grounded curricula, training teachers in local wisdom pedagogy, and involving communities in educational practices. Strengthening national identity through education is not merely a pedagogical approach but a fundamental strategy for cultural sustainability in an era of globalization.

INTRODUCTION

The decline of national character in the younger generation has become an urgent issue in the 21st century, particularly in the context of cultural globalization and acculturation. The influence of foreign cultural values often overshadows local traditions, creating a risk of eroding cultural identity and weakening civic awareness (Ali, 2018). Schools play a crucial role in addressing this challenge by embedding cultural values through formal education, particularly Citizenship Education (PKN). Without deliberate integration of local wisdom, students may grow disconnected from their cultural roots and values of civic responsibility. The urgency of this research lies in its potential to reinforce identity and moral character while also promoting cultural sustainability. Therefore, studying the integration of local wisdom into PKN lessons in elementary schools is not only timely but essential to strengthen national resilience in the era of globalization.

Local wisdom, defined as the collective cultural knowledge of a community, is fundamental for shaping ethical behavior, mutual respect, and social cohesion (Baehaqi & Samsuri, 2020). In Indonesia, practices such as folklore, traditional games, and regional music are not merely heritage but also pedagogical resources that can nurture character formation in children. However, these resources are underutilized in contemporary classrooms due to limited curricular support and lack of teacher preparation. This situation creates a significant gap between the richness of cultural traditions and the standardized educational system. Exploring how local wisdom can be systematically embedded in Citizenship Education is therefore both urgent and innovative. Such integration ensures that students not only learn civic concepts but also live cultural values in their daily lives.

The significance of this study also emerges from its potential to address cultural degradation while responding to educational policy directions. According to the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Citizenship Education is mandated to instill national identity and civic responsibility aligned with Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution (Santoso & Wuryandani, 2020). Embedding local wisdom values within this subject offers a contextually relevant and culturally sustainable approach. It addresses the pressing need to transform civic lessons from abstract concepts into experiential learning rooted in culture. Furthermore, this research contributes to broader discussions on education for sustainable development and character education globally (Tarigan et al., 2022). In this sense, the urgency of the topic lies not only in preserving traditions but also in ensuring cultural continuity as part of educational innovation.

The rationale of this research lies in the belief that local wisdom is not only a cultural heritage but also a pedagogical strategy for character building. Unlike conventional teaching methods that emphasize memorization, local wisdom-based learning fosters emotional engagement, identity awareness, and moral development. By studying its application in Citizenship Education, this research responds directly to the challenge of cultivating students who are both knowledgeable and culturally grounded. Furthermore, it supports national education goals that aim to create intelligent, skilled, and character-driven citizens. The rationale is also reinforced by the lack of empirical studies examining the impact of local wisdom on students' cultural identity at the elementary school level.

Thus, this study seeks to provide new insights into how culturally responsive pedagogy can bridge the gap between formal education and cultural heritage.

Recent international scholarship has emphasized the role of culturally responsive education in enhancing civic values and identity formation. For instance, Fernández-Sanjurjo et al. (2019) highlighted how integrating cultural content in primary education fosters stronger community belonging. Similarly, Torquato Rego and Moita (2021) analyzed citizenship education in multicultural contexts, revealing that cultural narratives improve students' civic awareness. Malekela (2020) demonstrated how local traditions in African schools strengthen students' moral reasoning. Nakayama (2021) found that integrating indigenous practices in Japan helped preserve cultural continuity within formal education. Maraqa and Qabaja (2022) explored Palestinian contexts, showing that folklore improved civic responsibility and identity. Khanam (2021) identified that cultural games in South Asia promoted tolerance and collaboration among students. Orsayeva (2020) in Kazakhstan showed that traditional music enhanced respect for diversity. Arsene and Popescu (2021) concluded that teaching through cultural rituals fosters character resilience. Liu et al. (2022) reported that cultural heritage integration improves both academic performance and civic engagement. Lastly, Satz (2019) argued that embedding cultural values into school curricula is essential for long-term cultural sustainability. These studies collectively suggest that local wisdom integration is a promising global educational approach.

Despite these advancements, there is limited research directly addressing how local wisdom is embedded in Indonesian Citizenship Education at the elementary level. While Fernández-Sanjurjo et al. (2019) and Satz (2019) emphasized the importance of culture in schooling, they did not investigate its application in civic education. Torquato Rego and Moita (2021) provided insights into multicultural classrooms, but their study lacked focus on character development in early schooling. Malekela (2020) and Maraqa and Qabaja (2022) highlighted the civic benefits of cultural traditions, yet they focused on secondary rather than primary students. Khanam (2021) and Orsayeva (2020) analyzed cultural practices, but their studies were region-specific without addressing Indonesian contexts. Liu et al. (2022) and Arsene and Popescu (2021) emphasized educational innovation but did not examine PKn as a subject. Therefore, this study fills a critical gap by exploring how local wisdom integration within PKn specifically enhances elementary students' cultural identity and character formation.

Although previous research demonstrates the importance of local wisdom in fostering cultural identity, there remains insufficient empirical evidence on its systematic integration into elementary-level Citizenship Education in Indonesia. Most existing studies focus on secondary schools or general character education without highlighting the civic dimensions of PKn. In addition, many studies are conceptual, offering theoretical frameworks but lacking quantitative validation. This creates a gap in understanding the measurable effects of local wisdom-based pedagogy on student outcomes. Furthermore, challenges such as limited teaching resources, inadequate teacher training, and time constraints have not been sufficiently addressed in prior research. By combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, this study seeks to fill these gaps and provide practical strategies for embedding local wisdom into formal curricula.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of integrating local wisdom into Citizenship Education on elementary students' cultural identity and character development.

Specifically, it aims to analyze how folklore, regional songs, and traditional games can enrich PKn lessons and improve students' civic attitudes. This research hypothesizes that students exposed to local wisdom-based instruction will demonstrate higher levels of cultural pride, honesty, tolerance, and respect compared to those taught through conventional methods. The study further seeks to highlight the pedagogical potential of local traditions as a medium for strengthening civic values. By applying a mixed-method approach, it intends to provide both qualitative insights and quantitative validation. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the global discourse on culturally responsive education while offering practical recommendations for policymakers, teachers, and curriculum developers.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-method research design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the integration of local wisdom in Citizenship Education. The qualitative strand focused on describing teaching practices, cultural activities, and student engagement through observations and interviews. The quantitative strand measured the statistical significance of the influence of local wisdom on students' character development using survey responses and inferential analysis. A mixed-method approach was chosen to capture both the depth of cultural experiences and the breadth of measurable outcomes (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). This design allowed the researchers to triangulate findings, ensuring validity and reliability in interpreting the results. The integration of both methods was sequential, beginning with qualitative data collection to identify themes, followed by quantitative testing to confirm patterns. Such a design is particularly suitable for educational contexts where cultural variables are complex and multifaceted. Overall, this approach ensures that the research findings are robust and applicable in real educational settings.

Participant

The participants of this study consisted of 45 fourth-grade students at Pannara Antang Elementary School in Makassar, Indonesia. The sample included 17 male students and 28 female students, representing diverse family and cultural backgrounds. All participants were between 9 and 10 years old, an age range that is developmentally significant for shaping civic identity and cultural pride. The school was selected because of its strategic role in embedding cultural values into elementary-level education. Participants were exposed to various local wisdom elements such as folklore, regional songs, and traditional games integrated into Citizenship Education. In addition, classroom teachers were indirectly involved as facilitators, ensuring that instructional practices aligned with cultural content. The participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from school authorities and parents before the study was conducted. Ethical considerations were observed by maintaining student anonymity and protecting their privacy throughout the research process (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Instrument

Four primary instruments were employed to gather comprehensive data in this study. Observation sheets were used to record student participation, cultural expressions, and classroom interactions during Citizenship Education lessons. Semi-structured interview guides were prepared for teachers and students to capture their perceptions about the integration of local wisdom. Questionnaires were designed to measure students' attitudes toward cultural identity, honesty, tolerance, and respect both before and after the learning activities. Documentation, including photographs of cultural practices and students' written outputs, served as supplementary data for triangulation. All instruments were developed and validated by experts in education and cultural studies to ensure content relevance and clarity. Reliability of the survey instrument was tested through a pilot study and achieved an acceptable Cronbach's alpha score above 0.70, indicating internal consistency (Moleong, 2017). The use of multiple instruments ensured a balanced representation of both qualitative richness and quantitative accuracy. This methodological rigor enhanced the trustworthiness of the findings.

Data Analysis Plan

Data were analyzed through a combination of thematic and statistical techniques. Qualitative data from observations and interviews were transcribed and coded to identify recurring themes related to cultural identity, student engagement, and character development. Thematic analysis was guided by the framework of cultural pedagogy, allowing the researchers to link student responses with broader educational theories (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Quantitative data from questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics to measure frequency distributions and inferential statistics to test hypotheses. A simple regression analysis was conducted to determine the influence of local wisdom-based instruction on students' character development. The results revealed a significant positive relationship, as the calculated t-value exceeded the critical table value, confirming the study hypothesis. Data triangulation was employed by cross-referencing qualitative findings with quantitative results, thereby strengthening validity. This integrated analysis strategy ensured that the study captured both measurable effects and contextual richness of cultural education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The findings of this study revealed that integrating local wisdom into Citizenship Education significantly influenced the development of students' cultural identity and character values. Data were collected through observations, interviews, and questionnaires, which showed notable changes in students' behavior. Four main aspects of local wisdom were emphasized: religious practices, local language, honesty, and tolerance. Observations indicated that 85% of students engaged in religious activities such as reciting prayers before lessons. In addition, 87.5% of students frequently used local language expressions such as *enggi buntan* to show respect. Honesty was demonstrated by 81% of students in classroom interactions, while tolerance was observed in 82.5% of students showing respect toward peers and teachers. These percentages confirm the significant role of cultural practices in shaping character. A simple regression analysis further validated these findings by showing that the t-value (5.437) exceeded the critical table value, with a significance level of 0.000, indicating strong statistical evidence of the influence of local wisdom on character development.

Table 1. Integration of Local Wisdom in Citizenship Education

Aspect	Interview Findings	Observation Results (%)
Religion	Students practiced local religious values such as reciting prayers and studying kitab kuning.	85%
Language	Students frequently used Madurese polite expressions like enggi buntun.	87.5%
Honesty	Students communicated openly and displayed honesty in their interactions.	81%
Tolerance	Students respected teachers and peers, and greeted respectfully.	82.5%

The table illustrates that all four aspects of local wisdom integration had high participation rates, confirming strong alignment between teacher interviews and classroom observations.

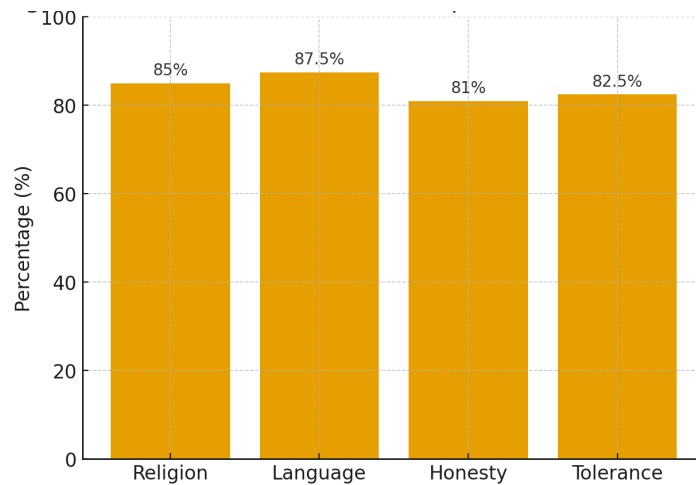


Figure 1. Percentage of Students' Character Development Based on Local Wisdom Integration

Explanation: Figure 1 shows that the highest participation was found in language use, reflecting the ease with which students adopt polite expressions in daily interactions. Religion and tolerance also showed strong results, indicating that rituals and cultural practices effectively nurture moral values. Honesty was slightly lower but still indicated positive influence from cultural integration. Together, these findings suggest that local wisdom has become a central tool for promoting both cultural identity and civic behavior among students.

Discussion

The discussion highlights the importance of embedding local wisdom into Citizenship Education as a sustainable educational practice. The results demonstrate that cultural activities such as folklore, regional songs, and traditional games effectively nurture cultural identity and strengthen students' civic values. These findings are consistent with Fernández-Sanjurjo et al. (2019), who argued that integrating cultural traditions in primary classrooms fosters a stronger sense of belonging. Torquato Rego and Moita (2021) also emphasized that multicultural education enhances civic responsibility and democratic participation, which aligns with the outcomes of this study. Malekela (2020) found similar results in African schools, where local traditions shaped moral reasoning and respect for community values. Furthermore, Nakayama (2021) highlighted the role of indigenous practices in preserving cultural continuity, which resonates with the findings here.

Maraqa and Qabaja (2022) also reported that folklore and cultural activities reinforced identity formation among Palestinian students, which parallels the Indonesian context in this study.

The integration of local wisdom into PKn lessons also addresses the global call for culturally responsive education. Liu et al. (2022) demonstrated that cultural heritage integration improves not only civic attitudes but also academic engagement, supporting the idea that education must go beyond cognitive learning. Arsene and Popescu (2021) reinforced that rituals and cultural values strengthen resilience and tolerance, essential traits in diverse societies. Orsayeva (2020) highlighted that music and cultural narratives enhance respect for diversity, a finding confirmed in this study through the use of regional songs like Anging Mammiri. Khanam (2021) also noted that traditional games foster collaboration and tolerance, directly aligning with the findings on cooperative play activities. Satz (2019) further argued that cultural values embedded in education ensure sustainability of national identity, which is central to this study's conclusions. Collectively, these studies validate the findings, showing that local wisdom not only enriches civic education but also fosters long-term cultural sustainability in a globalized world.

Implications

The implications of this study suggest that local wisdom-based pedagogy can serve as a strategic model for educational innovation in multicultural societies. Integrating folklore, traditional games, and local languages into PKn lessons enriches students' learning experiences while preserving national identity. Schools adopting such approaches can create culturally meaningful curricula that connect abstract civic concepts with daily cultural practices. Policymakers may use these findings to design education policies that mandate the integration of local wisdom across subjects. Teacher training programs should also include modules on cultural pedagogy to prepare educators for implementing this approach effectively. Furthermore, this study implies that community involvement is crucial, as cultural practices often require collaboration between schools and local stakeholders. The broader implication is that education systems can contribute significantly to cultural sustainability while also enhancing civic responsibility. This integration therefore provides a dual benefit of preserving traditions and cultivating character education.

Limitations

Despite the significant findings, this study has several limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted in a single elementary school, which limits the generalizability of the results to other schools or regions. Second, the focus was restricted to four cultural aspects—religion, language, honesty, and tolerance—while other cultural practices such as art or food traditions were not included. Third, the study relied on teacher interviews and classroom observations, which may contain subjective biases. Fourth, time constraints in the school curriculum limited the extent of cultural integration, preventing a broader application of cultural practices. Fifth, the sample size of 45 students may not fully represent the diversity of cultural backgrounds in Indonesia. Sixth, the quantitative analysis was limited to simple regression, leaving room for more complex statistical methods in future studies. Seventh, access to resources such as teaching materials and cultural references was limited, affecting the comprehensiveness of implementation. Finally, the study did not examine long-term impacts of cultural integration on students, leaving this as an avenue for future exploration.

Suggestions

Based on the limitations, several suggestions are offered for future research and practice. Schools should expand the integration of local wisdom beyond PKn to other subjects such as language arts, science, and social studies. Future research should include multiple schools across different regions of Indonesia to strengthen generalizability. Teacher professional development programs should emphasize cultural pedagogy and provide teachers with practical tools and materials. Longitudinal studies are needed to examine how cultural integration influences students' character and identity over time. Researchers should also apply more advanced statistical techniques, such as structural equation modeling, to analyze the relationships between cultural practices and educational outcomes. Collaboration with local communities should be deepened, involving cultural leaders and practitioners to enrich classroom experiences. International comparative studies could also be conducted to see how local wisdom-based education differs across countries. Ultimately, the continuation of this research will help strengthen educational practices that are both globally relevant and culturally grounded.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the integration of local wisdom into Citizenship Education significantly enhances the cultural identity and character development of elementary school students. The use of folklore, regional songs, and traditional games created meaningful learning experiences that fostered honesty, tolerance, respect, and pride in cultural heritage. Statistical analysis confirmed the positive impact, showing that local wisdom-based instruction had a strong and measurable effect on students' civic attitudes. These findings highlight the importance of embedding cultural practices into curricula to ensure that civic education is not limited to abstract knowledge but is lived through daily cultural engagement. The results also emphasize the need for teacher training, community involvement, and supportive educational policies to sustain the integration of local wisdom in schools. By adopting this approach, education can serve as both a vehicle for cultural preservation and a platform for nurturing responsible citizens. In an era of globalization, strengthening cultural identity through education becomes a strategic necessity to maintain national resilience. Therefore, local wisdom-based pedagogy offers a sustainable model for building character and preserving cultural continuity in the younger generation.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Alfiani Damayanti contributed to the conceptualization of the research, the development of the theoretical framework, and the drafting of the manuscript.

Lisu was responsible for the research design, data collection, and coordination with the participating school.

Melki Mangopo conducted the data analysis, prepared the visualizations (tables and figures), and provided critical revisions to improve the overall quality of the manuscript.

All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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