



Integration of Cultural Values in Character and Moral Education for Children at Bukit Permai 2 Kindergarten

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Abstract

The focus of this research is how local cultural values are integrated into character and moral education for children at TK Bukit Permai 2. This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques through observation, interviews, and documentation. The validity of the data is tested through triangulation of time, technique, and source, as well as collection, condensation, presentation, and conclusion drawing. The research results show that TK Bukit Permai 2 consistently integrates local cultural values into children's daily activities, such as the use of polite language ("iyye", "tabe"), the habit of greeting teachers, the practice of sharing food, and the reinforcement of empathy and mutual cooperation values through collaborative activities. Teachers also use culturally-based learning methods such as playing traditional games (dende/engklek), performing regional dances (Mappadendang), and storytelling folk tales rich in moral messages. These values are instilled through habituation, exemplary behavior, and socio-cultural approaches in accordance with the developmental theories of Vygotsky, Piaget, and constructivism. Parental support and synergy with the school environment strengthen the effectiveness of character education based on local culture. Children show improvement in character in aspects of empathy, discipline, responsibility, and respect.

Keywords: Local Culture, Character Education, Early Childhood, Culture-Based Learning

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INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education plays a crucial role in shaping children's character and morals from an early age. This is emphasized in Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, which emphasizes the need to integrate moral and character education into the overall national education system. In addition, Minister of Education and Culture Regulation Number 22 of 2020 concerning the 2020-2024 Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Education and Culture emphasizes the strengthening of character and cultural values based on Pancasila and local wisdom. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture (2020), this policy is intended to help children form a strong cultural identity by teaching them to understand, appreciate, and preserve their regional cultural heritage from an early age.

Character education is considered a necessity in order to face the challenges of changing characters in the present day. Character education functions as a learning process that integrates moral values, both through other activities and classroom learning activities related to the local wisdom of a region. Therefore, culture and education cannot be separated. (Hartiwisidi et al., 2022).

Character is a trait, moral, or personality that distinguishes one person from another. A person with good character is an individual who always strives to give their best to God as the Creator, to themselves, their surroundings, their fellow human beings, their nation, and their country. Good character also demonstrates awareness of one's potential and understanding of the principles that govern our relationship with God, other people, and our world. The process of character building includes knowledge, awareness, will, and actions taken by a person in practicing these values. Therefore, character building must begin at an early age. (Samad et al., 2025).

Character is part of a person's inner structure that is reflected through behavior and is permanent, both in the form of good and bad, and becomes the unique identity of that individual (Anshori, 2017). Atika (2019) states that character is formed through the process of internalizing moral values, because character is not only about right or wrong, but also involves instilling positive habits in everyday life. This encourages individuals to have awareness, understanding, concern, and commitment in realizing goodness. According to Rachmadyanti (2017), individuals with good character are those who consciously strive to develop their potential and contribute maximally as a form of devotion to God, themselves, the environment, and the country, as well as the world, based on strong motivation and the ability to manage emotions.

The formation of a person's character is influenced not only by internal aspects such as personal moral awareness, but also by external factors, including the social and cultural environment that surrounds them. A person's character develops through experiences, interactions, and values received from the surrounding community. In the context of early childhood education, culture plays a central role in shaping children's characters. Children learn from the customs, norms, and cultural practices they experience daily (Utaminingsih & Rachmawaty 2023). Therefore, exploring cultural values during the learning process is crucial to ensure that the character being built is in line with the cultural identity inherited from society (Utaminingsih & Rachmawaty 2023).

Vygotsky emphasized that social interaction plays an important role in children's learning process. Through communication with the people around them, children have the opportunity

to understand and absorb the cultural values that exist in society. He also believed that children actively shape their own knowledge, and most of the learning they acquire is influenced by the culture in which they grow and develop. Vygotsky argued that culture and social environment are the main factors that influence the development of knowledge in children. Vygotsky also said that culture influences children's learning process because they interact and collaborate with other people and their environment (Suardipa, 2020). Vygotsky believed that understanding a person's way of thinking must be based on their history and socio-cultural background (Suardipa, 2020).

Culture has a major influence on children's behavior, so the learning process in the classroom should use a culture-based approach. The Early Childhood Education (PAUD) learning model needs to be designed based on the characteristics of the region and the local culture. For example, PAUD in rural areas can highlight local potential as the basis for learning activities. Learning is carried out by optimizing the use of facilities, media, and play equipment available in the surrounding environment. This includes the use of traditional games, local arts, and regional songs as distinctive features that need to be preserved and developed (Ardiatyas, 2022). However, the national curriculum remains the main reference, but it is enriched with local content to make it more relevant to the needs and conditions of each region (Ardiatyas, 2022). South Sulawesi Provincial Regulation Number 2 Article 1 of 2016 concerning the Implementation of Local Wisdom-Based Education states that:

"Local wisdom-based education is the implementation of education based on the cultural values, customs, and traditions that are alive and thriving in the community of South Sulawesi" (South Sulawesi Regional Government, 2016)

Culture encompasses all attitudes, ways of thinking, and habits that develop in human life and are passed down from generation to generation within a particular community. According to Koentjaraningrat, culture can be defined as the result of human intellect, which includes the elements of creativity, taste, and will. The word "culture" comes from the Sanskrit word bud-dhayah, which means intellect or intellect (Rahmawati, 2015). Culture encompasses all ideas, actions, and human works that develop in social life and are acquired through a learning process (Rahmawati, 2015).

Local culture plays a significant role in shaping children's character values. Local cultural values often include relevant wisdom, such as honesty, cooperation, and tolerance, all of which support the development of children's character (Haryanto, 2018). In addition, local cultural values tend to be in line with the religious and moral teachings taught in formal schools. Therefore, the integration of local culture into learning can be an effective means of shaping children's character in accordance with their cultural identity.

Instilling cultural values into character learning in kindergarten plays an important role in shaping children's identity and morals from an early age. Character education based on local values not only strengthens cultural identity but also shapes children's morality as a whole (Anhar et al., 2024). Local wisdom plays a role alongside cultural education in guiding the process of shaping children's positive character, from early childhood to adulthood (Buhari & Endayana, 2024). Therefore, the application of local cultural values in learning in kindergarten can increase learning effectiveness while helping children develop characters that are in harmony with their cultural identities.

The increasingly strong currents of globalization and modernization today have raised concerns about the marginalization of local cultural values, especially in the Gowa region. In everyday life, there are symptoms such as children mocking each other, laughing at friends who make mistakes while learning, being reluctant to share food, refusing to work together in groups, and even restrictions from parents on their children's social interactions. The influence of modernization is also evident in children's high dependence on online games and gadgets. APJII (2023) data shows that 79% of children aged 5–12 are active internet users, and the majority use it to play games. This condition is exacerbated by the findings of the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (2022) that one in three Indonesian children is beginning to show symptoms of gadget addiction. As a result, children are more familiar with global-virtual culture than local wisdom-based culture. This can be observed from the declining interest of children in regional songs and dances. A survey by the Ministry of Education and Culture (2021) shows that only 28% of elementary school students know at least three Indonesian regional songs.

This phenomenon prompted researchers to explore how local cultural values can be taught and preserved through education at Bukit Permai 2 Kindergarten. This study aims to provide an understanding of the importance of integrating local culture into early childhood education, which not only strengthens cultural identity but also contributes to children's character and moral development. Bukit Permai 2 Kindergarten is one of the early childhood education institutions that has implemented local cultural values in its teaching and learning activities. From a preliminary study conducted by researchers in November 2024, it was found that strengthening local culture is one of the main focuses in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in this kindergarten.

This research is supported by several previous studies that show the importance of applying local culture-based learning in children's character development. For example, research conducted by Ramdani,(2017) shows that the application of local culture-based learning can increase children's awareness and appreciation of local culture, while research by(2019) shows that teaching local culture through activities such as introducing regional dances, regional songs, and traditional stories helps children to better appreciate their cultural heritage and strengthen their pride in their regional identity. Another study by Syahrir, (2021) reveals that children who are exposed to local cultural values in kindergarten, such as the habit of greeting others politely or showing mutual respect, have good social skills and are able to adapt to social environments outside of school. Unlike the three studies above, which focused more on local culture as a concept of character building or as formal learning material, this study specifically discusses how local cultural values are integrated into the daily activities of early childhood education at Bukit Permai 2 Kindergarten. Previous studies have not examined local cultural practices that emerge in early childhood education school routines, nor have they captured forms of cultural interaction such as greetings, salim, manners, and the habit of respecting teachers. Furthermore, they have not highlighted how modernization and the use of gadgets can weaken these local cultural practices at the kindergarten level.

The purpose of this study is to examine the application of local cultural values in character and moral education at Bukit Permai 2 Kindergarten. It is hoped that the results of this study can contribute to shaping children's cultural identity from an early age, while strengthening efforts to develop character education rooted in local culture. Thus, this study can serve as a

foundation for promoting the optimal integration of local cultural values into the learning process at the early childhood education level.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study applies a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the application of local cultural values in the process of character and moral learning of early childhood at Bukit Permai 2 Kindergarten. This approach aims to obtain a comprehensive understanding of how local cultural values are integrated into children's learning activities (Creswell, 2015).

The subjects in this study included classroom teachers, the principal, students, and several parents who were involved in school activities. The subjects were selected using purposive sampling, which is a sampling technique based on specific considerations so that the data obtained is relevant and supports the research objectives in depth (Sugiyono, 2017).

The data collection methods in this study included direct observation of learning activities that integrated cultural elements, in-depth interviews with teachers, principals, and parents, and the collection of documentation such as photographs. These three methods were used in an integrated manner to increase data validity and provide a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of cultural values integration in kindergarten environments.

The research instruments were developed in the form of observation guidelines and interview guidelines, each of which included cultural indicators such as the use of local languages, polite behavior, habits of mutual assistance, and traditional games and songs. The researcher's direct presence in the field provided an opportunity to understand the social and cultural context that could not be reached by quantitative data. The analysis of this research data refers to the Miles and Huberman model (Sugiyono, 2019), which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the reduction stage, the data is filtered to select relevant information from the observations and interviews. Next, the data is presented in the form of descriptive narratives to facilitate understanding. The final stage of drawing conclusions is carried out after finding recurring and consistent patterns of cultural values in the learning process in kindergarten.

In an effort to ensure data validity, the researcher used source, technique, and time triangulation techniques. This triangulation was intended to verify the consistency of data obtained from various sources, collection methods, and different times. The aim was for the research results to have scientific validity and truly reflect the reality in the field.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Integration of Local Cultural Values in Children's Daily Activities

The results of the study show that Bukit Permai 2 Kindergarten has consistently integrated local cultural values into the daily activities of early childhood. Children are accustomed to using polite language in interactions, such as the word "iyye" as a form of politeness to peers and adults, and "tabe" as a form of permission request. Local culture is also embodied in the habit of greeting teachers when arriving at and leaving school.



Figure 1. Children Playing Dende'

Eating together is an important activity for instilling the value of sharing, where children voluntarily pool their snacks and share food with each other without coercion. This activity illustrates the values of empathy and mutual cooperation that are alive in the local culture. This research is in line with Vygotsky's view that the formation of a child's character is influenced by social interactions and cultural values in their surroundings (Suardipa, 2020). By familiarizing children with cultural values in their school routine, they not only imitate good behavior but also internalize it as part of their identity.

Culture-Based Learning Through Traditional Methods and Media

Teachers at Bukit Permai 2 Kindergarten utilize various culture-based methods in the learning process, including:

- a. Traditional games such as "dende" or hopscotch, which teach honesty and cooperation,
- b. Regional dances such as "Mappadendang" that train discipline, creativity, and love of culture,
- c. Storytelling of folk tales rich in moral messages.



Figure 2. Children Watching Folk Tales

The use of learning media sourced from local culture provides meaningful and contextual learning experiences for children. This learning is also in line with Piaget's constructivism principle, emphasizing the importance of direct experience in building children's understanding. Children not only hear or see, but also experience cultural values themselves through playing, dancing, and listening to stories.

The Impact of Cultural Values on Children's Character and Morals

The integration of local culture at Bukit Permai 2 Kindergarten has had a tangible impact on children's character. Based on observations and interviews, improvements were seen in the following aspects:

- a. Empathy: children show concern for friends who are having difficulties.
- b. Responsibility: children tidy up their toys without being told,
- c. Discipline: following classroom rules and daily routines well,
- d. Respect: children are accustomed to greeting and saluting their teachers.



Figure 3. Children Sharing Snacks

These values are reinforced by the role of teachers as role models, as well as a school environment that creates an inclusive atmosphere and respects culture. This is in line with Bandura's theory of social learning, in which children learn by imitating the behavior of models they respect.

The Role of Parents and the Social Environment

This study also found that the successful integration of cultural values in learning cannot be separated from the role of parents. Parents at Bukit Permai 2 Kindergarten are involved in school activities such as traditional game competitions, storytelling, and cultural festivals. The synergy between families and schools creates a cohesive learning environment that supports the cultural values being taught.



Figure 4. Children Doing Community Service

Interpretation and Theoretical Implications

Overall, this study proves that early childhood character education is more effective when based on local cultural values. Culture is not merely a backdrop, but a living source of values that serves as the foundation for moral education. These findings not only confirm previous

theories but also broaden the discourse on the importance of contextual character education based on local wisdom. The implication is that this approach can be adopted more widely by other early childhood education institutions, especially in urban areas that are vulnerable to the influence of global culture.



Figure 5. Children Learning to Dance

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research conducted at Bukit Permai 2 Kindergarten, it can be concluded that local cultural values have been effectively integrated into the character and moral education of early childhood. Values such as the use of polite language (e.g., the words "iyye" and "tabe"), greeting teachers, saying hello, and sharing food with peers have become part of the daily habits consistently taught by educators. This integration is carried out through habituation, role modeling, and activities based on local culture such as traditional games, folk tales, and regional arts. These strategies have a positive impact on children's character development, particularly in shaping empathy, discipline, responsibility, and respect for others. Schools, teachers, and the surrounding environment play an important role in supporting this culture-based learning, thereby creating an educational atmosphere that is relevant to local wisdom values. Thus, the exploration of local cultural values in the educational process at Bukit Permai 2 Kindergarten has proven to be a strong foundation in shaping children's morals and character in line with their cultural identity.

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