

How Local Wisdom Shapes Character Education in Schools: A Qualitative Meta-Synthesis of Cultural Mechanisms

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ARTICLE INFORMATION	Abstract
Article history: Received : January 02, 2026 Revised : January 03, 2026 Accepted : January 03, 2026 Keyword: Local Wisdom, Character Education, Ethnopedagogy, DOI: https://ciiles.com/schole.v1i1.1	Character education has become a crucial educational priority in response to growing moral and social challenges among students. However, character education approaches that are standardized and detached from learners' sociocultural contexts often fail to foster meaningful and lasting value internalization. Local wisdom, embedded in community traditions, beliefs, and social practices, provides a culturally grounded foundation for contextual character education. This study aims to synthesize qualitative empirical evidence on how local wisdom shapes character education across school contexts. Using a qualitative metasynthesis design, the study systematically reviewed empirical qualitative research published in peer-reviewed journals that integrate local wisdom into school-based character education. Data were analyzed through thematic synthesis to identify recurring character values, educational practices, and underlying mechanisms of value internalization. The findings indicate that local-wisdom-based character education consistently promotes values such as spirituality, respect, responsibility, empathy, solidarity, discipline, and social harmony. These values are internalized through ethnopedagogical learning, ritual-based habituation, culturally responsive pedagogy, holistic school culture, and community engagement. The study concludes that integrating local wisdom holistically into curriculum, pedagogy, and school culture enhances the effectiveness and sustainability of character education.

I. INTRODUCTION

Character education has become a central concern in global educational discourse in response to the increasingly complex social and moral challenges of the twenty-first century, including value degradation, weakening social solidarity, rising intolerance, and identity crises among younger generations. These challenges indicate that education can no longer be understood merely as a process of cognitive knowledge acquisition, but must be viewed as a holistic effort to develop individuals with moral integrity, social responsibility, and cultural awareness (Ibrahim et al., 2024). Consequently, character education is widely recognized as a fundamental pillar for achieving sustainable education goals and promoting holistic human development (Suwartini, 2018).

In the national context, Indonesia possesses a vibrant and dynamic body of intangible cultural heritage that functions as a vital source of national identity and social capital. As of 2025, the number of officially recognized Indonesian Intangible Cultural Heritage (Warisan Budaya Takbenda Indonesia/WBTbI) elements has reached 2,727, resulting from a nationwide selection process conducted between 2013 and 2025 involving submissions from all provinces. Notably, in 2025 alone, 514 new elements were designated, reflecting intensified efforts to preserve and institutionalize local cultural practices embedded with moral, social, and cultural values (Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025). These data demonstrate that local wisdom in Indonesia is not only abundant in quantity but also holds substantial potential as a source of values for character education across school levels, given its close connection to students' socio-cultural environments.

At the school level, character education occupies a strategic position as it shapes students' values, attitudes, and habitual behaviors throughout their formative years. Early and middle schooling stages are particularly critical, as learners remain in a morally and socially plastic developmental phase, making character values introduced during this period more likely to be internalized and sustained over time (Hasanova, 2025; Purwati & Yanuarto, 2025). However, the implementation of character education across

school contexts often encounters challenges, especially when instructional approaches remain normative, abstract, and insufficiently connected to students' everyday socio-cultural experiences. Character education delivered in a formalistic and standardized manner risks losing contextual meaning, thereby reducing its effectiveness in fostering deep and enduring character development. In response to the limitations of universal and homogeneous character education approaches, there has been growing recognition of the need for more contextual, meaningful, and culturally grounded models of character education. Contextual approaches are believed to bridge the gap between moral values taught in schools and the lived experiences of students in their daily social environments. Within this framework, local wisdom emerges as a valuable educational resource due to its relevance to students' lived realities, its alignment with local social contexts, and its capacity to strengthen cultural identity and character formation within formal education settings (Pratiwi et al., 2025).

Local wisdom refers to a set of values, norms, knowledge systems, and social practices that have developed historically and been transmitted across generations within a community. These values have been empirically shown to contribute to social harmony, environmental sustainability, and the moral development of community members (Astuti et al., 2022). In educational contexts, integrating local wisdom into character education serves not only as a means of internalizing moral values but also as an effort to preserve cultural heritage and reinforce students' sense of identity. Accordingly, local wisdom holds strong relevance for integration into school-based character education across different educational levels, given students' continuous interaction with their surrounding social and cultural environments (Mansur & Sholeh, 2024). A growing body of empirical research has examined the role of local wisdom in character education across school contexts, including primary and secondary education, through diverse approaches such as curriculum integration, culture-based learning practices, and pedagogical activities rooted in community traditions. Overall, these studies consistently indicate that local wisdom contributes positively to the development of core character values, including responsibility, cooperation, discipline, social care, and moral awareness among students (Kusnita et al., 2017; Mansur & Sholeh, 2024; Priyono, 2012). Nevertheless, existing studies are conducted within varied cultural and geographical contexts, employ different qualitative methodologies, and focus on distinct forms of local wisdom and character values. As a result, current understandings of how local wisdom shapes character education remain fragmented and context-specific.

Despite the expanding literature on local wisdom and character education, there is still a lack of systematic synthesis that integrates qualitative empirical findings to reveal cross-contextual patterns, themes, and conceptual mechanisms through which local wisdom influences character formation across school levels. Most existing reviews remain narrative and descriptive, lacking rigorous qualitative synthesis procedures that could generate deeper theoretical insights and transferable understandings. This gap highlights the need for a qualitative meta-synthesis capable of consolidating, interpreting, and reconceptualizing existing qualitative evidence on local-wisdom-based character education. Based on this gap, the present study aims to conduct a qualitative meta-synthesis of empirical research on the role of local wisdom in shaping character education in school contexts. Specifically, this study seeks to identify key themes, implementation strategies, and character values associated with local-wisdom-based educational practices across different school levels, as well as to synthesize the conceptual mechanisms through which local wisdom contributes to character formation. Through this synthesis, the study is expected to contribute theoretically to the literature on culture-based character education and practically to the development of contextual and culturally grounded character education models applicable across school settings.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Character Education as a Contextual and Cultural Endeavor

Recent scholarship positions character education not merely as moral instruction but as a socially embedded process shaped by cultural norms, institutional practices, and everyday interactions within schools. Larsen (2024) conceptualizes character formation as an ongoing process of ethical becoming, produced through embodied practices, symbolic routines, and institutional cultures rather than through explicit moral instruction alone. This perspective highlights a critical limitation of standardized character education models, which often fail to resonate with students' lived realities. Consequently, scholars

increasingly argue that character education must be context-sensitive and culturally grounded to achieve deep and sustained moral internalization.

2.2. Local Wisdom as an Ethnopedagogical Foundation

Local wisdom constitutes a culturally embedded system of values, social norms, and collective practices transmitted across generations. In educational contexts, local wisdom functions as an ethnopedagogical resource that connects moral learning with culturally meaningful experiences. Zannah & Nurhayati (2025) demonstrate that traditional cultural expressions, such as the Tor-Tor Naposo Nauli Bulung dance, embody values of spirituality, solidarity, and communal harmony, making them effective resources for character education in schools. Similarly, Harahap & Hamka (2023) show that Angkola's Dalihan Na Tolu system integrates philosophy, culture, and social ethics into a coherent moral framework that fosters respect, responsibility, and social cohesion. These studies suggest that local wisdom offers more than cultural content; it provides normative structures through which moral values are lived, practiced, and internalized.

2.3. Theoretical Perspectives Explaining the Influence of Local Wisdom

The influence of local wisdom on character education can be understood through social constructivist and situated learning perspectives. From this view, moral values are constructed through participation in culturally meaningful practices rather than transmitted as abstract rules. Mulya et al. (2022) argue that locally grounded and spiritually embodied educational practices enable students to experience moral values as part of everyday life, challenging universalist and neoliberal educational frameworks. Complementing this view, Pang et al (2021) emphasize culturally relevant education as a holistic approach that recognizes students' cultural backgrounds as assets for learning and moral development. These perspectives converge on the idea that local wisdom shapes character through meaning-making, identity formation, and social participation.

2.4. Cultural Practices and Mechanisms of Character Internalization

Empirical studies indicate that local wisdom influences character education through both explicit and implicit mechanisms. Ritual traditions, for example, function as powerful tools for moral habituation. Suyitno et al (2023) show that ritual practices among the Osing community instill values such as perseverance, togetherness, and harmony through repeated communal participation rather than formal instruction. At the psychological level, Peristianto et al (2025) introduce the concept of *rasa rumangsa* in Javanese culture, highlighting empathy and self-awareness as culturally mediated moral dispositions. These findings suggest that local wisdom operates through affective, social, and symbolic mechanisms, enabling values to become internalized dispositions rather than external norms.

2.5. School-Based Integration of Local Wisdom

At the institutional level, local wisdom has been integrated into character education through curriculum design, pedagogy, school culture, and community engagement. Nurhalizah et al (2025) illustrate how culturally adaptive schooling models, such as the On-Off School Model for Bajo communities, align formal education with local lifestyles and values, fostering holistic character development. Latif, (2025) further emphasizes that character education rooted in local wisdom contributes to national character building by aligning moral education with cultural identity and foundational state values. These studies indicate that local wisdom becomes most effective when embedded systematically within school structures rather than treated as supplementary or symbolic content.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative meta-synthesis design to systematically integrate and interpret findings from empirical qualitative research examining the role of local wisdom in shaping character

education in school contexts. The qualitative meta-synthesis approach was selected to address the fragmented, context-specific, and diverse nature of existing qualitative studies, and to generate a more comprehensive conceptual understanding that transcends the findings of individual studies. The unit of analysis in this study was published empirical research articles, rather than human participants. Data sources were obtained through systematic searches of reputable academic databases, including Scopus, ERIC, Google Scholar, and SINTA-indexed journals. The literature search followed a structured and transparent procedure adapted from the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. A combination of keywords and Boolean operators was used, including local wisdom, character education, school, primary education, secondary education, culture-based education, and indigenous values, to ensure broad coverage across school levels.

The selection of studies was guided by explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) empirical studies employing qualitative or mixed-method approaches with a dominant qualitative component; (2) research conducted in school settings, including primary and secondary education contexts; (3) studies that integrated local wisdom, indigenous knowledge, or culturally grounded values into character education practices; (4) publications in peer-reviewed journals or reputable conference proceedings; and (5) articles written in English or Indonesian. The exclusion criteria comprised: (1) purely quantitative studies; (2) conceptual or theoretical papers without empirical data; (3) studies conducted outside formal school contexts; and (4) articles lacking methodological clarity or relevance to character education and local wisdom. Following the screening and eligibility process, approximately 20–25 studies were selected for inclusion in the final synthesis. Data analysis was conducted using thematic synthesis, which involved iterative coding, constant comparison across studies, and the development of analytical themes. This process aimed to identify recurring character values, implementation strategies, contextual factors, and underlying mechanisms through which local wisdom influences character education across school settings. Analytical rigor was ensured through systematic documentation of the selection process, transparent coding procedures, and continuous cross-study validation of emerging themes.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Conceptualization and Operationalization of Local Wisdom

The synthesis of empirical studies indicates that local wisdom in school-based character education is conceptualized as a culturally embedded system of spiritual, moral, and social values that are historically rooted and collectively upheld within communities. Across diverse contexts, local wisdom is understood not merely as cultural artifacts but as normative value frameworks that guide behavior, social relations, and moral orientations. For instance, the Tor-Tor Naposo Nauli Bulung dance embodies spiritual devotion, reverence for ancestors, solidarity, and communal harmony, positioning cultural performance as a moral medium through which character values are expressed and transmitted (Zannah & Nurhayati, 2025). Similarly, ritual traditions among the Osing community are conceptualized as carriers of personal and social character values, including responsibility, perseverance, togetherness, and harmony, which function as ethical references in everyday life (Suyitno et al., 2023). In broader institutional contexts, local wisdom is also conceptualized as an integrative moral foundation within educational systems, as demonstrated in the holistic-integrative Muhammadiyah education model, where religious values, cultural identity, and character formation are systematically combined within curriculum and school culture (Syamsiah & Hamami, 2022).

Conceptualizations are translated into school-based character education through ethnopedagogical and culturally responsive approaches, including curriculum integration, culturally grounded pedagogy, ritual-based habituation, and community involvement. Cultural practices such as traditional dances, rituals, lullabies, and communal activities are incorporated into formal learning to facilitate experiential moral learning and value internalization (Yusuf et al., 2023; Zannah & Nurhayati, 2025). In addition, culturally adaptive models—such as community-based schooling and culturally responsive teaching—enable students to connect character values with lived cultural experiences, strengthening identity formation and moral commitment (Rahmawati et al., 2023). However, the synthesis also highlights recurring challenges in operationalization, including generational shifts in cultural meaning, limited instructional time, and insufficient student understanding of the philosophical foundations of cultural practices, which may

constrain the effectiveness of local wisdom as a sustained mechanism for character education unless supported by systematic pedagogical design and institutional commitment (Zannah & Nurhayati, 2025).

4.2. Character Values Associated with Local-Wisdom-Based Character Education

The meta-synthesis demonstrates that local-wisdom-based character education across school levels is consistently associated with a set of core character values that are culturally grounded yet pedagogically transferable. Across primary, secondary, and community-linked educational contexts, the most prominent character values include spirituality and religiosity, respect for elders and authority, social responsibility, solidarity, cooperation, empathy, discipline, perseverance, gratitude, and harmony with others and the environment. Studies on the Tor-Tor Naposo Nauli Bulung dance reveal that character education rooted in cultural performance strongly emphasizes spiritual devotion, reverence for ancestors, social harmony, and cooperative behavior as foundational moral values (Zannah & Nurhayati, 2025). Similarly, research on ritual traditions among the Osing community identifies personal character values such as responsibility, sincerity, consistency, willingness to sacrifice, and gratitude, alongside social character values including togetherness, harmony, and communal safety (Suyitno et al., 2023). At earlier educational stages, the Acehnese lullaby Ratéb Dôda Idi instills compassion-based character values—care for parents, teachers, society, nature, and the homeland—demonstrating that local wisdom supports affective and moral development from early childhood (Yusuf et al., 2023). In more formal institutional settings, the Muhammadiyah holistic-integrative education system consistently associates local wisdom with moral integrity, discipline, religious commitment, and social responsibility as essential components of character formation across school levels (Syamsiah & Hamami, 2022).

In terms of educational practices, the synthesis indicates that local-wisdom-based character education is most consistently operationalized through culturally grounded, experiential, and participatory approaches. Ethnopedagogical learning emerges as a dominant practice, wherein local cultural expressions—such as traditional dances, rituals, songs, and community narratives—are integrated into subject learning to contextualize moral values within students' lived experiences (Zannah & Nurhayati, 2025). Ritual- and tradition-based habituation further reinforces character development through repeated participation in culturally meaningful activities, enabling values to be internalized as dispositions rather than taught as abstract rules (Suyitno et al., 2023). In school-based and curriculum-level implementations, holistic and integrative models embed character education within curriculum content, pedagogy, and school culture simultaneously, ensuring coherence between moral instruction and everyday practice (Hamami & Nuryana, 2022). Additionally, culturally responsive and transformative teaching practices facilitate reflective engagement with cultural identity, ethical reasoning, and social responsibility, allowing students to connect local wisdom with contemporary learning contexts (Rahmawati et al., 2023). Across studies, collaboration with community elders, cultural practitioners, and local institutions is identified as a key practice for maintaining authenticity and strengthening the educational impact of local-wisdom-based character education.

4.3. Cultural Mechanisms of Character Value Internalization

The meta-synthesis indicates that local wisdom influences the internalization of character values primarily through culturally embedded mechanisms that operate at the affective, social, and identity levels. Across studies, cultural practices such as traditional dances, rituals, lullabies, and communal traditions function as symbolic and experiential carriers of moral meaning, enabling students to encounter character values within authentic social contexts. These practices embed moral values in collective memory and everyday life, allowing learners to experience values such as respect, compassion, solidarity, and responsibility as lived realities rather than abstract norms. For example, ritual traditions in the Osing community and the Tor-Tor Naposo Nauli Bulung dance convey moral values through repeated communal participation, symbolic gestures, and shared cultural meanings, fostering habituation and emotional attachment to those values (Suyitno et al., 2023; Zannah & Nurhayati, 2025). Similarly, the Acehnese lullaby Ratéb Dôda Idi demonstrates how narrative and musical traditions serve as affective mechanisms for early character internalization by embedding compassion, care, and moral responsibility within intimate parent-child interactions (Yusuf et al., 2023). These findings suggest that local wisdom operates as a cultural

mechanism by linking moral values to emotion, identity, and a sense of belonging, thereby strengthening students' internal motivation to adopt and sustain those values.

In addition to cultural mechanisms, the synthesis highlights pedagogical mechanisms that translate local wisdom into structured learning experiences within school settings. Ethnopedagogical approaches enable teachers to mediate cultural values through curriculum integration, contextual learning tasks, and reflective activities that connect traditional practices with educational objectives (Zannah & Nurhayati, 2025). Through this mediation, character values are internalized via experiential learning, where students actively participate in culturally grounded activities rather than passively receiving moral instruction. Holistic and integrative pedagogical models further reinforce internalization by aligning curriculum content, teaching strategies, and school culture around shared moral and cultural values, as demonstrated in the Muhammadiyah education system (Hamami & Nuryana, 2022). Moreover, culturally responsive and transformative teaching practices encourage critical reflection on cultural identity, ethical behavior, and social responsibility, allowing students to reinterpret local wisdom within contemporary contexts (Rahmawati et al., 2023). Across studies, collaboration with community elders and cultural practitioners emerges as a key pedagogical mechanism for maintaining authenticity and ensuring continuity between school-based learning and community values. Collectively, these pedagogical mechanisms facilitate character internalization by combining experiential engagement, reflective meaning-making, and consistent value reinforcement within and beyond the classroom.

V. CONCLUSION

This qualitative meta-synthesis demonstrates that local wisdom functions as a culturally embedded mechanism through which character values are internalized in school settings, rather than merely serving as contextual or supplementary cultural content. Synthesizing qualitative evidence across diverse educational and cultural contexts, this study shows that local wisdom consistently shapes character education through culturally legitimate moral frameworks, ethnopedagogical mediation, habituation within school culture, and identity-based as well as affective internalization processes. Character values such as spirituality, respect, solidarity, responsibility, empathy, and social harmony are most effectively internalized when local wisdom is holistically integrated into curriculum design, pedagogical practices, school culture, and community engagement, enabling students to experience moral learning as part of their lived cultural reality. Theoretically, this study advances character education scholarship by reconceptualizing local wisdom as a core mechanism of character formation that operates through interconnected cultural and pedagogical processes, extending existing models that emphasize cognitive moral reasoning alone. Methodologically, it demonstrates the value of qualitative meta-synthesis for generating higher-order conceptual insights from fragmented qualitative studies, while practically, it underscores the need for culturally grounded and context-responsive character education models to enhance the sustainability and authenticity of moral education in schools.

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