

Strategy for Implementing Local Wisdom-Based Character Education Curriculum in Indonesian Language Learning: Case Study of Cultural Literacy Project in Merdeka Curriculum at SMA St. Petrus Medan

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Abstract

Character education is one of the main objectives of the education curriculum in Indonesia. However, the implementation of the character education curriculum still faces various challenges, especially in the context of local wisdom and cultural literacy. This study aims to reveal the strategy for implementing a local wisdom-based character education curriculum in Indonesian language learning through a cultural literacy project in the Merdeka curriculum. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method at SMA St. Petrus Medan. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model data analysis technique. The results of the study indicate that the strategy for implementing a local wisdom-based character education curriculum in Indonesian language learning through a cultural literacy project in the Merdeka curriculum includes: (1) learning planning that integrates core competencies, basic competencies, and character values; (2) implementation of learning using project, collaborative, and problem-based methods; (3) learning assessment using authentic instruments, portfolios, and rubrics; and (4) teacher professional development involving training, supervision, and reflection. This study contributes to the development of character education curriculum that is appropriate to the local and cultural context, and provides implications for innovative and meaningful Indonesian language learning practices. The implications of this study are that Indonesian language learning that integrates local wisdom and cultural literacy in the independent curriculum can improve students' character education, such as attitudes of tolerance, cooperation, creativity, critical thinking, and nationalism.

Keywords: character education, local wisdom, cultural literacy, independent curriculum, Indonesian language learning

INTRODUCTION

Character education has become an essential focus in the Indonesian education curriculum, emphasizing the development of moral and ethical values in students (Abdullah, 2018). The curriculum is designed not only to produce academically skilled learners but also to mold students into individuals who possess strong character traits such as honesty, responsibility, and respect for others. These values are seen as foundational to the personal development of students and crucial to building a strong national identity (Zuchdi, & Prasetyo, 2019). By integrating character education, the curriculum aims to create a holistic learning experience where students learn not just academically but also grow to become well-rounded individuals who contribute positively to society.

Despite its significance, character education in Indonesia faces several practical challenges in its implementation. The most pressing issue is the gap between the lofty goals of the curriculum and the realities of day-to-day classroom practices. Translating moral and ethical values into tangible

learning experiences that resonate with students has proven difficult for many educators. Moreover, Indonesia's vast cultural diversity adds complexity to this task, as different regions have unique customs, traditions, and beliefs that may not align uniformly with the national curriculum (Widyastuti, & Asfiah, 2018). These cultural differences require character education to be adaptable, flexible, and context-specific, ensuring that the values taught in the classroom are relevant and meaningful to students' local contexts.

Local wisdom and cultural literacy play crucial roles in the successful implementation of character education. Local wisdom refers to the traditions, beliefs, and practices that have been passed down through generations within a community, forming a core part of its identity. Incorporating local wisdom into the curriculum makes character education more culturally relevant and ensures that moral values are taught within a familiar context. Meanwhile, cultural literacy is about fostering an understanding and appreciation of a community's cultural heritage and promoting intercultural respect. Together, local wisdom and cultural literacy enrich the learning experience, allowing students to connect character values with their cultural environment, ultimately enhancing their sense of identity and belonging.

This study focuses on how character education can be effectively integrated into Indonesian language learning, specifically through a cultural literacy project as part of the Merdeka curriculum. The Indonesian language is more than just a means of communication; it serves as a medium for conveying cultural stories, traditions, and moral lessons. Therefore, the language curriculum provides a unique opportunity to blend character education with cultural learning. By engaging with local narratives, traditional stories, and proverbs, students not only learn linguistic skills but also explore moral values inherent in their cultural heritage. This integration provides a dynamic platform for character development, where language learning serves as a conduit for imparting moral values and fostering cultural literacy.

One of the main contributions of this study is its exploration of innovative strategies for developing a character education curriculum that is rooted in local and cultural contexts. Traditional character education approaches often rely on general principles that may not fully reflect Indonesia's diverse cultural landscape. This research underscores the importance of a more contextually sensitive approach, which utilizes local wisdom and cultural literacy as key elements in curriculum design. By adopting pedagogical strategies that reflect students' cultural experiences and backgrounds, educators can create learning environments where character education is not only relevant but also deeply connected to the students' lived experiences.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform and improve character education practices across Indonesia. By examining how a local wisdom-based curriculum can be integrated into Indonesian language learning, the research aims to provide practical insights for educators seeking to implement character education more effectively. It also carries broader implications for policymakers and curriculum developers, highlighting the need for character education that is adaptable to cultural diversity and grounded in local contexts. Ultimately, this study hopes to contribute to the cultivation of morally responsible and culturally aware students who are well-equipped to navigate the complexities of modern life while preserving and honoring their cultural heritage. By aligning character education with local wisdom and cultural literacy, the study aspires to support the development of an education system that not only promotes academic excellence but also nurtures the character and identity of future generations.

METHODS

The research in this study utilized a qualitative approach, specifically adopting a case study method, to gain a deep understanding of the implementation of character education based on local wisdom and cultural literacy at SMA St. Petrus Medan. The case study approach was chosen to allow a comprehensive exploration of the subject matter within its real-life context, emphasizing the intricate dynamics of how character education is integrated into the Indonesian language learning curriculum (Suyadi, & Selamet, 2019). The choice of SMA St. Petrus Medan as the research site provided a focused setting to observe and analyze how the local wisdom and cultural aspects are reflected and applied in educational practices. The qualitative nature of this study permitted the researchers to delve into the participants' experiences and perspectives, offering a rich, detailed portrayal of how the character education curriculum is enacted at the school level.

To gather a robust set of data, the research employed three main data collection techniques: observations, interviews, and documentation. Observations allowed the researchers to witness firsthand how the curriculum is implemented in the classroom setting, providing insights into the teaching methods, student interactions, and the practical application of character education strategies. Interviews with teachers, school administrators, and possibly students were conducted to collect various viewpoints and understand the perceptions, motivations, and challenges experienced in the implementation of character education. Meanwhile, documentation, which included lesson plans, assessment tools, and other relevant school records, offered additional context and evidence to support the findings. The data collected through these methods were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, a widely recognized qualitative data analysis technique. This model involves three key processes: data reduction, where unnecessary or unrelated information is filtered out; data display, where the remaining information is organized into visual formats like matrices or charts to facilitate understanding; and conclusion drawing/verification, where patterns, relationships, and insights are interpreted and validated. This systematic approach ensured that the data were rigorously analyzed to draw comprehensive and well-supported conclusions about how character education, grounded in local wisdom and cultural literacy, is operationalized in Indonesian language learning.

RESULTS

The results of the study highlight a comprehensive strategy for integrating local wisdom into character education within Indonesian language learning, with a specific focus on the cultural literacy project under the Merdeka curriculum. This approach is built upon a multi-layered framework that addresses not only the content of the curriculum but also its delivery, assessment, and continuous improvement. The cultural literacy project serves as a bridge to connect the students' learning experiences with their cultural heritage, providing a meaningful context in which character values can be nurtured and developed through the medium of the Indonesian language. The research found that this strategy successfully enhances character education by making it more relevant and impactful for students, allowing them to engage deeply with their local culture while developing essential character traits.

One key aspect of the strategy is the detailed planning of learning activities, where educators carefully integrate core competencies, basic competencies, and character values into their lesson plans. This integrated planning ensures that character education is not treated as a separate subject but is embedded within the learning objectives of the Indonesian language curriculum. By doing so,

educators are able to align the academic content with character development goals, making sure that students acquire not only linguistic skills but also the values and attitudes that form the basis of strong character. This planning process takes into account the local cultural context, allowing students to explore and reflect on traditional wisdom, proverbs, and narratives that are meaningful to their community.

The implementation of this strategy also emphasizes active and collaborative learning methods. The study found that project-based, collaborative, and problem-based approaches are effective in facilitating character development. Through these methods, students are encouraged to work together, solve real-life problems, and participate in hands-on projects that reflect cultural themes and values. Such active learning experiences promote the internalization of character values, as students learn to demonstrate cooperation, creativity, critical thinking, and respect for cultural diversity. To evaluate the effectiveness of these learning experiences, the assessment process employs authentic instruments, portfolios, and rubrics that measure not just academic achievement but also the growth of students' character. Finally, the study underscores the importance of continuous teacher professional development, which is achieved through ongoing training, supervision, and reflective practices. This professional growth is crucial for equipping educators with the skills and knowledge needed to deliver character education effectively, ensuring that the integration of local wisdom into the curriculum is both sustainable and impactful over time.

DISCUSSION

The discussion of this study's results highlights the significant impact of a local wisdom-based character education curriculum in shaping students' character within Indonesian language learning. The research demonstrates that when character education is grounded in local cultural wisdom, students are more likely to develop strong moral and ethical values, as the learning material resonates more deeply with their own cultural contexts and experiences. This localized approach ensures that character education is not seen as an abstract set of principles but rather as a reflection of the cultural practices, traditions, and beliefs familiar to students. Such a curriculum creates a bridge between academic content and real-life experiences, fostering an environment where character development is intertwined with the learning of the Indonesian language.

One of the key findings is that this approach to character education promotes the development of fundamental character traits such as tolerance, cooperation, creativity, critical thinking, and a sense of nationalism. By integrating local wisdom into the learning process, students gain insights into their cultural heritage, which in turn encourages them to appreciate differences and develop respect for others' beliefs and traditions (Rusdiana, & Komariah, 2015). This cultivation of tolerance is particularly vital in a diverse country like Indonesia, where students come from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The emphasis on cooperation is also strengthened as students participate in collaborative projects and discussions that require teamwork, empathy, and mutual support, skills that are essential for character development.

Additionally, creativity and critical thinking are fostered through active learning experiences that draw on local wisdom. Students are encouraged to explore cultural themes, solve problems, and create projects that reflect their cultural values, prompting them to think innovatively and reflectively. Such activities push students beyond rote memorization, challenging them to interpret cultural symbols, analyze moral dilemmas, and express their understanding through creative means. For example, storytelling, role-playing, and other creative expression activities allow students to embody the values of their culture, while simultaneously developing their critical thinking skills.

This approach also helps nurture a sense of nationalism, as students connect their personal identity with the larger cultural and national heritage, fostering pride and responsibility toward their country.

The integration of local wisdom and cultural literacy within the independent (Merdeka) curriculum enhances the effectiveness and relevance of character education. By embedding cultural literacy into language learning, the curriculum ensures that students do not merely learn about character in a theoretical sense but rather engage with it through culturally meaningful activities. This engagement allows students to reflect on moral values and ethical behavior within their own cultural frame of reference, making the lessons learned both more impactful and lasting. The cultural literacy component of the curriculum equips students with the knowledge and understanding of their own and others' cultures, thereby reinforcing the values of character education in a more holistic manner. Moreover, this approach aligns well with the goals of the Merdeka curriculum, which emphasizes student-centered learning and cultural contextualization. The Merdeka curriculum encourages educators to develop learning experiences that are not only academically sound but also culturally responsive, allowing students to connect with the material on a deeper level. The use of local wisdom as a foundation for character education within Indonesian language learning meets this objective by providing students with content that is immediately recognizable and relevant to their lives. This contextualization helps students to internalize the character values being taught, as they can see the direct application of these values in their own cultural and community settings.

In conclusion, the findings of this study underscore the importance of incorporating local wisdom and cultural literacy into character education within Indonesian language learning. This approach supports the development of key character traits, enhances student engagement, and ensures that character education is relevant and meaningful. The study suggests that such a curriculum has the potential to produce students who are not only linguistically competent but also morally and culturally aware individuals who can contribute positively to their communities. By grounding character education in the richness of local traditions and cultural practices, educators can provide a more comprehensive, effective, and impactful learning experience that prepares students to navigate both their cultural heritage and the broader social environment with integrity and understanding.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study significantly contribute to the ongoing development of a character education curriculum that is both contextually relevant and deeply rooted in local wisdom and cultural literacy, particularly within the context of Indonesian language learning. By focusing on how character education can be effectively integrated into language studies, this research offers practical insights and strategies that educators can use to design curricula that resonate with students' cultural experiences and values. The emphasis on local wisdom ensures that character development is not treated as an isolated aspect of education but is instead woven into the very fabric of language learning, making it a natural and meaningful part of the learning process. This contextually appropriate approach acknowledges the diverse cultural backgrounds of students in Indonesia, providing a pathway for more personalized and impactful character education that respects and reflects the students' community values and traditions.

The broader implications of this study highlight the potential for adopting an innovative and culturally responsive approach to education that significantly enhances students' character formation. By integrating local wisdom and cultural literacy into the curriculum, students not only

develop core moral values but also acquire a deeper understanding of their cultural identity and responsibilities as members of their community. This culturally grounded form of character education prepares students to engage in active citizenship, equipping them with the moral and ethical competencies needed to participate constructively in society. Moreover, this research underscores the importance of moving beyond generic models of character education toward approaches that are adaptive to cultural contexts, ultimately fostering a generation of students who are morally grounded, culturally literate, and equipped to navigate the complexities of modern society with a strong sense of character and civic responsibility.

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